

**Bishop**  
**Nikolaj Velimirović**  
**Old Controversies in Historical**  
**and Theological Context**

*Edited by*  
Vladimir Cvetković  
and Dragan Bakić

BISHOP NIKOLAJ VELIMIROVIĆ:  
OLD CONTROVERSIES IN HISTORICAL  
AND THEOLOGICAL CONTEXT



# BISHOP NIKOLAJ VELIMIROVIĆ: OLD CONTROVERSIES IN HISTORICAL AND THEOLOGICAL CONTEXT

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## All things to all people: The Contemporary Readings of Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović

A contemporary who had an opportunity to get to know Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović (1881-1956)<sup>1</sup> and was impressed by his personality and his works believed that “with what he wrote and said, he entered the ranks of the fathers of the whole Church, the universal Christian church, and not just our Serbian church, because his sermons are general Christian assets. He left behind him an opus that ensures for him that great rank. There is no doubt about it—acknowledgement is only a matter of time.”<sup>2</sup> If the reach of Bishop Nikolaj’s theological thought within Christianity is a question that still needs an answer, there is no doubt that his significance at the national level and within the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) is quite exceptional. The above mentioned contemporary and admirer noted that in the 1920s Nikolaj as then Bishop of Ohrid “was a great name, ... who reaches his acmes and affirms himself as one of the greatest minds in our cultural life; at that time Bishop Nikolaj finally gets his physiognomy of a writer and a preacher, deep thinker and moralist; he becomes the heart of the Serbian church, the soul of our Orthodoxy; his authority in religious and moral matters over-

<sup>1</sup> Bishop Nikolaj’s name appears in the English language in different forms, including his own usage, most often as Nicholas, Nicholai, Nikolai (his surname is usually given as Velimirovich), etc. Although it would perhaps make sense to use some of these forms originating with his lifelong and strong connections with the Anglo-Saxon world in a publication in English, that does not seem appropriate for chapters dealing with most of his biography, the time he spent in Serbia/Yugoslavia and elsewhere. For the sake of uniformity, the editors thus opted to use his Serbian name and surname.

<sup>2</sup> Milan Jovanović Stoimirović, *Portreti prema živim modelima*, ed. Stojan Trećakov and Vladimir Šovljanski (Novi Sad: Matica srpska, 1998), 23.

whelms all other authorities in that field; for the most part, he, the Bishop of Ohrid, is the Serbian church; he develops a tremendous publishing activity and makes an impact in all dioceses, and not just his own, through many brochures, but it is a pity that he did not then systematically collect his sermons and other papers, studies, essays, articles, etc. and that he did not compile, at least partially, a bibliography (or calendarium) of his sermons in English.”<sup>3</sup> This would be enough in and of itself to secure him a prominent place in theological as well as historical studies that concern the SOC in the first half of the twentieth century. However, Nikolaj lived during tumultuous times and the controversies surrounding the restless interwar period and then the tragedy of the Second World War in Yugoslavia dragged him into their vortex and exposed his legacy to differing interpretations and bitter debates.

The ancient world invented the *psogos* (ψόγος), a speech about or a written account of somebody made for the purpose of insulting, degrading, or otherwise criticizing the person in question. Sometimes, *psogoi* are the only preserved accounts of somebody’s life. An antipode to *psogoi* were panegyrics, another form of ancient speech that praises someone beyond good measure and conspicuously omits anything that might cast a critical light on their hero. There are many modern equivalents of both *psogoi* and panegyrics which deal with the life of Bishop Nikolaj. If an uninformed reader came across samples of both, providing such strikingly opposite and polarizing images of him, they would be much confused. As it happens, Nikolaj appears as both a Christian saint and a heretic, nationalist and anti-nationalist, ecumenist and anti-ecumenist, fascist and anti-fascist, communist and anti-communist, democrat and anti-democrat. Clearly, then, a reader of these accounts, no matter whether they are *psogoi* or panegyrics to Bishop Nikolaj, can learn much more about the authors in question and their attitudes towards Nikolaj than about the churchman himself. In this sense, many decades after his death, Nikolaj continues to fulfil the words

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 60. For an informative scholarly overview, see Bogdan Lubardić, “Nikolaj Velimirović,” in *Srbi 1903-1914: Istorija ideja*, ed. Miloš Ković (Beograd: Clio, 2015), 328-357.

of apostle Paul to be all things to all people (1 Cor 9: 19). He seems to serve both the need of some people to attribute to him the things they cherish and praise him for, and the requirement of other people to attribute to him the things they condemn and attack him for.

Controversies surrounding Nikolaj and all his works started during his lifetime. The editor of Bishop Nikolaj's *Sabrana dela* (Collected Works), late Bishop Lavrentije Trifunović, claims that the records of his last fifteen years were meticulously kept by his enemies, Nazi Germans and Yugoslav Communists.<sup>4</sup> The Nazis kept records on Nikolaj while he was their prisoner from 1941 to 1944, while the Yugoslav Communist continued to track and record Nikolaj's activities from the time of his deportation to Germany in 1944 to his death in the USA in 1956. The Nazi Germans considered Nikolaj to be an anti-Nazi and anti-fascist, while the Yugoslav Communist regarded him as an anti-communist, although for both camps communism and fascism were two excluding ideologies. Moreover, as Serbia and Yugoslavia under German occupation became a theatre of multiple and bitter civil wars along ethnic and ideological lines, every faction produced their own image of Nikolaj in accordance with their own ideological platforms. For the two warring resistance movements, the victorious communist partisans and the royalist chetniks, and the collaborationist members of ZBOR, Bishop Nikolaj came to represent an important figure, and their conflicting presentation of his views and activities carried on after 1945. It was largely in publicist portrayals in communist Yugoslavia and the outlets of the Serbian emigres in Europe and the USA that this clash of images took place.<sup>5</sup>

Besides the flagrant ideological bias of the majority of authors, a major difficulty for coming to a more critical assessment of Bishop Nikolaj concerns the problem of authentication of many writings at-

<sup>4</sup> Reč Episkopa Lavrentija u Episkop Nikolaj, *Sabrana dela*, vol. 1, 5. A reprint of this edition is also available: *Sabrana dela Episkopa Nikolaja u XIII knjiga* (Šabac: Glas crkve, 2013).

<sup>5</sup> For an analysis of the genesis and course of attacks on Nikolaj, see an insightful text by Bishop Atanasije Jevtić, "Napadi na Episkopa Nikolaja," in *Sveti vladika ohridski i žički Nikolaj: 1. tekstovi i svedočenja 2. simposion*, ed. Episkop Atanasije Jevtić (Žiča – Kraljevo: Episkopska Eparhija žička i Sveti Manastir Žiča, 2003), 555-570.



tributed to him. In many Orthodox homes today, for example, one may find picture frames with the inscriptions of popular sayings attributed to Bishop Nikolaj. In many cases it is hard to prove that he was the author of these sayings, but being considered an unquestionable authority his name has been used to confirm the conventional wisdom of these sayings. More importantly, this benign practice is unfortunately extended from the sayings to the works published under his name. The *Collected Works* of Bishop Nikolaj in 12 volumes were published between 1976 and 1986 in Düsseldorf and Himmelsthür in Germany by the diocese of Western Europe of the Serbian Orthodox Church. Due to very poor conditions the undertaking of publishing more than 10,000 pages was an extremely difficult one. To his credit, Archpriest Milisav Protić collected an impressive number of manuscripts, which were later delivered to Bishop Lavrentije and served as the material for the *Collected Works*. Unfortunately, many of these manuscripts are of dubious authorship, to say the least.<sup>6</sup>

The first problem is that many publications included in the *Collected Works* as Nikolaj's authentic works were previously published in various Yugoslav periodicals as anonymous. The second and a more serious problem is that the previously unpublished manuscripts attributed to Nikolaj after his death were completely unknown and never mentioned by Nikolaj himself. To appreciate how this came to pass, it is necessary to look at the circumstances and motives of the publishers. Most of the post-1945 Serbian emigration in Western Europe was comprised of members of Dimitrije Ljotić's ZBOR, a marginal fascist organization in the Yugoslav Kingdom that served the occupying German army during the war, and General Draža Mihailović's chetniks who fought against the ZBOR armed detachments as much as against the Germans and partisans. With the increasing popularity of Bishop Nikolaj after his death, many of his previous writings were republished, but also some allegedly unearthed and unpublished material appeared in print for the first time from the publishing houses of Serbian politi-

<sup>6</sup> Srećko Petrović, "Par uzgrednih napomena o proučavanju nasleđa Vladike Nikolaja Velimirovića: neki istraživački problemi," *Teološki pogledi* 53, no. 3 (2020): 827-832.

cal emigres. Since the followers of Ljotić took the lead in publishing Bishop Nikolaj's works, they included, whether intentionally or not it is difficult to judge, some manuscripts of dubious authorship simply because they reflected their own political and ideological views.<sup>7</sup> For that reason, certain essays voicing clearly pro-fascist, anti-democrat, anti-communist, and anti-ecumenical tendencies emerged under the name of Bishop Nikolaj. The most flagrant example is the work *Reči srpskom narodu kroz tamnički prozor* (Words to the Serbian People through the Dungeon Window), allegedly written by Nikolaj during his imprisonment in the Dachau concentration camp and supposedly found as late as 1981 in the attic of the Serbian church in Linz, Austria. A number of scholars expressed their doubts concerning the authenticity of this work,<sup>8</sup> advancing very convincing arguments, but other scholars decided to pass in silence over the issues of authenticity and largely based their assessment of Nikolaj as a visceral anti-Semite and fascist on this manuscript.<sup>9</sup> The fact that this and other contested texts were published under Bishop Nikolaj's name in his Collected Works was sufficient for them to turn a blind eye to the critical examination of their sources.

<sup>7</sup> For the followers of Ljotić's approach to relationship between Nikolaj and Ljotić, see Nebojša Mandić, "Nad grobom vladike Nikolaja," *Iskra*, 15.5.1956; Borivoje Karapandžić, *S verom u Boga za kralja i otadžbinu – Dobrovoljci 1941-1991* (Klivilend: privatno izdanje, 1991), 147-148; Đuro J. Vrga, *Ostala su svedočenja* (Beograd: Raška škola, 2007).

<sup>8</sup> Radmila Radić, Radio emisija, Pešćanik 24 May 2003: <https://pescanik.net/136-emisija/>; Bishop Jovan Čulibrk, "Izraelci nas odlično razumeju," *Jevrejski pregled* 2 (February 2009), 6-8; 7; Srećko Petrović, "Is Nicholai Velimirovich the author of the book *Words to the Serbian People Through the Dungeon Window?*," *Philotheos* 20, no. 2 (2020): 260-303; Vladimir Cvetković, "The Freedom from Passions and the Freedom for All: St Nicholai Velimirović on Democracy," *Nicholai Studies* 1 (2021): 53-80; 69-72; Stanko Lompar, *Učitelj ili farisej: Dimitrije Ljotić, hrišćanstvo i verske zajednice 1935-1945* (Beograd: Catena Mundi, 2021), 249.

<sup>9</sup> Nebojša Popov, "Srpski populizam: Od marginalne do dominantne pojave," dodatak nedeljniku *Vreme*, 24 maj 1993, 135; Mirko Đorđević, "Povratak Propovednika," *Republika* 8 (jul 1996), 1-10; Klaus Buchenau, *Orthodoxie und Katholizismus in Jugoslawien 1945-1991: ein serbisch-kroatischer Vergleich* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz Verlag 2004); Jovan Byford, *Denial and Repression of Antisemitism: Post-communist Remembrance of the Serbian Bishop Nikolaj Velimirovic* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2008).

Interpretations of Bishop Nikolaj's life and work became even more politically charged in the context of the crisis, disintegration and then tragic demise of Yugoslavia in the civil war during the 1980s and 1990s. After the disappearance of strict state censorship and the return of churches and religious communities to the public space of the country in the mid-1980s, Nikolaj was revealed to the wider public in Yugoslavia through the publication and circulation of his writings. Until the beginning of the 1990s more than 30 works of Nikolaj were published in Yugoslavia. Apart from reprinting Nikolaj's early works such as *Reči o svečoveku* (Words on the Allman) and *Molitve na jezeru* (Prayers by the Lake), it was the works that emphasized the national and religious distinctiveness of the Serbian people such as *Words to the Serbian People through the Dungeon Window* (1985), *Život Svetog Save* (The Life of St Sava) (1986), *Iznad istoka i zapada* (Above East and West) (1987), *Kosovo i Vidovdan* (Kosovo and St Vitus Day) (1988) that caught the attention of publishers, the academic community and the wider audience. This interest can be explained, to a certain extent, by the weakening and fall of communism and the emancipation of national and religious feelings and aspirations suppressed under communism. The number of Nikolaj's published works multiplied in the following years—more than 200 such publications turned up between 1990 and 2000. It was no coincidence that this renewed interest fell at the time of a nationalist resurgence that became the main driving force and program of the political elites in what were the constituent units (republics and autonomous provinces) of the former Yugoslavia, which led to armed conflicts, first in Slovenia in 1991, and then in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. During the 1990s Nikolaj's work *Rat i Biblija* (War and the Bible) was published in five different editions in Serbia (1993, 1995, 1996, 1998 and 2000). The recognition of Slovenian and Croatian independence by leading Western countries, especially Germany and France, and their general anti-Serbian stance in the wars of Yugoslav succession greatly influenced the interest in what was perceived as Nikolaj's anti-Western writings, like *Tri aveti evropske civilizacije* (Three Ghosts of European Civilization) (1991) and *Najstrašnija inkvizicija* (The Most Horrible Inquisition) (1992). During the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which centered to a considerable extent on the clash between different reli-

gious identities among the peoples who shared the same ethnic origins (Orthodox Serbians, Roman Catholic Croats and Muslim Bosniaks), it is possible to observe a new moment in the reception of the works of Bishop Nikolaj. The emphasis shifted from criticism of the USA and the West for imposition of their global domination to the topic of the sacrifice of an Orthodox Serbian peasant and the Serbian people at large. Consequently, Nikolaj's works dealing with the mentality of the Serbian people and their role in history, such as *Nacionalizam Svetog Save* (Nationalism of St Sava) (1994, 1996, 1998), *Words to the Serbian People through the Dungeon Window* (1995, 1996, 1997, 1999, 2000), *Srpski narod kao Teodul* (The Serbian People as Theodulos) (1993, 1996, 1999, 2000) became increasingly popular.

On the other side, non-Serbian participants in the Yugoslav civil war advanced their own interpretations of the entire modern Serbian history, conveniently describing it as a permanent pursuance of nationalist ambitions and territorial expansion at the expense of others. Special place in such narratives was reserved for the SOC, which was routinely depicted as the spiritual instigator of Serbian nationalism, and within that context the role of Bishop Nikolaj and his articulation of the concept of *Svetosavlje* (Saint Sava'sness), a Serbian variant of Orthodox Christianity, was given paramount importance. From wartime propaganda such narratives spilled into both official historiographies and more popular accounts in successor states, and remain in strong evidence to this day.<sup>10</sup>

It was also in the context of the break-up of Yugoslavia and the role of what is loosely termed as international community in it that Bishop Nikolaj's legacy attracted the attention of scholars from abroad. The

<sup>10</sup> For the case of Croatia, see Ljubica Štefan, *Pregled srpskog antisemitizma*, (Zagreb: Alatiir, 1992); Ljubica Štefan, *Srpska pravoslavna crkva i fašizam*, (Zagreb: Globus, 1996); Juraj Batelja, *Rivellijeva zavjera laži* (Zagreb: Postulatura blaženog Alojzija Stepinca, 2015), 53–141. The most recent example from Montenegro is Dragan Veselinov, *Moj Bog: pitajte popa* (Podgorica: Nova Pobjeda, 2022), 117–118. In this example, the author, a former politician, endeavors in a particularly nebulous manner to present Nikolaj as a virulent opponent of Darwin, humanism and Europeaness. It is a thinly veiled contribution to the campaign against the Serbian Orthodox Church spearheaded by the sections of Montenegrin society close to President Milo Đukanović.

first important book was Thomas Bremer's published doctoral dissertation *Ecclesial Structure and Ecclesiology of the Serbian Orthodox Church in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, defended in 1990 at the University of Münster (Germany).<sup>11</sup> For Bremer, Bishop Nikolaj was not a systematic theologian but rather a very practical and engaged churchman, dedicated to and loved by his flock.<sup>12</sup> Although Bremer points out Nikolaj's critique of Europe and his idealization of the Serbian peasantry as the cornerstone of Serbian Orthodoxy, he believes that Nikolaj's major failure was his inability to think about the full union between Orthodox and non-Orthodox churches, instead reducing their relationship only to practical cooperation and understanding.<sup>13</sup>

The emergence of Bremer's book also had an impact in Serbian society. A group of intellectuals headed by Nebojša Popov and Mirko Đorđević, a faction of opposition to the regime of Slobodan Milošević, pushed for the translation of Bremer's book, which indeed materialized six years after the original German edition.<sup>14</sup> The said group of intellectuals branded themselves as European-minded liberals deeply attached to civic values and they tended to take a moral high ground even in relation to other opposition parties and groups which they did not find committed enough to the modernization of Serbia. In their resistance to nationalism and Milošević's military involvement in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, they turned to the "deconstruction" of much of the Serbian historical heritage. Central to this was their critique of Bishop Nikolaj which, in their view, the book of the German theologian Bremer exemplified through critical examination of Nikolaj's ecclesiology. Indeed, the reason for publishing a Serbian translation of the book, as Bremer himself asserted in the preface of the Serbian edition, was an increased interest in the SOC, and especially its role in the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s.<sup>15</sup> It should be noted, though, that Bremer admitted that the reading of Nikolaj Velimirović and his dis-

<sup>11</sup> Thomas Bremer, *Ekklesiale Struktur und Ekklesiologie in der Serbischen Orthodoxen Kirche im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Würzburg: Augustinus-Verlag, 1992).

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 159-160.

<sup>14</sup> Tomas Bremer, *Vera, kultura i politika* (Niš: Gradina; Junir 1997).

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

ciple Justin Popović as proponents of Serbian nationalism was not necessarily the only one that could be drawn from their work. For him, such interpretations in the West were the products of a fairly modest knowledge about the SOC rather than hostility toward it, whereas in Serbia a certain political agenda was often hidden behind such assessments.<sup>16</sup> Bremer was no doubt correct in his judgement because for Serbian intellectuals who promoted his book there was no other interpretation of Nikolaj than that which saw him as a retrograde, anti-European, nationalist and clerical thinker.

The second important book was Radovan Bigović's revised doctoral dissertation published in 1998 under the title *From Allman to the Godman: The Christian Philosophy of Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović*.<sup>17</sup> Similar to Bremer, Bigović finds that Nikolaj was not a systematic theologian but rather the preacher of the word of God.<sup>18</sup> Although Bigović holds Nikolaj in high esteem, he does not consider his theology beyond reproach. Bigović deems Nikolaj's idea of the "all-man" as neo-Arianism, and his account of God's creation of the world as an aesthetical materialization of the preexisting idea of the cosmos and not the biblical creation *ex nihilo*. However, Bigović's major critique of Nikolaj is in the sphere of Christology. According to him, Nikolaj did not think of Christ in Chalcedonian terms as being both the perfect God and a perfect man, and he did not differentiate between the divine nature and divine energies.<sup>19</sup> While Bremer's focus was mostly on ecumenical theology, Bigović largely paid attention to dogmatic issues.

In spite of Bremer's remark that the interpretation of Nikolaj in the context of Serbian nationalism should not be the only one, it not only prevailed in the West, but also came to serve as a platform for a number of charges against him. As a natural extension of his Serbian nationalism,

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 12-13.

<sup>17</sup> Radovan Bigović's doctoral dissertation that bears the title *Hrišćanska filosofija Vladike Nikolaja Velimirovića* was defended in 1993 at the Theological Faculty in Belgrade and published as *Od svečoveka do bogočoveka: hrišćanska filosofija Vladike Nikolaja Velimirovića* (Beograd: Raška škola 1998).

<sup>18</sup> Bigović, *Od svečoveka do bogočoveka*, 6.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

Nikolaj was further portrayed as an anti-Westerner,<sup>20</sup> anti-European,<sup>21</sup> fascist,<sup>22</sup> anti-Semite,<sup>23</sup> anti-ecumenist<sup>24</sup> and anti-democrat.<sup>25</sup> As can be seen, the list includes the whole spectrum of anti-liberal stigmatization that might be applied in order to discredit an individual and ostracize him from the sphere of an acceptable historical legacy. The most influential castigation of Nikolaj, which caused a considerable stir in Serbian public opinion, certainly came from the works of Jovan Byford and centered on the Bishop's antisemitism.<sup>26</sup> The problem with Byford's and other similar works was that they appeared to have been designed to prove a premeditated thesis, as reflected in a selective and tendentious use of sources and an evasion to confront any alternative, much less opposing views.

It is not surprising then that such works, and Byford's in particular, provoked a response from some Serbian authors close to the SOC. These

<sup>20</sup> Buchenau, *Orthodoxie und Katholizismus in Jugoslawien*, 82.

<sup>21</sup> Klaus Buchenau, "Anti-Europeanism in the Balkans, Anti-Americanism in Latin America: a Comparison, Religion," *State & Society* 40, no. 3-4, (2012): 379-394, 384.

<sup>22</sup> Stefan Rohdewald, *Götter der Nationen: Religiöse Erinnerungsfiguren in Serbien, Bulgarien und Makedonien bis 1944* (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 2014), 516.

<sup>23</sup> Buchenau, *Orthodoxie und Katholizismus in Jugoslawien*, 161; Jovan Byford, "From 'Traitor' to 'Saint': Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović in Serbian Public Memory," *Analysis of Current Trends In Antisemitism* 22 (2004), 1-41; Julia Anna Lis, *Anti-westliche Diskurse in der serbischen und griechischen Orthodoxie – Zur Konstruktion des «Westens» bei Nikolaj Velimirović, Justin Popović, Christos Yannaras und John S. Romanides* (Berlin: Peter Lang 2019), 62.

<sup>24</sup> Vjekoslav Perica, "Interfaith Dialogue versus Recent Hatred: Serbian Orthodoxy and Croatian Catholicism from the Second Vatican Council to the Yugoslav War, 1965-1992," *Religion, State and Society* 29, no. 1 (2001): 39-66: 48.

<sup>25</sup> Klaus Buchenau, "Orthodox Values and Modern Necessities," in *Civic and Uncivic Values. Serbia in the Post-Milošević Era*, eds. Ola Listhaug, Sabrina P. Ramet and Dragana Dulić (Budapest — New York: Central European Press, 2011), 111-142: 115.

<sup>26</sup> Jovan Byford, "Willing Bystanders: Dimitrije Ljotić 'Shield' Collaboration and the Destruction of Serbia's Jews," in *In the Shadow of Hitler: Personalities of the Right in Central and Eastern Europe*, eds. Rebecca Haynes and Martyn Rady (London: IB Tauris 2011), 295-312; Jovan Byford, "Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović: 'Lackey of the Germans' or a 'Victim of Fascism'?" in *Serbia and Serbs in World War Two*, eds. Sabrina Ramet and Ola Listhaug (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2011), 127-152; Jovan Byford, *From "Traitor" to "Saint": Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović in Serbian Public Memory* (Jerusalem: SICSA, 2004).

works were not without merit in expanding our knowledge about Nikolaj in terms of the empirical material they brought forward, but they were not conducive to critical examination of his life and work, just like the studies of the authors whose claims they set out to disprove. The authors in question were openly apologetic in tone and avoided confronting squarely the evidence that contradicted their praise of the “holy Bishop Nikolaj” (he was indeed canonized in 2003).<sup>27</sup> Debate on Nikolaj has thus largely remained a reflection of clashes between different and opposing political paradigms and our understanding of him has not grown in keeping with the ever increasing number of publications.

Nevertheless, there are some works that have advanced a critical perusal of the most controversial aspects of Nikolaj and addressed the more extravagant claims made in literature. In one perspicacious analysis, it has been demonstrated that Nikolaj’s distaste for contemporary Europe revolved around the notion that it abandoned Christianity, which constituted its spiritual and moral backbone, and that apostasy accounted for its decline and the disasters that it suffered.<sup>28</sup> More recently, a different and more nuanced view has been advanced concerning some contentious issues from Nikolaj’s biography that challenges what has become conventional wisdom offered by German historiography.<sup>29</sup> Combining thorough research with the relevant theoretical approaches to the relationship between religion and fascism, a book-length study has explored Ljotić’s attitude toward Christian churches

<sup>27</sup> Vladimir Dimitrijević, *Oklevetani svetac: Vladika Nikolaj i srbofobija* (Gornji Milanovac: Lio, 2007); Predrag Samardžić, *Episkop Nikolaj i Novi Zavet o Jevrejima* (Beograd: Hrišćanska misao, 2004).

<sup>28</sup> Zoran Milutinović, *Getting over Europe. The Construction of Europe in Serbian Culture* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2011), 147–168.

<sup>29</sup> Vladimir Cvetković, “Još jedan osvrt na predavanje ‘Nacionalizam Svetog Save’ Svetog Nikolaja Žičkog,” *Crkvene studije* 16, no. 1 (2019): 131–148; Id., “The Freedom from Passions and the Freedom for All: St Nikolai Velimirović on Democracy,” *Nicholai Studies* 1 (2021): 53–80; Id., “The Reception of the Serbian Orthodox Church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century German Academia,” in *Philosophos – Philotheos – Philoponos: Studies and Essays as Charisteria in Honor of Professor Bogoljub Šijaković on the Occasion of His 65<sup>th</sup> Birthday*, ed. Mikonja Knežević (Belgrade: Gnomon, Podgorica: Matica srpska, 2021), 993–1004.



in Yugoslavia, and within that context the links and mutual influences between the leader of ZBOR and Nikolaj.<sup>30</sup> Cvetković's and Lompar's works not just do away with much of what has been repeated *ad nauseam*, but point to alternative and convincing readings of a number of controversies. This is important because while some claims relating to Nikolaj, such as his admiration to Hitler, are ludicrous in light of the evidence, others, such as his anti-Semitism, cannot be dismissed but yet require careful contextualization and assessment.

Building on those valuable contributions the present volume seeks to depart from the polarizing and highly politically-charged views of both Nikolaj's detractors and apologists. In an attempt to move away from the proverbial black legend and the golden legend, it aims to reassert the necessity to revisit the totality of primary sources, including the writings of Nikolaj himself, and to apply critical analysis to often repeated, but not adequately substantiated, claims. This is all the more necessary as there are many lacunae in our knowledge concerning some important episodes and aspects of Nikolaj's life—no scholarly biography of this prominent personality has been written so far<sup>31</sup>—and the editors hope that this volume will go some way toward clearing the air. Importantly, the facts of Nikolaj's life and work must be placed in the only methodologically sound and appropriate historical and theological context of his time. This seemingly obvious truth has too often been disregarded, and not just in Nikolaj's case,<sup>32</sup> and is a mandatory re-

<sup>30</sup> Rastko Lompar, *Dimitrije Ljotić – učitelj ili farisej*.

<sup>31</sup> A lot of material is provided in Milan D. Janković, *Episkop Nikolaj: život, misao i delo* (Beograd: Eparhija šabačko-valjevska, 2002), 3 vols; Ljubomir Ranković's *Sveti Vladika Nikolaj: život i delo* (Šabac: Glas crkve, 2013) is a biography, but it lacks scholarly apparatus and reads as something of a hagiography.

<sup>32</sup> A famous example of writing history backwards from the perspective of "our changed vantage point," especially given the tremendous success of the book, is provided in Christopher Clark's introduction to his own *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914* (London: Allen Lane, 2012). On p. xxvi he warns against "a vulgar presentism that remakes the past to meet the needs of the present," but only 23 lines later goes on to declare, with the touch of reproaching Balkanist discourse: "The Yugoslav wars of the 1990s have reminded us of the lethality of Balkan nationalism. Since Srebrenica and the siege of Sarajevo, it has become harder to think of Serbia as the mere object or victim of great power politics and easier to conceive of Serbian nationalism as an historical force in its own right."

quirement if one is to not only avoid the pitfalls of the kind discussed above but also open new alleys in scholarly investigation of Nikolaj's voluminous work. It is also to be hoped that a critical edition of Nikolaj's works will be published in the not so distant future and that more of it will be translated into English and other languages, since that would greatly facilitate further studies.

Since the charges against Nikolaj are presented mostly by historians and political scientists, the majority of chapters in this volume are contributed by historians and political scientists, with only a few theologians and philosophers. The volume is divided into three sections dealing with: i) Nikolaj's formative period before and during the Great War, which he spent in Germany, Switzerland, the UK and the USA, and his ecumenical endeavors; ii) the interwar period, while he served first as bishop of Žiža and later as bishop of Ohrid and Žiža again, and his relationship with the Yugoslav government, political parties, the Roman Catholic Church, Jewish communities, as well as his attitudes toward the ideologies of fascism and communism; iii) his immigration to the USA, and his life in immigration, including his political and literary activities and ecumenical engagements.

Slobodan G. Markovich focuses on Nikolaj's articles published in the literary avant-garde London journal *The New Age* in 1915 and in 1918-1919. It discusses Nikolaj's nationalism and anti-ecumenism, but also his religious syncretism and the origins of his idea of the all-man or pan-humanism. Markovich argues against the dominant scholarly attitude that Fr. Nikolaj was for rapprochement between Orthodox and Anglican churches, but had a profound suspicion towards Catholicism,<sup>33</sup> at least at that stage. Fr. Nikolaj's enthusiasm for reunion between all Christian churches refutes Bremer's remark that his ecumenism was limited to practical cooperation and understanding among the churches. Markovich also describes Fr. Nikolaj as an ardent critic of nationalism; he was a proponent of the Yugoslav idea, but not a Yugoslav nationalist, because he perceived Yugoslavia as a transitory entity on the path to the larger unity of European and world nations, rejecting ethnic

<sup>33</sup> Byford, *Denial and Repression of Antisemitism*, 32; Buchenau, *Auf russischen Spuren*, 161.

and racial divisions and the concept of nation-states. Finally, Markovich offers a new interpretation of Fr. Nikolaj's idea of the all-man or panhuman (*svečovek*) as a human being, and not the incarnate God as Bigović has claimed, who can accommodate the religious traditions of Judaism, Christianity, Islam and the main religions of the Far East, but at the same time oppose materialism, narrow nationalism and imperialism. Therefore, the all-man cannot be reduced to 'the Slavic and Orthodox antidote to the selfish Nietzschean, Germanic, and pagan superman.'<sup>34</sup>

Aleksandar Djakovac investigates how evil, the brutality of the Great War, and Nikolaj's anthropological universalism shaped his theological understanding of war and violence. He challenges the view that Fr. Nikolaj's universalism was rooted in the 'Slavophile idealization of rural lifestyle,'<sup>35</sup> arguing that it rather originated in the evangelical sense of the community of all people on earth. In Nikolaj's view, wars were but a consequence of the lost inner wars against sins in the soul of each individual; his understanding was thus not informed by the Kosovo covenant that emerged from the battle between the Serbians and Ottomans in the field of Kosovo on St. Vitus' Day 1389. Djakovac further argues that Nikolaj was critical of Europe not because of its rationalism,<sup>36</sup> but because of the war and violence that erupted in its midst. It was because Europeans abandoned Christianity that they lost their inner battles with vices and the war against sins was replaced by the war among the people—this is in line with Milutinović. For Djakovac, the idea of personal sacrifice is central to Fr. Nikolaj's views on war, violence and evil, because only by accepting it may one acquire life. Since all particular sacrifices are subsumed into the sacrifice of Christ, the final redeemer of history, only the return of Christianity to Europe might bring peace and love.

Phillip Calington explores the role that pre-Christian seekers and the religious figures of the Middle and Far East, such as Lao Tzu, Krish-

<sup>34</sup> Jovan Byford, *Denial and Repression of Antisemitism*, 31.

<sup>35</sup> Klaus Buchenau, "From Hot War to Cold Integration? Serbian Orthodox Church Voices on Globalization and the European Union," in *Eastern Orthodoxy in a Global Age: Tradition Faces the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, eds. Victor Roudometof, Alexander Agadjanian, and Jerry Pankhurst (Walnut Creek: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005), 58.

<sup>36</sup> Buchenau, "Orthodox Values and Modern Necessities," 131.

na, Buddha, and Zoroaster played in the religious philosophy of Father and latter Bishop Nikolaj. Calington rejects the view that in his pre-Ohrid phase Bishop Nikolaj's thought was a form of religious syncretism rather than the form of Christianity.<sup>37</sup> Calington argues that in his approach to non-Christian religious figures Fr. Nikolaj took the Orthodox Christian perspective, similar to the perspective of early Christians who had praised Greek philosophers as the forerunners of Truth. He not only compared pre-Christian philosophers with Eastern religious thinkers, but also the key concepts in different religions. Thus, the notion of "nirvana" employed in his *Prayers by the Lake* for Nikolaj corresponds, Calington believes, with the Christian notion of deification (*theosis*) as the goal of personal striving. Moreover, Calington argues that Fr. Nikolaj's position was not exceptional, as many other great Orthodox figures, such as St Seraphim of Sarov, St Nicholas of Japan and Fr. Seraphim Rose opined that pre-Christian philosophers and seekers were "prophets" of Christ.

Rastko Lompar investigates the contacts between Bishop Nikolaj and Dimitrije Ljotić from their early days to 1941. First, Lompar exposes the falsehood of the claim that the leadership of Ljotić's Zbor constituted the backbone of the God-devotionalists movement (*Bogomoljci*) led by Nikolaj;<sup>38</sup> he shows that most of the priests who joined Zbor by the late 1930s had been God-devotionalists since the early 1930s. Second, Lompar looks at the nature of Bishop Nikolaj's anti-Semitism by comparing it with Ljotić's position towards the Jews. There was a major difference indeed: while Nikolaj's views were a mixture of Christian anti-Judaism and anti-Jewish prejudices from the nineteenth century, Ljotić's propagated modern and secular anti-Semitism, although without the racial element central to the anti-Semitism of the Nazis. Nikolaj's antisemitism was of the kind typical for clerical conservatives. In this and other respects, as Lompar concludes, Bishop Nikolaj can hardly be considered as the ideologue of Zbor, although he did influence Ljotić to certain extent.

<sup>37</sup> C. Cimermam, "Nekoliko reči o Nikolaju Velimiroviću," *Hrišćanski život* 11-12 (1922), 606-612: 611-612.

<sup>38</sup> Byford, *Potiskivanje i poricanje antisemitizma*, 33.

Miloš Timotijević explores Bishop Nikolaj's stance toward the Yugoslav Communist Party and communist ideology in the interwar years. In line with Lompar's findings, he shows that Nikolaj's anticommunism was different in form, strength and content than that of Zbor and other right-wing parties in Yugoslavia. Timotijević stresses that Nikolaj was a harsh critic of capitalism for creating injustice among the people and thus turning workers toward communism and atheism. The Bishop's critique of communism centered on its aggressive atheism and primitive materialism, while he never criticized it for fighting against capitalism. His criticism of communism was not directed against the Yugoslav communists as much as against the Bolshevik regime in Russia. Nikolaj was rather concerned with foreign affairs and found that the atheist regime in the Soviet Union failed the role that Russia was supposed to play, in his view, on the international stage. Timotijević claims that Nikolaj had a strong belief in Orthodoxy and the Slavs, and he considered the role of "Holy Russia" as immensely important for the salvation of humankind.

Dragan Bakić offers a missing account of Nikolaj's attitude toward the regime of Prince Regent Paul, with a special emphasis on the crises caused by the opposition to the Concordat with the Holy See in 1937 and the 27 March 1941 coup d'état, both of which involved the Bishop as a ringleader. These two pivotal events provide insights in Nikolaj's stance toward the Roman Catholic Church at that time, his view of relations between the SOC and the authorities, his relations with Patriarchs Varnava and Gavriilo (especially the latter), and finally, his resistance to Nazi Germany. Nikolaj emerges as a particularly assertive and unbending church dignitary who influenced political developments in Yugoslavia, despite his professions to the contrary. Bakić argues that there was a clear link between the blow that the government authority suffered during the Concordat crisis, to which Nikolaj contributed immensely, and the apparent ease with which the coup d'état was executed in 1941, and draws attention to the politically irrational stance of the SOC leadership, and Nikolaj in particular, on both occasions.

Vladimir Cvetković also explores accusations regarding nationalism, fascism and anti-Semitism brought against Bishop Nikolaj in contemporary scholarship. He not only challenges these charges, but also

deconstructs the scholarly strategy applied to disputing the moral authority of Bishop Nikolaj. Cvetković argues that in much of this scholarship these strategies have been borrowed from the media, which has applied them to political or ideological adversaries such as Slobodan Milošević, Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin, and which aim at *reductio ad Hitlerum*, an effective disqualification of the personality in question by likening them with Hitler, regardless of the lack of foundation for such a comparison. In the rest of his paper Cvetković offers alternative interpretations of Nikolaj's alleged nationalism, fascism and anti-Semitism. In this connection, he explains that Nikolaj's Saint-Savian nationalism was an expression neither of Serbian ethnical nationalism, nor of Yugoslav integral nationalism, but rather the evangelical platform for building Yugoslav unity on the principles of holiness. He points out some of the main reasons for attributing fascist proclivities to Nikolaj, namely his lecture on Saint-Savian nationalism in 1935, his acceptance of the Red Cross medal from Nazi Germany in 1936 for restoring the German military cemetery in Bitolj, and his friendship with Ljotić, on the one hand, and glaring disregard for the overwhelming evidence of his hostility to Nazism, on the other. Cvetković's view of Nikolaj's anti-Semitism chimes with that of Lompar and he rejects Nikolaj's authorship of *Words to Serbian People through the Dungeon Window* which usually underpins the charges for his anti-Semitism.

Radmila Radić investigates the treatment that the authorities in communist Yugoslavia meted out to exiled Nikolaj, including accusations for falsifying history, slandering the USSR, and preaching darkness, fascism, religious and racial hatred. Both the government of Josip Broz Tito and the Synod of the SOC thwarted Nikolaj's attempts to create an independent Orthodox Church in the USA and Canada. Nikolaj foresaw the merging of national Orthodox churches in North America into one, united independent Orthodox Church of America. Not surprisingly, neither the Yugoslav authorities nor the Synod wanted to lose control over that part of the SOC and the Serbian emigration in North America. Tito's communists punished Bishop Nikolaj by stripping him of Yugoslav citizenship in September 1951, while the Synod remained deaf to Nikolaj's recommendations and proposals for dealing with the split in the Serbian diaspora. Nikolaj eventually withdrew to

St Tikhon monastery, which was under the jurisdiction of the Orthodox Church of America. The control that the Yugoslav authorities exercised over the Patriarch and the Synod of the SOC defeated all Nikolaj's plans and ensured that Tito's regime could contain the activities of the anti-communist diaspora in the USA and Canada.

Nemanja Andrijašević introduces the reader to the correspondence between Nikolaj and his life-long friend and associate, priest Aleksa Todorović, concerning the former's editorial work for the USA-based journal *Svečanik*. In doing so, Nikolaj intended to unite Serbian theological forces in Europe and the United States and to respond to the spiritual needs of the Orthodox people in Yugoslavia, as well as to familiarize the English-speaking readership with the spiritual heights of the larger Orthodox tradition. This was done through the English translations of Bishop Petar Petrović Njegoš's *Luča mikrokozma* (*The Ray of the Microcosm*). This was in keeping, as Andrijašević shows, with Nikolaj's equally dividing his missionary work between the Orthodox people in Yugoslavia deprived of spiritual counsel under communist rule, the Serbian Orthodox people in Western Europe and America, who as immigrants found themselves uprooted from their spiritual tradition, and the Western Christians of whom some were converts to Orthodoxy.

Dragan Šljivić explores Nikolaj's attitude toward democracy, focusing mainly on his post-1945 American period and analyzing his work *Zemlja nedodjija* (*The Nevercoming Land*). Šljivić argues that Nikolaj's discourse was an attempt to de-secularize and re-Christianize democracy and all previously secularized theological concepts employed in the modern theory of the state. Moreover, Nikolaj's understanding of democracy was shaped by the two pillars of the Serbian Orthodox tradition: Saint-Savanness, the legacy of the first Serbian archbishop Sava Nemanjić (1175–1236), and the Kosovo covenant. Šljivić thus contests the claim of some scholars that Saint-Savanness and the Kosovo covenant are exclusive concepts and, as such, oppose democracy based on inclusivity. Šljivić further argues that Nikolaj's Saint-Savian nationalism was a unifying force not only in regard to ethnic and national community, but also in regard to sex and gender, pointing to the equality of genders in the God-Worshippers movement in which women could vote and stand for candidates. Šljivić considers Nikolaj's work *The Nev-*

*ercoming Land* both his major criticism of and praise for democracy. Nikolaj was critical of political partisanship and skeptical of the scope of representative democracy, because of its focus on power and not on service, but at the same time praised democracy because of its connection to Christianity, which by its ideas of liberty, fraternity and equality laid the foundation for it.

Srećko Petrović turns to the post-1945 ecumenical activities of Bishop Nikolaj, bringing new evidence which rebuts the assessment that, apart from his early ecumenical activities during the Great War, he was anti-ecumenist. In fact, Nikolaj, then residing in Great Britain, shared the views that led to the World Council of Churches (WCC) as a permanent forum for the gathering of Church leaders. He was invited to the first preparatory meeting for establishing the WCC to be held in Geneva in early 1946. However, as Petrović shows, he did not participate on account of the expediencies of British foreign policy (which came to support Tito's regime) and the attitude of the Anglican Church. A visceral critic of Yugoslav communists, Nikolaj did not get a visa to remain in the UK and had to leave for the USA. The Archbishop of Canterbury, Geoffrey Fisher, disagreed with Bishop George Bell about Nikolaj's ability to represent the SOC at the planned meeting given the circumstances. However, despite his absence from the WCC's first assembly in Amsterdam in 1948 (all the Christian churches under Soviet dominion were absent because of the political climate of the early Cold War), Nikolaj was the only Orthodox bishop in the Committee on Displaced Persons of the Church World Service, an organization working under the auspices of the WCC. Moreover, against the decision of the Holy Synod of the SOC, he attended the Second general assembly of the WCC in Evanston in 1954 and wrote very positively about this ecumenical gathering.

Bishop Maxim Vasiljević draws attention to Nikolaj's extensive literary work during his exile in the USA, comprising more than ten books and a large number of articles, homilies, essays and letters. In particular, he focuses on his ecumenical and pan-Orthodox activities. Similar to Petrović, Bishop Maxim refutes the claim that Nikolaj was ecumenically engaged only in his early years and that he later abandoned ecumenical dialogue. On the contrary, many sermons Nikolaj



preached in the churches across New York during the late 1940s, as well as his attendance of the Second General Assembly of WCC, demonstrate his ecumenical openness and his opposition to those who reduced the Orthodox Church to either confessionalism or nationalism. As for Bishop Nikolaj's pan-Orthodox activities, Bishop Maxim also shows that he worked for a single Orthodox Church of America which would unite all Orthodox believers, regardless of their ethnic roots. Although he was aware of the importance of ethnic ecclesial traditions, Nikolaj decided to act in accordance with the reality that the new generations of church-goers were American-born and English-speaking Orthodox Christians, exhibiting a fine example of "enculturation".

With all this content in view, the editors hope that the present volume will not just advance the body of knowledge concerning Bishop Nikolaj, but also contribute to breaking the petrified paradigms, born out of ideological prejudices and political agendas, and facilitate further innovative studies of his theological thought and political agency in Serbia, Yugoslavia, and in exile, all of which undoubtedly deserve much scholarly investigation. Some additional information on the circumstances of his transition from Britain to the USA after the Second World War is provided by the annexed documents, freshly unearthed in the course of archival research.

*Vladimir Cvetković and Dragan Bakić*

# Cosmopolitanism, Ecumenism and Syncretism of Father Nikolaj Velimirović in 1915-1919

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There is still no full bibliography of Nikolaj Velimirović's written works from the period of the Great War. Only booklets, pamphlets and papers have been listed. He also published many newspaper articles in both the British provincial and London press and the full list of them is still not available.

His overall publication activity during the Great War in the United Kingdom and the United States (1915-1920) could be summarized into three groups:

1. Works written and sermons delivered to propagate Serbia and the future country of Yugoslavs.
2. Works and sermons on Eastern Orthodoxy prepared to get the anglophone public acquainted with Greek Orthodox Christian traditions.
3. Works written to emphasize the importance of faith and spirituality.

I have already dealt elsewhere with his activities focused on the promotion of Serbia and future Yugoslavia in Britain during the Great War and on bringing closer the Church of England with Orthodox churches.<sup>2</sup> This paper is focused on the ideas that he expressed in two

<sup>1</sup> This research was supported by the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia, project no. 7747152, "Cultural Transfer Europe-Serbia from the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> century – CTES".

<sup>2</sup> Slobodan G. Markovich, "Activities of Father Nikolai Velimirovich in Great Britain during the Great War," *Balkanica*, vol. XLVII (2017): 143-190. Idem, "British-Ser-

series of articles: the first during his stay in the United States in June-August of 1915, and the second in 1918/1919, in the literary avant-garde London journal *The New Age*.

In September 1915, he returned from the United States to Britain and he soon became a very prominent preacher in London and Britain. His lectures given at St. Margaret's Church, on March 30, and on April 6 and 12, 1916, created a sensation and he became immensely popular.<sup>3</sup> British writer Stephen Graham was a co-participant with Father Nikolaj in giving lectures to this church. He left a testimony on the effects of these lectures: "The acoustics were bad but the packed congregation hung on to every word of our wonderful Serb preacher." He immediately became very popular and began nation-wide tours to Anglican, but also to all other Christian churches and various associations. "He was tremendously in demand as a preacher and became overnight famous."<sup>4</sup>

The first climax of his activity was his sermon at St. Paul's Cathedral delivered on Sunday, July 23, 1917. As *The Church Times* informed its readers: "... never before has a priest of the Orthodox Church preached in the cathedral church of London, though the preacher of last Sunday morning has already spoken from the pulpits of many parish churches. By their invitation to Fr. Nicholai Velimirovic the Dean and Chapter of St. Paul's have given great satisfaction to Churchmen."<sup>5</sup>

bian Cultural and Political Relations 1784-1918," in Idem (ed.), *British-Serbian Relations from the 18th to the 21st Centuries* (Belgrade: Faculty of Political Science and Zepter Book World, 2018), pp. 13-117. Idem, "Kulturni izaštanici Srbije u Velikoj Britaniji, in Đorđe Đurić (ed.), *Prvi svetski rat i ujedinjenje / The First World War and the Unification* (Novi Sad: Matica Srpska, 2018), 100-114. Idem, "Serbia and Britain as War Allies in the Great War," *Symplexis*, No. 2 (2019): 76-92.

<sup>3</sup> "Slav Orthodoxy. Father Nicolai Velimirovitch at St. Margaret's Westminster," *The Church Times*, 7 Apr. 1916, 338.

<sup>4</sup> Stephen Graham, "Nicolai Velimirovic in London," FSU, MSS, No. 581, f. 23 a. See also Stephen Graham, *Part of the Wonderful Scene. An Autobiography* (London: Collins, 1964), 101-105.

<sup>5</sup> Editorials, *The Church Times*, 27 July 1917, 76 a. The full sermon was also reproduced in the same issue: "The Anglo-Catholic Pulpit. *The Sacrifices of Nations*. A sermon preached at St. Paul's Cathedral, on the seventh Sunday after Trinity by Fr. Nicholas Velimirovic, D. D., St. Savva's College, Belgrade," *The Church Times*, 27 July 1917, p. 73, a, b, c, d.

***Ecumenism in Živa crkva and the issue of the Reunion  
of the Anglican Communion and the Orthodox East***

Father Nikolaj arrived in Britain in May 1915. One of the first things he did was to write a pamphlet entitled "Religion and Nationality in Serbia." R. W. Seton-Watson prefaced it on June 15, 1915, in other words on St. Vitus Day (Vidovdan). Velimirović dedicated the pamphlet "to the memory of the great Croatian patriot Bishop Strossmayer on the centenary of his birth (1815-1915)." At the end of the pamphlet, he expressed how convinced he was of the future harmony of Orthodox and Catholic South Slavs: "All we Jugoslavs are sure that there will be harmony and unanimity between the two priesthoods, the two confessions, and the two Churches in the future Serbian State." He believed that the national watchword after the war would be "Love first, and then Logic!"<sup>6</sup> R. W. Seton-Watson was very enthusiastic about the author of this booklet who represented "in best form the new spirit which is awakening in the Serbian Church and from which many expect a serious movement of internal reform."<sup>7</sup>

Fully in line with this, during his visit to the United States in June-August 1915, he was dedicated to finding common ground between Yugoslav emigrants, their clergy and their public figures. There were several important events that he organized among Yugoslav emigrants of which two may be singled out. In July 1915, he organized "a congress in Pittsburgh known for the fact that it was the first congress in Yugoslav history in which Catholic and Orthodox priests took part together, and there they swore that they would work in harmony for the sake of national unity and religious tolerance."<sup>8</sup> On August 27, 1915, a joint meeting of Greek-Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Greek Catholic (Unitarian) priests "of Yugoslav nationality" was held in Chicago. It was prompted by Rev. Nikolaj Velimirović.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Nicholas Velimirović, *Religion and Nationality in Serbia* (London: Nisbet & Co Ltd, 1915), 22.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>8</sup> Milada Paulová, *Jugoslavenski odbor* (Zagreb: Prosvjetna nakladna zadruga, 1925), 235.

<sup>9</sup> "Yugoslav Clergy and National Unity," *The Southern Slav Bulletin*, No. 1, 2. Cf. Irinej Dobrijević, "Nicholai Velimirovich: The Great War and America 1915-1918," in Krinka Vidaković Petrov (ed.), *The Great War 1914-1918. The Kingdom of Serbia, the*

One may also follow his publication activities in the States where he published five issues of *Živa crkva* (The Living Church), three of which were in English. The first issue was written on the occasion of the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the burning of John (Jan) Hus (1372- July 6, 1415). He had already caused controversy early in 1914 when his associate, the young Serbian theologian Dr. Vojislav Janić, made a sensation in Prague. He was there to speak on the centenary of the birth of Serbian poet and Montenegrin Prince Bishop Nyegosh. Nikodim Milaš, a well-known Serbian Orthodox theologian, wrote a letter to Aleksa Ilić and complained that, on the same occasion, Janić also spoke about the unification of all the Slavs. He claimed that Janić mentioned that in Serbia there was “a group of younger theologians that have endeavored to undertake reforms in our church in accordance with the teachings of Luther and Hus, because we believe that full [national] unity may only be achieved that way.” Janić was given the position as the editor of *Hrišćanski Glasnik*, the main reformist ecclesiastical journal in Serbia and among Serbs. This position was given to him on Father Nikolaj’s recommendation.

The owner of the journal, a very influential Serbian priest Aleksa Ilić was also the personal priest of King Peter I Karađorđević. Ilić was a kind of sponsor and main protector of Velimirović for many years and he asked him to write a letter to the journal denouncing claims that Janić advocated the fusion of Hussite, Lutheran and Orthodox teachings. Father Nikolaj is supposed to have told him that Janić did everything with his knowledge and previous approval, and Ilić was forced to stop the publication of his journal for good.<sup>10</sup>

The background of the whole affair was a confrontation between King Peter and the Church hierarchy in Serbia. Following the Balkan Wars in 1912/13, Skopje became a part of the Kingdom of Serbia. The King wanted to have new reform-oriented bishops and a new Metropolitan of Skopje was to be elected. There were plans to later elevate the Metropolitan of Skopje to the rank of Patriarch. Some leaders of the

*United States of America and the Serbian American Diaspora* (Alhambra CA: Sebastian Press, 2018), 232-233.

<sup>10</sup> Aleksa Ilić, *Moji doživljaji sa dr. Nikolajem Velimirovićem*, 21-23. Prota Aleksa Ilić, *Moji doživljaji* (Belgrade: St. Sava Printing Press, 1931), 396-408.

ruling Radical Party in Serbia also supported this scheme. Among those who the King had in mind were Chedomille Mijatovich (1842-1932), a widower, and former Serbian minister in London,<sup>11</sup> and Father Nikolaj Velimirović. Both were close associates of *Hrišćanski glasnik*, and friends of its owner, priest Aleksa Ilić. Therefore, theologians around this journal were supposed to be the basis of a new, vibrant and open Serbian Orthodox Church. It was only natural that the Metropolitan of Serbia Dimitri (Dimitrije, Metropolitan from 1905 till 1920, Patriarch in 1920-30) did not like these plans and did all he could to prevent them.

Father Nikolaj's stay in the States coincided with the anniversary of the burning of Hus and offered him a chance to further discuss the importance of Hus. The first issue of *Živa Crkva* is entitled "Sveti Jovan Hus" ("St. John Hus"). This means that Father Nikolaj considered him equal with other Orthodox saints. He clarified this point in the text: "Professor Palimov, a very Orthodox Russian theologian, called the doctrine of Hus Orthodox. The Protestants call Hus their founder and leader. The enlightened Catholics call him their hero and role model. I think that Hus was formally neither Orthodox, nor Protestant, nor Catholic, but that in essence he therefore was at once all of the three. He was a Christian, a true Christian in action and deed. Like James and Philip, like Thaddeus and Andrew."<sup>12</sup>

This is all in line with his insistence that the church union was essentially "unium cordium" ("the unity of hearts") and not that much a dogmatic exercise. And he expressed this opinion as early as 1909 in his dialogue about the Reunion with Anglican theologian Leighton Pullan in the Anglican newspaper *The Guardian*.<sup>13</sup>

Although his Christian ecumenism was clearly not only in favor of reunion with the Church of England but also with the Roman Catholic Church and Protestant churches, in reality Father Nikolaj became

<sup>11</sup> Slobodan G. Markovich, "Count Čedomilj Mijatović, a Leading Serbian Anglophile," *Balkanica*, Vol. 38 (2007): 121-122. Count Chedomille Mijatovich, *The Memoirs of a Balkan Diplomatist* (London – New York: Cassel and Co., 1917), 147-151.

<sup>12</sup> "Sveti Jovan Hus," *Živa Crkva*, No. 1 (1915): 11-12.

<sup>13</sup> Leighton Pullan, "Problems of Reunion with the East," *The Guardian*, No. 3296, 3 Feb. 1909, 171. Nikola Velimirovitch D.D., "Problems of Reunion with the East," *The Guardian*, No. 3300, 3 March 1909, 340-341. Leighton Pullan, "Reunion with the East," *The Guardian*, No. 3301, 10 Mar. 1909, 398.

the symbol of both rapprochement and activities in favor of an Anglican-Orthodox reunion. One should, however, mention that he established close relations with Cardinal Francis Alphonsus Bourne (Archbishop of Westminster, 1903-1935) who “highly appreciated” him.<sup>14</sup>

On April 27, 1916, in the presence of Metropolitan Dimitri of Serbia, Father Nikolaj at Sion College spoke after Bishop of Willesden and the Metropolitan of Serbia. The Bishop was careful about the reunion with Orthodox churches and the Old Catholic bodies, and the Metropolitan of Serbia was more enthusiastic, but he also spoke in rather general terms. This, however, did not affect Father Nikolaj’s enthusiasm. On that occasion he said: “I hope the common suffering of our Churches for the same cause will bring them nearer to unity than all the theological disputes and all the cautious considerations of the friends of unity. We have many friends of the reunion of the Churches to-day.”<sup>15</sup>

At the very end of the war Father Nikolaj was instrumental in organizing a special dinner for the most prominent members of the Church of England. This dinner had two aims. The first one was to say “thank you” to the Church of England for its extraordinary war-time assistance to Serbia on behalf of the Serbian Church and the Serbian state. It also aimed to endorse the Serbian Prime Minister Pashich (Pašić), who was not particularly popular in Britain at that moment, and who was Father Nikolaj’s political protector throughout the war.

With this in mind, on October 12, 1918, he personally arranged a dinner at Claridge’s Hotel. The official host was the Prime Minister of Serbia Pashich. A special 4-page souvenir “to the clergy of the Church of England by Prime Minister of Serbia” was prepared with a window from the Studenitza monastery on the cover page, and the map of future Yugoslavia accompanied by a historical note on the Serbian Orthodox Church, and personal signature of the Prime Minister. It was explained that “at present” there were 26 bishoprics (10 in the Kingdom of Serbia, 3 in Montenegro, and 13 in the South Slav provinces of Austria-Hungary).<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Bogumil Vošnjak, *U borbi za ujedinjenu narodnu državu* (Ljubljana, Belgrade and Zagreb, 1928), 177.

<sup>15</sup> “Serbia’s Primate,” *The Church Times*, May 5, 1916, 423 d. Cf. Slobodan G. Markovich, “Serbia and Britain as War Allies in the Great War,” 80.

<sup>16</sup> AS [Archives of Serbia], KSPL, SPA, f. X.

In his address, which was most likely drafted by Father Nikolaj, Prime Minister Pashich said that the Serbian Orthodox Church, “unaccustomed to be aided by other Churches in the most difficult moments of her life, will never forget all that the English Church has done for her during the present war.” He also made reference to the issue of church union: “May it be that, by the aid of the Almighty, this work of charity of the Anglican Church for the Church of Serbia may be the foundation-stone on which may be placed the rapprochement and the definite union of our two Churches for the good of all humanity.”<sup>17</sup> Prime Minister Pashich definitely did not belong to the group of pious politicians. Therefore, one could easily assume that Velimirović stood behind this statement of the Serbian Prime Minister. It caused some sensation even in those Serbian circles that were fully pro-Anglican. Even Chedomille Mijatovich, another great proponent of the reunion, was somewhat surprised by the wording regarding the Reunion in the prime minister’s address.<sup>18</sup>

Father Nikolaj left Britain in March 1919. During his first post-war visit to Britain in December 1919–January 1920 he already held the position of Bishop of Zhicha (Žiča). On December 16, 1919, he preached his second sermon at St. Paul’s Cathedral entitled “The Principle of the Eastern Orthodox Church.” On this occasion he reiterated his commitment to church union, particularly the church union between the Anglican Church and the Orthodox Churches. He complained that at the recently held peace conference in Paris no due attention was given to religion. “The statesmen there disposed of nations and countries as if they were themselves creators of nations and of the Earth.”<sup>19</sup> But it was not their fault, he claimed. Christian divisions were to be blamed. Al-

<sup>17</sup> “Serbia’s Gratitude,” *The Church Times*, May 23, 1918, 493 c. Cf. Slobodan G. Markovich, “Serbia and Britain as War Allies in the Great War,” *Symplexis*, No. 2 (2019): 88.

<sup>18</sup> Jovan M. Jovanovitch, *Dnevnik 1896-1920* (Belgrade: Prometej, 2015). See minister’s entry for October 1, 1918. *Ibid.*, p. 536.

<sup>19</sup> Bishop Nicholai, “The Principle of the Eastern Orthodox Church,” at the service arranged by the Eastern and Anglican Association on Dec. 16, 1919, together with the welcome delivered by Dr. Herbert Bury, Lord Bishop of Northern and Central Europe, in Nicholai Velimirovic, *The Spiritual Rebirth of Europe* (London: The Faith Press, 1920), 54-55.





HIS HOLINESS NICKOLAI VELIMIROVIĆ,  
BISHOP OF ZIČA, SERBIA.

Nicholai Velimirovic, *The Spiritual Rebirth of Europe*  
(London: The Faith Press, 1920), p. 2.

though he made some remarks from the then vastly popular repertoire of Eurocentrism and imperialism, and was also strongly impressed by the events in Russia, his main point was that a disunited Christian Church could not be taken seriously. To meet not only the present anxieties of Christendom, but “all the anxieties to come” he suggested the reunion of the churches, and clarified that he meant “not only rapprochement but real unity,” since the rapprochement between the Anglican Communion and the Orthodox East was already achieved.<sup>20</sup> Everyone will gain by the unity and nobody will lose, or as he put it, “the unity on which depends the salvation of the white race as a whole and of Christ’s cause in this world.”<sup>21</sup> Echoing the book of Apocalypse he warned that the angels of the Churches were “sounding the trumpets summoning to unity. Lost will be, in this world and in the world to come, whoever does not hear the sounding trumpet of the angel of his Church.”<sup>22</sup>

During the Great War Father Nikolaj undertook unprecedented activity in terms of bringing closer the Church of England with the Serbian Orthodox Church and other Orthodox churches. This led to the rapprochement of the two churches. It therefore comes as no surprise that a report of the Anglican and Eastern Churches Association credits Nikolaj Velimirović as “the chief personality in this rapprochement.”<sup>23</sup>

### *Association with The New Age*

*The New Age* was an independent weekly founded in 1894. Originally open for Labor ideas it became a Liberal journal in the early twentieth century. In 1907 it changed its subtitle to “An Independent Socialist Review of Politics, Literature, and Art.” At the end of 1907 Alfred Orage became the sole editor of the journal.<sup>24</sup> He soon attracted very

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 57.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 57.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 59.

<sup>23</sup> *The Anglican and Eastern Churches: A Historical Record 1914–1921* (London: Published for the Anglican and Eastern Churches Association by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1921), p. 16.

<sup>24</sup> Wallace Martin, *The New Age under Orage* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1967), 17–29.

JULY 11, 1918

THE NEW AGE

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## London Songs.

By R. A. Vran-Gavran.

### III.

#### IN PICCADILLY.

In Piccadilly, in the city of restful clubs, of anxious flesh and bewildered spirits, Buck Legion attended a meeting of the Occult Club. Yellow caftans of yellow silk, and yellow faces of yellow souls, yellow light and yellow tea, that was the atmosphere of the Occult inquiry.

The masculines spoke and the feminines spoke. When the words were given and taken, while the spirits remained untouched and unexpressed, Buck Legion was urged to end the convocation with a song and to bring some blue colour into the yellow. And Buck Legion sang, accompanied by the rest:—

The Unseen is occult to the seen, and the seen is occult to the unseen. Our spirit is an occult thing to our flesh, and our flesh is an occult thing to our spirit. The flesh is yearning to understand the spirit, and the spirit is yearning to understand the flesh. Both are fearing each other, both are instructing each other, and yet both are yearning for each other. The spirit is clothed everywhere by the flesh, and the flesh hides everywhere the spirit. Yet neither the clothes know their hidden inhabitant, nor the inhabitant knows its clothes. The spirit is everywhere crying for a shelter, and the shelter takes its guest up with mistrust.

The spirit is both inside and outside of the flesh. It acts inside the leaves of a rose, and sits and watches on the surface of the rosy leaves. The first half of the spirit is an inner actor, and the second half is a watching gallery. The watching spirit is on a holiday. It sits on the rosy leaves and watches its own work, and watches also the neighbouring spirit sitting on the thorny leaves of a thistle. The watching part after its holiday plunges deep into act, and the actor comes up to watch. On your foreheads and on your palms I see your spirit sitting and watching. And the outside spirit and the inside spirit are in constant communication, wirelessly, noiselessly.

Lo! a worker is making a window to your house. The inside spirit, the spirit of energy, is labouring,

Thy angels, we do not know; but whoever it is, it is higher and deeper than ourselves, older than ourselves, and younger than ourselves.

Didst Thou create all things we see to show Thy power or Thy weakness? Hast Thou retired so much to give us a chance to show our own power, to walk on our own feet?

One thing is certain, brothers, one thing has been revealed to ten thousand years of History. That all pottery we see is from the same Potter. Yea, that all pottery bears the same seal. The strikingly nice apples and rotten apples lay under the apple-tree upon the yellow bed of yellow leaves, and all of them, the nice and rotten, whispered to me:—

"We do not know where is our apple-tree, but we all are sisters, we all come from the same home that is gone."

"You are right," I said, "you are right and wrong, children. Your scent and your smell indicate the same tree, there you are right. But you are gone, not yet your home. For I see both your home and you. And in a little while I shall see only your home, but not you."

O occult way from our home to us, and from us to our home! I am confident that whether I pace over the yellow trees or lie below it, I am not far from home.

### IV.

#### IN BERKELEY SQUARE.

In one of a million moon nights, a tree-worshipper stood in Berkeley Square and prayed to a grand tree. Stealthily the moon looked at him, silently listened the tree to him, shadow-like, while Buck Legion accompanied him.

And when the tree-worshipper knelt down and embraced the tree, Buck Legion knelt down and did the same. Surprisedly, asked the tree-worshipper:—

"Is there any tree-worshipper in this city but me?"

"I am one," answered Buck Legion, "and I think there ought to be many."

And the tree-worshipper cried, and spoke:—

"From sheer despair I have become a tree-worshipper. I cannot worship man, nor man-god. Too im-

*The New Age*, July 11, 1918, p. 171.

Internet source: <https://modjourn.org/journal/new-age/>

prominent contributors including G. K. Chesterton, H. G. Wells, Bernard Shaw and Hillaire Belloc. Orage was very tolerant in his editorial management. He cultivated the idea of free press and made the journal very inclusive in terms of the topics it covered. In addition to politics, it treated equally topics from the fields of art, literature and philosophy.<sup>25</sup> The journal was open for discussions of Eastern European and Russian artists and writers. From the ranks of Yugoslavs it opened its pages first to Slovene journalist and critic Janko Lavrin. In January-March 1918, he published in ten issues of the *The New Age* his contributions entitled “Dostoyevsky and Certain of his Problems.”

In the issue that followed the last part of Lavrin’s essay on Dostoevsky a new author appeared in *The New Age* with the peculiar pseudonym “A. R. Vran-Gavran.” Wallace Martin wrongly identified Vran Gavran as “a Russian monk.” He claimed that he was introduced to the *The New Age* by Janko Lavrin who described him “as a holy sinner, the living counterpart of the Dostoievskian hero.”<sup>26</sup>

In 1976, James Webb resolved the issue of who stood behind this pseudonym: “In 1918, for example, yet another Serbian, ‘R. A. Vran-Gavran’—alias the Orthodox priest Nicolai Velimirović—contributed a series of mystical ‘London Songs’ featuring a character called Buck Legion, who extolled the Unknowable God as the solution to all problems.”<sup>27</sup> In spite of this resolution some authors continued to follow W. Martin’s wrong attribution. The second part of “R. A.” in the pseudonym is easy to identify. It is Ananda, since Nikolaj used it later in his most popular book *Discourse on Pan-Human*. This book was published unsigned in Belgrade, in early 1920. The first and major part of the book is entitled “Ananada Vran Gavran.”<sup>28</sup> Recently a suggestion was made that “R” could stand for “Reverend.”<sup>29</sup> Since both *vran* and *gavran*

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 35, 38, 41.

<sup>26</sup> Wallace Martin, *The New Age under Orage* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1967), 284.

<sup>27</sup> James Webb, *The Occult Establishment* (La Salle, ILL: Open Court Publishing Co., 1976), 191-192.

<sup>28</sup> *Reči o svečoveku* (Belgrade: S. V. Cvijanović, 1920), iii, 339.

<sup>29</sup> Jean-Claude Larchet, “Les paroles sur l’homme universel, une parenthèse dans l’œuvre de Nicolas Velimirovic,” *Crkvene studije/Church Studies*, No. 19 (2022), 203.

mean raven in Serbian the pseudonym would stand for Reverend Ananda Raven. It is characteristic that Father Nikolaj selected for his pseudonym a personal name from Hinduist/Buddhist traditions.

It is not really clear who introduced Father Nikolaj to Orage. He did not need any particular introduction since, unlike Lavrin, he was by that time a super-celebrity in Britain. Moreover, he was closely associated with Dimitrije Mitrinovic who had escaped to Britain from Germany in the first days of August, 1914. Orage would later come under the spell of Mitrinovic, but their association began at some point during the Great War.

Father Nikolaj began his contributions to this journal with an essay entitled "Ideals and Methods," published in two parts.<sup>30</sup> It was written in a form of collected proverbs and instructive dialogues. The main point that he wanted to make was that idealism was fruitless without proper methods. "You, splendid Christian and communistic idealists, look what an evil smell your rosy ideals contract when your methodists are Jesuits and Bolshevics!"<sup>31</sup> But the author admits in his dialogue with dervishes in a mosque that the rarest of all men is "A man whose ideal and method are neither opposed to nor separated from each other."<sup>32</sup> Obviously he was in a search for exactly that kind of man.

This spiritual search took him to look carefully into various religious and philosophical traditions around the world, to see if he could find some answer to his tormenting questions. His insights into modernity obviously did not reveal the path that he was searching for. In one dialogue he presents a confrontation between a modern tribune and Aristotle:

"We are modern and free men. We live no longer in the Dark Ages when even the wisest of men, like Aristotle, advocated slavery."

I turned and saw Aristotle gazing at the speaker, amazed, and whispering:

<sup>30</sup> R. A. Vran-Gavran, "Ideals and Methods I," *The New Age*, No. 1333, Vol. 22 (March 28, 1918), 433; No. 1334, Vol. 22 (April 4, 1918), 455.

<sup>31</sup> R. A. Vran-Gavran, "Ideals and Methods I," *The New Age*, No. 1333, Vol. 22 (March 28, 1918), 433, a.

<sup>32</sup> R. A. Vran-Gavran, "Ideals and Methods II," *The New Age*, No. 1334, Vol. 22 (April 4, 1918), 455, b.

“I hoped that in twenty-four centuries mankind would develop into something much better. Alas, I see now that men have succeeded only in becoming voting slaves.”<sup>33</sup>

In another dialogue he asks Sirius about his strangest experience on Earth and received a reply from the Green Sun that it is “the divorce of knowledge and religion.” Then, a modern man takes Lao Tzu into a machine to fly around the globe:

“Are you not satisfied with what you have seen?”

“No,” answered Lao-Tze.

“Leaning upon the walls of China I saw many more things than on this tour with you. For I saw Tao.”<sup>34</sup>

The idea was to show that modernism separates modern men from their ancestors, something that the author clearly disapproved of.

In the article “Jesus the Carpenter” he made a new reference to Jan Hus:

During the great council at Constanza, on the day when John Hus was sentenced in the name of Jesus the Carpenter, I saw two tables in the dining-room. At the one in the middle there were sitting the learned gentlemen with red hats and red hands, and at the other in the corner there were: Krishna, Buddha, Laotse and an Arabian. “Come, O Lord, and bless our food!” a red gentleman prayed. Suddenly He entered, the doors being shut, in His garment of light, and walked by the two tables. Then He stood for a while, looked to the left and to the right, and took the fifth seat at the corner table.

In other words, the spirit of Christ was present more among great religious leaders of the world—even among those who lived in the pre-Christian age—than among the cardinals of the early 15<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>35</sup>

His syncretism reached its climax in his article published in December 1919, by which time he was already the Bishop of Zhicha. In London Father Nikolaj met a Mohammedan sheik who quoted Jesus twice as “our prophet.” This led him to mention “our prophet Krishna,”

<sup>33</sup> R. A. Vran-Gavran, “Modernism and Antiquism,” *The New Age*, No. 1336, Vol. 22 (April 18, 1918), 487, a.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 487, b.

<sup>35</sup> R. A. Vran-Gavran, “Jesus the Carpenter,” *The New Age*, May 2, 1918, p. 11.

and even to go one step further. Why not call him “our prophet” or, even “our great prophet” asks Bishop Nikolaj:

Was Elijah the Prophet a more spiritual being than the divine Krishna? Or does the Prophet Jeremiah stand nearer Christ than the Prophet Krishna? Hardly can one find more spirituality on many pages of the Old Testament than in the Bhagavad Gita.<sup>36</sup>

Father Nikolaj spent most of the Great War in Britain (May-June 1915, September 1915–March 1919). He lived in London, the center of the global industrial civilization. At the same time, he met and spoke with the most learned theologians of the Church of England and other Christian churches in the Isles. He was fascinated by British spirituality and particularly by great church orators. He was also very much afraid that the industrial and materialist side of Britain could prevail, sensing that it would have global consequences. In the United Kingdom he developed unusual admiration for British culture. As was noticed: “He was certainly the most prominent Serbian Anglophile in the first part of the twentieth century, and there are many testimonies that the sympathy was mutual.”<sup>37</sup>

### *Pacifism and the universal state*

In the second part of “Ideals and Methods” he expressed his pacifist and anti-war positions. R. A. Vran-Gavran found himself confronted with the skeleton of a cannibal in a museum:

And, mind you, this cannibal killed some hundreds of human bodies because he considered them valuable for his food, and you heroes kill millions because they consider them valueless for any mortal purpose and cast them to the dogs. Hypocrites, which is the greater cannibal of the two? And am I not bowing before a comparative saint?<sup>38</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Nicolai Velimirovic (Bishop of Zica), “Indian Panhumanism,” *The New Age*, Vol. 26, No. 8 (Dec. 25, 1919), 127 b.

<sup>37</sup> Zoran Mulutinović, “Serbian Anglophiles in the first Half of the Twentieth Century,” in S. G. Markovich (ed.), *British-Serbian Relations from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries* (Belgrade: Faculty of Political Science and Zepter Book World, 2018), 314.

<sup>38</sup> R. A. Vran-Gavran, “Ideals and Methods II,” *The New Age*, No. 1334, Vol. 22 (April 4, 1918), 455, a.

He rejected ethnic and racial divisions and also the concept of nation-states. This was a very peculiar stance and a source of great contradiction since he did it in the same period of his life when he officially advocated the creation of a new state based on the principle of nationality. In the sixth of his London songs Buck Legion visits lunatics and sings to them: "Lunatics is our politics of races and states. The wall between race and race is called Misunderstanding. The wall between state and state is called Non-understanding. When the representatives of Misunderstanding and Non-understanding come together to think, the meeting of lunatics is perfect."<sup>39</sup>

He later had to face the problem that he himself advocated the creation of yet another nation-state. Therefore, in his article on the Yugoslav idea he insisted that it was both an ethnical and panhuman idea, and he resolved the problem by subscribing to the original concepts of liberal universalism from the nineteenth century: "The ethnical, which means the freedom and union of the Yugoslav nation; the panhuman, which means the federation of the Yugoslav State first of all with all the neighboring national free States, and then with all the free national and ethnical human units on the globe."<sup>40</sup>

During his stay in London he displayed unusual respect for conscientious objectors and other pacifists. He tried to help Stephen Graham to avoid participation in war combat,<sup>41</sup> and also encouraged the Serbian minister in London to request, in April 1917, that R. W. Seton-Watson should not be a soldier but rather continue his publicist activities.<sup>42</sup> His close friend was Dimitrije Mitrinovic, who fled to Britain to avoid military conscription and who never fought for any army during the Great War. He also befriended one of Mitrinovic's followers, Philip Mairet, who was even imprisoned at the end of the war as a conscientious objector.<sup>43</sup> An entry in the diary of the Serbian minister in

<sup>39</sup> R. A. Vran-Gavran, "London Songs," *The New Age*, Aug. 8, 1918, 238 a.

<sup>40</sup> Nicholai Velimirovic, "Yugoslav Idea," *The New Age*, Vol. 23, No. 24 (Oct. 10, 1918), 378 a.

<sup>41</sup> Slobodan G. Markovich, "Activities of Father Nikolai Velimirovich in Great Britain during the Great War," 169-170.

<sup>42</sup> AS, KSPL, SPA, f. VII, r. 15.

<sup>43</sup> Philip Mairet, *Autobiographical and other Papers* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1981), 127.



London Jovan Jovanovitch mentions a conversation that took place just after the war ended. The Serbian minister claimed that, on that occasion, Sir R. Graham informed the Serbian minister in London that the War Office had a file on Father Nikolaj Velimirović, who worked with pacifists during the war, and that Mitrinovic was found in the same company.<sup>44</sup>

### *Materialism of Europe and the Question of Father Nikolaj's Inspiration for Syncretism*

One of the topics that increasingly interested Father Nikolaj during his stay in London was the influence of materialism on the most advanced modern societies. He presented a dialogue between “she-smoker in Belgravia” and R. A. Vran-Gavran in which he spoke for Asia and explained: “The holy prophets—the lovers of the soul—preached communism in Asia, whereas European communism has been taught by the deniers of the soul.” Echoing St. Augustine he concluded that Asian lovers of the soul want to establish a *civitas sanctorum*, while the deniers of the soul have as their aim a *civitas profanorum*.<sup>45</sup>

He offered his own version of a communist utopia through the person of “Zarathustra the Holy” who advises the modern communists: “A communism of spirits you must achieve first and communism of material goods will be fulfilled then by itself. But only saintly spirits can realize communism, not the profane, the diabolic. An army of saints on Earth can beat Ahriman, the Spirit of Darkness, and found a world-State of Ormuzd, the Spirit of Light.” For “the song of communism” to be realized humans would have to do no less than educate their children to be saints!<sup>46</sup>

In the meantime, there is the materialism of everyday life that he presented through the metaphor of Oxford Street filled with self-moving machines. It is the street that offers new things. In this street “no

<sup>44</sup> J. Jovanovitch, *Dnevnik*, entry of January 14, 1919, p. 580.

<sup>45</sup> R. A. Vran-Gavran, “Communism of the Saints,” No. 1342, Vol. 23 (May 30, 1918), 72 a.

<sup>46</sup> R. A. Vran-Gavran, “Communism of the Saints,” No. 1342, Vol. 23 (May 30, 1918), 72 a b.

yesterday is ever repeated!" Buck Legion goes around and sees "the moving flood of clothed flesh." Amazed he says to the multitude around: "Inexpressible is the object of your hunger, indefinable, unknowable."<sup>47</sup>

The final song that Buck Legion sings takes place at St. Paul's Cathedral. It was published fourteen months after he had the special privilege of delivering the first sermon of an Orthodox priest in this famous cathedral. Buck notices two groups of people: the first are those who want to come in and pray, the second are those who see no pleasure in doing that. Buck's song is for the first group, but it is also an invitation for the second:

Come to prayer, friends and enemies, come to communion with the saints. Through prayers and sufferings they have been victors...

Come, brothers and sisters, into communion with the saints. Turn your faces and minds from delusion's phantoms toward the restful realm of saints. Where no delusion, no protest and no desire are.<sup>48</sup>

Finally, in December 1919, bishop Nikolaj found the land which, in his opinion, was ripe for these kinds of ideas. It was India. The Lord was crucified in Israel, and he would have been crucified in all other countries, all save India he claimed. "For in India there existed neither of the two great enemies of mankind: neither narrow nationalism nor unscrupulous imperialism." The Great War was another instance when the Lord was crucified by nationalism and imperialism and, therefore, he had "to ask for refuge among those of more pan-human spirits."<sup>49</sup> There were two possibilities: the first, that India would become a new center of Christianity, and the second, "that Europe may through the purification and humiliation of suffering ripen and repent in ashes before her day is closed, embrace the Testament of the Crucifixion again and become the center of pan-humanism forever."<sup>50</sup> The first option seems to be more likely to him since India was "the best-prepared country in the world for receiving the Gospel of the Incarnation."<sup>51</sup>

<sup>47</sup> R. A. Vran-Gavran, "London Songs," No. 1346, Vol. 23 (June 27, 1918), 139 a.

<sup>48</sup> R. A. Vran-Gavran, "London Songs X," No. 1358, Vol. 23 (Sep. 19, 1918), 333 b.

<sup>49</sup> Nicolai Velimirovic (Bishop of Zica), "Indian Panhumanism," *The New Age*, Vol. 26, No. 8 (Dec. 25, 1919), 127 a.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 128 a.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

He finally contrasts Europe and Japan (as “Asiatic Europe”) with India and identifies the spiritual advantages of the latter:

Europe is quite conscious of the inadequacy of her philosophy, her psychology and her spirituality. She has, however, the ambition to lead, even in this matter, but that is only a parvenu’s arrogance. She has a philosophy too rough, a psychology too mathematical, and a spirituality that smells of coal and engine-oil. And further I ask when and in what manner will India’s activity show itself? Is India to become like Japan? That is not needed for, nor expected by, the world. Japan is a European convert. She is Asiatic Europe, making for nationalism and imperialism. India is destined for something far higher than Japan is, for something neither European nor Asiatic, but something Sophian and pan-human.<sup>52</sup>

This essay was an introduction to Bishop Nikolaj’s most famous book: *Discourse on Pan-Human (Reči o svečoveku)*. It appeared in Belgrade only several weeks after the publication of this essay. In this book Ananada Vran-Gavran travels around the world in search of the pan-human spirit, and again it is alluded that his search may well be rewarded in India. The book ends with the warning to Europe: “Woe, Europe! Yee, barren woman of prophets.” And it alludes to the new potential beginning:

And Pan-Human boarded a ship which sailed the Pacific Ocean. And his face glowing with light was turned towards Asia. And it was night. And the stars were in the sky. And the Asian magi examined the stars, and with great excitement they spotted a new star, which announced to them the coming of the King from exile.

Zoran Milutinović finds that Velimirović is “one of those authors whose entire work is based on a single idea.” For him that idea was that Europe had turned its back on Christ. “This is why Velimirovic turned his back on Europe and chose Christ.”<sup>53</sup> As a complementary concept Father Nikolaj also offered a vision of a Christianity that was never fully accepted. The third issue of *Živa crkva* is entitled “Christianity and War. Letters of a Serbian to his English Friend.” In this booklet that

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 128 a b.

<sup>53</sup> Zoran Milutinović, *Getting over Europe. The Construction of Europe in Serbian Culture* (Amsterdam – New York: Rodopi, 2011), 147-148.

was twice reissued in England Father Nikolaj struggles to explain to his English friend and fellow clergyman, with whom he had studied, the meaning of Christianity in the time of war. He admits that Christianity is not able to hinder the war:

Christianity is not yet grown strong enough successfully to offer resistance to all the evil in the world. Christianity has not yet become such a power that she can prevent all oppression. She is still, even now, more of an external than an internal force; she is still, now, a beautiful cathedral which men regard more from outside than feel and build in *themselves* inside.<sup>54</sup>



It is not an easy task at all to establish the various kinds of impact that Serbian emigrants in London made mutually. Stephen Graham (1884-1975) claimed in his autobiography that Dimitrije Mitrinovic made his first circle of associates in London, and that it consisted of himself, Dimitri and Father Nikolaj. He also described that its members were supposed to be “secretly committed” to giving their lives “to the realization of the Kingdom of Heaven upon Earth.” They were supposed to be “a Christianly conscious nucleus,”<sup>55</sup> out of which a more numerous association would come out, “but the secret society did not grow.”<sup>56</sup> This first esoteric circle may have been established in the last weeks of 1915.<sup>57</sup>

This group was short-lived because when, in early 1917, Mitrinovic gathered his second circle of followers it included British designer and subsequent writer Philip Mairet (1886-1975). By that time Father Nikolaj was not a member of this group, and Mairet left a testimony that he tried to attract Father Nikolaj to the circle but that his efforts were in vain. This attempt was made some time after the famous sermon by Father Nikolaj at St. Paul’s Cathedral on July 23, 1917. During their meeting Father Nikolaj said to Mairet that he “agreed with our aims in

<sup>54</sup> Unsigned, *Christianity and War. Letters of a Serbian to his English Friend*, *Živa Crkva*, No. 3, 1915, 17.

<sup>55</sup> Stephen Graham, *Part of the Wonderful Scene*, 121.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, 123.

<sup>57</sup> Michael Hughes, *Beyond Holy Russia. The Life and Times of Stephen Graham* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2014), 118.

principle on almost every point, but he would not take the decisive step of personal collaboration with us.”<sup>58</sup>

At some point after the February Revolution Stephen Graham completed his religious novel *The Quest of the Face*. It was published in 1918.<sup>59</sup> The book is actually about his association with Dushan under which name Graham disguised Dimitri Mitrinovic. The book presents ideas of Mitrinovic in the form of a personal religious quest. Father Nikolaj is mentioned once when Dushan enumerates “an endless diverse humanity glory to God for ever and ever” and includes in that list pairs of different personages:

There is a Diogenes and an Edison, an Achilles and a Bertrand Russell, and Zoroaster and General Booth and St. Peter and St. John, and Henry VIII and Henry VI, and St. Sava and Father Nicholas, and the Archbishop of Canterbury and St. Francis of Assisi, and for an endless diverse humanity glory to God for ever and ever.<sup>60</sup>

Father Nikolaj was thus paired with St. Francis of Assisi. It is, however, clear that he is not mentioned in this novel as a member of the circle of builders, so he was not a member of the group that was to build “the City in which Dushan and I have been active spiritual masons.”<sup>61</sup> Unlike Graham, Father Nikolaj was not viewed as a follower of Mitrinovic anymore, but just as a kindred spirit.

It is, however, clear that Graham’s *The Quest of the Face* and the London Songs and other essays in *The New Age* written by A. R. Vran-Gavran, aka Father Nikolaj, contain some strikingly similar ideas. They also include some very similar topics: modern man is in search of Christ, and to find Him he should seek inspiration in various religious and philosophical teachings.

<sup>58</sup> Philip Mairet, *Autobiographical and other Papers*, 113.

<sup>59</sup> The earliest mention I could find that the book was published is from August 1918. “List of New Books,” *The Athenaeum*, No. 4632 (August 1918), 361. There was a shortage of paper in Britain at the end of the war and printing of many publications had to be delayed.

<sup>60</sup> Stephen Graham, “Prefatory Note,” in Idem, *The Quest of the Face* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1918), 87.

<sup>61</sup> Stephen Graham, “Prefatory Note,” in Idem, *The Quest of the Face*.

The first person who paid attention to the potential impact of Mitrinovic on Velimirović was Serbian literary historian Predrag Palavestra. In 1983, he remarked that Mitrinović may have influenced Velimirović's poetic vision of the Panhuman.<sup>62</sup> He was, however, ambiguous in his analysis, and he expressed doubts that "an eclectic thinker" like Mitrinovic "may have shaken and transformed the learned theologian and subsequent bishop."<sup>63</sup> Jean-Claud Larchet recently attributed syncretic ideas in *Discourse on Pan-Human* to the impact that "esoterist" and "syncretist" Mitrinovic made on Velimirović. Larchet concluded: "In the years when he wrote *Discourse on Pan-Human*, he was strongly influenced by the syncretistic thought of Mitrinovic."<sup>64</sup>

To resolve the issue of who influenced whom one would have to compare three groups of writings: 1. essays from *The New Age* (1918-1919) and the book *Discourse on Pan-Human* (1920) by Nikolaj Velimirović; 2. the religious novel by Stephen Graham *The Quest of the Face* (1918), and 3. early notes of the lectures by Dimitrije Mitrinovic from 1917-18 preserved in Mairet's autobiography, and in the archives of the New Atlantis Foundation.<sup>65</sup> Before such a complete comparison is done one may only conclude that all three authors were in spiritual inner quests even before they met in London and that all three were prone to religious syncretism and inspired by idealistic philosophical systems even before the Great War. Also, the search for the pan-human or *pan-anthropos* was also something that preoccupied all three of them during the Great War.

<sup>62</sup> Predrag Palavestra, "Preobražaj realističkog nasledja," in *Istorija srpskog naroda*, vol. VI-2 (Belgrade: Srpska književna zadruga, 1983), 388.

<sup>63</sup> Predrag Palavestra, *Dogma i utopija Dimitrija Mitrinovića* (Belgrade: Zavod za udžbenike, 2003, 2<sup>nd</sup> engl. ed. [1<sup>st</sup> ed.: 1977]), 310.

<sup>64</sup> Jean-Claude Larchet, "Les paroles sur l'homme universel, une parenthèse dans l'œuvre de Nicolas Velimirovic," 225. Larchet also turned attention to the fact that *Discourse on Pan-Human* was never assumed under Velimirović's name. Ibid, 225. However, the longest essay that Nikolaj Velimirović published in *The New Age* was the last one entitled "Indian Panhumanism," and it was clearly signed: "Nicolaj Velimirovic, Bishop of Zica, Serbia," *The New Age*, December 25, 1919. This essay includes all the major ideas expressed in *Discourse on Pan-Human* and is a kind of summary in English.

<sup>65</sup> See, for instance: UB SC NAF, 1/1/6 and 1/7/5.

### In search of the *Pananthropos*/*Panhuman*

In 1916, Velimirović contributed to the large volume of Israel Gollancz dedicated to the tricentenary of the death of William Shakespeare. He considered the great English writer as a “real microcosmos,” as someone who captured “hundreds of men as vividly and truly as if he writes his own biography.” He noticed that Leo Tolstoy left after him a sect, while Shakespeare left mankind. He concludes: “Shakespeare is a pananthropos – Russian: *Vsechelovjek* – and an *epic* one. Dostojevsky perhaps could be called the *lyric pananthropos*.”<sup>66</sup>

The name “Buck Legion” that Father Nikolaj selected for the main character of his *London Songs* is also related to the concept of *Pananthropos*. One of the meanings of the word “legion” in its substantive form is “a very large number,” and as an adjective “many numerous.”<sup>67</sup> Discussing Shakespeare Velimirović wrote: “His name is *Legion*. He is almost the *Pananthropos*.”<sup>68</sup> So *Legion* would be a person containing in himself many faces of humanity, a feature that Father Nikolaj attributed to writers like Shakespeare and Dostoevsky. It was also a term in search of the *pananthropos*, something that he obviously made his own spiritual task that was to be attained, or as he phrased it in his essay on Shakespeare: “The Pananthropos is our ideal, our dream, our untold longing, our expectation, our confusion.”<sup>69</sup>

Father Nikolaj even credited Shakespeare as “primordial creator and inspirer” of the British Empire. Reading these lines one century later from the point of view of a post-colonial critique one discerns quite different overtones that Velimirović could not even have imagined. The leading expert on the Serbian reception of Shakespeare, for example, noticed that there was “a transcultural moment including three cultures,” and that Father Nikolaj’s defense of Shakespeare in the

<sup>66</sup> Nicholas Velimirovic, “Shakespeare – the Pananthropos,” Israel Gollancz (ed.), *A Book of Homage to Shakespeare. To commemorate the three hundredth anniversary of Shakespeare’s death* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1916), 520, 521-523.

<sup>67</sup> *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary* (Springfield MA: Merriam-Webster Incorporated, 2001, 10<sup>th</sup> ed.), 663.

<sup>68</sup> Nicholas Velimirovic, “Shakespeare – the Pananthropos,” 520.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

light of Tolstoy's criticism "can be regarded as a noteworthy contribution to the famous Tolstoy-Shakespeare debate."<sup>70</sup>

To summarize the main points expressed in his articles published in *The New Age*, the pananthropos would be a person who rejected three aspects of modernity: its materialism, its narrow nationalism and its unscrupulous imperialism. At the same time, the panhuman was envisioned as someone open to various teachings and philosophical systems, someone who would accept ideas and concepts not only from the Judeo-Christian and Christian traditions, but also from various religious teachings all around the world. Wherever the panhuman found the spirit of Logos he would be at home. Although Father Nikolaj expressed occasional admiration for Taoism, Islam, Zoroastrianism and Buddhism, during the Great War he was particularly fascinated by Hindu traditions and the text of the Bhagavad Gita.

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truth; if it exists, it is as much a part of me as of anyone else, I know it, as directly as anyone can know it. It is not the constants, but the variables, of life that men desire to know; but as we do not "know directly" what is constant and what is variable, men take all life for their field of study. If it is possible to draw any distinction between "spiritual" and "material" knowledge of the universe, I shall be very pleased to hear it. Copernicus, we are told, accounted for the motion of the planets by supposing them to be pushed along by angels; and I may say at once that I do not regard that, or any similar theory of personified force, as more "spiritual" than the theory of gravitation. He may, for all I know, have seen the angels at work, while I have never seen the force of gravity; but we all have a "direct knowledge" of gravity, and not all of us have a direct knowledge of angels. Material things are spiritually discerned; but spiritual beings, like spiritual or vital forces, recede as we learn to know more of the phenomena they are supposed to produce. As Dr. Haldane says of physiology: "As a matter of fact, we never actually run up against some mysterious entity, such as the supposed 'vital force.' We can always push physical and chemical analysis further; and there is nothing for it but to pursue this process from the known and firm ground of physical and chemical observation into the unknown ground within the living substance we are investigating." Or if we take the historical view of evolution, we see man emerging into civilisation with all his goods (and there are about 330 millions in India alone) swarming about his ears like a hive of hornets, "knowing directly" that these things were forbidden, those things proscribed—and

pragmatical, for pragmatism is progress—and man evolves not by discovering Eternity, but by extending himself to infinity, not by worship, but by work, not by believing in God, but by trusting himself and that poor glimmer of reason that not all the world's greatest religions have been able to suppress.

A. E. R.

### Indian Panhumanism.

By Nicolaj Velimirov.  
(Bishop of Zica, Serbia.)

"There is only one history—the history of man. All national histories are merely chapters in the larger one. And we are content in India to suffer for such a great cause."—TAGORE: "Nationalism."

THE greatest thing in India during the last five millenniums has been the heroic assertion of the freedom of the human soul and of her god-like power. So much is man free and omnipotent that he can become by choice not only happy, or unhappy, nor great or small, but god or dog. The most boring problem in Europe during the last nineteen centuries has been the problem of determinism and indeterminism. There have been two parties in every philosophy in Europe, one emphatically asserting determinism and another denying it. The party of Augustine and the party of Pelagius do not exist in the Church only, but also in pan-theism, in pan-materialism, in positivism, and in agnosticism.

Regarding the problem of freedom from the point of view of good and evil, it seems obvious that there is

*The New Age*, December 25, 1919, p. 125.

Internet source: <https://modjournal.org/journal/new-age/>

<sup>70</sup> Zorica Bečanović Nikolić, "Shakespeare in Serbia" (Belgrade: Faculty of Political Science and Zepher Book World, 2018), 183.



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<sup>71</sup> Post scriptum to the book was written by the editor in New York in October 1917. It contains the following explanation: "This volume, the arrangement and production of which in England the Rev. Fr. Nicholas Velimirovic, D.D., of St. Sava College, Belgrade, has supervised..." Editor, "Post scriptum," *Ibid*, 64.

# Fr Nikolaj Velimirović in England (1915–1919): A Theological Response to War, Violence and Evil

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**H**uman thought, especially of great thinkers, is often conditioned by historical circumstances. This is particularly true of theologians and clerics whose calling is not purely academic but pastoral and missionary as well. In this paper we shall explore the ways in which the Great War and subsequent refugee experiences influenced the formation of Fr. Nikolaj Velimirović's viewpoints regarding war, violence and evil. The development of his early thought rests on the ideas of not only Christian, but also pan-humanistic universalism, through which all the brutality of war violence happened to be refracted, especially since this violence in the immediate sense threatened to exterminate the Serbian people to which he belonged.<sup>1</sup> His universalism, in part, really represents a "patriarchal interpretation of Orthodox universalism (*sabornost*)," which is taken from a "Slavophile idealization of rural lifestyle."<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, Nikolaj's universalism also points to attitudes that stem from a purely evangelical sense of the community of all people,

<sup>1</sup> Bogdan Lubardić, "Nikolaj Velimirović 1903–1914," In *Srbi 1903–1914. Istorija ideja*, ed. Miloš Ković (Beograd: Clio, 2015), 328–357.

<sup>2</sup> Klaus Buchenau "From Hot War to Cold Integration? Serbian Orthodox Church Voices on Globalization and the European Union," in: *Eastern Orthodoxy in a Global Age: Tradition Faces the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, eds. Victor Roudometof, Alexander Agadjanian, Jerry Pankhurst, (Walnut Creek: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005), 58.

even all religions.<sup>3</sup> Not without reason, some scholars see his universalism as an exception to Christian thought.<sup>4</sup>

Velimirović was torn in different directions: by heart and reason, by ideal and reality. His thought is usually analyzed in terms of stages or periods. However, it is a case not of mere development, but of confronting history and the eschaton. Nikolaj saw the world as a gift from God. For him, the world is not subject to natural laws, but to the will of God. It is necessary for God and man, two rational beings, to cooperate, in order to realize a moral law that is simultaneously eschatological.<sup>5</sup> For these reasons we shall endeavor to indicate the uniqueness and consistency of his thought. His theological understanding of war and violence is conditioned by his facing of two crucial issues: the fact of anthropological universalism and the fact of the brutality of historical processes. This allows us to reflect on Velimirović as pastor and warrior, poet and politician, theologian and diplomat, cosmopolitan and patriot. His theological reflections are not always precise and consistent, specifically because they are existential. Sometimes consciously and sometimes intuitively, Velimirović aspires to synthesize two experiences: the experience of the world which lies “in the power of the evil one” and the experience of the Kingdom of God.

Nikolaj Velimirović cannot be regarded as a systematic thinker at all. Without much difficulty, contradictions can be found in his works. His thought is unbridled but not crude. He certainly doesn't lack a poetic element. As Darko Djogo notes: “his poetic theology brought, for the first time after the decline of Serbian medieval culture, theology and literature into one, in such a measure that Velimirović must be considered one of the best Serbian modern authors.”<sup>6</sup> If we were to

<sup>3</sup> Zoran Milutinović, *Getting Over Europe: The Construction of Europe in Serbian Culture* (Amsterdam – New York: Rodopi, 2011), 90.

<sup>4</sup> James Custinger, “The Mystery of the Two Natures,” in *Every Branch in Me: Essays on the Meaning of Man*, ed. Barry McDonald, (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2002), 109.

<sup>5</sup> Radovan Bigović, “Nomologija Sv. Nikolaja (Velimirovica),” In *Srpska teologija u XX veku: istraživački problem i rezultati*, vol. 2, ed. Bogiljub Šjaković (Beograd: Pravoslavni bogoslovski fakultet, 2007), 35–40.

<sup>6</sup> Darko Djogo “Serbian Neopatristic Theology (Some Aspects of History, Reception and Currents),” *Teologia* 16/4 (2012), 10–36: 20.

compare his style of writing with that of some of the ancient Fathers of the Church, then that would undoubtedly be the poetic part of the corpus of St. Gregory the Theologian. However, the comparison would not be complete without the elements of free thought that refuse to subdue to habit, as we find it in the works of the other Gregory, the one from Nyssa. In the strict sense of the word, Nikolaj is not only a theologian, he is also a philosopher of religion, and in his early works the theosophical conceptions are also clarified.<sup>7</sup>

In the preface to his book *Serbia in Light and Darkness*, published in 1916, Nikolaj explains his approach to English audiences: “It is only the peoples which suffer themselves that can understand and sympathize deeply with the Serbian soul. I dedicate, therefore, the following pages to all those who suffer much in these times, and whose understandings are enlarged and human sympathies deepened by sufferings.”<sup>8</sup>

There is also no doubt that he was successful in this, precisely because he genuinely meant what he was saying.<sup>9</sup> His admiration for British culture is based on knowledge of the same: “I thank you that you gave us Shakespeare, who is the second Bible for the world; and Milton the divine, and Newton and Herschel, the friends of the stars; and Wellington and Nelson, the fearless conquerors of the ambitious tyrant of the world; and Stephenson, the great inventor of the railway and the great annihilator of distance between man and man; and Carlyle, the enthusiastic apostle of work and hope; and Dickens, the advocate of the humble and poor; and Darwin, the ingenious revealer of brotherly unity of man and nature; and Ruskin, the splendid interpreter of beauty and truth; and Gladstone, the most accomplished type of a humane statesman; and Bishop Westcott and Cardinal Newman, the illuminated brains and warm hearts. No, I never will finish if I undertake to

<sup>7</sup> Bogdan Lubardić, “Srpska religijska filozofija u XX veku: ličnosti, ideje, tokovi”, in *Srpska teologija u XX veku: istraživački problemi i rezultati*, vol. 4, ed. Bogoljub Šijaković (Beograd: Pravoslavni bogoslovski fakultet, 2009), 7–56: 34.

<sup>8</sup> Nicholaj Velimirovic, *Serbia in Light and Darkness* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1916), Author’s note.

<sup>9</sup> Nikolaj’s success, however, must be seen in the context of the political interests of the United Kingdom. After World War II, those interests will change and Nikolaj will be denied a residence permit, which will require him to go to the United States.





*Daily Record, Glasgow,  
November 22, 1916 (No. 21,793)*



*Fr Nikolaj among Anglican clergy in England in 1917  
(Pravoslavlje, Vol. XLIV, No. 1069 (October 1, 2011): 46)*

enumerate all the illustrious names which are known in Serbia as well as in England, and which would be preserved in their integrity in Serbia even if this island should sink under the waters.”<sup>10</sup>

Nikolaj’s reflections on the war during this period were conditioned by the immense suffering of the Serbian people and the threat of extermination. There is no doubt that Nikolaj considered defensive war just and necessary. He openly praised the UK for entering the war: “Great Britain justified her greatness by entering this war so as to protest against the violation of right, even by those who agreed to this right, and to protect the small and poor.”<sup>11</sup> He sought to portray Serbia as a victim of its alliance with France and, of course, the United Kingdom: “The Bulgars even mocked the Serbs for allying themselves with the ‘degenerate’ French, with the ‘faithless traders,’ the English, and with the ‘barbarians,’ the Russians. They mocked us that we have not been ‘real’ politicians, that we have been stupid and could not foresee the German victory. They accused us even in their declaration of war of being ‘the felons’ who caused the ‘world’s conflagration.’ And they regarded as their mission to rise ‘in the name of civilization’ to punish ‘a criminal nation.’”<sup>12</sup>

Nikolaj’s performance here is clearly political. He acts as an advocate for the Serbian people in international relations. His views were in line with those of the UK, so it is no wonder he had great success. As the Archbishop of Kentucky Randall Cantuar notes in the preface to this book: “The presence of Father Nikolaj Velimirovic in England during the last few months has brought to the many circles with which he has been in touch a new message and appeal enforced which glows more warmly the better he is known.”<sup>13</sup>

He did not leave anyone indifferent—neither friends, nor enemies. Dr. Harold Backston, the Anglican bishop of Gibraltar, said in 1940: “I know Dr. Nikolaj from the time of the war when he spoke in the Cathedral of St. Paul, where ten or twenty thousand people listened to

<sup>10</sup> Velimirovic, *Serbia in Light and Darkness*, 4.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

<sup>13</sup> Randal Cantuar “Preface” in Nicholai Velimirovic, *Serbia in Light and Darkness*, xi.

him. (...) Even today in England, and especially in London, they wonder where and what Dr. Nikolaj Velimirović is doing. He was the first non-Anglican who was allowed to speak at the Cathedral of Saint Paul, and if today he came to London, all of the city would rush to hear him.”<sup>14</sup> George Bell, the Bishop of Chichester, said this of Nikolaj in 1956: “A Wonderful Man—yes! Great patriot—yes! But he was more than that. He was the prophet of God, and not only of God’s grace, but also of God’s judgment.”<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, in the Ustasha-paper “Hrvatski narod” (“Croatian people”), in an issue of 1941 (7<sup>th</sup> May), there is a title saying: “On the throne of St. Sava—an English agent; the reputed character of the bishop Nikolaj Velimirović; Žižica as the center of English propaganda.” The article itself reads: “In recent times, the legend of his consecration was promoted with the Serbian people skillfully; His speeches become extremely chauvinist-political propaganda; He is a national and spiritual ideologue of the pan-Serbian combat organization whose invisible people rule the entire state apparatus of the former Yugoslavia; The entire leadership of the Serbian church is just a toy in the hands of the English bishops through Dr. Nikolaj.” He was also denied by members of his own Church. The Association of the Orthodox Clergy of the FPRY issued a statement in 1949: “We also dissociate ourselves from and condemn the work of the bishops Nikolaj Velimirović and Irinej Đorđević, who, after the liberation of our fatherland, remained in the camp of imperialist countries and want new slavery

<sup>14</sup> Vladimir Dimitrijević, *Oklevetani svetac. Vladika Nikolaj i srbofobija* (Gornji Milanovac: Lio, 2007), 37.

<sup>15</sup> Dimitrijević, *Oklevetani svetac*, 38. The friendship of Bell and Velimirović still serves today as a paradigm for good relations between the Anglican and Orthodox churches. In an interview, Metropolitan Kallistos Ware notes: “Yes, you are quiet right to emphasize that contacts between the Orthodox Church and the Anglican Communion are not a new thing. They have roots going right back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century. And I am very glad that you referred to the correspondence between Saint Nikolaj Velimirović and bishop George Bell, a holy and saintly person. And this correspondence has been published in English, and it shows how across divisions of different nations, across divisions of divided Christians, there can yet exist a profound spiritual friendship, as between these two great men, and in the past, the Anglican church has rendered great service to the Orthodox.” (IntRes: [http://www.spc.rs/eng/see\\_christ\\_all\\_things](http://www.spc.rs/eng/see_christ_all_things)).

for our nations and spread lies, darkness and ignorance.”<sup>16</sup> Nikolaj was denied as a Serbian nationalist<sup>17</sup> and as an ideological opponent of the communist regime. Essentially, he was both, but much more than both.

The development of Nikolaj’s thought rests on the ideas of Christian as well as panhumanistic universalism, through which all cruelty of war violence breaks, which has a culmination in the immediate threat of the physical extermination of the Serbian people to which he belonged. Velimirović’s heart and mind, ideal and reality, dragged him to different sides. Researchers usually divide his thought into two stages or periods. According to Bogdan Lubardic, there are three stages in the development of Nikolaj’s thought: the pre-Ohrid phase (1902–1919), the Ohrid phase (1920–1936), and the post-Ohrid phase (1936–1956). Markovich accepts Lubardić’s chronology and adds that “Taking the years 1919/20 as the main dividing line in Velimirović’s thought, he has also offered a more general division into the pre-Ohrid and post-Ohrid periods. While the first period of Velimirović’s ideas was pro-Western, the one that ensued was Orthodox and directed towards the East, but was also ‘above the East and the West.’”<sup>18</sup> Such a division is by no means unfounded. It is very useful for studying Nikolaj’s work, and is a significant contribution to the understanding of his corpus. In Velimirović’s thought, we can really talk about *before* and *after* the Great War. Nevertheless, this is not a matter of simple development, even less of a change of mind. Nikolaj was a very deep thinker, but also a good shepherd who knew his sheep. Confronted with the horrors of war, destruction and catastrophe over the people to which he belonged, he had suspicions and fears, which intertwined with hope and faith. However, it’s not just about that. His fine spirit was constantly fighting with two equally vivid experiences that confronted each other—it’s about the experience of history and eschaton. It is therefore important to point out the inner uniqueness and consistency of his thought, which is based on his very identity, which is Christ. Nikolaj was crucified on the cross of history,

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>17</sup> Vladimir Cvetković, “Još jedan osvrt na predavanje ‘Nacionalizam Svetog Save’ Svetog Nikolaja Žičkog,” *Crkvene studije* 16 (2019), 131–148.

<sup>18</sup> Slobodan G. Markovich, “Activities of Father Nikolai Velimirovich in Great Britain during the Great War,” *Balkanica* XLVIII (2017), 143–190: 145.

so his voice often represented a cry, like *Eli Eli Lama Sabachthani*. Velimirović, sometimes conscious and sometimes intuitively, tries to synthesize two experiences: the experience of the world “lying in evil” and the experience of the Kingdom of God, the heavenly Jerusalem that comes from heaven.

Nikolaj’s pacifism and cosmopolitanism cannot be separated from his attitude toward non-orthodox Christians. Nikolaj’s ecumenism overcame the usual stereotypes of his time. For him, this was not an academic debate, but a matter of life and death, of truth and of lies, of good and evil. He says: “The Church of England cannot be saved without the Church of the East, nor the Church of Rome without Protestantism; nor can England be saved without Serbia, nor Europe without China, nor America without Africa, nor this generation without the generations past and those to come. We are all one life, one organism. If one part of this organism is sick, all other parts should be suffering. Therefore let the healthy parts of the Church take care of the sick ones. Self-sufficiency means the postponement of the end of the world and the prolongation of human sufferings. It is of no use to change Churches and go from one Church to another seeking salvation: salvation is in every Church as long as a Church thinks and cares in sisterly love for all other Churches, looking upon them as parts of the same body, or there is salvation in no Church so long as a Church thinks and cares only for herself, contemptuously denying the rights, beauty, truth and merits of all other Churches. It is a great thing to love one’s Church, as it is a great thing to love one’s country, but it is much better to love other Churches and other countries too. Now, in this time, when the whole Christian world is in a convulsive struggle one part against the other, now or never the consciousness of the desire for one Church of Christ on earth should dawn in our souls, and now or never should the appreciation, right understanding and love for each part of this one Church of Christ on earth should dawn in our souls, and now or never should the appreciation, right understanding and love for each part of this one Church begin in our hearts.”<sup>19</sup> And again: “For how will God’s

<sup>19</sup> Nicholai Velimirovic, *The Agony of the Church* (London: Student Christian Movement, 1917), 94–96.

great religion be cut down to sects? How long will the sects destroy the spiritual building of God on earth, and thus humiliate the human race? Until you start preaching religion to the world. For how long will man flee from man in the name of God? For how long will the little creature, man, spit on what his brother holds holy? For how long will the hatred of an altar to the other altar be considered a service to God? For how long will the temples of God be filled with cold words and cold hearts? For how long will people not without heart and not without wisdom flee from the sectarian strife of God onto the island called atheism? ... People do not argue about God, but about the gloves of God. People are not divided by faith in God, but faith in witches. Pride, which comes from an ubiquitous omniscience, has ripped apart and chopped up the great church of God. There is only no Church that saves yet; they are all semi-saving. You will come and build, among humans, and among the peoples a catholic church, the only one that will bring salvation. We're waiting for you. You are being watched."<sup>20</sup>

Julija Vidović correctly concludes that Nikolaj's ecumenical views provide a special place for the Orthodox Church.<sup>21</sup> Yet the totality of the reality of the Church of Christ for him is not limited to the canonical branches of the Orthodox Church. A number of authors have noted the lack of Orthodox dogmatism in Nikolaj.<sup>22</sup> For him: "The real value of any Christian community is not to be found in its own pros-

<sup>20</sup> Nikolaj Velimirović, "San o slovenskoj religiji," in *Pravoslavlje i ekumenizam*, ed. Aleksandar Djakovac (Beograd: Hriscanski Kulturni Centar, 2005), 442.

<sup>21</sup> Julija Vidović, "St. Nikolaj Velimirovic and St. Justin Popovic on Ecumenism," in *Orthodox Handbook on Ecumenism. Resources for Theological Education*, eds. P. Kalaitzidis, T. Fitzgerald, C. Hovorun (Volos: Regnum Books International, 2014), 270: "1) only the Orthodox Church has the plenitude of Christ, but this is not her own treasure but the treasure of Christ accessible to everyone; 2) the relationship of the Orthodox Church with other Churches must be a relationship of love, so that they can recognize the treasure that the Orthodox Church carries." According to Lubardic "Nikolaj noted that the fullness of faith is present in Orthodoxy and that pious American and English people feel the incompleteness of their own faith, and therefore come and want to become acquainted with Orthodoxy" (Bogdan Lubardić, "Justin Popović u Oksfordu 1916–1919: između romantizovanih činjenica i činjenice romantizma," In *Srpska teologija u XX veku: istraživački problem i rezultati*, vol. 10, ed. Bogoljub Šijaković (Beograd: Pravoslavni bogoslovski fakultet, 2011), 75–197: 116.

<sup>22</sup> Markovich, "Activities," 145.

perity but in its care for the prosperity of other Christian communities. So, for example, the value of the Protestants is to be found in their loving care for the Roman Catholics, and vice versa.” Yet, Nikolaj never thought in a narrowly confessional way. When Nikolaj analyzes Peter Petrović Njegoš’s works, he notices that the writer of the *The Mountain Wreath* (Gorski vijenac) and *The Ray of the Microcosm* (Luča mikrokozma) is heterodox, if his work is viewed from purely dogmatic positions. Nikolaj believes that Njegoš’s work should be viewed from a broader perspective, revealing his authentic piety.<sup>23</sup> This attitude of Nikolaj actually reveals his own position.

When it comes to war, Nikolaj has the inner war against sin in mind: “If you want to come to freedom by war, then you first lead a war against yourself, and if this war is successfully completed, you will see that all other wars are superfluous.”<sup>24</sup> Nikolaj’s pacifism is linked to a positive evaluation of secularism: “To separate the Church from the State does not mean, as many think, to separate soul from body; it means to separate two quite opposed spirits unakin and hostile to each other, like Cross and Capitol.”<sup>25</sup>

And then, some decades later, a bit surprisingly, we come across harsh criticism of Europe and Europeans. “Oh, my brothers, why did Europe descend from the right path and go astray into an impenetrable wasteland? Because she turned away from Christ the Pathleader, and began to ask her philosophers, her dukes, her politicians, her writers and all her other ignorants and fortunetellers about the path.”<sup>26</sup> He compares Europe with the Gadarins: “Europeans do not pray to Christ, but banish him. They banish him in all the ways: through school and through the press and through politics, through film, through scientific fortunetelling and through all their cultural bloatedness; They banish him with thoughts, words and deeds, both individually and in

<sup>23</sup> Nikolaj Velimirović, *Religija Njegoševa* (Beograd: Štamparija Svetog Save, 1911), 164; Mikonja Knežević, “Religija Njegoševa: skica za jednu studiju o religioznom promišljanju Njegoševog pesništva vladike Nikolaja Velimirovića,” *Njegošev zbornik Matice Srpske* 3 (2018): 59–76: 63.

<sup>24</sup> Nikolaj Velimirović, *Misli o dobru i zlu* (Linc: Pravoslavna crkvena opština 2001).

<sup>25</sup> Velimirovic, *The Agony of the Church*, 15.

<sup>26</sup> Nikolaj Velimirović, *Teodul* (Šabac: Glas Crkve, 1996), 223.

groups, and all together.” Here we see Nikolaj disappointed with Europe and European values. He did not lose his love for Europe, which is why he is speaking to her, but he is torn between what he believes Europe should be and what it is. But Europe had not changed so much in those decades, but the angle of view of Nikolaj had changed. He himself clearly emphasizes the continuity of Europe’s weaknesses: “Oh, my brothers, the eighteenth century is the father of the nineteenth century, and the nineteenth century is the father of the twentieth century. The father was very in debt. The son has not repaid his father’s debts, but he got in more debt, and the debt has fallen to the grandson. The father was afflicted with a severe illness, and the son did not heal the repulsive illness he got from his father, but he made it even worse, and the disease hit the grandson with thrice as much power. The grandson is the twentieth century we live in.”<sup>27</sup> In an imaginary dialogue, Europe speaks to Christ: “Get away from us. We do not recognize you. We follow European civilization and culture ... Science is the star that guides us ... You are only an old myth our grandmothers and grandfathers believed in.” In “Signs of the Last Days,” Nikolaj yearns for the old times: “The organic Christian world disappeared, in which, of course, not everything was iconic, but everything was striving to being an icon. The emperor on the throne and the plowman at the plow approached the kingdom of God. Today the spine of Christian sociality: God—Host of the cosmos, King—Host in the country, father—Host in the family.”<sup>28</sup>

We see Nikolaj’s agonizing thoughts. Nikolaj the secularist and Nikolaj the conservative, Nikolaj the modernist and Nikolaj yearning for the patriarchal past, Nikolaj the pacifist and Nikolaj the warrior. Nikolaj the preacher and Nikolaj the diplomat. Metropolitan Amfilohije correctly notes: “While being in constant dialogue with Europe and America, in his first period of life, we can say that Bishop Nikolaj

<sup>27</sup> These words come from the title “Kroz tamnički prozor,” which Nikolaj’s authorship is suspicious of. However, these alleged statements by Nikolaj became very popular, so they must be taken into account, even if he may not have written them.

<sup>28</sup> Nikolaj Velimirović, “Znaci poslednih vremena,” *List Manastira Hilandara* 44 (1995).



Price 15 Cents

April 14, 1946

# The Living Church

*A weekly record of the news, the work, and the thought of the Episcopal Church*

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*Elizabeth McCracken*

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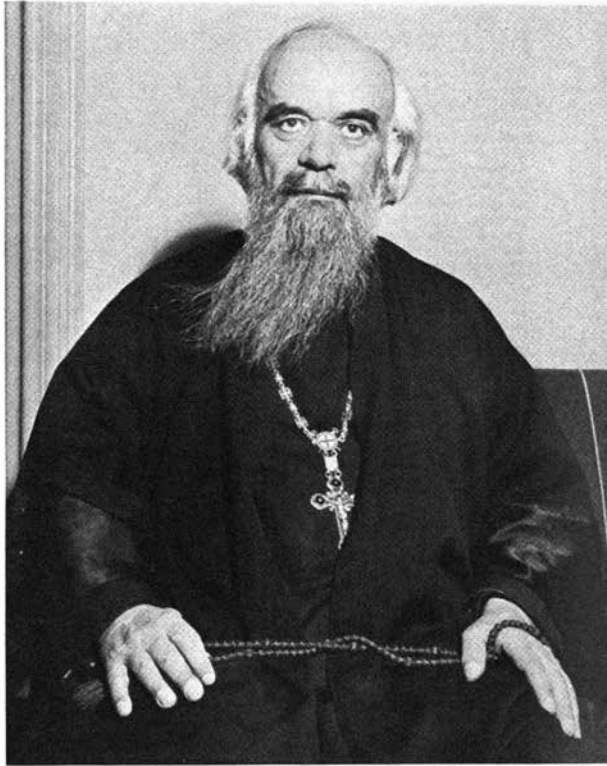
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STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
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MADISON WISCONSIN



**THE BISHOP OF OCHRIDA AND ZICHA**

Bishop Nikolaj, released from Dachau by American arms, reports the spiritual condition of Yugoslavia today in an interview with Miss Elizabeth McCracken. [See page 8.]

*The Living Church*, cover page with Bishop Nikolaj,  
vol. CXII, no. 2, April 14, 1946

considered himself, especially toward Europe, as a student.”<sup>29</sup> He was tied to the reality of the societal currents and messianic enthusiasms of his time, distinctive to Europe and to European intellectual and ecclesiastical circles in the first half of the twentieth century. But in his mature period, in the wartime and postwar time—sobered by Nazism and Bolshevism, and after experiencing Dachau—he no longer behaved toward Europe as a student but rather as a prophet who, in the spirit of the Old Testament prophets, felt responsible not only for his people but for all the people of Europe and the world without exception. Later works of Nikolaev show a fear of internationalism. Nikolaj distinguishes between red (communist), black (Roman Catholic) and yellow (capitalist) international. In his view, all these internationals are equally dangerous to the Serbian people.<sup>30</sup>

Being torn between the reality of this world and the reality of the future Kingdom is characteristic of all great thinkers. It is no coincidence that even in the millennia of the historical life of the Church or in our time, we cannot find a unique answer to the question of concrete evil, war and violence, whose greatest fear lies in banality, as claimed by Hannah Arendt. Do you oppose evil? How does one resist it without augmenting it? Nikolaj did not provide us with a theological examination of this problem, but he intuitively perceived and poetically processed it. A good illustration is found in the aforementioned sermon of Velimirović in the cathedral of St. Paul. He praises the great beauty of the church in which he is, and then adds: “I am coming from a little country in the Balkans, and there is a temple that is bigger, holier, and more beautiful and precious than this one. That temple is located in Serbian town of Nish and its name is the Skull Tower. That temple is built from the skulls that belong to my people. They have been standing there for five centuries, like a stout dam for the Asian sea, on the Eastern European gate. And if all the skulls and bones were used to build

<sup>29</sup> Amphilocius Radovic, “The Theanthropic Ethos of Bishop Nikolai Velimirovich,” in *Treasures New and Old. Writings by and about St. Nicolai Velimirovic*, ed. Bishop Maxim Vasiljevic (California – Vrnjacka Banja, Sebastian Press, 2010), 129.

<sup>30</sup> Miloš Timotijević, “Dunuli su vihorni vetrovi: stavovi episkopa Nikolaja Velimirovića o Jevrejima, liberalizmu, komunizmu i nacizmu u štampi Žičke eparhije pred Drugi svetski rat,” *Naša prošlost* 8 (2007), 97–119: 105.

the temple, that temple would be three-hundred meters tall, with identical width and length, and every Serb could have come in today, raise his arm and point at each one of them: This is the skull of my grandfather, my father, my brother my neighbor, my friend, my Godfather, my best man.”<sup>31</sup> For five centuries, Serbia has been defending Europe with its bones and skulls, so Europe could live peacefully.

Evil is non-being, according to the Fathers of the Church. It represents absence and lack, as darkness is absence of light. Nevertheless, it is active because, like a parasite, it lives by the will of created beings, who have the freedom (*exusia*), to go in any direction they want. Nikolaj says: “An evil deed is the absence of the miracle, which dries two hearts. Behold, no one speaks of the miracle when the grass dries, and all speak of wonder when the grass grows.”<sup>32</sup> His expression is poetic, and reminiscent of the utterances of the Stoic hypomnimas: “People who cannot bring peace into their hearts, can even less bring peace to the state. People who cannot see the world in themselves, can even less see themselves in the world. People who cannot participate in someone else’s pain, can even less participate in others’ joy ... If you want freedom, then try to free yourself from yourself first.”

In opposition to evil, Nikolaj sees the expression of Christian virtue. The war as such is evil, but also in the circumstances that are evil, there is virtue and vice. But what, in universal evil, can be the real virtue? Nikolaj’s answer is: sacrifice. “One does not need large historical events, so that a mortal man can decide for one or the other kingdom. Every single day is one great date in the battle of the two kingdoms. If violence is committed against your neighbor today, the book is open on your kin, and the holy bookkeeper expects an answer. If you turn your eyes to the other side, and you let violence be done and overdone, you have already given the answer—you have chosen the kingdom of the earth. And your neighbor will die by the hand of the abuser, and his house will be burned, and you will inherit his property. But your soul will not share the benefits of it with your body: it will feel discomfort and distress, as in a cage. Your victory will be the one of

<sup>31</sup> Nikolaj Velimirović, “Vidovdan,” accessed May 1, 2017, [http://www.spc.rs/eng/sveti\\_nikolaj\\_o\\_vidovdanu\\_u\\_katedrali\\_svetog\\_pavla\\_u\\_londonu\\_1916g](http://www.spc.rs/eng/sveti_nikolaj_o_vidovdanu_u_katedrali_svetog_pavla_u_londonu_1916g).

<sup>32</sup> Nikolaj Velimirović, *Misli o dobru i zlu* (Beograd: Ind Media Publishing, 2018), 56.

Murad, not of Lazar ... If you kill someone who has more rights than you, you did not kill him but celebrate him. By killing him, you have only slowed down your ruin and his triumph. The Army of Lazar fought for the defense of Christianity, the defense of the Fatherland, for the defense of the Balkans. Murad's army fought to impose his lordship, to impose yoke and silence. Is there even a little doubt, whose goal of struggle and the sense of suffering was more correct? How could Lazar be defeated? No, he was not beaten. His bloody head, rolling across Kosovo, wrote a death sentence to the so-called victors. Indeed, never does death justify its existence to such an extent, nor does it show so much beauty and nobility in itself as when it receives in its arms a man as a sacrifice for something more than his little life. Death then loses its sting, rips its dark veil, and equates itself with life. This touches the main nerve of Christian religion."<sup>33</sup>

It is precisely in the concept of sacrifice that we find the basis of the unity of Nikolaj's thought on evil, violence and war. When he speaks as a modernist, and when he speaks as a conservative, when he speaks as a pacifist and when he justifies war, Nikolaj has sacrifice in mind—the ultimate measure of good and evil, vice and virtue is sacrificial love. All contradictions of Nikolaj's thoughts are contained in the paradox of sacrifice, the sacrifice of Christ as a true Man and the true God who sacrifices himself “for the life of the world.”

Nikolaj did not offer a solution for the antinomies of this world, for the antinomy of war and love for the neighbor. His gaze remained directed toward Christ as the final redeemer of history “whose Kingdom will not end.” In the *Sermon on the Only peace and peacemaker*, we read: “With His sacrifice He replaced all other sacrifices. Thus He redeemed and replaced with himself the whole of the nature from which the people took and brought sacrifice to God. One sacrifice is sufficient both for the Israelites and for the gentiles—the sacrifice of Christ.”<sup>34</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Nikolaj Velimirović, *Lazareva pobeda*, accessed May 1, 2017, <http://www.ep-arhija-sumadijska.org.rs/библиотека/item/3319>

<sup>34</sup> Nikolaj Velimirović, *Ohridski prolog*, accessed May 1, 2017, <https://asinfo.info/150440-2/>

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# St. Nikolaj and pre-Christian seekers

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## Introduction

**S**t. Nikolaj and pre-Christian seekers. This title, this topic, might perhaps seem odd, out of place or even shocking to some. How can this great Serbian Orthodox Bishop and thinker of the 20<sup>th</sup> century be connected to pre-Christian, perhaps even Pagan, seekers, and philosophers?

For anyone who, however, has studied Nikolaj with an open mind, without trying to “use” him for their ideological purposes, will in fact themselves discover a man with an open mind; an open mind towards all, and a heart and soul completely dedicated to Christ and His Church—the Orthodox Church. In many ways, Nikolaj's whole life must be seen as a journey. We are all aware of the various phases that scholars of his life speak of and divide his life into. However, whichever phase we consider, we must affirm that his life's journey was full of open-mindedness, a real willingness to critical thinking and above all, to learning. At times, Nikolaj has been accused of changing his mind on a particular question—a good example being his ecumenical endeavors, where it would seem that he did modify his stance and approach on it a bit throughout his life, becoming more cautious later on. Having interviewed the late great Metropolitan Amfilohije of Montenegro,<sup>1</sup> I asked him about this perceived change in the positions of

<sup>1</sup> Private notes of the author. Interview took place in November 2015 at Ćelije monastery, Serbia, on the topic of Sts. Justin Popovic and Nikolaj Velimirovic.



Nikolaj. Metropolitan Amfilohije, himself a great thinker and man of God, did not see anything odd in this, but rather saw such changes as a clear sign of the journey that the great saint was on, a spiritual and intellectual growth. And we have to acknowledge that this journey of Nikolaj eventually led him to spiritual and intellectual heights unimaginable for most of us.

We will in this brief chapter focus on a very specific thing that Nikolaj left for us: a single hymn. It is found in Nikolaj's famous spiritual masterpiece, *Prayers by the Lake*. Prayer number 48 to be precise. It is written during Nikolaj's so called Ohrid period, after his stay in the UK. What is this hymn?<sup>2</sup> Let us first read it in its entirety and then look at the various parts more in depth.

All the prophets have from the beginning cried out to my soul, imploring her to make herself a virgin and prepare herself to receive the Divine Son into her immaculate womb;

Imploring her to become a ladder, down which God will descend into the world, and up which man will ascend to God; Imploring her to drain the red sea of sanguinary passions within herself, so that man the slave can cross over to the promised land, the land of freedom.

The wise man of China admonishes my soul to be peaceful and still, and to wait for Tao to act within her. Glory be the memory of Lao Tzu, the teacher and prophet of his people!

The wise man of India teaches my soul not to be afraid of suffering, but through the arduous and relentless drilling in purification and prayer to elevate herself to the One on high, who will come out to greet her and manifest to her His face and His power. Glorious be the memory of Krishna, the teacher and prophet of his people!

The royal son of India teaches my soul to empty herself completely of every seed and crop of the world, to abandon all the serpentine allurements of frail and shadowy matter, and then—in vacuity, tranquillity, purity and bliss—to await nirvana. Blessed be the memory of Buddha, he royal son and inexorable teacher of his people!

<sup>2</sup> We decided to call this prayer a hymn as we believe that name fits its contents the best. However, it is included in *Prayers by the Lake* and so could also be called a prayer or perhaps even a poem.

The thunderous wise man of Persia tells my soul that there is nothing in the world except light and darkness, and that the soul must break free from the darkness as the day does from the night. For the sons of light are conceived from the light, and the sons of darkness are conceived from darkness. Glorious be the memory of Zoroaster, the great prophet of his people!

The prophet of Israel cries out to my soul: Behold, the virgin will conceive and bear a son, whose name will be—the God-man. Glorious be the memory of Isaiah, the clairvoyant prophet of my soul! O heavenly Lord, open the hearing of my soul, lest she become deaf to the counsels of Your messenger.

Do not slay the prophets sent to you, my soul, for their graves contain not them, but those who slew them.

Wash and cleanse yourself; become tranquil amid the turbulent sea of the world, and keep within yourself the counsels of the prophets sent to you. Surrender yourself entirely to the One on high and say to the world: “I have nothing for you.”

Even the most righteous of the sons of men, who believe in you, are merely feeble shadows which, like the righteous Joseph, walk in your shadow. For mortality begets mortality and not life. Truly I say to you: earthly husbands are mistaken when they say that they give life. They do not give it but ruin it. They push life into the red sea and drown it, and beforehand they wrap it in darkness and make it a diabolical illusion. There is no life, O soul, unless it comes from the Holy Spirit. Nor is there any reality in the world, unless it comes down from heaven.

Do not slay the prophets sent to you, my soul, for killing is only an illusion of shadows. Do not kill, for you can slay no one but yourself. Be a virgin, my soul, for virginity of the soul is the only semi-reality in a world of shadows. A semi-reality—until God is born within her. Then the soul becomes a full reality. Be wise, my virgin, and cordially receive the precious gifts of the wise men from the East, intended for your Son. Do not glance back toward the West, where the sun sets, and do not crave gifts that are figmental and false.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Nikolai Velimirovich, *Prayers by the lake* (translated by Todor Mika and Stevan Scott), (Alhambra, CA: Serbian Orthodox Diocese of Western America, 2021), 86–87.

As we see, this is not a short text, but one that deserves inclusion in its entirety so that the reader can familiarize himself with its content and ethos.

Let us now examine the first lines of the hymn:

*All the prophets have from the beginning* cried out to my soul, imploring her to make herself a virgin and prepare herself to receive the Divine Son into her immaculate womb...

This would seem like a hymn of praise to the prophets of the Old Testament, ones Christians are very familiar with. However, if we continue, we find:

The wise man of China admonishes my soul to be peaceful and still, and to wait for Tao to act within her. Glory be to the memory of Lao-Tzu, the teacher and prophet of his people...

It is then that we realize that this is something else, something unique. Nikolaj calls the Chinese pre-Christian philosopher a teacher and “prophet” of his people. If we continue reading the hymn, we encounter a verse to Krishna who is called a prophet, and Buddha, who is referred to as teacher to his people.

What becomes very clear and is indeed something impossible to ignore is that these lines are not only praising some aspects of these pre-Christian seekers—they are also hymns of praise *to* these seekers, almost as troparions and kontakions to a particular saint would be. However, we surely cannot, from an Orthodox Christian standpoint, see this hymn as such?

Looking briefly at the three examples quoted, where Lao Tzu and Krishna are called “prophets” while Buddha is praised by Nikolaj because he “teaches my soul to empty herself completely of every seed and crop of the world,” we must challenge ourselves and explore deeper. We could of course take a simplified position and do away with any deeper research, simply as Orthodox Christians stating that the great Serbian saint did not mean it in *that* way. However, that would be intellectually and above all spiritually dishonest. The great saint left this hymn to us for a reason. He wrote it for a reason, and it would be hard to believe that Nikolaj would somehow not be aware of the weight and significance for instance of the title “prophet” in Orthodox Christianity.

It is because of this call, if we might allow ourselves to refer to it as such, of the great saint, who himself lived a life of full of inquiry and openness to the other or the unknown, that we will in this paper attempt to analyze the hymn and try to understand it within the framework of Orthodox theology and tradition. This is important since Nikolaj truly was Orthodox, deeply rooted in the teachings of the Church and a Holy Father of modern times.

### Prophet and soul

Let us first explore two main themes and specific terms of the hymn: “prophet” and “soul.”

#### “Prophet”

Let us start briefly at the word that perhaps initially sticks out the most in the hymn, namely “prophet.” Nikolaj uses it overall nine times in the hymn, directly calling Lao Tzu, Krishna, Zoroaster and Isaiah a “prophet.” However, he also seems to summarize the hymn by calling all the mentioned seekers (Lao Tzu, Krishna, Buddha, Zoroaster and Isaiah) as prophets when he addresses his own soul, “Do not slay the *prophets* sent to you, my soul, for their graves contain not them, but those who slew them.” To understand the significance of this term and its correct place within the Orthodox tradition and ethos, let us briefly examine it. Traditionally, a prophet is seen as one who speaks *for* God, a Prophet is seen as one who speaks by the direct inspiration of God and the Hebrew word for “prophet” means “God’s mouthpiece.” In Deuteronomy 18:18, God says, it seems as relating to a prophet: “I will put my words in his mouth and he will speak to them all that I command him.” If we continue looking at Deuteronomy 18:21-22, we learn that a prophet should be judged by whether what he predicted came true. In the seventh chapter of the Gospel of Matthew, we however learn that we must be aware of false prophets, who come to us in sheep’s clothing.

Likewise, it is important to point out that a prophet was someone who not only spoke about the future directly but would also lament over the state of his people now, urging them to return to the correct path. A prophet was therefore not someone who exclusively and always

had to know the future. In Orthodox tradition, St. John the Baptist is seen as the last prophet of the Old Testament, and it seems he clearly knew about Christ and His coming; he knew the future from God. However, other prophets from the Old Testament would speak at times generally about the need for repentance and returning to the way of the commandments. And so we must remember this, as often there is a tendency to believe a prophet is exclusively someone who knows the future, but this is not always the case.

Nikolaj of course knew this, many might even go as far as to call him a prophet of God in our own age. Therefore, he clearly demonstrated to us the importance of calling these pre-Christian seekers this term, and by doing this showed us what he thought of them: as persons speaking the will of God, there and then or regarding the future.

#### “Soul”

Another term used a lot in the hymn is “soul.” Nikolaj uses it 15 times and we would like to claim that in all instances when it is used, it is directly or indirectly his own soul he is speaking about. Generally, the hymn is mostly structured around Nikolaj addressing how the various seekers will help and guide his soul. In that sense, his soul is at the very center of the hymn, not unlike many of the poems written by St. Ephrem the Syrian († 373). Nikolaj writes for instance that Buddha “teaches” his soul, Lao Tzu “admonishes” his soul and Zoroaster “tells” his soul. All the mentioned seekers in one or another way interact with Nikolaj’s soul, affecting it in a positive manner with instruction and inspiration. Nikolaj likewise addresses his own soul on a number of occasions, just as St. Ephrem did, for instance, “Do not slay the prophets sent to you, my soul.”

As we know, the immortal soul is the most important part of the human, longing back to God, to a union with God. The soul prays to God and praises God,<sup>4</sup> the soul suffers, blesses, rejoices, is saved, and doomed. St. Justin the Martyr sees the teaching about the immortal soul as one of the seeds of God-given truth found already in ancient (pre-Christian) Greek philosophers<sup>5</sup> and St. John Chrysostom confirms

<sup>4</sup> Psalm 103 (104), “Bless the Lord, my Soul.”

<sup>5</sup> Justin Martyr, *Apologia prima* 44, in Denis Minns and P. Parvis (eds.), *Justin, Philosopher and Martyr, Apologies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2009), 195.



Nikolaj Velimirović during his studies in Halle, Germany  
(Courtesy of the Serbian Orthodox Diocese of Valjevo)

that God bestowed immortality on the soul just as He bestowed reason on humanity.<sup>6</sup>

The fact then, that Nikolaj uses this expression so frequently and in such a deeply spiritual way, again demonstrates to us that he wanted us to understand that these thinkers deeply and truly affected not only his intellect, but his immortal soul herself. It also demonstrates that he drew spiritual nourishment from these seekers, that he understood the deeper and sometimes perhaps hidden meaning of the messages they conveyed. Why else would he share with us how positively they affected his soul?

### **Truth: relative?**

The first reflection we would like to address is that of relativism and syncretism. Could this hymn and the views expressed in it somehow be seen as relativistic or syncretistic in nature? Is Nikolaj in any way promoting a standpoint where his Orthodox faith is one of many truths, rather than the Truth? Let us examine some historical instances of when Nikolaj engaged in contact with non-Orthodox faiths and ideologies. This engagement came to its fruition before the Prayers by the Lake were written, between 1905 and 1919, when he spent time in Germany, Switzerland, and Great Britain. He initially went there as a student and worked with and under non-Orthodox scholars, for instance with an Old Catholic Bishop, Eduard Herzog, who in 1908 was his supervisor on his D.D. thesis in Bern, entitled “The Resurrection of Christ as the fundamental dogma of the Apostolic Church.”<sup>7</sup> Upon completing that work, Nikolaj returned shortly to Serbia, however his wish was to continue his studies in the West. That is why only a few months later, in early November 1908, he arrived in Britain. We will

<sup>6</sup> John Chrysostom, *Homiliae XXI de Statius ad populum Antiochenum habitae* 73 in: Joannis Chrysostomi, *Homiliae XXI. De Statuis Ad Populum Antiochenum Habitae. Item: Homiliae Ejusdem IX. De Poenitentia. Ad. Mss. Codices Gallicanos, Vaticanos, Anglicanos, Germanicosque; Nec Non Ad Savilianam, & Frontonianam Editiones Castigatae*, Nabu Press 2013.

<sup>7</sup> Slobodan G., Markovich, “Activities of Father Nikolai Velimirovich in Great Britain during the Great War,” *Balkanica XLVIII* (2017): 146.

here not spend too much time analyzing in detail his endeavors abroad. Instead, we can see that the fact that Nikolaj spent so much time abroad, and most importantly wanted to spend so much time abroad, demonstrates to us the openness that we mentioned in the introduction of this work. He was clearly curious of the world and wanted to discover and learn about it. Metropolitan Amfilohije wrote about this period in the life of Nikolaj:

While being in constant dialogue with Europe and America, in his first period of life, we can say that Bishop Nikolai considered himself, especially toward Europe, as a student.<sup>8</sup>

So much so that when he returned to Serbia in 1910, he was attacked by some bishops and other ecclesiastical figures for having apparently introduced some Protestant elements or spirit into the Serbian Church<sup>9</sup> with a sermon he gave on the feast of St. Stephen in Belgrade Cathedral. As a result of his sermon (and most likely other undocumented events), he was sent to Russia, to Saint Petersburg, for correction, “to become more Orthodox.”<sup>10</sup> He stayed in Russia 17 months. These turns of events demonstrate to us that Nikolaj was certainly affected by his years of studies in the West, so much so that elements in the Serbian church were very negative towards him. It seems it was the way in which he thought and spoke that caused him some issues at home. Simply put, Nikolaj was not always understood by his contemporaries. We can baldly state this because he is a canonized saint of the Church: while not in any way infallible or free from sin, his canonization indicates that he was right more often than not, at least from the perspective of the Orthodox Church that canonized him.

During his stays abroad, and in particular Great Britain, he encountered people who were not simply Christians of heterodox confessions, but people of other faiths. We must remember that the British Empire of that time encompassed places like India. Nikolaj was surely

<sup>8</sup> Metropolitan Amphilocius (Radovic), ‘The Theanthropic Ethos of Biskop Nikolai Velimirovich’, in: Bishop Maxim (Vasiljevic), *Treasures New and Old. Writings by and about St. Nicolai Velimirovic* (Alhambra, CA: Sebastian Press, 2010), 129.

<sup>9</sup> Markovich, *Activities of Father Nikolai*, 149.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.





Bishop Nikolaj in USA in 1921  
(Courtesy of the Serbian Orthodox Diocese of Valjevo)

exposed to people and ideas from places like India and generally the Orient. One example of such a relationship is the famous Bengali poet, Rabindranath Tagore, whom Markovich calls a “close friend” of Nikolaj.<sup>11</sup> So close in-fact, that Tagore visited St. Nikolaj, presumably in Ohrid, in 1926.<sup>12</sup> It was during this visit that Nikolaj said to Tagore, regarding India, that it is “a Christian country without Christ.”<sup>13</sup> This “admiration for the religious traditions of India and the far East, for Hinduism as well as Buddhism”<sup>14</sup> earned Nikolaj many enemies, in and outside the Church, some going as far as calling him a heretic.<sup>15</sup>

The picture this presents to us is one of an Orthodox academic, priest and later bishop, who having travelled extensively and having met different people, seemed to respect them and the various cultures they brought with them. Whether that be Anglicans in England, Catholics in Germany, Bengali poets visiting Ohrid or anyone else, a picture emerges of Nikolaj that is a picture of openness. Is it however syncretistic? Did Nikolaj believe that only the Orthodox Church has the fullness of Truth, or did he believe in the idea that truth is spread around various places?

In *Agony of the Church*, in his younger years, he wrote,

“The Church of England cannot be saved without the Church of the East, nor the Church of Rome without Protestantism; nor can England be saved without Serbia, nor Europe without China, nor America without Africa, nor this generation without the generations past and those to come. We are all one life, one organism.”<sup>16</sup>

Julija Vidovic sees this as Nikolaj seeking a unity of love, rather than a unity of dogma. It should be, according to her, attributed to the context of the time, a time of war, she writes:

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 182.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 144.

<sup>15</sup> Markovich, *Activities of Father Nikolai*, 144-145, n. 5.

<sup>16</sup> Nicholai Velimirovic, *The Agony of the Church*, (London: Student Christian Movement, 1917), 94-95.

It seems that at first he emphasizes only love and has little to say regarding the theology of the Orthodox Church. However, as bishop Athanasius [Yevtic] pointed out, this does not mean that he denies the authenticity and uniqueness of the Eastern Orthodox Church, nor does he consider her lacking or defective in any way; rather, in the context of the wartime drama encompassing his and other European nations, he sincerely wishes for the unification of all European Christian communities for their benefit and for the benefit of other Christians in the world.<sup>17</sup>

Such positive sounding statements did not however prevent Nikolaj from more affirmatively stating what he believed, again in the same work, *The Agony of the Church*, where he wrote:

Well, we must come again to this source of Christian strength and greatness, which is the spirit of Christ. A new revival, yea, regeneration of Christianity, could be possible only in a united Christian Church of Christ; and the union of the Church is possible only upon the ground of the primitive Church.<sup>18</sup>

It is clear that for him the “original” Church, was the Orthodox Church. He made it also clear that the Orthodox Church is the only church that is not governed by the spirit of his century, and it is the only truly biblical Church.<sup>19</sup>

In the study of Nikolaj, we are so often met with a statement he made about a certain topic that takes a stance in that topic, yet we can equally quickly find one that balances out the former. In many ways, it is in this that his genius was manifested the most. His openness to learn and examine was his journey, a journey through life, a journey that made him confirm and re-confirm his Orthodoxy time and time again through his interaction and experiences with others. We believe therefore it is truly fitting to answer the question whether Nikolaj engaged

<sup>17</sup> Julija Vidovic, “Bishop Nikolai Velimirovic,” in *Orthodox Handbook on Ecumenism: Resources for Theological Education*, ed. Pantelis Kalaitzidis, Thomas Fitzgerald, Cyril Hovorun, Aikaterini Pekridou, Nikolaos Asproulis, Dietrich Werner and Guy Liagre (Edinburgh: Fortress Press, 2013), 269–270.

<sup>18</sup> Velimirovic, *The Agony of the Church*, 117–118.

<sup>19</sup> Nikolaj Velimirović, *Ljubostinjski stoslov* 12, u: Episkop Nikolaj, *Sabrana dela*, vol. 5 (Düsseldorf 1977), 865.

in relativism and syncretism with a resounding no; he did not engage in relativism and syncretism.

### Far Eastern seekers

For anyone reading the hymn we are here studying, it becomes clear that Nikolaj highly respected the seekers from what we generally refer to as the Far East. We would even claim he did not simply respect them, but that he also knew their teachings. This is clear when we read his hymn and see specific mentions of some of their teachings helping him. Let us therefore briefly look at the thinkers and some of the teachings and ideas of theirs that Nikolaj highlights.

#### *Lao Tzu*

The first seeker mentioned in the hymn by name, is the “wise man of China,” Lao Tzu, the founder of what is generally called Taoism, who is believed to have died in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC. Lao Tzu is today mostly known for his teachings regarding the “Tao,” which Nikolaj also mentions, and generally the notion of stillness and emptying of the mind and heart from earthly thoughts and cares. “Tao” is often translated as “Way” into English. Lao Tzu himself never made the Tao personal as such, as though it was God or a divinity. Instead, it seems that he saw it as the key to ultimate wisdom, not a name for a thing, but rather an underlying order of creation, which he saw being intimately connected to the creator. According to Hieromonk Damascene, Taoism “represents the epitome of what a human being can know through intuition, through the apprehension of the universal Principle and Pattern manifested in the created order,”<sup>20</sup> and to Hieromonk Damascene and his mentor Fr. Seraphim Rose, the Tao is the Eternal Logos, Christ. It would seem that Nikolaj thought in a similar way. “The wise man of China admonishes my soul to be peaceful and still, and to wait for Tao to act within her” is a clear indication of this.

<sup>20</sup> Hieromonk Damascene, *Christ the Eternal Tao* (Valaam books, 2012), 32.

### *Krishna*

According to Guy Beck, most scholars of Hinduism accept that there indeed existed a historical man called Krishna. It is believed that he lived-in modern-day India at least 1000 years before Christ.<sup>21</sup> An 11<sup>th</sup> century philosopher, Ramanuja, described Krishna as a monist,<sup>22</sup> meaning he believed Krishna believed in the oneness of God. This would of course be seen as positive by Nikolaj, even if it does not mean that Krishna himself would have necessarily agreed with the Christian idea of God. Nikolaj, in his praise of Krishna, focuses on the purification and prayer as a way for the soul to reach “the One on high, who will come out and greet her and manifest to her His face and His power.” As is the case with Lao Tzu, so also Krishna seems to have understood the need for some sort of purification of the self. It is the idea of emptying the heart of earthly cares and sins, to welcome God into our hearts and souls. While modern-day Hinduism is hundreds if not thousands of different ideologies and faiths, lumped together by Western scholars into one term, it is clear that Nikolaj did not praise that or the often-blattant polytheism. Instead, he saw in Krishna a man with some understanding of divine realities, an understanding that he clearly did not think was in its essence anti-Christian.

### *Buddha*

There is a lack of consensus concerning when Buddha was born, however most would agree he likely died in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, in or close to modern-day India. Little concrete historical facts are known about his life, apart from the general idea that he at some point started to be critical of various forms of spirituality, left the world in pursue of higher spiritual realities, and becoming an ascetic.<sup>23</sup> While the various modern forms of Buddhism are usually very different from Christian-

<sup>21</sup> Guy L. Beck, “Introduction,” in *Alternative Krishnas: Regional and Vernacular Variations on a Hindu Deity*, ed. Guy L. Beck (New York: State University of New York, 2005), 4.

<sup>22</sup> Edwin F. Bryant, *Krishna: A Sourcebook* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 329-333.

<sup>23</sup> Akira Hirakawa, *A History of Indian Buddhism: From Sakyamuni to Early Mahayana* (translated by Paul Groner), (Motilal Banarsidass, 1998), 24.

ity, there are aspects of the teachings of Buddha himself that can be seen as beneficial for Christians, especially as he never denied Christ, having lived at least 500 years before the birth of the Lord. Nikolaj, in his praise of Buddha, highlights again the emptying of self, of the soul, of “every seed and crop of the world.” Just as with Lao Tzu, this idea is very familiar to the core of the Orthodox Christian ethos of rejecting the world, freeing oneself from passions and through this obtaining the grace of the Holy Spirit. In his hymn, Nikolaj writes that his soul is “to await nirvana,” which in Buddhism is seen as the ultimate state of soteriological release and as the state when the soul has rejected the world and is completely detached from passions. Could this for Nikolaj correspond, in a way, to the Orthodox notion of theosis? This is highly possible, as while the name is different and Buddhism does not mention God as such, the approach is very similar and leads to Truth, which in Christianity is of course Christ Himself.

### *Zoroaster*

There is no consensus among scholars as to when Zoroaster was born. Guesses range from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC to the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC,<sup>24</sup> however we do know that he was a wise man in Persia (modern-day Iran). Zoroaster is unique in the hymn, as he is the only one called a “great” prophet by Nikolaj. It is said that Zoroaster had some sort of spiritual experience, or revelation, at the age of thirty. A shining being revealed itself to him as Vohu Manah (Good purpose). This led Zoroaster to somehow become aware of the existence of two spirits: Asha which was the spirit of order and goodness, and Druj which was the spirit of deception and chaos.<sup>25</sup> He would spend the rest of his life teaching people about Asha, the spirit of order and goodness. Nikolaj in his hymn addresses Zoroaster and proclaims that he is telling his soul “that there is nothing in the world except light and darkness, and that the soul must break free from the darkness as the day does from the night. For the sons of light are conceived from the light, and the

<sup>24</sup> Martin Litchfield West, *Hellenica: Volume III: Philosophy, Music and Metre, Literary Bayways, Varia*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 89–105.

<sup>25</sup> Martin Litchfield West, *The Hymn of Zoroaster: A New Translation of the Most Ancient Sacred Texts of Iran*, (London: I.B. Tauris 2010), 19–20.

sons of darkness are conceived from darkness.” It seems that for Nikolaj, Zoroaster had understood, through his pure longing for the Truth, that there exists a cosmic battle between good and evil, between order and chaos, between light and darkness. For St. Nikolaj, a pure longing for the light would lead to Christ, the Light of the world. It seems it is therefore that Nikolaj praises Zoroaster, as he somehow found out about this light and proclaimed it to his people, as a prophet would.

### *Prophet Isaiah*

The hymn does also include the Old Testament prophet Isaiah, someone essential in Christianity and someone whose inclusion in a hymn of praise is no surprise or controversy. What is however interesting for our purpose, is that he is included, and that Nikolaj emphasizes Isaiah’s prophecy about a virgin conceiving and giving birth to the God-man Christ. The fact that Isaiah is the last one mentioned and that Nikolaj specifically mentioned the God-man, would seem to suggest that all these thinkers and their longings only are rendered pure if they end up at the point that Isaiah ended up: Christ.

Having explored in more detail, if still briefly, the seekers included by Nikolaj in his hymn, let us proceed and try to look for similar sentiments among other saints and respected figures in the Church.

### **Orthodox Christianity and pre-Christian seekers**

The early Church respected the pre-Christian Greek philosophers. So much so that many philosophical systems were directly or indirectly used to explain God-given Christian faith and dogmas. Today, anyone who is a serious student of the early Church Fathers will also have to at least understand many of these pre-Christian philosophical systems. It is fair to say that these systems provided building blocks upon which a systematic exposition of the Christian faith could be built. While many specific terms were of course redefined, it is a fact that many early Church Fathers were trained in classical philosophy and used it for their cause. St. Justin the Martyr even called the pre-Christian Greek philosophers “friends of Christ,” not because they knew Christ, but because they strove for the truth, which is pleasing to

God. It has therefore become almost the norm that many of the Greek philosophers are viewed upon with respect, even if most of them would today have been seen as formal heretics due to some of their teachings. This is perhaps most evident today by the fact that there are Orthodox churches that have frescos of the likes of Aristotle, Plato, Socrates and other pre-Christian philosophers.<sup>26</sup> These frescos do not have halos around the heads of the philosophers, clearly showing they are not saints. However, their inclusion next to the saints of the Church does demonstrate to us their importance.

*St. Seraphim of Sarov*

The great Russian ascetic of the 18th and 19th century, St. Seraphim of Sarov (†1833), wrote:

Though not with the same power as in the people of God, nevertheless the presence of the Spirit of God also acted in the pagans who did not know the true God, because even among them, God found the chosen people. For instance, there were the virgin-prophetesses called Sibyls who vowed virginity to an unknown God, but to God, the Creator of the universe, the all-powerful ruler of the world, as He was conceived by the pagans. Though the pagan philosophers also wandered in the darkness of ignorance of God, yet they sought the truth which is beloved by God. Because of this, God-pleasing seeking, they could partake of the Spirit of God. It is said, that nations who do not know God, practice by nature the demands of the law and do what is pleasing to God (Rom. 2:14).<sup>27</sup>

We witness in this statement the traditional Christian Orthodox view on the formally non-Christian (pre-Christian mostly) seekers who sought after the Truth – which is Christ Himself (John 14:6), as God the Son, the second Person of the Holy Trinity as confessed by the Orthodox Church. The Orthodox Church demonstrates this view perhaps the most when it is showing respect, at times almost venerating, the previ-

<sup>26</sup> For instance, at the Great Meteron monastery in Greece and the Vatopedi monastery on Mount Athos.

<sup>27</sup> St. Seraphim of Sarov, N.A Motovilov, Sergei Nilus, *The true goal of our Christian life consists in the acquisition of the Holy Spirit* (translated by Vladimir Djambov), 2019, chapter 35.



ously mentioned Greek philosophers preceding the Incarnation of Christ. Many of the ancient Greek philosophers seem to in one or another way point towards Christ. It is perhaps also one of the reasons why the Greek people rather early and very devoutly accept Christianity. It is as though they had been prepared beforehand, because while not being Jewish and of the Old Covenant, but instead mostly Pagan Gentiles, they clearly expected Christ on some level and were also ready for Christ, at least unknowingly with their intuitions and hearts. Therefore, the Orthodox view is that some wise philosophers and seekers of the pre-Christian times could, as St. Seraphim said, “partake of the Spirit of God.”<sup>28</sup>

St. Seraphim in his statement, does not specifically speak of the ancient Greek philosophers, but rather about the Sibyls, women oracles and prophetesses. While they lived in ancient Greece, it seems they cannot be seen on par with the Greek philosophers. Instead, they were pagan priestesses who remained virgins for God, “an unknown God” as St. Seraphim points out. It seems that St. Seraphim saw them in a similar light as St. Nikolaj and the seekers he praises in his hymn; not Christian, not denying Christ, but while walking in darkness, doing their best to please the (to them) unknown God, Creator of the Universe. St. Seraphim of Sarov and St. Nikolaj seem therefore to share their view on pre-Christian seekers.

#### *St. Nicholas of Japan*

The great Russian missionary to Japan, St. Nicholas of Japan (†1912), engaged with Buddhism throughout his whole life in Japan. He spent countless years learning the Japanese language, culture, and religion, as well as regularly listening to Buddhist preachers preach their faith. He did this to understand the people he was preaching to. He clearly believed that missionary efforts must start by an understanding of the local ethos. He published an extensive study of Buddhism in Russian in 1869, *Japan from the point of view of Christian Mission*, the first description of Japanese Buddhism accessible in Russian. His deep study of Buddhism allowed him to write that Buddhism is “the best of the

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

pagan religions—a herculean pillar of human effort compiled for itself a religion, guided by those obscure remains of God-revealed truths that had been preserved by the races after the Babylonian dispersion.”<sup>29</sup>

St. Nicholas saw good elements in Buddhism and underlined for instance that it had spread in its early stages because it opposed the purely evil Brahmin caste system and oppression of the lower classes in India. He believed Buddha preached “against the vanity of this world.”<sup>30</sup> St. Nicholas saw noble and positive elements in Buddhism. He recognized that many of these elements were based on pure longing and ideas, in a sense based on eternal natural truths. As we recall, Nikolaj praised Buddha for teaching his soul to be free from every worldly seed and crop, “to abandon all the serpentine allurements of frail and shadowy matter,” which as we know is to be accomplished by stillness or meditation. St. Nicholas of Japan saw mediation in Buddhism in this way:

Thoughts can also cause distress or trouble a person—therefore it is better if they as if stop and freeze in their flow; if, in a word, a person immerses himself in insensibility, unconsciousness, then he immerses himself in nothingness, but in fact an integral human existence has immersed itself. Such an unconscious peaceful state is called contemplation; to it is ascribed lofty qualities of directly leading everything and the power to control everything, inasmuch as in this state a person, having renounced himself, merges into unity with everything and can become the possessor of that with which he has merged. This state is promoted as the aim of everyone and everything; the buddhas are therefore buddhas because they have attained the possibility to at all times immerse themselves in this state, and that is considered their most exalted blessedness.<sup>31</sup>

We see here how the two saints both recognize that Buddha and his followers aim at reaching this state, because a human is free from passions in this state. Neither one of them claims following Buddha

<sup>29</sup> Николай архиепископ Японский, *Япония с точки зрения христианской миссии*, в: *Избранные ученые труды святителя Николая архиепископа Японского*, (Москва: Издательство ПСТГУ, 2006), 44.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

himself is salvific, but both recognize that most likely Buddha himself had a pure longing for the unknown God and did what he could to please this God: renounce the world and preach poverty and asceticism as a purification. St. Nicholas also saw how the Japanese people “have Buddhism with its teaching of equality and brotherhood for all people, to thank for their rejection of slavery and absence of it in their country,”<sup>32</sup> another God-pleasing moral and ethical stance.

*Fr. Seraphim Rose*

Another Church figure we would want to consult before our conclusion, is Fr. Seraphim Rose (†1982). In the book of Hieromonk Damascene (a spiritual son of Fr. Seraphim Rose), “Christ the Eternal Tao,” we find sources that directly speak to our studied topic. In this book, Hieromonk Damascene uses a lot of material of Fr. Seraphim Rose which demonstrates how the notion of Tao, taught by Lao Tzu, is not only a little compatible with Orthodox Christianity, but rather is in fact Orthodox in its basic premises. The Tao is the Pre-Eternal Word of God, Christ Himself. Fr. Seraphim Rose studied Taosim under the famous Chinese scholar Gi Ming Shien before becoming Orthodox. It is clear this study meant a lot to him, and he expressed many times a positive view on it. It is clear it was one of the big non-Christian influences on his path to Orthodoxy, especially the notion of stillness and emptying of the mind and heart of worldly cares. This is the sentiment that Nikolaj shares in his hymn, writing about how Lao Tzu “admonishes my soul to be peaceful and still, and to wait for Tao to act within her.”<sup>33</sup> If we follow the understanding proposed by Hieromonk Damascene, based on Fr. Seraphim Rose, then when Nikolaj writes that his soul awaits Tao to act within her, he awaits Christ.

The way Lao Tzu was able to perhaps comprehend some realities more than the other mentioned seekers should be ascribed to natural law. St. Justin the Martyr believed that in every man there is a divine particle, which is his reason, which is and was the best guide before the coming of Christ. Lao Tzu used his reason and intuition, which are

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 154–171.

<sup>33</sup> Velimirovich, *Prayers by the Lake*, 86–87.

both God-given, to contemplate the created world and to truly seek its cause, to find its Creator. Lao Tzu longed to be closer to heaven. Lao Tzu was a mystic, and trusting his God-given reason and intuition, he wanted to return to pristine simplicity, a state that from a Christian perspective is the state before the fall. Lao Tzu would write, “The primitive origin. Here indeed is the clue to the Tao,”<sup>34</sup> demonstrating to us that we have to go back to the sinless state before the fall, when we were in full communion with God. There we will find Christ.

Fr. Seraphim Rose said:

In the history of ancient China, there are moments when it is absolutely incredible how the same things happened in Chinese life as happened in the West, even though there was no outward connection between the two civilizations. The first of the Greek philosophers—Thales and so forth—lived about the sixth century B.C., just about the time Confucius [a contemporary of Lao Tzu] was in China and Buddha was in India. It is as though there really was a spirit of the times.<sup>35</sup>

This is a very interesting and powerful statement. It shows us the possibility that seekers, or philosophers, around the world were somehow united in their longing for Truth, for God. An awakening of sorts, as a preparation for the coming of Christ?

## Conclusions

We have in our brief study of the hymn of praise for the pre-Christian seekers by Nikolaj, explored and examined a few different aspects involved. The first conclusion we want to suggest is that Nikolaj in his hymn does not praise any modern-day religious or philosophical movements. Instead, he is very clear that he is praising specific historical people, who sought after truth before the coming of Christ. We would like to argue that most Orthodox Christians today, as well as at the time of Nikolaj, would react shockingly to the words in this hymn. This is because most of them would most likely connect the praise of a certain

<sup>34</sup> Lao Tzu, *Tao The Ching* (trans. by D.C. Lau), (London: Penguin Books, 1965), ch. 15.

<sup>35</sup> Damascene, *Christ the Eternal Tao*, 30.

historical person with a modern-day movement that they believe is based on that person. It is however very important to underline that no heterodox ideologies or movements as such are praised by the saint. Rather, he praises only aspects that are, according to him, fully compatible with Orthodox Christianity.

The second conclusion we would like to highlight concerns the usage of the word “prophet” in connection to these seekers. This seems to be the most controversial part of this hymn, and one that if not understood correctly could scandalize some Orthodox Christians. To understand the usage of the word by Nikolaj, we must first understand who he was, as that will give us the correct context. As we previously explored in our analysis, he was not a relativist and there was only one truth and way for him: Christ.

Instead, it seems that he used the word “prophet” since he saw in these seekers, who all lived long before the Incarnation, a pure longing for the truth. This longing did in many cases provide for them glimpses of God and His wisdom. St. Ephrem the Syrian taught that revelation is revealed in two ways: through Scripture and through Creation. It is clear that many of these seekers, through natural law and creation around them, were able to in some limited yet pure way acquire seeds of divinely inspired truths. As St. Seraphim of Sarov wrote, “Though not with the same power as in the people of God, nevertheless the presence of the Spirit of God also acted in the pagans who did not know the true God, because even among them, God found the chosen people.” Nikolaj would write in a letter regarding Mahatma Gandhi to a British noble (“Charles, B.”), that God does in fact even act among the unbaptized, as He freely wishes: “I think that this is the reason why ever-active Providence has chosen Gandhi, an unbaptized man, to serve as a warning to the baptized, especially those baptized people who pile up one misfortune on another upon themselves and their peoples by using ruthless and harsh means. The Gospel also tells us that Providence sometimes uses such warnings for the good of the people. Your Grace will immediately realize that I am alluding to the Roman captain from Capernaum (Matt. ch. 8). On the one hand, you see the Elders of Israel who, as chosen monotheists of the time, boasted of their faith, meanwhile rejecting Christ, and, on the other hand, you see the despised

Roman pagan who came to Christ with great faith and humility, asking Him to heal his servant. And when Jesus heard it, He was astonished and said to those who followed Him, "Truly I say to you, not even in Israel have I found faith like this."<sup>36</sup> It is for this reason that Nikolaj called these seekers prophets, as they taught before Christ and in many ways prepared their people for the coming of the Lord. As time has shown, most of their followers have today formed groups which often are radically opposite Christianity, yet in the original teachings of these seekers, we can clearly see seeds of divinely inspired and eternal truths. And Gandhi, while unbaptized and heterodox, was still used by God, according to Nikolaj.

It is from the two above mentioned conclusions that the third and final one grows out of. This hymn is not ecumenical or part of an inter-religious dialogue. It seems that Nikolaj praised these seekers from an Orthodox Christian perspective and saw them as a part of the pre-Christian philosophical and spiritual heritage. A heritage that while not perhaps purely orthodox, nevertheless demonstrated what a human, created in the Image of God, can achieve, and reach with a pure enquiry and longing for the Truth, which as we know is God Himself. The most relevant comparison seems to be the Greek philosophers who were often seen in a positive light by early Christians and whose philosophical models helped to formally explain God-given dogmas of the Christian faith.

By praising the seekers as he did, Nikolaj shows us not only his intellectual capabilities, but above all he demonstrated to us the depth of his spiritual awareness and discernment. Rejecting blind zealotism, he saw the world and people around him in all dimensions; not simply as a vertical or horizontal lines or black and white facts to be determined. He himself clearly knew, black on white, what the truth was. According to the Church who has canonized him, he was in communion with this Truth, with Christ. For this reason, he was able to discern and contemplate realities far beyond what most people can do. He

<sup>36</sup> Nikolaj Velimirovic, "What is the meaning of the person Gandhi the Indian?, letter to a British noble, Charles, B.," in: *Missionary Letters of Saint Nikolai Velimirovich: Letters 1-100* (trans. by Serafim Baltic), *Treasury of Serbian Orthodox Spirituality*, vol 6 (Grayslake, IL: New Gracanica Monastery, 2008), 171-173.

spoke the Truth and was able to see the Truth among those who, due to historical circumstances, lived before the Incarnation of Christ. By recognizing these pre-Christian seekers as prophets of the Truth, Nikolaj solidified his own position as a prophet and saint of our own times.



Bishop Nikolaj in his visit to the USA in 1927 on the invitation of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, the American Yugoslav Society, and the Institute of Politics in Williamstown, Massachusetts (Courtesy of the Bibliothèque nationale de France, <https://gallica.bnf.fr/>)

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## Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović, Dimitrije Ljotić and Zbor in Interwar Yugoslavia\*

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When Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović was stripped of Yugoslav citizenship, the decision was justified by stating that he was a member of Zbor. Since then, he was portrayed in socialist Yugoslavia as “a fascist lackey” and a close ally of Dimitrije Ljotić. Numerous news articles were written about him as “the ideologue of Zbor,” and “a Hitler fan,” whose ideas would pollute the minds of Orthodox believers.<sup>1</sup> During the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s, these stances were only magnified, and used to portray the entire Serbian Orthodox Church as fascist. Although those works can be dismissed as wartime propaganda, they serve as a great example of the political importance of the ties between Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović and Dimitrije Ljotić to this day.<sup>2</sup>

On the other hand, for totally different reasons, members of Zbor who survived World War II and went into emigration, also aimed at presenting the relationship between the two men as more cordial and significant than it was.<sup>3</sup> Their goal was not to discredit the Serbian Orthodox Church but to show that Dimitrije Ljotić and his movement

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<sup>1</sup> See: Vladimir Dimitrijević, *Oklevetani svetac*, (Gornji Milanovac: Lio, 2007), 32, 40, 84; Ljubiša Jakšić, „Kleronacisti protiv vlastitih naroda,” *Oslobođenje*, 7. 7. 1981.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Ljubica Štefan, *Srpska pravoslavna crkva i fašizam*, (Zagreb: Globus, 1996); Ljubica Štefan, *Pregled srpskog antisemitizma* (Zagreb: Alatiir, 1992); Juraj Batelja, *Rivellijeva zavjera laži*, (Zagreb: Postulatura blaženog Alojzija Stepinca, 2015), 53–141.

<sup>3</sup> N. Mandić, „Nad grobom vladike Nikolaja,” *Iskra*, 15. 5. 1956.

were endorsed by a man of such importance. They often employed hyperbolic descriptions and flat-out falsehoods. For example, Svetolik Lazarević wrote that Bishop Nikolaj referred to Ljotić as a saint.<sup>4</sup> The former Prime Minister of the Yugoslav Government in Exile and not a member of Zbor, Božidar Purić, much more carefully wrote that Bishop Nikolaj “probably participated in the founding of the movement, certainly blessed it and cooperated with it, and many members saw him as their spiritual leader.”<sup>5</sup>

Recently, the psychologist Jovan Byford wrote extensively about the relationship between the two men. In his works, he saw them both as a part of a broader Christian nationalist movement,<sup>6</sup> and highlighted many points of overlap between them, whilst being very critical of Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović and his canonization. Although mostly factual, some of his conclusions were based on erroneous claims. Most notably, he claimed that Bishop Nikolaj gave an interview to a Serbian émigré journal in 1953, in which he said that Ljotić was “his student and a faithful follower in Christ.”<sup>7</sup> However, no such interview ever existed.<sup>8</sup>

Some authors, coming from the Serbian Orthodox Church, have shined a different light on the relationship between Bishop Nikolaj and Ljotić. They were critical of Ljotić, claiming that he manipulated the

<sup>4</sup> See: Borivoje Karapandžić, *S verom u Boga za kralja i otadžbinu – Dobrovoljci 1941 – 1991* (Klivilend: b.i, 1991), 147–148; Đuro Vrga, *Ostala su svedočenja* (Beograd: Raška škola, 2007), 133–135.

<sup>5</sup> Božidar Purić, *Biografija Bože Rankovića* (Minhen: Iskra, 1963), 210.

<sup>6</sup> Jovan Byford, “Willing Bystanders: Dimitrije Ljotić ‘Shield’ Colaboration’ and the Destruction of Serbia’s Jews” in *In the Shadow of Hitler*, Rebecca Haynes, Martyn Rady (eds), (London: IB Tauris 2011), 300.

<sup>7</sup> Jovan Byford, “Willing Bystanders: Dimitrije Ljotić ‘Shield’ Colaboration’ and the Destruction of Serbia’s Jews,” 300; Jovan Byford, “Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović: ‘Lackey of the Germans’ or a ‘Victim of Fascism?’,” in *Serbia and Serbs in World War Two*, Sabrina Ramet Ola Listhaug (eds), (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 139–140; Jovan Byford, *From «Traitor» to «Saint»: Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović in Serbian Public Memory* (Jerusalem: SICSA, 2004), 8.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Nebojša Popov, „Srpski populizam od marginalne do dominantne pojave,” *Vreme*, 24. 5. 1993; Anonim, „Sećanje na vladiku Nikolaja (Velimirovića),” *Hilandar*, br. 38, 1992, pp. 24–25. For an in depth analysis of this claim see: Rastko Lompar, *Učitelj ili farisej: Zbor, hrišćanstvo i verske zajednice 1935-1945* (Beograd: Catena mundi, 2021), 233–235.



Bishop Nikolaj with his flock  
(Courtesy of the Serbian Orthodox Diocese of Zvornik and Tuzla)



Bishop Nikolaj comes to Belgrade [probably 1940]  
(Courtesy of Goran Veljković, Kragujevac)



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

Bishop and used him to gain followers and increase his reputation.<sup>9</sup> To others, they were close and almost likeminded, with certain distinct differences.<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, Patriarch Gavriilo Dožić gave a completely different assessment in 1947: “Many think wrong. Nikolaj is not a follower of Ljotić, but the other way around. Ljotić was educated and instructed by Bishop Nikolaj to bring politics into Church.”<sup>11</sup> Such an interpretation could result either from the less than ideal relationship between Patriarch Gavriilo and Bishop Nikolaj, or by the Patriarch’s need to appease the Communist regime by criticizing one of their fiercest critics in the emigration.<sup>12</sup>

In essence, three distinctive approaches are present in the literature. According to one, their relationship is best explained as a symbiosis between church and politics, or church and fascism. The other maintains that Dimitrije Ljotić manipulated Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović and used him in the effort to gain power. Finally, the third and least numerous claims that in fact Ljotić was merely a puppet whose strings were pulled by the influential Bishop. This paper aims to provide a concise overview of the different points of contact between the two men from their youth to 1941, as well as a novel and more nuanced view of their relationship.

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Although most examinations of the relationship between Bishop Nikolaj and Dimitrije Ljotić and his movement start from the mid-30s, an important point of overlap in the early 20th century needs to be addressed. Nikolaj Velimirović spent several years at the turn of the

<sup>9</sup> See: Velibor Džomić, *Srbska crkva, Ljotić i ljotićeveci* (Beograd/Podgorica: Štampar Makarije/Oktoih, 2009), 118; Mitropolit Josif, *Memoari* (Cetinje: Svetigora, 2008), 215.

<sup>10</sup> See: Dimitrijević, *Oklevetani svetac*, 77–78; Pavel Tihomirov, *O krstu svetog vladike Nikolaja* (Beograd: Sveta Rusija, 2010), 93; Dragan Subotić, *Organska misao Srba u 19 i 20 veku 1* (Beograd: Preobražaj, 1999), 135.

<sup>11</sup> Radmila Radić, *Život u vremenima* (Beograd: PBF, 2011), 507–508. Already in August 1945 in a discussion with captain Radisav Raspopović he criticized Bishop Nikolaj and claimed that he was a member of Zbor and a traitor. Historical Archive of Belgrade [Istorijiski arhiv Beograda] (IAB), Security Information Agency (BIA), f-14, p-8, Report by Radisav Raspopović on his meeting with the Patriarch, 26. 8. 1945.

<sup>12</sup> Radić, *Život u vremenima*, 346.

century studying abroad in England, Switzerland and Russia. During the First World War he was advocating for Serbia within Allied countries and during that period he established close ties with the Anglican Church.<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, Dimitrije Ljotić, a student at Belgrade University, was going through an eccentric religious phase. Heavily influenced by the (pseudo) religious teachings of Leo Tolstoy, which were gaining popularity amongst the youth, Ljotić joined several ecumenical organizations which had sprung up in those years. He became a member of the Alliance of Sober Youth as well as the International Order of Good Templars.<sup>14</sup> More importantly, he joined the World Student Christian Federation created in 1911 at Belgrade University. The Federation was founded in Sweden in 1895 and gathered pious students of all Christian denominations. At the time of the creation of its Belgrade branch, it was under the undisputed leadership of the prominent ecumenical preacher John Mott (1865-1955).<sup>15</sup> Although the Kingdom of Serbia at that time was almost exclusively Orthodox, and therefore not very suitable for ecumenical work, the clergy of the Serbian Orthodox Church largely embraced and supported the rising ecumenical movement. Among those who supported the World Student Christian Federation was the young monk Nikolaj Velimirović, who gave several speeches at its meetings.<sup>16</sup> In May 1912 he spoke about “The Pessimism of the Youth,” and joined in the 1913 Universal Day of Prayer for Stu-

<sup>13</sup> See: Slobodan G. Markovich, “Activities of Father Nikolai Velimirovich in Great Britain during the Great War,” *Balkanica*, Vol. 48, (2017): 143-190.

<sup>14</sup> Archives of Serbia [Arhiv Srbije] (AS), Security Information Agency (BIA), II-69 Zbor Dimitrija Ljotića, 12. 5. 1952, pp. 2–3; Milan Popović, *Četnik: Ručna knjiga za srpsku omladinu, saveznike i četnike*, (Beograd: Savez trezvene mladeži, 1912), 15; Dim. Stojanović, „Za što?,” *Glasnik Saveza trezvene mladeži*, maj–jun 1921; Anonim, „Izveštaj uprave STM,” *Glasnik Saveza trezvene mladeži*, septembar–oktobar 1921.

<sup>15</sup> AS, BIA, II-69, Zbor Dimitrija Ljotića, 12. 5. 1952, pp. 2–3; Branko Bjelajac, „Hrišćanska zajednica studenata kao model saradnje i tolerancije među crkvama s početka XX veka,” *Religija i tolerancija*, br 16, 2011, 311; Dimitrije Ljotić, „Svetlo istine,” *Sabrana dela* 11 (Beograd: Zadruga, 2001), 314–315; Ljotić, „Iz moga života,” *Sabrana dela* 11, 14. – All page numbers in the Collective works of Dimitrije Ljotić correspond to the online (<https://issuu.com/novo-videlo/stacks/7af08a9c67cd4f648f6b773800299b5a>) and not the print version.

<sup>16</sup> Anonim „Drugi i treći godišnji izveštaj Hrišćanske zajednice studenata na Beogradskom univerzitetu,” *Studentski pokret*, jun 1914, p. 37.

dents celebration with his lecture “After 365 Days.” Also active in those meetings was Dimitrije Ljotić.<sup>17</sup> It seems quite likely that they met at one of those gatherings, and that Ljotić’s admiration for Nikolaj Velimirović stemmed from them, given how important they were for the ideological development of the former.<sup>18</sup>

There are very few sources about the contacts between the two men over the course of the next two decades. They were both still active in ecumenical organizations, as were many of their followers and friends.<sup>19</sup> They probably met on many occasions during those meetings, as was the case at the Annual Conference of the YMCA at the Ljubostinja Monastery in 1932.<sup>20</sup> Nikolaj Velimirović was climbing the ranks of the Serbian Orthodox Church, becoming the Bishop of Ziča in 1919, and the Bishop of Ohrid the following year. He remained the Bishop of the Ohrid and Bitola Eparchy until 1936. On the other hand, Ljotić was living far from the limelight, working as a lawyer and a local politician for the People’s Radical Party. He remained quite pious and regularly attended church service.<sup>21</sup> When he was chosen by the King to fill the slot of the Ministry of Justice, the Church supported his selection for the post.<sup>22</sup> In 1935, he became the President of the Council of the Braničevo Eparchy, which meant that he was delegated to the Patriarchal Council, the highest administrative body of the Serbian Orthodox Church ac-

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> See: Lompar, *Učitelj ili farisej*, 94-106.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. AS, BIA, II-69 Note on Mihailo Lukić, undated; AS, BIA, II-69 Note on Vlahko Vlahović, undated; AS, BIA, I-32 Milisav Grujić, Information on Zbor members in the Požarevac county, 22. 9. 1954; IAB, BIA, f-1, p-1, Minutes from the interrogation of Slobodan Radovanović, 27. 1. 1949; Vlahko Vlahović, „Sećanje na Vladiku Nikolaja,” *Iskra*, 25. 4. 1956; Aleksandar Stojanović, *Ideje, politički projekti i praksa vlade Milana Nedića* (Beograd: INIS, 2015), 85; Radmila Radić, *Misija britanske Hrišćanske zajednice mladih ljudi u Kraljevini Jugoslaviji* (Beograd: INIS, 2019), 292-294.

<sup>20</sup> Radić, *Misija britanske Hrišćanske zajednice mladih ljudi u Kraljevini Jugoslaviji*, 199-200.

<sup>21</sup> AS, BIA, II-69, Zbor Dimitrija Ljotića, 12. 5. 1952, p. 7; AS, BIA, II-69, Note on Dimitrije Ljotić, by Petrović, 15. 12. 1945; Dragoljub Jovanović, *Medaljoni III* (Beograd: Službeni glasnik 2008), 377; Svetomir Paunović, *Sećanja svedoka jednog vremena* (Beograd: privatno izdanje, 2004), 154.

<sup>22</sup> AS, BIA, II -76, Bishop Venijamin to Dimitrije Ljotić, undated.



cessible to laymen.<sup>23</sup> His tenure in the Patriarchal Council was marked by disagreements he had with the Church leadership. At that time, Bishop Nikolaj was also in opposition to the newly elected Patriarch Gavriilo and his closest allies.<sup>24</sup> According to the Metropolitan of Skopje Josif, Ljotić always “attempted to be the center of attention” at the Council meetings.<sup>25</sup> Most notably, Ljotić bitterly opposed the settlement between the Monastery of Beočin and two Jewish industrialists who had been embroiled in a dispute over land for several decades. When the out of court settlement was finally reached in 1940, it had to be ratified by the Patriarchal Council. What was supposed to be a purely formal occasion, turned into a small scandal, when Dimitrije Ljotić openly opposed the settlement, claiming that it was against the interests of the Church and driven by corruption. With clear anti-Semitic rhetoric, he stated that out of “moral reasons” no agreement should be reached.<sup>26</sup> Eventually, the settlement was ratified with only four dissenting votes.<sup>27</sup>

During the mid-1930s, Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović and Dimitrije Ljotić grew closer together both through their unrelenting yet distinct-

<sup>23</sup> *Crkva: kalendar Srpske pravoslavne patrijaršije za 1935* (Beograd: SASSPC, 1935), 34, 43; *Crkva: kalendar Srpske pravoslavne patrijaršije za 1936*, 37, 41; *Crkva: kalendar Srpske pravoslavne patrijaršije za 1938*, 107, 111; *Crkva: kalendar Srpske pravoslavne patrijaršije za 1939*, 109, 113;

Anonim, „Novi članovi Eparhijskog saveta Eparhije Braničevske,” *Braničevski vesnik*, avgust–oktobar 1939; Mil, „Sednica eparhijskog saveta,” *Braničevski vesnik*, novembar–decembar 1939; Anonim, „Patrijaršijski savet,” *Glasnik: Službeni list SPC*, 1. 4. 1940; Subotić, *Organska misao Srba u 19 i 20 veku* 1, 394.

<sup>24</sup> IAB, Befehlshaber der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD (BDS), Nikolaj Velimirović Dossier (N-65).

<sup>25</sup> Mitropolit Josif, *Memoari*, 213.

<sup>26</sup> S. Paunović, „Zasedanje patrijaršijskog saveta u Karlovcima,” *Politika*, 25. 3. 1940.

<sup>27</sup> See: Anonim, „Posle zasedanja Patrijaršijskog saveta,” *Glasnik: Službeni list SPC*, 1. 5. 1940; Čedomir Joksimović, *Nekoliko reči o industriskim preduzećima s inostranim kapitalom u Jugoslaviji*, (Beograd: bez izdavača, 1940), 26; M. Mojić, *Srpski narod u kandžama Jevreja*, (Beograd: b. I, 1941), 28; Anonim, „Patrijarhšijski savet,” *Glasnik: Službeni list SPC*, 1. 4. 1940; Ljotić, „Sad je vaš čas i oblast tame,” *Sabrana dela* 12, 74; S. Paunović, „Zasedanje patrijaršijskog saveta u Karlovcima,” *Politika*, 25. 3. 1940; Anonim, „Posle zasedanja Patrijaršijskog saveta,” *Glasnik: Službeni list SPC*, 1. 5. 1940; Mitropolit Josif, *Memoari*, 214.

ly different critique of the state of Interwar Yugoslavia, and due to their latent opposition toward the Church leadership at that time. The so-called Concordat Crisis of 1937, which shook the Kingdom of Yugoslavia to its core, marked the highpoint of their cooperation. The Serbian Orthodox Church feared that the Concordat between the Vatican and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia would favor the Catholic Church and therefore launched a bitter campaign of street protests against its ratification. Bishop Nikolaj, who had by that time become increasingly hostile to Roman Catholicism, was the most vocal opponent of the Concordat within the clergy. For him, there were no second thoughts when going against the regime. On the other hand, Dimitrije Ljotić was in a much more precarious position. Given his long-lasting sympathies for the Catholic Church, its organization and social doctrine,<sup>28</sup> as well as the fact that the Yugoslav National Movement Zbor was an “integral Christian” movement,<sup>29</sup> his choice was not as easy. He faced an impossible dilemma. Either he could support the position of the Serbian Orthodox Church and compromise the confessionally inclusive nature of his movement, or he could support the Stojadinović regime which he had previously criticized, and risk his solid relationship with the Church and Bishop Nikolaj. Ljotić chose the former, openly criticizing the Concordat and calling for its withdrawal. In the middle of the Crisis, Patriarch Varnava died, and rumors were spreading across Belgrade that he was poisoned. Although Dimitrije Ljotić never openly claimed that the Patriarch was murdered, some of his followers did, and many foreign observers claimed that the rumors originated from Zbor.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>28</sup> See: Ljotić, „Iz moga života,” *Sabrana dela* 11, 12; Ljotić, „Svetlo istine,” *Sabrana dela* 11, 167; Anonim, „Katolička socijalna doktrina,” *Otadžbina*, 5. 1. 1936; Dimitrije Ljotić, „Sukob Hrvatska straža – Nova riječ,” *Otadžbina*, 11. 2. 1937.

<sup>29</sup> Lompar, *Učitelj ili farisej*, 100-119.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Archives of Yugoslavia [Arhiv Jugoslavije] (AJ), Stanislav Krakov Collection (102), 102-7-18, Flyer, Bishop Nikolaj’s Sermon, August 1937; AJ, Central Press Bureau of the Ministerial Council of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (38), 38-620-798, Anonim, „Beograd sahranio Varnavu,” *Hrvatski list*, 31. 7. 1937; AJ, 38-618-796, Anonim, „Povest o otroveni Varnavove – dilem hakenkrajcalarske propagandy,” *Narodni Oslobozneni*, 5. 8. 1937; Anonim, „Hitlerovsky jed v Jugoslavii,” *Ranny noviny*, 5. 8. 1937; Anonim, „Hakenkrajclerska propaganda v Jugoslavii,” *Večernik*, 6. 8. 1937; Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde (BArch), Reichssicherheitshauptamt (R58)/9196,

Members of Zbor were instructed to join the Concordat struggle as hard as they could.<sup>31</sup> Most vocal amongst them were those that were also Serbian Orthodox priests.<sup>32</sup> Around that time, several close adherents of Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović from the clergy—Aleksa Todorović, Dimitrije Najdanović, Mitrofan Matić—joined Zbor following his advice.<sup>33</sup> Some contemporaries claimed that Bishop Nikolaj championed the creation of a clerical party, but that the majority of bishops were against it. Therefore, he instructed several of his adherents to join Zbor in order to bind it closer to the SOC.<sup>34</sup> He never openly endorsed Zbor, but cryptically wrote that “priests can support any patriotic national group, which fears God and loves their people.”<sup>35</sup> As a result, the number of priests within Zbor multiplied several times. Zbor, which had only three priests as candidates at the general elections in 1935, had eighteen at the next elections in 1938.<sup>36</sup> The regime responded by attacking the SOC for cooperating with the opposition.<sup>37</sup> To many it seemed as though Zbor was becoming the Church party in Yugoslavia. Ljotić did little to disprove such impressions, as the symbols of the Movement were prominently featured at many protest gatherings.<sup>38</sup> Anonymous leaflets were circulating Belgrade which called for a coup d’état and the

Zbor Leaflet, To the Citizens of Yugoslavia; Croatian State Archive [Hrvatski državni arhiv] (HDA), Group VI – Burgeois Parties and Societies (1353), Inv. br. 3969, Daruvar administration to the administration of the Sava Banovina, Department for State Security, 5. 12. 1938.

<sup>31</sup> AJ, Milan Stojadinović Collection (37), 37-46-300, Milan Stojadinović to Ljubomir Marić, 28. 7. 1937.

<sup>32</sup> AS, BIA, II-69, Statement by Dragoslav Obućina, undated; Milan Stojadinović, *Ni rat ni pakt* (Buenos Aires: privatno izdanje, 1963), 533.

<sup>33</sup> AS, BIA, II-69, Note on Aleksa Todorović, undated; Željko Jelić, „Odlomci o Dimitriju Najdanoviću,” *Srpske organske studije*, br 1, 2000, 117; Karapandžić, *Sverom u Boga za kralja i otadžbinu – Dobrovoljci 1941–1991*, 538; Dimitrije Najdanović, *U senci vladike Nikolaja*, (Beograd: privatno izdanje, 2001), 108–109. Đorđe Đekić, *Otac Mitrofan Matić* (Ruma: privatno izdanje, 2015), 30.

<sup>34</sup> Purić, *Biografija Bože Rankovića*, 210.

<sup>35</sup> BArch, R58/9196, Bishop Nikolaj, Sermon, November 1938.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. *Politika*, 22. 4. 1935 and *Politika*, 26. 11. 1938.

<sup>37</sup> Anonim, *Prikaz političke situacije u zemlji prilikom glasanja o Konkordatu u narodnoj skupštini* (Split: bez oznake izdavača, 1937), 3.

<sup>38</sup> Anonim, „Sveštenička skupština,” *Vreme*, 23. 9. 1937; Anonim, „Skupština svešteničkog udruženja,” *Pravda*, 23. 9. 1937; Radić, *Život u vremenima*, 303–304.

creation of a new government led by bishops Dositej, Irinej and Nikolaj, in which Dimitrije Ljotić would once again be the Minister of Justice.<sup>39</sup> By aligning himself with the SOC, Ljotić did irreparable damage to his relationship with the Vatican. Although he was careful not to criticize the Catholic Church too harshly, and to champion equality between the churches,<sup>40</sup> from that point on he was seen in Catholic circles (as the main Catholic journal in Yugoslavia *Obzor* stated in 1940) as “a proponent of greater Serbian Orthodoxy.”<sup>41</sup>

Although the Concordat was voted through the National Assembly, its ratification by the Senate was indefinitely postponed.<sup>42</sup> Public pressure forced the Government of Milan Stojadinović to quietly abandon the agreement with the Vatican. Since Patriarch Varnava had passed away, a new head of the Serbian Orthodox Church had to be elected. Many observers thought that Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović was the most suitable candidate, given his immense public authority. However, Bishop Gavriilo, who was more prone to compromise with the Government, was elected. Prime Minister Stojadinović lobbied behind the scenes for his election.<sup>43</sup> On the other hand, Dimitrije Ljotić attempted to get Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović elected.<sup>44</sup> It seems that the closeness between Ljotić and Velimirović did more harm than good for his bid to the Patriarchal seat. Many allies of the Prime Minister warned him of the danger posed by Bishop Nikolaj, “who gathers God-devotionalists around him, and schemes with the opposition.”<sup>45</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Radić, *Život u vremenima*, 304–305; Dragoljub Jovanović, *Političke uspomene 3* (Beograd: Arhiv Jugoslavije, 1997), 291.

<sup>40</sup> Vasilije Dragosavljević, „JNP Zbor i koncept srpske državnosti”, *Savremeno društvo i nauka* (Niš: Filozofski fakultet Niš, 2019), 261.

<sup>41</sup> AJ, 38-353-501, Anonim, „Obzor,” *Obzor*, 19. 11. 1940.

<sup>42</sup> AJ, 38-620-798, Anonim, „Konkordat se neće izneti pred Senat,” *Samouprava*, 11. 10. 1937; Miloš Mišović, *Srpska crkva i konkordatska kriza*, (Beograd: Sloboda, 1983).

<sup>43</sup> Stojadinović, *Ni rat ni pakt*, 543; Đoko Slijepčević, *Istorija Srpske pravoslavne crkve 2* (Beograd: JRJ, 2002), 595.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. AS, BIA, II-69, BDS Milan Nedić Dossier, pp. 66; IAB, BIA, Patriarch Gavriilo Dožić Dossier (f. 14, p. 8), How Gavriilo became the Patriarch; IAB, BIA, f-14, p-8, Gavriilo's Election; IAB, BIA, f-14, p-8, The Stance of Nedić and Ljotić towards the Orthodox Church in Croatia and Serbia.

<sup>45</sup> Radić, *Život u vremenima*, 307–308.

In many ways, the events of 1937 marked the highpoint of the cooperation between the two men. They seemed to be quite close and their political agendas identical. For decades, it was claimed that the God-devotionalists movement, whose spiritual leader was undoubtedly Bishop Nikolaj, collectively joined Zbor at that time.<sup>46</sup> The beginnings of the God-devotionalists movement, or the People's Christian Community, can be traced to northern Serbia in the late 19th century.<sup>47</sup> The Movement, which had for decades lingered close to heresy, was started by uneducated preachers, who had criticized the state of the Church and the secularization of the masses. Coming from a religiously heterogeneous area, there was clear influence of various Protestant groups, such as Nazarenes and Adventists, as well as Spiritism and popular superstitions and beliefs. Following an endorsement by Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović, the Movement started its transformation into a purely Orthodox renewal movement since 1921.<sup>48</sup> The Movement remained officially autonomous from the SOC, but it was guided by its priests and bishops.<sup>49</sup> It became widely popular amongst Orthodox Serbs and until its dissolution in 1941 its membership was measured in tens of thousands.

Many priests, however, never accepted the God-devotionalists, and their demonstrative piety seemed to many out of place in traditional Orthodox worship.<sup>50</sup> Bishop Nikolaj was often criticized for his support

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Mirko Đorđević, „Povratak propovednika,” *Republika*, 1–31. jul 1996; P. Ilić, *Srpska pravoslavna crkva i tajna Dahaua* (Beograd: privatno izdanje, 2006), 92; Byford, *Potiskivanje i poricanje antisemitizma*, 33; Stefanović, *Zbor Dimitrija Ljotića*, 31; Maria Falina, *Pyrrhic Victory: East Orthodox Christianity, Politics and Serbian Nationalism in the Interwar Period*, Budapest: CEU, PhD thesis, 2011, 145–146; Maria Falina, „Svetosavlje. A Case Study in the Nationalisation of Religion,” *Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Religions- und Kulturgeschichte*, Vol. 101, 2007, 505–527; Veljko Đurić, *Golgota srpske pravoslavne crkve 1941–1945* (Beograd: privatno izdanje, 1998), 49.

<sup>47</sup> Đekić, *Otac Mitrofan Matić*, 19–20; Slijepčević, *Istorija SPC* 2, 216.

<sup>48</sup> Đoko Slijepčević, *Nazareni u Srbiji do 1914. godine* (Beograd: Jugoistok, 1943), 28–29; 31.

<sup>49</sup> Aleksandar Sredojević, *Srpski patrijarh Dimitrije Pavlović* (Beograd: Hrišćanska misao, 2017), 492–498; Dragan Subotić, *Episkop Nikolaj i pravoslavni bogomoljački pokret* (Beograd: Nova iskra, 1996), 15–16; 92.

<sup>50</sup> Milivoj Petrović, „Utisci sa kanonske posete Nj. SV. Patrijarha, Bosni, Hercegovini i delu Dalmacije,” *Pravda* 12. 10. 1933; Tihomirov, *O krstu svetog vladike Nikolaja*, 105–107.

of the Movement. Over the years, they expelled members that were deemed not Orthodox enough and started criticizing Adventists, Catholics, Spiritists, and Mediums.<sup>51</sup> They also started reprinting various anti-Semitic texts such as the *Protocols of the Elders of Sion*, works of Henry Ford and similar Serbian pamphlets.<sup>52</sup> On the surface, it seemed likely that the Movement was coopted by Dimitrije Ljotić and Zbor. However, was that so?

Several high-ranking God-devotionalists did join Zbor, both laymen (Jovan Sarčević, Vlajko Vlahović, Ratibor Djurdjević) and clergymen (Aleksa Todorović, Dimitrije Najdanović, Radislav Paunović, Dragutin Bulić).<sup>53</sup> Some researchers have claimed that the Zbor leadership constituted the backbone of the God-devotionalists movement.<sup>54</sup> However, this seems impossible, since all priests had been members of the God-devotionalists movement years before they joined Zbor. Father Aleksa Todorović became the leader of the God-devotionalists in 1932, and joined Zbor only in 1937, whereas Dragutin Bulić joined Zbor a year later.<sup>55</sup> Equally unlikely seems the claim that the Movement merged with or collectively joined Zbor. Not a single contemporary source substantiates that claim. Such a “monumental success” was never claimed in any Zbor periodical at the time, even though Zbor members went to great length to prove that the SOC favored them. Equally, German sources on Bishop Nikolaj, Dimitrije Ljotić and the God-devotionalists movement never mentioned this fact.<sup>56</sup> Those members that did join

<sup>51</sup> Subotić, *Episkop Nikolaj i pravoslavni bogomoljački pokret*, 38-41, 50, 91-93, 215-217.

<sup>52</sup> See: Jovan Byford, *Potiskivanje i poricanje antisemitizma* (Beograd: Helsinški odbor za ljudska prava u Srbiji, 2005), 172; Emil Kerenji, *Antisemitism and Corporatism in the writings of Dimitrije Ljotić*, Budapest: CEU, MA thesis, 1998, 56; Subotić, *Episkop Nikolaj i pravoslavni bogomoljački pokret*, 64-65; 120; Miloš Timotijević, „Dunuli su vihorni vetrovi – stavovi episkopa Nikolaja Velimirovića o Jevrejima, liberalizmu, komunizmu i nacizmu u štampi Žičke eparhije,” *Naša prošlost*, Vol. 8, 2007, 101-102.

<sup>53</sup> Subotić, *Episkop Nikolaj i pravoslavni bogomoljački pokret*, 79, 118, 160-163, 200, 223, 258; Radić, *Misija britanske Hrišćanske zajednice mladih ljudi u Kraljevini Jugoslaviji*, 66.

<sup>54</sup> Byford, *Potiskivanje i poricanje antisemitizma*, 33.

<sup>55</sup> Goran Davidović, „Jugoslovenski narodni pokret Zbor u čačanskom kraju 1935-1945. godine,” *Zbornik radova narodnog muzeja*, Vol. 30, 2000, 155.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. IAB, BIA, f-14, p-8, Dimitrije Ljotić i IAB, BIA, f-14, p-8, Nikolaj Velimirović.

Zbor were in fact part of the “second wave” within the God-devotionalists movement, or, in other words, followers of Bishop Nikolaj. They joined the movement in order to institutionalize it and tie it closer to the Church. Much more difficult is assessing how many “anonymous” members in fact joined Zbor. Membership structures of both movements were never adequately researched. In my opinion, the entry of God-devotionalists into Zbor was by no means done en masse. Allegedly this merger occurred in 1937/38, which means that a significant influx of new members into Zbor would have impacted their electoral results, given that the elections were held in 1935 and 1938. The total membership of the God-devotionalists movement is estimated to be between 70,000 and 200,000, which means that even if 10 percent of them joined Zbor, a significant change would occur. However, Zbor went from around 25,000 votes in 1935 to around 30,000 in 1938. In total, Zbor gained around 5,000 votes.<sup>57</sup> If we break down the electoral results and compare them to areas with large number of God-devotionalists, it only strengthens the hypothesis. God-devotionalists were most numerous in two Banovinas in Serbia proper—the Banovina of Morava and Banovina of Danube—but Zbor lost votes in the former and only gained 3,000 votes in the latter.<sup>58</sup> The elections in 1938 were much freer than those carried out three years earlier, which could also explain the influx in votes. Having this in mind, it seems certain that part of the God-devotionalists’ leadership joined Zbor, mostly followers of Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović, but not the Movement as a whole.

During 1938, Zbor became increasingly hostile toward the Stojadinović regime, which led to a short-lived ban of the movement and the incarceration of Dimitrije Ljotić in late 1938.<sup>59</sup> Staying true to his vision of a unitary Yugoslavia, Ljotić was opposed to the push for federalization and a solution to the so-called Croatian question. When the agreement was reached in August 1939, and the Banovina of Croatia was

<sup>57</sup> Stefanović, *Zbor Dimitrija Ljotića*, 44–47

<sup>58</sup> Ibid; Subotić, *Episkop Nikolaj i pravoslavni bogomoljački pokret*, 243, 262.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. AJ, Microfilmed Collection of Prince Paul Papers (797), rolna 14, fotografije 308–316, Ljubica Ljotić to Prince Paul, 29. 10. 1938; AJ, Political Parties in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (730), doc. No. 47, V. Maček, D. Ljotić, „Statement,” 2. 1. 1939; AJ, 102-7-17; Anonim, „Iz advokatske komore,” *Branich*, decembar 1938.

created, both Zbor and the SOC protested against it. However, fearing another Concordat struggle, the new regime, led by Dragiša Cvetković, successfully lobbied the Patriarch into abstaining from public criticism of the agreement. Once again, Bishop Nikolaj dissented, and led the opposition within the church.<sup>60</sup> Following a bloody clash between communists and Zbor members at the University of Belgrade, the movement was outlawed in October 1940.<sup>61</sup> Many Zbor ideologues were arrested, but Dimitrije Ljotić was nowhere to be found. One of the regime's main propagandists, Milan Jovanović Stojimirović, wrote in his *Diary* that there were rumors that Ljotić was hiding in a church protected by the bishops.<sup>62</sup> In fact, the rumors were true. Ljotić was hiding in the female monastery of Kovilj.<sup>63</sup> It seems highly unlikely that this was done against the wishes of at least part of the SOC leadership. Reacting to the news of the arrest of Zbor members, many of whom were his followers as well, Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović wrote a letter to the Prime Minister. In it he praised Dimitrije Ljotić and his ancestors by writing: "I have no intention of defending Mr. Ljotić. His faith in God and his character are a sufficient defense. I just wanted to say that many of his friends and followers are just as faithful to the Orthodox beliefs as him."<sup>64</sup> In his cynical response, Prime Minister Cvetković wrote that

<sup>60</sup> Ljotić, „Lajbek je zakopčan,” *Sabrana dela* 8, 119; Radić, *Život u vremenima*, 343–344.

<sup>61</sup> Branislav Gligorijević, „Napad ljotićevaca na studente Tehničkog fakulteta u Beogradu, u oktobru 1940. i rasturanje Ljotićevog Zbora,” *Istorijski glasnik*, br 2, 1963, 52–81.

<sup>62</sup> Milan Jovanović Stojimirović, *Dnevnik 1936–1941* (Novi Sad: Matica srpska 2000), 420.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. AS, BIA, II-69, Zbor Dimitrija Ljotića, 12. 5. 1952, p. 12; Ratibor Đurđević, *Svetosavski nacionalizam u judeo-masonskom okruženju* (Beograd: Ihtus, 2002), 169; Subotić, *Organska misao Srba u 19 i 20 veku* 1, 410; Milan Koljanin, *Jevreji i antisemitizam u Kraljevini Jugoslaviji 1918–1941* (Beograd: ISI, 2008), 431; Anonim, *Kako su komunisti zatrovali našu univerzitetsku omladinu* (Beograd: bez imena izdavača, 1941), 6; Karapandžić, *S verom u Boga za kralja i otadžbinu – Dobrovoljci 1941–1991*, 138; Branislav Žorž, *Tragom učitelja* (Beograd: privatno izdanje, 2004), 14.

<sup>64</sup> *Memoari patrijarha srpskog Gavrila*, (Beograd: Sfair, 1990), 208; Letter from Bishop Nikolaj to Dragiša Cvetković: <http://www.novo-videlo.com/sveti-vladika-nikolaj-pismo-dragisi-cvetkovicu/> pristupljeno 4. 8. 2017.



Zbor members had in fact substituted God for Satan.<sup>65</sup> This letter serves as a clear testament to the strength of the relationship between Dimitrije Ljotić and Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović at that time. However, its importance should not be overstated, as Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović had supported other political detainees, such as the former Prime Minister Milan Stojadinović, with whom he had less than amicable relations when he was interned in 1940.<sup>66</sup> Dimitrije Ljotić, aware that he could count to an extent on the support of Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović, wrote a letter to the Prince Regent Paul in August 1940, in which he criticized the current state of Yugoslavia, and gave his suggestions for reform. Amongst concrete suggestions, several cryptic and seemingly unrelated sentences were included. He wrote to the Prince about advice given to him by “a friend,” who was one of the most spiritual people in the country. This unnamed “friend” told him: “Speak and write, Dimitrije. Speak and write, but know that we are doomed. Speak, because you are needed as a witness before the Judgement of God. Nobody will listen and understand you, although it is quite easy to understand. Because their hearts are closed.”<sup>67</sup> This unnamed “friend” could only have been Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović, which had to be clear to the Prince as well. By alluding to him, Ljotić once again underlined that he could count on the support of the Church.

Just when it seemed that the relationship between Bishop Nikolaj and Dimitrije Ljotić was better than ever, a series of events was triggered which did irreparable damage to it. After months of pressure by the Third Reich, Yugoslavia was forced to join the Axis on the 25 March 1941. This decision was quite controversial at the time, and opposed by many within the officer corps but also within the SOC. Whereas Dimitrije Ljotić endorsed the decision, Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović was completely opposed to it.<sup>68</sup> Dimitrije Ljotić was revolted by the stance of the Church and he criticized the Patriarch, as well as bishops Nikolaj and Irinej in a letter sent on 26 March 1941. According to oral tradition,

<sup>65</sup> Radić, *Život u vremenima*, 344.

<sup>66</sup> Stojadinović, *Ni rat ni pakt*, 692; Mihailo Konstantinović, *Politika sporazuma* (Novi Sad: Mir 1998), 196.

<sup>67</sup> Ljotić, „Pismo knezu Pavlu 30. 8. 1940”, *Sabrana dela* 6, 222.

<sup>68</sup> Radić, *Život u vremenima*, 346.

Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović had, upon receiving the letter, torn it in half, whilst remarking with regret that he had always defended Ljotić.<sup>69</sup> His demonstrative plea did little to persuade the Church leadership, and the SOC supported the coup d'état carried out by part of the officer corps on 27 March 1941. German secret police files reveal that Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović met with the officers prior to the coup and Patriarch Gavriilo gave a speech on the radio, endorsing the new Government.<sup>70</sup> According to Zbor sources, Dimitrije Ljotić refused to meet with the new Prime Minister Simović, and rejected Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović's pleas to cooperate with the new Government.<sup>71</sup> The Third Reich and its allies invaded Yugoslavia on 6 April 1941, and following a brief war, the country was occupied and divided.

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Mirko Đorđević once wrote that sometimes one could not distinguish a quote by Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović from one written by Dimitrije Ljotić.<sup>72</sup> Indeed, when Ljotić wrote that "Stalin, Mussolini and Hitler were the children of Europe, which had turned its back to Christ ... born by the Europe, which thought that it could create people as tough as steel without Christ," it sounded like Bishop Nikolaj's thought.<sup>73</sup> The same could be said for his understanding of the responsibility of a nation before God.<sup>74</sup> In a text "A Message to Living Skin," Ljotić said as much: "Their skin is talking, as Bishop Nikolaj would say, and their soul is dead asleep."<sup>75</sup> There are other examples when he directly quot-

<sup>69</sup> Bojić, *Jugoslavenski narodni pokret Zbor*, 140.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid; IAB, BDS, N-65; Slijepčević, *Istorija Srpske pravoslavne crkve* 2, 602–603.

<sup>71</sup> Đoko Slijepčević, *Jugoslavija uoči i za vreme Drugog svetskog rata*, (Minhen: Iskra, 1978), 231–251; *Memoari patrijarha srpskog Gavriila*, 268; Branko Petranović, *Srbija u Drugom svetskom ratu* (Beograd: Vojnoizdavački i novinski centar, 1992), 87; Đuro Vrga, *Ostala su svedočenja*, 104–105; Hrvoje Magazinović, *Kroz jedno mučno stoljeće* (Valjevo: Hilandar, 2009), 165.

<sup>72</sup> Mirko Đorđević, „Povratak propovednika,” *Republika*, 1–31. jul 1996.

<sup>73</sup> Ljotić, „Unutrašnja politika,” *Sabrana dela* 9, 79–80.

<sup>74</sup> Ljotić, „Poruka živoj koži,” *Sabrana dela* 5, 34.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

ed Nikolaj Velimirović.<sup>76</sup> He even did so during WWII when their relationship was far from ideal.<sup>77</sup> However, is that enough to prove that Bishop Nikolaj decisively influenced the political thought of Dimitrije Ljotić? In my opinion, the answer is no. In fact, fascists and religious conservatives agree on a wide spectrum of ideological beliefs. However distinct, they have similarities. This is not only true for Orthodox conservatives. One of the leading ideologues of the Slovene clericalist party and the editor of the party journal *Slovenec*, Ivan Ahčin, stated that, although their worldview was different from the national socialist one, they agreed on three cases: free masons, Jews and communists.<sup>78</sup> That does not mean that their solutions to these “problems” were identical. Similarly, Dimitrije Ljotić and Bishop Nikolaj agreed on a wide array of topics, but never fully. More than anything, they were ideological fellow travelers.

Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović and Dimitrije Ljotić were pious from a young age, and attracted to ecumenical ideas popular at the turn of the century.<sup>79</sup> They read similar literature (Blaise Pascal, François Fénelon).<sup>80</sup> They shared the conviction that Christianity needed to be fused with nationalism, and that renewal can arrive only through it. Both were conservatives and monarchists. Some of the ideas popularized by Ljotić, like the organicist understanding of nature, could be traced among the followers of Bishop Velimirović significantly prior to the creation of

<sup>76</sup> Ljotić, „Sabotaža nacionalnih svečanosti,” *Sabrana dela* 7, 154; Ljotić, „Pakosnicima oko Demokrata,” *Sabrana dela* 9, 18; Ljotić, „Reč, dve Srbima,” *Sabrana dela* 8, 206–207.

<sup>77</sup> Ljotić, „Kako će srpski narod izaći iz današnjih teškoća,” *Sabrana dela* 10, 38; Ljotić, „Jedan značajan dokument,” *Sabrana dela* 10, 75; Ljotić, „Sila zla,” *Sabrana dela* 10, 88; Ljotić, „O ustavnosti namesništva,” *Sabrana dela* 10, 224; Ljotić, „Svetlo istine,” *Sabrana dela* 11, 133.

<sup>78</sup> Bojan Godeša, „Fašizam, klerofašizem, obmejni fašizem in Slovenci,” *Acta Historiae*, Vol. 24, No.4, 2016, 775; Milan Jovanović Stojimirović, *Dnevnik 1936-1941*, 432.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. IAB, BIA, f-14, p-8, Nikolaj Velimirović; M. Đorđević, „Povratak propovednika,” *Republika*, 1-31. jul 1996; Aleksa Ilić, *Moji doživljaji sa dr. Nikolajem Velimirovićem i dr. Vojom Janićem* (Beograd: privatno izdanje, 1938), 21-24; Bogumil Vošnjak, *U borbi za ujedinjenu narodnu državu* (Ljubljana: Tiskovna zadruga/Geca Kon/ Z. I. Vasić, 1928), 175-177.

<sup>80</sup> Nikolaj Velimirović, *Nacionalizam Svetog Save*; H. Nojbaheer, *Specijalni zadatak Balkan* (Beograd: Službeni list, 2004), 178.

Zbor.<sup>81</sup> When Bishop Nikolaj stated the ideal pillars, on which the Yugoslav society should rest—God, King, and Homeowner—Ljotić took it as a credo.<sup>82</sup>

Although the cult of Saint Sava was very old amongst the Serbs, Bishop Nikolaj was one of the most responsible for its reaffirmation during the 1930s. Saintsavaism<sup>83</sup> is usually understood as a fusion between religion and nationalism, using Saint Sava, the founder of the Serbian national church as a motif.<sup>84</sup> The lecture given by Nikolaj Velimirović in 1935, entitled *The Nationalism of Saint Sava*, later became quite controversial because of the parallel between Saint Sava and Adolf Hitler. This lecture was used by Bishop Nikolaj's critics to prove his admiration of fascism.<sup>85</sup> Some historians have claimed that Ljotić endorsed the ideology of Saintsavaism, and propagated it.<sup>86</sup> He did propagate the fusion between religion and nationalism, understanding secular nationalism as an empty shell. However, he refrained from overly praising Saintsavaism, as it was entirely Serbian and Orthodox doctrine, and as such incompatible with the integral Yugoslav and integral Christian nature of Zbor. A further connection between Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović and Ljotić was seen in their relationship towards fascism, especially within the context of the above mentioned lecture *The Nationalism of Saint Sava*. One must keep in mind the fact that Bishop Nikolaj spoke affirmatively about Adolf Hitler in 1935, when such statements were not different than the stances of the SOC leadership, or the European public in general. At that point in time, communism was a

<sup>81</sup> D. N., „Grožđe je njihovo grožđe otrovno,” *Vesnik srpske crkve*, jul 1931.

<sup>82</sup> Nikolaj Velimirović, *Žički venac za omladinu* (Bitolj: Žička Jevanđeoska akcija, 1936), 15–17; Vlajko Vlahović, „Vladika Nikolaj,” *Iskra*, 1. 4. 1956.

<sup>83</sup> Jelena Grbić, „Svetosavlje – omen za numen pravoslavlja,” *Sabornost*, Vol. 7, 2013, 148–158.

<sup>84</sup> Maria Falina, „Svetosavlje. A Case Study in the Nationalisation of Religion,” *SZRKG*, Vol. 101, 2007, 505–527.

<sup>85</sup> Cf. Atanasije Jevtić, „Četiri kruga napada na svetog Nikolaja srpskog,” *Dveri srpske*, br 32, 2006; Vladimir Cvetković, „Još jedan osvrt na predavanje 'Nacionalizam Svetog Save' Svetog Nikolaja Žičkog,” *Crkvene studije*, br. 16 (1), 2019, 136; IAB, BDS, N-65.

<sup>86</sup> John Paul Newman, *Yugoslavia in the Shadow of War* (Cambridge: CUP, 2015), 229.

much bigger threat to the Serbian Orthodox Church than the young German regime.<sup>87</sup> Later that stance changed, and Bishop Nikolaj instigated a series of anti-fascist public speeches. In fact, the stances of Dimitrije Ljotić and Bishop Nikolaj towards fascism and communism went into opposite directions. Whilst Ljotić wrote more critically about fascism than communism at the beginning of his political engagement (1934), and then mostly ceased with any criticism of fascism, becoming a convinced anti-communist, Bishop Nikolaj went the other way. In June 1936 he preached to his parishioners: “Your road in life should be the middle-road. Don’t stray left or right, because a ditch is waiting for you on both sides, and if you stray from the middle, you will fall to a doom.”<sup>88</sup> He criticized the secularization of Germany, called the ideology of fascism the “European evil,” and referred to Hitler as the “Viennese painter” and “Satanic evil.”<sup>89</sup> On the other hand, he had much more understanding for communism, and clearly supported the Allies when the Second World War erupted.<sup>90</sup> Further difference between Ljotić and Velimirović was evidenced in the conviction of the latter, that Christ foresaw the arrival of Karl Marx and communism. By quoting the Biblical verse “I am come in my Father’s name, and ye receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive” (John 5:43), he claimed that: “Marx came not in the name of the Heavenly Father, but in his own. He denounced God, and ridiculed the faith of all Christians in the Heavenly Father. And Jews accepted him. They

<sup>87</sup> Radić, *Život u vremenima*, 322.

<sup>88</sup> AJ, 38-608-786, Anonim, „Episkop g. Nikolaj osvetio je ikonostas crkve u selu Grivcu,” *Politika*, 4. 6. 1936.

<sup>89</sup> Cf. Mihailo Konstantinović, *Politika sporazuma* (Novi Sad: Mir, 1998), 198–200; Miloš Timotijević, „Dunuli su vihorni vetrovi – stavovi episkopa Nikolaja Velimirovića o Jevrejima, liberalizmu, komunizmu i nacizmu u štampi Žičke eparhije,” *Naša prošlost*, Vol. 8, 2007, 111–112; Milan Jovanović Stojimirović, *Portreti prema živim modelima* (Novi Sad: Matica srpska, 1998), 47; Vladimir Cvetković, „Još jedan osvrt na predavanje ‘Nacionalizam Svetog Save’ Svetog Nikolaja Žičkog,” *Crkvene studije*, br. 16 (1), 2019, 137–140; Radić, *Život u vremenima*, 322–324; V. V., „Vladika Nikolaj i obučari,” *Iskra*, 15. 5. 1956.

<sup>90</sup> Miloš Timotijević, „Dunuli su vihorni vetrovi – stavovi episkopa Nikolaja Velimirovića o Jevrejima, liberalizmu, komunizmu i nacizmu u štampi Žičke eparhije,” *Naša prošlost*, Vol. 8, 2007, 113–114.

followed him like nobody from Moses to today.”<sup>91</sup> Dimitrije Ljotić never claimed that communism was foreseen in the Bible.

In addition to already stated similarities, they both had anti-Semitic beliefs. A German document from the WWII explained their relationship in the following way: “Bishop Nikolaj sympathized with Ljotić because he had a Christian worldview. Simultaneously, Nikolaj was very close to his stances on the Jews; he often preached against them, and labelled them as troublemakers and ideologues of atheist and communist beliefs.”<sup>92</sup> Ljotić could not have influenced Bishop Velimirović in this regard, as his anti-Semitic stance predated the founding of the Zbor. Already in 1928, Bishop Nikolaj was accused by the rabbi Alkalaj of being an anti-Semite, after he published an article in the journal *Vreme*.<sup>93</sup> Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović and Dimitrije Ljotić shared some thoughts about the Jews, mostly about the perceived chauvinist nationalism of the Jews, who rejected and murdered Christ because of his universalist message.<sup>94</sup> However, they also differed, because Ljotić’s anti-Semitism was much more aggressive and based not only on old Christian traditions, but also on modern theories about a Jewish conspiracy and alleged plans for world domination. Bishop Nikolaj denied the authenticity of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, whereas Ljotić praised them and Zbor promoted them.<sup>95</sup> Ljotić even implicitly rejected Moses and the Old Testament, unlike Bishop Nikolaj.<sup>96</sup> Velimirović’s anti-Semitism can best be understood as a fusion of Christian anti-Judaism and anti-Jewish prejudices from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, whereas Ljotić’s anti-Semitism was much more modern and secular, even though he did not fully accept the racial doctrine of the national social-

<sup>91</sup> Ibid. 108.

<sup>92</sup> IAB, BIA, f-14, p-8, Dimitrije Ljotić.

<sup>93</sup> Nikolaj Velimirović, „Priča o vuku i jagnjetu,” *Vreme*, 6–10. 1. 1928; I. Alkalaj, „Priča o vuku i janjetu,” *Vreme*, 15. 1. 1928; Koljanin, *Jevreji i antisemitizam u Kraljevini Jugoslaviji 1918–1941*, 334–335, 338–339.

<sup>94</sup> See: Nikolaj Velimirović, *Indijska pisma* (Beograd: Evro, 2000).

<sup>95</sup> Predrag Samardžić, *Episkop Nikolaj i Novi Zavet o Jevrejima* (Beograd: Hrišćanska misao, 2004), 17; Episkop Nikolaj Velimirović, „Kroz tamnički prozor,” u: *Izabrana dela* (Beograd: Vulkan, 2019), 260.

<sup>96</sup> Vladimir Dimitrijević, „Sveti vladika Nikolaj u očima svojih neprijatelja,” *Dve-ri srpske*, br 32, 2006.

ists. Velimirović's critics often point to his work called *Through the Prison Window*, allegedly written at the Dachau concentration camp in 1944.<sup>97</sup> In it he claimed that Jews were behind all modern evils, by stating "All modern European ideas were created by the Jews who impaled Christ on the cross: democracy, strikes, socialism, atheism, religious tolerance, pacifism, total revolution, capitalism, and communism. Those are all Jewish inventions and their father the Devil."<sup>98</sup> This interpretation was much closer to Ljotić's stance on the Jews than writings from the interwar period. Bishop Nikolaj's defenders claimed that he merely paraphrased the Bible (John 8:44), reducing it to another expression of Christian anti-Judaism.<sup>99</sup> However, the authenticity of this work is still debated,<sup>100</sup> and Velimirović was in my opinion much closer to other Christian conservative thinkers, such as the Austrian Catholic priest Wilhelm Schmidt.<sup>101</sup>

Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović also had different views on the Roma population than Dimitrije Ljotić. A clear testament is the difference in which the two men interpreted an old folk saying: "A Gypsy woman has a black face, but a full purse."<sup>102</sup> Ljotić interpreted it as a proof that common folk clearly understood the inherent moral corruption of the "Gypsies," who only strive for material wealth.<sup>103</sup> On the other hand, Bishop Nikolaj interpreted the same saying as a proof of the inherent fairness and solidarity of the Serbian people, which always helped the socially endangered.<sup>104</sup> While serving as the Bishop of Ohrid, he organized many humanitarian actions to help the local Roma population.

<sup>97</sup> Byford, *Potiskivanje i poricanje antisemitizma*, 169–179.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>99</sup> Borivoje Karapandžić, *Viđenja i razgovori sa svetim Nikolajem Žičkim* (Klivenland: Književni vesnik, 2002), 164–169; Samardžić, *Episkop Nikolaj i Novi Zavet o Jevrejima*, 114–117.

<sup>100</sup> See the interview with Radmila Radić: <https://pescanik.net/136-emisija/>

<sup>101</sup> Udo Mischek, "Antisemitismus und Antijugalismus in den Werken und Arbeiten Pater Wilhelm Schmidts S.V. D. (1868–1954)," In: *The Study of Religion under the Impact of Fascism*, (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 467–488.

<sup>102</sup> Vuk Stefanović Karadžić, *Narodne srpske poslovice i druge različne, kao one u običaj uzete riječi* (Cetinje: Narodna štamparija, 1836), 140.0

<sup>103</sup> Ljotić, "Zašto idemo na izbore," *Sabrana dela* 2, 108; Ljotić, "Naš izborni proglas," *Sabrana dela* 2, 105; Ljotić, "Smisao naše borbe," *Sabrana dela* 6, 38.

<sup>104</sup> See: Nikolaj Velimirović, *Srednji sistem* (Valjevo: Glas Crkve, 1996).

In conclusion, Dimitrije Ljotić undoubtedly was to an extent influenced by Bishop Nikolaj. The two men agreed on a variety of topics, ranging from the God-King-Homeowner social hierarchy to anticomunism and anti-Semitism. However, even in those topics on which they agreed in principle, they often had different and sometimes totally opposite interpretations. Therefore, Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović can hardly be regarded as the *spiritus movens* of Zbor.

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## Interwar Attitudes of Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović toward the Communists

Miloš Timotijević

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When analyzing the thought of Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović (1881-1956), one can observe a continuity and unity of faith in Serbianhood, religion and Orthodoxy. However, his attitudes toward the society in which he lived were never monolithic. Namely, until 1919, Nikolaj Velimirović had a pro-Western orientation in his intellectual activities, yet after arriving in Ohrid he built an attitude of opposition to the West, in defence of the 'eastern orientation of the Serbian spirit' which he identified with Orthodoxy. Universal ideas did not disappear with this reversal, but in the "post-Ohrid" phase they were no longer derived from ecumenism, panhumanism and theohumanism, but from complete identification with traditional Orthodoxy based on the patristic Christian heritage. Yugoslavia gradually gave way to a Serbian "Saint Sava-ness" in the sign of the "people's theodulia" (i.e., the union of Orthodox Balkan states-nations), and the philosophy of universal humanity to the theology of the God-man as defined by the historical Orthodoxy of the Ecumenical Councils. Bishop Nikolaj's 'post-Ohrid' anti-modernism promoted the national traditions of Serbian-Slavic Orthodoxy, the person was determined by *sobornost* as the conciliar reality, freedom by the concept of "freedom-for," truth by sacrifice, society was perceived as an organic unity of the class, and the economy was determined by solidarity among cooperatives. Such attitudes were significantly influenced by the experience of the First World War, the

collapse of Russian tsarism, the geopolitical cynicism of the great Western powers towards the Balkans, the betrayed hopes for Yugoslav unity, as well as the rise of totalitarian ideologies.<sup>1</sup>

Critics of Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović most often point out his opposition to communism, sympathy for reactionary movements, even fascism, and persistence in narrow-minded anti-modern conservatism, which became the inspiration for the “Christian right” in contemporary Serbian society. For his critics all this together was clear proof of Nikolaj’s right-wing and anti-democratic political orientation.<sup>2</sup> His numerous and often contradictory statements are most often read selectively.<sup>3</sup> One of the serious objections is his anti-Semitism combined with anti-communism, which “pushes Serbia towards the ‘totalitarian and undemocratic ideology’ of pre-war Serbian fascism.”<sup>4</sup> In this case, “fascism” is most often understood as ‘Saint Savaness,’ which was propagandistically transformed for the needs of Milan Nedić’s governmental “national” policy into a right-wing doctrine close to fascism during the German occupation in the Second World War by merging militant anti-communism and anti-Semitism.<sup>5</sup> Concrete political activity and the contacts of Bishop Nikolaj with right-wing politicians (such as Dimitrije Ljotić), as well as a persistent anti-communist orientation, additionally contributed to the attitude that the bishop was close to the fascists.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Bogdan Lubardić, “Nikolaj Velimirović,” in *Srbi 1903–1914: istorija ideja*, ed. Miloš Ković (Beograd: Clio, 2015), 328–357.

<sup>2</sup> Vladimir Dimitrijević, *Oklevetani svetac: vladika Nikolaj i srbofobija*, (Gornji Milanovac: Lio, 2007), 12, 200.

<sup>3</sup> Željko Perović, „Da li je Sveti Vladika Nikolaj bio fašista? Pregled njegovih svetosavskih obraćanja od marta 1935. do aprila 1941. godine”, *The Nicholai Studies*, 1/2 (2021): 395–434.

<sup>4</sup> Jovan T. Byford, *Potiskivanje i poricanje antisemitizma: sećanje na vladiku Nikolaja Velimirovića u savremenoj srpskoj pravoslavnoj kulturi* (Beograd: Helsinški odbor za ljudska prava u Srbiji, 2005), 34, 40, 92–93, 210.

<sup>5</sup> Todor Kuljić, „Srpski fašizam i sociologija”, *Sociologija* 2 (1974): 237–267.

<sup>6</sup> For a detailed overview of these topics, see: Radmila Radić, *Država i verske zajednice 1945–1970: prvi deo: 1945–1953* (Beograd: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 2002); Radmila Radić, *Život u vremenima: Gavrilo Dožić: 1881–1950*, (Beograd: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 2006); Maria Falina, „Between ‘Clerical Fascism’ and Political Orthodoxy: Orthodox Christianity and Nationalism in Interwar Serbia,” *Totalitar-*

The period between the two world wars almost completely belongs to the “post-Ohrid” period in the mind of Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović, in which he persistently opposed the negative influence of Western modernism and materialism. Although he understood Marxism as one of the products of modernity, Bishop Nikolaj never directly spoke out against communism in the form of special speeches and articles. That is why such attitudes can be noticed and analyzed in numerous texts criticizing modernism and the rise of totalitarian ideologies, the Bolshevik government in Russia, and finally in warnings of the danger of a new great world war.

### Resistance to modernism and totalitarian ideologies

When he was ordained for the first time as the bishop of Žiča in 1919, Nikolaj Velimirović had just come from America. He publicly expressed if Serbia, which became part of Yugoslavia, would manage to advance and progress “and become one of the free and enlightened states.” He did not refer to material wealth, but rather the “pleasure of the whole nation,” which can only be achieved by fulfilling the principles of Christ.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, he was very critical of the religiosity and cultural level of the believers in his diocese.<sup>8</sup>

After leaving for Ohrid, Bishop Nikolaj developed an anti-Western attitude, which was widespread among many intellectuals in Yugosla-

*ian Movements and Political Religions*, 2 (2007): 247–258; Maria Falina, „Svetosavlje. A Case Study in the Nationalization of Religion,” *SZRKG*, 101 (2007): 505–527; Radmila Radić, *Vojislav Janić (1890–1944): sveštenik i političar: pogled kroz analitički prozor* (Beograd: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 2018); Vladimir Cvetković, “Svetosavlje između hrišćanske filosofije i ideologije nacionalizma: sveti Nikolaj Velimirović i sveti Justin Popović,” in *Istorija srpske filozofije: prilozi istraživanju* 4, ed. Irina Deretić (Beograd: Filozofski fakultet, 2019), 173–219; Rastko Lompar, *Dimitrije Ljotić – učitelj ili farisej: Zbor, hrišćanstvo i verske zajednice: 1935–1945*, (Beograd: Catena mundi, 2021).

<sup>7</sup> Anonim, „Posvećenje gosp. Nikolaja Velimirovića, episkopa žičkog,” *Zastava*, no. 107, 27 May 1919, 2.

<sup>8</sup> Miloš Timotijević, „Zapušten vinograd Gospodnji’: religioznost u čačanskom kraju tokom XX veka (prvi deo),” *Zbornik radova Narodnog muzeja XXXVI* (2006): 191–248.

via. Resistance to Europe, the search for Yugoslavia's own path, and faith in the mission of the Slavs marked many debates about cultural identity and the ways of its further development. Such views were expressed by many modernists and traditionalists.<sup>9</sup> In many ways, such convictions followed the strong Russophile orientation of Serbian intellectuals, whose views largely coincided with the ideas of Russian "Slavophiles" who insisted on their own distinctive Orthodox Slavic culture.<sup>10</sup>

The secularization of society in Western Europe and its materialist culture were the main object of criticism by Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović between the two world wars.<sup>11</sup> According to his vision, belonging to the Orthodox Church suppressed pride and arbitrariness, and then developed humility and obedience, which was a way to avoid the "traps" of modern society. He viewed the entire reality through the perspective of religiosity, including the need for change. When it came to the notion of "revolution," Bishop Nikolaj considered Christ's ideas to be revolutionary, but in a religious sense, distinguishing between political and spiritual revolution.<sup>12</sup>

"It is revolutionary only in the relation of man to himself. The Christian revolution is moral, internal and spiritual, and it is the only justified, useful, positive and constructive revolution. Everything else, which Eu-

<sup>9</sup> Branka Prpa-Jovanović, „Između Istoka i Zapada: kulturni identitet i kulturno-civilizacijska uporišta,” *Tokovi istorije*, 3–4 (1997): 7–28; Nikola Baković, „Istočno od modernističkog raja. Srpski 'uvezeni' antimodernizam u delima Čujte Srbi! Arčibalda Rajsa i Crnogorski čovjek Gerharda Gezemana,” *Tokovi istorije* 2 (2015): 73–99; Vladimir Dimitrijević, „Srbi i jugoslovenski mesijanizam: san koji nije dosanjan,” u: *Istorija jedne utopije: 100 godina od stvaranja Jugoslavije*. Knj. 1 (Beograd: Catena mundi, 2018), 148–166.

<sup>10</sup> Miroslav Jovanović, „O 'dve Rusije' u srpskom društvu ili Rusija 'za unutrašnju upotrebu': slika Drugog kao identitetsko samodefinisanje,” in *Srbi o Rusiji i Rusima: od Elizabete Petrovne do Vladimira Putina /1750–2010/*, ed. Miroslav Jovanović (Beograd: Pravoslavni bogoslovski fakultet Univerziteta: Institut za teološka istraživanja) Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije 2011), 11–42.

<sup>11</sup> Miloš Timotijević, *Vek sumnje: religioznost u čačanskom kraju 1886–2008* (Čačak: Legenda/Narodni muzej Čačak, 2009), 62–77.

<sup>12</sup> Đorđe J. Janić, *Politika kao teodulija: politička misao vladike Nikolaja* (Beograd: Hrišćanska misao: Hilendarski fond; Foča : Univerzitetski obrazovani pravoslavni teolozi; Valjevo: Zadužbina „Nikolaj Velimirović i Justin Popović”, 2009), 232–233.

rope called a revolution, is nothing but a bunch of crimes, bigger or smaller.”<sup>13</sup>

The emergence of Christianity was interpreted as the greatest revolution, which was constantly going on in the context of the salvation of the human soul.<sup>14</sup>

Bishop Nikolaj did not avoid expressing his opinion directly and openly on current economic and political issues of the time in which he lived, including the economic crisis. He also observed this seemingly every day and completely profane phenomenon outside the field of faith in the categories of religious teachings, because he translated and presented the word “crisis” as a “judgement” for human sins, as a traditional way of explaining all troubles that befell humanity:

The people also consider the current financial and economic trouble as a judgment of God, but they do not say the judgement, but the crisis. That trouble may be multiplied by misunderstanding! While the understandable word “judgement” was being uttered, the reason why the trouble came was also known: the Judge who mitigated the trouble was also known; the goal of the mitigated trouble was finally known. As soon as the word ‘crisis’ is used, a word incomprehensible to all and everyone, no one knows how to explain why, from whom or to what end? This is the only difference between the current crisis and the crisis of drought or of flood or of war or pestilence or of caterpillars or of other disasters.

He also saw the cause of the economic crisis through the eyes of a conservative theologian:

People caused this crisis by the sin of apostasy, and God eased it in order to awaken, enlighten, spiritualize and bring people back to Himself. Modern sins—also modern crisis. And indeed, God used a modern means to reason with modern people: he hit the banks, the stock exchanges, the finances, the currencies of money. He knocked over the exchange offices all over the world, as if in a temple in Jerusalem. It cre-

<sup>13</sup> Anonim, „Pred međunarodni kongres Hrišćanske zajednice: odgovori Episkopa g. Nikolaja Velimirovića na pitanja Hrišćanske zajednice,” *Vreme*, no. 1441, 22 December 1925, 3.

<sup>14</sup> Drag. Marković, „Religija kao revolucija,” *Pregled crkve Eparhije žičke*, June 1935, 153–156.



ated an unprecedented panic among traders and money changers. It rises, knocks down, mixes, confuses, intimidates. All in order to awaken, revive and inspire the arrogant heads of European and American sages. That the anchored in the ports of material security may remember their souls, confess their iniquities and worship the Most High God, the Living God.

He announced the end of the crisis only after the repentance of the people (“As long as the arrogant people who caused this crisis do not capitulate to the Almighty”).<sup>15</sup> His critics warned the bishop that he was not consistent in his critique of materialism, because he allowed the “shine” and “wealth” of temples.<sup>16</sup>

Bishop Nikolaj did not support capitalism and was aware that the Bolshevik government in Russia had conditioned the situation of workers in Western countries to improve:

Nevertheless, it must be admitted that apart from her own business Russia has not remained useless to humanity. The fear of Moscow improved the situation of the working class everywhere in the world—except in Russia. The fear of Moscow cut off unnecessary fat for the capitalism of the whole world. The fear of Moscow, like a cold stream, awakened and aroused the elders and leaders all around the world, to examine and heal the wounds of injustice toward the small people in their nations and states.<sup>17</sup>

Criticism of capitalism as a cause of conflict in society, and the turn of workers towards atheism and communism, spread among members of the Bogomoljci (Godworshippers) movement led by Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović:

Workers are deceived today. Their leaders are the magnates, professors, writers, who only care about coming to power and fame through work-

<sup>15</sup> Anonim, „Bog je ispreturao menjačke astale po vascelom svetu,” *Politika*, no. 8584, 2 April 1932, 8.

<sup>16</sup> D. S. Nikolajević, „Misionarstvo g. Velimirovića,” *Pravda*, no. 10427, 14. novembar 1934, 2.

<sup>17</sup> Goran Davidović i Miloš Timotijević, *Osvetljavanje istine: dokumenta za političku i vojnu istoriju Čačka knj. 1: 1938–1941* (Čačak: Narodni muzej; Istorijski arhiv; Kraljevo: Narodni muzej, 2006), 524–525.

ers. Workers are atheists out of resentment. Their communism is communism out of desperation. This indignation and this despair is the fruit of ruthless capitalism. The great capitalists are the greatest atheists and the greatest materialists. They practically and through false science theoretically enabled atheism among workers.<sup>18</sup>

Bishop Nikolaj was not a complete opponent of the modernization of society, so in his sermons he often emphasized the need to receive technical innovations from the West, but not changes that destroy the “old faith and piety.”<sup>19</sup> He saw the greatest problem for European civilization in atheism:

The danger is that we have turned our backs on the only truth, the only reality, the only happiness—Christ. We buried Christ, we buried him for the second time, and as if that was not enough, we set him upside down. Instead we worship, yes, we worship philosophers, like Marx in Russia; Nietzsche in Germany and Italy; and Darwin all over the world. We worship science, the microscope, the machine. And what is all that really? Nothing but dust. That would have some value if we looked at it all simply as manifestations that lead us to obedience to Christ. Instead, we spend time studying the lower world, minerals, chemical processes, microbes, and denying the higher world. That can only lead to destruction.<sup>20</sup>

Criticism of Western Europe in the church press was often based on the views of Fyodor M. Dostoevsky and Oswald Spengler, and their “prophecy” about the downfall of Europe and the rise of the Slavs as a new civilization in the future.<sup>21</sup> Western Europe was criticized for putting man, not God, at the center of all its interests and culture, to which the Catholic Church contributed the most:

It should be said that the man-god culture is not a spontaneous phenomenon in the spirit of European man. That culture arose from the culture that preceded it, and that culture is Roman Catholicism. Therefore, the

<sup>18</sup> Anonim, „Tromesečni sabor bratstva Eparhije žičke,” *Misionar*, januar 1937, 21–24.

<sup>19</sup> Anonim, „Episkop Nikolaj u Vrnjima,” *Žički blagovesnik* 8, avgust 1940, 24.

<sup>20</sup> Rom Landau, *Search for tomorrow: the things which are and the things which shall be hereafter* (London: Nicholson and Watson, 1938), 372–373.

<sup>21</sup> Mil. K. Pašić, „Sumrak zapadne kulture,” *Pregled crkve Eparhije žičke*, januar-februar 1935, 39–41.

genesis of the Western man-god's culture would be this: father—Catholicism, son—Protestantism, grandson of Catholicism—atheism, and the sons of atheism are godless socialism and human culture. This whole family carries the devil's mark on itself and the blasphemy in itself.<sup>22</sup>

In the text "Opposition to God," published in June 1940 (at the time when World War II was raging in Western Europe), Bishop Nikolaj gave his vision of the "doom of the West" conditioned by deviation from Christian norms and dogmas, which all the ideologies against which the bishop fought in his public appearances had in common:

Opposition to God in the West did not arise in the common people but among well-educated and learned people, i.e., among writers and Pharisees, as in ancient times. First, it hit Christian ethics, and then dogmatics. At first, reckless writers wrote reckless books, and reckless painters painted scandalous paintings, some of which have been preserved to this day in the papal courts in Rome. Thus, by destroying ethics, the ground was prepared for destroying dogmatics. Then came the overthrow of God-revealed dogmas. And this demolition lasted for the last two centuries. First French encyclopedists and English utilitarians, then sociologists and lawmakers, then German metaphysicians, then Darwinist naturalists, then destructive novelists and so-called "realist" artists, then scientists with their persistent and fantastic theories and, finally, abusers of all scientific inventions for selfish purposes and for destruction of faith and morals among European youth. That is how the opposition to God grew, the temperature rose, the inflammation spread [...].<sup>23</sup>

His resistance to modernism included opposition to all totalitarian ideologies, at the root of which Bishop Nikolaj saw atheism and blasphemy. He publicly expressed his negative attitude toward the "three internationals"—the Catholic Church, capitalism and communism—to which he opposed the freedom of Orthodoxy:

Many do not understand our position, because they do not see these two internationals which threaten us. They are also surprised by our Diocese

<sup>22</sup> Lj. Ivančević, „Dr. Justin Popović o Dostojevskom,” *Žički blagovesnik* 11, novembar 1940, 19.

<sup>23</sup> Episkop Nikolaj, „Opozicija Bogu,” *Žički blagovesnik* 6, jun 1940, 1-6.

of Žička and the Bishop of Žička and angry with us, and we, my brothers, see so clearly what we say and what we claim [...].<sup>24</sup>

Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović saw in the acceptance of modern ideas the very root of the “Russian disaster” (Bolshevik revolution), for which a part of the Russian “Judaized” intelligentsia had the greatest responsibility. Although this expression referred to Jews, Bishop Nikolaj used it in a much broader context, implying acceptance of materialist culture and the modernization of society.<sup>25</sup>

One of the secondary currents of Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović’s thought (within the framework of opposing Western modernism) is also dedicated to the criticism of Judaism. This segment of his public activity is connected with anti-Semitism, which was especially insisted on at the time of the disintegration of socialist Yugoslavia at the end of the twentieth century. In fact, his texts also contain anti-Judaic themes (opposition to religious norms) and the view that Jews are responsible for the rise of modernity on the basis of anti-Christian beliefs. After the tragic experience of the Second World War and the Holocaust, such statements began to be interpreted as open anti-Semitism on racial grounds, which in the case of Nikolaj Velimirović in the context of the interwar period is not true.<sup>26</sup> Just before the start of the war in Yugoslavia, Bishop Nikolaj condemned the introduction of anti-Semitic measures under pressure from Nazi Germany and criticized extremist ideologies.<sup>27</sup> Although Bishop Nikolaj directly influenced certain priests to become members of Dimitrije Ljotić’s Zbor, he did not share the same anti-Semitic views with him. For example, while Bishop Nikolaj “rejected the accuracy of the ‘Protocol of the Sages of Zion,’ Ljotić praised them and Zbor promoted them.”<sup>28</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Anonim, „Osvećenje doma za iznemogle starce i starice i dečjeg hranilišta u Kraljevu,” *Pregled crkve Eparhije žičke* 11–12, novembar–decembar 1938, 34–3.

<sup>25</sup> Nikolaj Velimirović, „152. Pismo. Ruskom vaspitaniku K.T.: O ruskoj tragediji,” in: Episkop Nikolaj, *Sabrana dela*, knjiga 8: *Misionarska pisma* (Düsseldorf 1978), 177.

<sup>26</sup> Miloš Timotijević, „Dunuli su vihorni vetrovi’: stavovi episkopa Nikolaja Velimirovića o Jevrejima, liberalizmu, komunizmu i nacizmu u štampi Žičke eparhije pred Drugi svetski rat,” *Naša prošlost* 8 (2007): 97–119.

<sup>27</sup> Milan Koljanin, *Jevreji i antisemitizam u Kraljevini Jugoslaviji: 1918–1941* (Beograd: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 2008): 447.

<sup>28</sup> Lompar, *Dimitrije Ljotić – učitelj ili farisej*, 219–220, 248.

However, there were many anti-Semitic texts in the press of the Bogomoljci (God-worshiper) movement led by Bishop Nikolaj, such as harsh criticism of “modern innovations,” modernism (which included Satanism), Judaism, Freemasonry, liberalism and communism, “which overwhelmed the Orthodox people in Serbia, and wider in Yugoslavia.”<sup>29</sup> Although the attitude of the Serbian Orthodox Church toward the Jews was predominantly tolerant, anti-Semitic contents occasionally appeared.<sup>30</sup>

In his public addresses, Bishop Nikolaj emphasized the need to respect people of any religion.<sup>31</sup> At the same time, he advocated a type of tolerance in which a person and his personality were always respected, regardless of religious beliefs, but he did not accept the view that religious norms of other denominations could be “respected,” with which he could not agree as a Christian.<sup>32</sup> His polemical views on Judaism did not turn into anti-Semitism, although he believed that Jews were responsible for the rise of modernism in the world and the communist revolution in Russia.<sup>33</sup>

Bishop Nikolaj’s position on totalitarian ideologies is perhaps best illustrated by his epistle to the European Christian youth in August 1939 (“Three Ghosts of European Civilization”). Nikolaj Velimirović accused Darwin, Nietzsche and Marx as the main culprits for deviating from Christian norms in the modern world:

Darwin is the bearer of a fatal scientific theory. Nietzsche is the bearer of a fatal ethical theory. Marx is the bearer of the fatal social theory [...] By accepting the Darwinian conception of the world as chaos over which

<sup>29</sup> Dragan Subotić, *Episkop Nikolaj i pravoslavni bogomoljački pokret: Pravoslavna narodna hrišćanska zajednica u Kraljevini Jugoslaviji 1920–1941* (Beograd: Nova Iskra, 1996): 184.

<sup>30</sup> Milan Koljanin, „Srpska pravoslavna crkva i Jevreji 1918–1937,” *Istorija 20. veka*, 2 (2009): 67–78; Milan Koljanin, „Odnos srpske Crkve prema Jevrejima i ‘jevrejskom pitanju’ (1918–1941)”, u: Bogoljub Šijaković (ur.), *Srpska teologija u dvadesetom veku* 7 (2010): 93–115.

<sup>31</sup> Anonim, „Beseda episkopa g. Nikolaja u Banjoj Luci,” *Pravda* 10385, 3. oktobar 1933, 3.

<sup>32</sup> D. Dožić, „Kako treba razumeti versku trpljivost: episkop g. Nikolaj Velimirović o verskoj toleranciji,” *Pravda* 10404, 22. oktobar 1933, 3.

<sup>33</sup> Timotijević, „Dunuli su vihorni vetrovi,” 97–119.

the Spirit of God does not hover, Nietzsche suddenly found himself “on the other side of good and evil,” i.e., on the other side of scruples, conscience and every moral. Nietzsche tried to fill the emptiness that stared eerily before him in the absence of a denied Deity with the imaginary being of a superman [...] Marx took a different approach to the struggle with universal chaos without God. Nietzsche, as an Aryan, to whom personal freedom was dearer than anything, entered into an unequal duel with the entire existing world. Not so much Marx, a practical Semite, the bearer of the indignation of his people against the whole world, especially the Christian one. He devised an organized army that would fight against other organized social forces [...] Nothing could be more disgusting to Nietzsche than the communism of the Jew Marx, nor could anything seem crazier and funnier to Marx than Nietzsche’s lonely superman. But no matter how much they are antipodes to each other, they are in fact twins from the same parent, Darwin, or Darwinism. When they were born, one was born as a “russet beast” and the other as a “red beast.” Both beasts in the race are eager to swallow the Lamb of God!<sup>34</sup>

Bishop Nikolaj advocated opposition to the materialistic values of liberal society and condemnation of modernization in everyday life, which, according to him, was the only way to “repent” and “save” Europe at the time. He suggested the baptism of Jews, as bearers of liberalism and symbols of a whole generation of European intellectuals turned against religion, as a solution to many tensions in the world.<sup>35</sup>

The transformation of intellectuals and a return to Christianity was an ideal that was emphasized by the press of the God-Worshippers movement led by Bishop Nikolaj. The example of French left-wing writers (André Gide, Louis-Ferdinand Céline) was emphasized, who were disappointed in Soviet Russia when they “went to the scene” was a perfect illustration.” Céline was quoted as saying that communism was a “defeat of Man.”<sup>36</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Episkop Nikolaj, „Tri aveti evropske civilizacije,” *Žički blagovesnik* 1, January 1940, 19–25.

<sup>35</sup> N[ikolaj], „Jevrejin filosof – kršten (translated from the English journal *Church of England Newspaper*, April 1940),” *Žički blagovesnik* 5, maj 1940, 17–19.

<sup>36</sup> Ž. Krstić, „Marksistička postrojenja se ruše,” *Misionar*, februar 1937, 51–54.

## Communists and Bolshevik Russia

Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović never wrote a special work in which he presented his views against communism. That is why in many of his texts he often pointed out the wrongness of communist ideology, with which he did not agree primarily due to its aggressive atheism and vulgar materialism.<sup>37</sup> Condemnation of the materialism of the Bolshevik regime was at the heart of his criticism:

While the two-minded West wavered halfway, they went to the end and stopped only now on the edge of a dark abyss. They denied God and Christ. They denied the ethics of spirituality and grace. They denied all the past of humanity and all spiritual and moral values. And with Islamic fanaticism, they prescribed a new Creed that reads: Technology is God, there is no other God but technology! And for twenty years now, they have been carrying out by fire and sword their extreme technical westernization, their Creed of negation. Doing someone else's work and with someone else's idols for twenty years, Russia confirms the old experience of the human race: that every idolatry plunges people into the abysses of debauchery and crime. For twenty years, both hemispheres have been watching with astonishment what is being done in Russia. For twenty years, a deep disappointment in Russia has been etched in the heart of both the dreamy East and the technical West. The disappointed East could say about present-day Russia: It is a triumph of materialism, i.e., what I hate the most, and the disappointed West could say: It's me in a straitjacket!<sup>38</sup>

Like other hierarchs of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Bishop Nikolaj always criticized the political practice of the communists, and welcomed the Yugoslav state's struggle against "destructive Bolshevik influences."<sup>39</sup> This attitude did not change, nor could the communists become members of the God-Worshippers movement led by him:

... those teachers, professors and other intellectual workers, who are atheists (do not believe in God), who do not go to church, who do not re-

<sup>37</sup> Nikolaj Velimirović, „299. Pismo. Jednom komunisti: O Bogu i bogovima,” u: Episkop Nikolaj, *Sabrana dela*, knjiga 8: *Misionarska pisma*, 296.

<sup>38</sup> Davidović i Timotijević, *Osvetljanje istine*, 524–525.

<sup>39</sup> Anonim, „Svetinje i spomenici,” *Politika* 7822, 12. februar 1930, 4.

spect the Orthodox faith, who are communists and who in general destroy the moral orthodox people's life with their ideas, are considered enemies of God and cannot be members of our movement.<sup>40</sup>

However, Bishop Nikolaj did not attack communism as an ideology that fought against capitalism, but as a part of modernity that propagated primitive materialism and is a totalitarian blasphemous regime that used violence:

Why does the Church hate communists? Who told you that? They can hate the Church, but the Church must not hate its enemies. The Church condemns the evil deeds of communists, but not communists as people. The Church condemns the violence of the communists, the murder of the emperor and his children, the murder of many bishops and priests, the arrest and persecution of Christians, mocking the faith, desecration of shrines, sale of icons, digging up tombs of saints, mocking the relics of saints, turning temples into theatres, belching blasphemies against God and His Christ, banning prayer gatherings, glorifying Judas and Satan, mindless reducing of a human being to an ape, degrading human values to the value of a screw in a machine, and materialistic blindness which sees neither God, nor soul, nor any spiritual reality. That is what the Church has always condemned, condemns and will condemn. God does not like all that, so the Church of God does not like it either. But it is not true that the Church hates people, even if they are persecutors. It is not true that the Church hates Russian communists as people. Not only does the Church not hate them, but she prays to God for them. Will you believe me when I tell you that the Church prays to God for the Russian communists?<sup>41</sup>

While Bishop Nikolaj was in Ohrid, Belgrade journalists praised the monastic communities in his diocese as "ideal communes," where true communism has lived for centuries and everyone renounces private property.<sup>42</sup> Nikolaj himself pointed out that the Church never renounced its original "communal ideal," nor did it ever abandon it voluntarily:

<sup>40</sup> Subotić, *Episkop Nikolaj i pravoslavni bogomoljački pokret*, 51.

<sup>41</sup> Nikolaj Velimirović, „233. Pismo. Vođi jedne grupe: O molitvi za gonitelje,” u: *Episkop Nikolaj, Sabrana dela*, knjiga 8, *Misionarska pisma*, 237.

<sup>42</sup> S. Krakov, „Kroz južnu Srbiju: slava Sv. Nauma,” *Vreme* 918, 11. jul 1924, 3.



It could easily be that, by God's providence, the first Christian community was just a prophecy, or a prototype, of that Christian social order that will prevail among Christian nations at the end of time.

At the same time, the Bishop denied that the church was helping capitalism.<sup>43</sup> In fact, the church looked with "pity" on the rich and the emptiness of their souls, trying to "save" them, seeing in them primarily people who need spiritual help.<sup>44</sup>

His opponents also pointed out the "revolutionary-Orthodox" direction of his public activity (especially within the God-Worshippers movement), that he had liberal beliefs before the Great War, and then became a preacher of apocalyptic mysticism, suggesting that the Church would proclaim him as a saint in the future.<sup>45</sup> His activity was perceived in liberal circles as a kind of "revolutionary Christian socialism." At the same time, they clearly pointed out that the activity of Bishop Nikolaj was actually counter-revolutionary, because he used religious norms against social upheaval:

Undoubtedly, this Christ is the antithesis of red Bolshevism. He does not preach organized resistance and rebellion to the poor, but a calm resignation, which brings them heavenly pleasures in the other world.<sup>46</sup>

Unlike Bishop Nikolaj, the church press, including the publications of the God-Worshippers, launched much harsher condemnations of the Communists and their rule in Soviet Russia. It wrote about falling morality, encouraging promiscuity, breaking up families, leaving offspring, homes for abandoned children, sexual relations among minors, and the spread of sexually transmitted diseases.<sup>47</sup>

It was emphasized that the communists in Russia "destroy everything that is sacred, noble and Christian," and that was Satanism ("they

<sup>43</sup> Nikolaj Velimirović, „231. Pismo. Jednom oštrom partizanu: O hrišćanskom opšteziću,” u: Episkop Nikolaj, *Sabrana dela*, knjiga 8, *Misionarska pisma*, 245.

<sup>44</sup> Nikolaj Velimirović, „196. Pismo. Jednom revolucionaru: O sažaljenju,” u: Episkop Nikolaj, *Sabrana dela*, knjiga 8, *Misionarska pisma*, 214.

<sup>45</sup> V. V. Vukićević, „Jedan lažan apostol,” *Nova Evropa*, 11. novembar 1921, 306–311.

<sup>46</sup> V. V. Vukićević, „Nikolaj bogomoljac – pesnik,” *Nova Evropa*, 26. oktobar 1926, 226–229.

<sup>47</sup> Anonim, „Sovjetsko – boljševički moral,” *Pravoslavna hrišćanska zajednica* 1-12, 1927, 27–28.

erected a monument to Judas the traitor of Christ, celebrate Friday instead of Sunday, they do everything wrong, indeed the devil took some people into his power”).<sup>48</sup> Internationalism was especially criticized as a form of betrayal of the fatherland:

Such is the morality of communism. Its characteristic feature is ungodliness, renunciation of morals and elevation of the proletarian revolution to the level of divinity. It is comprehensive, because it regulates all relations of private, social and political life. It is built on the principle of permissiveness.<sup>49</sup>

Such practices were condemned as a form of betrayal of national and state interests.<sup>50</sup>

Along with the condemnations of communism, texts on the survival of Orthodoxy in Russia despite persecutions were constantly published:

The end of Russian Orthodoxy has not yet come, which some would be happy about; the Holy Orthodox Church did not fail, but strengthened itself, showed its endurance, tenacity and invincibility.<sup>51</sup>

At the same time, a consistent anti-Bolshevik policy was pursued in the Kingdom of SCS/Yugoslavia, which was the basis for many political anti-communist attitudes and support for Russian emigration.<sup>52</sup>

Among the many ideological directions among the Russian refugee colony in the Balkans, the “Eurasianism” movement that emerged in 1921 stands out. The bearers of the Eurasian idea went to Western Europe after 1921, so the Balkans was not their center. Eurasianists rejected Eurocentrism as cultural imperialism; they praised non-European national cultures, turned to the Slavic, but also to the Mongol tradition of Russia as a Eurasian country. The Russian revolution was seen on the one hand as a catastrophic end to the perilous process of

<sup>48</sup> M. Tijanić, „Satanizam,” *Pravoslavna hrišćanska zajednica* 2, februar 1928, 16–17.

<sup>49</sup> K. Kakljugin, „Komunistički moral,” *Hrišćansko delo* 2, mart 1936, 138–141.

<sup>50</sup> I. Iljin, „Čemu nas uči ruska revolucija?,” *Misionar*, maj 1939, 13–15.

<sup>51</sup> V. Petrov, „Iz života ruske crkve: rezultati desetogodišnjeg proganjanja Hristove crkve u Rusiji,” *Crkva i život* 1-2, januar-februar 1928, 46–48.

<sup>52</sup> Miroslav Jovanović, *Srbi i Rusi 12–21. vek: istorija odnosa* (Beograd: Narodna biblioteka Srbije 2011): 174–179.

Europeanization, and on the other hand as the beginning of its beneficial “turn to the East.” Liberal democracy was criticized and a new state system was set up to replace it – ideocracy.<sup>53</sup>

In 1921, Bishop Nikolaj openly praised the doctrine of Eurasianism, which he characterized as a religious movement, expressing his belief in the transformation and “repentance” of Russia:

Europe is less valuable, Asia is more valuable; but united they would be of full value. Hence the cry: back to the Orthodox Church; it is a correction for the European key, for the mystery of Asia. The alpha and omega of the Russian people is Orthodoxy, say the Eurasianists.

At the same time, Bishop Nikolaj saw in the God-Worshippers movement that was emerging in Yugoslavia a similar force for the transformation of the country on Christian grounds.<sup>54</sup>

Apart from the Eurasian movement (which he openly supported), the views of Bishop Nikolaj could have been influenced by other intellectual and political directions that emerged among the Russian emigrants in the Balkans. The “Young Russia” organization was started by the second generation of Russian refugees in the Balkans with the aim of inheriting reworked monarchist ideas in a kind of “right-left” thesis, uniting the monarchist tradition with socialist and nationalist ideas. They rejected the idea of overthrowing the Soviet system by resuming the anti-Bolshevik struggle from exile, believing that it would destroy Russia. They advocated a “middle way” by calling for a national revolution in Russia itself. The “National Alliance of the Young Generation” with its center in Belgrade had similar views. They advocated Christian social teaching under the slogan “Homeland – Orthodoxy – People,” and the basis was still monarchism. They favoured an “All-Russian National Revolution.”<sup>55</sup>

In his writings, Bishop Nikolaj always pointed out the “eternity” of Russia and the transience of the communist government:

<sup>53</sup> Milan Subotić, *Put Rusije: evroazijsko stanovište* (Beograd: Plato, 2004): 255–268; Miroslav Jovanović, *Ruska emigracija na Balkanu 1920–1940* (Beograd: Čigoja štampa, 2006): 70–73.

<sup>54</sup> Nikolaj Velimirović, *Bogomoljački pokret : (članci, besede, poslanice i studije): Duhovne pouke: O ekologiji* (Valjevo: Glas Crkve, 1997): 11–14.

<sup>55</sup> Jovanović, *Ruska emigracija na Balkanu*, 76–77, 82–83.

What is really happening in Holy Russia? There is a struggle between the two religions. All people live by faith, no matter whether their faith is right or wrong. We will present here Creeds of both camps, which are fighting in Russia today. One Creed is Christian, and the other Creed is Materialist.

Nikolaj emphasized the superiority of Christian values over primitive materialism, the sublimity of moral laws and the survival of the family, but also the importance of freedom of speech and association, and the survival of the independent human person in society. He pointed out the mistake of raising the almighty state and industry as new deities.<sup>56</sup>

The press of the Serbian Orthodox Church persistently transmitted news about the persecution of religion in Soviet Russia, but also about the strong Orthodox traditions, pointing to their presence in contemporary works of art, among the intelligentsia, and even among workers.<sup>57</sup> It was emphasized that although the external authority of the church weakened, “the spirit of tradition remained powerful.”<sup>58</sup>

Bishop Nikolaj’s faith in the transformation of communist Russia was unwavering. Therefore, he draw analogies with the martyrdom of early Christians in the Roman Empire:

But the time will come, and that will be soon, when Holy Russia will shine like the sun after a stormy and dark night, in which now her ungodly and soulless tormentors drink her blood, like once upon a time the beasts drunk blood of the Christians in the Roman Colosseum. The time will come when Christians from all over the world will travel to Holy Russia, to take a little of its holy land and take it to their homes. Because that land is the blood of the holy martyrs of Christ.<sup>59</sup>

He spoke in a similar way many times until the beginning of the Second World War, announcing the return of “mystical” Russia:

A shift is taking place: Russia the Beast is giving way to the Lamb of God. Russia the sinner rises from the mud and blood like a penitent, cleansed

<sup>56</sup> Nikolaj Velimirović, „Dva tabora u Sovjetskoj Rusiji”, *Misionar*, mart 1936, 71–72.

<sup>57</sup> Anonim, „Hronika: Sovjetska Rusija”, *Bratstvo* 5, maj 1927, 102.

<sup>58</sup> Anonim, „Hronika: Sovjetska Rusija”, *Bratstvo* 4-5, april-maj 1928, 94-95.

<sup>59</sup> Nikolaj Velimirović, „Rimski koliseum [koloseum]”, *Misionar*, april 1936, 97–98.

by torments and tears. Vulgar Russia is being replaced by holy Russia. Western Russia is being replaced by Russian Russia, the holy and Orthodox Russia, which will like a 'beautiful sun' (*krasno solnyshko*) warm the cooled heart of the world with mercy and kindness.

At the same time, the church press in his Diocese of Žiža did not miss the opportunity to criticize the communists in Russia for the war against Finland in 1940, emphasizing that because of such actions the Russians became a "barbarian horde" for America and Europe.<sup>60</sup> However, Bishop Nikolaj's faith in the uniqueness of Russia never disappeared, which he confirmed in his statements during the Second World War.<sup>61</sup>

Bishop Nikolaj had no doubts about what kind of state should emerge from Soviet Russia and the nature of the political future of Orthodox peoples of the Balkans, to whom he attributed an important role on a global scale, which he stated in his work "Serbian people as Theodoulos":

The empire of the Balkan people with the empire of holy Russia—not non-Russian and Jewish Russia, but holy Orthodox Russia—can bring happiness to all mankind and achieve that mystical thousand-year-lasting empire, peace on earth, which was shown on Patmos in a vision to that glorious visionary apostle, St. John the Evangelist. Because that millennium has not yet been achieved in the history of the world [...] With what kind of program? With violence, conquest, pride, selfishness, arson theocracy, world autocracy, fair democracy? No, but rather by theodoulia alone, the everyday program of the Serbian people.<sup>62</sup>

Bishop Nikolaj often spoke about the persecution of Orthodoxy in Russia in the religious categories of suffering and resurrection.<sup>63</sup> On the day of St. Vladimir (28 July 1932), a Russian prince who accepted

<sup>60</sup> Davidović i Timotijević, *Osvetljavanje istine*, 21, 29, 524–525, 534.

<sup>61</sup> Nikolaj Velimirović, *Vojlovački zapisi svetog vladike Nikolaja srpskog* (Pančevo: manastir Vojlovica, 2006): 144.

<sup>62</sup> Nikolaj Velimirović, *Srpski narod nao Teodul: Divan: Emanuil: Kasijana: Zemelja Nedodžija* (Valjevo: Glas Crkve, 1997): 41–42.

<sup>63</sup> Nikolaj Velimirović, „25. pismo. Jednom ruskom veteranu koji plače nad raspetom domovinom svojom”, u: Episkop Nikolaj, *Sabrana dela*, knjiga 8, *Misionarska pisma*, 39.

Christianity, Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović gave his vision of Russia's suffering under the Bolsheviks and its ties with Serbia. He clearly stated how the Serbian people were in Russia's debt for 1914 "so that centuries and generations cannot repay them." According to his interpretation, the Russian people and the tsar were unprepared to enter the war in 1914, sacrificing themselves for the Serbs, which led to their death. The First World War, as well as the Civil War in Russia, were presented as a single event, and the Bolshevik execution of the Russian tsar and his family was a sacrifice for the freedom of the Serbian people ('Russians have in our days repeated the Kosovo drama'). The unity of Serbs and Russians was confirmed in that way, and the terror of the communists in Russia was presented as a way for the Russian people to reach "perfection" after "torments and tears":

The Russian people today are divided into martyrs and torturers. Both are endlessly tormented. With this feat of self-torture, the Russian people are preparing for their great mission in humanity.

Bishop Nikolaj prophesied that after the great sufferings, "the face of the Russian people will shine like the sun and illuminate all those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death," which would be understood by all nations of the world, seeing Russia as a "savior."<sup>64</sup>

The Communists portrayed Soviet Russia in the same way, but in accordance with their ideological discourse. Bishop Nikolaj explained the difference between Orthodox and communist Russia by emphasizing the Bolshevik practice of persecuting religion. He pointed out the example of many scientists, statesmen, military leaders and "convinced-would socialists (Saint-Simon, Owen, Fournier, MacDonald, Henderson, Lansbury) who were also sincere Christians. Bishop Nikolaj perceived the "mission" of the Slavs on a global scale only in the spirit of Christianity, and not within the framework of international communism: "Without the faith of Christ, the Slavs will not be the salvation of the world but leprosy. Fearing leprosy, the world began to quarantine you."<sup>65</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Anonim, „Dan ruske slave u Beogradu': episkop g. Nikolaj o našem dugu Rusiji", *Politika* 8697, 29. jul 1932, 6.

<sup>65</sup> Anonim, „Besedništvo. Božićni pozdrav bezbožnicima", *Glas crkve* [Šabac], 1932, 29.

However, despite everything, Bishop Nikolaj never lost faith in the “mission” of the Slavs, especially Russia as the largest Slavic country, but he denied that the Communists were the bearers of such a “mission”:

The sad news is that in the former great Slavic empire, Russia, savage atheists rule, those who betrayed Christ; those who removed icons from the churches and tried to erase the name of Christ from the soul of the Russian people. For fifteen years, all human lives have been reduced to work and food. Death is their last word. When we die, they say, there is nothing. Sad and bitter news comes to us from the Slavic race. The Slavs promised world treasure through the greatest prophets. They promised that we, the Slavs, would announce the good news to the peoples and that we would bring them a new word. But, all of us Slavs do not report the good news to anyone, and all the nations have asked themselves: Will not the Slavs give history great disappointment?

Atheism was, in fact, the main argument for his distance from the communists.<sup>66</sup> At the same time, it was his warning to all mankind about the consequences of a complete turn to materialistic views of life, from which the communist idea emerged:

We can see in Russia’s torture the signal of God to all other nations, to beware of materialism in theory and practice, in thought and deed [...] We think and believe that even the Creator of the Russian people did not let this great nation into the fire of suffering in order to punish and kill them, but to warn and enlighten other nations through their terrible example, as well as glorify them—the Russian people—before heaven and earth.”<sup>67</sup>

Bishop Nikolaj presented the events in the Soviet Union with the categories of “sin” and “redemption,” emphasizing in a positive way the Serbs, who remained committed to Orthodoxy.<sup>68</sup> Bishop Nikolaj did

<sup>66</sup> Anonim, „Propoved episkopa g. Nikolaja u sabornoj crkvi: ‘Ja bih želeo, draga kćeri beogradske, da lepota vaša bude lepota vaše duše!’” *Pravda* 10207, 8. april 1933, 4.

<sup>67</sup> Nikolaj Velimirović, „70. pismo. Nepravoslavnom svešteniku koji pita: Zašto Bog kažnjava pravoslavnu Rusiju,” u: Episkop Nikolaj, *Sabrana dela*, knjiga 8: *Misionarska pisma*, 87.

<sup>68</sup> Anonim, „Beseda Episkopa g. dr. Nikolaja o duši u mostarskoj Sabornoj crkvi,” *Pravda* 10379, 27. septembar 1933, 7.

not dispute the basic human values for which communism was fighting, but he resolutely opposed aggressive atheism, praising instead Christian virtues:

The best form of communism in the world has already been achieved among the holy people. Pan-human preaches holiness and communism to pan-humanity based on holiness.<sup>69</sup>

Although he always believed in the “mission” of the Russian people and their transformation, Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović’s negative attitude toward the Communists never weakened because the Bolsheviks intended to build a “Babylonian Tower of Human Happiness” on the “ruins of Orthodox national Russia.” For these reasons, he welcomed the determination of Patriarch Varnava (1880-1937) to “defend our healthy national organism in Yugoslavia from that red monster.”<sup>70</sup>

On Christmas day 1936, Patriarch Varnava issued a circular against communist activities.<sup>71</sup> The patriarch also advocated an alliance of European countries against the “Bolshevik danger.”<sup>72</sup> In his public activities, Bishop Nikolaj did not take such a sharp stance, but by propagating the “middle way” he tried to distance himself from left and right political extremists, which he also suggested to the faithful:

Let your way in life be the way of the middle. Do not go left or right, because if you look from one side and the other, you will see a ditch, and each of us, if he wanders from the middle, goes to abyss. Do not be the extreme leftists or the extreme rightists. The far left is communism, and the far right is fascism. Let your political conviction be the Orthodox faith, and let your common house be Yugoslavia.<sup>73</sup>

Moreover, Bishop Nikolaj was an opponent of all totalitarian ideologies that had their source in the modernization of society, which he

<sup>69</sup> Anonim, „Izreke i reči episkopa dr. Nikolaja,” *Pregled crkve Eparhije niške*, jun–jul 1935, 6–7.

<sup>70</sup> Nikolaj Velimirović, „Četrdesetnica od smrti patrijarha Varnave. Poslanica Episkopa Nikolaja pravoslavnom klieru i narodu Eparhije Žičke”, *Pregled crkve Eparhije žičke*, septembar 1937, 20.

<sup>71</sup> Radić, *Život u vremenima*, 153.

<sup>72</sup> Koljanin, *Jevreji i antisemitizam u Kraljevini Jugoslaviji*, 332.

<sup>73</sup> Anonim, „Episkop Nikolaj osvetio je ikonostas crkve u selu Grivcu,” *Politika* 10067, 4. jun 1936, 8; Radić, *Život u vremenima*, 155.





Bishop Nikolaj on the occasion of celebration of the Ascension Day in the town of Čačak in 1936 (Courtesy of the National Museum of Čačak)



Bishop Nikolaj with Mihailo Konstantinović, minister of justice, during the consecration of the Kađenica cave on 13 October 1940. Source: Mihailo Konstantinović, *Politika sporazuma: Dnevničke beleške 1939-1941. Londonske beleške 1944-1945*, ed. Radomir Konstantinović (Novi Sad: Agencija "Mir," 1998)



Bishop Nilkolaj with clergy (Courtesy of the National Museum of Čačak)

clearly stated in the text “Three Ghosts of European Civilization” (1939), referring to the intellectual heritage of Darwin, Nietzsche and Marx which denied God. He saw the root of the problem in Darwin’s theory of the “struggle for survival,” which influenced Nietzsche’s “brutal superman” and Marx’s “brutal communist.” However, his attitude toward communism was milder than toward Darwinism and Nietzsche’s “superman”:

And if future generations want the communist system of society, they will want it only in the name of Christ and will base it on the love of Christ. Because only such communism can be blessed by God and praised with a song. The current experiment with ethics and sociology without God, without spirit and morals, will be mentioned with horror as a nightmare, or as a dark tunnel through which humanity passed until it came to light.

In any case, Russia was portrayed as a “land of martyrs” and “martyrs of Christ,” which indicated the future Christian transformation of this country. The martyrdom ought to end with a “victory shout.”<sup>74</sup>

<sup>74</sup> Nikolaj Velimirović, „Tri aveti evropske civilizacije,” *Hrišćanska misao*, avgust-septembar 1939, 99–101.

In ideological and political terms, Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović advocated the creation of “Middle System” on the principles of monarchism, Orthodoxy, Pan Slavism, and resistance to communism, Nazism and liberalism:

Our axis is from the Aegean Sea to the Pacific Ocean, or from Thessaloniki to Vladivostok. It is the belt of Orthodox peoples, which divides the earth into two hemispheres, the eastern and the western. Observe this axis in the light of geography, and in the light of history, and in the light of idealism, and you will see for yourself that the secret of God’s guidance of the world rests on this axis. This is the spiritual and moral axis needed by the whole world.

According to Nikolaj, this “axis” was not chauvinism or “pale internationalism,” and the rule of the Bolsheviks in Russia was seen as a transient “wound on the body” of a huge country with a special “mission.” Bishop Nikolaj proclaimed the Orthodox “axis” to be “exactly what all people and nations need.”<sup>75</sup> He viewed the transformation of communist Russia in a mystical way, and not as part of a military endeavor, because the terror of the Bolsheviks was part of God’s incomprehensible plan, as the monks of Mount Athos spoke:

God loves the world unspeakably. He knows the goals of everything and the deadlines for everything. For some future good, He gave this suffering to the Russian people. I can neither understand nor interrupt it. All I have left is prayer and love. That is what I am saying to the excited brothers: you can only help Russia with prayer and love. Anger and shouting at the atheists do not fix things.<sup>76</sup>

The state policy of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was completely the opposite, which resulted in many repressive measures against the communists. In that context, Bishop Nikolaj’s struggle during the Concordat crisis was characterized as “Bolshevik,” “anti-state,” and some generals even characterized him as a “communist,” and Roman Catholic clergy as opponents of Yugoslavia and “a Greater Serb.”<sup>77</sup>

<sup>75</sup> Anonim, „Naša osovina,” *Žički blagovesnik* 2, februar 1939, 33.

<sup>76</sup> Episkop Nikolaj, „Upokoj Gospode!,” *Misionar*, oktobar 1938, 289–290.

<sup>77</sup> Arhimandrit Jovan Radosavljević (ur.), *Pisma oca Jovana Rapajića* (Novi Sad: Beseda, 2016): 323–325, 352.

Bishop Nikolaj's sharpest attack on communism, as a Jewish "invention," was published in *Žički blagosvesnik* (*The Annunciator of Žiča*) in March 1940 under the title "Against Ungodly Communism," but was not signed. The article begins with an accusation of Marx, as a Jew, because he came up with the slogan of faith as "opium for the people." Communists are openly labeled as "lepers" of the people, because they have deviated from the faith and God, and the words of the Old Testament prophets are mentioned as proof of such claims: "And we do not say this from our heads, but the Holy Scriptures say it, which is the word of God through the Jewish prophets." The opposition to God and denial of God in the Old Testament was considered a leprosy, which also appeared physically, so on the basis of such an analogy it was attributed to the communists:

Therefore, ungodly communists are also lepers, and for all other people and nations they are lepers. Until they cleanse themselves. How to cleanse oneself from the leprosy of ungodliness? Let them be taken to the priest, said God (Exodus 24: 2). And that means: let them return from their folly; let them repent of their wickedness, and let them return to the Church of God, and the servants of God will tell them what to do next, in order to be completely cleansed from the leprosy of their souls, and returned to the people of God.

According to Bishop Nikolaj, the appearance of Karl Marx was foretold in the Gospel:

This is what the Lord Christ said to the persistent Jews. I have come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not; if another comes in his own name, you will receive him (Jn 5:43). Marx came not in the name of the Heavenly Father, but in his own name. He denied God and mocked the faith of all Christians in the Heavenly Father. He was also received by the Jews. They supported him. They announced him all over the world through their press. They followed him like no one before from the times of Moses to this day. With the help of Marx, they brought confusion and disorder into the whole Christian world. With his help, they destroyed the main fortress of Christ on earth—Holy Russia.

Before the appearance of Marx, Jews, according to Bishop Nikolaj, were not supporters of socialist ideas, because they were inherited by Christian thinkers, and some of them were very religious people:

That is why Jews did not want to be with them. When Marx appeared, first as a Jew and second as an atheist, then the Jews of the whole world accepted him as their messiah who would lead them to power over the world. But they were grossly mistaken. Satan was also deceived when he tried to destroy Adam and Eve with lies. So Marx was deceived when he rose up against Christ and his Church. Marx could not foresee or predict anything about the future, because he was blind in spirit, because he was without God. And Christ foresaw Marx. So who should we follow: the one who sees or the one who does not see? The clairvoyant or the blind?<sup>78</sup>

With the beginning of the Second World War, political relations in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia became increasingly radicalized, as did the state's attitude toward the communists, who were increasingly agitating for the Soviet Union. Even the Church could not remain completely isolated, so in January 1940 the Bishop of Zvornik-Tuzla Nektarije Krulj (1879-1966), an associate of Bishop Nikolaj in the Bogomoljci (God-Worshippers) movement, published an epistle to his faithful in which he sharply attacked "Bolshevik-communist agitators," who advocated the overthrow of the state order "for the benefit of and in the name of atheist international dictators" (Stalin). Bishop Nikolaj never published such an open attack on the communists as Bishop Nektarije, who supported the official state policy with his epistle:

They [communists] are trying to discredit everything that is sacred to a Serb, to kill his faith in eternal values, to discourage him and to poison his soul; they incite the people against the State and its organs and against anyone who is not with them, they assure the people that today's society is not capable of resolving social issues fairly, they preach revolution and the destruction of institutions to which the Serbian people owe their very survival. The more experienced people know about the troubles and sufferings of the Russian people under the terrorist-communist regime, so they stay away from those agitators and their propaganda, while those less experienced believe that communism will bring them happiness and prosperity, so they succumb to communist influence. Thank God, the vast majority of our Serbian people are very cautious,

<sup>78</sup> Anonim. [Episkop Nikolaj], „Protiv bezbožnog komunizma,” *Žički blagovesnik* 3, mart 1940, 5–6. Episkop Nikolaj, *Bogomoljački pokret*, 201–202.

thanks to their centuries-long suffering, so there is a lot of hope that they will not follow dubious ideas and dubious propagandists of those ideas.

Bishop Nektarije saw great danger in the actions of some priests who had sympathy for “foreign agitators” and their ideas:

In this critical time and age of fateful temptations, we ask all priests, without excuses and without exceptions, to prepare and gather for the service of God, their King and their homeland [...] At every opportunity and in every place, in sermons and on the occasions of pastoral visits, priests are obliged to warn the people of the dangers posed by the new prophets, who know neither God nor the Gospel of God [...] We hope that Our priests in communion with Us will perform their sacred duty, and that Our flock will be spared from the invasion of foreign ideas and everything that could bring damage to the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Serbian people.<sup>79</sup>

At the beginning of October 1940, General Milan Nedić, Minister of the Army and Navy, asked of Patriarch Gavriilo Dožić (1881-1950) “that the clergy spare no effort preaching from the altar and in a parish to suppress communism.”<sup>80</sup> Such a call was answered by the Bogomoljci movement, which in Bishop Nikolaj’s diocese of Žiča made an appeal to the faithful to distance themselves from the communists:

The Orthodox People’s Movement establishes the fact that in recent times, ruthless atheist propaganda has spread inordinately throughout the country, which is especially successful among the educated youth, angry workers and uprooted peasants. The movement favors using all available means, word, deed and the press, to suppress and radically destroy this atheist propaganda, without entering politics, although that propaganda today is related to a certain policy and serves as the means for a clearly defined, subversive goal. The movement demands from its members the strictest stance against ungodly communism and its agitation, full of lies and darkness, deception and meanness.<sup>81</sup>

However, Bishop Nikolaj himself never made such statements in

<sup>79</sup> Anonim, „Iz poslanice preosvećenog gospodina upućene sveštenstvu Eparhije zvoničko-tuzlanske prilikom Nove 1940,” *Misionar*, januar 1940, 7–9.

<sup>80</sup> Radić, *Život u vremenima*, 209.

<sup>81</sup> Anonim, „Godišnji sabor u Sv. Žiči,” *Misionar*, septembar-oktobar 1940, 47–48.

public. His persistent criticism of communism had a religious basis, and did not imply the abandonment of faith in Russia's "mission." The Bolshevik regime in Moscow was portrayed as transient. In the spring of 1940, Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović believed that Stalin himself could become a "Christian" ruler. The dictator from Moscow was called to become a modern Saul, to transform himself, to stop persecuting Christians, which would make the communists respected: "Then they will be truly great, because they will bring peace to the world."<sup>82</sup>

Bishop Nikolaj made a similar statement in September 1940, referring to the then current political and diplomatic rapprochement between the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and the USSR, especially to the propaganda that communist Russia would come to Yugoslavia's aid in case of war:

Today, many are talking about how it is necessary to be with Russia. That is what we want. Only we cannot be with those atheists who rule today's Russia and oppress the Russian people. Many say Russia is strong, do not be afraid [...] The Russian people need to be freed from shackles, so they can receive help and protection. The Russian people need to be freed from the the shackles, so they can provide help and protection. We do not care what the economic order will be in Russia, we just want the Russian rulers to recognize God as God and man as man. If the Russian people want their doctors of law and philosophy to be state apprentices, let them be.

However, Bishop Nikolaj did not recommend such a form of social organization, as well as communism itself, as a system that should be introduced in Yugoslavia.<sup>83</sup>

### Fear of a new world war

As early as 1927, Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović announced in his work *War and the Bible* that the civilized world would put all of its resources in the service of the upcoming world war, which would be character-

<sup>82</sup> Anonim, „Nedelja pravoslavija,” *Žički blagovesnik* 3, mart 1940, 22–23.

<sup>83</sup> Anonym, „Sveštenarodni sabor u svetoj Žiči,” *Žički blagovesnik* 9, septembar 1940, 22–23.

ized by an “absence of mercy and heroism.”<sup>84</sup> Bishop Nikolaj’s political attitudes, including those toward war and peace, always stemmed from theological norms.<sup>85</sup> The Bishop regularly noted that Christianity without its dogmas has no possibility of existence, recalling the fact that Christians always had in mind that God is with them, which was a condition of happiness of each individual, but also a message to pagans: “God is with us, understand pagans and submit, for God is with us.” However, in terms of everyday political reality, the bishop did not deny the power of European states, pointing the large expenses for war equipment, the hostility of great powers and the possibility of a general bloody conflict of people on the eve of the Second World War. In contrast to such a situation, the bishop reminded the faithful of God’s love, human hope and faith in goodness and justice. The symbolism of the New Year’s celebration, which began on the feast of the circumcision of Jesus Christ, was supposed to initiate the spiritual purification of humans, so that people could be transformed from the misconceptions of the past years:

You know what hurt us in 1938; you know what should be circumcised or cut off from people, so that 1939 would be a happy year for them. Self-worship, personal vanity, greed, selfishness, sick nationalism (chauvinism), sick cosmopolitanism (internationalism), the pursuit of quick success, which ultimately proves to be defeat, the capture of easy profit that ultimately appears as harm, lies and crime as political and personal means—weeds, weeds, weeds; thorns, thorns, thorns.

Salvation from “human madness” and the creation of “personal happiness,” according to Bishop Nikolaj, were possible only through God’s mercy, which is immeasurable and omnipotent, and that also concerned the increasingly certain war: “Let us not be afraid of the hills of steel, nor the clouds of smoke, nor exceptionally large war budgets. The conqueror of death can conquer all this in one stroke and turn it around for the better.”<sup>86</sup> When the Second World War began in 1939,

<sup>84</sup> Nikolaj Velimirović, *Rat i Biblija*, u Episkop Nikolaj, *Sabrana dela*, knjiga 5 (Düsseldorf 1977): 190.

<sup>85</sup> Ilija Kajtez, „Poimanje rata i mira kod Svetog Nikolaja Velimirovića, srpskog velikana,” *Nicholai Studies* 1/2 (2021): 435–474.

<sup>86</sup> Episkop Nikolaj, „U senci od čelika i dima: beseda na Novu godinu,” *Žički bla-*



Bishop Nikolaj introduced “regular offerings of a special prayer to God for peace among nations” in his diocese of Žižča.<sup>87</sup> In 1940, on behalf of the people, Bishop Nikolaj thanked God that the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was spared destruction while the war was raging in Europe.<sup>88</sup>

His faith in the special mission of the Slavs did not disappear with the beginning of the Second World War in 1939: “If the Slavs today seem crazy and weak to many of their neighbors, it is a sign that the Creator of men is preparing something salvific through the Slavs for the whole world, even for those who despise them.”<sup>89</sup> As a special “sign,” the Bishop pointed out the fact that the Slavic Orthodox peoples were not affected by the war:

I do not know God’s plans, but I believe that God’s Providence wants to say a saving word to the world through the Orthodox Slavs, to bring saving consolation and saving medicine: that is why He keeps them away from war. That saving word can only be the one incarnated in the Son of God and written in the Gospel.<sup>90</sup>

In this way, Bishop Nikolaj continued to insist on the “middle way” and faith in the renewal of “Orthodox Russia” after the fall of the communist dictatorship. Some of his associates saw the “middle way” as Western European democracy, pointing to the “great struggle” between communism and fascism and their mutually exclusive opposites. The atheism of both totalitarian ideologies was pointed out, as well as the quasi-religious aspirations of fascism, which elevates the state as an absolute and ethical value, and humiliates the individual. It was also emphasized that fascism is the fruit of the German-Romanic race, communism of the Semitic race, and democracy, as a middle way, of the Anglo-Saxon-Slavic race. The rise of fascism and communism in these texts was seen as a return to paganism.<sup>91</sup>

*govesnik* 1, januar 1939, 4–8.

<sup>87</sup> Episkop N. Velimirović, „Poslanica za božićni post pravoslavnom narodu Eparhije žičke,” *Misionar*, oktobar-novembar 1939, 1–4.

<sup>88</sup> Episkop N. Velimirović, „Božićni pozdrav Episkopa Žičkog Nikolaja Pravoslavnim bratstvima,” *Žički blagovesnik* 12, decembar 1940, 1–7.

<sup>89</sup> Episkop Nikolaj, „Vaskrsenje,” *Žički blagovesnik* 4, april 1940, 6.

<sup>90</sup> Subotić, *Episkop Nikolaj i pravoslavni bogomoljački pokret*, 276.

<sup>91</sup> Lj. Ivančević, „Cezar ili Hristos?,” *Žički blagovesnik* 3, mart 1939, 71–77.

If we analyze the speeches of Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović himself, we can see that he contrasted democratic political system to war, as a consequence of the lost internal struggle of human being with passions. He insisted that democracy can provide freedom for most people, but that it is “vulnerable” and can easily fall into lies or selfishness. He believed that democracy could only survive if it was supported by the Christian faith based on the principles of truth, love and mercy.<sup>92</sup> As soon as the early 1920s, many concluded that Bishop Nikolaj wanted that our statesmen have the same attitude toward Christianity as British and American politicians.<sup>93</sup>

Although he always had good relations with liberal European democracies, especially the Anglican Church, the fundamental political views of Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović grounded in Saint Savian nationalism and the people’s state. Bishop Nikolaj’s contemporaries emphasized nationalism as the main feature of his personality:

Without that quality, Bishop, in addition to all other virtues, would certainly not have managed to take the warmest place in the people’s soul and become an idol of our honest and patriotic peasants. This trait above all other traits was given to Great Nikolaj by the blessed spirit of the genius creator of our church and state—Saint Sava, and it is called nationalism [...] Nikolaj, among other things, said this: This nationalism of Saint Sava includes 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. The basis and center of all Saint Savian nationalism is the people’s church. It is like a spirit that revives the entire national organism, illuminating, warming and uniting with one faith, one hope and one love [...] Even in the most recent times, we see the Great Bishop defending Saint Saveness. Surrounded by the people and armed with the grace of God, cold-blooded and fearless, he has successfully repulsed Satan from the consecrated walls of the Seven-Gated Žiča, “our old story.”<sup>94</sup>

<sup>92</sup> Vladimir Cvetković, „The Freedom from Passions and the Freedom for All: St Nikolaj Velimirović on Democracy,” *Nicholai Studies*, 1/1 (2021): 53–80.

<sup>93</sup> Radić, *Vojislav Janić*, 121.

<sup>94</sup> Ilija Ž. Trifunović, „Nacionalizam Episkopa Nikolaja,” *Pregled crkve Eparhije žičke*, septembar 1938, 13–17.

Before the Second World War, Bishop Nikolaj was described in the church press of his diocese of Žiča as a religious traditionalist, a populist by nature, enthusiastic about his church and nation, but also as a man who clearly feels reality: “He accurately sensed our cultural identity as the interspace between East and West, as the Balkans; racially as Slavdom; ethnically as Serbhood; religiously as Orthodoxy.” This was not narrow-mindedness, it was stressed, because Nikolaj was universal in his spirit:

And it was from his comprehensiveness, breadth of heart and mind, that the concept of the necessity of the synthesis of East and West, ethics and technique, mysticism and rationality, which only Slavs can give to the world as their last, most beautiful and greatest gift. That synthesis is much needed if the world wants to avoid the paths that would otherwise lead to disaster.

The strength of Bishop Nikolaj in organizing the church, in his sermons, and also in his clarity in answering contemporary problems was emphasized.<sup>95</sup>

During the Second World War, Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović was interned in the Vojlovica Monastery near Pančevo, where Patriarch Gavriilo Dožić was later brought. The internment was actually a captivity, in which they still had the opportunity to read the press. Although they were all anti-communists, they followed the advance of the Soviet Red Army on the Eastern Front with approval and joy, as Jovan Velimirović, nephew of Bishop Nikolaj, recalled:

Usually before lunch, the Patriarch and Bishop Nikolaj come to Vasilije’s room, sit down and then the daily commentary on the situation on the battlefield begins and the frontline is drawn on the map. Vasilije was the most zealous in marking the frontline. As soon as the Russians advanced, Bishop Nikolaj said: “Ruža is going like a storm” [...] We were really happy because of the successes of the Russians as if they were our own, because, after all, in their victory we saw, if nothing else, the end to our prison and captivity in Vojlovica. That was the mood of all of us in Vojlovica. When the Russians pushed the Germans deep into Ukraine to-

<sup>95</sup> Anonim, „Vladika Nikolaj u Ćupriji”, *Žički blagovesnik* 6, jun 1939, 165–166.

wards the Romanian border, Russian appetites began to be tangible. Then, Bishop Nikolaj said one day: "I am afraid that the Russians will not know how to moderate themselves at the end of the war and will show too great appetites and thus irritate America. And it is not good to have America as an enemy. This war is just a race for bases for a new war. And a new war will be a war for Asia."<sup>96</sup>

\* \* \*

Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović was a persistent fighter against all the negative consequences of the modernization of society, in which he included totalitarian ideologies. His public anti-communist views between the two world wars had distinctly Christian features, and were not tied to right-wing ideologies. Condemnation of aggressive atheism and primitive materialism in Soviet Russia was the basis of his criticism of the Bolshevik authorities. At the same time, Bishop Nikolaj sincerely believed in the mystical mission of Russia as a "holy land" and Orthodoxy in God's plan for the salvation of mankind. He viewed communism as a passing phenomenon in "eternal Russia." This is the main reason why his public statements never had anti-communist sharpness and intolerance, as in the case of some other bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church. He approved the anti-communist activities of the state, but did not propagandistically support it. At the same time, he did not oppose the critique of capitalism, but he advocated freedom in Christian categories and political practice, which was familiar to him from Anglo-Saxon democracies. Although his ideal of organizing Serbian society was certainly "Saint Sava'sness," Bishop Nikolaj adhered to the norms of liberal democracies in his public activities, which he confirmed with his concrete political activities in crucial historical events.

<sup>96</sup> Knjigoljubac (ur.), *Svetac i genije – životopis vladike Nikolaja, Sveti Nikolaj Ohridski i Žički: Rečnik večnoga života: Vladika Nikolaj nas vodi putem spasenja – poruke azbučnim redom / Životopis svetog vladike Nikolaja*, drugo dopunjeno izdanje, (Beograd: „Očev dom” Versko dobrotvorno starateljstvo Mitropolije beogradsko-karlovачke, 2012): 404–405. – Hieromonk Dr Vasilije Kostić was a teacher in the monastic school in Ostrog Monastery and in the theological seminaries in Bitola and Prizren. He was imprisoned together with Bishop Nikolaj and Patriarch Gavrilo Dožić in the Monastery of Vojlovica. After the war, he was first elected the bishop of Banja Luka, and later transferred to the see of Žiča.

Anti-communism did not bring him closer to right-wing totalitarian movements and ideologies. Belief in Orthodoxy, the Slavs, the “mission of Russia” and the salvation of mankind were the basis from which he observed and assessed the “misconceptions” of the communists, believing in their “transformation.”

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# Tempestuous Relations: Bishop of Žiča, Nikolaj Velimirović, and the Regency Government of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, 1936-1941\*

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**O**n 22 June 1934 Nikolaj Velimirović, then bishop of Ohrid and Bitolj, was appointed an administrator of the Žiča diocese (he had been a bishop of Žiča in 1919-1920) and two years later became a regular bishop there. By that time he had acquired the reputation of the most prominent figure in the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) as an exceptional philosopher, orator and the leading spirit of the God-Worshiper movement.<sup>1</sup> With his strong personality and influence within the church, he was bound to play an important role in the tumultuous times that were to befall both the SOC and Yugoslavia under the Regency regime after the murder of King Alexander Karađorđević in October 1934. The late king's cousin, Prince Paul Karađorđević (1934-1941), was the key figure in the three-member regency. The initial phase of the Regency, with Milan Stojadinović as Prime Minister (1935-1939), who liked to stress that he was “a grandson of the first Serbian Metro-

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<sup>1</sup> Milan Jovanović Stoimirović, *Portreti prema živim modelima* (Novi Sad: Matica srpska, 1998), 15-69; Bogdan Lubardić, “Nikolaj Velimirović,” in *Srbi 1903-1914: Istorijska ideja*, ed. Miloš Ković (Beograd: Clio, 2015), 328-357; For the God-Worshippers, see Dragan Subotić, *Episkop Nikolaj i Pravoslavni bogomoljački pokret: Pravoslavna narodna hrišćanska zajednica u Kraljevini Jugoslaviji, 1920-1941* (Beograd: Nova iskra, 1996).

politian, Milentije Pavlović,”<sup>2</sup> seemed not to bode ill for the future. It was, however, the so-called Concordat crisis of 1937-38 that marked Stojadinović’s premiership and had a profound impact on relations between the SOC and the government until the destruction of Yugoslavia during the Second World War. Tensions resurfaced in connection with foreign policy issues and pitted the SOC against the government again—the former sided with the army officers’ coup d’état on 27 March 1941. This paper focuses on the role of Bishop Nikolaj in both these pivotal events, which has not been examined so far, and, in doing so, offers insights into some controversial or neglected aspects, arguing that there was a clear link between the SOC attitude towards the state in 1941 with that in 1937.

### The Emergence of the Concordat Crisis

In 1919-1920, legislation was introduced regulating the status of all the recognized religious communities in Yugoslavia (the Serbian Orthodox, Islamic, Jewish and Evangelistic Christian), except the Roman Catholic. The government had been trying to conclude a concordat with the Holy See since the early 1920s given that more than a third of the population was Roman Catholic.<sup>3</sup> In July 1935, the final draft of the Concordat was completed and signed at the Vatican, and the new Stojadinović government was only supposed to see the formalities through. In Stojadinović’s own words, he expected the parliament to ratify the Concordat agreement as easily as sending a letter in the post office.<sup>4</sup> However, the parliamentary procedure to adopt the Concordat gave rise to the bitter opposition of SOC and turned into a major crisis,

<sup>2</sup> Archives of Yugoslavia (Arhiv Jugoslavije, hereafter AJ), Belgrade, Milan Stojadinović Papers (Zbirka Milana Stojadinovića), collection no. 37, box 23, folder 382 [hereafter 37-23-382], Milan Stojadinović to Patriarch Varnava, 1 January 1935.

<sup>3</sup> Mirko Petrović, *Konkordatsko pitanje Kraljevine Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca* (Beograd: Intermex, 1997); Nikola Žutić, *Kraljevina Jugoslavija i Vatikan: odnos jugoslovenske države i rimske crkve 1918-1935* (Beograd: Maštel Commerce, Arhiv Jugoslavije, 1994).

<sup>4</sup> Milan Stojadinović, *Ni rat ni pakt: Jugoslavija između dva rata* (Buenos Aires: El Economista, 1963), 523.

which has been detailed elsewhere.<sup>5</sup> It will be outlined here shortly just to place Bishop Nikolaj's views and activities in the proper context.

Patriarch Varnava asked the Prime Minister repeatedly to send him the text of the Concordat so that the Council of Bishops and the Synod of SOC could consider it, but Stojadinović dragged his feet, maintaining that the matter was not actual, since he had not decided if and when he wanted to proceed with it.<sup>6</sup> Once the bishops had familiarized themselves with the treaty, their council prepared a letter to Stojadinović urging him not to take it to the parliament. The SOC found that it infringed on the principle of equality between the officially recognized churches, bestowing on the Roman Catholic Church (RCC)

<sup>5</sup> Đoko Slijepčević, *Istorija Srpske pravoslavne crkve*, II, *Od početka XIX veka do kraja Drugog svetskog rata* (Beograd, 2002), 384–391; Miloš Mišović, *Srpska crkva i konkordatska kriza* (Beograd: Sloboda, 1983); Viktor Novak, *Magnum crimen: Pola vijeka klerikalizma u Hrvatskoj* (Beograd: Nova knjiga, 1986), 411–468; Olga Manojlović Pintar, “Još jednom o konkordatskoj krizi,” *Tokovi istorije*, 1-2 (2006), 157–171; Veljko Đurić Mišina, *Varnava patrijarh srpski* (Sremski Karlovci: Eparhija sremska, Beograd: Parohija Hrama Svetog Save 2009), 163–186; Veljko Đurić Mišina, “Milan Stojadinović i Konkordat Vatikana i Kraljevine Jugoslavije,” in *Milan Stojadinović: politika u vreme globalnih lomova*, ed. Miša Đurković (Beograd: Službeni glasnik i Centar za konzervativne studije, 2012), 208–242; essentially the same text under the title “Patrijarh Varnava i konkordat Vatikana i Kraljevine Jugoslavije,” is published in: Veljko Đurić Mišina, ed., *I život za pravoslavlje: Zbornik radova povodom 75-godišnjice upokojenja patrijarha Varnave* (Beograd: Hram Svetog Save, Pljevlja: Srpski kulturni centar “Patrijarh Varnava,” Podgorica: Književna zadruga Srpskog narodnog vijeća, 2012), 47–92; Radmila Radić, *Život u vremenima: Patrijarh Gavrilo (Dožić) 1881-1950*, 2 ed. (Beograd: Pravoslavni bogoslovski fakultet, Institut za teološka istraživanja, 2011), 273–311; Slobodan Jakovljević, “Srpska pravoslavna crkva u konkordatskoj borbi 1937. godine – pokušaj nove sinteze,” *Bogoslovlje* 2 (2014): 272–295; Slobodan Jakovljević, “Srpska pravoslavna crkva u konkordatskoj borbi 1937. godine – pokušaj nove sinteze (II deo),” *Bogoslovlje*, 1 (2015): 269–293; Gašper Mithans, *Jugoslavanski konkordat: Pacem in discordia ali jugoslovanski “kulturkampf”* (Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, 2017). For parliamentary debates, see Milorad Sredojević, *Konkordat u Skupštini Kraljevine Jugoslavije* (Beograd: Srpska književna zadruga, 2016).

<sup>6</sup> AJ, 37-23-382, Patriarch Varnava to Milan Stojadinović, 25 September 1935; Jovan Gašić [head of the prime minister's office] to Patriarch Varnava, 25 September 1935; Patriarch Varnava to Milan Stojadinović, Sremski Karlovci, 30 September 1935, urgent-confidential; Milan Stojadinović to Patriarch Varnava, 30 September 1935.

special privileges to such an extent that it even encroached on the sovereignty of the state. On 5 December 1936, the Metropolitan of Montenegro and the Littoral, Gavriilo Dožić, Bishop of Bačka, Irinej Ćirić, and Bishop Nikolaj handed the letter to Stojadinović.<sup>7</sup> Nikolaj later claimed that Stojadinović had said he had not read the treaty as yet and assured them that they should have confidence in him.<sup>8</sup> The delegates were carefully chosen as Metropolitan Gavriilo had been friends with Prime Minister since the 1920s when the latter had been a member of parliament (MP) from Montenegro, Bishop Irinej was a brother of Stevan Ćirić, the chairman of parliament, and Nikolaj had known and corresponded with Stojadinović in connection with his donation for an iconostasis for the St. Sava church in the Žiča monastery.<sup>9</sup> The letter, their talk and Stojadinović's subsequent arrival to the Patriarchy for another conversation on 11 December were of no avail. Instead, an open clash between the church and the state was just about to begin.

It must be said that there were other unstated reasons for the opposition on the part of SOC. In retrospect, Nikolaj asserted that the true meaning of the struggle against the Concordat was to detach Catholic Croats, who boycotted centralist state institutions, from the RCC, which was in line with his old and utterly unrealistic idea that they should have their own national church.<sup>10</sup> It is ironic that Stojadinović, conversely, considered the adoption of the treaty an important part of dealing with the Croatian question, but in his view the benefit of making an agreement with the RCC was further isolation of Vladimir Maček's Croatian Peasant Party. Another interpretation of the SOC's hostility was that it felt endangered in competition with the

<sup>7</sup> Đurić Mišina, "Patrijarh Varnava i konkordat Vatikana i Kraljevine Jugoslavije," 62–63.

<sup>8</sup> Siniša Paunović, *Kad su letele kamilavke* (Čačak: Gradska biblioteka "Vladislav Petković Dis," 2006), 187–188.

<sup>9</sup> See their correspondence in AJ, 37–23–382.

<sup>10</sup> Mihailo Konstantinović, *Politika sporazuma. Dnevničke beleške 1939–1941. Londonske beleške 1941–1945* (Novi Sad: Agencija "Mir," 1998), 199. For more details on Nikolaj's thinking regarding the nationalization of the Catholic church in Yugoslavia, see Vladimir Cvetković, "Još jedan osvrt na predavanje 'Nacionalizam Svetog Save' Svetog Nikolaja Žičkog," *Crkvene studije* 16, no. 1 (2019): 140–144.

wealthier RCC with its better educated and more cultured priesthood, especially as it was still coming to terms with the fact that it was no longer a state-sponsored church as it had been in pre-1914 Serbia.<sup>11</sup>

In order to assess Bishop Nikolaj's role in that struggle, it is necessary to look at his attitude toward the RCC. Although he had been a promoter of ecumenism prior to becoming Bishop of Ohrid in late 1920, it should be noted that his contacts with and enthusiasm for Anglican and Old Catholic Churches were much more pronounced than his brotherly feelings for the RCC. In fact, his animosity to the Papacy and its doctrine of papal infallibility, if not to the whole RCC, could be observed from his writings dating back as early as 1906-1909.<sup>12</sup> Nikolaj had approved of what he called the revolutionary Catholicism of the Slavs, an aspiration to the original Christian values that had driven the work of the major dissidents from the RCC such as Jan Hus.<sup>13</sup> This implied a critical stance towards the mainstream of the RCC's historical development. In his preaching in Great Britain during the Great War he had praised, as part of the propaganda for the Yugoslav unification, the national consciousness of Croat and Slovene Roman Catholic clergy in the past that took precedence, as he asserted, over clerical tendencies.<sup>14</sup> This was a dubious interpretation, to say the least, which conveniently passed in silence over any contentious issues that could be raised with regard to the attitudes of Croat and Slovene clergy. Nikolaj had also clashed with the most senior representatives of the RCC in Yugoslavia. He had been irritated by the request of Archbishop of Zagreb, Antun Bauer, that Catholics must not be made to participate in the celebration of Saint Sava, the first Archbishop of the autocephalous Serbian church from the thirteenth century, in 1935 which marked the 700-year anniversary from his death. The request had been superfluous

<sup>11</sup> Milan Jovanović Stoimirović, *Dnevnik 1936-1941* (Novi Sad: Matica srpska, 2000), 152-153.

<sup>12</sup> *Sabrana dela Episkopa Nikolaja u XIII knjiga* (Šabac: Glas crkve, 2013) [Reprint izdanje Sabranih dela Episkopa Nikolaja Velimirovića Eparhije zapadnoevropske (1976-1986) izdao Episkop Lavrentije sa saradnicima], knj. 2, "Versko-socijalni pokreti na Zapadu," 167-180; "Verska kriza u rimokatolicizmu," 197-217.

<sup>13</sup> *Sabrana dela*, knj. 3, The Religious Spirit of the Slavs, 229-239.

<sup>14</sup> *Sabrana dela*, knj. 3, The Soul of Serbia, 331-348.

as no one had forced Catholics to do so, and Nikolaj had resented the “spirit” in which it had been made.<sup>15</sup> With all this in view, it was not surprising that Nikolaj came to the forefront of the anti-Concordat campaign of the SOC.

The citizens of the town of Čačak and the surrounding area were invited to a rally scheduled for 24 December 1936 in which Nikolaj was going to discuss the Concordat, certain articles of which were, as a leaflet read, “pernicious to our holy Orthodox Church, and some gravely affecting the sovereignty of our state.”<sup>16</sup> Nikolaj used the occasion to elaborate his views on contemporary dangers to both the church and the state that bore distinctly international marks: “Our church has lately seen three international diseases, three wounds on the body of our people ... the red, black and yellow international.” The red, communist international “wants to make us uniform, to make us puppets,” whereas the black one “wants to destroy all the national churches and to create an international church”; the yellow one without which there would be no red one, “is the international capital, cartel-capitalism. Capitalism is an evil that fattens the red international.”<sup>17</sup> The black international was clearly the RCC with its universalist pretensions which equaled, in Nikolaj’s mind, the internationalist ambitions of communism and capitalism. He scorned the authorities for fighting just the red, while supporting the black and yellow internationals. The SOC was a national church, just like all the other Orthodox churches and Anglican Church which Nikolaj favored so much, and therefore an antipode to the Vatican’s doctrines. But he insisted that although the Orthodox churches were national organizations, their religion was universal.<sup>18</sup> Any com-

<sup>15</sup> *Sabrana dela*, knj. 10, “Primedba na Okružnicu Presvetlog Gospodina D-r Bauera nadbiskupa zagrebačkog,” 606–610.

<sup>16</sup> AJ, 37-58-370, From the Orthodox Church municipality in Čačak, 22 December 1936, attached to Prefect of the Trnava County [illegible name] to Jovan Gašić.

<sup>17</sup> “Osvećenje doma za iznemogle starce i starice i dečijeg hranilišta u Kraljevu,” *Pregled Crkve Eparhije žičke*, godina XX, br. 11–12 (novembar–decembar 1938); published in *Sabrana dela*, knj. 10, 366–371; quoted in Željko Perović, “Da li je Sveti Vladika Nikolaj bio fašista? Pregled njegovih svetosavskih obraćanja od marta 1935. do aprila 1941. godine,” *Nicholai Studies*, Vol. I, No. 2 (2021): 411–412.

<sup>18</sup> *Sabrana dela*, knj. 13, “Nacionalna crkva je najveća crkva na svetu,” “Nacionalna crkva ali ne nacionalna vera,” 89–93.

partmentalization of religion on the national basis was an aberration incompatible with true Christianity.

If Nikolaj's speech was perhaps the first public utterance on the part of church dignitaries, that of Patriarch Varnava which followed closely was certainly the most thunderous one. In a 1937 New Year address to the believers, he did not mince words, accusing those in power of losing their brain and honesty, because they "made an agreement with the black chief of the black international." "Against that black chief and his Jesuit army," the Patriarch explained, Byzantine patriarchs and emperors fought, then the [medieval Serbian] Nemanjićs with St. Sava, and then the Turks who stopped that invasion of the Balkans as they saw the Catholic Church as a political organization, unlike the Orthodox faith. "Let the Turks be honored, and shame on such Orthodox believers and Serbs!" He also claimed—a recurring theme of the Concordat critics—that the main victims of that instrument were Roman Catholics in Yugoslavia who were chained and became "the slaves of a foreign sovereign."<sup>19</sup> To strike at the government even stronger, Varnava inveighed against the pervading corruption in the country.

In parallel with the vocal criticism of church dignitaries, a propaganda war by means of booklets, pamphlets and posters, the publishing and distribution of which were illegal, was in full swing. It started with the distribution of a document setting forth the remarks about the text of Concordat preliminary signed at the Vatican, which the SOC hoped would be improved on and hence withheld its publication for nearly half a year.<sup>20</sup> The most convincing criticism was that of a university professor which dealt with the issues of defining the term "mission" of the RCC used in the first article, the appointment of archbishops, bish-

<sup>19</sup> AJ, 37-23-382, "Govor Patrijarha Varnave o novoj 1937 godini u Beogradu (Opomena izdajnicima vere pravoslavne)," also in AJ, Stanislav Krakov Papers (Zbirka Stanislava Krakova), no. 102, 102-7-17.

<sup>20</sup> *Primedbe i prigovori na projekat Konkordata između naše države i Vatikana: parafranoz 25 VII 1935 god.* (Sremski Karlovci: b.i., 1936); a short version of that argumentation was given in a letter for Stojadinović written on 3 December 1936 and handed to him, as mentioned above, two days later, which recorded the decision of the Holy Synod and was signed by Patriarch Varnava. It was published in the official *Glasnik: službeni organ Srpske pravoslavne patrijaršije*, 6 (19) jula 1937, br. 15 (in AJ, 102-7-17).



ops and pastors, restraint from political activities on the part of priests, the work of the Catholic Action associations, church officials, state subsidies and return of church property, the status of military priests, marital law in the cases of religiously mixed marriages, schools and education.<sup>21</sup> The government responded with their own brochures.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, the Council of Bishops threatened to excommunicate all MPs who supported the Concordat which made Stojadinović request from his justice minister an expert analysis about the legal implications of such decisions. He was especially interested to learn how such decisions would affect the right of cabinet members to participate in the election of a new patriarch, whether they could be valid given the relevant articles of the Constitution and of the SOC constitution, and what the government could do to protect their rights and the rights of MPs.<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, Stojadinović offered an olive branch, using the mediation of Metropolitan Gavriilo and Vojislav Janić, a former priest and an MP who specialized in church affairs. He pointed out that he had replied to the Holy Synod and prepared a new article of the Concordat guaranteeing the equality of the Orthodox Church in the sense of Gavriilo's opinion, and received a letter from Vatican with a favorable interpretation of certain contentious matters.<sup>24</sup>

But the climax of the crisis was the outrage caused by the so-called "bloody litany" on 19 July 1937. Following a service in the *Saborna crkva*,

<sup>21</sup> Mihailo Ilić, *Pred konkordatom: povodom zakonskog predloga upućenog Narodnoj skupštini* (Beograd: Francusko-srpska knjižara A. M. Popovića, 1937). An important booklet was also *I opet o Konkordatu – pravoslavno gledište na ovo pitanje* (Sremski Karlovci, 1937). In the foreword of a reprint of this edition (Banja Luka, Svetosavska omladinska zajednica eparhije banjalučke, 2019) written by Platon Jović, it is said that Bishop Platon was the author of not just this, but also the previous *Prime-dbe i prigovori na projekciju konkordata između naše države i Vatikana, parafiranog 25.07.1935. god.* For an overview of the polemics, see Sima Simić, *Jugoslavija i Vatikan* (Zagreb, 1937), 125-132.

<sup>22</sup> *Tekstovi projekta Zakona o Konkordatu i odnosnih stavova iz zakonodavstva Srpske pravoslavne crkve, Konkordat pred Narodnom Skupštinom and Govori i članci o Konkordatu* published in the course of 1937 by the ruling Yugoslav Radical Union. (A), Central Press Bureau [fond Predsedništvo Ministarskog saveta – Centralni presbiro], no. 38, 38-620-798, "Govori i članci o Konkordatu," *Samouprava*, 12. oktobra 1937.)

<sup>23</sup> AJ, 37-44-294, Milan Stojadinović to Nikola Subotić, 5. jul 1937.

<sup>24</sup> AJ, 37-23-382, Milan Stojadinović to Metropolitan Gavriilo Dožić, 6 July 1937.

the oldest church in Belgrade, for the sake of Patriarch Varnava who fell sick (of which more will be said later), a procession of people led by Bishop Simeon of Šabac and a number of priests took to the street to reach a site on which Varnava initiated the building of a new temple. Since this was a violation of the ban on public gathering, the police used force to prevent the crowd from proceeding downtown and the incident ended with some people injured, including Bishop Simeon himself.<sup>25</sup> A day later, the agitated Bishop Nikolaj sent a message to Stojadinović: “As a son of this St. Sava’s diocese, I beg you to remove the evil from the order of business. Stop violence to the Orthodox Church. Know that the hand of [St.] Sava Nemanjić is heavy.”<sup>26</sup> Stojadinović replied that Nikolaj should trust him and asked him to exert conciliatory influence with his colleagues. But Nikolaj was not in a conciliatory frame of mind. In a longer letter, he noted that the Interior Minister, Anton Korošec, the leader of the clerical Slovenes and a Catholic priest himself, “did not beat Catholics in Dalmatia, who curse in the worst manner our King, and he beats Serbian bishops and priests when they pray to God for their ill Patriarch!” He claimed that the people nearly revolted, but not because of the agitation of priests, and he warned Stojadinović to save himself “from moral and political death.”<sup>27</sup> Moreover, Nikolaj dispatched letters reproaching the ministers for internal affairs, justice, education and the army, demanding that they speak against “the prince of the black international” and “the ancient enemy of Serbdom and Orthodoxy.”<sup>28</sup> He was especially inimical to Korošec not just because of the conduct of the gendarmerie on 19 July, but also because of the police repression to which the SOC and its believers were exposed to in the wake of the incident. Nikolaj admonished Korošec that he offended God with his actions and took his soul “to the edge of Hell.”<sup>29</sup>

In his reply, Stojadinović enlarged on “a major misunderstanding” caused by Nikolaj’s lack of information on the incident next to *Saborna*

<sup>25</sup> Mišović, *Srpska crkva i konkordatska kriza*, 88–96.

<sup>26</sup> AJ, 37-23-382, Bishop Nikolaj to Milan Stojadinović, 20 July 1937.

<sup>27</sup> *Sabrana dela*, knj. 13, Milan Stojadinović to Bishop Nikolaj, 20 July 1937; Bishop Nikolaj to Milan Stojadinović, 21 July 1937, 645–647.

<sup>28</sup> *Sabrana dela*, knj. 13, 647–651.

<sup>29</sup> AJ, 38-70-194, To Mr. Anton Korošec, Minister of Interior Affairs, Belgrade, August 1937, in the Žiča monastery; *Sabrana dela*, knj. 10, 594–598.

*crkva* and also on his own intentions. The Prime Minister underscored “a triple offense” of the injured Bishop Simeon and other clergymen who disregarded firstly the promise of Metropolitan Dositej, deputy of Patriarch Varnava, given to the chief of the Belgrade police to the effect that the priests would not take to the streets, secondly, the appeal of a priest to those gathered in the church to go home in peace, and thirdly, the ban on any sort of manifestations for the remainder of the month issued by the city authorities. Stojadinović also explained that the ratification of the Concordat must pass through four stages (National Assembly, Senate, the confirmation of the Regency and the final decision of the Cabinet) and “therefore you should not be nervous now, or agitate the people, or consider it the nick of time, as you write, when the National Assembly has adopted Concordat.” “What happens now? In my opinion, the Cabinet and the Holy Synod should keep in contact, talk, and the Holy Synod should not fight against the Cabinet, not have MPs threatened, leaflets spread, [church] bells rung, black flags raised, etc.”<sup>30</sup>

More importantly, Stojadinović carried out the ratification of the Concordat in the National Assembly just four days after the “bloody litany.” He was determined not to allow the SOC to appear to dictate the actions of the government. As it happened, Patriarch Varnava died on the same day, 24 July, which created a particularly bitter feeling in Serbian public opinion. Stojadinović was aware of the heavy atmosphere surrounding the whole affair and immediately declared that he would not pass on the treaty to Senate in the existing circumstances. Indeed, he had enough difficulties to secure the loyalty of his own MPs torn between party discipline, public pressure and their own convictions, as exemplified by the case of Todor Živković who toed the line only after having been assured that the Concordat would not proceed further. To assuage his anxieties, Stojadinović asked Živković to have confidence in him “not just as his political chief, but also as a good Serbian and a good Orthodox believer.”<sup>31</sup> No wonder then that the Prime Minister was relieved when the parliament vote was over and hoped that the excite-

<sup>30</sup> AJ, 37-23-382, Milan Stojadinović to Bishop Nikolaj, 22 July 1937.

<sup>31</sup> AJ, 37-57-368, Todor Živković to Milan Stojadinović, 24 July 1937; Milan Stojadinović to Todor Živković, 24 July 1937. For other examples, see Stojadinović, *Ni rat ni pakt*, 530, 533.

ment would settle down. “I have had a lot of headaches about the Concordat—without any guilt on my part!” he complained to Radenko Stanković, one of the three regents. “I have directed the matter now in such a manner as to mollify religious passions. Let us have everything come down over the summer and let God make these Orthodox bishops of ours wiser!”<sup>32</sup> Shortly after announcing that he had dropped the Concordat Stojadinović left for the littoral and his closest associates among the Cabinet members informed him about the situation in Belgrade. One of them, Đura Janković, optimistically reported that the crisis had blown over and that even in the countryside “the priests begin to sober up.” Especially important is his remark that Metropolitan Gavrilo could not meet with Stojadinović, who was close to the seat of the Montenegrin-Littoral diocese, “because it would be conspicuous” but that he would see Janković himself “to bring me all that was necessary for You before your departure for Brdo [the summer residency of Prince Paul].”<sup>33</sup> This is perhaps the most convincing documentary evidence of close cooperation between Gavrilo Dožić and the Prime Minister of which the former’s opponents within the SOC had no doubt.

### **The Death of Patriarch Varnava**

Varnava’s sickness and death at the height of the Concordat crisis immediately gave rise to multiple versions of his alleged poisoning and that controversy has continued ever since.<sup>34</sup> Historiography has contributed its share of speculations; to this day, works have been produced, especially those apologetic in tone to the SOC, that take the

<sup>32</sup> AJ, Collection of Microfilms (Zbirka mikrofilmova), no. 797, Prince Paul Karađorđević Papers (Arhiva kneza Pavla Karađorđevića), reel 12, Milan Stojadinović to Radenko Stanković, 24 July 1937.

<sup>33</sup> AJ, 37-45-297, Đura Janković to Milan Stojadinović, 31 August 1937. Equally optimistic was the education minister, Dobrivoje Stošović. See AJ, 37-43-293, Dobrivoje Stošović to Milan Stojadinović, 3 August 1937.

<sup>34</sup> Bojan Drašković, “Smrt patrijarha Varnave u publicistici i literaturi,” in *I život za pravoslavlje: Zbornik radova povodom 75-godišnjice upokojenja patrijarha Varnave*, ed. Đurić Mišina (Beograd: Hram Svetog Save, Pljevlja: Srpski kulturni centar “Patrijarh Varnava,” Podgorica: Književna zadruga Srpskog narodnog vijeća, 2012), 27–46.

criminal poisoning of the Serbian Patriarch for granted.<sup>35</sup> This is all the more surprising since there are ample indications that the poisoning story stemmed from the deliberate and malicious spreading of rumors for the purpose of discrediting the Stojadinović government. All shades of the opposition partook in that unscrupulous business, from Vojislav Janić who turned against Stojadinović, to the illegal and atheist communists. Janić went from one place to another, usually speaking from churchyards against the government and accusing it of poisoning the Patriarch.<sup>36</sup> For obvious reasons, the government paid much attention to this misinformation campaign. A report from the Central Press Bureau asserted that the communique issued by the medical concilium that had treated the late Varnava dispelled the poisoning rumors. “The opponents of the regime are trying to invalidate the report with their comments, using the absence of statements on the part of [Josef] Pelnář and [Hans] Eppinger [the Czech and Austrian doctor] and say that it is necessary to have the two of them make their statements in Prague and Vienna as testimonies of persons outside the reach of our authorities.”<sup>37</sup>

In fact, as Varnava’s biography clearly shows, the Patriarch had been ill for years and his death in the summer of 1937 was not such a

<sup>35</sup> Miloš Mišović, whose earlier book on the Concordat crisis has remained a classic work on the topic, has strayed far into conspiracy theory in which he has connected Varnava’s death with the allegedly missing, true testament of late King Alexander. On the pattern of Shakespeare’s drama, the villain of his story is Prince Paul with his ambition to usurp the throne of his young cousin, Peter II. See his *Zatamnjena istorija: tajna testamenta kralja Aleksandra i smrt patrijarha Varnave* (Beograd: Službeni list SRJ, 1994). [Vladimir Dimitrijević] *Sveti Nikolaj Ohridski i Žički, Rečnik večnoga života i životopis svetog Vladike Nikolaja*, 2 ed. (Beograd: Versko dobrotvorno starateljstvo Arhiepiskopije beogradsko-karovačke, 2012), 379 is more restrained and refers to the death “under mysterious circumstances.” Bojan Mitić, *Srpska crkva u jugoslovenskoj kraljevini: Patrijarh Varnava i njegovo doba* (Beograd: Centar za istraživanje pravoslavnog monarhizma, 2018), 84–89 is undecided. An exhaustive overview of different versions of and suspicions concerning Varnava’s death is given in Bojan Drašković, *Konkordatska kriza i smrt patrijarha Varnave* (Beograd: Glas javnosti, 2022), 163–189.

<sup>36</sup> Radmila Radić, *Vojislav Janić (1890-1944): sveštenik i političar* (Beograd: INIS, 2018), 326, f. 240, 338–340.

<sup>37</sup> AJ, 38-70-194, Report for Mr. Prime Minister, 7 August 1937, signed by [Kosta] Luković.

surprise.<sup>38</sup> Professor Pelnář, one of the doctors who treated him, gave a statement before the county court in Prague, which was translated into Serbian in the state prosecutor's office in Belgrade. This was apparently done to counter the allegations that the foreign doctors would not subscribe to the official medical findings. Pelnář described how the medical concilium arrived at the diagnosis of the patient and also referred to the poisoning rumors. "We unanimously rejected that possibility, because the symptoms and the course of the disease did not match any known criminal poisoning, but rather a banal food intoxication, which is often seen in the summer months," Pelnář explained.<sup>39</sup> In the same way, copies of the statements made before the court in Vienna by Professors Eppinger and Hoff, another two of Varnava's foreign doctors, were obtained, but these have not been preserved.<sup>40</sup> All the copies were forwarded to the three regents. The length to which the government went to receive such confirmation of the natural causes of Patriarch's passing demonstrates how the joint statement of nine Yugoslav doctors involved in the treatment published in the press in early August had done little to calm down the public.<sup>41</sup>

Nevertheless, the stories of the alleged murder of Varnava carried on. The SOC never officially condoned such rumors, but there is no denying that it benefited from them in the struggle against the authorities.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, some church dignitaries seem to have been ambiguous in their professions about the causes of the death, fostering a sense of suspicion. For example, Metropolitan Dositej said in a private conversation that the doctors, foreign and Yugoslav alike, had found "intoxication-poisoning" to have been the reason for the disaster.<sup>43</sup> Nikolaj's conduct in this respect was not beyond reproach either, al-

<sup>38</sup> Đurić Mišina, *Varnava patrijarh srpski*, 187–197.

<sup>39</sup> AJ, 37-44-294, a copy of the translated statement given by Professor Pelnář, attached to Milan Simonović to Milan Stojadinović, 28 October 1937.

<sup>40</sup> AJ, 37-44-294, Milan Simonović to Milan Stojadinović, 23 October 1937.

<sup>41</sup> "Od čega je bolovao i umro blagoupokojeni Patrijarh Varnava," *Vreme*, 6 August 1937, published in Mišović, *Zatamnjena istorija*, 119–121.

<sup>42</sup> Metropolitan Dositej later admitted that much. See Milan Mladenović, ed., *Memoari Patrijarha srpskog Gavrila* (Beograd: Sfairos, 1990), 118–120.

<sup>43</sup> AJ, Prince Paul Papers, reel 12, Vojislav Jovanović to Milan Antić ["Poštovani Gospodine Ministre"], 23 July 1938.

though he appears to have been convinced in the righteousness of his claims. Nikolaj told a large crowd in the town of Kraljevo that “medical reports were very suspicious and ambiguous,” but the church remained tranquil despite the rumors and the legal prosecution of those who spoke about the poisoning, as it believed “that the conscious will torture someone day and night and that someone will step forward and reveal how Patriarch Varnava died.”<sup>44</sup> And just a day later he placed the alleged crime in the international context: “They killed our King, he went for a visit [to France] and he was killed there. They killed our Patriarch Varnava. They think they destroyed Yugoslavia by that, but we know that all that is fleeting, no one can set the Serbian Orthodox Church against the state, just like a soul cannot be estranged from the body.”<sup>45</sup>

### In the Wake of Varnava’s Death

Following Varnava’s death the Council of Bishops held an extraordinary session. It decided to hand all MPs who voted for the Concordat to church courts in their respective dioceses; until the court ruling they were denied all “church honors” and priests were forbidden to perform rites in their home without special permission from a bishop.<sup>46</sup> This was not an outright excommunication from the church as has often been claimed in historiography. In addition, the bishops demanded “full satisfaction” from the authorities for the police repression on 19 July. According to information provided by Metropolitan of Skoplje,

<sup>44</sup> *Sabrana dela*, knj. 10, Govor Episkopa žičkog Dr Nikolaja Velimirovića u Valjevu 26. septembra 1937, 247–257.

<sup>45</sup> AJ, 38-70-194, Govor episkopa g.g. Dositeja i Nikolaja u Nišu, 28. septembra 1937.

<sup>46</sup> Episkop Sava Vuković, “Krvava litija u Beogradu 19. jula 1937. godine,” in *Izabrani bogoslovsko-istorijski radovi*, ed. Episkop Sava Vuković (Kragujevac: Kalenić, 2011), 272. According to Budimir Pavlović, a lawyer of the Church of St. Marko and the president of council of a church municipal in Belgrade, “church honors” were the active and passive voting rights that concerned an election of church boards of directors and councils. He found the decision of the Council of Bishops legally unfounded given the relevant legislation concerning the SOC and said that the president of the Belgrade church court, Nikola Josić, shared his opinion. See AJ, 37-65-386, Budimir Pavlović to Milan Stojadinović, no date.

**ДИРЉИВИ ТРЕНУЦИ У САБОРНОЈ ЦРКВИ**  
за време говора епископа г. др. Николаја

**ПРАВДА**  
27 јул 1937



ЕПИСКОП Г. ДР. НИКОЛАЈ ВЕЛИМИРОВИЋ СЛАВНО ДЕЛО БЕ-  
ЗБОРБАЉЕВОГ ПАТРИЈАРХА



ЗА ВРЕМЕ ГОВОРА ЕПИСКОПА Г. ДР. НИКОЛАЈА  
И ДЕЦА СЪ ПЛАКАЈА



Е. ДР. НИКОЛАЈ ОДЛАЗИ У ПАТРИЈАРШИНУ



МИТРОПОЛИТ Г. ДОСТЕЈ СЪ АРХИЕПИСКОПА СЛУША ГО-  
ВОР ЕПИСКОПА Г. ДР. НИКОЛАЈА



РАДИЦИ ЈУДС ИКОНУ НА ОДРУ ПАТРИЈАРШИНУ



ЗА ВРЕМЕ СЛУЖБЕЊА ЈУТРОЊИЈЕ ЗАВНОКОЛЕНЕ ЛИТУРГИЈЕ



ЦРКВА СВЕТОГА ТРОЈИЦЕ У КОЈОЈ ЋЕ ПОЧИВАТИ БЛАГОПО-  
КОЛЕН ПАТРИЈАРХ

ВЛАСНИК И УРЕДНИК ДАМЈАН М. СКОЉИЋ, БОЉА ВАШИНГТОНА 21

ИШТАМПАРНИЈА „ПРАВДА“ ВАЉЕВСКИЈЕВА 8

Photos taken during the service for the late  
Patriarch Varnava and published in the *Pravda* daily, 27 July 1937



Josif Cvijović, moderate opinion prevailed among the episcopate, although some of them advocated an intransigent attitude towards the government: “The main campaigners were Bishop Nikolaj of Ohrid, Dositej of Zagreb and Jovan of Niš. They requested to put on record that the Patriarch had been poisoned and to excommunicate from the Orthodox church the whole Cabinet and the MPs who had voted for the Concordat. Montenegrin Bishop [*sic*] Dožić and Bishop Josif of Skoplje were resolutely opposed.”<sup>47</sup> It should also be noted that the *Narodna Odbrana* (National Defence), an organization of integral Yugoslav nationalists inimical to the Stojadinović regime, was a strong radicalizing force in the crisis. Their leader Ilija Trifunović-Birčanin supported the clergy, pressured them to excommunicate Cabinet members and MPs, and blamed Josif and Gavriilo for their moderation, both being the Prime Minister’s personal friends; his bellicosity reinforced that of Nikolaj and Bishop Irinej Djordjević of Dalmatia.<sup>48</sup> Nikolaj, in particular, was close to Trifunović-Birčanin as a honorary member of *Narodna odbrana*. It was not a coincidence that the homonymous journal of that organization published Nikolaj’s and Irinej’s funeral orations.<sup>49</sup>

Contrary to Stojadinović’s hopes and despite the attempts to reach an understanding with the SOC behind the scene, there was no sign of appeasement. Refusing to back down, the Prime Minister sent a message to the bishops through an intermediary “that they have done a lot

<sup>47</sup> AJ, 37-51-315, Marko Novaković to Milan Stojadinović, Skoplje, 6 August 1937. Other reports also indicated that Metropolitan Josif took a very balanced and conciliatory attitude towards the government. See AJ, 37-15-95, Ugrin Joksimović [MP and president of the JRZ committee for the Vardar Banovina] to Milan Stojadinović, 26 July 1937; Ugrin Joksimović to Milan Stojadinović, Gostivar, 9 August 1937; AJ, 37-23-382, Metropolitan Josif to Archpriest Bogoljub Milošević, a priest from Belgrade, Skoplje, 6 November 1937.

<sup>48</sup> Paunović, *Kad su letele kamilavke*, 181-185. The members of *Narodna odbrana* maintained order at Varnava’s funeral instead of gendarmerie and Trifunović-Birčanin held a speech. See AJ, 102-7-17, “Govor g. Ilije Ž. Trifunovića kod Slavije u Beogradu 29 jula o. g.”

<sup>49</sup> *Narodna odbrana*, br. 31, 1. avgusta 1937; Nikolaj’s friend, a supporter of Stojadinović, pointed out that his membership of *Narodna odbrana* was “inconvenient.” See AJ, 37-65-386, Radovan Kazimirović to Milan Stojadinović, undated but 3 August 1938.

of stupidities so far. If they apply sanctions to Cabinet members and MPs, it is impossible for us to remain with our hands folded. This is not pacification then, but rather continuation of the struggle. Let them attribute to themselves whatever may come out of that.” He was interested to find out if the bishops intended to exclude Cabinet members from the election of a new patriarch. While the head of the Belgrade police, Milan Aćimović, wanted to continue with an investigation into Varnava’s death, Stojadinović cold-shouldered his suggestion, since he considered that the statement of Varnava’s doctors was sufficient. “If you want to investigate further, then you should know: what is the purpose of further investigation? What do you want to achieve with that? ... As various scoundrels accused the Cabinet of poisoning the Patriarch—that accusation has now fallen. We should proceed further only if those future results would suit us.”<sup>50</sup>

Metropolitan Dositej on behalf of the Holy Synod sought to come to an agreement with the Crown through the Court Minister, Milan Antić. He suggested that Aćimović might take the blame for the “bloody litany” as the SOC was determined not to bow before the government; he also demanded that the Concordat be removed from the parliamentary procedure altogether and asked Prince Paul to dismiss the Cabinet and thus be “a friend of the people.”<sup>51</sup> Antić kept the Prime Minister informed about these contacts and they agreed that it would be too much to sacrifice Aćimović (the Cabinet’s resignation was not considered). Instead Stojadinović would show his good will by inviting the Synod to present their demands to him personally. He was still concerned about the poisoning rumors and stated that some Cabinet members insisted on the exhumation of Varnava in order to put an end to them. They believed that the government would benefit even from the Synod’s refusal to allow an exhumation, but Antić was against that proposal because it would not contribute to pacification.<sup>52</sup> The propaganda campaign carried on and Stojadinović protested to each and every Bishop, being astonished because the printing house in Sremski

<sup>50</sup> AJ, 37-62-378, Milan Stojadinović to Milan Aćimović, 5 August 1937.

<sup>51</sup> AJ, Prince Paul Papers, reel 12, Milan Antić to Prince Paul(?), 19 August 1937.

<sup>52</sup> AJ, Prince Paul Papers, reel 12, Milan Antić to Prince Paul(?), 20 August 1937.

Karlovci belonging to the Patriarchy churned out anti-government leaflets, leading to the “Bolshevization of our country.”<sup>53</sup> But in time the negotiations with the SOC became more constructive. Metropolitan Dositej returned a visit to the Justice Minister, Milan Simonović, and emphasized the clergy’s wish that a special act be introduced to invalidate the Concordat.<sup>54</sup> Stojadinović also made a point of settling financial matters to the satisfaction of the church. He granted 30,000 dinars to Bishop Simeon of Šabac, who was one of the symbols of the “bloody litany,” to complete the construction of three churches in his diocese.<sup>55</sup>

Bishop Nikolaj emerged as the most bitter opponent of the government in the wake of Varnava’s death. He spoke against what he saw as lies and repression on the part of the government intent on seeing the ratification of the Concordat through, and also against the RCC.<sup>56</sup> With the passing of time his professions were increasingly radical. He condemned “the dark sons of ours” who served “as a bridge to the Roman Pope, the oldest international in Europe, the oldest fascism in Europe, the oldest dictatorship in Europe.”<sup>57</sup> Having listened to one of Nikolaj’s speeches along the same lines in the vicinity of Kragujevac during those days, a lawyer close to the SOC described it as “horrifying and soullessly destructive through the oratory of a [John] Chrysostom.”<sup>58</sup> In late October 1937, Nikolaj openly cast doubt on the statements of the most senior government officials relating to the withdrawal of the Concordat from parliamentary procedure. He assured his congregation that it would “return as a vampire” and quoted the writings of the foreign press to prove his point.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>53</sup> AJ, 37-23-382, Milan Stojadinović to Gavriilo Dožić, 29 August 1937.

<sup>54</sup> AJ, 37-44-294, Milan Simonović to Milan Stojadinović, 23 October 1937.

<sup>55</sup> AJ, 37-23-382, Bishop Simeon to Milan Stojadinović, 11 October 1937.

<sup>56</sup> AJ, 102-7-17, “Govor episkopa Nikolaja u Gornjem Milanovcu u nedelju 29 avgusta 1937 godine”; *Sabrana dela*, knj. 10, 280-286.

<sup>57</sup> AJ, 38-70-194, “Govor episkopa žičkog Dr. Nikolaja Velimirovića u Valjevu 26. septembra 1937”; *Sabrana dela*, knj. 10, 247-257; quoted in Perović, “Da li je Sveti Vladika Nikolaj bio fašista?” 410.

<sup>58</sup> AJ, 37-65-386, Budimir Pavlović to Milan Stojadinović, 22 September 1937.

<sup>59</sup> AJ, 37-58-370, “Narode, razmisli dobro, jeli Konkordat mrtav? Hoće li se po-vampiriti?”; *Sabrana dela*, knj. 10, 168-169.

With this in view, it was hardly surprising that the government was rather weary of his public appearances and subversive utterances. The agile Minister for Social Policy, Dragiša Cvetković, informed the Prime Minister that he made preparations in connection with a large church gathering scheduled for 18 November and organized by Bishops Irinej and Nikolaj. "I instructed people what to do and I hope that this meeting will not be successful in terms of attendance or their purely political tendencies." The aim was to have as many government supporters present as possible to discourage the organizers "to use this meeting for political purposes."<sup>60</sup> A report also came from southern Serbia that distinguished between the reasonable attitude of the bishops of Skoplje, Štip and Prizren, and that of Nikolaj "who struck by delirium tremens" relentlessly attacked the government, alleging that the Concordat would be passed on to the Senate as soon as the elections for the upper house had been over in March next year.<sup>61</sup> The notorious Janić also made a speech as Nikolaj allowed him to do so on the premises of the seminary in Bitolj. There was hardly a sermon or any public appearance in which Nikolaj did not remind his flock of "the terrible 1937."<sup>62</sup> From the *Saborna crkva* in Kragujevac he reiterated his mistrust of Stojadinović's assurance that the Concordat was off the table as long as "it had not been returned to Rome," but this time he also demanded that the Prime Minister ask for forgiveness from the Serbian people headed by the SOC.<sup>63</sup> At the same time he was unremitting in his communication with officials. Nikolaj flatly rejected the request from the deputy *Ban* (prefect) of Morava *Banovina* to inform the people of his diocese that the Concordat had been scrapped. He argued that such a request originating with the interior affairs minister was confidential and the cancelation of the Concordat would not become public before being published in the official gazettes of not just Yugoslavia, but also the Vatican.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>60</sup> AJ, 37-45-298, Dragiša Cvetković to Milan Stojadinović, 7 November 1937.

<sup>61</sup> AJ, 37-51-315, Marko Novaković to Milan Stojadinović, 11 November 1937.

<sup>62</sup> *Sabrana dela*, knj. 9, "Pozdrav o Vaskrsu 1938," 225-228.

<sup>63</sup> AJ, 38-70-194, Report from Kragujevac, 26 December 1937.

<sup>64</sup> *Sabrana dela*, knj. 13, "Odgovor na pismo p. Bana Moravske banovine," 8 December 1937, 652.

Such was the zeal of Nikolaj's struggle against the government that it begs the question if and to what extent he had inspired and directed the SOC resistance to the Concordat even before the death of Varnava. According to a well-informed lawyer of the Church of St. Marko and the president of the council of a church municipal in Belgrade, after Varnava's election for Patriarch his relations with Nikolaj were strained, but the former did not want to engage in a conflict and even fell under the spell of Bishop of Ohrid. The moving spirit of the anti-Concordat campaign was Nikolaj: "Everywhere is his style and his fiery word ... The late Varnava accepted the campaign with the zest and the true enthusiasm of a former *comitaji* [paramilitary fighter]."<sup>65</sup> Following the Patriarch's death Nikolaj lost no opportunity to glorify his dedication to Orthodoxy and courage to defend it. But Nikolaj was certainly not alone in his unyielding attitude among the SOC bishops. Apart from Varnava and him, the most outstanding figure in the crusade against the Concordat and the government that stood for it was Bishop Irinej of Dalmatia. The latter's Christmas message in January 1937 was an overt agitation against the Concordat and its supporters.<sup>66</sup> It was Bishop Irinej who headed the Orthodox People's Committee founded by a decision of the Holy Synod, which mostly consisted of prominent laymen. The Committee's proclamation that mentioned how Varnava had fallen ill from "a strange poison" was widely distributed.<sup>67</sup> The Committee established a network of local branches throughout the country which were often militant in their intransigence. Their call to the believers to attend Varnava's commemoration was a disconcerting reading: "If the disgusting and from the whole people despised violent regime of J.R.Z. [Yugoslav Radical Union] in its cynicism and desperate

<sup>65</sup> AJ, 37-65-386, Budimir Pavlović to Milan Stojadinović, no date.

<sup>66</sup> AJ, 102-7-17, "U Episkopskoj Rezidenciji na Roždestva Hristova u Šibeniku, 1937 god. E. Br. 788."

<sup>67</sup> AJ, 102-7-17, Leaflet "Pravoslavnim hrišćanima u Jugoslaviji," Pravoslavni narodni odbor – Patrijaršija Beograd, na dan Sv. Dimitrija (8. novembra) 1937. godine u Beogradu. Apart from Bishop Irinej, the signatories were: secretary Vasilije Kostić, a hieromonk, Grigorije Božović, Ilija Trifunović-Birčanin, Josif Mihailović, Milan Gavrilović, Milan Milojević, Milić M. Sokić, Milosav Jelić, Miloš Rašović, Mirko Došen, Nedeljko K. Savić, Colonel Pavle Karimanović, Risto Grđić, Radoje Knežević, Ranko Vujić, Savo Ljubibratić.

straining to hold on to power tried on that day to desecrate the holy grave of Martyr Varnava by the presence of Cabinet members—that should be prevented and punished.”<sup>68</sup> It is difficult to overstate how the use of such language and the general attitude of malcontents undermined the government authority.

### Exploitation on the Part of the Opposition

It is impossible to understand the commotion caused by the Concordat without appreciating the extent to which the opposition parties, regardless of their own ideological and political differences, abused the emerging crisis. Trying to harness the momentum created by the SOC’s resistance virtually all the opposition parties, the United Opposition (a coalition consisting of the faction of Radicals around the Main Committee of the party, Democrats and Agrarians), the Yugoslav National Party (JNS), the extreme right-wing ZBOR, and even communists, used the occasion to attack the regime.<sup>69</sup> The campaign was a dirty one and some of the participants were shockingly unscrupulous. On his own admission, Dragoslav Smiljanić, a medical doctor and well known leftist, falsely diagnosed Bishop Simeon’s injuries as serious ones and put up a show driving him in an open carriage, with his head unnecessarily wrapped in bondages, to Smiljanić’s own sanatorium.<sup>70</sup> After all, this was a man who told Stojadinović to his face that he had not bothered to read the Concordat and that his agitation was all about bringing down the government.<sup>71</sup> The leftists organized demonstrations in the town of Leskovac on the day the Patriarch died but police dispersed

<sup>68</sup> AJ, 102-7-17, “Pomen patrijarhu mučeniku Varnavi,” Pravoslavni akcioni odbor.

<sup>69</sup> AJ, 102-7-17, Leaflets “Čitaj, brate Srbije! Treba li primiti Konkordat?”; “Demokratsko gledište o Konkordatu”; “Dragi prijatelju,” a letter from Ljubomir Davidović, 10 August 1937; Paunović, *Kad su letele kamilavke*, 132-134; Rastko Lompar, *Učitelj ili farisej: Dimitrije Ljotić, hrišćanstvo i verske zajednice 1935-1945* (Beograd: Cate-na Mundi, 2021), 208–211. For a sample of propaganda brochures and leaflets for and against Concordat, see Archives of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts [Arhiv Srpske akademije nauka i umetnosti (ASANU)], Belgrade, no. 13.586/3 (1–31), Građa o Konkordatu.

<sup>70</sup> Dragoslav Smiljanić, *Sećanja na jednu diktaturu* (Beograd: Rad, 1960), 126–135.

<sup>71</sup> Mišović, *Srpska crkva i konkordatska kriza*, 115–116.

them. According to an official report, the peasant masses were busy with their agricultural work and indifferent, although rumors were ripe among the Orthodox population that they would have to convert to Catholicism and the authorities were suppressing that agitation.<sup>72</sup>

But the worst impact of the seditious campaign was certainly in the religiously mixed areas such as Bosnia and Herzegovina. The county committee of JRZ in Gračanica from the Vrbaš *Banovina*, complained to Stojadinović that the agitators from JNS made every effort by haranguing the Orthodox Serbs and spreading all sorts of false and incredible news to turn them against their party and the government, especially after Varnava's death. A local priest assisted them by saying that the government had poisoned the Patriarch and organizing a litany in town which was expected to become a purely political manifestation perhaps accompanied by violence against the most prominent supporters of JRZ as had happened in the Tuzla diocese.<sup>73</sup> A report from central Bosnia confirmed that JNS based its political strength there on the irresponsible stirring of religious hatred between the Orthodox and Muslim populace.<sup>74</sup> One of the JNS leaders, Velimir Popović, certainly signed a leaflet that condemned Stojadinović's "soulless and satanic struggle against St. Sava's Orthodoxy."<sup>75</sup> A senator from Tuzla, Dušan Đerić, depicted the impact of the crisis in his area as follows: "Confusion is brought among the people, all sorts of lies are launched, many leaflets distributed and it is no wonder that the people are a bit confused. It is said that all will convert to Catholicism, that celebrations of patron saints [*slava*] will not be allowed, that our churches will be closed, that priests and bishops will be expelled to Serbia, that the Drina [river] will again become a border between Serbia and some

<sup>72</sup> AJ, 37-51-315, Marko Novaković to Milan Stojadinović, Skoplje, 9 August 1937; Marko Novaković to Milan Stojadinović, 18 September 1937. The prefect of the Pocerina county also reported on the opposition and communist agitators fomenting disorder and revolt. (AJ, 37-58-370, Vojislav Vujić to Milan Stojadinović, Šabac, 22 July 1937.)

<sup>73</sup> AJ, 37-15-98, JRZ committee from the Gračanica county to Milan Stojadinović, 27 July 1937.

<sup>74</sup> AJ, 37-59-373, Copy of a report by Omer Kajmaković, 17 July 1937; also copy of a report by Andra (Omer?) Kajmaković, 28 August 1937.

<sup>75</sup> AJ, 37-59-372, "Dragi prijatelju," September 1937.

other state here, etc. You personally are not spared either, and the lies go further and relate to the Prince Regent.”<sup>76</sup> The government endeavored to counter this intense propaganda: *ban* Lukić held a series of meetings explaining the emergence of the Concordat and comparing its provisions with those of the SOC and Islamic Community constitutions—he claimed that his reasoned speeches had an excellent influence on the audience, but was dissatisfied with the wavering of the local JRZ branches.<sup>77</sup>

Such was the extent of the opposition abuse of the crisis that the SOC tried to distance itself from the anti-government agitation of political parties by means of a declaration of the Holy Synod made on 26 May 1937.<sup>78</sup> Nikolaj also refuted the charges of the SOC’s involvement in politics and fighting against the regime,<sup>79</sup> but this was not very convincing in the circumstances.

### The Election of a New Patriarch

The election of a new patriarch, important in and of itself, acquired additional urgency in light of the need to do away with tensions between the SOC and the state, which Prince Paul, Stojadinović and most bishops equally sought for. Three names were mentioned as candidates (bishops Nikolaj, Georgije Zubković and Irinej Ćirić), but the government took a dim view of them, Nikolaj most of all for obvious reasons. With a view to the election procedure in which the government had their say, the negotiations took place behind the scene between Prince Paul and a group of church dignitaries through the mediation of Aćimović and his friend Bishop Vikentije Prodanov. This is how the choice fell on Metropolitan Gavriilo who consented, came to Belgrade and undertook to establish normal relations with the authorities. To do so,

<sup>76</sup> AJ, 37-52-326, Dušan Đerić to Milan Stojadinović, 21 August 1937; also AJ, 37-24-184, Veljko Grgurević to Milan Stojadinović, Zenica, 16 August 1937.

<sup>77</sup> AJ, 37-48-310, Predrag Lukić to Milan Stojadinović, Sarajevo, 30 August 1937; Predrag Lukić to Milan Stojadinović, Niška Banja, 12 September 1937.

<sup>78</sup> Simić, *Jugoslavija i Vatikan*, 139–140.

<sup>79</sup> *Sabrana dela*, knj. 13, “Nije istina da se crkva umešala u politiku,” “Nije istina da crkva pravoslavna vodi borbu protiv jednog političkog režima,” 653–654.



he had to overcome the strong opposition of a few bishops supported by Janić who went as far as planning demonstrations in Belgrade and the election of another patriarch in Žiča in case either Dožić or Irinej Ćirić were elected.<sup>80</sup> The very mention of Žiča suggests the centrality of Nikolaj to any such schemes. Stojadinović was informed about the plan to have an extraordinary assembly of the entire priesthood together with the God-Worshippers force the Regency to confirm a patriarch elected by the people and priests rather than the Council of Bishops, dismiss the Stojadinović Cabinet and request the removal of civil servants opposed to the clergy. He considered such news fantastic, but he also heard that Nikolaj came up with a similar idea.<sup>81</sup>

Invoking the earlier official statements made by Stojadinović and Korošec to the effect that the Concordat had been abandoned, the Council of Bishops finally accepted those assurances.<sup>82</sup> After a written exchange of views between the Prime Minister and Council of Bishops regarding punishment for the responsible for oppression and giving satisfaction to the victims of the Concordat struggle, the Royal decree of 8 February 1938 granted amnesty to the prosecuted. A day later the Council instructed their members to lift the sanctions imposed on the Cabinet members and MPs.<sup>83</sup> This was the background against which Gavriilo Dožić was elected Patriarch on 21 February 1938. He and other bishops who supported him considered the Concordat crisis over as the SOC achieved what it had been after. They declined tendencies to read another meaning into the struggle, which was a clear break from the opposition's attempts to exploit the events to their own benefit. They also insisted that the SOC bishops were united in their attitude. How-

<sup>80</sup> Radić, *Patrijarh Gavriilo*, 313–314. According to a credible source, Gavriilo and Nikolaj could not stand each other. See Paunović, *Kad su letele kamilavke*, 160.

<sup>81</sup> AJ, 37-51-317, Petar Ivanišević to Milan Stojadinović, Cetinje, 2 January 1938; Milan Stojadinović to Petar Ivanišević, 6 December [January?] 1938.

<sup>82</sup> AJ, 38-620-798, "Deklaracija Svetog arhijerejskog sabora Srpske pravoslavne crkve o projektu Konkordata," *Politika*, 9. februara 1938; "Deklaracija," *Glasnik: službeni organ Srpske pravoslavne patrijaršije*, br. 3, 26 januara (8 februara) 1938.

<sup>83</sup> AJ, 38-620-798, "Sveti Arhijerejski sabor skinuo sankcije prema ministrima narodnim poslanicima i drugim licima u vezi sa pitanjem Konkordata," *Vreme*, 11. februar 1938; "Zvanično saopštenje Svetog arhijerejskog sabora," *Glasnik: službeni organ Srpske pravoslavne patrijaršije*, br. 4–5, 2 (15) februara 1938.

ever, it was conspicuous that Nikolaj was absent from the session of Council of Bishops which started the election process and also from the 60-man-strong Election Council (Bishop Irinej of Dalmatia and three others were also not present).<sup>84</sup> He and Bishop Irinej left Belgrade in anger, pointing to further dissension among the episcopate.<sup>85</sup> This was all the more striking as Nikolaj was one of the six candidates that the Candidate Committee of the Election Council put forward. The new Patriarch Gavriilo later claimed that Nikolaj did not want to meet with the members of the government which had intended to ratify the Concordat.<sup>86</sup> A fervent supporter of Nikolaj has recorded what was the essence of division that emerged among the episcopate of the SOC from the perspective of Bishop of Žiča and his followers: "At the Council during which the new patriarch was elected and, a bit earlier, Bishop Nikolaj suffered a nervous breakdown, all the main champions against the Concordat were put on the dock. It looked as if Korošec spoke through the voice of the then Metropolitan Gavriilo and the present-day Metropolitan Josif. They proclaimed the struggle against the Concordat bolshevist, anti-state, and that the church was heading to financial breakdown without a householder. In fact, they were after one thing, to put the question of electing a new patriarch on the agenda as soon as possible, so that they could run for it and to have one of them elected patriarch with the secured support of the Concordat government."<sup>87</sup> Nikolaj requested from the bishops that they demand an unconditional resignation of the Stojadinović Cabinet for having pushed the Concordat through parliament and to restore normal relations with the state only after the formation of a new Cabinet. Out of protest that his position was not accepted he resigned from Council of Bishops and abstained from participating in the three following sessions.<sup>88</sup>

<sup>84</sup> *Glasnik: službeni organ Srpske pravoslavne patrijaršije*, br. 7, 28 februara (13 marta) 1938.

<sup>85</sup> Jovanović Stoimirović, *Dnevnik*, 170–171.

<sup>86</sup> *Memoari patrijarha srpskog Gavriila*, 133–138.

<sup>87</sup> Arhimandrit Jovan Radosavljević, ed., *Pisma oca Jovana Rapajića* (Novi Sad: Beseda, 2016), 323–324.

<sup>88</sup> Ljubomir Ranković, *Sveti Vladika Nikolaj: život i delo* (Šabac: Glas crkve, 2013), 122.

## Nikolaj and the Church Opposition after the Election of Patriarch Gavrilo

Despite the formal reconciliation between the SOC and the government, Nikolaj remained unyielding to the latter. For example, he refused to greet and bless the officials who visited Čačak and forbade priests in his diocese by word of mouth to perform any religious rite for an MP who had voted for the Concordat unless he repented in writing.<sup>89</sup> It was characteristic for the continued simmering conflict between Nikolaj's followers and the government that the latter kept a watchful eye on possible manifestations of opposition in the church. Given certain preparations for the commemoration of the "bloody litany," Aćimović asked for the assistance of the Holy Synod which warned the Belgrade priests about the consequences. In Kragujevac, such commemoration for the victims of the last year's struggle took place and did not draw much attention. Aćimović took precautionary measures in Belgrade but he decided not to intervene in order to avoid any incident—it is clear that further complications were still feared. He also had a conversation with the representatives of *Narodna odbrana*, the most reliable allies of the SOC. "From those quarters I received a promise that Narodna odbrana would have no connection with daily politics and political parties," he reported to Stojadinović.<sup>90</sup>

Nikolaj's voice was heard before the parliamentary elections of 11 December 1938. Condemning demagogy, dishonest methods and corruption surrounding the election process, he recommended to priests how to cast their votes: "With the exception of non-believers and known enemies of St. Sava's Orthodox Church, priests could assist to the best of their knowledge people from any patriotic national group who fear God, love their people and respect what is sacred to the people."<sup>91</sup> Although he formally remained restrained, respecting the right of priests to vote according to their own lights, his subtle message could only be understood, in view of the last year's events, as an anti-government stance. But there was no need to guess. A local JRZ organization from

<sup>89</sup> Radić, *Patrijarh Gavrilo*, 324, f. 587.

<sup>90</sup> AJ, 37-62-378, Milan Aćimović to Milan Stojadinović, 20 June 1938.

<sup>91</sup> AJ, 37-23-382, "Poslanica prečasnom sveštenstvu eparhije žičke, u manastiru Žiči," November 1938.

the Trstenik county admonished Stojadinović that not just there, but rather “in the whole Žiža diocese to which Nikolaj sets the tone the United Opposition is agitating against us with the strongest argument being that You will introduce the Concordat in the new parliament.” Demanding the most energetic countering of such rumors, Stojadinović replied that would not be “the only lie that the opposition will use against us and the JRZ in the forthcoming election struggle.”<sup>92</sup> Nikolaj supported his old friend Janić, a candidate of the United opposition in his own electoral constituency, but the latter lost nevertheless.<sup>93</sup> This was perhaps a reflection of Janić’s increasingly low reputation after having changed his attitude and policies too many times, which even Nikolaj could not save.

Although the case of Janić does not suggest so, it is important to note that the intransigent faction of the SOC did exert some detrimental influence (the extent of which is impossible to measure) on the result of the JRZ at the elections, which has not been appreciated in historiography. The abuse of the Concordat as a means of election campaigning was most effective among Orthodox Serbs in Bosnia.<sup>94</sup> Commenting on the results in the Vrbas *banovina*, Bogoljub Kujundžić, minister for forests and mines, pointed out that certain Orthodox candidates failed because a considerable number of Muslims voted for the opposition and “the entire priesthood headed by Dr. Irinej Djordjević and a large number of teachers have worked against us.”<sup>95</sup> The Concordat crisis was also revived by Stojadinović’s opponents in the memory of Orthodox priests in northern Dalmatia, part of Bishop Irinej’s diocese,

<sup>92</sup> AJ, 37-14-90, President, vice-president and secretary of the local JRZ committee from the Milutinovac municipality, Ljub. Đulaković, a priest; J. V. Pavlović, a teacher; and Sv. Ž. Stojanović, respectively, to Milan Stojadinović, 9 November 1938; Milan Stojadinović to the local JRZ committee from the Milutinovac municipality, 22 November 1938.

<sup>93</sup> Radić, *Vojislav Janić*, 361–362.

<sup>94</sup> AJ, 37-15-98, Resolution adopted by the JRZ assembly in Bosanska Krupa, 19 September 1937, attached to Milan Petrović to Milan Stojadinović, 22 September 1937.

<sup>95</sup> AJ, 37-45-297, Bogoljub Kujundžić to Milan Stojadinović, 14 December 1937. For similar claims, see AJ, 37-15-98, Milan Petrović to Milan Stojadinović, 16 December 1938, with the attached report (“Izveštaj o teroru i radu Udružene opozicije povodom decembarskih izbora,” 15 December 1938).

with a view to influencing voters through them.<sup>96</sup> Conversely, the election campaign in Dalmatia on the side of the Catholic Croats was conducted as an expression of national movement, and thus had a distinct anti-Serb tone, facing local Serbs with the necessity to close their own ranks. For that purpose, a series of priests conferences were held in Benkovac, Šibenik, Knin, Sinj and Bosansko Grahovo on 24-26 October 1938 which defined the terms for establishing correct relations with the government and JRZ, or for open support for Stojadinović, depending on the extent of their fulfilment. Six delegates even visited Patriarch Gavriilo and Stojadinović, and came to an agreement to end hostility to the government, but the priests fell short of siding with the JRZ. This was put in writing and distributed to all the priests from the diocese who were duty bound to announce it to their flock.<sup>97</sup> An agreement could have hardly been more favorable to the government in a diocese in which Bishop Irinej was in charge.

Nikolaj's intransigence equally extended to Patriarch Gavriilo and the bishops supporting him, whom he seemed to have perceived as having made a dishonorable deal with the regime. There were genuine concerns in the church that the rift between its dignitaries might have severe consequences. A prominent theologian feared an outright split in the SOC because "we have two so outstanding personalities in a church dispute: the head and the genius."<sup>98</sup> There were also less subtle partisan polemics. Reacting to an article from a provincial newspaper which targeted Nikolaj for disorder and turmoil in the church—pointedly reprinted in the official gazette of the SOC, implying official endorsement—his young and devoted disciple, Archimandrite Justin Po-

<sup>96</sup> AJ, 37-24-187, Pravoslavni sveštenik [an Orthodox priest], "Vama kao pravoslavnom svešteniku na razmišljanje," Na dan sabora arhanđela Mihaila, 8 November 1938.

<sup>97</sup> AJ, 37-24-187, "Saopštenje svemu sveštenstvu eparhije dalmatinske," Beograd, 4 November 1938, signatories: archpriest Stevan Prostran, abbot Naum Miljković, priest Novak Delić, archpriest Pavle Zelić, abbot Nikodim Opačić, priest Momčilo Đujić; extract from the minutes of the priests' conferences held in Benkovac, Knin and Bosansko Grahovo.

<sup>98</sup> Dimitrije Najdanović, "Raskol ili saborno jedinstvo," *Hrišćanska misao*, br. 11-12 (novembar-decembar 1939).

pović, praised him as “the greatest saint and the greatest educator of the Serbian stock since the days of Saint Sava.”<sup>99</sup> No doubt Nikolaj had many supporters. Many of them wanted to restore the Association of Priests canceled in 1933 and articulated their views in the *Pastirski glas* (Voice of the Shepherd), regretting that “the main captain of the Concordat struggle is in Holy Žiča almost as a prisoner.” Having formed the association of alumni theologians as a replacement for the disbanded priest association, they sent greeting telegrams to Patriarch Gavriilo and Nikolaj. They appealed to the former to spare no effort to “establish church unity urgently” and hailed the latter as “the worthiest heir to the Saint Sava throne.” The newly formed association adopted a resolution which, *inter alia*, demanded an end to “the ugly, stupid, mean and undignified attacks on His Eminence Bishop of Žiča, Mr. Nikolaj.”<sup>100</sup>

A number of attempts were made to arrange for reconciliation between Patriarch Gavriilo and Nikolaj.<sup>101</sup> They finally met and made peace with each other in the Kalenić monastery on 27 August 1940 as both domestic affairs and the international situation urged stabilization in the ranks of the SOC. One of the participants of their meeting recorded that the church dignitaries “after the most open and honest conversations restored peace, brotherly concord and cooperation in our terrible times, guided by the spirit of Christ’s love and highly aware of their responsibility after three years of pain and suffering, rift and discord.” Bishops Irinej Djordjević and Nektarije Krulj of Zvornik and Tuzla and Archimandrite Nikon, the abbot of Kalenić, signed the agreement to-

<sup>99</sup> Arhimandrit Justin [Popović], “Apokalipsis Glasnika Srpske pravoslavne patrijaršije,” *Pastirski glas: list za versko-moralnu obnovu Šumadije*, br. 2, 20 mart 1939 god. Justin’s article is published in an abridged form in: Episkop Atanasije Jevtić, ed., *Sveti vladika ohridski i žički Nikolaj: 1. tekstovi i svedočenja 2. simposion* (Žiča – Kraljevo: Episkopska Eparhija žička i Sveti Manastir Žiča, 2003), 174–176. The article “Pravoslavna crkva pred problemima” published by Slobodna misao from Nikšić which criticized Nikolaj’s attitude towards Patriarch and to which Justin reacted is given in an abridged form in Milan D. Janković, *Episkop Nikolaj: život, misao i delo* (Beograd: Eparhija šabačko-valjevska, 2002), knj. 2, 690–691.

<sup>100</sup> “Braći sveštenicima,” “Izveštaj sa skupštine,” “Rezolucija,” “Prokaženi,” *Pastirski glas*, br. 23, 15 mart 1940 god.

<sup>101</sup> Paunović, *Kad su letele kamilavke*, 212–216, 219, 221, 228–231.

gether with Gavriilo and Nikolaj.<sup>102</sup> While Nektarije and Nikon played the role of mediators, Bishop Irinej was, just like Nikolaj, a party to the conflict. Commenting on the meeting and the agreement, the newspaper of Serbs from Dubrovnik stressed that Nikolaj and Irinej, “the two hardened and firm characters, two brilliant pioneers of a true Christian democratic idealism” had received “satisfaction for the people’s offended soul.”<sup>103</sup> To mark the restored unity of the SOC Patriarch and Nikolaj together went to Sarajevo in October 1940.

In reality, both of them were rather skeptical about their reconciliation.<sup>104</sup> After returning from Bosnia Gavriilo granted an audience to Korošec in the Patriarchy which incensed Nikolaj—he said he could never forgive the Patriarch for doing that.<sup>105</sup> But this time their estrangement was kept away from the public eye. Nikolaj made a point of attending an extraordinary session of the Council of Bishops held from 25 November to 11 December 1940 after three years of absence.<sup>106</sup> Tensions between Gavriilo and Nikolaj were in evidence in connection with the possible new confrontation with the government now headed by Dragiša Cvetković who replaced Stojadinović as Prime Minister in February 1939. The SOC had serious misgivings about the position of Serbs in Yugoslavia following the agreement between Cvetković and Maček in August 1939 which resulted in the formation of *Banovina Hrvatska* and the confederalization of the country. The statement of the Council of Bishops disclosing anxieties about the treatment of Serbs in *Banovina Hrvatska* was leaked in the press despite the assurances given to Mihailo Konstantinović and Lazar Marković, ministers in the

<sup>102</sup> “Sastanak u manastiru Kaleniću,” *Žički blagovesnik*, br. 8, avgust 1940; also “Susret Njegove Svetosti Patrijarha Gospodina Gavrila i Episkopa Žičkog Gospodina Nikolaja Velimirovića u manastiru Kaleniću,” *Pastirski glas*, br. 33–34, 6 septembar 1940 god; “Hronika,” *Novi istočnik: službeni list pravoslavne eparhije dabrobo-sanske*, br. 9–10, septembar-oktobar 1940; Episkop Sava Vuković, “Izmirenje Patrijarha Gavrila Dožića sa episkopima Nikolajem Velimirovićem i Irinejem Đorđevićem,” in *Izabrani bogoslovsko-istorijski radovi*, ed. Episkop Sava Vuković, 558–559.

<sup>103</sup> “Značaj susreta srpskih arhijereja u Kaleniću,” *Dubrovnik*, reprinted in *Žički blagovesnik*, br. 9, septembar 1940.

<sup>104</sup> Radić, *Patrijarh Gavriilo*, 341.

<sup>105</sup> Konstantinović, *Politika sporazuma. Dnevničke beleške*, 199.

<sup>106</sup> “Beleške,” *Braničevski vesnik*, novembar-decembar 1940.



Patriarch Gavriilo and Bishop Nikolaj on the train to Sarajevo, Courtesy of the National Library of Serbia, Photo Documents Fund, F 606, [Sarajevo: b. i., 1940]



Visit of the Crown Prince Peter II Karadorđević to Žiča Monastery, Courtesy of the National Library of Serbia, Photo Documents Fund, F 1227/1, [B. m.: b. i., 1940]



Cvetković Cabinet. Gavrilko was again lenient to the government and entirely laid blame on Nikolaj for spearheading dissatisfaction among the clergy.<sup>107</sup>

### The Coup d'état of 27 March 1941

With the Second World War approaching there was no doubt where the strong-willed and opinionated Nikolaj stood in relation to the aggressive ideology and foreign policy of the Axis Powers. He was particularly blunt in a speech delivered in Čačak ten days after Italy's annexation of Albania: "He turns to the arming of our neighbors and especially attacks Germany and Italy which arm themselves with cannons and machine guns and want to kill millions of innocent people. The speaker says these words with special vehemence which, to a large extent, meets with the approval of those present."<sup>108</sup> He did not restrain from interposing criticism of the Stojadinović government's foreign policy in his sermons. "We rely more on many new false earthly allies than on the tried allies and friends of ours," he alluded to close relations established with the Axis Powers.<sup>109</sup> Nikolaj was not intimidated by Hitler's successes in the imperial aggrandizement of Germany in the late 1930s. He reminded the readers of his diocese's journal of Napoleon's, Prussian and Austrian experience; although he predicted that the Third Reich would cause a world war, he maintained that those earlier historical experiences showed what the ultimate fate of the Third Reich would be.<sup>110</sup> In private conversations, such as that with Mihailo Konstantinović, Nikolaj vented his hostility to the "Viennese painter" and "imperator" Hitler.<sup>111</sup> In light of his attitude and that of Patriarch Gavrilko, equally opposed to the fascist powers, it is not surprising that both of them kept in touch with General Dušan Simović, the air force

<sup>107</sup> Radić, *Patrijarh Gavrilko*, 343–344.

<sup>108</sup> AJ, 38-70-194, Telephone report by Mr. Ostojić from Čačak, 17 April 1938.

<sup>109</sup> "Velika propoved Ep. g. Nikolaja u Vrnjačkoj Banji," *Pastirski glas*, br. 28, 15 avgusta 1938 god; *Sabrana dela*, knj. 9, 672–677.

<sup>110</sup> Milan Koljanin, "Srpska pravoslavna crkva i jevrejsko pitanje," *Istorija 20. veka*, 1 (2010): 33.

<sup>111</sup> Konstantinović, *Politika sporazuma. Dnevničke beleške*, 198–200.

commander, who would carry out the 27 March 1941 putsch, dethrone Prince Paul and form the new government.<sup>112</sup>

With increasing prospects of Yugoslavia's adherence to the Tripartite Pact (Germany, Italy and Japan), Gavrilo consulted the bishops and all of them, especially Nikolaj and Irinej, the most anglophile ones, were adamantly against it. A memorandum in that sense was prepared and handed to Prince Paul. Milan Antić has observed that the rivalry between Gavrilo and Nikolaj played a part in shaping the attitude of the SOC in this fateful matter. According to Antić, Gavrilo was so antagonistic to Nikolaj that his opposition to the regime was motivated by his anxiety not to have the Bishop of Žiča overshadow him.<sup>113</sup> Be that as it may, Gavrilo spoke against the signature of the pact in his audiences with Prince Paul on 20 and 23 March 1941 and in a conversation with Radenko Stanković.<sup>114</sup> When the Crown Council had made a decision to accept the pact, the Holy Synod gathered for a meeting on 23 March and addressed a letter to Prince Paul appealing to him not to do so; once it had become clear that the government would proceed with the pact, the Synod called an extraordinary meeting of the Council of Bishops for 27 March.<sup>115</sup> As the coup d'état was carried out on that day, it begs the question whether the SOC was familiar with and supported the plans of the putschist officers. There are indications that was the case. The Patriarch shunned Cvetković's request for a meeting to show him the text of the pact (with its unprecedented concessions made to Yugoslavia), went to Sremski Karlovci instead and returned to Belgrade just before the coup. Besides, when the bitterness among the Serbian population erupted on 26 March, a day after Cvetković had attached his signature to the Tripartite Pact in Vienna, there was much talk

<sup>112</sup> Branko Petranović and Nikola Žutić, *27. mart 1941.: tematska zbirka dokumentata* (Beograd: NICOM, 1990), "Objašnjenje generala Simovića o ulozi vodećih ličnosti u državnom udaru od 27. marta 1941.," 351–353; *Memoari patrijarha srpskog Gavrila*, 226–234.

<sup>113</sup> Radić, *Patrijarh Gavrilo*, 345–346.

<sup>114</sup> Ljubomir Durković-Jakšić, *Učešće Patrijarha Gavrila i Srpske pravoslavne crkve u događajima ispred i za vreme 27. marta 1941. i njihovo stradanje u toku rata – povodom 30-godišnjice od smrti Patrijarha Gavrila* (Beograd: Sveti Arhijerejski Sinod Srpske pravoslavne crkve, 1980), 13–15.

<sup>115</sup> Radić, *Patrijarh Gavrilo*, 347–348.

about Gavrilov's and Nikolaj's organizing a march on Belgrade.<sup>116</sup> Nikolaj spoke twice to the demonstrators gathered in front of his seat in Kraljevo immediately after the news had broken out. He was haranguing the people, stressing that 16 million Yugoslavs did not accept what 16 individuals had accepted and asking those present if they authorized him to let the government know about their mood.<sup>117</sup> It is also said that on that occasion he referred to Hitler as "the biblical Antichrist."<sup>118</sup>

The SOC episcopate acted fully aware of the inevitable consequences that a coup d'état would have as it was bound to be interpreted as a rejection, *de facto* if not formal, of the just concluded treaty with the Axis. During their assembly the Patriarch explained their attitude as follows: "We considered that what the government did was wrong and that it offends the honor, glory and tradition of our people and that at the moment when the people were willing to go to the end. Let God be praised... Our position is [now] much easier. Last night one of the Royal regents [Stanković] told me that we would be guilty if the people rose and revolt started, and that the consequence would be the entry of Germans into our country. The last night act saved the honor of our people and the state, and therefore we can only bless this undertaking."<sup>119</sup> During a session two days later Nikolaj took initiative to discuss and decide on some concrete and practical matters: "1) about relations with Russia, 2) about concord among the people, 3) about the religious-moral education of the army, 4) about the question of war, the question of violence in case of war, as well as demobilization of the priesthood, and he explains each point and gives suggestions for realizing them."<sup>120</sup> In the following discussion Nikolaj's suggestions were accepted in principle, but it was left to the Patriarch and the Synod to see them through.

<sup>116</sup> Petranović and Žutić, 27. mart 1941., "Izveštaj dr Isaka Alkalaja, vrhovnog rabina jevrejske zajednice u Jugoslaviji – Naši doživljaji i utisci o poslednjim događajima u Jugoslaviji," 418–420.

<sup>117</sup> Petranović and Žutić, 27. mart 1941., "Komanda žandarmerije – ministru vojske i mornarice, (Đeneralštabno odeljenje)," 25. mart 1941, 259.

<sup>118</sup> Ranković, *Sveti Vladika Nikolaj: život i delo*, 122.

<sup>119</sup> Petranović and Žutić, 27. mart 1941., "Zapisnik I sednice vanrednog zasedanja Svetog arhijerejskog sabora, održanog 14/27. marta 1941. godine," 407–410; Durković-Jakšić, *Učešće Patrijarha Gavriila i Srpske pravoslavne crkve*, 18.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid*; Durković-Jakšić, *Učešće Patrijarha Gavriila i Srpske pravoslavne crkve*, 19.

The most striking feature of the SOC's role in the coup remains the unwavering pursuance of the utterly irrational policy from a realpolitik point of view. After all, the coup led to the Axis's aggression against Yugoslavia and the destruction of the country only three weeks later. Central to any assessment of such irrationality is the influence of the concept of *Svetosavlje* (Saint Sava's), an Orthodoxy of Serbian style and experience as Nikolaj defined and promoted it in the pre-war years. Although a detailed discussion is outside the scope of this paper, it is necessary to appreciate that for Nikolaj it meant the guiding principle on which the entire national life of the Serbian people is based for which he believed Serbian history, as he saw it, provided evidence. He succinctly explained the essence of *Svetosavlje* as Orthodoxy practiced in a national state: "It is an application of Evangelic principles on the entire life of a people. National church, national state, national education, national army and national culture." Treading in the footsteps of St. Sava could be challenging, but it was the only righteous path, and no sacrifice was too great to remain true to it. "And even if suffering and sacrificing come along, are we going to be scared? Are we going to waver? Are we going to be worse than our fathers who went into torment with joy and song for Christ's faith? The greatness of a man or a people is measured by the extent of torment and suffering for the sake of God's truth and justice. It is better to die gloriously than to live in shame."<sup>121</sup> A perfect historical illustration for this was the glorious death of Prince Lazar and his knights in the battle of Kosovo against the Turks in 1389, eternalized as choosing the Kingdom of Heaven over the earthly one. The Kosovo tragedy as a source of spiritual strength and vitality of the Serbian people because of which it survived the age of slavery and restored its freedom in the recent past was a classic theme of Nikolaj's writings, sermons and speeches.<sup>122</sup> For Nikolaj, Lazar's embrace of the

<sup>121</sup> AJ, 102-7-17, "Četrdesetnica od smrti Patrijarha Varnave. Poslanica episkopa Nikolaja Pravoslavnom kliru i narodu Eparhije Žičke," in the Žiča monastery, August 1937; *Sabrana dela*, knj. 9, 488-491. For Nikolaj's interpretation of Serbian history, see *Sabrana dela*, knj. 13, "Uputstvo sveštenicima i sveštenomonasima Žičke eparhije /odnosno verskog tumačenja srpske istorije, naročito s pogledom na najnoviji preokret u sudbini narodnoj/," 162-164.

<sup>122</sup> Ep. Atanasije Jevtić, "Kosovska misao i opredeljenje episkopa Nikolaja" in *Srpski zavet na razmeđi svetova*, ed. Protojerej R. Nikčević (Cetinje: Svetigora, 2001), 13-24.

Kingdom of Heaven “became the program of history and life of the Serbian people.”<sup>123</sup> Nikolaj’s disciples and admirers reflected his thought. According to Justin, the spirit of St. Sava was a distinction of the Serbian national soul and fidelity to that spirit tolerated no compromise. “We Serbs know: the golden freedom must be redeemed with the honorable cross,” he posited and found that “suffering and sacrifice for Christ’s heavenly justice is something specifically ours, Serbian.” From such premises his conclusion was but logical: “It is St. Sava-like, Lazar-like, Serbian: not to fear a new Kosovo. It is scarier . . . to fall into slavery without a new Kosovo, without a new nationwide sacrifice for heavenly justice, for the honorable cross and the golden freedom.”<sup>124</sup>

Yet, for all the narrative of the Serbian patriarch and bishops underpinned by the emotional charge connected with the votive thought of the Kosovo legacy and traditions stemming from it, it should be noted that such a stance was different from the earlier, more diplomatic approach of the leaders of the Serbian church. As a recent study has demonstrated, it was the church dignitaries who tried to protect to the best of their abilities, and with considerable appreciation for geopolitical realities, the earthly interests of their flock during the difficult times when the Serbian people were stateless and divided between the Ottoman and Habsburg Empires.<sup>125</sup> Why their successors in the middle of twentieth century were completely devoid of the sense of responsibility for the physical survival of the country and much of its population remains a question without a satisfactory answer. In that context, the role of Bishop Nikolaj is essential and paradigmatic for the conduct of the SOC during two exceptionally important events under the Regency regime. With poor assessment of the political circumstances, he was perhaps the ringleader of the anti-Concordat campaign that turned into a struggle against the government, which was as bitter as detrimental for both sides. The clash ended in a Pyrrhic victory for the SOC which came out of it divided and weakened, whereas the government

<sup>123</sup> *Sabrana dela*, knj. 10, “Poslanica episkopa Nikolaja narodu u Priboju,” 628–629.

<sup>124</sup> D-r Justin Popović, “Duhovno jedinstvo Srba,” *Žički blagovesnik*, br. 11, novembar 1940.

<sup>125</sup> Miloš Ković, *Velike sile i Srbi (1496-1833)* (Beograd: Catena Mundi, 2021).

authority suffered a devastating blow.<sup>126</sup> The latter was permanently damaged among the considerable section of the Serbian population which prepared the ground, to a large extent, for the coup d'état of 27 March 1941. It was not just the standing of the government, be it that of Stojadinović or Cvetković, that was undermined, but also the prestige of Prince Paul even without any particular reason or blame on his part.<sup>127</sup> Nikolaj also led the way in stirring public outrage because of Yugoslavia's adherence to the Tripartite Pact, but this time, unlike at the time of the Concordat crisis, he aligned the entire SOC in a decided opposition to government policy. This contributed to the unspeakable disaster that befell both the country and the Serbian church.

<sup>126</sup> For examples of the scandalous language used against the Stojadinović Cabinet, see AJ, 102-7-17 and ASANU, no. 13,586/3 (1-31), Građa o Konkordatu, "Hrabri vojvoda Ilija Trifunović-Birčanin neustrašivi ratnik, predsednik Narodne odbrane uhapšen je i bačen u mračne tomruke beogradske policije"; also see seditious leaflets in AJ, 102-7-17, "Brate Srbine," signed by Srpski pravoslavni akcioni odbor u Beogradu.

<sup>127</sup> See, for example, a song alluding to Prince Paul's alleged intention to take the crown from Peter II (AJ, 37-58-370) or equally unscrupulous slander that he backed the Concordat in order to have the Rome government place at his disposal a large estate in Italy that he inherited from his late aunt, Princess Demidov (AJ, 38-620-798, "Zašto princ Pavle hoće konkordat!," *Slobodna misao*, 26. avgust 1937).

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## “Nationalism”, “Fascism” and “Anti-Semitism” of Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović\*

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More than a five years ago I received an email from a young German convert to Orthodox Christianity asking me to help him with revising the entry on Nikolaj Velimirović on the German version of Wikipedia. He was distressed because the saint was depicted as a nationalist or the co-founder of political ideology of Serbian ‘Saint-Savian nationalism,’ a fascist or the inspirer of the Serbian fascist movement Zbor, which collaborated with Nazi Germany during the Second World War and as an anti-Semite.<sup>1</sup> According to the opinion of the young convert some facts about Nikolaj’s life were very deliberately suppressed in the entry. Since the Wikipedia entries cannot be changed he proposed to supplement the existing entry with new information that would stress the facts that: a) Nikolaj was one of the first victims of Nazi Germany, being imprisoned first in Serbia and then in Dachau almost the whole duration of the Second World War; b) he was a very severe critic of Serbian nationalism for turning Christianity into a tribal religion, and c) he saved the lives of some Jews, by hiding them from Nazis at the beginning of WWII. The German convert hoped that this new information would, if not challenge, then soften, the constructed image of Nikolaj. Since the sentences depicting Nikolaj in negative terms were according to the German convert ‘cleverly’ put together, he asked for my help. Finally, he stated that his action was inspired by the sayings

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<sup>1</sup> Wikipedia entry on Nikolaj Velimirović: [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nikolaj\\_Velimirovi%C4%87](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nikolaj_Velimirovi%C4%87).

of Church Fathers that one should not lie about the saints, as well as his opinion that hardly any other people in Germany are so defamed as the Serbian people, and that both issues should be corrected.

Far from being an expert on Nikolaj Velimirović, I thoroughly examined the scholarly sources on which the entry was based. The most quoted sources were scholarly authorities in the field, such as the German Roman-Catholic theologian Fr Rudolf Chrysostomus Grill, who obtained his doctoral dissertation on Nikolaj Velimirović from the Pontifical Oriental Institute in Rome in the mid 1990s, as well as two German historians of Southeastern Europe, late Professor Holm Sundhaussen from Frei Universität Berlin and his former doctoral student, now professor at the University of Regensburg, Klaus Buchenau. Thus, although the Wikipedia entry might be considered as biased towards Nikolaj Velimirović, it was substantiated with scholarly material produced by leading experts in the field. From the viewpoint of an Orthodox Christian and a Serb or a German Serbophile, it matters whether his or her Church has canonized a person who is a nationalist, fascist and anti-Semite, because it sends a message about the values this Church and people stand for. Since nationalism, fascism and anti-Semitism are based on love for one nation at the expense of other nations, as well as the hate of other nations, particularly Jews, they are not compatible with the notion of holiness, characterized by perfect goodness and righteousness. By accusations concerning nationalism, fascism and anti-Semitism the holiness of Nikolaj Velimirović was directly challenged and therefore many people concerned with such a depiction of Nikolaj attempted to free him from these charges. However, such scholarly attempts, being informed by personal feelings and opinions and not as proper scholarly investigations by research and reasoning, are usually deemed as an apology or advocacy of Nikolaj.

The aim of this paper is to analyze existing views on Nikolaj as an ardent nationalist, fascist and anti-Semite and to offer different interpretations of Nikolaj's attitudes about these issues. This endeavor is motivated not by an intention to clear Nikolaj Velimirović as a saint of the Orthodox Church of all charges, but rather by a conviction that many of the charges against Nikolaj are products of later controversies connected to his work. Doubt in scholarly objectivity of some authors

arises from the fact that assessments of the works of Nikolaj Velimirović written before the Yugoslav wars of the 1990's, or in the first years of these wars, does not mention his nationalism, fascism and anti-Semitism. Thus, Thomas Bremer's *Ekklesiale Struktur und Ekklesiologie in der Serbischen Orthodoxen Kirche im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* defended as a PhD thesis in 1990 at the University of Muenster and published as a book in 1992 mentions that Velimirović's ecclesiology is very closely connected with the national idea, as an indispensable and necessary element,<sup>2</sup> but it does not go so far as to identify the elements of nationalism, fascism and anti-Semitism in his theology. Similarly, Rudolf Chrysostomus Grill's doctoral thesis *Serbischer Messianismus und Europa bei Bischof Velimirovic (†1956)*, defended at the Pontifical Oriental Institute in Rome and published in 1998, draws a parallel between Russian messianism and Serbian messianism proclaimed by Nikolaj, points to the similarities in their views on Europe, but still acknowledges Nikolaj's vision of the Holy Church in Holy Europe.<sup>3</sup> However, already in the foreword of Rudolf Grulich to this book it is emphasized that Nikolaj's ideas are part of the background of Serbian president 'Slobodan Milošević's aggression against Croatia in 1991 and Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1992.<sup>4</sup> One may suppose that the subsequent studies on Nikolaj in German and Western academia have been built on the presupposition that Nikolaj's ideas may have fueled Serbian nationalism and the Yugoslav wars of the 1990's and therefore they should be scrutinized.

In the remainder of this paper, I intend first to demonstrate that charges concerning nationalism, fascism and anti-Semitism are not exclusively applied to Nikolaj Velimirović, but they are elements of a wider strategy of discrediting someone, usually a political adversary, in contemporary media and scholarship. Next, I will explore the reasons why Nikolaj became a particularly relevant historical figure for being scapegoated. Finally, I will investigate, one by one, charges against him for being nationalist, fascist and anti-Semite.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Bremer's *Ekklesiale Struktur und Ekklesiologie in der Serbischen Orthodoxen Kirche im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, (Würzburg: Augustinus-Verlag, 1992), 158.

<sup>3</sup> Rudolf Chrysostomus Grill, *Serbischer Messianismus und Europa bei Bischof Velimirovic († 1956)*, (St Ottilien: EOS Verlag, 1998), 213.

<sup>4</sup> Rudolf Grulich, "Vorworth," in Grill, *Serbischer Messianismus*, 12.

### From scholarship to conventional wisdom and back

Almost every contemporary publication dealing with the Serbian church in the interwar period mentions Nikolaj Velimirović either as an ardent nationalist or a Hitler admirer or an anti-Semite, or all three.<sup>5</sup> Such a description of Nikolaj became generally accepted belief or conventional wisdom. As I have mentioned earlier, proving Nikolaj's nationalism, fascism and anti-Semitism is not an isolated case, but rather a rule frequently employed in the political and media realm in order to disqualify somebody or something.

The current war in Ukraine is a good example of the employment of such conventional wisdom. Already in his lecture 'UnCommon Core: The Causes and Consequences of the Ukraine Crisis' delivered at the University of Chicago in late 2014, the political scientist John Mearsheimer indicated four elements of conventional wisdom regarding the causes of the conflict. Namely: a) Russian President Vladimir Putin is the main cause of the conflict, b) Putin is crazy and irrational, c) Putin is bent on creating a greater Russia and d) Putin bears marked resemblance to Hitler.<sup>6</sup> Here it is evident that driven by Russian nationalism Putin aims to create a greater Russia, and that he is similar to Hitler in pursuing his goals. Such views are so widespread in western media and accepted by the general audience that questioning them would put one on the side of Putin.

This kind of classification, with or without variation, was applied to certain political figures in Yugoslavia during the wars in the 1990s. Thus, the late president of Serbia, Slobodan Milošević, was usually depicted by western media as the main originator of the wars in Yugoslavia, caused either out of his madness, or out of his intention to create a greater Serbia on the ruins of Yugoslavia. In the last instance, Milošević

<sup>5</sup> Jovan Byford, "The Serbian Orthodox Church," in *World Fascism: A Historical Encyclopedia*, vol. 2: L-Z, ed. Cyprian Blamires (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC - CLIO, 2006), 492; Raymond Detrez, "Religion in the Yugoslav Successor States at the Beginning of the Twenty-First Century," in *Religion in the Post-Yugoslav Context*, ed. Branislav Radeljić & Martina Topić (Lanham - Boulder - New York - London: Lexington Books 2015), 17-38: 27.

<sup>6</sup> John Mearsheimer, "Why is Ukraine the West's Fault?": [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JrMiSQAGOS4&list=FLXtnoSkiW2iomIRaMWEKlbw&index=2&t=1694s&ab\\_channel=TheUniversityofChicago](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JrMiSQAGOS4&list=FLXtnoSkiW2iomIRaMWEKlbw&index=2&t=1694s&ab_channel=TheUniversityofChicago)

was compared to Hitler. However, this tendency was not only characteristic of some western media, but also of certain historians and political scientists working on the region of the Balkans. Already in the subtitle of her famous book *Balkan Babel: The Disintegration of Yugoslavia from the Death of Tito to the Fall of Milosević* from 2002, Sabrina Ramet points out that the main cause of the disintegration of Yugoslavia and, thus, of the Yugoslav wars too, was Slobodan Milošević.<sup>7</sup> One can hardly find a single page in her book without references to Milošević. The investigation of Milošević’s alleged madness is presented as insights into his ‘narcissistic’ character,<sup>8</sup> and the assessment of his ‘psychopathic paranoia.’<sup>9</sup> Milošević has also been seen as a proponent of greater Serbian nationalism and the chief creator of a greater Serbia.<sup>10</sup> Finally, Ramet concludes that Milošević’s biography shares some points in common with the biography of his fellow dictator Hitler.<sup>11</sup>

One may look for the origins of this fourfold categorization in Judeo-Christian tradition, particularly in the book of Genesis. Thus, the world created by God was good, but some angelic and human beings due to their free will disobeyed the will of God and sinned. The consequence of their disobedience was their corrupted nature and will which became generators of new sins and creators of evil in the world. The same story may be told in the following way: a) Adam is the main cause of all human hardship, and death (Gen. 3:19), b) as the consequence of sin Adam’s nature is corrupted (Gen 3: 21), c) Adam was bent on achieving deification without God (Gen 3: 5), and d) by using his free will against God Adam bears marked resemblance to Satan, as the personification of absolute evil (Gen 3:4-5).

Like the fourfold gradations applied to Putin and Milošević, the forefather Adam is the main cause or agent in the process and he bears the greatest responsibility. He is deficient in some way or his nature or character is corrupted. He aims to achieve something at the expense of

<sup>7</sup> Sabrina Ramet, *Balkan Babel: The Disintegration of Yugoslavia from the Death of Tito to the Fall of Milosević* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2002).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, xix, 331.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 331–332.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 36, 162,

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 380.



someone else and because of the wrong ways in achieving his ends he is evil. The main problem with this categorization is the loss of the sense of evil. The consequence of the Nietzschean ‘death of God’ was also a ‘death of Satan,’ because Satan has ceased to play a significant role in the imagination of modern men and women. However, as a church historian, Alec Ryrie argues that western civilization did not need to wait too long for the new personification of absolute evil. Since 1945 the Holocaust is recognized in western civilization as a universally accepted reference point for what constitutes absolute evil.<sup>12</sup> The direct consequence of this, according to Ryrie, is not only that the new secular definition of evil overrides all other definitions of evil proposed by world religions, but that every aspect of public action, including religious, is assessed in relation to this reference point.

The Holocaust not only became the universally accepted reference point to evil, but the Holocaust perpetrator became a worst epithet in analogies used in political, media and social media debates. In order to motivate people to think harder about the Holocaust as a universally accepted reference point to evil, the attorney Mike Godwin introduced in 1990 “Godwin’s law” (or rule) of Nazi analogies.<sup>13</sup> Godwin’s law or the *reductio ad Hitlerum* indicates the probability of a comparison of someone or something to Nazis or Adolf Hitler in online debate as this debate increases in length.<sup>14</sup> Although Godwin proposed this rule as a pedagogical and rhetorical tool for avoiding Nazi and Fascist comparison in the Internet forums, the effect was quite the opposite. The *reductio ad Hitlerum* became a widespread phenomenon in mainstream western media for demonizing or intimidating political opponents. It has not only been applied to those foreign leaders who have challenged the universal supremacy of the USA, such as Slobodan Milošević and Vladimir Putin, but also to US politicians, such as the former US pres-

<sup>12</sup> Alec Ryrie, “Two Kingdoms in the Third Reich”: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kEdnwpo28NM>.

<sup>13</sup> Mike Godwin, “I Seem To Be A Verb: 18 Years of Godwin’s Law,” Jewcy.com. April 30, 2008: [https://jewcy.com/arts-and-culture/i\\_seem\\_be\\_verb\\_18\\_years\\_godwins\\_law](https://jewcy.com/arts-and-culture/i_seem_be_verb_18_years_godwins_law).

<sup>14</sup> “Godwin Law” in *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press): <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/340583?redirectedFrom=Godwin%27s+law#eid>.

ident Donald Trump, and to political movements, such as the alt-right. Moreover, it has become a common tool in social media debates for demonizing and intimidating certain targets.

The *reductio ad Hitlerum* is successfully applied by scholars, at first to present political figures and then past personalities and concepts. Thus, Nikolaj Velimirović is subjected to the same key of interpretation as political leaders, being ultimately associated with ideological advocates of Nazism, Holocaust perpetrators and proponents of anti-Semitism. The *reductio ad Hitlerum* of Nikolaj Velimirović consists of all four elements. Thus, Nikolaj appears in several publications as the main force not only of Serbian nationalism and fascism, but also of Orthodox anti-Westernism. The element of madness or irrationality usually attributed to political leaders is in the case of Nikolaj presented as a sort of cunningness and deceitfulness that again reflects his corrupted nature like madness reflects the corrupted natures of Hitler, Trump and Putin. Next, similar to political leaders who have certain ideological motivations in common, Nikolaj is described as a proponent of Serbian nationalism and chauvinism. Finally, Nikolaj’s similarity to Hitler is portrayed in terms of his collaboration with Nazism and his anti-Semitism. Since there is no evidence of personal collaboration of Nikolaj with Nazis during the Second World War, because Nikolaj spent the war as a German prisoner, first in Serbia and then in Germany, the link between Nikolaj and the Nazis is established through pre-WWII right-wing politicians, such as Dimitrije Ljotić and his movement Zbor. The book *Words to the Serbian People Through the Dungeon Window* remains the main source of arguing for Nikolaj’s anti-Semitism.

### **Bishop Nikolaj as the main cause of calamities**

In contrast to political leaders such as Hitler, Milošević, Trump or Putin, who according to *reductio ad Hitlerum* interpretations bear the sole responsibility for the Second World War and holocaust, the dismemberment of Yugoslavia and subsequent Yugoslav wars, destruction of USA democratic institutions and the wars of Russia with its neighbors respectively, portraying Nikolaj Velimirović as the main cause of nationalism in the Serbian church, which fuelled the Yugoslav wars in

the 1990s was not an easy task. Although acknowledging the important role of Nikolaj Velimirović for Serbian nationalism and fascism, many political scientists are hesitant to ascribe him a greater historical part in the Serbian nationalistic project. While many scholars today establish links between Vladimir Putin and the philosopher Ivan Ilyin, as the one who provided metaphysical and moral justification for Putin's Russian 'fascism,' there were no attempts to establish similar links between Slobodan Milošević and Bishop Nikolaj.

I have argued before that the German scholarship on the Serbian Church follows to a certain extent the German media in relation to the Balkans.<sup>15</sup> Thus, there are three phases in the approach of the German press to the Serbian Church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>16</sup> The first phase is characterized by a neutral approach towards the Serbian Church, which is considered as one of various agents in the very complex social and cultural milieu of the post-Yugoslav era. This phase lasted until 2004, and it was succeeded by the phase in the German press in which the Serbian Church became the key actor, responsible for most if not all problems in the region. The Serbian Church was depicted as a stronghold of nationalism, conservatism and anti-modernity. In the third and last phase which is from 2014 onwards, interest in the Serbian Church in the German press is substituted with interest for the Orthodox Church in general and the Russian Church in particular. One may see that the same pattern applied to Serbia and the Serbian Church during the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is now applied to the Russian Church and Russia is characterized as the main villain in the conflict in Ukraine. It became commonplace in the German press to find the explanation for Russian aggression in Ukraine (as for Serbian aggression in Croatia, Bosnia and Kosovo) in Orthodox Christianity, or, to be specific, in 19th

<sup>15</sup> Vladimir Cvetković, "The Reception of the Serbian Orthodox Church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century German Academia," in M. Knežević (ed.), *Philosophos – Philotheos – Philoponos: Studies and Essays as Charisteria in Honor of Professor Bogoljub Šijaković on the Occasion of His 65<sup>th</sup> Birthday* (Belgrade: Gnomon, Podgorica: Matica srpska 2021), 993–1004.

<sup>16</sup> Jelena Jorgačević Kisić, "The Serbian Orthodox Church in the German Press: How far is Byzantium," in *Schein and Sein: Sichtbares und Unsichtbares in den Kulturen Südoeuropas*, hrg. Wolfgang Dahmen und Gabriella Schubert (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2017), 199–211: 206–207.

century Orthodox nationalism and anti-Westernism by which these Churches are now driven.<sup>17</sup>

In German historiography, like in the German press until 2004, the Serbian Church is depicted as one of the multiple agents in the complex Yugoslav reality. In his book *Orthodoxie und Katholizismus in Jugoslawien 1945-1991: ein serbisch-kroatischer Vergleich* from 2004, Klaus Buchenau argues that the national mobilization and false evangelization of the Serbian Church, especially connected with the campaign over Kosovo during the 1980s, bears the responsibility for the wars of the 1990s.<sup>18</sup> Although Buchenau has a number of references to Nikolaj, many of these references are historically neutral. Only in a few of them, Nikolaj is mentioned as sharing with the Zbor leader Dimitrije Ljotić sympathies for the Serbian village and anti-modern attitudes,<sup>19</sup> and with Justin Popović Serbian Orthodox anti-Westernism<sup>20</sup> and ecclesial nationalism.<sup>21</sup> Buchenau also mentions Nikolaj’s anti-Semitic attitudes exposed in his book written in two and half months while he was in the Dachau concentration camp.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, Buchenau also criticizes Rudolph Chysostomus Grill for remaining blind to Nikolaj’s nationalism.<sup>23</sup> Although Buchenau attributes to Nikolaj nationalism, anti-Westernism and anti-Semitism, Nikolaj remains just one of many leaders of the Serbian Church whose negative role led to the dismemberment of Yugoslavia and the consequent wars.

Similar to the German press of the period from 2004 to 2013, in which the Serbian Church becomes the main protagonist, in Klaus Buchenau’s book *Auf russischen Spuren: orthodoxe Antiwestler in Serbien, 1850-1945* published in 2011 Nikolaj Velimirović and his student Justin Popović play the main role in the adoption of Russian anti-West-

<sup>17</sup> Kristina Stoeckl, “The Orthodox Component in the Russian Support for Eastern Ukrainian Separatists,” in: <https://www.iwm.at/transit-online/orthodox-component-russian-support-eastern-ukrainian-separatists/>

<sup>18</sup> Buchenau, *Orthodoxie und Katholizismus in Jugoslawien 1945-1991*, 379-391.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 436.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

ernism and hatred towards the West and Europe.<sup>24</sup> Buchenau considers Nikolaj Velimirović's and Justin Popović's discussion on European identity, not as a critique of European internal conditions that led to the First World War and consequently the Second World War as perused by other religious and secular European thinkers of that time, but as a form of anti-Westernism.

Similarly, in his book *Götter der Nationen* from 2014,<sup>25</sup> Stefan Rohdewald portrays the patron saints of Serbia, Bulgaria and Macedonia, St Sava, St John of Rila, and St Clement of Ohrid as national gods of the Orthodox people. He identifies the Serbian Kosovo covenant with Kosovo mythology,<sup>26</sup> and Svetosavlje with an 'ethno-philosophy',<sup>27</sup> and deems Nikolaj Velimirović as a proponent of both. Rohdewald also links Velimirović to fascism through Dimitrije Ljotić.<sup>28</sup>

The same tendency to interpret the Orthodox theological heritage of the Balkan Churches through the prism of nationalism and anti-Westernism may be observed in Anna Julia Lis' monograph *Zur Konstruktion des „Westens“ in den Schriften von Nikolaj Velimirović, Justin Popović, Christos Yannaras und John S. Romanides*, published in 2019 by Peter Lang.<sup>29</sup> Among other things, Lis accused Nikolaj Velimirović and Justin Popović for anti-Semitism because for both authors Jewish treason of God leads them to suicide.<sup>30</sup> Velimirović, according to Lis, extended the same metaphor to Europe and its abandonment of God.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Klaus Buchenau, *Auf russischen Spuren. Orthodoxe Antiwestler in Serbien, 1850–1945* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2011).

<sup>25</sup> Stefan Rohdewald, *Götter der Nationen. Religiöse Erinnerungsfiguren in Serbien, Bulgarien und Makedonien bis 1944* (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 2014), 512–546.

<sup>26</sup> Rohdewald, *Götter der Nationen*, 508, 546.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 546.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 516.

<sup>29</sup> Anna Julia Lis, *Zur Konstruktion des „Westens“ in den Schriften von Nikolaj Velimirović, Justin Popović, Christos Yannaras und John S. Romanides*, (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2019). Lis is also an author of the article "Anti-Western Theology in Greece and Serbia Today," in *Eastern Orthodox Encounters of Identity and Otherness: Values, Self-Reflection, Dialogue*, ed. Andrii Krawchuk and Thomas Bremer (New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2014), 159–168.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 62, 115.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

All three German authors who produced extensive works on Nikolaj in the period between 2004 and 2019 have the same focus on Nikolaj’s alleged nationalism, fascism and less on his anti-Semitism. However, Nikolaj appears as the main figure in introducing these phenomena in the Orthodox Church and particularly the Serbian Church and therefore is perceived as the main cause of ecclesial estrangements.

### **Bishop Nikolaj as a cunning opportunist: The relationship towards Catholicism**

The next element that is observed in Nikolaj’s character, which corresponds to the madness or irrationality usually attributed to political leaders, is opportunism and cunningness which Nikolaj employs for attaining his goals. Another severe critic of Nikolaj’s anti-Semitism, Jovan Byford writes in his book *Denial and Repression of Antisemitism*:

Significantly, however, the enthusiasm for Yugoslavia as a league of equal nations and faiths which Velimirović professed in his speeches reflected his role as the representative of the Serbian state, rather than his genuine political orientation. Behind the enthusiastic conciliatory rhetoric lay a profound suspicion towards Catholicism which he regarded as “the most conservative among western denominations” (see Bigović, 1998, p. 35). In public, Velimirović readily advocated the signing of a Concordat with the Vatican as a mark of Serbia’s broadmindedness and tolerance. Also, he proclaimed that in Yugoslavia, once it was created, the Serbian Orthodox and the Roman Catholic churches would be on equal footing, with comparable rights and privileges (e.g., Velimirović, 1916a, pp. 70–71). In conversations with his associates, however, he endorsed the opposite view. He called for complete severance of ties with the Vatican and the creation of a national (Yugoslav) Catholic Church. Similarly, he maintained that following unification, Orthodox Christianity should not forfeit the status of state religion which it previously occupied in the Kingdom of Serbia (memoirs of Dr. Bogumil Bošnjak, cited in Janković, 2002a, p. 39).<sup>32</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Jovan Byford, *Denial and Repression of Antisemitism: Post-Communist Remembrance of the Serbian Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović*, (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2008), 30.

In modern research, Nikolaj's attitude toward the Catholic Church is often interpreted as negative. As evident from the above quotation, Byford suggests that despite Nikolaj's earlier support of the Serbian government to sign a concordat with the Vatican as an expression of sincerity and openness to Catholics in Serbia, there is continuity in Nikolaj's negative attitudes toward the Catholic Church. According to Byford, in addition to publicly advocating good relations with the Roman Catholic Church in Serbia and later in Yugoslavia, Nikolaj advocated in private talks severing all ties with the Vatican and establishing a national (Yugoslav) Catholic Church. For Byford, Nikolaj's attitude does not only demonstrate his hidden agenda, but also Nikolaj's opportunist character.

Similar to Byford, Klaus Buchenau argues that Nikolaj's ambiguous stance toward the Catholic Church is reflected in the public acceptance of the Roman Catholic Church on the one hand, and in hidden distrust on the other hand. While Byford is explicit that Nikolaj advocates 'Serbian Orthodox exclusivity,' Buchenau believes that Nikolaj's motive for rapprochement between the two churches remained unclear, as rapprochement was sometimes presented as a political instrument and sometimes as a precondition for uniting the churches into a common Yugoslav church.<sup>33</sup> However, Buchenau agreed with Byford that for Nikolaj the rapprochement of the churches actually meant the conversion of Roman Catholics to Orthodoxy. According to these authors, it turns out that Nikolaj's attitude toward the Catholic Church in his early works was either insincere, because he wanted to instrumentalize the Catholic Church in Yugoslavia for Serbian national and ecclesial goals, or it was not clear enough even to Nikolaj. Therefore, Nikolaj appears either as a deceitful and two-faced person or as a person who takes actions without any previous planning.

In my opinion Nikolaj's relationship toward the Catholic Church is straightforward and frank from the beginning.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, in addition to the two interpretations mentioned above, there is a third, which

<sup>33</sup> Buchenau, *Auf russischen Spuren*, 161.

<sup>34</sup> Here I follow the argumentation exposed in Vladimir Cvetković, "Još jedan osvrt na predavanje 'Nacionalizam Svetog Save' Svetog Nikolaja Žičkog," *Crkvene studije* 16 (2019): 131–148.



Bishop Nikolaj with Archpriest Stevan Dimitrijević and pilgrims in front of the church of Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem in 1930  
(Courtesy of Goran Veljković, Kragujevac)



Bishop Nikolaj at the inter-Orthodox preparatory committee in 1930 at the monastery of Vatopedi on Mount Athos (Courtesy of Museum of Byzantine Culture, Thessaloniki, Internet source <https://www.mbp.gr/>)



makes it possible to connect Nikolaj's early works from the pre-WW period with one from the interwar period, without resorting to the already stated arguments. Byford's position that Nikolaj advocated good relations with the Catholic Church in Serbia before and during the Second World War and later in Yugoslavia, and at the same time advocated severing all ties with the Vatican and founding a national (Yugoslav) Catholic Church is correct, but it should not be considered a product of Nikolaj's insincerity. As early as 1909, in the article 'The Great Crisis in Roman Catholicism,' Nikolaj discusses the reception of the encyclical *Pascendi dominici gregis* of Pope Pius X from July 1907, which condemns anti-modernist views in the Roman Catholic Church. Here, Nikolaj refers to the French Catholic theologian Alfred Loisy's invitation to the pope to "accept his vocation as teacher again, and to abandon all pretensions to rule the world."<sup>35</sup> At the end of this article, Nikolaj concludes that Pope Pius X with this encyclical destroyed all human efforts to make humanity feel as one, and that the papal system, which encloses and limits everything, and under which the Catholic Church sighs, must disappear. Nikolaj ends with the question: will Catholicism disappear with the papacy? to which he answers that Catholicism existed before the papacy, and will continue to exist after it, because Catholicism is guided by truth and directed towards salvation.<sup>36</sup> Therefore, Nikolaj's commitment to severing all ties with the Vatican and the papacy is not directed toward Catholicism, but is inspired by bringing 'renewed and reborn' Catholicism into a closer relationship 'with other parts of Christianity.'

In the context of Yugoslav unification, Nikolaj often refers to the document of the Roman Catholic clergy of the Zagreb diocese from 1848, which proclaims the following goals: unification of Serbs and Croats, tolerance of differences in the Creed, and use of Old Slavonic language in worship services of the Yugoslav Catholic Church.<sup>37</sup> Buchenau well observes that when Nikolaj speaks about political and na-

<sup>35</sup> Nikolaj Velimirović, "Velika kriza u Rimokatolicizmu," in: Episkop Nikolaj, *Sabrana dela u 13 knjiga*, vol. 2 (Šabac: manastir Svetog Nikolaja, 2014), 786.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 791.

<sup>37</sup> Nicholas Velimirovic, *Religion and Nationality in Serbia* (London: Nisbet, 1915), 10–11.

tional issues, as well as the theological merits of the Catholic clergy, he primarily refers to dissidents and critics of papal authority.<sup>38</sup> This claim is applicable to Alfred Loisy, and his critique of the papal resistance to modernism, and it is also applicable to the Catholic clergy who demanded the introduction of the vernacular in worship in 1848, which was opposed by the first archbishop of Zagreb, Juraj Haulik.<sup>39</sup> However, Buchenau is wrong in his claim that by proposing holiness, catholicity and apostolicity as the characteristics of the new Slavic religion, Nikolaj proposes the characteristics of the Eastern Church, without mentioning Orthodoxy.<sup>40</sup> In the lecture entitled ‘The Agony of the Church’ delivered at St. Margaret’s Church in Westminster, London, in 1917, Nikolaj points out that the Church’s service to national or imperial goals in Europe causes its division, which is contrary to its nature.<sup>41</sup> On the basis of the Nicene-Constantinople Creed, which is common to both the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Church, Nikolaj defines the Church as one, holy, catholic and apostolic. Here, Nikolaj especially emphasizes the first two characteristics of the Church: its unity, that is, its uniqueness, and its holiness, concluding that divided churches should feel their unity in holiness.<sup>42</sup> When talking about individual churches, he describes their virtues and shortcomings, mentioning as the pope’s main virtue the preservation of the idea of theocracy as the starting point of social teaching about the Church, but also the pope’s main flaw as his failure to transform the Church into a Christocracy and Saintocracy.<sup>43</sup> In the end, Nikolaj argues that the renewal of Christianity in Europe is only possible through the unique Church of Christ, and unity of this Church should be built on the foundations laid by the early Church, by being considerate and condescending in teaching, worship and organization, but strict and exclusive in the keeping of its

<sup>38</sup> Buchenau, *Auf russischen Spuren*, 162.

<sup>39</sup> Vlasta Švoger, “Vjerska problematika u zagrebačkom liberalnom tisku 1848–1852,” *Croatia Christiana Periodica* 56 (2005): 121–145; 133.

<sup>40</sup> Buchenau, *Auf russischen Spuren*, 162.

<sup>41</sup> Nicholai Velimirovic, *The Agony of the Church* (London: Student Christian Movement, 1917), 109.

<sup>42</sup> Velimirovic, *The Agony of the Church*, 113.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

spirit.<sup>44</sup> Similarly, in the work ‘The Dream of the Slavic Religion,’ by following the Creed, Nikolaj points to three elements that the new religion of the Slavs should have, and that is holiness, catholicity and the apostolate.<sup>45</sup>

It may be concluded that the idea of uniting the Catholic and Orthodox into one Yugoslav Catholic Church<sup>46</sup> did not seem like an impossible mission to Nikolaj. He even stated that in the beginning the Yugoslav church would have about fifty dioceses, half Catholic, half Orthodox, and that the churches would have freedom of teaching, worship and organization, until the fences separating them for centuries were overcome, which would be, according to Nikolaj, not very difficult.

How then to understand Nikolaj’s critique of the Roman Catholic Church in Yugoslavia? The edge of his criticism, both in his lecture on the nationalism of Saint Sava from 1935, and in earlier and later writings, is not directed against the Catholic Church in Yugoslavia itself, but against its dependence on Rome. Nikolaj’s critique of the papacy has a continuity from his early works from 1909 to the famous speech against the Concordat delivered at Valjevo High School in 1937.<sup>47</sup> While in his early works, Nikolaj paid more attention to the reform movements in the Roman Church itself, in his works and public speeches during the 1930s, criticism of the papacy was from the standpoint of the Yugoslav state and church interests. Nikolaj considered the policy of the Vatican, and especially the initiative for signing the Concordat between the Vatican and Yugoslavia, an expression of the imperial policy of Rome, to the detriment of Yugoslav unity. According to Nikolaj, Catholics in Yugoslavia, by recognizing papal authority, renounce not only their independence, but also the evangelical and apostolic foundations of the national church. However, it would be wrong to

<sup>44</sup> Velimirovic, *The Agony of the Church*, 118.

<sup>45</sup> Nikolaj Velimirović, “San o slovenskoj religiji kriza u Rimokatolicizmu,” in: Episkop Nikolaj, *Sabrana dela u 13 knjiga*, vol.4 (Šabac: manastir Svetog Nikolaja 2014), 318.

<sup>46</sup> The term Catholic in the name of the church does not relate to Roman Catholicism, but rather to the attribute of catholicity or conciliarity (*sabornost*), by which the Creed defines the Church.

<sup>47</sup> Grill, *Serbischer Messianismus*, 191.

conclude that Nikolaj criticizes the Roman Church from Orthodox positions, as Buchenau suggests.<sup>48</sup> In his lecture ‘The Nationalism of St Sava,’ Nikolaj refers to the work of Saint Sava in the context of the independence that the Serbian Church gained by uniting all its scattered jurisdictions in the Belgrade Patriarchate in 1920. He draws a parallel between modern times and Sava’s relocation of the center of his church from Constantinople to Žiča, and the replacement of Greek priests and the Greek liturgical language with Serbian clergy and language.<sup>49</sup> Thus, Nikolaj invites the Catholic clergy and people in Yugoslavia to establish their independence in relation to Rome, following the example of Saint Sava, who made the Serbian Church institutionally independent from the Archbishopric of Ohrid and from the Patriarchate of Constantinople. In the late 1930s and early 1940s, Nikolaj insisted also on the idea of church independence from Rome and Constantinople, and again he referred to the work of Saint Sava. In his Vidovdan sermon delivered on June 28, 1939, on the occasion of the 550<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo in the Ravanica Monastery, Nikolaj described Saint Sava as the inventor of the third ecclesiastical authority, which is between the Byzantine and Roman ecclesial authority. The invented ecclesial authority relates to the free national church, which is neither foreign nor international. In his work “The Serbian People as Theodoulos,” Nikolaj argues that, by following the political direction of his father Nemanja, Saint Sava traced the new ecclesial path between Constantinopolitan panhellenism and Roman pantheocracy.<sup>50</sup> Thus, St Sava won over panhellenic chauvinism from Constantinople, while the international papal theocracy from Rome he defeated by creating a *theodoulia*, as service to God, centered in the person of the ruler. This work, written in the midst of the Second World War, has neither a Yugoslav nor an ecumenical dimension, but it includes similar arguments against the international church, no matter whether Roman or Constantinopolitan, as in the lecture on Saint Sava’s nationalism.

<sup>48</sup> Buchenau, *Auf russischen Spuren*, 162.

<sup>49</sup> Nikolaj Velimirović, “Nacionalizam Svetog Save,” in: Episkop Nikolaj, *Sabrana dela*, vol. 9, 305–318: 307.

<sup>50</sup> Nikolaj Velimirović, “Srpski narod kao teodul”, in: Episkop Nikolaj, *Sabrana dela*, vol. 5, 651–684: 657.

It conclusion, the relation of Nikolaj toward the Catholic Church was always benevolent, while his criticism of the papacy was sometimes very harsh. Probably for him as a student at the Old Catholic theological faculty in Bern it was not difficult to imagine the Catholic Church without the papacy. It seems that Nikolaj was very sincere in both his praise of Catholics and his disapproval of the papacy and therefore it is hard to imagine any deceitfulness on his part which Byford, and to certain extent Buchenau claim.

### **Bishop Nikolaj as a Nationalist: The Nationalism of Saint Sava**

The next characteristic, usually employed in the defamation of political and ideological opponents, is accusations concerning certain hidden agendas. Thus, Milošević was accused of creating Greater Serbia and Putin of creating Greater Russia. As may be seen from the works of Buchenau and Rohdewald, the covert agenda of Nikolaj was his Serbian nationalism, closely associated with the ideas of Svetosavlje and the Kosovo covenant. The problem with such an interpretation is the sheer identification of Serbian nationalism from the 1930s with the one of the 1990s. Thus, the Serbian nationalism from the 1990s appears as a mere continuation of the nationalism from the 1930s. According to Buchenau, the link between the two nationalisms, and at the same time two anti-Westernisms, were the disciples of Justin Popović, and indirectly Nikolaj Velimirović, Metropolitan Amfilohije Radović and Bishop Atanasije Jevtić, who played the most prominent roles in the Serbian Orthodox Church during the 1990s, but also the Serbian Orthodox youth organizations such as *Dveri* and *Obraz*, which considered Nikolaj's teachings as their program.<sup>51</sup>

I intend in the following lines first to analyze Nikolaj's understanding of nationalism and then to use the example of his lecture "Nationalism of St Sava" to demonstrate that his Saint-Savian nationalism is rather a project of Christian universalism than nationalistic particularism.

<sup>51</sup> Klaus, Buchenau, "Orthodox values and modern necessities," in *Civic and uncivic values, Serbia in the post- Milošević Era*, ed. Ola Listhaug, Sabrina Ramet and Dragana Dulić (Budapest: CEU Press, 2011), 111-142.

Buchenau very well observes that the generation of Serbian church intellectuals raised and educated at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, to which Nikolaj belonged, adopted nationalism, liberalism and anti-clericalism as core values of both the Church and society.<sup>52</sup> In spite of its positive connotation as love for one’s own nation, nationalism for Nikolaj may also have negative repercussions.

In the book *The War and the Bible*, written in 1931, Nikolaj depicts nationalism, together with materialism, egoism, imperialism and culturalism as possible dangers if they originate from atheism.<sup>53</sup> According to Nikolaj, nationalism, like the other four phenomena, are given to humanity by God as good in themselves, but when employed independently of love and service to God, nationalism turns into an idol or idolatry. The worshiping is not focused on a single idol, but on several ones at the same time, and usually nationalism turns either to materialism and egoism or imperialism.<sup>54</sup>

In his writings from the mid-1930s, Nikolaj pointed to the political deviations of good nationalism. In his article “Between Left and Right” from 1935, Nikolaj criticizes internationalism and fascism, the two most powerful movements and political orders in Europe at that time. Internationalism for Nikolaj was the negation of nation and national determination, while fascism was idolatry of one’s own nation.<sup>55</sup>

Nikolaj’s views on nationalism proclaimed in his lecture “The Nationalism of St Sava” are mostly criticized in modern scholarship due to alleged connection to fascism and anti-ecumenism. The lecture “Nationalism of Saint Sava,” held on the 20<sup>th</sup> of March, 1935, on the feast of the Sunday of Orthodoxy at Kolarac People University in Belgrade, Nikolaj dedicates the place that Saint Sava should occupy in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.<sup>56</sup> 1935 marked the seven hundredth anniversary of

<sup>52</sup> Buchenau, “Orthodox Values and Modern Necessities,” 112–113.

<sup>53</sup> Nikolaj Velimirović, “Rat i Biblija,” in: Episkop Nikolaj, *Sabrana dela*, vol. 5, 181–251: 234.

<sup>54</sup> Velimirović, “Rat i Biblija,” 235.

<sup>55</sup> Nikolaj Velimirović, “Između levice i desnice,” in: Episkop Nikolaj, *Sabrana dela*, vol. 9, 711–712: 711.

<sup>56</sup> The lecture was published under the same title in an excerpt in the Orthodox Library, published by the Association of Serbian Orthodox Clergy of the Archbishopric of Belgrade and Karlovci (Belgrade, 1935, 29), and then in its entirety in the Kra-

the repose of Saint Sava and the whole year was dedicated to him. The lecture was held in the context of the controversy that Nikolaj had with the Archbishop of Zagreb, Antun Bauer, who denied the importance and role of Saint Sava in the joint Yugoslav project.<sup>57</sup>

Nikolaj identified Saint Sava's nationalism with his work on the establishment of the autonomy of the Serbian Church from the Patriarchate of Constantinople and thus the strengthening of the Serbian state. For Nikolaj, the nationalism of Saint Sava 'encompasses the national church, the national dynasty, the national state, the national education, the national culture and the national defense,' but the basis and center of this nationalism is the national Church.<sup>58</sup> Bishop Nikolaj believed that the existence of the national church and the national church language is based on the Gospel and the apostles. In order to substantiate his claim, Nikolaj referred to Christ's message to the apostles to 'baptize all nations' (Matt 28: 15) and to the gift of the Holy Spirit to the apostles at Pentecost to speak tongues other than Hebrew, Greek and Latin (Acts 2: 6-11).

Nikolaj constructs the nationalism of Saint Sava as an evangelical platform that should serve as a model for the establishment of the national church. This nationalism, unlike nationalism that originates from the Enlightenment and secular tradition, is based on faith as a basic principle. According to Nikolaj, the nationalism of Saint Sava is a) evangelical, because it protects the integrity of the human person and helps its perfection, and b) organic, because it protects the individuality of the peoples themselves, preventing them from falling into imperialism and disintegrating into internationalism.<sup>59</sup> By being established on holiness as the highest personal and ecclesiastical ideal, such evangelical nationalism, according to Nikolaj, becomes a barrier to

gujevac magazine *Misionar* 1 (1938), 2-10. Republished in Episkop Nikolaj, *Sabrana dela Episkopa Nikolaja u 13 knjiga*, (Šabac: manastir Svetog Nikolaja 2014), 305-318.

<sup>57</sup> Nikolaj Velimirović, "Primedba na Okružnicu Presvetlog Gospodina dr Bajera, 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.

<sup>58</sup> Velimirović, "Nacionalizam Svetog Save," 306.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 309-310.

chauvinism and exclusivity toward other nations. According to this Saint-Savian nationalism promoted by Nikolaj, all peoples on earth, regardless of blood, language and religion, are the people of God and brothers among themselves.

Nikolaj constructs not only Serbian, but also Yugoslav history around the person of Saint Sava. In order to describe the role of Saint Sava's nationalism, Nikolaj refers to its three stages: the stage of national heroism, the stage of national geniuses and the stage of national saints.<sup>60</sup> Heroism is reflected in national uprising and the struggle both against imperialism and against ecclesial internationalism. According to Nikolaj, many peoples of Europe have taken this path, but without establishing their nationalism on faith they have either slipped into chauvinism and imperialism at the state level, or internationalism or atheism at the spiritual level. The next degree that protects heroism from negative consequences is genius, which, according to Nikolaj, is reflected in connecting nationalism with faith and the national state with the national church. Only then nationalism is safe from turning into imperialism or chauvinism, because through the national church and the vernacular liturgical language the spirit of the Gospel can penetrate such nationalism and sanctify it. The national geniuses transformed nationalism from service to one's own nation to the service of unity and brotherhood among nations. Ingeniousness is a turn from secular social and state goals toward eternal Christian and universal values. According to Nikolaj, the most important, third and last stage in this pyramid of Saint Sava's nationalism is holiness. Holiness deeply transforms the feeling of national belonging, which is no longer expressed as love for one's own people, nor as universal love for all other peoples, but as love for God. If heroism is expressed as a service to national goals, ingeniousness as a service to universal goals, then holiness is the focus on God and the service to God. According to Nikolaj, Saint Sava combined his heroism in resisting the ecclesial centers of Rome and Constantinople with his ingeniousness in binding the Serbian state to the Serbian church. Finally he achieved holiness by serving God as the first Archbishop of the Serbian church.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 312.



Nikolaj projects all three stages of Saint Sava's nationalism onto the common Yugoslav history. It would be easier to understand Nikolaj's three-stage nationalism of Saint Sava if the analysis is supplemented with similar ideas about common Yugoslav history which he exposed twenty years earlier in his lectures delivered in Great Britain during the First World War.

For Nikolaj the first stage, i.e., heroism, consisted in the establishment of a national state of Yugoslavia. Thanks to the heroism of the Yugoslavs (Serbs, Croats and Slovenes), which stretches from the past centuries until the Great War—the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was created as a barrier to European imperialism. At this level of Saint-Savian nationalism are national heroes, such as the Croatian-Slovenian insurgent Matija Gubac and the Serbian leader of the First Serbian Uprising, Karađorđe Petrović, who fought against foreign domination.<sup>61</sup> The next stage is ingeniousness and it consisted of binding faith to the nation so that the nation state would not slip into political or religious chauvinism or imperialism. This process of tying the nation state to the national church was begun by national geniuses, such as the Montenegrin bishop Peter II Petrović Njegoš and the Croatian bishop Josip Juraj Strossmayer,<sup>62</sup> but it is not yet finished. According to Nikolaj, this process should continue through the establishment of independence of the Catholic Church in Yugoslavia from Rome. This process would enable the establishment of a national church of Yugoslavia consisting of the Serbian Orthodox Church and Catholic church of Yugoslavia, and this church will be independent in decision-making and will use the national language for service. The foundation, but also the culmination of this new national church and nation state, would be the saints, and above all the national saints, such as Saint Sava and Saint Symeon the Myrrh-bearer.<sup>63</sup>

According to Nikolaj, Saint Symeon, that is, Stefan Nemanja, was the founder of the Serbian state, while Saint Sava was the founder of the Serbian Church. For Nikolaj, the Serbian church, as the soul of the

<sup>61</sup> Nicholas Velimirović, *The Soul of Serbia* (London: The Faith Press, 1916), 42.

<sup>62</sup> Velimirovic, *Religion and Nationality in Serbia*; Nikolai Velimirovich, *Two Churches and One Nation* (New York: Živa crkva), 8–11.

<sup>63</sup> Velimirovich, *Two Churches and One Nation*, 4–5.

Serbian people, continued to live even after the Serbian state disappeared during the Ottoman occupation.<sup>64</sup> Nikolaj claims that the national ideal of liberation and unification was expressed through the idea of Yugoslavia, while the church ideal should be realized through holiness. Saint Sava, as the forerunner of Yugoslavia and the founder of the national church, stands at the very beginning of the common Serbian-Croatian-Slovenian history, which continues with Patriarch Arsenije Černojević, Karađorđe, Ljudevit Gaj, Valentin Vodnik, Ban Jelačić, all the way to Njegoš and Strossmayer.<sup>65</sup> According to Nikolaj, Saint Sava reconciled two ideals, Yugoslavism and holiness, which the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, as well as the national Church in it, should strive for.

It is often believed that Nikolaj was an ardent supporter of the idea of Yugoslavia during the Second World War,<sup>66</sup> and that later in the 1930s, when the Yugoslav project got into trouble, he abandoned it, turning himself toward the Serbian national idea.<sup>67</sup> However, even twenty years later, Nikolaj does not abandon his belief that Saint Sava is and should be the basis of the idea of Yugoslavia, and that Yugoslavia was still the best institutional arrangement for the South Slavs. This is evident from his message to Orthodox believers in his diocese from June 1936 that ‘the Orthodox faith should be their political conviction, and Yugoslavia their common house.’<sup>68</sup>

However, his strategy to convince the Catholic clergy regarding the significance of Saint Sava for the common Yugoslav project, and also Serbian and Croatian people regarding the importance of Yugoslavia as the common house of all South Slavs went in a different direction. He did not construct a common Yugoslav history, but rather turned to European history pointing to attempts of European nations to create national churches.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 5–8.

<sup>66</sup> Radovan Bigović, *Od svečoveka do Bogočoveka* (Beograd: Društvo Raška škola, 1997), 178–179.

<sup>67</sup> Rohdewald, *Götter der Nationen*, 528–533.

<sup>68</sup> Anonymus, “Episkop Nikolaj osvetio je ikonostas crkve u selu Grivcu,” *Politika*, no. 10067, 4 June 1936, 8.

According to Nikolaj, European history is in fact the history of the struggle of European nations for the national Church, led by Hus and Žiška in the Czech Republic, Luther and Leibniz in Germany and Pascal in France, among others. The failure of the national leaders in Europe to first create national churches, and then gather all their compatriots within them, resulted in a rift between the state and the church, that is, the nation and religion. According to Nikolaj, this further led to the separation of political elites from the people, which undermined national unity. Unlike the relatively unsuccessful struggle waged by the peoples of Europe, Saint Sava overcame difficulties on his way to creating the Serbian national church independent from the dominance of medieval ecclesiastical centers of power, such as Rome and Constantinople. According to Nikolaj, Saint Sava built faith into the basis of such nationalism, and presented the national church as the highest expression of this nationalism. Nikolaj concluded his speech by saying that Saint Sava founded his nationalism seven centuries ago, not only as a rebellion against imperialism and the international church, but also as an endeavor based on evangelical and organic principles.<sup>69</sup>

By his lecture on Saint Sava's nationalism as a common identity platform, Nikolaj tried to save the Yugoslav project to some extent. Yugoslavism, which became the state policy of King Alexander Karađorđević after the First World War, was also supported by the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church in Yugoslavia.<sup>70</sup> When King Alexander prorogued the Yugoslav Parliament due to nationalist and communist tendencies in society and introduced a personal dictatorship on January 6, 1929, he had the support of the Serbian Orthodox Church. In 1930, Patriarch Varnava Rosić expressed support for the Serbian church to the royal nation-building policy of the complete unification of 'brothers of the same blood.'<sup>71</sup> In the period from

<sup>69</sup> Velimirović, "Nacionalizam Svetog Save," 312.

<sup>70</sup> Radmila Radić, "Religion in Multinational State: Case of Yugoslavia," in *Yugoslavism: Histories of a Failed Idea, 1918–1992*, ed. Dejan Djokić (London: Hurst, 2003), 196–207: 197.

<sup>71</sup> Nikola Žutić, "Narodnosna (nacionalna) politika crkava u Kraljevini Jugoslaviji," in *Religija, crkva, nacija: vreme posle rata*, ed. Bogdan Đurović (Niš: Jugoslovensko udruženje za naučno istraživanje religije, 1996), 364–369.

1929 to 1934, many religious organizations were banned as tribal, because in spirit they were contrary to the Yugoslav project.<sup>72</sup> With the assassination of King Aleksandar Karađorđević in Marseilles on 9 October 1934, all the negative consequences of his policy of integral Yugoslavism, or Yugoslav nationalism, came to the surface.<sup>73</sup>

Nikolaj’s lecture on the nationalism of Saint Sava intended to reawaken the same energy that the Yugoslav peoples, or the Yugoslav people, had at the beginning of the common state, and to use that energy to create a common national and Christian identity. However, the nationalism of Saint Sava is not the same as Yugoslav nationalism, as proclaimed by the Yugoslav royal government. The evangelical platform on which Nikolaj wanted to build Yugoslav unity was directly opposite to the policy of coercion exercised by the Yugoslav royal government during the dictatorship. Nikolaj insisted on holiness, not on national unity, as the basis for the nation and state-building project. Nikolaj’s reference to Hitler in the lecture on the nationalism of Saint Sava should also be understood in the context of building a Christian identity, on forced unification and not on the ideal of holiness, and this will be the subject of the next chapter.

### **Nikolaj as Fascist and Anti-Semite: *Reductio at Hitlerum***

The final momentum in rebuking the image of Bishop Nikolaj as a pan-Christian saint and holy figure was his identification as a fascist and anti-Semite. The accusation for fascism went in several directions. Most of these accusations are for Nikolaj’s alleged sympathy for Hitler and fascism. First, Nikolaj was accused of mentioning Hitler in a positive context in his lecture ‘The Nationalism of St Sava’ in March 1935. The second charge against Nikolaj concerned the medal of the Red Cross he received in 1936 by Nazi Germany for restoring the First World War German cemetery in Bitolj in 1926.<sup>74</sup> The final and probably the

<sup>72</sup> Christian Axboe Nielsen, “Policing Yugoslavism: Surveillance, Denunciations, and Ideology during King Aleksandar’s Dictatorship 1929–1934,” *East European Politics and Societies* 23/1 (2009): 34–62.

<sup>73</sup> Christian Axboe Nielsen, *Making Yugoslavs Identity in King Aleksandar’s Yugoslavia* (Toronto: Toronto University Press 2014), 5.

<sup>74</sup> Byford, *Denial and Repression of Antisemitism*, 47.

most persisting accusation of Nikolaj for fascism pertains to his relationship with Dimitrije Ljotić, the leader of the fascist movement Zbor and a collaborator with the German Nazi regime during the Second World War. In spite of the fact that Nikolaj in many public speeches as well as written works severely criticized fascism and Hitler, the interpretations of his lecture of St Sava's nationalism, the affair with the medal he was awarded, and his relationship with Ljotić secured Nikolaj a prominent place in the Encyclopaedia of world fascism.<sup>75</sup> Although several books and articles have been written so far in which the accusations against Nikolaj for fascism are argumentatively rebuked,<sup>76</sup> the view of Nikolaj Velimirović as a fascist became conventional wisdom. Without intending to repeat all the argumentation offered in these works I intend to briefly review these charges.

In his lecture "The Nationalism of Saint Sava," Nikolaj refers to Hitler:

'One must commend the current German Leader, who, as a simple craftsman and a common man, realized that nationalism without faith is an anomaly, a cold and insecure mechanism. In the 20th century he arrived at the idea first introduced by Saint Sava, and although a layman, he took upon himself that most important of all missions, one that is only worthy of a saint, a genius, a hero.'<sup>77</sup>

<sup>75</sup> Byford, "The Serbian Orthodox Church," 492. See also Srećko Petrović, „Neki aspekti eklisiologije dijaspore u misli Vladike Nikolaja Velimirovića: ka crkvenom odgovoru na pitanja nacionalizma i etnofiletizma”, in *Mesto eklisiologije u savremenoj sistematskom bogoslovlju*. Naučni skup – kolokvijum, 11. februar 2021. Zbornik radova, ed. Zlatko Matić, Aleksandar Đakovac, Rade Kisić (Beograd: Pravoslavni bogoslovski fakultet Univerziteta u Beogradu – Institut za Sistematsko bogoslovlje, 2021), 165–210: 180–181.

<sup>76</sup> Vladimir Dimitrijević, *Oklevetani svetac. Vladika Nikolaj i srbofobija* (Gornji Milanovac: Lio 2007); Bojan Belić, *Vladika Nikolaj, Hitler i Evropa – kontroverze* (Valjevo: Valjevska gimnazija, 2019); Rastko Lompar, "Zatočeništvo patrijarha Gavrila i episkopa Nikolaja Velimirovića u Dahauu 1944. godine," *Studije istorije Ilarion* 3 (2018): 9–29; Rastko Lompar, *Dimitrije Ljotić – učitelj ili farisej* (Beograd: Catena mundi, 2021), 251; Srećko Petrović, "Neki aspekti eklisiologije dijaspore u misli Vladike Nikolaja Velimirovića," 165–210; Željko Perović, "Da li je Sveti Vladika Nikolaj bio fašista? Pregled njegovih svetosavskih obraćanja od marta 1935. godine do aprila 1941. godine," *Nicholai Studies* 1/2 (2021): 395–434.

<sup>77</sup> Velimirović, "Nacionalizam Svetog Save," 311.

Nikolaj’s reference to Hitler’s realization that nationalism without faith is an anomaly has several elements. First, Nikolaj probably understood that the unification of 28 Protestant churches of Germany in the movement known as German Christians (*die Deutschen Christen*) in 1933 and 1934 was a step toward the creation of a German national church and that this process was supported by Hitler.<sup>78</sup> Therefore, Nikolaj perceived the intention of Hitler to create a national church and unify it with the nation state worthy of a genius, because this is related to the second stage of Saint Savian nationalism. Second, Nikolaj’s claim that Hitler realized something did not mean that Hitler succeeded in his plans. The creation of the German national church for Nikolaj included the unification of the Protestant churches with the Catholic church as well, and this did not happen. In his letter to Bishop Dionisije from 1946, Nikolaj states that in his lecture ‘The Nationalism of St Sava’ he did not glorify Hitler but Saint Sava, because as a saint, genius and hero St Sava united the Serbian people through the Serbian Church, while Hitler and Pascal failed in similar endeavors.<sup>79</sup> Third, Nikolaj’s reference to Hitler might also be understood as a warning of what nationalism might become without faith. Nikolaj is very clear in his article ‘Between Left and Right’ from December 1935 that fascism was idolatry of one’s own nation.<sup>80</sup> Therefore, the reference to Hitler in his lecture on Saint Savian nationalism was a kind of prediction that German nationalism might slip into chauvinism and imperialism if Hitler failed to establish a national church and unite it with the national state. This happened at the end.

Nikolaj’s reference to Hitler might also be interpreted in the context of internationalism, which contrary to fascism is the negation of nation. The only internationalism Nikolaj mentions in his lecture is the ecclesial internationalism of Constantinople and Rome which Saint Sava opposed by establishing an independent Serbian Church. As a

<sup>78</sup> Dimitrijević, *Oklevetani svetac*, 58; Matthew D. Hockenos, *A Church Divided: German Protestants Confront the Nazi Past* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 4-5.

<sup>79</sup> Nikolaj Velimirović, “Pismo Episkopu Dionisiju od 20. februara 1946. godine,” in: Episkop Nikolaj, *Sabrana dela*, vol. 10, 704-705: 705.

<sup>80</sup> Velimirović, “Između levice i desnice,” 711.

bishop of the Serbian Church, Nikolaj was a witness of the revival of both ecclesial internationalisms. As a representative of the Serbian Church in the inter-Orthodox preparatory committee in 1930 at the monastery of Vatopedi on Mount Athos, Nikolaj was aware of the attempts of the Greek metropolitans (especially Metropolitan Germanos Strenopoulos of Thyateira of the Constantinopolitan Patriarchate) to impose the Greek language on other non-Greek churches as the official language in the Orthodox Church.<sup>81</sup> For all those Slavonic churches, which experienced the rule of the Phanariot bishops during the Ottoman period, a move in this direction was nothing else than ecclesial imperialism. Nikolaj pointed also in the direction of the Roman Church. During the pontificate of Pope Pius XI the Roman Catholic Church concluded a number of concordats, for example with Romania and Lituania in 1927, and with Germany in 1933. For Nikolaj concordats in which the Catholic Church agreed with European states was also a form of internationalism or ecclesial imperialism directly opposite to the Gospel and Christian traditions, and a sign of disrespect to the nations and national languages. In this respect the situation in Germany and Yugoslavia was for Nikolaj similar because the Catholics in both countries had to serve a foreign pope. While Nikolaj wanted to liberate Orthodox Serbs from the ecclesial rule of Constantinople and Catholic Croats from the ecclesial rule of Rome, many Catholics considered their affiliation with Rome as crucial for their Catholic identity. Thus, in his book *Deadly Sins* from 1937, the Ustaša leader Ante Pavelić argued that it is impossible “to change the thousand years old orientation of Croats-Catholics and to interrupt the existing relationship between them and the Holy See.”<sup>82</sup> This statement of Pavelić demonstrates that it is possible to be fascist and internationalist at the same time, which was unthinkable for Nikolaj. Nikolaj’s reference to Hitler, therefore, did not intend to glorify Hitler, but to convince Catholics to renounce the rule of the Roman pope and together with Orthodox Serbs work on church unity and Yugoslav identity.

<sup>81</sup> Petrović, “Neki aspekti eklisiologije dijaspore u misli Vladike Nikolaja Velimirovića,” 178.

<sup>82</sup> Cited from Vladimir Dedijer, *Vatikan i Jasenovac. Dokumenti* (Beograd: Rad, 1987), 71.

The reference to the medal Nikolaj received from Germany for the restoration of the German military cemetery can hardly prove Nikolaj’s adherence to fascism, but it is an interesting case because of the scholarly interpretations and misinterpretations. For example, Byford states that in 1934 “Velimirović received the medal at a high-profile ceremony at the German Embassy in Belgrade, which was attended by representatives of the Yugoslav government and the Patriarch Varnava Rosić.”<sup>83</sup> Substantiating his claim by the Yugoslav press, Srećko Petrović places this event in October 1936 and denies the presence of Nikolaj at the German embassy.<sup>84</sup> Moreover, Petrović observes that the choice of retired bishop Jerotej Gavrilović and not a more important figure of the Serbian Church to be the representative of Patriarch Varnava Rosić at this ceremony explains the stance of the Serbian Church towards Germany.<sup>85</sup> The whole issue about awarding Nikolaj with the German medal of the Red Cross can hardly be of any importance regarding Nikolaj’s relationship with fascism, but it obviously plays a role in the ongoing debate.

The most persistent accusation against Nikolaj for fascism stemmed from Nikolaj’s relationship with Dimitrije Ljotić. It has become conventional wisdom to claim that Nikolaj Velimirović, as a personal friend of Dimitrije Ljotić, the leader of the Serbian fascist movement ‘Zbor,’ was a follower of Ljotić and Zbor.<sup>86</sup> Focusing on the character of Nikolaj, Byford argues that Ljotić was rather the follower and disciple of Velimirović, than vice versa.<sup>87</sup> Rastko Lompar maintains that there are three different interpretations of the relationship between Nikolaj and Ljotić: a) they complemented each other’s actions as representatives of religion and politics, b) Ljotić manipulated Nikolaj for his own political

<sup>83</sup> Byford, *Denial and Repression of Antisemitism*, 47.

<sup>84</sup> Petrović, “Neki aspekti eklisiologije dijaspore u misli Vladike Nikolaja Velimirovića,” 180.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 181.

<sup>86</sup> Ljubica Štefan, *Srpska pravoslavna crkva i fašizam* (Zagreb: Globus 1996); Ljubica Štefan, *Pregled srpskog antisemitizma* (Zagreb: Alatir 1992).

<sup>87</sup> Jovan Byford, “Willing Bystanders: Dimitrije Ljotić ‘Shield Collaboration’ and the Destruction of Serbia’s Jews,” in *In the Shadow of Hitler*, ed. Rebecca Haynes and Martyn Rady (London: IB Tauris 2011), 300.



ends, and c) Ljotić was an exponent of Nikolaj.<sup>88</sup> In analyzing all three interpretations, Lompar came to the conclusion that in the period between the Concordat crisis in 1937 and Yugoslavia's joining the Tripartite pact in 1941 Nikolaj to a certain extent supported the movement Zbor, but never publicly and resolutely.<sup>89</sup> When it comes to the personal relation between Nikolaj and Ljotić neither Ljotić controlled Nikolaj, nor Nikolaj Ljotić. Lompar argues that by being 'ideological fellow travelers,' they did have foci on similar issues in their public appearances and writings, such as communism, fascism, Jews, European secularism, but different, sometimes opposite, views on how to deal with these issues.<sup>90</sup> Both authors were considered fascists, anti-Communists and anti-Semites, but there were differences between them on these particular issues.

Nikolaj's last benevolent reference to Hitler was in his lecture "The Nationalisms of Saint Sava" from March 1935. This is not surprising because at that time many Yugoslav and European intellectuals, including Serbian church dignitaries, such as Patriarch Varnava Rosić, praised Hitler.<sup>91</sup> However, already in December 1935, in his article 'Between Left and Right,' Nikolaj proposes the middle way between communism, which is on the left, and fascism which is on the right.<sup>92</sup> By the end of the 1930s, Nikolaj became very harsh in his criticism of fascism and Hitler, comparing them with "the antichrist," "Satan's evil," and the "apocalyptic beast."<sup>93</sup> Similarly, Nikolaj criticized communism as a totalitarian ideology, but his critique of communism was much milder than his critique of fascism.<sup>94</sup> Nikolaj criticized communism for being atheistic, and he hoped that future generations would want com-

<sup>88</sup> Lompar, *Dimitrije Ljotić – učitelj ili farisej*, 237.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 245.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 246.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 249.

<sup>92</sup> Velimirović, "Između levice i desnice," 711.

<sup>93</sup> Miloš Timotijević, "Dunuli su vihorni vetrovi: stavovi episkopa Nikolaja Velimirovića o Jevrejima, liberalizmu, komunizmu i nacizmu u štampi Žičke eparhije pred Drugi svetski rat," *Naša prošlost* 8 (2007): 97–119: 117.

<sup>94</sup> Miloš Timotijević, "Interwar attitudes of Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović towards Communism," here, 147.

munism in the name of Christ.<sup>95</sup> While imprisoned at the monastery of Vojlovica together with Patriarch Gavriilo Dožić, Nikolaj several times fended off German insistence to give moral support to the anti-communist front in Serbia, because this would have meant taking the side of the German fascists and endorsing the occupation of Serbia.<sup>96</sup> A few weeks before the total collapse of the Third Reich, sensing that fascism would be soon dead, Nikolaj called for national unity and a common front of the troops of Dragoljub Mihailović, Dimitrije Ljotić and Milan Nedić against Tito’s Communist state in Yugoslavia.

Contrary to Nikolaj, Ljotić was in the mid-1930s suspicious of Hitler and German Nazism, while toward the beginning of the Second World War he became an ardent supporter of Hitler.<sup>97</sup> In 1935, Ljotić also had a positive understanding of Marxism and communism as the justified criticism of capitalism,<sup>98</sup> but already in 1936, he and his movement entered in armed conflicts with the communists in Serbia.<sup>99</sup>

Regarding the anti-Semitism of Nikolaj and Ljotić, they had opposite trajectories like their views on fascism. While Nikolaj’s anti-Semitic and anti-Judaist attitudes were strongest during the 1920s, they alleviated immediately before the Second World War, when he stood against the anti-Semitic propaganda of Zbor and the anti-Semitic laws of the Yugoslav government.<sup>100</sup> Contrary to Nikolaj’s anti-Semitism, Ljotić’s anti-Semitism progressed from the Christian anti-Judaism<sup>101</sup> he propagated until mid-1930s to classical anti-Semitism, without the racial dimension of German Nazism, to which he turned during WWII.<sup>102</sup> They also had opposite views on *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. While Ljotić praised and promoted them, Nikolaj rejected them.<sup>103</sup>

<sup>95</sup> Nikolaj Velimirović, „Tri aveti evropske civilizacije”, *Hrišćanska misao*, August-September 1939, 99–101.

<sup>96</sup> Radmila Radić, *Život u vremenima: Patrijarh Gavriilo (Dožić): 1881–1950* (Beograd: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 2006), 232–233.

<sup>97</sup> Lompar, *Dimitrije Ljotić – učitelj ili farisej*, 250.

<sup>98</sup> Dimitrije Ljotić, „Čudna sprega,” *Sabrana dela*, vol. 3, 98.

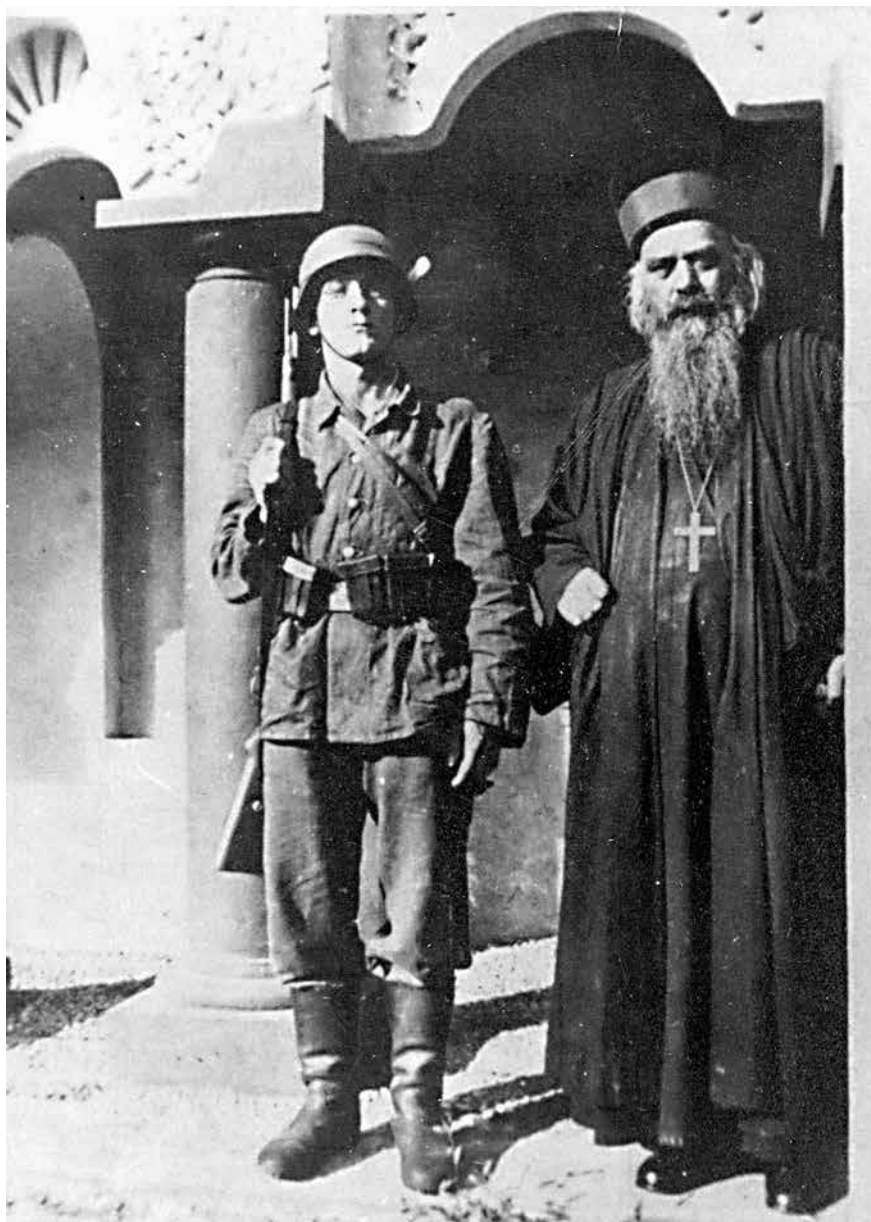
<sup>99</sup> Lompar, *Dimitrije Ljotić – učitelj ili farisej*, 164.

<sup>100</sup> Timotijević, “Dunuli su vihorni vetrovi,” 109, 111.

<sup>101</sup> Holm Sundhaussen, “Ljotić Dimitrije,” in: *Handbuch des Antisemitismus 2* (Berlin: De Gruyter Saur 2008), 486–487.

<sup>102</sup> Lompar, *Dimitrije Ljotić – učitelj ili farisej*, 165–166.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 250.



Bishop Nikolaj and a German soldier in the monastery of Žiča in 1941  
(Courtesy of the Serbian Orthodox Diocese of Valjevo)

As Miloš Timotijević argues, Nikolaj’s anti-Semitism had a double origin. The main origin and the root of his anti-Semitism was Christian anti-Judaism, i.e., an attitude that stems from the Bible narrative that the Jewish priests were responsible for the death of Jesus Christ. This is evident in Nikolaj’s allegorical story about Jesus as a lamb and Jewish priests as wolfs published in January 1928 in Belgrade’s magazine *Vreme (Time)*.<sup>104</sup> The second origin of Nikolaj’s anti-Semitism was an attitude, adopted from white Russian refugees in Yugoslavia, that Jews masterminded the October revolution in 1917 and inspired Russian communists to persecute Christians. Such an attitude may be seen in the article “Against the godless communism” from 1940, in which the author, later proved to be Nikolaj, accuses Karl Marx as a Jew that by his proclamation of religion as opium of the masses he motivated attacks on Christ and the Church.<sup>105</sup> A direct consequence of such atheistic ideology was the disappearance of Christian Russia.

The book that contributed immensely to the attitude about Nikolaj as an anti-Semite is *Words to Serbian People through the Dungeon Window*. The suspicion in Nikolaj’s authorship of this book has been already expressed by other scholars,<sup>106</sup> but this did not have much effect of scholars keen in proving Nikolaj’s fascist orientation. I will just repeat my views exposed elsewhere, why it is hard to believe that Nikolaj is the sole author of this work.<sup>107</sup>

The bishop of the Central European Diocese of the Serbian Church, Lavrentije Trifunović, as the editor of the *Collected Works of Bishop Nikolaj* (published in Himmelsthür in Germany in 1986) decided to include the text “Words to the Serbian People Through the Dungeon Window” in volume 13. This text was published for the first time in Himmelsthür in 1985 on the basis of the alleged autograph found in the attic of the

<sup>104</sup> Timotijević, “Dunuli su vihorni vetrovi,” 102.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>106</sup> Radmila Radić, Radio emisija, *Peščanik* 24 May 2003; <https://pescanik.net/136-emisija/>; Jovan Ćilibrik, “Izraelci nas odlično razumeju,” *Jevrejski pregled* 2, February 2009, 6–8: 7; Srećko Petrović, “Is Nikolai Velimirovich the author of the book *Words to the Serbian People Through the Dungeon Window?*,” *Philotheos* 20/2 (2020): 260–303.

<sup>107</sup> Vladimir Cvetković, “The Freedom from Passions and the Freedom for All: St Nikolaj Velimirović on Democracy,” *Nicholai Studies* 1 (2021): 53–80.

Serbian church in Linz a few years earlier. As a proof of the authenticity of this work the editor Bishop Lavrentije included a photograph of one sheet of paper from the alleged autograph in the *Collective Works*. In the short introduction to the text, Bishop Lavrentije argues that the work was undoubtedly written by Bishop Nikolaj in Dachau, because the author refers to Germans and Germany with a letter G instead of using full nouns. However, there are many spurious facts in regard to this work, which need some explanation.

First, the printed text in the *Collective Works* occupies more than 160 pages, and could at least occupy the same number of pages in the autograph. Producing a text of such a length during more than a month of his imprisonment in Dachau<sup>108</sup> under constant surveillance and hiding it from the German guards looks hardly like a feasible endeavor for Nikolaj. Therefore, it is hardly possible that a text of such a length was produced in Dachau. Moreover, in a letter to Atanasije Jevtić from March 3, 1972, Justin Popović claims that he came across the handwritten sermons of Bishop Nikolaj, and decided to integrate them in his book *The Orthodox Church and Ecumenism*.<sup>109</sup> At the same time, Justin adds that he did not get permission from Uncle Jova to mention the manuscript and its title. It could be assumed that the mentioned Uncle Jova is actually the bishop of Šabac-Valjevo, Jovan Velimirović, the nephew of Bishop Nikolaj and at the same time the owner of Nikolaj's sermons. As the editors and translators of Justin Popović's *Orthodox Church and Ecumenism* into Greek, Atanasije Jevtić and Amfilohije Radović refer to these sermons of Nikolaj as writings from Dachau,<sup>110</sup> while in the Serbian version the reference to Dachau is missing. Parts of chapters 12, 16, 18, 25, 27, 30, 32, 35, 40, 42, 44 of *Words to Serbian People through the Dungeon Window* appear ad verbatim in *The Orthodox Church and Ecumenism*. It is more probable to suppose that the sermons at stake are from the interwar period, and not from Dachau,

<sup>108</sup> Lompar, "Zatočeništvo patrijarha Gavrila i episkopa Nikolaja Velimirovića u Dahauu 1944. godine," 18.

<sup>109</sup> Justin Popović, "Pismo 146 Atanasiju Jevtiću od 3. 3. 1972," u: Prepodobni Otac Justin, *Pisma I* (Beograd: Manastir Ćelije 2020), 295–296: 295.

<sup>110</sup> Αρχιμ. Ιουστίνου Πόποβιτς, *Ορθόδοξος Εκκλησία και Οικουμενισμός* (Θεσσαλονίκη: Εκδόσεις „Ορθόδοξος Κυψέλη,” 1974), σελ. 234.

and that they existed as copies. Moreover, Srećko Petrović notes that communication between prisoners in Dachau was strictly forbidden and Nikolaj did not have any opportunity to address people publicly.<sup>111</sup>

Second, the noun “Germans” appears only twice in the whole text and both times in reference to the First World War.<sup>112</sup> Moreover, the German people appear in an affirmative context as being the instruments of the divine punishment of the Serbian people for their sins during WWI. It would be more likely that during Nikolaj’s imprisonment in Dachau, where “he suffered intense agonies as a Nazi prisoner,”<sup>113</sup> his attitudes toward Nazis changed for the worse, and not for the better. Thus, it is surprising that Nazis who were just a few years earlier “Satan’s evil,” and the “apocalyptic beast,”<sup>114</sup> become the instruments of divine providence. Similarly, the nouns “Jews” and “Jewish” appear around 150 times in an extremely negative context. The author accuses Jews that they are the inventors of all evils that came upon Europe and responsible for its tragic destiny. The question arises why Nikolaj would hide this text from German guards if it contains the worst anti-Jewish propaganda, which almost justifies the German treatment of Jews during the Second World War. It is also surprising that Nikolaj, who had randomly criticized, but also defended Jews in previous writings and sermons, attacks them suddenly and furiously from a concentration camp, knowing that thousands of them have been killed on a daily basis. This attitude is also in stark contrast to his pre-WWII opposition to the anti-Jewish laws of the Yugoslav government and the anti-Semitic propaganda of Zbor. Moreover, Nikolaj’s anti-Semitism was mainly expressed through Christian anti-Judaism and the accusation against Jews for masterminding the October revolution. Suddenly, the Jews are also accused of inventing democracy, socialism and religious tolerance, something that Nikolaj highly valued before but also after the Second

<sup>111</sup> Petrović, “Is Nicholai Velimirovich the author of the book *Words to the Serbian People Through the Dungeon Window?*,” 267.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 278.

<sup>113</sup> “Bishop Nicolai Seriously Ill,” *American Srbobran*, Vol. L, No. 11, 575, February 29, 1956: 2. Cf. Petrović, “Is Nicholai Velimirovich the author of the book *Words to the Serbian People Through the Dungeon Window?*,” 270.

<sup>114</sup> Timotijević, “Dunuli su vihorni vetrovi,” 117.

World War. Last but not least, Nikolaj's latter works lack evidence and references to his writings from Dachau.<sup>115</sup>

A possible explanation is that the work "Words to the Serbian People Through the Dungeon Window" was composed of Nikolaj's interwar sermons to which is added the anti-Jewish writings of some Zbor members. There were many examples in Nikolaj's letters written during the 1950's in which he wanted to distance himself from the actions of Zbor members in the emigration. Nikolaj even labelled the Zbor movement as "national godlessness" in order to differentiate it from communist godlessness.<sup>116</sup> On several occasions Nikolaj prevented Zbor members usurping and exploiting for their political goals the publishing house "Svečanik" in Munich founded by Nikolaj.<sup>117</sup> Therefore, it would not be hard to imagine that some Zbor members in Austria or Germany combined Nikolaj's interwar sermons with their anti-Semite, anti-ecumenical and anti-democratic works, and persuaded the editors of the Collected works of Nikolaj of the authenticity of this work. However, it is surprising that the scholars who attempted to prove Nikolaj's anti-Semitism on the basis of this work never took the argument of its inauthenticity as plausible, in spite of the fact that this argument circulated before they built their case against Nikolaj.

## Conclusion

The conventional wisdom about the Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović depicts him as the main ideologue and the chief cause of Serbian Saint-Savian nationalism and anti-Westernism, as a cunning and deceitful

<sup>115</sup> In several letters to Fr Aleksa Todorović, Velimirović mentions his works written during the Second World War, including some writings from Dachau but he never refers to the particular book. See letters to Aleksa Todorović, one is undated, but probably written in early 1951, and another is from 19th of March 1953 in: Episkop Nikolaj, *Sabrana dela*, vol. 13, 659–660; 693–694. Cf. Petrović, "Is Nikolaj Velimirovič the author of the book Words to the Serbian People Through the Dungeon Window?" 275.

<sup>116</sup> Nikolaj Velimirović, Pismo Aleksi Todoroviću od 30. aprila 1952. godine, in: Episkop Nikolaj, *Sabrana dela*, vol. 13, 677.

<sup>117</sup> Nikolaj Velimirović, Pismo Aleksi Todoroviću od 2. aprila 1953. godine, in: Episkop Nikolaj, *Sabrana dela*, vol. 13, 699.

churchman, as a proponent and inspirer of Serbian nationalism, and finally as a fascist and an anti-Semite. These accusations against Nikolaj were framed according to a media strategy previously applied to some political leaders, such as Slobodan Milošević, Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin. This strategy consists of four stages or levels. At the first level it is necessary to demonstrate the responsibility or main responsibility of a person for some wrongdoings, such as wars, violence or demoting democratic institutions. The second stage is to point out certain mental deficiencies of this person. The third stage relates to some covert agenda that this person is driven by, and the fourth stage pertains to comparing this personality with Hitler and finding similarities. The same strategy is applied to Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović. Thus, he has been seen as the chief ideologue of Saint-Savian nationalism and anti-Westernism of the Serbian people, and therefore the main cause of all wrongdoings of the Serbian people in the 20th century. Due to his positive attitudes toward Catholics in Yugoslavia and the Catholic Church in general, and at the same time severe opposition to the Concordat between Yugoslavia and the Catholic Church he was perceived as a deceitful person and a cunning opportunist. This alleged moral corruption of Nikolaj relates to the second stage of the aforementioned strategy. The third stage pertains to the alleged hidden agenda of Nikolaj. Thus, all of his actions toward the unification of the South Slavs, as well as his ecumenical endeavors are perceived as a covert agenda of Serbian expansion and domination in Yugoslavia and the conversion of all Yugoslav people into Orthodox Christianity. Finally, *reductio ad Hitlerum* is achieved by comparing Nikolaj with Hitler. Several events from Nikolaj's life as well as several of his writings are employed in order to demonstrate Nikolaj's fascism and anti-Semitism, the features he shares with Hitler. Since these constructions on Nikolaj are of a later date, mainly promulgated in international, especially German, scholarship in the last two decades, it is pertinent to explore their objectivity.

The main cause of the Yugoslav wars for the international media and to some extent international scholarship during the 1990's was Slobodan Milošević. After Milošević was extradited to the Hague tribunal in 2001, the narrative of his sole responsibility was replaced with the alternative narrative about the permanent danger of Serbian national-



ism, that caused not only the Yugoslav wars but also jeopardizes the very fragile peace in the Balkans. The Serbian Orthodox Church was deemed as the main generator of this nationalism, while Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović and his disciple Justin Popović are indicated as the chief inspirers of this nationalist ideology cherished by the Serbian Church. The link between Nikolaj and Justin and the present day was established through Justin Popović's spiritual children and influential bishops of the Serbian Church during the Yugoslav wars, Amfilohije Radović, Atanasije Jevtić, Artemije Radosavljević and Irinej Bulović. They played a prominent role in defining and expressing the interests of the Serbian people during the wars, especially in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo, which are interpreted by the international media and scholarship as the ideology of Saint Savian nationalism invented by Nikolaj.

The charge against Nikolaj for fueling with his attitudes current Serbian nationalism is further extended with charges of being anti-ecumenist, nationalist, fascist and an anti-Semite. He was accused of being deceitful in his relationship to the Catholic Church, because at the same time he worked on the unity between Catholics and Orthodox he opposed the Roman pope. Nikolaj perceived the dependence of Catholics on the Roman pope and the dependence of the Orthodox on the Constantinopolitan patriarch as the relics of imperial times and ecclesial imperialism, and he looked for liberation of the Catholics in Yugoslavia from Vatican rule as he previously supported the liberation of Orthodox Serbs from the rule of the Phanar. He was very honest in his views from his earliest to his latest works.

The Serbian nationalism ascribed to Nikolaj is presented as a certain hidden agenda. However, as a severe critic of nationalism as the idolatry of nations, Nikolaj proposed to couple service to one's own nation with the service to universal humanity and to God. Thus, Nikolaj wanted to prevent the transformation of nationalism into chauvinism, as the hatred of other people, or imperialism, as the rule over other different people. Moreover, he wanted to establish nationalism on faith, as a permanent category of human existence, and thus preserve national identity as something valuable. Therefore, his nationalism was neither Serbian nor Yugoslav and it is not restricted to the political and

economic goals of a particular nation, but is rather perceived as a step on the ladder toward God, fulfilling its purpose only in respect to such an end.

Finally, in spite of spending almost the whole the Second World War as a German prisoner, first in several monasteries in Serbia, and finally in Dachau, Nikolaj was portrayed as a fervent follower of the Nazis. A positive reference to some of Hitler's actions from 1935, an acceptance of the Red Cross from the German Embassy in Yugoslavia in 1936, an acquaintance with the leader of the fascist movement in Yugoslavia in the period before the Second World War and finally a book with anti-Semite messages attributed to him posthumously were exposed as evidence of his fascism and anti-Semitism. Many other events and written accounts that prove the opposite were completely overlooked and neglected. Similarly, his Christian anti-Judaism from the 1920s, very common in theological circles at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, were proclaimed as racial anti-Semitism. Again, his critique of Yugoslav anti-Jewish laws and anti-Semite propaganda of the Zbor movement as well as his hiding of a Jewish family from the persecution of the Nazis at the beginning of the Second World War in Yugoslavia were totally ignored. Finally, the anti-Semite passages from the work attributed to him 25 years after his death served as the strongest evidence. However, the style as well as content of these passages were in stark opposition to all issues he stood for during his life, including ecumenism, democracy and science.

Without entering the reasons and motives for such interpretations, it is obvious that many of the charges against Nikolaj do not stand. Therefore, it would be pertinent to abandon the conventional wisdom about Nikolaj as a fascist and anti-Semite and put his life and work again under rigorous scholarly scrutiny.

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# Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović as an “Enemy of the People”<sup>1</sup>

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## Some introductory remarks

**N**ikolaj Velimirović (1881–1956) was someone who remained a mystery and was incomprehensible to many of his contemporaries.<sup>2</sup> After his death, he was largely forgotten, and his legacy continued to be respected by a few admirers in Serbia and by a larger group in exile. Many of his works were published in Western Europe and the United States during the 1960s and 1970s. Since the mid-1980s, his presence has grown, and controversies have been escalating around him. Even though he has been the subject of countless biographies and essays, none has satisfactorily addressed his contradictory heritage.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Radmila Radić, *Život u vremenima: patrijarh Gavrilo (Dožić) 1881–1950*. Drugo prošireno i dopunjeno izdanje (Beograd: PBF, 2011), 171.

<sup>3</sup> In 23 volumes, the complete writings of Saint Nikolaj Velimirović have been published by the Valjevo publishing house *Glas Crkve*. Here we list some publications and books that deal with him, but we have not cited them directly in the paper: Veselin M. Vukićević, “Jedan lažan apostol,” *Nova Evropa* (November 11, 1921): 306–311; Veselin M. Vukićević, “Književna kronika. Nikolaj Bogomoljac – pesnik,” *Nova Evropa* (October 26, 1926): 226–229; Tomas Bremer, *Vera, kultura i politika* (Niš: Gradina/JUNIR, 1997); Chrysostomus R. Grill, *Serbischer Messianismus und Europa bei Bischof Velimirovic (1956)*. (St. Ottilien: EOS-Verl, 1998); Velibor Džomić, “Prilozi za biografiju Sv. Vladike Nikolaja u II svetskom ratu,” in *Sveti Vladika Nikolaj Ohridski i Žički*, ed. Atanasije Jevtić (Kraljevo: Sveti Manastir Žiča, 2003), 426–440; Jovan



Like most of his predecessors or contemporaries, Nikolaj Velimirović was not educated in Russia. In addition to studying at the Old Catholic Theological Faculty in Bern, he spent some time in London and Oxford.<sup>4</sup> In 1909, he returned from studying in Europe and took a monastic vow. Following that, he went to Russia in January 1910 to “orthodoxize” on the recommendation of Metropolitan Dimitrije. He returned to the Kingdom of Serbia in May 1911 and was appointed as a trainee teacher at the Theological Seminary of St. Sava.<sup>5</sup> In 1912, he was appointed court priest by royal decree due to his close relationship with King Peter I Karađorđević. The Belgrade press sometimes called him “Salon Monk Rasputin,” a mocking term that persisted even after the war.<sup>6</sup> Although he was criticized in the early years of his ministry, Velimirović was viewed as a progressive theologian, an Anglophile sympathetic to Protestantism, a liberal within the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC), and someone who would lead the Church into a modern era.<sup>7</sup>

During World War I, Hieromonk Nikolaj was a spokesperson for Serb national interests in England and the United States, and he advo-

Radosavljević, *Život i stradanje Žiće i Studenice pred rat, pod okupacijom i posle rata (1938–1945)* (Novi Sad: Beseda, 2003); Jovan Byford, “From ‘Traitor’ to ‘Saint’: Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović in Serbian Public Memory,” *Analysis of Current Trends in Antisemitism*, no. 22 (2004): 1–41; Vladimir Dimitrijević, *Najveći Srbin posle Svetog Save* (Čačak: Legenda, 2006); Vladimir Dimitrijević, *Oklevetani svetac, Sveti vladika Nikolaj i srbofobija* (Gornji Milanovac: Lio, 2007); Klaus Buchenau, *Auf russischen Spuren: Orthodoxe Antiwestler in Serbien, 1850–1945* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2011); Jovan M. Jovanović Pižon, *Dnevnik (1896–1920)* (Novi Sad: Prometej; Belgrade: RTS and Arhiv Jugoslavije, 2015); etc.

<sup>4</sup> Aleksa Ilić, *Moji doživljaji sa dr. Nikolajem Velimirovićem i dr. Vojom Janićem* (Beograd, 1938), 9–10; Bogdan Lubardić, “Nikolaj Velimirović 1903–1914,” in *Srbi 1903–1914. Istorija ideja*, ed. Miloš Ković (Beograd: Clio 2015), 328–357; Slobodan G. Markovich, “Activities of Father Nikolai Velimirovich in Great Britain during the Great War,” *Balkanica*, no. 48 (2017): 143–190, 148; Urs von Arx, “Bishop Nikolaj Velimirovic (1880–1956) and his studies in Bern within the context of the old Catholic–Serbian Orthodox relationship,” *Serbian Studies* 20, no. 2 (2006): 307.

<sup>5</sup> Klaus Buchenau, “Just as Real-life Brothers. Serb–Russian Contacts in the Ecclesiastical Academy of Kyiv (1850–1914) and Orthodox Schools of Interwar Yugoslavia (1920–1941),” *Tokovi istorije*, no. 3–4 (2005): 54–67; Markovich, “Activities,” 143–190.

<sup>6</sup> Radmila Radić, *Vojislav Janić (1890–1944) sveštenik i političar* (Beograd: INIS, 2018), 35.

<sup>7</sup> Radić, *Život u vremenima*, 169.

cated the idea of a South Slavic national and spiritual union. In his essay “Religion and nationality in Serbia,” published as both a pamphlet and in an edited volume, *The Soul of Serbia* (1916), Velimirović expresses strong pro-Yugoslav sentiments. He said Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes one nation due to their language, blood, destiny, aspirations, and desire to break free from the Habsburg yoke. However, in private, he held a deep aversion to Catholicism, which he saw as “the most conservative of the western denominations.”<sup>8</sup>

Due to his cooperation with the Anglican Church, Velimirović was nominated for an honorary Lambeth Doctorate of Divinity, but he did not receive it because he was not a British citizen or a priest of the Anglican Church.<sup>9</sup> Instead, a specially designed pectoral cross and chain were given to him by the Archbishop of Canterbury on St. George’s Day (23 April) 1919 as a symbol of brotherly love, commitment to ecumenical unity, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>10</sup>

According to some sources, after assuming the office of the Bishop of Žiča in 1919, Nikolaj Velimirović had a good chance of being elected patriarch of the unified SOC at the time.<sup>11</sup> Instead, he was transferred to the Ohrid diocese at the end of 1920. He traveled to Athens, Constantinople, the Holy Mountain, England, and America on several national and religious missions. Nikolaj also attended ecumenical church gatherings and pan-Orthodox consultative forums. However, the war and the Bolshevik Revolution influenced his perceptions and actions. In Ohrid, the bishop had a profound spiritual experience and transformation. Afterwards, he launched into a sharp critique of modern Eu-

<sup>8</sup> Nikolaj Velimirović, *The Soul of Serbia* (London: The Faith Press, 1916), 56; Dragoljub R. Živojinović, *Vatikan, Srbija i stvaranje jugoslovenske države 1914–1920* (Beograd: Nolit, 1980), 145–148; Radovan Bigović, *Od Svečoveka do Bogočoveka: Hrišćanska filozofija vladike Nikolaja Velimirovića* (Beograd: Društvo Raška škola, 1998), 25, 35; Milan D. Janković, *Episkop Nikolaj. Život, misao i delo*. Three vols. (Valjevo: Eparhija Šabačko-valjevska, 2002–2003), I/39.

<sup>9</sup> Markovich, “Activities,” 143–190; Muriel Heppell, *George Bell and Nikolaj Velimirovic. The Story of a Friendship* (Birmingham: Lazarica Press, 2001), 12–13.

<sup>10</sup> “The Anglican and Eastern Churches: A Historical Record, 1914–1921,” *Project Canterbury*, accessed January 4, 2022, [http://historical\\_record1921.html](http://historical_record1921.html); Lubardić, “Nikolaj”, 328–357.

<sup>11</sup> “Izbor srpskog patrijarha,” *Zastava*, 63 (March 30, 1919).

rope, which he said rejects God and worships idols.<sup>12</sup> After the early 1930s, he gradually lost interest in concerns about Yugoslav unification and the ecumenical movement, although he maintained contact with Anglican Church representatives and some ecumenical organizations. His attention focused on the God Worshipers Movement (hereinafter “Worshippers”), an evangelistic network of Orthodox Christians.<sup>13</sup> In the 1930s, Velimirović elevated *svetosavlje* to the status of a principle unifying state, nation, and church.<sup>14</sup> Once again, he became bishop of Žiča in 1936, and in 1936/7 he was a leading voice against the signing of the Concordat between Yugoslavia and the Vatican. Despite reconciliation between the state and church in the second half of 1937, he remained at odds. For about three years, he boycotted Holy Synod and SOC Assembly meetings and avoided communication and reconciliation with state officials.<sup>15</sup> He had complicated and often strained relationships with many of his contemporaries outside and inside the church. He was officially reconciled with Patriarch Gavriilo Dožić in 1940, but their relations remained complex. There was a conflict between Nikolaj and Dionisije Milivojević, the future American-Canadian bishop, over the leadership of the Worshipers. In 1933, Bishop Nikolaj was expelled from Mount Athos due to activities related to the introduction of communal or coenobitic monasticism (κοινόβιον) instead of self-regulated or idiorhythmic monasticism (ιδιορρυθμία), in the Hilandar Monastery, which the Ecumenical Patriarch did not recognize.<sup>16</sup> Bishop Platon Jovanović

<sup>12</sup> Bigović, *Od Svečoveka*, 39–40.

<sup>13</sup> Dragan Subotić, *Episkop Nikolaj i Pravoslavni bogomoljački pokret* (Beograd: Nova Iskra, 1996); Jovan Byford, *Denial and Repression of Antisemitism* (New York: Budapest: CEU Press, 2008), 19–76; Radmila Radić, Aleksandra Djurić Milovanović, “The God Worshiper Movement in Serbian Society in the Twentieth Century: Emergence, Development, and Structures,” in *Orthodox Christian Renewal Movements in Eastern Europe*, eds. Aleksandra Djurić Milovanović and Radmila Radić (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 137–172.

<sup>14</sup> Maria Falina, “Svetosavlje. A Case Study in the Nationalization of Religion.” *SZRKG* 101 (2007): 505–527.

<sup>15</sup> Miloš Mišović, *Srpska crkva i konkordatska kriza* (Belgrade: Sloboda, 1983); Radić, *Život u vremenima*, 277–315; Radmila Radić, *The Mission of the British Young Men’s Christian Association in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia* (Beograd: INIS, 2019), 254, 255, 263.

<sup>16</sup> Radić, *Život u vremenima*, 257–259.



Bishop Nikolaj delivers a sermon for the late Patriarch Varnava in the Cathedral in Belgrade, Source: *Vreme*, 27 July 1937, 1



Bishop Nikolaj, the exiled King Peter II Karadorđević and Bishop Dionisije (Milivojević) in London (Courtesy of The Royal Family of Serbia, Internet source: <https://royalfamily.org/hm-king-peter-ii-of-yugoslavia-gallery/>)

of Ohrid and Bitola, later Bishop of Banja Luka, sharply attacked Bishop Nikolaj in 1939, accusing him of heresy, sectarianism, a schism within the SOC, not being Orthodox, and hating Tsarist Russia.<sup>17</sup>

The SOC, including the patriarch Gavrilo Dožić and Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović, backed the putsch that annulled the treaty between Yugoslavia and the Axis in March 1941. The putsch attracted considerable public support in Serbia. Nikolaj Velimirović is believed to have written, or at least inspired, the famous patriotic speech, which patriarch Gavrilo read on national radio.<sup>18</sup> Both patriarch Gavrilo and bishop Nikolaj were branded Anglophiles and interrogated for aiding the March 1941 coup by German occupiers. Like the patriarch, Bishop Nikolaj was interned during the war. After their transfer to Germany in September 1944, they spent two months at Dachau as “honorable prisoners” (Ehrenhaft).<sup>19</sup> As a result of a deal between Serbian collaborators and the German envoy in the Balkans, Hermann Neubacher, Velimirović, and Dožić were freed from prison in November 1944. They remained under surveillance until they were released on May 8, 1945, in Kitzbühel by soldiers from the US 36<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division in Tyrol.<sup>20</sup> According to some sources, Gestapo agents demanded that the patriarch and the bishop write an epistle to the Serbian people asking them to fight against the communists. The patriarch was also offered to form a new Serbian government or a broad national committee based in Ljubljana to assist the Germans in defeating the partisans. However, neither of these proposals had any effect. Furthermore, the patriarch refused to preside over the Orthodox Council of refugees from Russia, Bulgaria, Poland, and other countries.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Radić, *Vojislav Janić*, 360.

<sup>18</sup> Atanasije Jevtić, “Kosovska misao i opredeljenje Episkopa Nikolaja,” *Glas crkve*, no. 3 (1988): 24; Artemije Radosavljević, “Životopis Svetog Vladike Nikolaja,” in *Sveti Vladika Nikolaj Ohridski i Žički*, ed. Atanasije Jevtić (Kraljevo: Sveti Manastir Žiča, 2003), 329–340; Byford, *Denial*, 19–76; Radić, *Život u vremenima*, 348–356.

<sup>19</sup> Rastko Lompar, “Zatočeništvo patrijarha Gavrila i episkopa Nikolaja Velimirovića u Dahauu 1944. godine,” *Studije istorije Ilarion*, no. 3 (2018): 9–29.

<sup>20</sup> Radić, *Život u vremenima*, 439–440.

<sup>21</sup> Radmila Radić, *Država i verske zajednice 1945–1970*, I–II (Beograd: INIS, 2002), I/91; Radić, *Život u vremenima*, 445, 449.

In mid–August 1945, Gavriilo Dožić left Kitzbühel, and Bishop Nikolaj had already left for Salzburg.<sup>22</sup> The two met again in London for the christening of Crown Prince Alexander of Yugoslavia, the son, and heir of King Peter II. Patriarch Gavriilo and Bishop Nikolaj were granted British visas under the condition that they refrain from political activities. The patriarch gave a sermon at the request of the Anglican and Eastern Churches Association and appealed to the British to provide help and protection to the people of Yugoslavia, where there was no freedom. He returned to Europe on a train in a special compartment in the following days.<sup>23</sup>

The ship “Queen Elizabeth” brought Bishop Nikolaj to the USA from Southampton, England, on January 9, 1946. The SOC Canadian–American Bishop Dionisije Milivojević signed his guarantee to enter the USA. Transit passenger records indicate he had a number 27 arriving from Dachau, Germany.<sup>24</sup> When Velimirović first came to America, he lived at the St. Sava Monastery in Libertyville. The monastery also housed bishops, Dionisije and Irinej Đorđević.<sup>25</sup> Bishop Dionisije asked the former ambassador of the Yugoslav Kingdom, Konstantin Fotić,<sup>26</sup> to arrange Nikolaj’s visa. Fotić was informed on May 7, 1946, that Nikolaj had no intention of returning to Yugoslavia.<sup>27</sup> As a monarchist loyal to the Karađorđević dynasty and an anti-communist, he probably believed that he would be more successful in fighting the new authorities if he remained abroad. At the end of 1951, Nikolaj moved from the monastery in Libertyville to the monastery of St. Tikhon.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Radić, *Država*, I/91.

<sup>23</sup> Radić, *Život u vremenima*, 477.

<sup>24</sup> Nemanja Andrijašević, “George Radin on Bishop Dr. Nikolaj Velimirovich and the Serbian Orthodox Church in America,” *Nicholai Studies* I, no. 2 (2021): 369–394, 379.

<sup>25</sup> From 1931 to 1952, Irinej Đorđević (1894–1952) served as bishop of the Dalmatia SOC Eparchy. In 1941, he was captured by the Italians and held until they capitulated. He left Italy in 1945 to become a parish priest in Steubenville, Ohio. He returned to England in 1949 and worked at the University of Cambridge until he died in 1952.

<sup>26</sup> Konstantin Fotić served as a Yugoslav envoy from 1935 to 1942 before becoming the first Yugoslav ambassador to the United States of America. He remained in the United States after retiring in 1944, closely involved with Serbian emigration circles.

<sup>27</sup> Stanimir Spasović. *Istorija Srpske pravoslavne crkve u Americi i Kanadi 1941–1991* (Beograd: Istočnik, 1997), 29–38.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

In June 1946, Columbia University in New York bestowed on Velimirović an honorary Doctorate of Theology. He wrote and published several books and essays while living in the United States.<sup>29</sup> He lectured at various Orthodox seminaries and institutions in the United States and provided material assistance to Serbian Orthodox monasteries in Yugoslavia.<sup>30</sup> On March 5, 1956, he died at St. Tikhon Monastery in South Canaan, Pennsylvania, and was buried on March 27 at St. Sava Monastery in Libertyville. He was returned to Serbia on May 12, 1991, and buried at his endowment, the monastery church of Lelić. The SOC included him in the list of recognized saints in 2003.<sup>31</sup>

### Enemy creation

Exclusive political systems have similar characteristics, such as power rationalization, enemy definition, and predetermined goals. The Bolsheviks and Lenin adhered to the Jacobin principle that a political community could only have two parties: the people and their enemies. Individuals and entire groups of political opponents were terrorized, sometimes just for expressing a view contrary to the dominant ideology. A monopoly of power and ideological cohesion were the primary objectives of inciting hatred toward the enemy.<sup>32</sup> In Yugoslavia (Serbia), communism was defined by statehood and the unique ideological interests of all the “working people” who lived there. Both internal and external opposition, whether political or class opponents, were seen as enemies of the state. Presumptions about ideologically defined groups like “bourgeoisie,” “citizens,” “intellectuals,” “kulaks,” “speculators,” and “remnants of pre-war political organizations,” among other ex-

<sup>29</sup> Between 1949 and 1953, Nikolaj Velimirović published: *The Faith of the Saints, The Universe as Signs and Symbols*, a book in Serbian called *Zemlja nedođija* [*The Nevercoming Land*], *The Life of Saint Sava, Žetve Gospodnje* [*The Harvests of the Lord*], *Kasijana* [*Cassiana*], and *Divan* [*Conversations*]. *Jedini čovekoljubac* [*Only Lover of Mankind*] was published posthumously in 1958.

<sup>30</sup> Heppell, *George Bell*, 87; Byford, *Denial*, 19–76; Sava Vuković, *Izabrani bogoslovsko-istorijski radovi* (Kragujevac: Kalenić, 2011).

<sup>31</sup> Arx, “Bishop Nikolaj”, 307.

<sup>32</sup> Kosta Čavoški, *O neprijatelju* (Beograd: Prosveta, 1989), 165, 173, 178, 183, 212, 225.

amples developed prejudices about “oneself” and “others.”<sup>33</sup> The phrase “enemies of the people” was defined by various laws, notably the May 1944 *People’s Courts Decree* and the 1945 *Law on Crimes Against the People and the State*.<sup>34</sup>

However, some sort of opposition is always present in any political order. The opposition takes many forms, from multiparty democracies to the timid defiance of loyalists to one-party systems.<sup>35</sup> Yugoslavs disagreed with the communist rule for many reasons (personal and political freedoms, communist economic policies, and the national question). Despite anti-communist sentiments in Serbia, the opposition was weak, uncoordinated, and mostly individual. Following the war, thousands of people perished in Serbia, including Nazi supporters and potential class rivals.<sup>36</sup> Some of the Communist Party’s opponents emigrated from Yugoslavia, forming a significant outside opposition force. Some of them, like bishop Nikolaj Velimirović, belonged to the SOC.

In official documents, as well as texts written about his activities after the Second World War and even after his death (1956), Nikolaj Velimirović was referred to as an “enemy of Yugoslavia” (1954; 1968);<sup>37</sup> a “servant of American imperialism”; an “enemy of all the achievements of the National Liberation Struggle”; a “mercenary of foreign capital”; an “instigator”; a “traitor”; a “cancer on the body of the SOC”; a “conspirator against the interests of his country,” etc.<sup>38</sup> He was accused of collecting reactionary migrants to advocate hatred toward

<sup>33</sup> Olivera Milosavljević, “Izbor ili nametanje tradicije,” *Republika*, 281, accessed January 4, 2022, [http://www.yurope.com/zines/republika/arhiva/2002/281/281\\_16.html](http://www.yurope.com/zines/republika/arhiva/2002/281/281_16.html).

<sup>34</sup> Momčilo Mitrović, “Narodni i državni neprijatelji u Srbiji posle Drugog svetskog rata,” in *Dijalog povjesničara–istoričara* 6 (Zagreb: F. Naumann Stiftung, 2001), 249–245.

<sup>35</sup> Leonard Schapiro, “Introduction,” *Government and Opposition* 1, no. 1 (1965): 1–6.

<sup>36</sup> Dejan N. Zec, “Communist Action, the Perception by the Serbian Urban Elite and Anti-Communist Resistance in Serbia,” in *Violent Resistance. From the Baltics to Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe 1944–1956*, eds. Michael Gehler and David Schriffl (Brill–Schöningh, 2020), 353–72.

<sup>37</sup> *Zapisnici sa sednica Komisije za verska pitanja NR/SR Srbije 1945–1978*, eds. Radmila Radić and Momčilo Mitrović (Belgrade: INIS, 2012), 864.

<sup>38</sup> *Zapisnici*, 919; Jovan Byford, *Potiskivanje i poricanje antisemitizma: Secanje na vladiku Nikolaja Velimirovića u savremenoj srpskoj pravoslavnoj kulturi* (Beograd: Helsinški odbor, 2005), 36–41.



Yugoslavia.<sup>39</sup> The Federation of Orthodox Priest Associations (hereinafter “Priest Association”) of the FPRY, an organization of Orthodox priests under government control, oversaw “fighting against the most reactionary bishops through the press, conferences, and assemblies”, especially against bishops living in exile. *Vesnik (Gazette)*, the magazine of this association, published regular articles about Velimirović.<sup>40</sup>

Bishop Nikolaj experienced criticism, particularly for emigrating to the USA and supporting imperialism, but also for his anti-communism,<sup>41</sup> support for Draža Mihailović’s movement,<sup>42</sup> and contacts with Dimitrije Ljotić and members of his movement Zbor [Rally],<sup>43</sup> and cooperation with Serbian political exiles in the diaspora. According to Jovan Byford, during the 1940s and 1950s, Velimirović had a reputation as a collaborator rather than a fascist. The broader ideological backdrop of postwar reconciliation and Cold War divisions was more suitable.

<sup>39</sup> “Šta je u Americi govorio i radio episkop Nikolaj?,” *Politika* (August 4, 1968).

<sup>40</sup> *Vesnik*, no. 1 (1949); no. 3 (1949); no. 4, and no. 5 (1949); no. 15 and no. 23 (1949); Radić, *Država*, I/321.

<sup>41</sup> In a series of his works during his stay in exile, he sharply attacked communist ideology and the regime in Yugoslavia. For example, the books *Zemlja Nedođija* and *Žetve Gospodnje*, articles such as “I’m talking about the conflict between the ideology of light and darkness” [Nikolaj Velimirović, *Sabrana dela*, XIII (Himelstir: Srpska pravoslavna eparhija zapadnoevropska, 1986), 563] and others.

<sup>42</sup> General Dragoljub Draža Mihailović, Yugoslav Army (Chetniks) leader, nationalist and royalist movement established after Germany invaded Yugoslavia in 1941. Between January 11, 1941, and August 1944, he was Minister of the Army, Navy, and Air Forces of the Yugoslav government-in-exile. He was convicted of high treason and war crimes after the war and executed on July 17, 1946. See more from Walter R. Roberts, *Tito, Mihailović and the Allies: 1941–1945* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: DUP, 1973); Jozo Tomasevich, *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia, 1941–1945: The Chetniks* (Stanford: SUP, 1975); Stevan K. Pavlowitch, *Hitler’s New Disorder: The Second World War in Yugoslavia* (New York: CUP, 2007); Kosta Nikolić, *Istorija ravnogorskog pokreta*, 1–3 (Beograd: Srpska reč, 1999).

<sup>43</sup> Dimitrije Ljotić (1891–1945) was a right-wing politician, the Minister of Justice of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, a lawyer, the leader of the movement Zbor, and a German collaborator during the occupation of Yugoslavia and Serbia in the Second World War. In Slovenia, Velimirović blessed the volunteers of Dimitrije Ljotić. Ljotić was killed in a car accident on April 23, and Bishop Nikolaj gave a speech at his funeral. For more, see: Rastko Lompar, *Dimitrije Ljotić–učitelj ili farisej. Zbor, hrišćanstvo i verske zajednice 1935–1945* (Beograd: Catena Mundi, 2021).

Patriarch Gavriilo, who returned to the country in 1946, was named a hero by the government and the SOC. However, the patriarch and Bishop Nikolaj both supported the putsch, and they spent most of the war together. Nevertheless, Velimirović’s opponents emphasized the differences between him and Dožić as much as possible, while ignoring the similarities.<sup>44</sup>

The FPRY’s Public Prosecutor’s Office submitted on April 10, 1947, to the Public Prosecutors of the Republics a list of banned books it deemed to falsify history, slander the USSR, preach darkness, fascism, religious and racial hatred, chauvinism, incite crime, etc. The inspection of all bookshops and the seizure of confiscated books took place during that month.<sup>45</sup> Nikolaj’s were among them. The FPRY Ministry of Internal Affairs revoked bishop Nikolaj Velimirović’s citizenship on September 27, 1951.<sup>46</sup> The SOC did not receive official notification of Bishop Nikolaj’s citizenship revocation until October 1954.<sup>47</sup>

Since the 1960s, Bishop Nikolaj has increasingly become a symbol not only of anti-communism but also of Serbian nationalism and fascism. Significant protests occurred in 1968 after Velimirović’s sermon appeared in the official SOC newspaper, *Pravoslavlje*. In 1969, the Federal Commission on Religious Affairs (FCRA) stated that he was a “well-known collaborator of the occupiers,” who wrote “nationalist and even racist articles.”<sup>48</sup> Moreover, *Politika* published additional articles on Velimirović that emphasized his praise of Hitler in the 1935 speech,<sup>49</sup> and affirmative references to Draža Mihailović in some of his

<sup>44</sup> Byford, *Poricanje*, 36–41; Byford, *Denial*, 19–113.

<sup>45</sup> Zdenko Radelić, *Hrvatska u Jugoslaviji 1945–1991: od zajedništva do razlaza* (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 2006), 156–157.

<sup>46</sup> The decision was based on the Law on Deprivation of Citizenship of Former Yugoslav Army Officers and Non-Commissioned Officers Who Will Not Return to Their Homeland, Members of Military Formations Who Served the Occupier and Fled Abroad, and Persons Who Fled After Liberation (article 1, paragraph 2). *Službeni list DFJ*, 64/45; *Službeni list FNRJ*, 86/46.

<sup>47</sup> Radić, *Država*, I/365.

<sup>48</sup> *Zapisnici*, 879.

<sup>49</sup> On Orthodox Sunday, March 4–17, 1935, Bishop Nikolaj gave a speech at the Kolarac University about St. Sava. He saw a follower of the Serbian saint in the actions of the “German Leader.” Nikolaj Velimirović, *Nacionalizam Svetog Save* (Belgrade: Pravoslavlje, 1935); Lompar, *Učitelj ili farisej*, 245–249.

post-war writings.<sup>50</sup> The press also criticized the SOC for attempting to publish Velimirović's book, *Religija Njegoševa* (*The Religion of Njegoš*), in 1969.<sup>51</sup> Additionally, Justin Popović, a dissident monk, preached occasionally during the sixties and seventies in praise of Velimirović. This provoked additional criticism against Popović and Velimirović. Bishop Nikolaj was even accused of waging a fratricidal crusade against his people to benefit foreign intelligence agencies.<sup>52</sup>

Because of the resurgence of the Worshipers in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sarajevo's daily media attacked the SOC's rising clericalism as the legacy of "war criminal" Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović. During those years, Nikolaj was commonly referred to as a "war criminal," even though he was never charged.<sup>53</sup> After hearing Bishop Nikolaj's sermon at a Worship Movement session in Bijeljina, members of the movement went to jail for being nationalistic.<sup>54</sup> The newspaper *Pravoslavlje* tried to protect the Worshipers, but a few months later, another attack occurred.<sup>55</sup>

According to the journal *Bezbednost* (Security), published by the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Serbia in 1982, "their attempts [a reference to the representatives of religious communities] to impose themselves as political partners on the League of Communists of Yugoslavia and other organized political forces, then attempt to rehabilitate some proven enemies of socialist Yugoslavia (RCC Cardinal Alojzije Stepinac, SOC bishop Nikolaj Velimirović, etc.),<sup>56</sup> and other sim-

<sup>50</sup> *Politika* (July 25, 1968), 6; (July 7, 1968), 7; Byford, *Denial*, 19–76.

<sup>51</sup> *Nedeljne novosti* (October 5, 1969): 6; Byford, *Poricanje*, 36–41; Byford, *Denial*, 19–76.

<sup>52</sup> Justin Popović, *Besede na parastosu Vladici Nikolaju Lelićkom* (Valjevo: Manastir Čelije, 1998); *Nedeljne novosti* (May 23, 1976), 4.

<sup>53</sup> *Oslobođenje* (July 5, 1981), 3; (July 7, 1981), 3; (September 18–21, 1981), 7; Predrag Ilić, „Političko–bezbednosni aspekti delovanja bogomoljačkog pokreta Srpske pravoslavne crkve,” *Bezbednost* 24, no. 5 (1982): 407–419, 417.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 407–419.

<sup>55</sup> Atanasije Jevtić, “Kome služi uravnilovka?” *Pravoslavlje* (August 1, 1981): 4; Ilić, „Političko–bezbednosni,” 417; Byford, *Denial*, 19–76.

<sup>56</sup> Ilić, „Političko–bezbednosni,” 407–419. Alojzije Stepinac, the Archbishop and head of the RCC in the so-called Independent State of Croatia, and Serbian Orthodox Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović were here openly connected, perhaps for the first time. The major difference between their fates during the Second World War was

ilar phenomena clearly show the counter-revolutionary nature of their plans and goals. They still want to turn the wheel of history and re-establish relations between the state and religious communities on some long-forgotten tracks.”<sup>57</sup> The author of this article, Predrag Ilić, attacks the revival of the God Worshipers Movement in the country. According to him, it is impossible to make a final judgment on the Worshiper Movement because detailed research is necessary. But despite the lack of research, he concludes that “probably the vast majority of worshipers were on the side of the counter-revolution,” although there were some opposite examples. He supports his claim by citing data on the behavior of several prominent members of the movement and those who served in Chetnik’s or Ljotić’s troops or opposed the regime after the war. He writes that the Worshiper Movement leadership “sided with domestic traitors and attempted to prevent the People’s Liberation Movement and socialist revolution.” Accusing Nikolaj Velimirović as one of the key leaders of the God Worshipers Movement, Ilić claimed that the Nazis wanted to use him because of his anti-communism and sympathies for National Socialism.<sup>58</sup> In one later text, the same author described Nikolaj Velimirović as “one of the most prominent representatives of Serbian Orthodox clericalism in the twentieth century.”<sup>59</sup>

The connections between Bishop Nikolaj and Dimitrije Ljotić, the right-wing Zbor movement, and his pro-Nazi beliefs,<sup>60</sup> have received

ignored, since the only thing that linked them was their resistance to the communist regime after the war. The communist regime sought to establish something of a balance between Stepinac’s and Velimirović’s conduct during the war in line with their balancing act between the Roman Catholic Croats and Orthodox Serbs. Later, in the 1990s, during, and after the breakup of Yugoslavia, this discourse developed further.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ilić, „Političko–bezbednosni,” 411–412, 414, 417; Predrag Ilić, “Pravoslavlje i klerikalizam: kritika teze o nepostojanju pravoslavnog klerikalizma,” *Bezbednost* 28, no. 6 (1986): 534–556. The same text was published in: *Religion and the Modern World* (Beograd: Centar za marksizam univerziteta, 1987), 103–111.

<sup>60</sup> Velimirović’s pro-Nazi views were supported by the fact that Nazi Germany awarded him a civilian medal in 1934 for his contribution to the restoration, in 1926, of a German cemetery from the Great War in Bitola, Macedonia. Velimirović received the award at a high-profile ceremony at the German Embassy in Belgrade, attended by representatives of the Yugoslav government and the patriarch. (Byford,

widespread attention since the mid-1980s. Nikolaj was accused of not publicly criticizing Ljotić, of supporting him during his 1940 imprisonment, and of speaking at his 1945 burial.<sup>61</sup> But 1985 marked a turning point for Nikolaj Velimirović. In that year, his most controversial work, *Reči srpskom narodu kroz tamnički prozor* [*Words to the Serbian People Through the Dungeon Window*], was published in West Germany, first independently and then in his collected works. According to the editor, Velimirović wrote the manuscript in the Dachau concentration camp between September 15, 1944, and May 8, 1945. Nikolaj abbreviated German terms to avoid detection by guards.<sup>62</sup> Then Velimirović came under attack in waves. Bishop Velimirović's anti-Semitism became central to the controversy over his legacy and credibility because the text had

*Denial*, 19–76) Nevertheless, his critics left out arguments that did not support this thesis. At the beginning of June 1936, at the consecration of the church iconostasis in the village of Grivec, Bishop Nikolaj stated: "Let your path in life be the path of the middle. Never go left or right. Never be an extreme leftist or rightist. The far left is communism, and the far right is fascism." In the late 1930s, he openly criticized the Third Reich and Hitler. While giving a lecture at the "Tanasko Rajić" falconry home on April 17, 1938, he sharply attacked Germany and Italy for arming and intending to kill millions of innocent people. (Milan Koljanin, *Jevreji i antisemitizam u Kraljevini Jugoslaviji 1918–1941* (Beograd: ISI, 2008), 341; Milan Koljanin, „Srpska pravoslavna crkva i jevrejsko pitanje”, *Istorija 20. veka*, no. 1 (2010): 23–40). On October 21, 1939, P. H. Sitters, National Advisory Secretary and Director of YMCA in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, wrote in one letter that the Bishop of Gibraltar, and he, believed that the Patriarch and the Bishops of Niš, Jovan, of Bačka Irinej, and Žiča, Nikolaj, were not Germanophiles, but very sympathetic to England. (Radić, *The Mission*, 266–267).

<sup>61</sup> Miloš Martić, "Dimitrije Ljotić and the Yugoslav National Movement, ZBOR, 1935–1945," *East European Quarterly* 14, no. 2 (1980): 219–239; Mladen Stefanović, *Zbor Dimitrija Ljotića 1934–1945* (Beograd: Narodna Knjiga, 1984); Mihailo Konstantinović, *Politika sporazuma – dnevničke beleške 1939–1941: londonske beleške 1944–1945* (Novi Sad: Prometej, 1998), 299, 623–626; Predrag Ilić, "Srpska pravoslavna crkva i tajna Dahaua" – Mit i istina o zatočeništvu patrijarha Gavrila i episkopa Nikolaja Velimirovića u Dahauu (Beograd, 2006): 100; Byford, *Denial*, 19–113; Željko Z. Jelić, *Nepoznata pisma Svetog Nikolaja srpskog* (Beograd: Zavod za unapređivanje obrazovanja i vaspitanja, 2009), 103–105; Lompar, *Učitelj ili farisej*, 215–216, 308–320.

<sup>62</sup> Episkop Nikolaj, "Govori srpskom narodu kroz tamnički prozor (iz logora Dahau)," *Sabrana dela*, XIII (Himmelstir: Srpska pravoslavna eparhija za Zapadnu Evropu, 1986), 183–350.

allegedly emerged at the time when he had to be aware of the true nature of Nazism and its consequences.<sup>63</sup> He was described as a “virulent antisemite,” the “darkest individual in Serbian history,” a symbol of “classic fascist anti-communism and antisemitism<sup>64</sup> and even someone who “wholeheartedly supported the ideology of Jewish extermination.”<sup>65</sup> These remarks prompted a series of responses from Atanasije Jevtić in *Pravoslavlje* (September–November), beginning the “memory wars” over the Bishop’s reputation.<sup>66</sup> Several questions remain without answers quite apart from the text’s content.<sup>67</sup> Nikolaj remained in the camp from early October to early December 1944, not September 15 to May 8, 1945. Did the editor extend Nikolaj’s stay on purpose, or was he unaware of this? Was the book written during these two months or later? Why did he not publish it himself? Why did it appear so long after his death? There is only a single page of the original manuscript

<sup>63</sup> Byford, *Denial*, 19–113; Jovan Byford, Michael Billig, “The Emergence of Anti-semitic Conspiracy Theories in Yugoslavia During the War with Nato,” *Patterns of Prejudice* 34, no. 4 (2001): 51–63; Mirko Đorđević, “Povratak propovednika,” *Republika* 8, no. 143–44 (July, 1996): 1–10; etc.

<sup>64</sup> Nenad Ivanković, “Što se zbiva u SPC?” *Danas* (August 5, 1986): 24–25. A series of articles by journalist Pero Simić in *Večernje novosti* in September and October 1986; Byford, *From ‘Traitor’ to ‘Saint’*, 12.

<sup>65</sup> Laslo Sekelj, “Obracun kod Davidove zvezde,” *Borba* (August 24, 1991).

<sup>66</sup> Byford, *Poricanje*, 36–41.

<sup>67</sup> According to Milan Koljanin, for Bishop Nikolaj, the biblical tradition was the basis for interpreting history, and it is in that dogmatic framework that his attitude toward Jews should be understood. Nevertheless, one can observe an evolution in the criticism of the Jewish religion, from anti-Judaism to modern anti-Semitism, as part of the criticism of liberalism, materialism, and modernity. Because of his attitude towards Jews, Nikolaj had a controversy with the Supreme Rabbi Alkalaj in 1928. On July 16, 1936, he described three great evils that threatened the internal and external development of the country, the second of which was “Jewish Judaism, because Jews work cunningly and wisely like snakes to destroy faith in the true God.” However, in some other texts, written about the same time, he pointed out that it would be “ridiculous to accuse the Jews as the main culprits and causes of modern apostasy from God and Western neo-paganism.” In his Epistle for Christmas to the Orthodox people of the Diocese of Ziča in November 1939, the bishop called on the people to fast for one day for the Serbian Orthodox people “and for all people living in Yugoslavia,” including Jews. The *Židov*, the Jewish newspaper in Zagreb, pointed out this on December 22, 1939. Koljanin, *Jevreji*, 341.

published, which is unclear. There is no other evidence of the original manuscript. Authentication is impossible. Can we accept the editorial notes as accurate and deem the manuscript authentic? These and other comparable concerns are not new,<sup>68</sup> and theologian Srećko Petrović has already addressed some of them in his persuasive research.<sup>69</sup> There are still open questions, however.

### **Actions and responses**

The origins of the attacks on Nikolaj Velimirović are clear, but what were the real reasons behind them? Before consolidating power, the Yugoslav authorities were lenient with religious communities. Yugoslavia wanted to build an image as a progressive and tolerant state, and accusations of religious oppression would tarnish that reputation. Therefore, the authorities tolerated religion but gradually removed it from public life, keeping as much of it as possible under state control regarding churches as sources of instability. Religions divided Yugoslavia, and their dogmas stood at odds with the League of Communists' materialist theories. The SOC was regarded with suspicion because it was more than a religious institution. It was regarded as the sole defender and protector of the Serbian people, national values, and traditions.<sup>70</sup> In the general re-socialization of society, all symbols of the past had to be replaced with the new ones and separate identities associated with nationalism, the church, the monarchy, and the like had to be abolished.

Due to its traditional dependence on the state, the SOC could not oppose the new regime, unlike the Roman Catholic Church (RCC). Although the SOC frequently protested, public defiance was sporadic and local. In several cases, clergymen and bishops were harassed or

<sup>68</sup> Vladimir Cvetković, "The Freedom from Passions and the Freedom for All: St Nikolaj Velimirović on Democracy," *Nicholai Studies* I, no. 1 (2021): 53–80.

<sup>69</sup> Srećko Petrović, "Is Nicholai Velimirovich the author of the book *Words to the Serbian People Through the Dungeon Window?*" *Philotheos* 20, no. 2 (2020): 260–303.

<sup>70</sup> Stevan K. Pavlowitch, *The Improbable Survivor: Yugoslavia and its problems 1918–1988* (London: Hurst & Co., 1988), 96; Radić, *Država*, II/645.

intimidated.<sup>71</sup> When the constitution was enacted in 1946, the state and schools were separated from the church, and faith became a private matter. The economic foundations of the church were undermined in order to reduce its power, and the SOC’s dependence on state subsidies increased. State funding was contingent on the regime’s goodwill and measured through churches’ contributions to socialism. Furthermore, authorities established rival powers within the church, causing internal divisions. The first step in this direction was the formation of the state-sponsored Priest Association. The SOC was constantly under pressure to recognize this association of priests. Separating autonomous churches from the SOC was a further step in weakening its internal structure. Although the process was supposed to be much more extensive at first, it eventually came down to establishing an autonomous Macedonian Orthodox Church and requesting SOC recognition. Third, state authorities pressured the SOC to neutralize the actions of bishops in the diaspora.

The regime targeted enemies, but it also received inducements for doing so. Bishop Dionisije led a delegation of American Serbs to protest the allies’ recognition of the Tito–Šubašić agreement.<sup>72</sup> On May 5, 1945, Bishop Dionisije appealed to Stanoje Simić, Yugoslavia’s ambassador, for the recognition of SOC rights in the country. Following the victory in Europe, Bishop Dionisije spoke at St. John the Baptist Cathedral in San Francisco, calling the new Yugoslav regime totalitarian. In the same month, he wrote to President Truman requesting protection of Yugoslavia from “enemies, aggressive atheism, and international communism.”<sup>73</sup> The Diocesan Board stated on May 30, 1945, in a circular

<sup>71</sup> Dragoljub R. Živojinović, *Srpska pravoslavna crkva i nova vlast 1944–1950* (Beograd: Hrišćanska Misao, 1998).

<sup>72</sup> Radić, *Država*, I/363; Spasović, *Istorija*, 89. The Serb national organizations and the eparchy in the USA submitted a memorandum to President Roosevelt against the government of Tito–Šubašić in March 1945. Archives of Yugoslavia–AY, Embassy of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in the USA–Washington, 371–81–744.

<sup>73</sup> Spasović, *Istorija*, 88. In a letter dated September 13, 1944, Bishop Dionisije pleaded with Churchill and Roosevelt to give the Serbs in Yugoslavia help and the freedom of their own choice and not to discard General Draža Mihailovich. (AY, Sava N. Kosanović, 83–5–981). On October 24, 1944, he wrote to Sava Kosanović, a member of the Yugoslav government in exile in London, asking for protection for



letter delivered to the clergy and church communities of the Serbian Orthodox Diocese of the USA and Canada, that any future aid from the Yugoslav government would end and advised that Yugoslav representatives would not be allowed into church gatherings in the future. In June, Bishop Dionisije submitted a memorandum to the UN requesting aid for the SOC and the Serbian people.<sup>74</sup> In the following months, protests continued.<sup>75</sup> The Ministry of Interior affairs demanded that the Synod of the SOC hold the American–Canadian Bishop accountable and prevent him from committing acts against the new Yugoslavia. In response, the Synod said that bishops should follow the judgment of the higher ecclesiastical authority only in matters of faith and canonical discipline. In the absence of post-war order, “individual arbitrariness appears only in another form within our homeland, which may be encouraged by reflection at various assemblies and religious meetings.”<sup>76</sup> However, the Synod asked Bishop Dionisije not to engage in political debates and everyday political issues on November 25, 1945.<sup>77</sup>

Furthermore, on March 27, 1946, a few months after arriving in the USA, Bishop Nikolaj wrote to Winston Churchill, requesting that he intercede on behalf of Draža Mihailović (shortly after his arrest). Ten days earlier, on March 15, he wrote to former American President Hoover, who was planning a trip to Europe, begging him to visit Yugoslavia, where “food, freedom, justice, and security have become

the rights of the SOC against those who were taking over Yugoslavia. (AY, Sava N. Kosanović, 83–5–270). On January 17, 1945, priest Strahinja Maletić telegraphed Sava Kosanović, stating that the Diocesan Plenum, in collaboration with the Serb national organizations in America, had petitioned the highest authorities for intervention in Yugoslavia. As reported by Maletić, on December 14, the Bishop sent a letter to Serb parishes declaring the eparchy was against Tito’s regime. According to the same source, the Bishop also hired a lawyer to separate his eparchy from the Belgrade Patriarchate. AY, Sava N. Kosanović, 83–5–375.

<sup>74</sup> Radić, *Država*, I/362.

<sup>75</sup> Dionisije Milivojević, „U odbranu prava Srpske pravoslavne crkve”, *Američki Srbobran* (September 18, 1945): 1. The speeches of Bishop Dionisije, Konstantin Fotić, and others were held on 19 August, against the persecution of the SOC in Yugoslavia. „Detroitski četvrti Dražin dan bio je najuspeliji do sada,” *Američki Srbobran* (September 11, 1945).

<sup>76</sup> *Glasnik SPC* (October 1 / September 18, 1945), 2.

<sup>77</sup> Spasović, *Istorija*, 94–95.

luxuries.”<sup>78</sup> In his 1946 Christmas Epistle, Bishop Dionisije asked for the redemption of the Serbian Orthodox people from “madmen who wish to convert humanity into a menagerie.” In July 1946, Bishop Dionisije issued a proclamation calling on the clergy to perform mourning services for Draža Mihailović; following the incident with American planes near the Yugoslav border,<sup>79</sup> the Bishop wrote to President Truman requesting that the USA cut ties with Yugoslavia. He also called for an end to UNRRA’s support for Yugoslavia. Bishop Dionisije lost his Yugoslav citizenship in 1946 but earned American citizenship shortly after.<sup>80</sup>

In January 1945, Bishop Dionisije wrote to the priest Živojin Ristanović<sup>81</sup> in England regarding the removal of “red” priests from the church in the diaspora.<sup>82</sup> Vojislav Gaćinović, one of these priests, returned to Yugoslavia in 1946 and criticized Bishop Dionisije for his anti-canonical actions, urging the SOC Assembly to replace him.<sup>83</sup> On October 12, 1946, the Belgrade *Borba* published additional assaults on the American–Canadian bishop Dionisije and the SOC, which did nothing to remove the bishop seen as an enemy.<sup>84</sup> On November 12, 1946, the British Embassy in Belgrade transmitted a report to London

<sup>78</sup> Jelić, *Nepoznata pisma*, 10–13, 18–19.

<sup>79</sup> Two American planes were shot down over Slovenia in August 1946 by the Yugoslav air force for violating Yugoslav airspace during the Cold War. Lorainne M. Lees, *Keeping Tito Afloat: The United States, Yugoslavia, and the Cold War, 1945–1960* (Penn State University Press, 2010), 15–16.

<sup>80</sup> At the request of the Embassy of the FPRY in Washington, Strahinja Maletić wrote a memorandum in 1947 entitled “Political Work of Bishop Dionisije in America against the People of Yugoslavia between 1941 and 1946.” Maletić details how bishop Dionisije launched a “Branch of the pro-fascist policy of the émigré Greater Serbia reaction” from the Serbian diocese in America. Radić, *Država*, I/363.

<sup>81</sup> The Yugoslav government in exile wrote to Bishop Dionisije, requesting that he send a priest to take care of the religious needs of the Serbian community in London. Archpriest Živojin Ristanović arrived in London in 1942 and served there until March 1945. On October 31, 1945, Patriarch Gavrilo designated the priest Miloje Nikolić as a parish priest of London and, a little later, the bishop’s deputy and SOC representative to the Archbishop of Canterbury. Radić, *Država*, I/367.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> *Politika* (June 20, 1946), 5.

<sup>84</sup> Spasović, *Istorija*, 90–92.

concerning Metropolitan Josif's meeting with a member of the Embassy. The Metropolitan requested assistance from the British Embassy regarding the case of American-Canadian Bishop Dionisije, as FPRY authorities had requested his excommunication for anti-national acts.<sup>85</sup>

Yugoslav authorities accused Bishop Dionisije of organizing a congress of *Srpska narodna odbrana* (Serbian National Defense) in 1947.<sup>86</sup> In the same year, bishops Nikolaj, Irinej, and Dionisije were invited to join the SOC Assembly. Bishop Dionisije responded that he could not obtain the required travel passports at such a short notice. In Yugoslavia, the Foreign Ministry questioned whether visas should be issued. According to the Interior Ministry, invitations to the Synod should be sent to each bishop by the Foreign Ministry, but visas should not be issued.<sup>87</sup> In a conversation with members of the American Episcopal Church on August 3, 1947, Marshal Josip Broz Tito accused Bishop Dionisije of being hostile to communist Yugoslavia. He asked the Synod and the patriarch to resolve the issue. It was no coincidence that during that year, Bishop Dionisije received major financial aid from the American Episcopal Church for the Patriarchate in Belgrade.<sup>88</sup>

In May 1948, the SOC Assembly judged it necessary to again propose to the Synod that bishops and Assembly members overseas refrain from political engagement. The press continued to target bishops in the diaspora.<sup>89</sup> In the early half of 1948, Bishop Irinej Djordjević requested official authority over the diocese in England. Patriarch Gavriilo in-

<sup>85</sup> Radić, *Država*, I/241.

<sup>86</sup> Mihajlo Pupin founded the Serbian National Defense (SND) in 1914 in New York City. Following the Second World War, it provided material aid and brought thousands of displaced people to the USA in cooperation with the Serbian Orthodox Diocese and Serbian Fraternal Aid. The SND sponsored a Serb Congress in Chicago in 1947 when the Serbian National Committee was formed, led by Konstantin Fotić. At another conference in Akron, Ohio, in 1949, the Serbian National Council was founded, and Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović attended. Bosiljka Stevanović, "Serbian Americans: Major Immigration Waves," accessed January 23, 2022, <https://www.everyculture.com/multi/Pa-Sp/Serbian-Americans.html>.

<sup>87</sup> During each subsequent session of the Assembly, the Synod renewed the request for visas, but they were never approved. Radić, *Država*, I/363.

<sup>88</sup> Spasović, *Istorija*, 74.

<sup>89</sup> *Politika* (October 24, 1948); (March 5, 1949).

formed the British envoy in Yugoslavia that was not possible since the priest, Živojin Ristanović, was already appointed. The Patriarch further stated that the Bishop was a *persona non grata* in the eyes of the Yugoslav government and that he was under pressure to remove him. In March 1950, state representatives again criticized Bishops Nikolaj, Irinej, and Dionisije’s activities in a conversation with Patriarch Gavriilo.<sup>90</sup>

Patriarch Gavriilo died unexpectedly on May 7, 1950. On May 8, the FCRA President visited the Patriarchate to notify the episcopate that all bishops from the diaspora and a few local ones could not be considered when selecting a new patriarch.<sup>91</sup> The main page of *Vesnik* included an item headlined “What Should the Characteristics of the Future Patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church Be?” At least five bishops with at least five years of service were named, with the condition that the future patriarch could not be chosen on seniority but must be capable of protecting SOC unity. The article concluded with excerpts from a wartime journal regarding certain bishops’ cooperation with the occupiers.<sup>92</sup>

On July 1, Bishop Vikentije Prodanov was elected patriarch by the SOC Assembly. Bishop Irinej sent a congratulatory message to the patriarch, while Bishop Nikolaj remained silent.<sup>93</sup> State authorities’ tactics changed after the election of the new patriarch, but their goal remained the same. Given the changed circumstances in the Patriarchate, the FCRA believed the Priest Association should engage the Patriarch more delicately. “As the association has so far been used to attack reactionary bishops, it will surely be necessary to exert pressure in the future and, in this way, help the patriarch,” said the FCRA. The FPRY and FCRA presidencies agreed that the Priest Association should be involved in

<sup>90</sup> Veljko Đurić Mišina, *German Đorić: Patrijarh u obezboženom vremenu* (Beograd: Manastir Svetog prvomučenika i arhiđakona Stevana, 2012), 595–645.

<sup>91</sup> The conversation focused on, among other things, the activities of Bishop Dionisije. Radić, *Država*, 1/315.

<sup>92</sup> *Vesnik*, no. 28 (June 7, 1950).

<sup>93</sup> Bishop Nikolaj refrained from commenting on the reports that the government selected the new patriarch, pointing out that in such a scenario, the patriarch would have to submit to their authority “as a state official.” “Razgovor sa episkopom Nikolajem,” *Sabrana dela*, XIII (Himelstir: Srpska pravoslavna eparhija zapadnoevropska, 1986), 143–144.

selecting and preparing priests to go to dioceses overseas and conduct a campaign against bishops in the diaspora. The Priest Association's journal, *Vesnik*, acted as a conduit for this "war" between the SOC and state authorities. A trio of Serbian bishops, including Nikolaj, found themselves at the top of a list of those considered traitors. He and other bishops were viewed as "clerical nationalists" and "socialist opponents."<sup>94</sup> This did not stop them from opposing the Yugoslav regime. Bishop Irinej accused priests in London who cooperated with the church in Yugoslavia of being pro-Communists, although they were under SOC jurisdiction.<sup>95</sup> In an article published in the *American Srbobran* and the *Glas kanadskih Srba (Voice of the Canadian Serbs)* in December 1950, Bishop Dionisije pleaded on behalf of jailed Metropolitan Josif and Vicar Bishop Varnava.<sup>96</sup>

Bishop Nikolaj was supposed to receive a medal from Archbishop Lang when he was in London in 1946, considering his merits from before the war. Patriarch Gavriilo's presence prevented the award. During Canon Herbert Waddams's (the secretary of the Church of England Council on Foreign Relations)<sup>97</sup> visit to Yugoslavia in May 1951, he brought up the issue with Patriarch Vikentije again. According to the Anglican Church, awarding the decoration would benefit the unification of SOC communities in England and the USA. Miloje Dilparić, President of the FCRA, advised Patriarch Vikentije to refuse the decoration.

<sup>94</sup> Radić, *Država*, I/263–338.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, I/364.

<sup>96</sup> In 1947, Vicar Bishop Varnava Nastić, the administrator of the Dabro-Bosnian Diocese in Sarajevo, was arrested and tried for crimes against the people and the state. The judge sentenced him to eleven years in prison with hard labor and three years of loss of civil rights. In the first public accusation and trial of a member of the SOC episcopate, the state warned those who continued to oppose state policy towards religious communities. (More in Radmila Radić, "Episkop Varnava Nastić – prilog za istoriju Srpske pravoslavne crkve," *Jugoslovenski istorijski časopis*, no. 1–2 (1996): 123–134). During the election of the new patriarch in 1950, Metropolitan Josif was removed from Belgrade, and several other bishops suffered abuse. The Metropolitan was interned at the monastery of Ljubostinja. His release came in November 1951. Radić, *Država*, I/318.

<sup>97</sup> Herbert Montague Waddams (1911–1972), Canon of Canterbury Cathedral. From 1945 until 1959, the Rev. Canon Waddams was the general secretary of the Church of England's Council on Foreign Relations.

## Diaspora splitting

As the 1940s ended, the question of the SOC's future in the diaspora began to be raised. Bishop Nikolaj proposed for the first time in 1948 that Bishop Varnava Nastić, an American citizen, was the right man to serve as Bishop Dionisije's vicar in the USA. In his letter to Patriarch Gavriilo, Bishop Dionisije officially publicized the idea, i.e., the 1948 SOC Assembly. He indicated that he required an assistant because of his many responsibilities and that bishops Nikolaj and Irinej were unwell and unable to help. The *American Srbobran* ran a text written by Nikolaj Velimirović on May 7, 1951, concerning the need to form a foreign episcopate in the USA and Canada. In a letter to the Assembly in 1951, Bishop Dionisije broached the issue of appointing a vicar once more. For fear of losing his position, he now opposed the idea. These actions frightened the Patriarch since he believed they intended to tarnish his dignity and destroy the unity of the church. Bishop Dionisije's letters to him raised further doubts about how elements of the emigration were conspiring to split the church. A curious fact is that Bishop Velimirović offered to resign in 1951, but his resignation was rejected. After the Patriarch reported to the Assembly on Dionisije's activities, he was almost condemned. To prevent further escalation and to support the "weaker" bishop, the Patriarch prevented a conviction.<sup>98</sup>

The memorandum from Bishop Nikolaj came to the Patriarchate after the Assembly's meetings. It recommended that as many bishoprics abroad be established as possible, along with a Great Church Court, a newspaper, and a printing house. Bishop Dionisije informed him later that the SOC had rejected his recommendations. Bishop Nikolaj then wrote confidentially, on August 27, 1951, to Bishop Dionisije about his idea of an independent Orthodox Church in America and Canada. Nikolaj reminded him that they had written to Patriarch Gavriilo about establishing an episcopal seat in Canada. Continuing, he stated that the Serbian Church in the USA needed more bishops, "for the sake of more intensive work and representation with as much power as the Holy Synod of Bishops from Belgrade has given them. The support of these bishops, even if modest, would not be impossible." In response to

<sup>98</sup> Radić, *Država*, I/365.

the news that Anglican and Episcopal Church representatives gave some advice to the SOC, Nikolaj stated that he was not aware of that fact and that the SOC should avoid foreign influence. He continued that “all Orthodox priests in America are watching the day-to-day tendencies of their youth towards an autonomous Orthodox Church. That autonomy may come in the next 20–30 years. We Serbs want to push it as far as possible in the future. But, anticipating this, all other Orthodox churches are slowly and wisely preparing for this transition, to be carried out with the blessing of their mother churches and not revoltingly (books, sermons, and chanting in English, for example).” He strongly denied the accusations from Yugoslavia that he was seeking power and a higher salary.<sup>99</sup> Bishop Dionisije rejected splitting the American-Canadian Diocese.<sup>100</sup>

The Patriarch accepted the state authorities’ idea of sending a delegation to Europe and America to gather information about church life in the diaspora.<sup>101</sup> The Synod of the SOC debated whether or not to dispatch a delegation in January 1951. When it was discovered that Bishops Nikolaj and Dionisije disagreed, it was believed that this was necessary. Upon receiving the report of the delegation, the Patriarchate should decide what steps to take next to reorganize the church in the Diaspora. The delegation (Father Hranislav Đorić, and Professors Dušan Glumac and Blagota Gardašević) were briefed about Bishop Dionisije’s work at the FCRA. They received a study on what to do and who to contact during their stay in America. The purpose of the planned trip was to strengthen connections between the SOC and its dioceses abroad damaged by the conflict and to secure material aid from the World Alliance

<sup>99</sup> Velimirović, *Sabrana dela*, XIII, 768–769; Nikolaj Velimirović, “Istočna pravoslavna crkva u Americi i njena budućnost,” *Sabrana dela*, XIII, 565–579.

<sup>100</sup> Spasović, *Istorija*, 34–35.

<sup>101</sup> On August 17, 1950, Ambassador to the USA Vlada Popović informed the Yugoslav authorities that emigrants of the Orthodox faith were interested in the new patriarch’s attitude toward SOC representatives in the USA. The patriarch’s representative should travel to America to gain a better understanding of the situation. Miloje Dilparić conveyed the idea to the patriarch, and they decided to include vicar bishop Hranislav Đorić and Professor Dušan Glumac in the delegation. The patriarch promised to summon members of the Synod to decide on the delegation’s departure with “eminent authority.” Radić, *Država*, I/366–7.

of Churches. Bishop Dionisije sent a memo to the American Department of State warning it about possible propaganda conducted by visitors in support of the communist state, which caused the postponement. After that, USA visas could not be obtained for the trip, but diplomatic activity and meetings between the Patriarch and the American ambassador to Belgrade, George Allen, resulted in permission being granted on March 6, 1951.<sup>102</sup> The government paid the expenses. On September 6, the Synod accepted Patriarch Vikentije’s proposal to send a delegation, and they left on September 11, 1951. The church delegation met with bishops Dionisije, Nikolaj, and Irinej and members of the Serbian diaspora. Dionisije was initially sceptical about the delegation’s arrival, believing their purpose was to gather evidence against him.<sup>103</sup> The delegation stayed until December 9, 1951, and by that time, Dionisije’s attitude had changed. According to the FPRY Embassy in Washington, the visit was a big success.<sup>104</sup> Despite his previous criticism of the Patriarch for cooperating with the government, Dionisije started to praise him for his demonstrated leadership abilities.<sup>105</sup> After the delegation left, the split between him and Bishop Nikolaj was almost officially declared.

At the end of November 1951, the embassy in Washington reported that Konstantin Fotić, Bishop Nikolaj, and Bishop Irinej were trying to bring Bishop Varnava Nastić to the USA. In that case, four bishops

<sup>102</sup> Radić, *Država*, I/366; Spasović, *Istorija*, 39–46; Đurić, *German*, 595–645.

<sup>103</sup> In April 1951, an American Embassy official in Belgrade asked Hranislav Đorić, then a referent of the Synod and later a patriarch, if that institution could replace Bishop Dionisije. See Radić, *Država*, I/367; Đurić, *German*, 595–645.

<sup>104</sup> On January 15, 1952, Miloje Nikolić wrote to Patriarch Vikentije that the delegation had made a favorable impression in England. However, there were concerns that the SOC was taking over the authorities’ desire to bring migrants back home. (Radić, *Država*, I/367) Tvrtko Jakovina mentions the visit, specifically Budimir Lončar’s contacts with Bishop German, but gives the wrong year (1953) and claims they were supposed to meet with “Patriarch” Nikolaj Velimirović. [Tvrtko Jakovina, *Budimir Lončar. Od Preke do vrha svijeta* (Belgrade: Službeni glasnik, 2021), 102]. On November 21, 1951, Nikolaj Velimirović wrote to a priest that he had met Bishop German and Dušan Glumac, and that they had made an impression on him. Velimirović, *Sabrana dela*, XIII, 665.

<sup>105</sup> Spasović, *Istorija*, 31–38; Đurić, *German*, 595–645.



could make legal decisions independently of the Patriarchate of Belgrade.<sup>106</sup> The FCRA opposed a foreign synod. The government did not want to lose control over that part of the SOC or Serbian emigration. The Yugoslav government believed that American diplomatic representatives and the Episcopal Church could more easily interfere if a synod was formed in America. In a letter to the SOC Assembly dated January 10, 1952, Bishop Dionisije renounced the request to send him a vicar bishop. After that, Dionisije's clash with some emigrant leaders was inevitable. At the end of 1951, Bishop Nikolaj moved to St. Tikhon's monastery.<sup>107</sup>

On January 24, 1952, the SOC decided that a trusted archbishop should be appointed metropolitan for Australia and Western Europe, overturning Bishop Nikolaj and Irinej's plans. Additionally, it was decided to support Bishop Dionisije and prevent Bishop Varnava Nastić from leaving for America.<sup>108</sup>

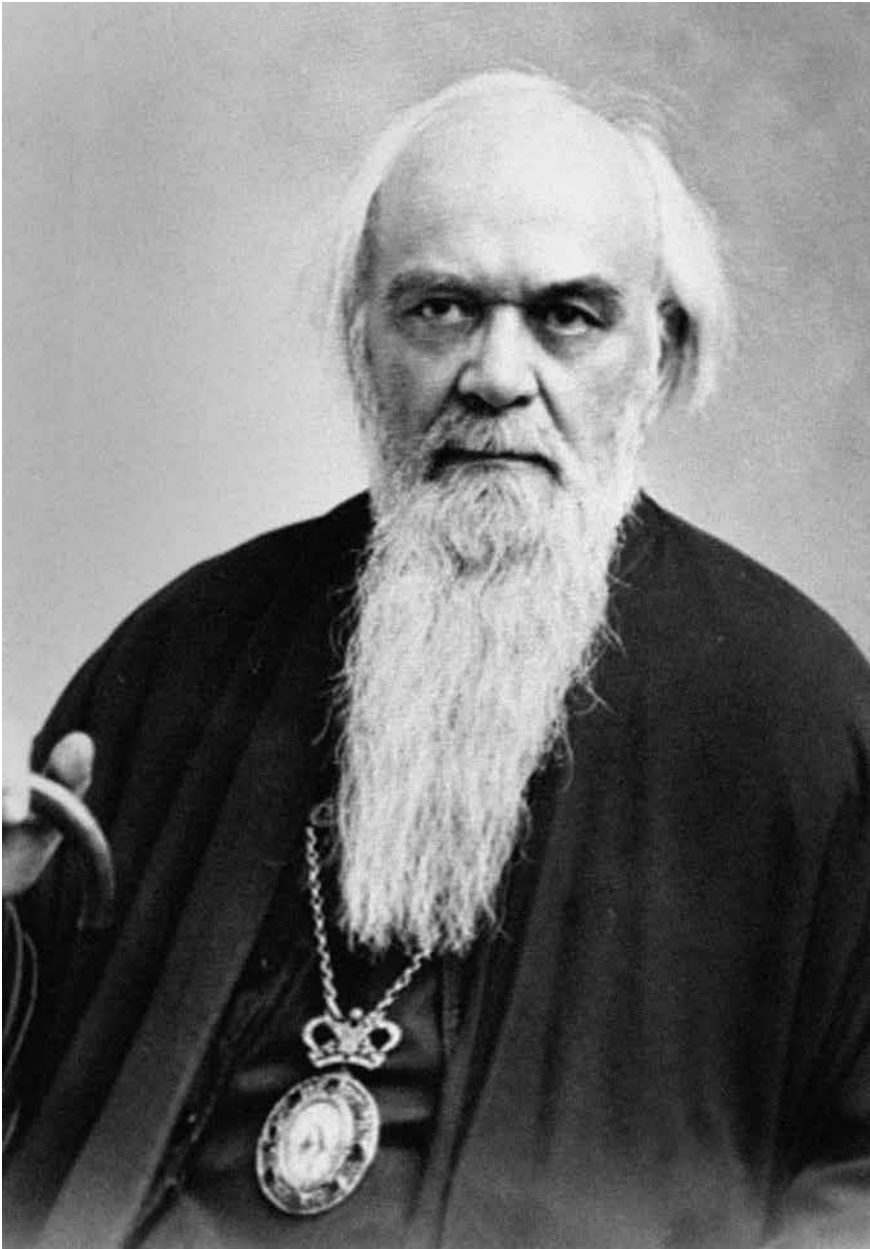
The SOC Synod ordered a commission in October 1951 to investigate which periodicals were attacking bishops and when. A circular against the Priest Association was issued on October 23, 1951. A month later, the Synod sent an act warning the bishops that the Priest Association had to explain its assaults on specific bishops. In December, Metropolitan Arsenije Bradvarević petitioned the Synod against the Priest Association. At the end of December 1951, the Priest Association met and sent threats to the SOC. Consequently, the authorities put increased pressure on the SOC.<sup>109</sup>

<sup>106</sup> The American Embassy in Belgrade and the Anglican Church intervened several times on behalf of Bishop Varnava. He was granted parole on June 26, 1951, at the request of the SOC Assembly. He had to resign from his episcopal office and join a monastery before being released from prison. The Patriarchal Board authorized his retirement on September 8, 1951. When an American senator visited Yugoslavia with regard to the Stepinac issue, President Broz informed him that Bishop Varnava Nastić had been released. This release corresponds with Yugoslavia's proposal to the Holy See that Stepinac should leave the country. The state authorities intended to compensate for the perception that Stepinac would be free. Radić, "Episkop Varnava Nastić", 123–134; Spasović, *Istorija*, 36, 47; Đurić, *German*, 595–645.

<sup>107</sup> Spasović, *Istorija*, 48, 121; Radić, *Država*, I/367.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>109</sup> Radić, *Država*, I/356.



Bishop Nikolaj in the monastery of St. Tikhon  
(Courtesy of the St Tikhon Monastery, South Canaan, Pennsylvania.  
Internet source: <https://sttikhonsmonastery.org/public/ss/gallery.php?ssid=124&s=1>)

At the beginning of 1952, Archpriest Miloje Nikolić warned Bishop German that decisions made by the future SOC Assembly would determine the church's fate abroad. Nikolić also claimed that the Yugoslavian Embassy in London did everything possible to create a schism within the SOC to break up the emigrants. On March 10, 1952, the Patriarch attended a meeting of the FCRA and promised to take over the diaspora at the next Assembly and help bishop Dionisije settle a dispute with Irinej and Nikolaj. At the Assembly in May 1952, the Patriarch had the authority to oversee the diaspora.<sup>110</sup> However, the Assembly of Bishops secretly removed the topic of recognizing the Priest Association from the agenda on June 2, 1952. The emigrants waged an aggressive campaign overseas against recognition of the Priest Association and even against the patriarch before the 1952 Assembly sessions. Bishop Nikolaj was particularly active in the emigrant press. In addition, Bishop Dionsije stated on numerous occasions that the issue of the Priests' Association and the church in Macedonia should not be resolved. In a letter to the Patriarch dated January 5, 1952, Bishop Nikolaj refused to recognize a priestly association because it was organized on state-political principles rather than those of a church organization. According to him, the Priests' Association was too "conscientious and loyal" to respect the state law on religious tolerance in Yugoslavia. Lastly, he told the Patriarch: "I will continue to fight against its destructiveness."<sup>111</sup>

Priest Association members launched a new campaign against the bishops after being denied recognition at the SOC Assembly session of 1952. They also proposed changing the church's constitution. The authorities ceased church funding and publication of *Glasnik*, the SOC's official journal. Controversial matters from the past of the church were published, depicting priests as swindlers and enemies of the people.<sup>112</sup>

The diaspora situation and the relationship between the SOC and the state became increasingly complicated in 1952. St. Sava's Temple was

<sup>110</sup> Đurić, *German*, 595–645. Patriarch Vikentije visited Bishop Varnava in April 1952. The latter informed him of efforts to bring him to the USA. The Patriarch said that those efforts were futile. Radić, *Država*, I/368.

<sup>111</sup> Radić, *Država*, I/329–330.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid*, I/333.

founded in London in 1952 after an abandoned church was donated by the Anglican Church. In June, Bishop Nikolaj consecrated the shrine during his visit to England.<sup>113</sup> He then attended the remembrance of Draža Mihailović held at the London Temple by the Yugoslav People's Committee on July 13.<sup>114</sup> Parallel to this, a group of priests purportedly inspired by Bishop Nikolaj signed a resolution. Its demands were very similar to those in Nikolaj's 1951 memo. Three bishops from the diaspora were the only recipients of the document. On August 16, 1952, Bishop Dionisije forwarded a copy to the Synod and the patriarch. Also, he recommended the establishment of a diocesan center in Great Britain and the election of a new deputy in London. The Patriarch sent this letter to the FCRA President on September 1, 1952, emphasizing the importance of the proposal.<sup>115</sup>

On October 6, 1952, Bishop Dionisije informed Patriarch Vikentije about the Seventh Church and People's Assembly in Libertyville. Bishop Dionisije was questioned about Nikolaj leaving the monastery in Libertyville. In response, he said that he tried his best to help Nikolaj, but disagreements over the church organization arose. On the same occasion, Bishop Nikolaj once more stressed the importance of dividing the American-Canadian Diocese. One autocephalous Orthodox Church for the whole of America, i.e., the USA, in the opinion of Bishop Nikolaj, was inevitable for the survival of Orthodoxy in that country in the future. That is why he thought that more Serbian bishops were needed (in the USA) who would be engaged in intensive missionary and pastoral work.<sup>116</sup> However, the meeting brought about no changes; the diocese

<sup>113</sup> *Spomenica hrama Sv. Save u Londonu* (London, 1953).

<sup>114</sup> The Yugoslav authorities were also informed about the Anglican Church's plans to establish a Serbian Orthodox Church diocese in England, led by Bishop Nikolaj. Radić, *Država*, I/368.

<sup>115</sup> Đurić, *German*, 595–645.

<sup>116</sup> In the episcopo-centric structure of the Orthodox Church, the Eucharistic and dogmatic aspects remain unchangeable, while other organizational structures that emerged through history are changeable. Since in the last two or three centuries, the principle of geographical ecclesial jurisdiction coincided with political and administrative organization of the state, it evolved the principle of strictly "national" organization of the Church. It was accepted by autocephalous churches that gained their autocephalous status in recent times, but it was rejected by the old pa-

remained in canonical unity with the SOC. But, according to Milutin Devrnja, the editor of the *American Srbobran*, this was the beginning of the future independence, autonomy, and eventually autocephaly of the American-Canadian Diocese. Dionisije steadfastly opposed it, explaining his position in letters to Patriarch Vikentije, the Synod, and many bishops.<sup>117</sup>

In late 1952, diplomatic relations were severed between Yugoslavia and the Vatican, and Marshal Tito was preparing a visit to Great Britain. When the Archbishop of Canterbury, Geoffrey Fisher, presided over the annual conference of the Assembly of Christians and Jews in London in December 1952, he issued a statement condemning religious persecution in Yugoslavia, stating that Tito should protect religious freedom.<sup>118</sup> *Borba* soon received a letter from Patriarch Vikentije in

triarchates. It is not acceptable for the the old patriarchate that every Orthodox Church, as autocephalous (that is, with “national” origins), claims “universal jurisdiction” over its believers throughout the world on the basis of their “national affiliation”. However, they accepted only for the purpose of mission and only temporarily that Orthodox Diaspora (especially America) might be a missionary area. The Orthodox churches thus accepted the existence of several ecclessial jurisdictions on the same territory, being at the same time aware that this situation cannot last forever. Orthodoxy does not have “national faith,” nor “national Church,” and by becoming “national” the Church would renounce its universal mission and its identity. The Diaspora contributed to the replacement of the ancient Eucharistic-episcopal ecclesiology with a new “national-autocephalous” ecclesiology. Therefore, some Orthodox theologians argued for the need to return to traditional ecclesiology so that the Diaspora be organized locally, on the principle: “One Bishop in one city”. Atanasije Jevtić, “Savremeni eklisiološki podsetnik (O američkom raskolu: Uvod–O dijaspori),” in *Zagrljaj svetova: eseji o čoveku i crkvi*, ed. Atanasije Jevtić (Srbinje: Pravoslavna duhovna akademija Svetog Vasilija Ostroškog, 1996), 153–168.

<sup>117</sup> Spasović, *Istorija*, 121; Đurić, *German*, 595–645.

<sup>118</sup> “Tito should protect the freedom of churches, says Dr. Fisher,” *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer* (December 11, 1952); *Bradford Observer* (December 17, 1952). British and French Catholic papers expressed displeasure at the British authorities’ courtship of Marshal Tito and their decision to invite the “red leader” and the “Yugoslav dictator” officially to London. Aside from the Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Geoffrey Fisher, other public protesters included Cardinal Bernard Griffin, Archbishop of Westminster, and others. Protests in Parliament have revealed the growing disgust of many British Christians over Marshal Tito’s visit to Britain during the Churchill administration. HCWC News Service (Foreign), “Brit-

which he denied this statement. He also sharply criticized the behavior of the RCC in an interview published in *Politika*. The Patriarch said that the relationship between the SOC and the state was improving gradually and continuously.<sup>119</sup> The Minister of Foreign Affairs of the FPRY praised the attitude of the SOC in a December 18, 1952, speech announcing the severance of relations with the Vatican. In late 1952, Bishop Nikolaj wrote to the Archbishop of Canterbury to prevent Tito from visiting Great Britain. The visit did, however, proceed as planned in March 1953, and a photograph was published in which Tito cordially shook hands with the Archbishop of Canterbury.<sup>120</sup>

However, this did not stop bishops from the diaspora and emigrant leaders from criticizing the regime and the SOC leadership. In March 1953, Bishop Dionisije published an article that attacked the new *Law on Religious Communities* in Yugoslavia in the *American Srbobran*. Bishop Nikolaj wrote to the Patriarch on April 19, 1953, that despite his authority over the diaspora, the SOC leader was unable to meet their needs for the time being.<sup>121</sup> After Canon Waddams arrived again in Belgrade just before the Assembly of Bishops in 1953, the Patriarch and Synod received a letter from Professor Slobodan Jovanović (Prime Minister of the Royal Yugoslav government-in-exile in London between Janu-

ish Catholic Papers Critical of Government’s Invitation to Tito,” (October 13, 1952), *Catholic Research Resources Alliance*, accessed January 28, 2022, <https://thecatholicnewsarchive.org/>; “Cardinal Sees Tito’s Visit Chance to Aid Victims,” *The St. Louis Register*, vol. 12, no. 51 (December 19, 1952), *Catholic Research Resources Alliance*, accessed January 28, 2022, <https://thecatholicnewsarchive.org/>; “Words to Yugoslavia,” *The Living Church*, vol. 126 (January–June, 1953): 3, 10; Catholic News Service–Newsfeeds (February 2, 1953), “Demands British Government Dissociate Self from Tito Persecution Before Visit,” *Catholic Research Resources Alliance*, accessed January 28, 2022, <https://thecatholicnewsarchive.org/>.

<sup>119</sup> Bishop Varnava Nastić told a British Embassy official that most bishops were disappointed that the Patriarch gave a completely incorrect response to the statement of the Archbishop of the Anglican Church. As Bishop German told a representative from the British Embassy, Marshal Tito sent a car to pick up the Patriarch and explained to him personally that he needed to issue a statement. Radić, *Država*, I/368.

<sup>120</sup> “Politics – President Marshal Tito – London,” Image ID: G8oK95, accessed January 28, 2022, <https://www.alamy.com/stock-photo-politics-president-marshal-tito-london-108194609.html>

<sup>121</sup> Đurić, *German*, 595–645.

ary 1942 and June 1943).<sup>122</sup> According to him, the Patriarch's actions and statements indicated that the SOC had reached an agreement with the regime. It would be "in the interest of the Christian community" for relations between the SOC and RCC not to deteriorate, he added.<sup>123</sup>

Metropolitan Arsenije Bradvarević, Chair of the Assembly's Legislative Committee, drafted a report to the Assembly of Bishops in 1953, accusing the Priest Association's members of launching a new campaign against the bishops (after being denied recognition at the SOC Assembly session of 1952).<sup>124</sup> Despite heavy pressure from the authorities, the Priest Association was again unrecognized by the Assembly in 1953. The state attributed the rejection to external influences on the bishops. The conflict ended in a break in communication between the SOC leadership and the state authorities. Consequently, bishops could not perform their regular duties. Canonical visits to dioceses could not occur, and subsidies were unpaid. In some parts of Yugoslavia, protest rallies against Orthodox bishops began at the end of August. Two bishops suffered physical attacks, resulting in their expulsion from dioceses. A new president of the FCRA met with the members of the SOC Synod on September 1, 1953, and conditioned subsidies and better relations on the recognition of the Priest Association. The lack of progress led to the arrest of four priests from the Metropolitanate of Montenegro and the Littoral. The head of this diocese, Metropolitan Arsenije was sentenced to jail shortly afterwards.<sup>125</sup>

Bishops Nikolaj and Dionisije participated in the World Council of Churches meeting in September 1954, despite the SOC Synod's wishes.<sup>126</sup> Bishop Nikolaj delivered a sermon, and Bishop Dionisije wrote an

<sup>122</sup> Canon Waddams stayed in Yugoslavia between April 20 and April 26, 1953, as a guest of the Patriarchy. Although he brought a letter from Slobodan Jovanović, he later apologized for not knowing its contents. But, the Foreign Affairs Council of the Anglican Church and the British Embassy in Belgrade were aware of what was going on. Radić, *Država*, I/368.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid, I/331–332.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid, I/382–385.

<sup>125</sup> Radmila Radić, "Suđenje mitropolitu Arseniju Bradvareviću 1954. godine," *Tokovi istorije*, no. 1–2 (1994): 189–203.

<sup>126</sup> Bishop Nikolaj wrote of the meeting in Evanston that no Orthodox church had sent representatives beyond the Iron Curtain. According to a statement issued

extensive memorandum entitled, "Persecution of the Serbian Orthodox Church under Tito's regime."<sup>127</sup> This document was made available to all Canadian newspapers and delivered to Canada's Foreign Minister and Prime Minister. *The Windsor Daily Star* reported that Bishop Nikolaj was participating in the congress in Evanston and working on a resolution opposing religious persecution in Yugoslavia. The FCRA petitioned the Synod on September 24, 1954, urging it to act against the hostile actions of Bishops Dionisije and Nikolaj. Patriarch Vikentije assured the Secretary of the FCRA that Dionisije had done everything at his own risk. The SOC responded to the government protest against the participation of the bishops in the Evanston congress and the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the First Serbian Uprising in Chicago (June 27, 1954) on October 12, 1954. The Synod reminded the state authorities that in 1948 it had conveyed to Bishops Nikolaj, Irinej, and Dionisije a decision on the need to refrain from political activities and interference in politics in general.<sup>128</sup> The Synod, however, once again asked Bishop Dionisije to keep his activities within church boundaries. Dionisije responded that he was opposed to the establishment of a separate Macedonian Orthodox Church. Additionally, he opposed the autonomy of parts of the SOC in Croatia and Montenegro, the activities of the Priest Association, and the persecution of certain bishops. Towards the end of his letter, he stated that he would continue to stand against anything detrimental to the SOC.<sup>129</sup>

At the beginning of 1955, Bishop Dionisije changed his mind again. On January 21, 1955, he wrote to Patriarch Vikentije about bringing

by the SOC, the Patriarchate was unable to send representatives owing to the circumstances (arrest of Metropolitan Arsenije). Bishop Dionisije and Nikolaj went to thank the World Alliance of Churches for what they had done for the SOC, including material help at home and help to displaced persons through Church World Service. Several clerics joined Nikolaj in Evanston. In the Orthodox Delegates' Declaration, given just before the convention ended, communism received harsh criticism. Nikolaj Velimirović, "Dogadaž u Evanstonu," *Sabrana dela*, XIII, 42–46.

<sup>127</sup> Đurić, *German*, 595–645.

<sup>128</sup> *Zapisnici*, 138–139; Dimšo Perić, "Istupi otvorenog neprijateljstva protiv FNRJ," *Hrišćanska misao*, no. 7–8 (1994): 31–35; Radmila Radić, "Političke akcije episkopa u dijaspori i Srpska pravoslavna crkva," *Hrišćanska misao*, no. 9–12 (1998): 50.

<sup>129</sup> Đurić, *German*, 595–645.



Vicar Bishop Varnava to America. According to him, a delegation had already visited Washington to meet with the American Department of State. Bishop Varnava was expected to arrive soon. Once again, Bishop Nikolaj's plans to appoint the third bishop and thereby separate the diocese from the Patriarchate were started.<sup>130</sup> However, Bishop Varnava Nastić did not travel to the United States, Bishop Nikolaj died in 1956, and Bishop Dionisije continued to follow in Velimirović's footsteps.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

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# Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović's Instructions to Very Reverend Protopresbyter-Staurophor Aleksa Todorović for Editorial Work on the Religious-National Series *Svečanik*

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## Introduction

Aleksa Todorović was a parish priest in the Diocese of Žiča. He met Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović through his activities in the Devotional Movement (Cf. *Bogomoljački pokret*, also known as the Devotionists or *Bogomoljci*).<sup>1</sup> Their cooperation intensified after Todorović's transfer from his first parish in Guča to the fourth Kraljevo parish in August 1935, precisely based on the Bishop's decision.<sup>2</sup> In late 1944, he emigrated from Yugoslavia together with the members of the Yugoslav National Movement Zbor.<sup>3</sup>

After Bishop Nikolaj was freed from the Dachau concentration camp, he did not return to his fatherland and moved to the United States in early 1946. In the late 1940s, he sent many letters to Todorović, who was at the time interred in camps in Italy and Germany but none-

<sup>1</sup> Dragan Subotić, *Episkop Nikolaj i pravoslavni bogomoljački pokret: pravoslavna narodna hrišćanska zajednica u Kraljevini Jugoslaviji 1920–1941* (Beograd: Nova iskra, 1996).

<sup>2</sup> Todorović's letter to Protopresbyter Miodrag Mija Đurić, a SOC parish priest of in Lackawanna, Pennsylvania, dated 28 March 1968, p. 6. The author of this paper owns a copy of the letter.

<sup>3</sup> Christian Kurzydłowski, *Ideology and Politics of Dimitrije Ljotić and the ZBOR movement*, dissertation (London: University of London, 2017).

theless managed to regularly reply to the Bishop. In the early 1950s, their correspondence intensified and remained lively until Bishop Nikolaj died in 1956.<sup>4</sup> The Bishop lived at Saint Tikhon's Monastery, a Russian monastery in South Canaan, Pennsylvania.<sup>5</sup> He was a professor at the local Seminary, also serving as its rector toward the end of his life.

The Todorović family kindly allowed the author of this paper to read and examine the majority of the letters exchanged by those two ecclesiastical dignitaries. Perusing those letters, we learn how the pair came to organize joint religious-national, educational, missionary, and cultural projects abroad. This particularly concerns their launch, work, and publication of *Svečanik*, a religious-national series managed by Priest Aleksa in Munich. Protopresbyter-Stavrophor Zoran Andrić classed the authors that published their articles or works in *Svečanik* as *monumenta serbiae*, noting: "The foundations of *Svečanik* lie on the patriotic synergy of Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović and Protopresbyter Aleksa Todorović. The first was the alpha of its creation and the second the omega of its existence – it was a symbiotic convergence of a titan of spirit and a titan of will".<sup>6</sup>

The socialist regime in Yugoslavia carefully monitored their work,<sup>7</sup> which it saw as hostile.<sup>8</sup> Dr. Radmila Radić has noted: "The work of

<sup>4</sup> Only a small part of their correspondence was published and includes only the Bishop's letters to the Munich priest.

<sup>5</sup> Nikolaj Velimirović, *Sabrana dela*, XIII (Šabac: Manastir Svetog Nikolaja Soko, 2016), 657–730. The Metropolitanate of North America, to which this monastic community belonged, later declared itself the Orthodox Church of America. The Russian Orthodox Church granted it autocephaly in 1970, but it has not been recognized by some Orthodox local churches.

<sup>6</sup> Zoran Andrić, „Svečanik, iliti karijatide srpske duhovnosti u dijaspori”, *Spoimenica pedeset godina Srpske pravoslavne Crkvene opštine u Minhenu 1946–1996*, urednik Vladimir Konjikušić (Minhen: Srpska pravoslavna crkva Crkvena opština Minhen, 1997), 87; Cf. Dobrivoje Boban Tomić, *Crveno sunce u zenitu*, knjiga 2 (Beograd: Udruženje književnika Srbije, Književne novine, 2004), 120–121.

<sup>7</sup> This inference was drawn from the documentation found in the Archive of Yugoslavia, (AJ), Fond: Savezna komisija za verske poslove, fascikla 144-1-1.

<sup>8</sup> Prof. Dr. Irinej Bulović, Bishop of Novi Sad, Bačka, Sombor and Szeged, has said that reading *Svečanik* publications was seen in postwar Yugoslavia as an "act of subversion against the state". Irinej Bulović, „Kosmološka dimenzija bogoslovlja oca

reactionary emigrant priests and bishops was controlled through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Yugoslavia and the intelligence organs of UDBA”.<sup>9</sup> Dr. Veljko Djurić Mišina observed: “The Ministry of Foreign Affairs had a Department for Emigration, which monitored, among other things, the work of religious and educational communities of the Serbian Orthodox Church in other countries. [...] Priest Aleksa Todorović from Munich was the most troublesome”.<sup>10</sup> In the Archives of the Serbian Patriarch’s Cabinet in Belgrade, information was found revealing that the head of the SOC, German Djorić, was informed of *Svečanik*’s notable achievements: “Most Rev.[erend], for years now Mr. A. Todorović has been successfully editing the religious series *Svečanik*, which has greatly contributed and continues to contribute to the spread of religious awareness among our believers in the Diaspora”.<sup>11</sup>

The main part of this paper contains an overview of the written instructions that Bishop Nikolaj sent to Protopresbyter Aleksa regarding editorial work, publication and promotion of *Svečanik* publications, revealing the extent of the Bishop’s and Todorović’s respective roles in this project. Also, the correspondence of these two SOC ecclesiastics sheds light on the life and work of distinguished clerics of this church community in the diaspora at the beginning of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as well as the scope of their missionary work, which was remarkably simple and primarily dependent on their diligence and engagement. We also learn that they received no support from a num-

Justina Popovića”, *Otac Justin Popović život i delo. Zbornik sa naučnog skupa*, Sunčica Denić ed. (Vranje: Eparhija vranjska, 2015), 20.

<sup>9</sup> Radmila Radić, *Država i verske zajednice 1945–1970. Prvi deo: 1945–1953* (Beograd: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 2002), 369. Commenting on the period discussed in her study, the author notes: “In general, the entire period 1945–1970 can be divided into the period of heavy repression against religious communities by organs of the state and the former’s more visible resistance up to 1953/54 and the period of adapting and seeking a *modus vivendi* from 1953/54 to the mid-1960s”. *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>10</sup> Veljko Đurić Mišina, *Letopis Srpske pravoslavne crkve 1946–1958. godine: vreme patrijarha Gavrila (1946–1950) i Vikentija (1950–1958)*, knjiga 3 (Beograd: Srpsko kulturno društvo „Zora”, Knin, 2002), 1396.

<sup>11</sup> Serbian Patriarch’s Cabinet, Collection “Personal file of O. Aleksa Todorović”, Act 287/63 sent on 10 October 1963 from the Bishop’s deputy for Germany, Protopresbyter Milan Lj. Jovanović to the head of SOC concerning awarding Protopresbyter Aleksa a pectoral cross.



ber of church communities abroad and Dionisije Milivojević, Bishop of the United States and Canada. That also speaks volumes about this Bishop's lapse of judgment and failure to appreciate the possibilities and reach that the cooperation between Bishop Nikolaj and Protopresbyter Aleksa could have had for spreading the Word of God in the challenging and bitter postwar years, especially among those who, after the wartime devastation, had begun new lives in an "unknown and alien world".

### **Content of the letters and Bishop Nikolaj's instructions on editing, managing and distributing *Svečanik* publications**

From Protopresbyter Aleksa's letter to Bishop Nikolaj of June 1951 we learn that he was the initiator of printing the church calendar: "If you bless the printing of a small-format calendar with a reader of religious-moral content for the general public, I ask you to please send, along with your blessing, an appropriate contribution and, before the contribution, your suggestions for this task".<sup>12</sup> He also added that, as a parish priest, he was aware of the need to "publish a monthly magazine for the lay public".

In his first undated reply, with the number 1 written on it,<sup>13</sup> Bishop Nikolaj said that he had translated the New Testament and added: "If I die, my greatest regret would be if this new translation of the full New Testament text fell through".<sup>14</sup> In his next letter, dated 11 July, he touched on the topic of the church calendar: "Definitely prepare and print it, you might as well since you already have Cyrillic [type]", and also agreed with the idea of launching a magazine.<sup>15</sup> He added: "I'll try to send you something for the Religious Layman's Reader." He proposed the term

<sup>12</sup> Archive of the Todorović Family [hereafter ATF], Protopresbyter Aleksa to Bishop Nikolaj, 21 June 1951.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. the printed edition in which this letter is marked as the Bishop's first: Veli-mirović, *Sabrana dela*, XIII, 660.

<sup>14</sup> ATF, Bishop Nikolaj to Protopresbyter Aleksa, undated. In this undated letter he added: "What matters most to me, for the remainder of my days on Earth, is to definitely prepare the New Testament text."

<sup>15</sup> ATF, Bishop Nikolaj to Protopresbyter Aleksa, 11 July 1951.



Bishop Nikolaj at the meeting of St Seraphim of Sarov Fund in December 1950 in New York. Photo credit: A. Garvilin, Internet source: <https://www.rocorstudies.org/ru/2020/11/03/latvijskoe-pravoslavnoe-duhovenstvo-na-territorii-zapadnoj-germanii-v-1945-1949-godah/>



Bishop Nikolaj in St Sava's Cathedral in London in 1952  
(Courtesy of Goran Veljković, Kragujevac)

“Svečanik” for the title of the whole publishing project because believers in Bosnia used the word for a small church calendar and offered the alternative name “Bogomolja”, but left the choice up to the Munich priest.

In the meantime, after working on the project for months, Protopresbyter Aleksa accepted the name, adding: “I keep thinking about the paper. I’m becoming increasingly convinced that we should launch the paper as soon as possible. [...] Even if, at first, we don’t have enough contributors (a non-political selection), we can print things already published in our periodicals and publications because these would be completely new for our people in the diaspora. The paper needs to contain things that are timeless and do not age”.<sup>16</sup> The Bishop praised the priest for having “bravely completed the *Svečanik* calendar so quickly”.<sup>17</sup> He suggested that Protopresbyter Aleksa send it to the US by November 15, when in other places a few different calendars were to be printed, which would appear already at the end of the month. He also instructed him to compile a list of subscribers in many continents and told him he would consider launching a paper.<sup>18</sup> He was happy with the first copy of the calendar he received and commended the author in a letter written on the feast of St. Archangel Michael (Arandelovdan, November 8/21 in the Eastern Christianity, dates are given according to both old style (Julian) and new style (Gregorian) calendar).

On the last day of 1951, Bishop Nikolaj sent the manuscript of his work *Žetve Gospodnje* (*The Lord’s Harvest*), enclosing 25 dollars to help cover the printing expenses.<sup>19</sup> He left it up to Protopresbyter Aleksa to determine the print run and other details concerning the appearance of the monograph. The following sentence echoes toward the end of the letter: “I am ashamed of the negligence and laxity with which St. Sava’s church is being run in the Diaspora”. The Bishop also explained his plan for the journal: “If you do decide to launch a journal (either a monthly or bi-monthly one), I believe that:

<sup>16</sup> ATF, Protopresbyter Aleksa to Bishop Nikolaj, 2 October 1951.

<sup>17</sup> ATF, Bishop Nikolaj to Protopresbyter Aleksa, 12 October 1951.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> After the calendar for the coming year, 1952, this was the first book published in the *Svečanik* series.

1. A Brotherhood of St. Sava should first be organized in Munich and its area, and the journal should be the organ of that brotherhood (rather than a single person's). That's very important, even if the fraternity has no more than ten good members;
2. The journal – with no political or party affiliation – in that I agree with you. But it will be seen as such unless you ensure the cooperation of priests and laymen from various Serbian 'camps.' [...]
3. Name of the journal: Serbian Church or Serbian Life – unless you can think of something more appropriate.
4. Short and numerous articles.
5. For the sake of frugality (in our overall destitution), the journal can have fewer than 36 p.”

The Bishop continued to support the priest's efforts throughout 1952 by frequently sending him short articles and other manuscripts. Protopresbyter Aleksa selected the writings he received and printed some in calendars and others in the supplement *Sveta Srbija, pozdrav Svečanika* (*Holy Serbia: Svečanik's Greetings*). The Bishop's next book, *Kassiana: Lessons in Divine and Christian Love*, was published that same year. In his letter of 24 January, the Protopresbyter touched on the difficulties and general circumstances that impeded his editorial and parochial duties:

I've just received the second delivery of 75 dollars [...] I keep thinking about the journal. I know there's a great need for a religious-ecclesiastical paper. I know there'll be substantial difficulties to launch and maintain the journal. [...] I know that these emigrant circumstances of ours are now much more challenging. They lie in blind party loyalty and the Serbs' division into 'blocs.' [...] I've had trouble from the local Serbs and I still do, what's more, from those very Serbs that never set foot in a church but spend all day in camp canteens. And you know only too well that those camp canteens are pretty much the same thing as the taverns we used to have. [...] I have accurate information that Tito's local consul keeps pressing the Bavarian government to throw us out of this house.<sup>20</sup>

In his letter of 6 February 1952, the Bishop sent numerous guidelines for printing his two works. He did not want to launch another journal

<sup>20</sup> ATF, Bishop Nikolaj to Protopresbyter Aleksa, 24 January 1952.

to “rival” the existing one, especially because Protospresbyter Aleksa was labeled and denounced as a former priest of Zbor, which meant that the launching of a paper or journal could be misconstrued as politically motivated and the periodical seen as an organ of Zbor or Ljotić’s followers. Therefore, he instructed the priest to include a note in both books informing the reader that they were a “literary supplement to the *Svečanik* calendar.” He also mentioned that he would send the funds to cover the printing costs, adding: “I can neither distribute the books nor help with their distribution”.<sup>21</sup> He said that the raised funds should be added to the “*Svečanik* calendar fund”, which the Munich priest would manage on his own for the purpose of “future devotional activities”.<sup>22</sup> He suggested that a part of Philip Schaff’s book *The Person Of Christ: The Miracle Of History* should be translated from German.<sup>23</sup> Mentioning the help often provided by priest Aleksa’s son, Svetomir, who was living in the United States after having fled from a mass unmarked execution site with some other members of the National Liberation Army,<sup>24</sup> he added: “You have an assistant there, and I don’t”, ending with “the author Nikolaj, secretary Velimirović, expeditor of Lelićanin [man from Lelić]”.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>21</sup> ATF, Bishop Nikolaj to Protospresbyter Aleksa, 6 February 1952.

<sup>22</sup> Priest Aleksa was certainly not in a position to print any works at the expense of the Church Community in Munich or to privately fund them, especially at the beginning of the project. This inference is based on a survey of the logs of the Treasury from 1951 to 1976, in which the Munich priest recorded the expenses of the Munich Church Community. Eleven logbooks have been found. There are also logbooks for the following four years, but they are not relevant here because *Svečanik* ended its activities after the publication of its last edition in 1975. Source: SOC Archive in Munich, Collection: Treasury.

<sup>23</sup> Jovan Brkić translated the book, and it was published in 1953 as the seventh edition in the *Svečanik* series.

<sup>24</sup> A list of the persons who escaped execution was compiled by the regiment coach of the Second Battalion of the Serbian Volunteer Corpus (SDK). Milenko R. Radojević, „38 srpskih dobrovoljaca koji su pobjegli iz predatih pukova iz Vetrinja”, Borivoje M. Karapandžić, *S verom u Boga za kralja i otadžbinu – Dobrovoljci 1941–1991* (Klivland, Ohajo, Sjedinjene Američke Države: samostalno izdanje autora, 1991), 443–444. The escape of the priest’s son Svetomir, nicknamed Otrov (Poison), is mentioned in: Radovan Raško Ojdrović, „Ispit vere i mučeništva”, *ibid.*, 199. He was a member of the Second Battalion of the Serbian Volunteer Corpus (SDK). He died and was laid to rest in the United States.

<sup>25</sup> ATF, Bishop Nikolaj to Protospresbyter Aleksa, 6 February 1952.

A letter dated 9 February informs us that the Munich priest received an additional 300 dollars to print *The Lord's Harvest* as soon as possible.<sup>26</sup> Many of their subsequent exchanges suggest that the Bishop was careful about every detail and meticulously explained his demands to priest Aleksa. In his suggestions about the design of the *Kassiana* booklet, he mentioned that his name was to be written without “any other titles”<sup>27</sup> and in his communication of 18 March explained that the reason for that was “the narrative form of Kass.[iana].” He reviewed the content of the calendar in detail, and, interestingly, remarked that it should include only the Orthodox calendar and by no means the “Catholic calendar”. He expressed satisfaction that the Munich priest was leading a “Devotionalist fraternity”, which had “failed in both England and here [USA].” He mentioned that the Serbian patriarchy might open a religious academy,<sup>28</sup> concluding that such an academy “could be funded from here [USA].”

The letter dated 2 April 1952 reveals the Bishop's excitement because the “*Svečanik family* [was] growing,” as evidenced by the “feedback from priests concerning the first book.” He also noted that he had “never had this feeling before”.<sup>29</sup> The letter of 6 April clearly shows that the Bishop had no support and met with few (influential) Serbs, which is why he couldn't help priest Aleksa with finding someone to distribute the books.<sup>30</sup> Instructing him to hurry up with the translation of the first part of Schaff's monograph, he also suggested that the next publication should be *Divan*, “a description of our Devotional movement”. He added that father Radovan, most likely Paunović, a SOC parish priest in postwar Germany, had agreed with the launching of the journal provided that the editor had “no political affiliation whatsoever”, which was not easy to find. That shows that Bishop Nikolaj was realistically assessing the possibilities for launching a paper or magazine but was also acutely aware of all the challenges that could arise in such a

<sup>26</sup> ATF, Bishop Nikolaj to Protopresbyter Aleksa, 9 February 1952.

<sup>27</sup> ATF, Bishop Nikolaj to Protopresbyter Aleksa, 10 February 1952.

<sup>28</sup> It was then that the Orthodox Faculty of Theology was expelled from the university community.

<sup>29</sup> ATF, Bishop Nikolaj to Protopresbyter Aleksa, 2 April 1952.

<sup>30</sup> ATF, Bishop Nikolaj to Protopresbyter Aleksa, 6 April 1952.

project. They were, above all, of a political nature because many were concerned about the ideological affiliation of the person editing the journal.

From the letter of 30 April we learn of criticisms about *Svečanik*'s editions from friends and former brothers-in-arms: "Regarding the books: don't be cross with Najdan. I laughed so much at his remark about *Svečanik* and saw it as funny but, of course, damaging – not too much though, don't worry. If you want, you can explain to Najdan that this was my idea. To dispel any suspicions about you".<sup>31</sup> Although Najdanović held a Ph.D., was an intellectual and an undoubtedly religious man, who later became a priest himself, he was critical of the Munich publishing project. We also learn the following: "We're facing a storm of quarrel between the National Defense and the Union. All because of the damned politics of Zbor and non-Zbor. And they won't leave me alone. Lord, have mercy on me! There's no repentance, pacification or unification. We fight against the godless, yet we godlessly offend God ourselves."

In the letter of 18 July, Bishop Nikolaj enclosed a story and asked about the possibility of printing the manuscript of Dr. Miodrag Purković's work *Srpski patrijarsi* (*Serbian Patriarchs*).<sup>32</sup> In a letter dated on the feast of the Dormition of the Mother of God (Velika Gospojina, August 15/28 in the Eastern Christianity), he reports that Zoran [probably Miljković, who was tasked with sending money to the SOC parish in the Bavarian capital] sent the manuscript of the work *Pesme molitvene* (*Prayerful Songs*), while the author explained the order in which the devotional songs were to be printed and instructed the Munich priest not to change the punctuation in them – not to modernize it but to leave it "old-fashioned".<sup>33</sup> On 3 September, he reminded the addressee: "Just keep informing me about the prices and how much you can handle".<sup>34</sup>

<sup>31</sup> ATF, Bishop Nikolaj to Protospresbyter Aleksa, 30 April 1952. The last two sentences were added on the left margin of the letter.

<sup>32</sup> ATF, Bishop Nikolaj to Protospresbyter Aleksa, 18 July 1952. This scholar lived and worked at the SOC branch in London. He authored a few books and many articles on church and national history.

<sup>33</sup> ATF, Bishop Nikolaj to Protospresbyter Aleksa, 28 August 1952.

<sup>34</sup> ATF, Bishop Nikolaj to Protospresbyter Aleksa, 3 September 1952.

The text suggests that it was very important to him for as many editions of *Svečanik* as possible to reach their homeland.<sup>35</sup>

In the letter of 5 September, Bishop Nikolaj stated the following: "But my greatest sorrow is that our brothers have shown themselves not to be brothers to you, a laborer of God. [...] Then you confounded me with your statement that you would stop printing the books due to the complaints about 'Nikolaj' and 'Ljotić'. You're not publishing those books for the glory of N. or Lj. but for the glory of Christ, God and for the benefit of the Serbian people..."<sup>36</sup> He suggested that the priest consider moving the publishing venture to London in order to nudge the local community into action and encourage it to get involved. In the letter of 10 September, he touched on the Brotherhood of St. Sava in London.<sup>37</sup> He gave him guidelines about dealing with them in regard to, among other things, launching the paper. Although he believed that, in that way, they would win over "as Paul [the Apostle] says, Jews and Greeks", he left the final decision up to the priest because he was the "initiator of it all". From the letter of 25 September, we learn that Protopresbyter Aleksa

<sup>35</sup> ATF, Bishop Nikolaj to Protopresbyter Aleksa, 5 September 1952. Some persons are often referenced by their nicknames: "Vranjanac" (a person from the town of Vranje) was the nickname of Justin Popović, "Piroćanac" (a person from the town of Pirot) was Bishop Vasilije Kostić, "Bokeljac" (a person from Boka Bay) was Bishop Simeon Zloković, etc.

<sup>36</sup> ATF, Bishop Nikolaj to Protopresbyter Aleksa, 5 September 1952.

<sup>37</sup> ATF, Bishop Nikolaj to Protopresbyter Aleksa, 10 September 1952. The Todorović family archive shows that he previously addressed them in writing, responding point-by-point: "Regarding the second matter, I think that it would be sensible and useful if the Brotherhood, instead of launching a new book edition, would, in agreement and with the consent of the Munich church community and the current editor of the *Svečanik* calendar and its literary supplement, Protopresbyter Aleksa Todorović, would accept ownership of the entire initiative and extend it. BECAUSE IT IS EASIER TO CONTINUE SOMETHING THAN TO BEGIN FROM SCRATCH. It is unnecessary, I think, to LECTURE priests, officers of Christ, that the entire action should never – least of all in these tragic times for the Serbian people – have even the slightest political or party hue, and it must be and remain, for now and forever, purely ecclesiastical and religious, patriotic, and edifying, like all the toil of our spiritual father St. Sava, whose name the brotherhood bears. If the Brotherhood should accept my suggestion (and I am not commanding but entreating them to do so), then the first step would be to launch an organ of the Church in your milieu, using the funds from the sale of *Svečanik* and the books."



asked about the formats of the books that would be printed, and Bishop Nikolaj explained that it was a “series of books (like [the publisher] Književna Zadruga), and they must all have the same format”.<sup>38</sup>

The letter of 11 October shows that the Bishop invested considerable efforts into promoting *Svečanik*'s editions. He also wanted to know what priest Aleksa was “hearing from Serbia”.<sup>39</sup> After he had gotten some rest after many taxing travels, in a letter dated 22 October, he praised *Svečanik*, adding that others were “also saying it was good”.<sup>40</sup> He then asked for a list of “Serbian theology graduates in those lands,” probably to consider which among them could be asked to get involved in the Munich publishing project.

In a letter written shortly before the feast of Saint Demetrius (Mitrovdan, October 26 / November 8 in the Eastern Christianity), he added that a photograph of the newly built SOC church in Los Angeles should be used as the cover for the monograph *Pesme molitvene*.<sup>41</sup> He asked Priest Miloje Nikolić in London for a definitive reply on whether the local church community was willing to take over the entire SOC publishing project from the Bavarian capital. He also suggested that priest Aleksa's manuscript *O pastirstvovanju u dijaspori* (*On Being a Parish Priest in the Diaspora*) should be the fourth volume in the *Svečanik* series, which never came to fruition.

In a letter written on Saint Stefan of Dečani (Mratindan, November 11/24 in the Eastern Christianity), he noted that he had sent his work *Divan*, which was to be meticulously reviewed and checked.<sup>42</sup> He also

<sup>38</sup> ATF, Bishop Nikolaj to Protopresbyter Aleksa, 25 September 1952.

<sup>39</sup> ATF, Bishop Nikolaj to Protopresbyter Aleksa, 11 October 1952. He knew that some letters were reaching the Munich cleric, either directly or indirectly. He also knew that the Bavarian capital – often the first pitstop after fleeing Yugoslavia – was the place where one could find out a lot about the circumstances of the Serbian people and SOC's position in Yugoslavia. He usually asked about the status of SOC, especially about local challenges and the troubles the local clergy was facing. On the bottom left margin of the second page of the letter dated 15 March 1954, he noted: “4 months since I haven't heard from my Jovan. He's under surveillance.” This referred to the Bishop's nephew, later the Bishop of Šabac and Valjevo.

<sup>40</sup> ATF, Bishop Nikolaj to Protopresbyter Aleksa, 22 October 1952.

<sup>41</sup> ATF, Bishop Nikolaj to Protopresbyter Aleksa, 7 November 1952.

<sup>42</sup> ATF, Bishop Nikolaj to Protopresbyter Aleksa, 24 November 1952.

remarked: "The most difficult part is finding authors. I'm embarrassed to keep sending my books when there are so many learned theologians." He also touched on a subject they had frequently written about and discussed a few years ago: "Concerning the paper. Miloje says he's willing, but with the clergy so fragmented, he's a pessimist." So he proposed an alternative: "Here's an idea: if the initiative for the clerical brotherhood to publish a paper should fail, we'll have to try to organize a Serbian Bible Society and then launch a paper, at least a bi-monthly one with 24 to 32 pages, maybe called *Holy Serbia*." In addition, he wanted to get younger people involved: "Then we also need to organize theology graduates and get them involved. The young are the future. I've forwarded your list so that it can be expanded." The Bishop praised the priest's "detailed guidelines on services and readings in *Svečanik*", describing them as "precious like pearls". He gave the following instructions about sending books to Yugoslavia: "Due to the events in London last summer, the Church is once again under pressure. They've forbidden sending any books, food, clothes or money to the Patriarchate. Therefore, try to send the books to institutions (monastery and church administrations, the so-called [illegible word, probably 'parochial houses'] and to a few personal names). So as not to bring any harm to them." On the left margin of this text, he added: "German's been arrested".<sup>43</sup>

The letter of 25 November informs us that the London Protopresbyter Miloje would launch a four-page paper, with which Bishop Nikolaj generally disagreed because they needed to "either launch a quality journal gathering all theological forces or not bother at all. And what he has in mind is just a simple parish bulletin".<sup>44</sup> This is a remarkably important sentence because it tells us that the Bishop had nothing against launching a parish organ but thought that *Svečanik* was useful and had become more widely known. Hence he pointed out that he was against reducing the project to a smaller-scale paper for a narrower audience because the existing project that united theological forces in Europe and the United States and in which unification and creation,

<sup>43</sup> This is a reference to German Đorić, who was anointed the Bishop of Budim that year. He went on to serve as the head of the Serbian Orthodox Church from 1958 to 1990.

<sup>44</sup> ATF, Bishop Nikolaj to Protopresbyter Aleksa, 25 November 1952.

both of which he saw as important objectives, were possible. However, all of this came to nothing. Interestingly, in his letter of 22 December, he said that the “names of the heads of different Serbian organizations” should not appear on the last page of *Divan* and asked the editor to “remove” them.<sup>45</sup>

Over the following year (1953), Bishop Nikolaj was approached by an (unnamed) association of Serbs from Zurich, who asked him to provide the printed books, which is why he asked the Munich priest to send “all existing *Svečanik* editions” to the address of Petar Vukčević.<sup>46</sup> He also reminded him to send copies of all editions to the Hilandar Monastery if he had not done so already. From the letter of 13 January, we learn the Bishop’s opinion of Herbert Waddams, secretary of the Church of England Council on Foreign Relations, who had visited Protopresbyter Aleksa and made some offers. The cautious Bishop was not in favor of any association with Waddams, which he termed a “partnership”, and emphasized that they could not and must not accept any “subsidies” from him or “cede to them the copyrights to our work”.<sup>47</sup> He did, however, allow that the Church of England official could buy a larger quantity of books and noted that his cooperation could be useful because it would allow priest Aleksa to employ a worker to take care of administrative and shipping matters. This letter makes it abundantly clear that the idea to move the *Svečanik* project to London was abandoned because “we absolutely have to keep this in our own hands”, but the possibility that someone else could launch and publish the planned paper remained. The Bishop was evidently happy that *Svečanik* was coming to Yugoslavia: “Positive feedback from the country – a reason for joy”.<sup>48</sup> In his letter of 15 January, he suggested offering an alternative

<sup>45</sup> ATF, Bishop Nikolaj to Protopresbyter Aleksa, 22 December 1952.

<sup>46</sup> ATF, Bishop Nikolaj to Protopresbyter Aleksa, 5 January 1953 (written on the day before Christmas Eve according to the Julian calendar used by the SOC).

<sup>47</sup> ATF, Bishop Nikolaj to Protopresbyter Aleksa, 13 January 1953.

<sup>48</sup> ATF, Bishop Nikolaj to Protopresbyter Aleksa, 13 January 1953. The regime of the Federal People’s Republic of Yugoslavia (FNRJ) did not look kindly on this, and Protopresbyter Aleksa tried to find a way to deliver the books. Bringing printed books was banned, and the Yugoslav authorities would seize every book or journal they found at border control. And yet some people were willing to take that risk. One of those people who, while Nikolaj was alive, managed to bring a number of

toWaddams: that those whom he represented could print a larger print run of a book, “the first few thousand”, provided they cover the shipping and copy-editing costs, and then “leave the type for us to print (perhaps 2000) copies for our displaced people. That wouldn’t cost much, and we could meet the needs of the Diaspora”.<sup>49</sup>

The letter of 25 February is more optimistic, and the author is thrilled about the attractive appearance of his book *Divan*. Given that the work was lengthier than the previous two, he suggested reducing the price from 1.5 to 1 USD because he was “receiving complaints from England that the books [were] expensive as it is. They’re really penniless there”.<sup>50</sup> His concern about the appearance of the books is also attested by his instruction to place a piece of firm cardboard on the edges of the books when packing them “because otherwise they get frayed”. Besides praising Protopresbyter Aleksa and his efforts, he wanted to know how many copies were being sent to France and Germany and how many to Serbia. He also wrote: “Give my best to Mandić and Mišulić<sup>51</sup>, your good associates. Tell them not to lose spirit. It’s like building an endowment. For now, that’s my and your work for our people. What else can we do?”

books into the country and take them to the archimandrite and professor Justin Popović was the young psychologist and future academician and professor, Dr. Vladeta Jerotić. Later on, seminary pupils and theology students, as well as some believers, also took the books into Yugoslavia, among them Magister Vasilije Tomić, theologian, literatus and distinguished priest in Canada; Slobodan Stojanović, who later became a professor at the Belgrade Seminary; Dr. Ioannis C. Tarnanidis, a graduate student at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Belgrade and later a professor at the University of Thessaloniki, and many others. At first, the books were sent as packages through the post but later they found that it was best to send one copy at a time. Radmila Radić has noted: “In the early 1950s, many deliveries of religious books from various religious organizations abroad made their way to Yugoslavia. They were sent as gifts. The state organs believed that the ‘political damage done by that literature was substantial’ and tried to impede the delivery of those books however they could. Out of political opportunism, they did not formally ban their import but, in the end, they introduced import duties on these publications”. Radić, *Država i verske zajednice*, 256.

<sup>49</sup> ATF, Bishop Nikolaj to Protopresbyter Aleksa, 15 January 1953.

<sup>50</sup> ATF, Bishop Nikolaj to Protopresbyter Aleksa, 25 February 1953.

<sup>51</sup> Milan Mišulić, a SDK volunteer, an emigrant, and later the sacristan and cantor of the Munich church community. He was eventually tonsured at Hilandar, taking the monastic name of Mitrofan.

In the letter dated 13 March, he said: “But we must go to the very limit of our abilities with that series of books. The One whom *Svečanik* celebrates and in whose name it operates will take care of the funds. But the most difficult part is finding contributors. I was really looking forward to getting young people involved in this project. So much for looking forward to it!”<sup>52</sup> He also mentioned that the “letter from Brekovo [was] concerning” and pointed out that material directed against “Adventists and other heretics for the people in Serbia” was needed. This reveals that rumors and letters from Yugoslavia were reaching him and that he was considering the spiritual needs of the inhabitants of this socialist country. He suggested preparing and printing works that would be useful for local believers and push religious life in the right direction. He was also alarmed about the appearance and spread of sects, especially the Adventists and Baptists, and advised considering writings and works that could awaken religious awareness and highlight the danger of joining those church communities. This concern of his and consideration of the possibilities for protecting inadequately informed believers and lay people in Yugoslavia attests to his refined missionary character.

In his letter of 19 March, the Bishop instructed the Munich priest to, together with his associates, correct the mistakes in the translation of Schaff’s book as he saw fit and to “feel free to Serbianize” the text where needed because “clarity [was] of paramount importance.” He included some instructions about the cover page and design of the book and asked them to do so “urgently” because “death doesn’t wait.”<sup>53</sup>

Bishop Nikolaj had detailed plans and thoughts about the authors who could publish their views in *Svečanik*. In an overview of the work of some authors in West Europe, he noted that the former university professor Dr. Djoko Slijepčević should write a history of the Serbian Orthodox Church in the last 100–150 years. Vlajko Vlahović, a prewar theology professor, could compose a work on the faith and ethics of the

<sup>52</sup> ATF, Bishop Nikolaj to Protospesbyter Aleksa, 13 March 1953.

<sup>53</sup> ATF, Bishop Nikolaj to Protospesbyter Aleksa, 19 March 1953. There is another intriguing remark: “The most difficult part is the writing. Either no one wants to write or they don’t know how. And too many Serbs keep writing memoirs to glorify themselves and condemn others. Lord, spare us the memoirs! I could do that, too.”

Serbian people in Montenegro, and the professor and former dean of the Faculty of Law, Dr. Lazo M. Kostić, could write an overview of the legal status of the SOC from the time of Karadjordje to modern times. He concluded that Protopresbyter Aleksa must publish a work on the SOC in emigration. It would be good to find someone capable of writing a religious novel or a collection of religious poems. Another important piece of information was that monk Dr. Jakov Arsović had found Nikolaj's manuscripts at the Ljubostinja Monastery and that they needed to be examined to see "if there's any value in them for our glorious *Svečanik* series, which holds all of my heart and all of your renown and praise."<sup>54</sup>

In the letter of 25 March 1953, he mentioned that they would print an amended translation of the *Psalter* "with the numeration harmonized with the church Psalter."<sup>55</sup> He also ordered: "Next up is the printing of *The Ray of the Microcosm* in English," and added: "I know that the Serbs won't read this, but the Serbs will be able to buy and give it as presents to their English and American acquaintances, should they wish to do so". In the following letter, written on Palm Sunday "at night," he gave instructions for printing the English translation of *The Ray of the Microcosm* and the revised and amended edition of *Lord's Harvest*. To encourage the priests Miloje Nikolić and Radovan Paunović to get involved in the project, he inserted: "*Svečanik*, series of the Serbian Bible Society".<sup>56</sup> This was an attempt to encourage the revival of the Devotional Movement, although he did not believe it possible. In regard to that, he asked Protopresbyter Aleksa for his consent. He also pointed out that the design and content of the calendar needed to be reworked and filled with texts against the Adventists and Baptists, who were being tolerated by the communist regime in Yugoslavia. He suggested the translation and publication of Evgeny Spektorsky's *Христианская этика* (*The Christian Ethics*) in the *Svečanik* series.

<sup>54</sup> ATF, Bishop Nikolaj to Protopresbyter Aleksa, 19 March 1953. Monk Jakov, a Sorbonne graduate, was canonized by the SOC in 2017 as the Venerable Jakov of Tuman.

<sup>55</sup> ATF, Bishop Nikolaj to Protopresbyter Aleksa, 25 March 1953.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

The Bishop's following sentence from a letter written on the Sunday of Thomas (1953) shows how difficult it was to translate and publish Schaff's monograph: "If Satan ever interfered to thwart a project, he must have done it in this case".<sup>57</sup> He added: "Jesus Christ has once again emerged victorious against his and our adversary." He then proceeded to ask about the challenges of publishing *The Ray of the Microcosm*. The letter of 2 April includes an important instruction: "Do you see this paper? I was forced to put 'publisher E. N.' because unfettered tongues keep saying that I serve Iskra and who knows what else. So I've added this to make it known that I am the founder and certainly not a political party".<sup>58</sup> On 14 April, he advised that it would be better to print 2000 copies of *The Ray of the Microcosm* because he saw that "some others, who favor English over Serbian, were interested in it."<sup>59</sup>

In a letter written on the Sunday of the Myrrhbearers, the Bishop offered new details: "The reception of the books is heavily damaged by the vocal propaganda of politicians, it's Zbor members that are publishing those things. Even the wretched Dionis[ije] helps that propaganda. [That means that we need to] hold on to England and Australia even tighter, preferably with personal letters."<sup>60</sup> From the letter of 25 April, we learn that Protopresbyter Aleksa had managed to deliver a number of books to Yugoslavia: "Your letter of the 20<sup>th</sup> of this month emanates a joyous mood, which brings joy to me, too. That is certainly down to

<sup>57</sup> ATF, Bishop Nikolaj to Protopresbyter Aleksa, 12 April 1953.

<sup>58</sup> ATF, Bishop Nikolaj to Protopresbyter Aleksa, 2 April 1953. *Iskra* was a journal published by Zbor members in postwar Germany from 1949. It was published in Munich, usually twice a month. With this statement, the Bishop wanted to distance himself from them and make it clear that his writings had nothing to do with any political propaganda.

<sup>59</sup> ATF, Bishop Nikolaj to Protopresbyter Aleksa, 14 April 1953.

<sup>60</sup> ATF, Bishop Nikolaj to Protopresbyter Aleksa, 19 April 1953. These sentences show that Bishop Nikolaj was aware that Protopresbyter Aleksa was in correspondence with believers and clerics in many countries across several continents. In numerous interviews with the author of this paper, from 2016 to the present, Aleksa's son Časlav has said that his father did not receive letters about *Svečanik*'s activities and publishing only from China and Albania. The author of this paper has discovered Protopresbyter Todorović's letters even in Johannesburg, South Africa, at the SOC Archive, where he conducted two weeks-long research campaigns with the blessing of the departed Serbian patriarch Irinej (Gavrilović).

your successful efforts and the favorable response to the books in the Fatherland".<sup>61</sup> He also volunteered a key piece of information: "When we get some money from the books, we need to do the primary objective of *Svečanik*: a charity fund for our sick patients in Ger[many]. – What you've done for them is worth more than one good book. God keep you safe."

In his letter of 1 May, the Bishop touched on the printing of the works of the archimandrite professor Dr. Justin Popović, emphasizing that he was willing to support it but that the author should choose which of his books would be published. *Svetosavlje kao filozofija života* (*Saint Sava's cult as a Philosophy of Life*) was a better choice than *The Vitae of St. Simeon and St. Sava* because "we only publish original works."<sup>62</sup> From the letter of 3 May, we learn that Bishop Nikolaj sent the photographs for the *Svečanik* calendar. He described Justin Popović as "our most profound theologian".<sup>63</sup> Once again, he emphasized that "good feedback from the impoverished in Serbia" was most important.

In the letter of 21 May 1953, he remarked that the word *Svečanik* should be printed in red lettering and that the publisher's address needed to be written on the right-hand side.<sup>64</sup> He also noted: "Now, as soon as the exams are done here after Trinity Sunday, I have to make sure that packages are sent to monasteries. A report from the Ćelije Monastery (where archimandrite professor Dr. Justin Popović resides): they don't even have bread! The same goes for the Ovčar monasteries. That should not be a concern of yours (besides in prayers), but it must be mine."<sup>65</sup>

<sup>61</sup> ATF, Bishop Nikolaj to Protopresbyter Aleksa, 25 April 1953.

<sup>62</sup> ATF, Bishop Nikolaj to Protopresbyter Aleksa, 1 May 1953.

<sup>63</sup> ATF, Bishop Nikolaj to Protopresbyter Aleksa, 3 May 1953.

<sup>64</sup> ATF, Bishop Nikolaj to Protopresbyter Aleksa, 21 May 1953.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.* He was troubled by the lack of care for the flock and an inappropriate attitude to monastics, especially nuns. He struggled to accept the treatment of magnificent monasteries and their invaluable altars, iconostases, frescoes, dormitories, treasuries, archives, libraries, and edifices, especially medieval ones, which would, in the years and decades after his death, win fist prizes at many international exhibitions and be inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage list. At the same time, in Yugoslavia, these holy shrines were often left to rot and fall into disrepair, particularly in Kosovo and Metohija and southern Serbia. Half a century after his observa-



In the letter of 1 July, he informs the priest that he has found “*Svečanik*’s first benefactor”, Đuro Davidović, and two more people in Chicago, which made him think that God was “pleased with our work on his behalf”.<sup>66</sup> He also touched on Protopresbyter Aleksa’s appeal sent to some priests, although they would not respond (in writing). In the following letters of July and August, he notified the editor that some other donors to the Munich publishing project had appeared. He suggested not printing the *Prologue* as it was too lengthy. He thought it important to “compile a *Svečanik* bulletin in the leadup to Christmas” and made some suggestions: “If we had personnel, we could found:

1. A Serbian missionary brotherhood in emigration;
2. Ecclesiastical-literary clubs;
3. Serbian Bible Institute.”<sup>67</sup>

The following statement is also intriguing: “The jewel in the crown of our series should be the printing of the amended translation of the New Testament.” That, however, never happened. In the letter of 25 August, he warned the priest to use better-quality and more durable covers.<sup>68</sup> He added that he was shocked by Protopresbyter Aleksa’s modest lifestyle, of which he had learned from Mileta Tošović: “Do you really live in such destitution?” From the letter of 2 September, we learn: “Your suggestion to print liturgical books is very appropriate given the need”.<sup>69</sup> In the letter of 16 September, he sent the Protopresbyter a list

tion, R. Radić confirmed those claims: “Some staff of the Institute for the Protection and Research of Cultural Monuments of the People’s Republic of Serbia” allegedly took care of and supervised those shrines. “Many of them, however, were more concerned with controlling the monks’ activities than with protecting the monasteries” (Žiča, Dečani). *Ibid*, 262.

<sup>66</sup> ATF, Bishop Nikolaj to Protopresbyter Aleksa, 1 July 1953.

<sup>67</sup> ATF, Bishop Nikolaj to Protopresbyter Aleksa, 2 August 1953.

<sup>68</sup> ATF, Bishop Nikolaj to Protopresbyter Aleksa, 25 August 1953.

<sup>69</sup> ATF, Bishop Nikolaj to Protopresbyter Aleksa, 2 September 1953. In undated letter written, no doubt, in the second half of August 1953, the Munich priest reports: “It seems to me that we must consider printing at least some liturgical books (a Miscellany, solid and as extensive as possible; the Service Book [Hieratikon], Book of Needs [Euchologion], even an Evangelistary and an Apostolos). [...] Those books are scarce both here and there.” There is another interesting piece of information: “Brother Milorad Veličković of Donja Gorevnica has written to let me know that they have

of donors, which was to be reduced due to spatial constraints, and added a short note on the Baptists after the one on the Adventists.<sup>70</sup>

The letter of 4 October shows that the Bishop learned that lay theologians were planning to launch a journal called *Hrišćanska misao* (*Christian Thought*). In view of that, he believed that they should abandon the plan to set up a separate Munich-based paper and at the same time begin printing the *Svečanik Bulletin*.<sup>71</sup> In a letter written on St. Thomas' Day (Tomindan, October 6/19 in the Eastern Christianity), he suggested that the Protopresbyter hire a paid assistant and elaborated on the concept of the *Bulletin* – four pages with a circulation of 500–700, and discussed its content.

The Bishop wrote on 27 October to Milan Mišulić because the Protopresbyter was ill.<sup>72</sup> He enclosed a “Prayer for the Health of Father Aleksa” and on the following day, the feast of St. Paraskevi (Sveta Petka, October 14/27 in the Eastern Christianity), sent instructions to Mišulić for printing Spektorsky's *Ethics*. He also explained to the Munich cleric what had caused his illness: “It is God's will that you should rest and that all those hatchlings around you learn to fly on their own, i.e., to do printing and administrative jobs. Once you come back to them, you will find them more capable and deft.”<sup>73</sup>

In a letter written on the feast of the Holy King Milutin, he told Protopresbyter Aleksa that “it takes a hero to handle German printers and Serbian politicians.”<sup>74</sup> The following year, on 23 January 1954, we learn that the Bishop was personally preparing *Svečanik's Bulletin*.<sup>75</sup>

not received the books I sent. His son is a priest in Brezna and has received the books, but the authorities confiscated them. Mladimir [Todorović – son of Priest Aleksa] advises us not to send them to rural areas because they never get there, only to Belgrade. But not even in Belgrade do they reach everyone to whom they are sent. All of this makes me struggle to find ways to deliver as many books there but not in this unsafe way.”

<sup>70</sup> ATF, Bishop Nikolaj to Protopresbyter Aleksa, 16 September 1953.

<sup>71</sup> ATF, Bishop Nikolaj to Protopresbyter Aleksa, 4 October 1953.

<sup>72</sup> ATF, Bishop Nikolaj to Milan Mišulić, 27 October 1953.

<sup>73</sup> ATF, Bishop Nikolaj to Protopresbyter Aleksa, undated, sent in an envelope on 3 November 1953.

<sup>74</sup> ATF, Bishop Nikolaj to Protopresbyter Aleksa, 12 November 1953.

<sup>75</sup> ATF, Bishop Nikolaj to Protopresbyter Aleksa, 23 January 1954.

The letter written on the feast of the Presentation of the Lord contains information about the material for the journal *Holy Serbia: Svečanik's Greetings* and the report that, due to his ill health, the Bishop had “barely managed to compile it.”<sup>76</sup> He added that he was “having difficulties with the donors. They are quick to make promises and slow to deliver.”

In the letter of 22 February, the Bishop discusses the material and financial aspects of the project.<sup>77</sup> He thought that around 200 instead of 500 copies should be sent to the United States, noting: “Priests are the worst at distributing [the books] except 4 or 5 among them. They have no missionary talent although they live in this country, where missionary work is the most developed in the world.” He added: “A great impediment to *Sveč[anik]* in Am[erica] is the propaganda of some politicians and even the Bishop [Dionisije] himself, as if our series was pro-Zbor. And I told you in London and wrote from here that our wretched project must be above all political party divisions; as it was said: ‘All Serbs gathered together under the auspices of the Church.’ With the communists being the only exception [...] Bleak news are coming from the Fatherland. We hope that it is darkness before dawn. The suffering of our people and clergy torments my soul more than any physical troubles could either [back home] with them or in Dachau.” In the letter of 15 March, he said that he would raise at least half the funds needed for printing the books by Prof. Vlahović and Prof. Slijepčević but could not do so for his own work, which shows how highly he valued and prioritized other authors.<sup>78</sup> On 11 April, he informed the priest from New York City: “I believe that it is now my main contribution to *Svečanik* to find donors and semi-donors. [...] *Svečanik* should gradually pass into younger hands.”<sup>79</sup> Enclosed in the letter of 3 September, he sent a handmade postcard with a picture of Arsenije Bradvarević, Metropolitan of Montenegro and the Littoral, at the time interned in Yugoslavia. He also wrote a poem in the metropolitan’s honor.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>76</sup> ATF, Bishop Nikolaj to Protopresbyter Aleksa, 15 February 1954.

<sup>77</sup> ATF, Bishop Nikolaj to Protopresbyter Aleksa, 22 February 1954.

<sup>78</sup> ATF, Bishop Nikolaj to Protopresbyter Aleksa, 15 March 1954.

<sup>79</sup> ATF, Bishop Nikolaj to Protopresbyter Aleksa, 11 April 1954.

<sup>80</sup> ATF, Bishop Nikolaj to Protopresbyter Aleksa, 3 September 1954.



Bishop Nikolaj as the rector of the St Tikhon Seminary with seminarians Yaroslav Sudick (right), Michael Bobich (left), and hierodeacon Kyrill (in the background) in front of the seminary (Courtesy of the St. Tikhon's Orthodox Theological Seminary, South Canaan, Pennsylvania)

Sometimes errors happened in the preparation of the calendar. For instance, Bishop Nikolaj mentioned in his letter of 15 December: “First of all, I was sad all of today. How, in God’s name, have we failed to include the great Serbian saint [in the entry] for 2 Dec. – Janićije of Devič. I am simply aghast. I’ve lit two candles, in the church and in my room, so that the great miracle-worker of Kosovo might forgive us”.<sup>81</sup> It is particularly noteworthy that he touched on his complicated relationship with the SOC bishops in Yugoslavia, pointing out: “I destroy all letters, yours too, and I hope that you destroy mine. It’s simply crazy to keep them in these times.”

In the letter of 5 April 1955, Nikolaj wanted to know if the editions were being sent to Sava, the Bishop of the Russian Church in Australia.<sup>82</sup> Two days later, on the feast of the Annunciation (Blagovesti), he confided in Protopresbyter Aleksa: “I’ve long thought about setting up a Serbian Bible Institute, but in this disjointed milieu I didn’t have anyone with whom and through whom I’d make this idea come to fruition”.<sup>83</sup> On 30 August, he mentioned the manuscript *Za decu (For Children)*<sup>84</sup> and, at the same time, gave instructions to add to the list of donors the jeweler Jevtić and the brothers Svetozar and Petar Bunjak. Interestingly, the Bishop said that the report that 1600 Serbs had taken communion in Lelić had “brought him great joy,” which he learned from a letter from Protopresbyter Voja Stepanović, who was serving there.<sup>85</sup> Commenting on this report, he noted that “faith was gaining momentum under pressure.” In his letter of 21 December 1955, he had good news for the Munich cleric: “Four new monks have arrived in Hilandar. The old fraternity rejoices. Your candidates are up next.”<sup>86</sup>

In one of his last letters, dated 4 March 1956, he emphasized that he was planning to resign as the rector of the Seminary as soon as the school year ended, adding: “And, anyway, I thought to leave it all be-

<sup>81</sup> ATF, Bishop Nikolaj to Protopresbyter Aleksa, 15 December 1954.

<sup>82</sup> ATF, Bishop Nikolaj to Protopresbyter Aleksa, 5 April 1955.

<sup>83</sup> ATF, Bishop Nikolaj to Protopresbyter Aleksa, 7 April 1955.

<sup>84</sup> ATF, Bishop Nikolaj to Protopresbyter Aleksa, 30 August 1955. The work was printed that year as *Srpska crkva srpskoj deci (The Serbian Church to Serbian Children)*.

<sup>85</sup> ATF, Bishop Nikolaj to Protopresbyter Aleksa, 30 August 1955.

<sup>86</sup> ATF, Bishop Nikolaj to Protopresbyter Aleksa, 21 Decembar 1955.

hind in June, withdraw, and limit myself to working on *Svečanik*".<sup>87</sup> Two days later, he said he was touched by the diligence of the Bishop of Braničevo, Hrisostom Vojnović: "Bishop Hrisostom ardently supports the Devotionalists. The largest prayer meetings are at his [place]. He also has a correspondence with some Devotionalists here in the United States. God give him health. If our editions could reach him, he would distribute them all".<sup>88</sup> In his last letter to Protopresbyter Aleksa, written four days before he died, the Bishop's words ring out: "Christ is risen!"<sup>89</sup> In these few short sentences, the term resurrection appears three times.

## Conclusion

Protopresbyter-Stavrophor Aleksa Todorović was the ideational architect of the publishing project of the SOC parish in Munich. Crucial support came from Bishop Nikolaj, who for years sent him guidelines, suggestions, and instructions. The Bishop's role was manifold:

- advisory role and supervision of the publishing project;
- writing shorter or longer contributions and books;
- selection of manuscripts to be translated or published;
- correspondence with SOC bishops around the world to request their support for *Svečanik*;
- raising and sending the funds needed for printing.

Protopresbyter Aleksa and Bishop Nikolaj both struggled with financial hardship and lived in a climate of political and ideological pressures and distrust, but they never gave up working for the ecclesiastical and national cause. The archpriest was a devoted worker despite his personal discontent due to the fact that he was unable to live and serve in his Church.

The translation and publishing of synthetic works by non-Serbian authors, on the instructions of Bishop Nikolaj, made *Svečanik* a top-rate publishing project remarkable both in terms of quality and quan-

<sup>87</sup> ATF, Bishop Nikolaj to Protopresbyter Aleksa, 4 March 1956. Due to financial hardship and his teaching duties, he never visited the faithful in the Bavarian capital.

<sup>88</sup> ATF, Bishop Nikolaj to Protopresbyter Aleksa, 6 March 1956.

<sup>89</sup> ATF, Bishop Nikolaj to Protopresbyter Aleksa, 14 March 1956.

tity.<sup>90</sup> A testimony to this is the fact that the series included two new manuscripts by the archimandrite Justin Popović,<sup>91</sup> a professor of the Orthodox Faculty of Theology of international renown and recognition, one of the few genuine dissidents, who was dismissed from his teaching post and placed under surveillance by Yugoslav intelligence services, with a ban on publishing and promoting his writings and books in Yugoslavia. Nowhere in the world did the SOC have a bigger publishing house – not in any of its dioceses and monasteries or as an individual project led by a cleric (either a monk or priest). In addition, in Yugoslavia, launching and developing such projects was banned, especially on that scale.<sup>92</sup>

Bishop Nikolaj was au courant with contemporary religious topics and the publication of religious books abroad, while also keeping up-to-date with the current linguistic rules. His Orthodox faith remained untarnished. He advised Protopresbyter Aleksa to keep his distance from and avoid closer cooperation with members of other Christian denominations, but to leave them the possibility to support the project once it was done and the product needed placement. This was confirmed verbally by Časlav, the priest's last living son, who often quoted the following words that the Bishop of Žiča said to his father: "Don't take money from other denominations, above all, Roman Catholics, because you'll have to pay them back and not in cash!"

Bishop Nikolaj was a great visionary. After his dismissal from the Faculty of Theology in 1952, he suggested opening a religious academy, convinced that the SOC had the capacity to found, manage and finance it. He believed that there were enough educated Orthodox Serbian theologians all over the world. This plan came to fruition a few decades after his death, with the founding of the Serbian Orthodox School of

<sup>90</sup> The series included translations of works by Philip Schaff, Evgeny Spektorsky, Boris Petrovich Vysheslavtsev, V. N. Ilyin, and Iginio Giordani.

<sup>91</sup> The works in questions were *Svetosavlje kao filozofija života* (*Saint Sava's cult as a Philosophy of Life*) and *Filozofske urvine* (*Philosophical Crevasses*).

<sup>92</sup> At the first postwar exhibition on emigrant literature titled "Serbian Books and Periodicals in the Diaspora 1918–1990" held at the National Library of Serbia in 1994, *Svečanik* was described as "the only religious edition outside of Yugoslavia." Up to that moment, most books and publications published in the diaspora after 1941 were kept in a "special collection" and were not available for perusal.

Theology in Libertyville, Illinois, as another illustration of how far in front of his time Bishop Nikolaj was. He suggested translating some important works, such as *The Ray of the Microcosm*, from Serbian to English for the benefit of the generations who would be born and raised on the American continent, in an English-speaking environment. Although this initiative was met with fierce criticism and often condemnation from many Serbian emigrants in the United States, decades passed after Velimirović's death before this method began to be employed to approach the generations who could get to know the Word of God, the Serbian ethos, and the classic works of religious, national and scientific value on a much deeper level if they were rendered in English, which had evidently become their native language.

Bishop Nikolaj occasionally wrote to the Serbian church community in London, some parishes in the United States, and a few ecclesiastics in the diaspora to bring the usefulness of *Svečanik* editions to their attention. However, his appeals were essentially futile, and only individuals sporadically supported the SOC's publishing project in the Bavarian capital. The Bishop tried to influence the attitude of SOC priests in Germany toward the evident results of the Munich priests. And yet, there was little support for the Munich priest either at the beginning or later on. Bishop Nikolaj's patronage did not translate to real influence and importance in the SOC's church life in Germany. That was the reason that the long planned and discussed paper/journal/organ was never launched.

Other missed opportunities include the failure to print the New Testament and set up the Serbian Bible Institute, which Bishop Nikolaj felt he had no one to found it with. Another plan that never came to fruition was priest Aleksa's idea to print liturgical books. In that period and in the following decades, there was an evident lack of liturgical books and auxiliary works used in church choirs. The Bishop's suggestion to print *Bogomolja* (*Devotional Book*), a booklet containing responses at the Liturgy, didactic thoughts about the importance of prayer and some religious chants, was an attempt to fill that gap.

Finally, Bishop Nikolaj denied that *Svečanik* editions suffered because the project was led by Protopresbyter Aleksa – a former “Zbor priest”. Although the SOC Bishop in the United States and Canada,



Dionisije Milivojević, espoused this view, it was incorrect. Both Nikolaj and Aleksa Todorović, like many other ecclesiastics (monks and clerics) and theologians, had played (a more or less prominent) role in World War Two. Yet, in the postwar period, in many countries where the Serbs had settled, there was a noticeable spiritual hunger and a lack of religious literature. Given that, besides the church calendar, *Svečanik* also published important and useful theological books and works with national topics, we can conclude that malicious and tendentious condemnations and the rejection of the organizers and architects of this religious-national series were wrong.

Unlike the priests who refused to get involved in the Munich publishing project or did get involved and quickly gave up, Bishop Nikolaj remained committed to supporting and helping Protopresbyter Aleksa and the *Svečanik* project. One of the best confirmations of this is that, besides in religious benefit and national sobering, the importance of *Svečanik*'s editions was the reprinting of some books that had resurfaced and sold better in the late 1980s and early 1990s, usually with no regard for the copyrights of Protopresbyter Aleksa or the SOC in Germany. Thus, Bishop Nikolaj's selection of works proved its importance for a second time, precisely during the years when the Serbian people decided to permanently bring his remains to Serbia, to the Lelić Monastery, in 1991. Shortly after that, *Svečanik*'s supporter and spiritual father was canonized at the Holy Council of the Serbian Orthodox Church in May 2003 and then solemnly commemorated at the Temple of St. Sava in the Belgrade neighborhood of Vračar.

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## The Orthodox Nevercoming Land: St. Nikolaj of Ohrid and Žiča on Democracy

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St. Nikolaj of Ohrid and Žiča represents one of the towering figures of contemporary Serbian theology. He is celebrated as a skilled orator and prolific author, whose theological production touched upon many practical issues, including the politics of his day and age. His work, extraordinary by its scope and impact in Serbian intellectual history, influenced several generations of Serbian theologians, even during the period when its circulation was forbidden in communist Yugoslavia. The authority of his writings was further enhanced in 2003, when his name was added to the list of Serbian, and thus pan-Orthodox saints. In order to reflect this dimension of his work's authority, he will be referred to as St. Nikolaj (St. Nicholas) and not under his monastic name of Nikolaj (Velimirović), as is often the case.

The list of praises given to St. Nikolaj is quite long and is not limited to extraordinary qualifications such as “equal to equal-to-the-Apostles,” “Church Father,” “the greatest preacher of the Serbian people” and “the new/Serbian Chrysostome.”<sup>1</sup> The last attribute was given to him by another Serbian Saint, Justin of Ćelije (Popović), who even considered St. Nikolaj the second greatest Serb after St. Sava—the founder of the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC). He had a very impactful person-

<sup>1</sup> Klaus Buchenau, *Auf russischen Spuren: Orthodoxe Antiwestler in Serbien 1850–1945* (Wiesbaden: Harassowitz, 2011), 140–141.

ality and even some non-Orthodox Christians considered him a saintly figure during his lifetime, e.g. bishop George Bell.<sup>2</sup>

His opus was not free from controversial points and internal contradictions.<sup>3</sup> It has been the subject of many academic inquiries, mostly those dealing with different theological or national aspects of his discourse. However, it appears that the evolution of his understanding of democracy belongs to those topics that merit additional consideration, especially in an age of protracted democracy backsliding,<sup>4</sup> in which “the end of History” through liberal democracy<sup>5</sup> does not appear as certain, as in the early 1990s.

### St. Nikolaj and democracy

In the ideal case, the central problem of this chapter could be summed up in the question “What was St. Nikolaj’s position on democracy?” However, already at first glance, one is compelled to admit that there is no easy way of answering it. St. Nikolaj’s productive period encompasses more than half a century. At its beginning, it was contemporary with the apogee of European colonialism and national liberation struggles in the Balkans. At its end, it reflected the realities of the first decade of the Cold War and communist expansion. In between, it was impacted by the surge of totalitarian ideologies and authoritarian challenges to democracy of the interwar period, which culminated in the tragedies of WWII.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Muriel Heppell, *George Bell and Nikolai Velimirovic: The Story of a Friendship* (Birmingham: Lazarica Press, 2001), 87.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Buchenau, *Aufrussischen Spuren*, 143.

<sup>4</sup> Fifteen years in 2021, according to Amy Slipowitz and Sarah Repucci, *Freedom in the World 2021: Democracy under Siege* (Washington, D.C.: Freedom House, 2021), 1; cf. Nancy Bermeo, “On Democratic Backsliding.” *Journal of Democracy* 27 (1 2016): 5–19; For current theoretical debates cf. David Waldner and Ellen Lust. “Unwelcome Change: Coming to Terms with Democratic Backsliding.” *The Annual Review of Political Science* No. 21 (January 2018): 93–113. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-050517-114628>.

<sup>5</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992), 341–343.

The idea that he had an immutable and firm position on democracy should also be abandoned at this point. His positions evolved, following changes in his life circumstances, the social context in which he communicated his ideas, and, of course, his political and pastoral aims. In addition, one can assume that there was a hierarchy of discourses within his work, marked by the strategic and long-term orientation of his books, the “tactical” character of some of his speeches, and the miscellaneous quality of his recorded remarks, that should not be awarded equal status within his opus in a balanced assessment of his work. He was a skilled communicator, who often operationalized his ideas through simplifications, especially in his works dedicated to the evangelization of the broader (and less educated) public. He apparently never really cared about the long-term consistency of his writings. His tone had more of a prophetic and poetic character, reflecting his spiritual experiences of the creative process,<sup>6</sup> with little regard for strict adherence to specific terminology. Simply put, democracy in his writings could gain meanings he ascribed to it for the given occasion, the context of which would forever remain obscure to posterity.

His style often included the chain of motifs *kerygma*—denial—redemption, thus reflecting Christian hagiographies, which rendered many of his works open to a variety of interpretations. He was not a researcher, analyst or an observer, but rather a Christian moralist. Moreover, he did not appear keen on offering any new knowledge to his public. He rather gave the impression that he was interested in reminding his audience of the consequences of abandoning the already existing and known truth, before showing the way to redemption.<sup>7</sup> Whereas members of the Serbian clergy were no strangers to active participation in Serbian party politics,<sup>8</sup> St. Nikolaj mostly refrained from directly entering the political arena. Every democracy is driven by a tension between “what is” and “what ought to be,”<sup>9</sup> and St. Nikolaj’s work

<sup>6</sup> Heppel, *George Bell and Nikolai Velimirovic*, 31–32.

<sup>7</sup> Zoran Milutinović, *Getting over Europe: The Construction of Europe in Serbian Culture* (Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, 2011), 149–152.

<sup>8</sup> Vladimir Cvetković. “The Freedom from Passions and the Freedom for All: St Nikolaj Velimirović on Democracy,” *Nicholai Studies*, Vol. I, No. 1 (2021): 58.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Paul Blokker, *Multiple Democracies in Europe: Political culture in new member states* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), 20.

was mostly focused on the latter. If one agrees with Carl Schmitt's view that all significant concepts of the modern theory of the state emerged from similar, yet secularized, theological concepts,<sup>10</sup> St. Nikolaj's discourse on democracy can be seen as an attempt to de-secularize and re-Christianize it.

### Evolution of notions – St Nikolaj's positions on democracy

Most of St. Nikolaj's biographers tend to distinguish several phases in his work. Bogdan Lubardić delineated three "formative phases": pre-Ohrid (1902–1919), Ohrid (1920–1936) and post-Ohrid (1936–1956), which also reflected St. Nikolaj's stance towards the role of Western and Eastern influences on Serbian culture.<sup>11</sup> This periodization also indicates that a major transition in his life occurred while he was the bishop of Ohrid in the SOC. When considering his political writings, his post-Ohrid phase should be subdivided into a short, yet politically quite significant "Žiča period" (1935–1941), the time he spent in captivity during the Axis occupation of Yugoslavia (1941–1945) and his post-war emigration in the West (mostly in the United States of America).<sup>12</sup> These periods also reflect considerable changes in his visions of democracy, which corresponded to concurrent events.

He was brought up in a patriarchal family. In his youth, he witnessed the peak of Serbian populist democracy, the introduction of universal suffrage in Finland (then an autonomous part of the Russian Empire) and later, the Serbian WWI alliance with the democracies of the UK, France, and USA. Economic turmoil and rising authoritarianism in Europe took place during his Ohrid and later Žiča period, reaching its peak during WWII. Finally, his last years in the USA were marked by the initial phase of a bitter ideological confrontation with the USSR, within which the USA used its notions of freedom and democracy as

<sup>10</sup> Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 1985), 36.

<sup>11</sup> Bogdan Lubardić, "Nikolaj Velimirović," in *Srbi 1903–1914: Istorija Ideja*, ed. Miloš Ković (Belgrade: Clio, 2015), 328.

<sup>12</sup> Buchenau offered a simpler periodisation of his active years: before the end of WWI, the interwar period including the WWII, and his post-WWII emigration. Cf. Buchenau, *Auf russischen Spuren*, 161.

the flagships of its global ideological crusade. None of these trends passed without leaving their mark on St. Nikolaj's work.

Major influences on St. Nikolaj's discourse of democracy were Serbian epics and popular religiosity, which to St. Nikolaj both represented deep expressions of Christianity of the Serbian style and experience (which is one of the *Svetosavlje*'s<sup>13</sup> definitions, uttered by St. Justin of Čelije<sup>14</sup>). The Serbian epic tradition relates to the battle of Kosovo on St. Vitus' Day (*Vidovdan*) in 1389 creating an amalgam of Christian militarism, appreciation of the unity in political endeavors, and the struggle for freedom. Those narratives which centered on St. Sava emphasized state-building, church-political, cultural, pan-Slavic and pan-Orthodox moments.<sup>15</sup> As later medieval Serbian rulers and bishops often attempted to emulate St. Sava's life, accounts of his life could be considered as the Serbian version of the Mirror for Princes genre (together with other early Nemanjić hagiographies). Even today, St. Sava's political legacy, with its strong parallels to the Old Testament, can be used for interpretations that there is a specific Serbian Testament with God—established by St. Sava and confirmed by the Kosovo sacrifice.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> *Svetosavlje* is a term that phono-semantically indicates an expression of Orthodox Christianity (*Pravoslavljje*) defined by the impact of St. Sava's (*Sveti Sava*) cultural and political achievements. In one interpretation, it was first outlined by the Russian émigré scholar Teodor (Feodor) Titov, who defined it as a *sui generis* religious-spiritual movement, created through the "personality, life and work of Serbian saint and enlightener Sava Nemanjić." Teodor Titov. "Svetosavlje," in *Tajna Svetosavlja: nepoznati pogledi na ličnost Svetog Save*, ed. Branimir Nešić (Belgrade: Catena Mundi, 2013). [First published in *Svetosavlje* 2 (3-5) (1933): 97–104], 82–85. Titov gave pan-Orthodox and pan-Slavic overtones to the concept, which added a sense of mission to it. Cf. Klaus Buchenau. *Kämpfende Kirchen: Jugoslawiens religiöse Hypothek* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2006). 24–25. There is also a wide-spread belief, that the concept was first defined by Dimitrije Najdanović, cf. Vladimir Veljković. "Svetosavska politička konfuzija," *Peščanik*, June 13, 2012. <https://pescanik.net/svetosavska-politicka-konfuzija/#refmark-8>

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Dragan Subotić. "Pravoslavljje iznad Istoka i Zapada u bogoslovskoj misli Nikolaja Velimirovića i Justina Popovića," in *Čovek i Crkva u vrtlogu krize: Šta nam nudi pravoslavljje danas*, ed. Gordana Živković (Niš: Gradina, 1993). 119. Cf. Justin [Popović], *Svetosavlje kao filozofija života* (Valjevo: Manastir Čelije, 1993).

<sup>15</sup> Buchenau, *Kämpfende Kirchen*, 20–21.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Miloš Ković. "Vidovdan i Kosovski zavet," *Novi Standard*, June 28, 2021. 16:19. In <https://standard.rs/2021/06/28/vidovdan-i-kosovski-zavet/>



### St. Nikolaj's pre-Ohrid period

Early in his life, St. Nikolaj was an active contributor to the reformist circles within the Serbian Church. Not least due to his education in Bern (where he wrote dissertations in history and theology),<sup>17</sup> he appeared confident when dealing with Western ideas. He considered it a duty to continuously study Western developments.<sup>18</sup> His stance also reflected theological currents in, at that time, quite progressive Russian Orthodoxy—especially those espoused by Dostoyevsky. According to his biographers, he was sent to Russia to “re-Orthodoxize” in the first place, as his positions were considered too Protestant by the conservative establishment of the Metropolitanate of Belgrade.<sup>19</sup>

His discourse on democracy before WWI was often interlocked with his enthusiasm for national liberation. During the Balkan Wars, when half-a-millennium-long Ottoman rule was finally crushed in the Balkans, monk Nikolaj promised to the newly liberated Christians that the “character and culture of this state shall be democratic and Christian. Democracy and Christianity need the free people, the internally free people.”<sup>20</sup>

He nonetheless did not have a positive view of the role of political parties,<sup>21</sup> which would remain one of the constants of his thinking about the realities of representative democracy. In his 1912 speech to the Belgrade Traders' Youth (*Beogradska trgovačka omladina*), which he aptly named *On Merchants at the Temple*,<sup>22</sup> he equated democratic institutions and processes to a people's temple, the sanctity of which was

<sup>17</sup> Ljubomir Ranković, *Sveti vladika Nikolaj: Život i delo* (Šabac: Glas Crkve, 2013), 22–23, 29–31, 36.

<sup>18</sup> Episkop Nikolaj, “Versko-socijalni pokreti na Zapadu,” in: Episkop Nikolaj, *Sabrana dela*, vol. 2. (Šabac: Glas Crkve, 2013). 167–196, here 167. Reprint from *Vesnik Srpske Crkve* 1906, vol. 8, 677–690.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Ranković, *Sveti vladika Nikolaj*, 35.

<sup>20</sup> Episkop Nikolaj, “Beseda: O Slobodi: Govorena u oslobođenom Skoplju,” in: Episkop Nikolaj, *Sabrana dela*. vol. 4. (Šabac: Glas Crkve, 2013), 289.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Cvetković, “The Freedom from Passions,” 58.

<sup>22</sup> This speech was published among his: Episkop Nikolaj, “Besede pod Gorom,” in Episkop Nikolaj, *Sabrana dela*, vol. 4. (Šabac: Glas Crkve, 2013). 3–175, here: 113–127. This collection was so influential at the time it was published, that the members of the Young Bosnia (Mlada Bosna) took their oaths of allegiance to their cause upon its copies; Buchenau, *Auf russischen Spuren*, 156.

despoiled by the modern equivalents of the proverbial moneychangers from first-century Jerusalem. The election campaign activists in his view made a comedy out of Serbia, otherwise a decent and serious country. Those politicians who came to parliament not to create a good piece of legislation, but to benefit themselves, were exchanging the sanctity of truth, justice, patriotism, common sense, friendship, oaths and pledges for a seat in the parliament. By doing so, they mocked the “temple of people’s legislation.” However, the “temple” itself should not be rejected, despite democracy’s flaws, which was the point at which he defended the ideas of parliamentarism and republicanism. It is unlikely that he lightly took the only event in the Gospels when Jesus Christ Himself resorted to violence. “Believe only, that Christ would also sway his whip [...] like he did against the fake representatives of the people of his age. Believe, that the Christ would consider His mission today [...] to expel [this] trade from the temple of legislation as well.”<sup>23</sup> Other kinds of traders were those who made business out of the “sanctity of the public speech,” i.e., the irresponsible journalists, or as one might call them today, the tabloid press. These not only defamed those better than themselves, but also corrupted young generations by distorting the idea of the freedom of speech.<sup>24</sup>

During WWI St. Nikolaj was sent to public diplomacy missions in the UK and USA.<sup>25</sup> Even before the outbreak of the war, he developed a strong admiration for Anglophone Christianity and appreciation of the Anglican Church<sup>26</sup>—which stood in very sharp contrast to his negative opinion of the Vatican.<sup>27</sup> To his English-speaking audience, St. Nikolaj portrayed Serbs as struggling for “freedom and democracy,” against “European Caesarism and Asian sultanism.”<sup>28</sup> In his lectures he contrasted the United Kingdom, as a beacon of democracy and protector of the peoples oppressed by the Germans and the Habsburgs. He

<sup>23</sup> Episkop Nikolaj, “Besede pod Gorom,” 122.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 122–123.

<sup>25</sup> Buchenau, *Auf russischen Spuren*, 156–157.

<sup>26</sup> Slobodan G. Markovich, “Activities of Father Nikolai Velimirovich in Great Britain during the Great War.” *Balkanica* XLVII (2017): 147, 149.

<sup>27</sup> Not Roman Catholics in general, cf. Ranković, *Sveti vladika Nikolaj*, 50–62; Markovich, “Activities of Father Nikolai Velimirovich,” 152.

<sup>28</sup> Ranković, *Sveti vladika Nikolaj*, 57–59; 63.

also took pride in representing the only democracy among the four independent Slavic states (Bulgaria, Montenegro and Russia).<sup>29</sup> He also wrote that “Serbia [was] the little America” and that Serbian experience was quite similar to the American one, as they both sought to overcome limitations and inequalities of the class societies of Europe.<sup>30</sup> In another chapter of the same book, named *Serbia’s Place in Human History*, he also equated national liberation to the struggle for democracy.<sup>31</sup> In 1916, *The New Ideal in Education* was published in the UK. In it he rejected the liberal notion of unrestricted individual freedom early on, as he had equated it to selfishness, which could be overwhelmed through *pan-humanism*. The individual should serve society not through compulsion, but voluntarily, which is why education was of critical importance.<sup>32</sup> Social harmony could be achieved by employing one’s freedom in the service of other fellow humans. At this point, his understanding of democracy could be framed as having no (culturally) foreign oppressors, living in a relatively egalitarian society based on the Christian principles<sup>33</sup> of love and non-indifference to other human beings.

There are different interpretations of this period today, and consequently of the statements he made. Bishop Lavrentije (Trifunović) saw his engagement as cosmopolitan,<sup>34</sup> Thomas Bremer and Klaus Buchenau saw in his WWI addresses mere pragmatic moves.<sup>35</sup> This can be considered a rather narrow view. Slobodan G. Markovich believed that

<sup>29</sup> Cvetković, “The Freedom from Passions,” 61.

<sup>30</sup> Episkop Nikolaj, “The Soul of Serbia,” in: Episkop Nikolaj, *Sabrana dela*, vol. 3. (Šabac: Glas Crkve, 2013), 296–297. Reprinted from: Nicholas Velimirović, *The Soul of Serbia: Lectures Delivered Before the Universities of Cambridge and Birmingham in London and Elsewhere in England*, (London: The Faith Press, 1916).

<sup>31</sup> Episkop Nikolaj, “The Soul of Serbia,” 321–323.

<sup>32</sup> Episkop Nikolaj, “The New Ideal in Education,” in: Episkop Nikolaj, *Sabrana dela*, vol. 3. (Šabac: Glas Crkve, 2013), 183–197.

<sup>33</sup> St. Nikolaj explicitly praised the “Islamic spirit of righteousness,” which he contrasted to the perversions of the Ottoman rule. Cf. Episkop Nikolaj, *The Soul of Serbia*, 297.

<sup>34</sup> Buchenau, *Auf russischen Spuren*, 157.

<sup>35</sup> Thomas Bremer, “Ekklesiale Struktur und Ekklesiologie in der Serbischen Orthodoxen Kirche im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert” (PhD diss., Faculty of Catholic Theology of the Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster, 1989), 159–160. Buchenau, *Auf russischen Spuren*, 163.

prior to his mission St. Nikolaj had already been considered a person of liberal theological views by his contemporaries, ideally suited to advocate Yugoslav unification among the Orthodox (Serb) and the Roman Catholic (Croat and Slovene) diaspora communities.<sup>36</sup> Whereas it is true that St. Nikolaj was acting upon instructions from the Serbian government, and that there was a pragmatic dimension to his addresses, it did not mean that his writings and lectures were not impacted by his core beliefs. Presenting Serbia as the “little America”<sup>37</sup> to his British audience could serve as a case in point.<sup>38</sup> Prior to its entry into the war, the image of the USA in Europe was not necessarily positive, as the country’s inhabitants were considered uncultured, backward, materialistic and arrogant<sup>39</sup> by the more elitist and conservative upper-class Europeans.

### Interwar years: Bishop of Ohrid and Žiča

St. Nikolaj’s intellectual attitudes changed after he was first appointed the Bishop of Žiča and in 1920 of Ohrid.<sup>40</sup> Ljubomir Ranković saw in it a “lucky convergence of Western pragmatism and Eastern contemplation.”<sup>41</sup> His works became more mystical and his focus shifted toward evangelization of the common folk. According to Ranković, he also began downplaying his intellectual achievements (“If I only could unlearn and forget everything, so that I could return to that unme-

<sup>36</sup> Markovich, “Activities of Father Nikolai Velimirovich,” 152–154.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Cvetković, “The Freedom from Passions,” 61.

<sup>38</sup> This was probably not an exaggeration. After the coup of 1903, the Great People’s Assembly first restored the constitution of 1888, and then accepted the monarch’s oath. In return, the new monarch, King Peter I, had to accept the primacy of the sovereignty of the people over his royal prerogatives. According to Slobodan Antonić, this rendered Serbia an elective monarchy or, as he dubbed it, a *cryptorepublic*. Slobodan Antonić, “Demokratija” in: Miloš Ković (ed.), *Srbi 1903–1914: Istorija ideja*, (Belgrade: Clio 2015), 59.

<sup>39</sup> Brednon O’Connor, “A Brief History of Anti-Americanism: From Cultural Criticism to Terrorism,” *Australasian Journal of American Studies*, 23/1 (2004): 79–80.

<sup>40</sup> Buchenau, *Auf russischen Spuren*, 223–231; Heppel, *George Bell and Nikolai Velimirovic*, 31; Jovan Byford, “From ‘Traitor’ to ‘Saint’: Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović in Serbian Public Memory.” *Analysis of Current Trends in Antisemitism* 22 (2004): 4.

<sup>41</sup> Ranković, *Sveti vladika Nikolaj*, 90.

diated experience of God”)<sup>42</sup> and sought inspiration in the expressions of the Christian faith among his less educated flock. This phase of his work coincided with the global events that ushered in an unprecedented rise of totalitarianism and, coupled with it, doubts about democracy. St. Nikolaj saw the secularization of Europe as the main cause of these processes. In his lecture given at London’s Kings College in 1920, he prophesied the doom of the civilization which had abandoned Christianity as its core.<sup>43</sup>

He readily contrasted Anglo-Saxon politicians to their counterparts from the secularized European societies. He compiled an extensive list of the possible role-models for his Serbian audience from the ranks of US and British politicians. Moreover, he emphasized that all the US Presidents were staunch Christians. The sessions of Congress were opened by a prayer, American Universities had their chapels, and the Bible was omnipresent. The USA was nothing short of a “holy experiment.” Although Orthodoxy was the best religion, British and Americans were the best believers.<sup>44</sup> It could be written that in the early 1920s he believed that the ideological positions of individual politicians were not of crucial importance, as long as they complied to the ideals of Christianity and democracy.<sup>45</sup> According to Ranković, during this period St. Nikolaj remained an admirer of the USA, to which he ascribed a special historical mission.<sup>46</sup> This still did not mean that he praised the political system of the Anglo-Saxon countries as readily as the piety of their politicians.

Some of his most impactful works were written in Ohrid. His practical activities during the same period included charity projects, like the orphanage of *Bogdaj* (literally: God-give), which took care of children regardless of their creed and within which they were educated according to their respective religious traditions. The official assimila-

<sup>42</sup> Quoted from: Ranković, *Sveti vladika Nikolaj*, 100.

<sup>43</sup> Nikolaj Velimirovic, *The Spiritual Rebirth of Europe* (London: The Faith Press, 1920), 20.

<sup>44</sup> Episkop Nikolaj, “Anglosaksonski političari i vera,” in Episkop Nikolaj, *Sabrana dela*, vol. 10. (Šabac: Glas Crkve, 2013), 574–592.

<sup>45</sup> Cvetković, “The Freedom from Passions,” 63.

<sup>46</sup> Ranković, *Sveti vladika Nikolaj*, 83–84, 101.

tion policies of the state were not among his priorities in Macedonia. He did not support the expulsion of the Bulgarian Exarchate's clergy. According to Klaus Buchenau, he was in favor of establishing bilingual schools for Slavic and Albanian children within a broader project, which foresaw the creation of an autonomous monastic region in the area around the Lake of Ohrid bordering Albania.<sup>47</sup>

He maintained his pre-War skepticism toward the divisive and polarizing role of the political parties. For example, in his *Pan-Humanity* lecture, given to the Academic cosmopolitan club in New York during this period, he praised the American universities, since the "students in America [were] not divided into political parties."<sup>48</sup>

His book *The War and the Bible* from 1931 might help explain this apparent contradiction. In it, he contemplated on the causes of future war. By rejecting God, one opened the door to five modern idolatries: materialism as the idolatry of matter, egoism as the idolatry of self, nationalism as the idolatry of nation, imperialism as the idolatry of the empire and culturalism as the idolatry of culture. According to St. Nikolaj, war would be an external consequence of the already lost inner war with sins and vice.<sup>49</sup> Partisanship in his view simply emphasized narrow interests, while putting Christian virtues, the wellbeing of democracy and community aside. Or, as Vladimir Cvetković notes, "[o]nly the democracy that serves higher principles such as love for God and for a fellow human being is deemed worthy of admiration."<sup>50</sup>

The see of Žiča has a particular symbolic importance within the Serbian Church. It was the first center of the autocephalous Serbian Archbishopric in 1219. Unlike the see of Ohrid (later Ohrid-Bitola), its population was culturally deeply embedded in the pre-1912 democratic political traditions of the Principality and Kingdom of Serbia.

<sup>47</sup> Buchenau, *Auf russischen Spuren*, 227–229.

<sup>48</sup> Episkop Nikolaj, "Pan-Humanity," in: Episkop Nikolaj, *Sabrana dela*, vol. 3. (Šabac: Glas Crkve, 2013): 797.

<sup>49</sup> Episkop Nikolaj, "Rat i Biblija," in: Episkop Nikolaj, *Sabrana dela*, vol. 5. (Šabac: Glas Crkve, 2013), 234235, 246–248.

<sup>50</sup> Cvetković, "The Freedom from Passions," 63.

As the Bishop of Žiča, St. Nikolaj assumed a leadership role of the Orthodox revivalist movement, the “People’s Orthodox Christian Community,” popularly known as the *Bogomoljci* (God-worshippers). He tended to consider the correct practice more important than the “correct belief” (i.e., orthodoxy) itself. As he would write later in his life, monastic ascetic experience was superior to theological education.<sup>51</sup> While working with this grassroots movement, he espoused positions that even today could be considered progressive. For example, he promoted the restoration of the ancient clergy order of deaconesses (women who assisted during liturgy by helping believers receive communion).<sup>52</sup> Long before they could vote in democratic parliamentary elections in Serbia, women could stand as candidates and vote within the *Bogomoljci* movement. His engagement with the women in Church took place in a country in which ecclesiastic affairs, prior to 1918, were a man’s domain.<sup>53</sup> Declaring St. Nikolaj one of the major contributors to the restoration of female monasticism in Serbia does not represent an overstatement.

As his political conceptions of the time show, he believed that the political order should be based on two principles—faithfulness to Christian Orthodoxy<sup>54</sup> and embeddedness in the people (nation). In many of his lectures from that period, democracy and national emancipation are difficult to discern from one another.<sup>55</sup> This was not entirely the case when he addressed British or American audiences. In such instances, he was more ready to criticize the non-democratic character of Russia (the Soviet Union).<sup>56</sup> One can only speculate whether this was

<sup>51</sup> Episkop Nikolaj, “Vojlovički stoslov” in: Episkop Nikolaj, *Bio-bibliografija 1880-1941: Sabrana dela*, ed. Milisav Protić, vol. 1. (Šabac: Glas crkve, 2014), 552.

<sup>52</sup> Ranković, *Sveti vladika Nikolaj*, 114.

<sup>53</sup> For example, in 1918, there was only one women’s monastery in Berovo, contemporary North Macedonia. Buchenau, *Aufrussischen Spuren*, 200. Moreover, since female monasticism was almost entirely extinguished in Serbia before 1918, nuns of the newly restored female monasteries were occasionally met with hostility by the local population. Cf. Miloš Timotijević, *Vek sumnje: religioznost u Čačanskom kraju 1886-2008* (Čačak: Narodni muzej Čačak and Legenda K.D., 2009), 121–123.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Episkop Nikolaj, “Očenaš kao osnova društvenog uređenja,” in: Episkop Nikolaj, *Sabrana dela*, vol. 8. (Šabac: Glas Crkve, 2013), 378.

<sup>55</sup> cf. Miloš Timotijević, *Vek sumnje*, 274–284.

<sup>56</sup> Buchenau, *Aufrussischen Spuren*, 167.

only a reflection of his pragmatism, or whether such instances reflected his genuine rejection of Russia which abandoned Dostoyevsky's pan-humanism for communism.

By the 1930s, his work became increasingly political in content. In his controversial programmatic speech held at the Kolarac Foundation on March 20, 1935, known as *The Nationalism of St. Sava*, he argued that *Svetosavic* (i.e., Saint-Savian) nationalism consisted of the people's Church, the people's dynasty (leaders of the Serbian state had to originate from the Serbian people),<sup>57</sup> the people's state (which can expand only to incorporate the entirety of the people and not beyond that), the people's education system, the people's culture and the people's defense (and it had to maintain a foremost defensive character). The nationalism of St. Sava was not only the oldest in Europe, it was also Gospel-based. It stood in contrast to the capitalist culture, modern imperialism, and value-neutral education. It was an organic nationalism, which shielded the people from the temptations of imperialism and internationalism (perhaps metonyms for fascism and communism). Such nationalism was also not exclusionary.<sup>58</sup> The secular nationalism which emerged in Europe was, in his view, a result of desperation that created the cleavage between atheistic elites and believing people.<sup>59</sup> In this speech he crafted a geopolitical outlook which clearly dissociated Serbdom (with its *Svetosavic* character) from the European West and the Asian East. It belonged to the Orthodox circle potentially rising above both, provided it could restore its (idealized) 19<sup>th</sup> century morality.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Historically, this was really the case with the Yugoslav Karadjordjević dynasty, which was founded by the leader of a popular uprising.

<sup>58</sup> As a case in point, he listed several quotes from the Serbian epic poetry, in which main protagonists addressed the Roma and Muslims as brothers. He also claimed that the Serbian soldiers readily socialized with their allies' colonial troops during the war, thus hinting that racism was not immanent to Serbian nationalism.

<sup>59</sup> Episkop Nikolaj, "Nacionalizam Svetog Save," in: Episkop Nikolaj, *Sabrana dela*, vol. 9. (Šabac: Glas crkve, 2013), 305–312.

<sup>60</sup> Episkop Nikolaj, "Iznad Istoka i Zapada," in Episkop Nikolaj, *Sabrana dela*, vol. 5. (Šabac: Glas Crkve, 2013), 795–810; "Srpski narod kao Teodul," in: Episkop Nikolaj, *Sabrana dela*, vol. 5. (Šabac: Glas Crkve, 2013), 651–684; "Srednji sistem," in: Episkop Nikolaj, *Sabrana dela*, vol. 5. (Šabac: Glas Crkve, 2013), 685–700.



In another work, published in 1935 as well, *Our Father as The Basis of the Social Order* (*Očenaš kao osnova društvenog uređenja*),<sup>61</sup> he stated that Christians needed to accept that their homeland was the heavenly one, while earthly affairs ought to be sanctified through God's name. Social orders of his age were unable to survive, as they ignored Divine authority. "To base entire human society only on the human will, means founding it on aimlessness, ignorance and injustice," he wrote.

During his Žiča period, he became an advocate of a specific Serbian, or Slavic-Orthodox third way in politics. The program he attempted to formulate would represent a middle ground between internationalism (communism) and fascism (while at the same time rejecting plutocratic capitalism). In his article "Between the Left and the Right," he dismissed internationalism as a negation of national self-determination. Fascism, on the other hand, exalted one's own nation over others, and represented extremism of another kind.<sup>62</sup>

His "Middle System" was written by using a similar argumentation pattern—the Orthodox option is usually a superior, moderate, compromise, or "middle" solution between two dangerous extremes. The original Christian community of Jerusalem was the ideal, kept alive in monastic communities and Serbian agricultural cooperatives (patriarchal extended families known as *zadruga*). However, he recognized the necessity of individual property,<sup>63</sup> in order to keep the social order sustainable with its collective solidarity mechanisms. The Middle System represented the historical reality of Serbian communities, in which voluntary contributions to communal property maintained social security. No forms of coercion, other than "the fear of God and shame of people" were necessary. The Middle System defended the Serbs from two evils—the cartel plutocracy and violent communism, or as he put it, servitude of a human to another human and serfdom to the state.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Episkop Nikolaj, "Očenaš kao osnova društvenog uređenja," in: Episkop Nikolaj, *Sabrana dela*, vol. 8. (Šabac: Glas Crkve, 2013), 375–382.

<sup>62</sup> Episkop Nikolaj, "Između levice i desnice," in: Episkop Nikolaj, *Sabrana dela*, vol. 9. (Šabac: Glas Crkve, 2013), 711.

<sup>63</sup> Interestingly, he did not reject the ideals of Christian communism, in the form attempted by Nikolay Neplyuev on the territory of present-day Ukraine in the 19<sup>th</sup> c.

<sup>64</sup> Episkop Nikolaj, "Srednji sistem," in: Episkop Nikolaj, *Sabrana dela*, vol. 5. (Šabac: Glas Crkve, 2013), 685–700.

Serbian elites' foreign education "among the peoples of extreme economic theories and practices" was the cause of their economic decline. Were Serbs to restore the economic model that combined private with communal property, they would be able to overcome this problem. Whereas it could be said that he wanted to democratize the economy (by preventing it from turning into socialism or monopoly capitalism), this cannot be claimed for the role of the figure of *domaćin* (*pater familias*) in his works. In the *Middle System*, he is just a responsible manager or steward,<sup>65</sup> who should be followed by the rest of the *zadruga*. Other than rejecting both communism and capitalism, St. Nikolaj did not expand on the modern implications of the Middle System.<sup>66</sup> Instead, as Cvetković noted, he attempted to ground the economy within the *oikonomia* of Salvation.<sup>67</sup> However, St. Nikolaj's associates saw this work as a democratic project already in the 1930s.<sup>68</sup>

St. Nikolaj's disappointment with Yugoslav democracy<sup>69</sup> was growing during this period. So was his conviction that engagement with Western ideas came before Serbs could properly prepare for that challenge. He attempted to sketch several alternative programs. One collection of his scattered notes was published as recently as 2011 under the name of the "*Žiča Constitution*."<sup>70</sup> St. Nikolaj only drafted the first

<sup>65</sup> Episkop Nikolaj, "Srednji sistem," 698–699.

<sup>66</sup> Cvetković noted that St. Nikolaj's contemporaries Dimitrije Ljotić and Milan Nedić (both WWII Axis collaborators) used the same terminology, but endowed it with different meanings. To Ljotić, a *new zadruga* system would provide a more efficient state control of labor and capital. To Nedić, the *zadruga* emerged not out of Christian communities, but from the ethno-racial characteristics of the Serbs, and was thus the best expression of the Serbian national socialism. Cvetković, "The Freedom from Passions," 65–66.

<sup>67</sup> Cvetković, "The Freedom from Passions," 64–65.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Timotijević, *Vek sumnje*, 273.

<sup>69</sup> The Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes functioned as a democracy until January 1929, when the King proclaimed a royal dictatorship. It lasted until September 1931, when the new constitution was proclaimed. The new political system maintained a veneer of popular sovereignty through holding formal elections. The secrecy of ballot was no longer guaranteed and substantial restrictions of freedom of expression and association were put in place.

<sup>70</sup> The authenticity of these notes, to the best of author's knowledge, has never been confirmed by an independent inquiry.

five articles. In the rest of his notes, he clearly rejected democracy. Were people to take Christian belief seriously, it would transform individuals and bring order to families and state institutions. “Not culture, not Progress, not industry, not science, nor the state, but the human above all and God above the human,” was the motto of (allegedly) his most authoritarian project.<sup>71</sup>

St. Nikolaj was deeply moved by the problems of rampant corruption within the first Yugoslav state. In his *Thou shalt not Steal from the State* he elevated corruption to the worst of crimes possible. The one who is stealing from the state is undermining the common good, stealing from the poorest within the society, stealing from those who gave their lives for the freedom of that state.<sup>72</sup> It is possible that the high level of corruption and deviations from the national ideals of his youth made him increasingly skeptical of the chaotic manifestations of democracy in interwar Yugoslavia.

In 1938, while the largest Church–state conflict<sup>73</sup> in the interwar period was still in vivid memory, he warned the priests of his Žiža Eparchy that “[The Orthodox Church] in peaceful times and in its free states [...] does not engage in politics, draft its political program, have a political party within the people, or its Parliamentary caucus.” The Church should only step in when “in the times of peace politics, the people’s heritage is devastated, selfish goals are proclaimed over those of the general people’s interest and corrupt methods are applied.” Voter intimidation and buying votes were, in St. Nikolaj’s view, directly insulting God. The elections were “not the end of the World” and people should preserve civilized relationships among themselves after the campaign ends.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>71</sup> Nikolaj [Velimirović], *Srbadija: Žički ustav* (Vojlovica (Pančevo): Manastir Vojlovica, 2011).

<sup>72</sup> Episkop Nikolaj, “Ne kradi državu,” in: Episkop Nikolaj, *Sabrana dela*, vol. 8. (Šabac: Glas Crkve, 2013), 624–630.

<sup>73</sup> The Concordate crisis, sparked by SOC’s protest over Yugoslav government’s attempt to sign an agreement with the Vatican, which in SOC’s view would give the privileged position to the Roman Catholics.

<sup>74</sup> Episkop Nikolaj, “Poslanica sveštenstvu povodom izbora”, In Episkop Nikolaj: *Sabrana dela*, vol. 10. (Šabac: Glas Crkve, 2013), 498–499.

He apparently became disappointed later, as ill-prepared Yugoslavia was about to be drawn into the global conflict. St. Nikolaj saw “intellectual, moral, political and economic” partisanship<sup>75</sup> as the cause of Serbian troubles.<sup>76</sup>

Although being progressive in the treatment of women among the God-Worshippers, he did, although rarely, express antisemitic views, often when talking about the evils of Soviet communism. He was also ambivalent in this regard—ranging from accusing the Jews of the October Revolution and undermining Christianity in Europe, to defending them from different defamation campaigns, mostly initiated among the members of the ZBOR movement.<sup>77</sup>

## WWII—The Darkest Hour

Contrary to stereotypes of Orthodox Church’s docility vis-à-vis the state, St. Nikolaj was not shy when challenging the authorities. Apart from playing a very pronounced role during the Concordat crisis of 1937,<sup>78</sup> when police resorted to violence to quell the Church’s protest, he was also among those bishops who supported the anti-Axis coup of March 27, 1941. No sooner had the Yugoslav army capitulated, after being attacked from all directions, except from Greece, than St. Nikolaj was arrested by the occupying forces. Serbian suffering quickly escalated to genocidal proportions.

This phase of his work is probably the most difficult to assess, as some works attributed to St. Nikolaj from this period are of disputed authenticity. Moreover, their content is also less compatible with his works published before and after the war, the issue of authenticity notwithstanding, which can also complicate drawing conclusions which could encompass the entirety of his work.

<sup>75</sup> Episkop Nikolaj, “Srpski narod kao Teodul,” 680.

<sup>76</sup> Episkop Nikolaj, “Srednji sistem,” 697.

<sup>77</sup> Timotijević, *Vek sumnje*, 231–265.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. Slobodan Jakovljević, “Konkordatska kriza u Žičkoj eparhiji 1937/38. godine”, in *Zbornik radova Narodnog muzeja u Čačku*, vol. 41, ed. Delfina Rajić (Čačak: Narodni muzej Čačak, 2011), 137–151.

Like the prophets of the Old Testament, so St. Nikolaj saw foreign influences as the main cause of the Serbian tragedy. He apparently became even more critical of Yugoslav and Western democracies.<sup>79</sup> He was convinced that the Serbs should once again become God's servants, in a political order he dubbed *Teodulija* (from *Theodoulos*, God's servant). The entire Serbian history, in his view, was guided by Divine Providence,<sup>80</sup> and was symbolized by the cross. The vertical line represented dependence on God, the horizontal one freedom (independence from oppression by other humans).<sup>81</sup> St. Sava established the Serbian *Teodulija*, which was confirmed in the battle of Kosovo. The *domaćin* represented both the leader and the priest of the *zadruga* (an extended family community living in one place and sharing economic resources) who resembled Christ in his care, devotion and sacrifice for all its members. *Domaćin* transformed the Serbian home into a temple.<sup>82</sup> Although resembling in some respects Western democracy, it should not be conflated with it. It represented a "way of life of the Serbian people."<sup>83</sup> Despite their close cooperation, neither Church, nor state would lose their identities in such a political order. According to Buchenau, St. Nikolaj's *Teodulija* did not have an emancipating potential from within, even though it could help resist outside pressures.<sup>84</sup>

He was not supportive of religious pluralism or the laicist state, as he (allegedly) wrote in his *Hundred words from Vojlovica*. "To recognize all faiths by the state as equal is the same as to reject all faiths altogether."<sup>85</sup> His position was not clerical, but rather resembled that of the *Symphonia* between Church and state. St. Nikolaj stated that it was "bad for the Church that the bishop runs the state, political, financial or military affairs." The state's role would be to morally educate its citizens.<sup>86</sup>

<sup>79</sup> Episkop Nikolaj, "Srpski narod kao Teodul," 678, 682. Vladimir Cvetković treated this work as authentic. Cf. Cvetković, "The Freedom from Passions," 67.

<sup>80</sup> Buchenau, *Kämpfende Kirchen*, 31.

<sup>81</sup> Nikolaj, "Srpski narod kao Teodul."

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 657; 671–672.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 678.

<sup>84</sup> Cf. Buchenau, *Kämpfende Kirchen*, 33–34.

<sup>85</sup> Nikolaj, "Vojlovički stoslov," 545.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 554, 562.

During his captivity in the Dachau concentration camp, St. Nikolaj allegedly wrote a work that was published posthumously<sup>87</sup>—three decades after his death. Recent research shows that St. Nikolaj authorship is very unlikely.<sup>88</sup> It was not found among his manuscripts from that period and the style in which it was written does not reflect his other works.<sup>89</sup> Last, but not least, it is highly improbable that a work of this magnitude could be written during St. Nikolaj's captivity in Dachau, which lasted for around one month.<sup>90</sup> Its content led Vladimir Cvetković to conclude that this was probably a forgery made by the members of the ZBOR movement in emigration after the war ended.<sup>91</sup> Similar conclusions were reached by Srećko Petrović, after detailed examination of the text, its comparison to St. Nikolaj's other works and documented testimonies from the surviving letters.<sup>92</sup> Ljubomir Ranković did not dispute the authorship of the text, but considered its content to be a consequence of St. Nikolaj's psychological condition at that point.<sup>93</sup> Allegedly, it was published contrary to St. Nikolaj's wishes.<sup>94</sup> Although it is likely that large parts of the text were misattributed to St. Nikolaj, because it was widely circulated in the Serbian public it should be given some attention.

Apart from shockingly antisemitic passages (the Jews were accused of being behind democracy, strikes, socialism, atheism, tolerance for all religions, pacifism, the World revolution, capitalism, and communism)<sup>95</sup> it also contained extensive condemnations of European culture, which declared its "war on Christ," and whose innovations served as a tool of

<sup>87</sup> Episkop Nikolaj, "Reči srpskom narodu kroz tamnički prozor," in: Episkop Nikolaj, *Sabrana dela*, vol. 13. (Šabac: Glas Crkve, 2013), 183–350.

<sup>88</sup> Srećko Petrović, "Is Nicholai Velimirovich the author of the book *Words to the Serbian People Through the Dungeon Window?*" *Philotheos* 20/2 (2020), 260–303.

<sup>89</sup> Petrović, "Is Nicholai Velimirovich the author," 275–289.

<sup>90</sup> Rastko Lompar, "Zatočeništvo patrijarha Gavrila i episkopa Nikolaja Velimirovića u Dahauu 1944. godine," *Studije istorije Ilarion* (3/2018): 18.

<sup>91</sup> Cvetković, "The Freedom from Passions," 70–71.

<sup>92</sup> Petrović, "Is Nicholai Velimirovich the author," 275–289.

<sup>93</sup> Cf. Ranković, *Sveti vladika Nikolaj*, 136–142.

<sup>94</sup> Ranković, *Sveti vladika Nikolaj*, 140. No physical proof of that claim was ever made public.

<sup>95</sup> Nikolaj, "Reči srpskom narodu kroz tamnički prozor," 340.

its suicide.<sup>96</sup> Both Europe and Serbia were punished for their apostasy. The way out would be to introduce “schools with faith, politics with honesty, army with patriotism and the State with God’s blessing.”<sup>97</sup> Two other mentions of the word “democracy” in this work are consistent with his earlier writings,<sup>98</sup> indicating that at least in part this text could have been based on St. Nikolaj’s notes.

This period drew most criticism against St. Nikolaj’s work. Already in communist Yugoslavia, he was considered an enemy of the state and labelled a clerical fascist. St. Nikolaj equated fascism to sickness, “selfishness and hatred,” an ideology of the “mad genius” who was pushing the World into extremism, abyss and disaster.<sup>99</sup> Buchenau, otherwise quite critical of St. Nikolaj’s work, believed that the contemporary variation of these accusations had no solid grounds.<sup>100</sup> Maria Falina emphasized that the word “fascism” in Serbia was more often used as a moral judgement, rather than as an analytical concept. She believed that St. Nikolaj was a non-democrat who demonstrated a strong dislike for totalitarian ideologies.<sup>101</sup> Another attempt to refute this thesis came from the Orthodox authors, who portrayed him as a supporter of the Yugoslav Homeland Army (the royalist resistance movement during the Second World War in Yugoslavia).<sup>102</sup> There is no evidence that St. Nikolaj ever agreed to collaborate with either the Axis or Serbian quislings during the entire period of his wartime captivity. It appears that the story of his rapprochement with Dimitrije Ljotić at the very end of the war was also partly based on forgeries.<sup>103</sup>

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 202, 205, 236, 274.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 187.

<sup>98</sup> Cvetković, “The Freedom from Passions,” 72.

<sup>99</sup> Episkop Nikolaj. “Između levice i desnice,” 711–712.

<sup>100</sup> Buchenau, *Kämpfende Kirchen*, 30.

<sup>101</sup> Maria Falina, “Between ‘Clerical Fascism’ and Political Orthodoxy: Orthodox Christianity and Nationalism in Interwar Serbia,” in: *Interwar Europe in Clerical Fascism in Interwar Europe*, ed. Matthew Feldman, Marius Turda and Tudor Georgescu (London/New York: Routledge, 2008), 36, 41, 43–44.

<sup>102</sup> Vladimir Dimitrijević *Oklevetani svetac: Vladika Nikolaj i srbofobija* (Gornji Milanovac: LIO, 2007), 73–77; Ranković, *Sveti vladika Nikolaj*, 78–105.

<sup>103</sup> Petrović, “Is Nicholai Velimirovich the author,” 276–277.



Bishop Nikolaj and Patriarch Gavrilo Dožić  
together with General Damjanović, Vojvoda Đujić and soldiers  
of the Yugoslav Homeland Army in Vipava, Slovenia, in 1945  
(Courtesy of Goran Veljković, Kragujevac)



Address of Bishop Nikolaj on St Vitus Day Academy in Chicago  
(Courtesy of Goran Veljković, Kragujevac)



## The Orthodox Nevercoming Land

St. Nikolaj spent his last years in the USA, where he was awarded a PhD *honoris causa* by Columbia University in 1946. He also maintained contact with the *émigrés* organizations aiming to “liberate Serbia” from the communists. When he died in 1956, the US Congress passed a resolution of condolence to the Serbian people.<sup>104</sup>

It was in the USA that St. Nikolaj wrote his last major criticism and praise for democracy *Zemlja Nedođija*<sup>105</sup> (The Nevercoming Land, or the Neverland, i.e., Utopia). The story’s setting is a trial against a concentration camp inmate, captain Spaso Spasović of the Yugoslav army, who, like St. Nikolaj, is a historian and theologian,<sup>106</sup> and who wrote religious texts in captivity.<sup>107</sup> Spaso was captured as a resistance fighter in Serbia and stood accused of celebrating the news of Hitler’s assassination in 1944. Already in the opening lines, Spaso states that he does not belong to any political party, because every party has to promise more than it can fulfill. It thus leads the people toward the Nevercoming Land, which all political propagandists promised, without ever seeing it.

Which party was the main target of this remark became clear soon after, when Spaso Spasović assailed national socialism.<sup>108</sup> Later in the text, he would also reject extreme individualism (the source of which he saw in Friedrich Nietzsche) and communism (as explained by Karl Marx)<sup>109</sup> and would argue that all human technologies must be controlled by ethical principles.<sup>110</sup> The goals of the French and Russian revolutions could not be achieved by the atheists, as only those who believed that they shared one Heavenly Father could consider each other brothers

<sup>104</sup> Ranković, *Sveti vladika Nikolaj*, 150, 153, 187.

<sup>105</sup> Episkop Nikolaj, “Zemlja Nedođija: Jedna moderna bajka,” in: Episkop Nikolaj, *Sabrana dela*, vol. 12. (Šabac: Glas Crkve, 2013), 9–57. He dedicated this work to “all Serbian victims in the enemy concentration camps during the Second Great War.”

<sup>106</sup> This is an interesting word-play. Salvation in Serbian is *spasenje*. Already in the opening lines of the play, St. Nikolaj translated this name as *Isus Isusović*, (Jesus Jesus-ović).

<sup>107</sup> The work itself contains motifs which are reminiscent of the accounts of St. Nikolaj’s wartime captivity – Cf. Ranković, *Sveti vladika Nikolaj*, 125–150.

<sup>108</sup> Episkop Nikolaj, “Zemlja Nedođija,” 13-15, 19-21, 39-40.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 29-30.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

(*fraternité*). Were one to begin by prioritizing fraternity (or solidarity, in modern parlance), one would quickly realize the remaining two ideals of the French revolution—liberty and equality.<sup>111</sup> He also claimed that the accumulation of power enabled tyrants to grab all the freedom, while the people were left with none. “Democracies [...] emerged as a cure from tyranny,” within which, however, the freedom of all was not secure. Freedom needed truth and mercy (compassion, or love) in order to secure stability, peace and bring joy to society.<sup>112</sup> Lies and egotism destroyed the freedom and democracy of the ancient Athenian state. In modern democracy, the threat lied in alienation and isolation (*osamljenost*) without truth and compassion.<sup>113</sup> Freedom was “outsourced” through democratic constitutions and laws, when it became a national and state matter. Truth and compassion on the other hand remained within the private sphere.

Modern democracies had one major advantage over ancient Athens. They cherished Christianity and the private initiative. Their survival still depended on achieving a balance through freedom, compassion and initiative (i.e., social activism). Without Christianity, freedom was cruel and impure, and the system itself was fragile, constantly in risk of turning into a dictatorship or tyranny.<sup>114</sup> In order not to lose sight of the remedy for these risks, democracies ought to post on their entry points the following quote: “For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another” (Gal. 5:13). In line with the Orthodox understanding of freedom, democracy’s aim was to enable the people to voluntarily serve God.<sup>115</sup>

Additional material for understanding this position can be found in his letters. “Christianity is too noble to be equated with democracy, too human-loving to be equated with autocracy.” Politics should be an act of service, not holding power. While negative rights represent classical liberalism’s ethical focus, St. Nikolaj centered his political pro-

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 38.

gram on the ethics of service, “our only lawful right on this Earth.”<sup>116</sup> This was in his view true, not only in domestic politics, but also on the international level. Christians should abandon their competition in gaining wealth and power and should compete in serving other people.<sup>117</sup> Politics ought to be complemented with a sense of morality.

Since this service had to be voluntary, it required certain freedoms and with them related rights, which did not mean that these corresponded to the entire liberal catalogue. The “ethics of service” is the basic idea behind most political concepts he developed over time. It should be implanted in the people’s minds through education, not through force. Whether he had the answer to manifestations of freedom that did not necessarily abide with these ideals, remained an open question. All Christians sin, thus failing to meet the vision of the perfect Christian society. “Human-loving” in St. Nikolaj’s work could mean both tolerance and abstention from force. Whether he would support “benevolent” coercion, the point at which many utopias of the past did forsake their ideals, remained a matter of speculation. However, answering all the possible questions was never his goal.

On a more practical level, St. Nikolaj believed that politics is more than holding elections. He also believed that holding elections was not the universal solution to all the questions which would be opened after Tito’s death.<sup>118</sup> He nonetheless had a more favorable view of the parliamentary/conciliatory organization of the Church, than of autocracy in ecclesiastical matters, which he attributed to the Pope of Rome.<sup>119</sup>

### Unused potential?

Vladimir Cvetković wrote that St. Nikolaj was known for enthusiastically adopting certain ideas, only to discard them abruptly.<sup>120</sup> An-

<sup>116</sup> Episkop Nikolaj, “Hrišćanstvo i politika,” in: Episkop Nikolaj, *Sabrana dela*, vol. 10. (Šabac: Glas Crkve, 2013), 175.

<sup>117</sup> Episkop Nikolaj, “Hrišćanstvo i međunarodni odnosi,” in: Episkop Nikolaj, *Sabrana dela*, vol. 10. (Šabac: Glas Crkve, 2013), 172–173.

<sup>118</sup> Episkop Nikolaj, “Opomena Srbima rodoljubima,” in: Episkop Nikolaj, *Bibliografija 1880–1941: Sabrana dela*, ed. Milisav Protić. vol. 1. 540.

<sup>119</sup> Episkop Nikolaj, “Pašićeva religioznost i crkvenost,” in: Episkop Nikolaj, *Sabrana dela*, vol. 9. (Šabac: Glas Crkve, 2013), 507–508.

<sup>120</sup> Cvetković, “The Freedom from Passions,” 75.

other difficulty with assessing his work is the existence of texts which were attributed to him and published without a sufficient inquiry of their authenticity.

As seen above, St. Nikolaj's position on democracy was rather ambivalent, as it revolved around conceptions which were not central to the architecture of a democratic order. Any outright pro or anti-democratic interpretation of his work must be regarded as selective, if not outright biased. As such, its contemporary relevance may depend critically on authoritative interpretations of his work. In contemporary Serbia, the interpretation and reception of his work was predominantly pro-democratic (not liberal-democratic though), although there were prominent right-wing extremist groups, which mostly accepted the anti-democratic writings attributed to him.<sup>121</sup> This ambivalence enabled legitimation of a wide range of political programs through the texts which were considered to be of his authorship.

Regarding democracy, there are certain constants in his work. In those texts of undisputed authenticity, he never really renounced the idea of a government stemming from the people. The issue of democracy was never really his priority, and when it was addressed, it was often done in the context of his public diplomacy or ecclesiastic missions. His rejection of totalitarianism and capitalism (as generators of unfreedom) was based on his interpretation of Christian ideals, rather than a clear preference for any existing form of government. If one were to accept the idea that his views evolved over time and that "The Nevercoming Land" was the capstone of his political writings, he affirmed the idea that democracy could be improved through more active and more intensive participation in charity work and emphasis on Christian values. Democracy could fulfil its potential in a society which prioritized the ethics of service to one another.

His criticism of political partisanship rendered him skeptical of representative democracy and its realities. He apparently never accepted it as a definite form of government and searched for possible alternatives instead. Although unusually progressive in certain aspects of his

<sup>121</sup> Cf. srska akcija (blog). Sveti vladika Nikolaj: Kapitalizam je zlo, koje goji crvenu internacionalu!. January 6, 2022. <https://akcija.org/sveti-vladika-nikolaj-kapitalizam-je-zlo-koje-goji-crvenu-internacionalu/>

work, especially given his promotion of the equality of women with men among the God-Worshippers he was nonetheless unable to evade the intellectual trap of antisemite conspiracy theories.

Whereas he was not a friend of liberal democracy, he was not, overall, inimical to the idea of democracy either. Like St. Nikolaj's *Middle System*, democratic and republican forms of government have the common good as their focal point. Contemporary Serbian society would benefit a lot if St. Nikolaj's essays targeting corruption and the individual morality of politicians were more widely circulated.



Nikolaj Velimirović during his studies in Halle, Germany  
(Courtesy of the Serbian Orthodox Diocese of Valjevo)

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# Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović and the Foundation of the World Council of Churches

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## Introduction

In May 1945, Patriarch Gavrilo Dožić (1881–1950) and Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović were in Austria, where Allied forces finally released them from captivity. It is not easy—and perhaps not even possible—to determine where and in what condition the two of them were in during the first few months of 1945.<sup>1</sup> After their release, they were both in bad

<sup>1</sup> For various reconstructions of this period and the stay of Serbian hierarchs in captivity, cf. for example Predrag Ilić, *Srpska Pravoslavna Crkva i tajna Dahaua: mit i istina o zatočeništvu patrijarha Gavrila i episkopa Nikolaja u koncentracionom logoru* (Beograd: Draslar partner, 2006), Vladimir Dimitrijević, *Oklevetani svetac: Vladika Nikolaj i srbofobija* (Gornji Milanovac: Lio, 2007), and Velibor Džomić, *Sveti Vladika Nikolaj i Udba* (Podgorica: Udruženje književnika Crne Gore, 2009). Cf. also Bojan Belić, *Vladika Nikolaj, Hitler i Evropa — kontroverze* (Valjevo: Valjevska gimnazija, 2019).

It is not difficult to imagine how during the war destruction and bombing there was no opportunity for systematic and accurate recording of chronicles. Unfortunately, the lack of clear and systematic information later served as a good basis for constructing various myths about Bishop Nikolaj and Patriarch Gavrilo, both for the post-war Yugoslav regime and various opponents of this regime in exile. Cf. Srećko Petrović, “Is Nicholai Velimirovich the Author of the Book *Words to the Serbian People Through the Dungeon Window?*,” *Philotheos — ΦΙΛΟΘΕΟΣ: International Journal for Philosophy and Theology*, Volume 20, Issue 2 (2020): 260–303, <https://doi.org/10.5840/philotheos202020217>. Cf. also Vladimir Cvetković, “The Freedom from Passions and the Freedom for All: St Nicholai Velimirović on Democracy,” *Nicholai Studies: International Journal for Research of Theological and Ecclesiastical*

condition—weak and in poor health.<sup>2</sup> For the sake of health treatment, Patriarch Gavrilo went to Rome.<sup>3</sup> Bishop Nikolaj left Austria for the United Kingdom, where he arrived at the end of the year, passing Germany and Switzerland, and maybe Belgium and France.<sup>4</sup> An interesting fact for our topic is that very soon after his liberation from Nazi slavery, Bishop Nikolaj connected with hierarchs and clergy from other Christian traditions, simply continuing his previously well-trodden ecumenical path—guided by the vision that Christians should approach problems together.<sup>5</sup>

*Contribution of Nicholai Velimirovich*, Vol. I, no. 1 (January 2021): 53–80: 69ff, <https://doi.org/10.46825/nicholaistudies/ns.2021.1.1.53-80>.

<sup>2</sup> There are not many sources regarding Serbian hierarchs in the first half of 1945. However, two interesting letters are preserved in the Episcopal Diocese of New York Archives. Those letters are sent from Kitzbühel by Rev. John L. Baldwin, Chaplain of 42<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division, to Canon Edward N. West, Secretary of the Bishop of New York William T. Manning, on May 23<sup>rd</sup> and May 24<sup>th</sup>, 1945. Baldwin wrote these letters after spending hours in conversation with Bishop Nikolaj. These letters bring interesting information about the time and circumstances of the captivity of Bishop Nikolaj and Patriarch Gavrilo — cf. “Letter from John L. Baldwin to Edward N. West, 23<sup>rd</sup> May 1945” and “Letter from John L. Baldwin to Edward N. West, 24<sup>th</sup> May 1945”, Episcopal Diocese of New York Archives, Bishop William T. Manning Papers, Box 8 [WTM–8], File 1.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Mitar M. Džaković, *Životno delo Patrijarha Srpskog Gavrila* (Pariz: [b. i.], [1983]), 357ff.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. “Vladika Nikolaj: Život i delo,” in Nikolaj Velimirović, *Sabrana dela* (hereafter: SD), I (Šabac: Manastir Svetog Nikolaja Soko, 2016), 769–803: 794–795.

<sup>5</sup> Maybe it is worthy to mention that there was an interest regarding the fate of Serbian hierarch in the ecumenical circles during the war: in newspapers and church journals, as well as in ecumenical periodicals from the time of WWII there are reports and news about Velimirović; for instance: “In his place, fiery, black-bearded Bishop Nikolai Velimirovitch urges the guerrillas to continue their fight.” — Henry Smith Leiper, Foreign Secretary, Federal Council of Churches, “Churchmen Who Defy Hitler IV: Patriarch Gavrilo of Yugoslavia,” *The New York Times*, Vol. XCI, No. 30,819 (June 11, 1942, Late City Edition): 14L+; “Bishop Nikolaj Velimirovitch, of the Serbian Orthodox Church, has been arrested on charges of preaching against the Milan Nedic, puppet head of the Yugoslav Government.” — R. N. S., “[The World Church: News and Notes] Serbian Orthodox Bishop Re-arrested,” *Christianity and Crisis: A Bi-Weekly Journal of Christian Opinion*, Vol. 3, No. 8 (May 17, 1943): 7–8; “... Bishop Nikolaj Velimirovic, ... was arrested early this year for preaching against Yugoslavia’s Quisling regime” — “Germans Guard Against Escape of Serbian Church

Thus, in the summer of 1945, Velimirović seems to have met with his Old Catholic friends in Bern—an inmate from his student days and later a professor at the University of Bern, Arnold Gilg (1887–1967), and perhaps some other Old Catholic clerics he had known since his studies in Switzerland.<sup>6</sup> Somewhat later, on September 20, 1945, Bishop Nikolaj from Munich tried to establish contact with the Archbishop of Canterbury, Geoffrey Francis Fisher (1887–1972), whom he probably knew from the period before World War II.<sup>7</sup>

Patriarch Gavrilo and Bishop Nikolaj were reunited together in London (for the last time) in October 1945, performing the Baptism of the son of the exiled King of Yugoslavia, Peter II.<sup>8</sup> This Baptism was an ecumenical event, with Anglicans as godparents.<sup>9</sup>

In the meantime, in Democratic Federal Yugoslavia, Velimirović's name had been mentioned in court proceedings against opponents of the new regime since August 1<sup>st</sup>, 1945.<sup>10</sup> The events that followed will show that the new Eastern European political climate also affected the

Head," *The Living Church: A Weekly Record of the News, the Work, and the Thought of the Episcopal Church*, Vol. CVIII, No. 14 (April 2, 1944 [Palm Sunday and Holy Week]): 9.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Urs von Arx, "Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović (1880–1956) and His Studies in Bern within the Context of the Old Catholic–Serbian Orthodox Relationship," *Serbian Studies: Journal of the North American Society for Serbian Studies*, Vol. 20, Number 2 (2006): 307–339; 330–331, <https://doi.org/10.1353/ser.0.0027>.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. a letter sent by Velimirović from Munich to the Serbian politician and lawyer Dr. Milan Gavrilović (1882–1976) to London; in this letter Velimirović asked Gavrilović to deliver the attached memorandum (sent with the letter) to the Archbishop of Canterbury — cf. "+ Episkop Nikolaj [Minhen, 20. sept. 1945]," Hoover Institution Archives, Gavrilovic Milan Papers, Box no. 18, Folder no. 14.

<sup>8</sup> Last King of Yugoslavia, Peter II Karađorđević (1923–1970; King of Yugoslavia 1934–1945).

<sup>9</sup> Godparents of new-born Alexander II Karađorđević (1945–) were King George VI (Albert Frederick Arthur George, 1895–1952, King 1936–1952), and his daughter, Princess Elizabeth Alexandra Mary (now Queen Elizabeth II, 1926–, Queen 1952–). The baptism of Crown Prince Alexander was officiated on October 24, 1945, at Westminster Abbey — cf. "Connections between the Royal Family of the United Kingdom and the Royal Family of Serbia," in [14<sup>th</sup>] *Serbian Month in Great Britain: British Serbs*, Part Two, ed. by Olga Stanojlović and Maya Jordan (London: Serbian Council of Great Britain, 2022), 14–18: 17.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *Suđenje članovima političkog i vojnog rukovodstva organizacije Draže Mihailovića: stenografske beleške* (Beograd: Prosveta, 1945), 246, 248.

Western European political reality—and the developments of the ecumenical movement as well.

### Velimirović in the Context of the Ecumenical Movement after World War II

In one of his letters to Bishop Dionisije<sup>11</sup> from 1951, Bishop Nikolaj mentioned that since the Nazi occupation of Yugoslavia in 1941 he didn't receive any salary.<sup>12</sup> With no money, no home, far away from his diocese, wandering around the globe as a refugee and homeless, faced with the problems of many exiled Orthodox,<sup>13</sup> and also faced with tensions and threats of schism in the Serbian Orthodox Church (hereafter SOC),<sup>14</sup> Velimirović was not able to act as he used to before WWII. But somehow he maintained his ecumenical contacts with churchmen from other Churches and with leaders of the ecumenical movement, and he enjoyed respect as a Christian leader and thinker—in spite of the fact that he was poor and practically homeless,<sup>15</sup> and moreover an *apatride*, a stateless person.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Dionisije Milivojević (1898–1979), Serbian Bishop of America and Canada 1939–1964.

<sup>12</sup> This letter is written on August 27<sup>th</sup>, 1951; the title is “Confidential;” cf. “Pisma,” SD, XIII, 768–769.

<sup>13</sup> Namely, Velimirović dealt with issues of organizing Church life and education of the faithful, as it is attested in his published letters (cf. SD, XIII, 657ff).

<sup>14</sup> For instance, Velimirović was an opponent and critic of Arsenije Tošović, a conservative Orthodox hieromonk from Jordanville, who was trying to start a schism in the SOC after WWII. Cf. Episkop Atanasije Jevtić, “O ekumenizmu,” *Pravoslavljje — novine Srpske Patrijaršije*, god. XLIV, br. 1055 (1. mart 2011): 10–13; 12.

<sup>15</sup> Just for the record, during the mentioned period (more precisely, from the time of release from Nazi captivity in 1945 until 1951), Velimirović received an honorary degree at the Columbia University; he was elected a member — actually an honorary president of the Orthodox and Anglican Fellowship; he was a member of the Catholic Club of Chicago; he was present as an esteemed guest at conventions of the Episcopal Church in the United States of America, etc. Also, he was continually involved in different projects with Biblical Society, and he continued his fruitful cooperation with Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), etc.

<sup>16</sup> In 1951, Velimirović was officially deprived of his Yugoslavian citizenship (cf. Dimšo Perić, “Oduzimanje državljanstva Episkopu Nikolaju,” *Hrišćanska misao: Svečanik*, godina III, br. 1–3 (1995): 14–15; Miloje Ž. Nikolić, “Oduzimanje državljanstva Epi-

### Preparation of the 1<sup>st</sup> Assembly of the WCC: Provisional Committee Meeting in Geneva and the Issue of the Participation of Velimirović

In the eyes of pioneers of the modern ecumenical movement, Bishop Nikolaj was one of the prominent ecumenicals, as is attested in the correspondence of organizers of the founding assembly of the World Council of Churches (hereafter WCC). Namely, a few months after the war was finished, in correspondence regarding the preparation of the 1<sup>st</sup> Assembly of the WCC in Amsterdam, George Bell<sup>17</sup> suggested to Geoffrey Fisher<sup>18</sup> and Willem Visser 't Hooft<sup>19</sup> that Velimirović should

skopu žičkom Nikolaju (Velimiroviću),” *Museum: Godišnjak Narodnog muzeja u Šapcu / The Annual of the National Museum in Šabac*, Vol. 15 (2014): 297–302; cf. also Petrović, “Is Nicholai Velimirovich the Author of the Book *Words to the Serbian People Through the Dungeon Window?*,” 276–277), and he did not get another one, as far as we know.

<sup>17</sup> George Kennedy Allen Bell (1883–1958), Anglican Bishop of Chichester 1929–1958. At that time, Bell was the vice-president of the Provisional Committee of WCC (in Process of Formation): cf. Gerhard Besier, ‘Intimately Associated for Many Years:’ *George K. A. Bells and Willem A. Visser ‘t Hooft’s Common Life–Work in the Service of the Church Universal — Mirrored in Their Correspondence (Part One. 1938–1949)* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), 7.

<sup>18</sup> Geoffrey Francis Fisher (1887–1972), Archbishop of Canterbury 1945–1961. Fisher was recently elected as an Archbishop (enthroned in May 1945), and soon after his enthronement, he became a member of the Provisional Committee of WCC, although “he knew little about the workings of WCC” (Edward Carpenter, *Archbishop Fisher: His Life and Times* (Norwich: Canterbury Press 2012), 169–170); that was his position in the time of this correspondence with Bell (cf. *ibid.*, 170; cf. also W. A. Visser ‘t Hooft, *Memoirs* (Geneva: WCC Publications 1987), 186).

<sup>19</sup> Willem Adolph Visser ‘t Hooft (1900–1985), Dutch theologian, first general secretary of the WCC (he held this position 1948–1966). At the time of mentioned correspondence with Bell, Visser ‘t Hooft was a secretary of the Provisional Committee of WCC (since the Committee of Fourteen Conference held in Utrecht (Netherland) in 1938; cf. Willem Adolf Visser ‘t Hooft, “The Genesis of the World Council of Churches,” in *A History of the Ecumenical Movement. Vol. I. 1517–1948*, ed. Ruth Rouse and Stephen Charles Neill (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 19934), 695–724: 705). Visser ‘t Hooft probably met Velimirović at YMCA conference in Kifissia in 1930 (maybe even before that date), and he was impressed by his personality. On this event, he later wrote: “One of the most impressive figures at the meeting was Bishop Nicolai Velemirovitch, at that time bishop of ancient but small Diocese of Ochrida in Macedonia.” Cf. Visser ‘t Hooft, *Memoirs*, 62. There is a group picture of participants of this meeting, published in the Dutch edition of Visser ‘t Hooft’s *Memoirs*. In this picture, we can see Visser ‘t Hooft, John Raleigh Mott (1865–1955), Velimirović, and

be involved in a gathering which was planned for 1946—i.e., for the Provisional Committee meeting in Geneva in February 1946.<sup>20</sup> So, on November 21<sup>st</sup>, 1945, Bell wrote to Visser ‘t Hooft:

I think it would be an enormous gain to our meeting in Geneva if Bishop Nicolai Velimirovic could be invited. I had a long talk with him last week... He has much to contribute to an oecumenical gathering such as this if he could come.<sup>21</sup>

This suggestion came after Bell and Velimirović met in London on November 16<sup>th</sup>, 1945,<sup>22</sup> when the latter—although weak, after four years of suffering, isolation, and imprisonment—showed interest in ecumenical engagement, especially in the possibility of a global gathering of Church leaders. He had some ideas which he shared with Bishop Bell. Namely, Velimirović suggested that it would be great if Church leaders could gather regularly, in order to discuss, share and cooperate; more precisely in order to give common witness to the world.<sup>23</sup> According to

other participants together (cf. W. A. Visser ‘t Hooft, *Memoires: Een leven in de oecumene* (Amsterdam – Brussel: J. H. Kok N. V. Kampen, 1971), 34).

<sup>20</sup> The correspondence regarding this issue is hosted in Geneva, WCC Archives, Box 42.0008. General Secretariat (1914–1995): Bell, George Kennedy Allen (1940–1956), files 2–5, and in London, in Lambeth Palace Library, Bell Papers 105 (WCC, 1943–1948). Letters that are interesting for us are also published in Besier, *Intimately Associated. Part One & Part Two*.

<sup>21</sup> WCC Archives, Box 42.0008. General Secretariat (1914–1995): Bell, George Kennedy Allen (1940–1956), file 2. Cf. Besier, *Intimately Associated. Part One*, 300.

<sup>22</sup> Bell described this meeting in his diary; for an account, see Muriel Heppell, *George Bell and Nikolai Velimirovic: The Story of a Friendship* (Birmingham: Lazarica Press, 2001), 65–69. Velimirović told Bell about the persecution of Christians in Yugoslavia, about brutalities of atheism, about consequences of international politics, and also about the new Yugoslavian ruler as a “Satanic man.” One interesting topic was Velimirović’s plea for help in training new Orthodox ministers, since during the war many priests were killed. The outcome was that, as in the WWI, the Church of England took the responsibility to train Orthodox students afterwards, “this time at Dorchester College” — cf. Heppell, *George Bell and Nikolai Velimirovic*, 68, n. 17. So, soon after the mentioned meeting of Bell and Velimirović, the Church of England supported the education of Serbian students in Dorchester College (cf. R. N. S., “World Relief: Theological Scholarship 1948–1949,” *The Living Church: A Weekly Record of the News, the Work and the Thought of the Episcopal Church*, Vol. CXVIII, No. 1 (January 2, 1949): 7).

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Heppell, *George Bell and Nikolai Velimirovic*, 67–69.

Bell's words, Velimirović was not well informed about developments in the ecumenical movement. It is not hard to imagine that after more than four years in isolation and imprisonment, without communication with the outer world, Velimirović had no idea about practical steps toward the formation of the WCC.<sup>24</sup> But he shared his own thoughts anyway, his own concerns and his own ideas about building bonds between Churches and acting together in a secularized post-war world, namely his own ecumenical vision, which was appreciated by Bell.<sup>25</sup>

As one can see from Fisher's letter which was enclosed with the letter to Visser 't Hooft, the Archbishop of Canterbury previously agreed with Bell's suggestion regarding Velimirović's participation in the Provisional Committee meeting. Namely, a few days earlier, on November 19<sup>th</sup>, 1945, Fisher wrote to Bell:

About Bishop Nicolai, in the first place I agree that it would be most valuable to have *at Geneva* another representative of the Orthodox Church besides Archbishop Germanos;<sup>26</sup> indeed it is most important to

<sup>24</sup> On the other hand, it should not be forgotten that Velimirović was familiar with pre-WWII ecumenical efforts, and he was involved in various aspects of the ecumenical movement from the very beginning of the organization of the World Conference on Faith and Order (cf. Srećko Petrović, "Prilog poznavanju delatnosti Nikolaja Velimirovića: prepiska sa Robertom Gardinerom," *Teološki pogledi: verskonaučni časopis*, Vol. LII, No. 3/2019 (2019): 677–710, <https://doi.org/10.46825/tv/2019-3-677-710>), or on the other hand, through ecumenical contacts with the Anglican Church (cf., for instance, Slobodan G. Markovich, "Activities of Father Nikolai Velimirović in Great Britain during the Great War," *Balkanica* XLVIII (2017): 143–190, <https://doi.org/10.2298/BALC1748143M>), and also later, as a participant in ecumenical work, e.g. as an official of the World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches (cf. Radmila Radić and Priit Rohtmets, "The World Alliance for International Friendship through the Churches and Religious and Political Rapprochement between Bulgaria and Yugoslavia in the 1920's and 1930's," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, Vol. 50, No. 4 (2015): 583–605: 595, <https://doi.org/10.1353/ecu.2015.0066>, and Radmila Radić and Priit Rohtmets, "The Process of Religious and Political Rapprochement between Bulgaria and Yugoslavia in 1920's and 1930's — An International Ecumenical Perspective," *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (2016): 42–89: 62, <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree/vol36/iss1/5>), etc.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Heppell, *George Bell and Nikolai Velimirovic*, 67–69.

<sup>26</sup> Metropolitan of Thyateira Germanos Strenopoulos (Γερμανός [Γεώργιος] Στρηγόπουλος, 1872–1951). Metropolitan Germanos actively participated in the ecumenical movement as a representative of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.



strengthen their representation. Nicolai himself, I think, suffered badly from his experiences, and is not unnaturally overwhelmed by the present political condition of his country and his Church; but, even so, I should be very willing to see him at Geneva.<sup>27</sup>

However, there was one problem: the British Foreign Office refused to let Velimirović stay in England, so he had to move to America “as soon as he can travel,” in the words of Archbishop Fisher.<sup>28</sup>

This inhospitality of the British Foreign Office can be seen as an echo of a shift in British policy toward the new Yugoslavian regime. Since 1944, British politics shifted from supporting the exiled Yugoslavian government toward supporting Communist partisans, which took over rule in the country during the first months of 1945. Velimirović was an old critic of Communists, and now he was *persona non grata* in new Yugoslavia;<sup>29</sup> he also had some contacts with the exiled government, as well as with some exiled anti-Communist movements during 1945, which could be an additional reason for this unfriendly treatment. So, unlike during WWI, now the British Foreign Office showed no hospitality to Velimirović.

However, although he had some doubts regarding Velimirović's involvement, Visser't Hooft accepted Bell's initiative and supported it. On November 27<sup>th</sup>, 1945, Visser't Hooft replied to Bell, expressing his concerns regarding relations with the Russian Orthodox Church, which now was on the other side of the Iron Curtain:

Many thanks for your letter of November 21<sup>st</sup>. I had wondered about inviting Bishop Velimirovic. He is of course a wonderful personality and a real friend of the Ecumenical cause. My only worry in this connection is whether his coming will make future relations with the Russian Church even more difficult. Is it not so that Russians are definitively refusing to allow him to go back? ... The whole matter is further complicated by the fact that the only Russian members in the Provisional Committee are men of emigration who have not yet made their peace with Moscow ...

<sup>27</sup> WCC Archives, Box 42.0008. General Secretariat (1914–1995): Bell, George Kennedy Allen (1940–1956), file 2. Cf. Besier, *Intimately Associated. Part One*, 300–301.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. the letter quoted above; cf. Besier, *Intimately Associated. Part One*, 300–301.

<sup>29</sup> Cf., for instance, *Suđenje članovima političkog i vojnog rukovodstva organizacije Draže Mihailovića*, 246, 248.

It seems that we are only dealing with such Orthodox Slavs as are not in good relations with their own Churches.<sup>30</sup>

On December 4<sup>th</sup>, 1945, Bell replied to Visser 't Hooft:

We are in such bad need of the Orthodox world, and also of Christian prophets, that it will be a grave loss to miss the opportunity of inviting Nicolai to join us ... He is one of the most distinguished Orthodox Bishops, and he has suffered terribly from the Nazis.<sup>31</sup> Are we really to wait for Moscow's approval for every non-Russian Orthodox who might attend World Council deliberations?<sup>32</sup>

Although Bell and Visser 't Hooft had to face many problems regarding the participation of Eastern European Churches after the expansion of Soviet influence in this area, they were thinking about the role that Velimirović could have in organizing the WCC, and they were already talking about logistics and some practical steps. Thus, in the letter he wrote to Visser 't Hooft on December 20<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup>, 1945, Bell underlined that they should act as soon as possible and ensure the arrival of Bishop Nikolaj to Switzerland right from Great Britain, before he left for America. Bell also informed Visser 't Hooft about the proposal for the prayer of the Churches that he received from Velimirović in those days; here we bring a passage from the letter (written on December 20<sup>th</sup>, 1945), followed by a few lines from the postscript (written on December 27<sup>th</sup>, 1945):

Bishop Nicholai Velimirovic has sent me a copy of his informal proposal with regard to the prayer of the Churches.<sup>33</sup> I am much touched by

<sup>30</sup> WCC Archives, Box 42.0008. General Secretariat (1914–1995): Bell, George Kennedy Allen (1940–1956), file 2. Cf. Besier, *Intimately Associated. Part One*, 301–302.

<sup>31</sup> Interestingly, in this correspondence there are several references regarding Bishop Nikolaj's sufferings during WWII, his imprisonment and torture in Nazi captivity, etc.; maybe the fact that Velimirović was a Nazi prisoner and also a captive of Dachau was somehow important in ecumenical circles of the time, since the question of reconciliation was an important topic in the eve of the foundation of WCC. As we will see, Church leaders who survived imprisonment during the war were especially honored in the initial ecumenical meeting during the official formation of WCC.

<sup>32</sup> Lambeth Palace Library, London, Bell Papers 105 (WCC, 1943–1948), 111–112; cf. Besier, *Intimately Associated. Part One*, 303–304.

<sup>33</sup> We do not know if the copy of the mentioned proposal is preserved.

it myself. I do think this is a chamber of the Council on which we ought to be working. What Bishop Nicholai writes and also says to me makes it more important than ever, in my humble view, that every possible step should be taken to secure that he is present at the Provisional Committee meetings. He would add much spiritual strength. He is a great spiritual leader, and has very much to tell us. I think we should be impoverished indeed if we were to deprive ourselves of his presence through an unwillingness to risk a possible offence to the Soviets. A man of his pre-eminence and great spiritual authority stands in an altogether exceptional position in the present-day life of oecumenical Christianity.<sup>34</sup>

One week later, on December 27<sup>th</sup>, 1945, Bell added one important note to Visser 't Hooft regarding current political changes, and suggested some concrete steps:

December 27<sup>th</sup>

P.S. This letter was accidentally held up. But I am glad to have the chance of adding a postscript, to say that the recognition by the American and British Government of the Tito regime, and of the overthrow of the monarchy, seems to me to strengthen the importance of Bishop Nikolaj's presence at Geneva. We do not want our action for the fellowship of the Churches to be frustrated by power politics. If, as I suppose, the Swiss Government would give a visa to allow Bishop Nikolaj to come. But the matter is urgent, and I cannot help thinking that unless steps are taken soon, it may be too late. I would suggest your writing to his London address: Serb Orthodox Church, Lennox Gardens, London, S.W.1. I do not think he has yet left England. It would be simpler in very many ways for him to take Geneva on his way to America rather than to go to America and thence come back to Switzerland. Incidentally, there would surely be some considerable advantage in our having some conference with him before he sees Bishop Dionysius. I note in No. 47 of the I.C.P.I.S. just received that the Patriarch of Moscow has made an approach to Dionysius and has expressed a wish for a personal interview, though I do not know what has happened since the Open Letter was published on Octo-

<sup>34</sup> WCC Archives, Box 42.0008. General Secretariat (1914–1995): Bell, George Kennedy Allen (1940–1956), file 2. Cf. Besier, *Intimately Associated. Part One*, 309.

ber 19<sup>th</sup>, clearly, however, contact with Bishop Nikolaj at such a time would be of great value.<sup>35</sup>

### **Geneva Meeting in February 1946: No Place for Bishop Nikolaj**

As it can be seen from this correspondence, it seems that Bishop Bell cared very much about ensuring the presence of Bishop Nikolaj in meetings of the Provisional Committee. On the other hand, it seems that Bishop Nikolaj was also very interested. But after one intervention at the beginning of 1946, the initiative was over and it became obvious that, maybe due to political reasons, Velimirović could not be an official Orthodox representative in the ecumenical movement. Namely, on January 9<sup>th</sup>, 1946, Visser 't Hooft wrote to Bell:

As to the invitation to Bishop Nikolai the situation is rather confused. I have written fully to Dr. Mott about it and told him on the one hand what you said, adding that I have also greatest regard for Bishop Nikolai and that I believe we should keep in close touch with him, but pointing out on the other hand what the difficulties are.<sup>36</sup>

And here comes one interesting detail:

In the meantime I have received the word that the Archbishop of Canterbury [Geoffrey Fisher] now believes that it would not be right to invite him.

Can this change of mind of Archbishop Fisher be seen as an influence of British foreign policy? Especially if we know that Fisher was the first who informed Velimirović about the Geneva meeting, before Velimirović's meeting with Bell on November 16<sup>th</sup>, 1945?<sup>37</sup> The situation is not clear, especially in light of Bell's confrontation with the British government. Namely, Bell was leading British churchmen during WWII,

<sup>35</sup> WCC Archives, Box 42.0008. General Secretariat (1914–1995): Bell, George Kennedy Allen (1940–1956), file 2. Cf. Besier, *Intimately Associated. Part One*, 309–310.

<sup>36</sup> Lambeth Palace Library, London, Bell Papers 105 (WCC, 1943–1948), 140; cf. Besier, *Intimately Associated. Part One*, 317–318.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Heppell, *George Bell and Nikolai Velimirovic*, 68: "Archbishop Fisher had told him of the World Council meeting in Geneva."

but since he was openly against the bombing of German cities<sup>38</sup> and also against the identification of Germany with Hitler, there was permanent tension between him and the British government. Bell's reputation was one of the reasons why Winston Churchill<sup>39</sup> nominated Fisher to be Archbishop of Canterbury, although Bell was the most likely candidate.<sup>40</sup> This weakened Bell's influence, and although Churchill lost power in the July election, the new government did not change Britain's domestic policy—in terms of relations with the Church—or foreign policy, as defined by the Crimean Conference agreements in February 1945.

However, political tensions of the time simply influenced ecumenical streams. The political reality was mirrored in the life of the ecumenical movement. This fact is confessed even by ecumenical leaders of the time. In his *Memoirs*, Visser 't Hooft wrote his recollection of those days:

At the meeting of various sectors of the movement ... in the 1920s and 1930s the Orthodox churches were well represented ... But as a result of political repercussions of WWII the situation changed considerably ... This meant not only the Church of Russia ... but also the Orthodox Churches of Rumania, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia and Poland remained outside the WCC.<sup>41</sup>

\* \* \*

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Philip Coupland, "George Bell, the Question of Germany and the Cause of European Unity, 1939–1950," in *The Church and Humanity: The Life and Work of George Bell, 1883–1958*, ed. Andrew Chandler (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2012), 109–128: 116.

<sup>39</sup> Sir Winston Leonard Spencer Churchill (1874–1965); Prime Minister of the United Kingdom from May 10th, 1940 to July 26th, 1945, and again from October 26th, 1951 to April 5th, 1955.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Owen Chadwick, *Michael Ramsey: A Life* (Oxford — New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 87–88; cf. also Carpenter, *Archbishop Fisher*, 129–139. The confrontation between Bell and the British government deepened after WWII finished and after Fisher was appointed as Archbishop of Canterbury; that could have also had some influence on this topic.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Visser 't Hooft, *Memoirs*, 254.

At the beginning of 1946, Bishop Nikolaj arrived in America. Before the Geneva meeting in February 1946, Velimirović wrote a letter to Bell stating that he did not receive an invitation, and therefore would not come to the meeting:

As to Geneva's conference, I am not going there. No invitation received. Please do explain my little proposal to the council if it should be mentioned in Geneva ...<sup>42</sup>

In the same letter, we find Velimirović is concerned for the fate of displaced persons (D.P.s):

I read that you are a member of the Oecumenical Ref[ugee] Commission. Thank God that such a commission had been formed. I am very much troubled about our D.P.s and refugees. It would certainly be a sin to force them to go home—to the realm of shadow and death. May the Lord give you light and courage to do in this problem what is best.

I shall pray and pray for Geneva's conference's success and for you wherever you are and whatever you do ...<sup>43</sup>

So the Geneva meeting, which symbolically involved participants who suffered as Nazi prisoners during WWII (Rev. M. Niemöller,<sup>44</sup> Bishop Berggrav,<sup>45</sup> and Rev. Dr. Chester S. Miao<sup>46</sup>), who all preached at the service celebrated at Saint Peter's Cathedral in Geneva on February 20<sup>th</sup>, 1946,<sup>47</sup> passed without Nikolaj Velimirović, a Nazi hostage and a prisoner of Dachau.

<sup>42</sup> Lambeth Palace Library, London, Bell Papers 79, 136ff; cf. Heppell, *George Bell and Nikolai Velimirovic*, 71–73.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Heppell, *George Bell and Nikolai Velimirovic*, 73.

<sup>44</sup> Friedrich Gustav Emil Martin Niemöller (1892–1984) was a German theologian and Lutheran pastor; for his opposition to the Nazis, Niemöller was imprisoned in Sachsenhausen and Dachau concentration camps from 1938 to 1945.

<sup>45</sup> Eivind Josef Berggrav (1884–1959), a Norwegian Lutheran churchman, Bishop of Hålogaland 1928–1937 and Bishop of Oslo 1937–1951. During WWII, because of resistance against the Nazi occupation of Norway, Berggrav was placed in solitary confinement from 1942 to 1945.

<sup>46</sup> Chester S. Miao (Miao Qiusheng, 1894–?), general secretary of the China Christian Council; he was in prison in Japanese occupied Shanghai during the war.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Odair Pedroso Mateus, "The Ecumenical Spirit at Calvin's Cathedral," World Council of Churches, 24 February 2021, <https://www.oikoumene.org/news/the-ecumenical-spirit-at-calvins-cathedral> (accessed August 3rd, 2021).

Despite the goodwill and commitment of his friends, Bishop Nikolaj did not attend the Geneva meeting in February 1946. On the other hand, at the Geneva meeting of the Provisional Committee of the WCC in the Process of Formation, among the selected delegates (a total of about 30 participants) was a large number of ecumenical deputies with whom Velimirović was friends or in some way connected, and with some of them he remained close to the end of his life. In addition to Bishop Bell, the vice-president of the Provisional Committee of the WCC, Visser 't Hooft, the general secretary of the same body, and Archbishop Fisher, there were more of Velimirović's friends, acquaintances, and collaborators at the Geneva meeting in February 1946, such as Archimandrite Kassian,<sup>48</sup> Leo Zander,<sup>49</sup> John R. Mott, Georges Florovsky,<sup>50</sup> Metropolitan Germanos of Thyateira, Bishop Küry,<sup>51</sup> Henry-Louis

<sup>48</sup> Archimandrite [later Bishop of Catania] Kassian Bezobrazov (Кассиан [Сергей] Сергеевич Безобразов, 1892–1965). Sergei (later Cassian) Bezobrazov, one of the key figures of the Russian Student Christian Movement (Russkoe studencheskoe hristianskoe dvizhenie) — an important Russian youth organization that established its foundations in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes — became friend with Velimirović already in 1923: cf. А[лексей Николаевич]. Емельянов, “Афонские письма архимандрита Кассиана (Безобразова),” *Вестник Православного Свято-Тихоновского гуманитарного университета. Серия II: История. История Русской Православной Церкви*, Вып. II: 3 (52) (2013): 81–125: 82–83.

<sup>49</sup> Leo [Lev] Zander (Лев Александрович Зандер, 1893–1964), Russian philosopher. Across Bezobrazov, he was involved in cooperation with Velimirović already in Kingdom of Yugoslavia, in affairs of RHSD — cf. Емельянов, “Афонские письма архимандрита Кассиана (Безобразова),” 88–89.

<sup>50</sup> Protopresbyter Georges Vasilievich Florovsky (Георгий Васильевич Флоровский, 1893–1979). Florovsky and Velimirović probably knew each other before WWII. They had contact in the USA, especially at St Vladimir's Seminary. Florovsky and Elder Sophrony Sakharov (1896–1993) mentioned Velimirović in their correspondence (cf. Srećko Petrović, “Prilog proučavanju srpsko-ruskih svetogorskih veza: povezanost Episkopa Nikolaja Velimirovića sa Starcem Siluanom, Arhimandritom Sofronijem i drugim ruskim svetogorcima,” *Teološki pogledi: verskonaučni časopis*, Vol. LIII, No. 2/2020 (2020): 513–554: 539–540, <https://doi.org/10.46825/tv/2020-2-513-554>). In Georges Florovsky Papers, in the Special Collections at the Princeton University Library, there is some unpublished correspondence between Florovsky and Velimirović (cf. Georges Florovsky Papers, 1916–1979, Princeton University Library, Co586).

<sup>51</sup> Adolf Küry (1870–1956), the Old Catholic Bishop of Switzerland 1924–1955, with whom Velimirović has known since the time of his studies in Switzerland — cf. von Arx, “Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović,” 32off.



Bishop Nikolaj at the YMCA conference in 1930 in Kifissia in Athens together with John. R. Mott, Visser't Hooft, Rev. Alphons Koechlin, Metropolitan Evlogii of Paris, Bishop Dositej Vasić of Niš and others (Courtesy of the World Council of Churches Archives, Geneva)

DOING IT WITH DISTINCTION



Babette Deutsch '17 received the honorary degree of Doctor of Letters at the 192nd annual commencement of Columbia University.

She is shown here with her distinguished colleagues, seated, l. to r.: Howard Hanson, Commodore John Kelly Richards, Jr., Acting President Frank Faulkenbush, Will Deutsch, Enrico Fermi; standing, l. to r.: Timothy Edward Shea, Harold Clayton Urey, Frank Saitoff Haickitt, Maxwell Anderson, Dr. Chang P'ing, the Rt. Rev. Nikolaj Velimirović, W'ntthrop Aldrich, and Francis Gordon Coffey.

Bishop Nikolaj at the Columbia University on June 4, 1946—honorary degrees award (Barnard College Alumnae Magazine, Vol. XXXV, Number 5 (June 1946): 18)



Henriod,<sup>52</sup> and others.<sup>53</sup> One can conclude that in the ecumenical circles of his time Bishop Nikolaj was very well known.

The possible concrete reasons for his exclusion from the activities of the ecumenical movement after WWII were later found out. Four years later, after certain consultation with SOC hierarchs, it became clear that Velimirović, for his own Church, was not a representative at all; he was nothing more than “a private person.”<sup>54</sup>

In any case, afterward WWII Bishop Nikolaj stayed in America, poor and somehow maybe cut off in the life of the Orthodox Church, but respected among American Christians, especially among Episcopalians. In the years to come, he would have to find his own place, both in American society and in the structures of the Orthodox Church, finally becoming a lecturer at St Tikhon’s Seminary in South Canaan, Pennsylvania. Meanwhile, the participation of the Orthodox Churches in the ecumenical movement became a problematic issue.

<sup>52</sup> Pastor Henry-Louis Henriod (1887–1970), Swiss reformist pastor with whom Velimirović cooperated through work with Christian youth associations, and with whom he has known since 1915 — cf. Herbert Reece Coston, Jr., “The World’s Student Christian Federation as an Ecumenical Training Ground” (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University, PhD diss., 1963), 135, 138.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. *The World Council of Churches: Its Process of Formation. Minutes and Reports of the Meeting of the Provisional Committee of the World Council of Churches held at Geneva from February 21<sup>st</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1946. The Constitutional Documents of the World Council of Churches and an Introduction by W. A. Visser’t Hooft* (Geneva: Conseil œcuménique des Églises — World Council of Churches — Ökumenische Rat der Kirchen, 1946), 16–18.

<sup>54</sup> In a letter to Bell, written on May 26th, 1950, Robert Tobias (1919–2010) sent a report on his visit to Yugoslavia: “Bishops Iriney [Irinej Đorđević (1894–1952), another exiled Serbian Bishop] and Nicolai Velimirovic... are considered by Serbian Church as having no authority beyond that of private persons. They cannot speak in the name of the Serbian Church and have no jurisdiction over any other Serbian Orthodox Christians outside of Yugoslavia.” WCC Archives, Box 42.0008. General Secretariat (1914–1995): Bell, George Kennedy Allen (1940–1956), file 5; ff. Gerhard Besier, *‘Intimately Associated for Many Years:’ George K. A. Bells and Willem A. Visser ‘t Hooft’s Common Life–Work in the Service of the Church Universal — Mirrored in Their Correspondence (Part Two. 1950–1958)*. (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), 624–625.

### Moscow Conference, July 1948: Ecumenism as a Western Trap

The Moscow Pan-Orthodox Conference was held on the eve of the 1<sup>st</sup> Assembly of the WCC, in July 1948. Among other things, after this event the division of the Orthodox world into two groups of churches became obvious. Orthodox Churches in Eastern Europe which were found in states under Soviet control allied with the Patriarchate of Moscow, while those on the other side of the Iron Curtain supported the Patriarchate of Constantinople. As it is noted by D. Kalkandjieva, the Cold War became a fact in the religious realm as well.<sup>55</sup> The mentioned division also applied to the attitude toward the ecumenical movement: unlike in the times before WWII, Orthodox Churches from Eastern Europe abstained from participation in inter-Christian organizations.

One of the topics at this gathering in Moscow was the participation of the Orthodox Churches in the WCC. Although all Orthodox Churches received invitations from the organizers of the gathering in Amsterdam to send their delegates to the WCC assembly, the position of the Moscow Inter-Orthodox Conference was that the Orthodox should not participate in the gathering or join the WCC. Thus, the attitude from Moscow in the post-war period was simply to block the participation of the Eastern European Orthodox Churches (i.e., the vast majority of Orthodox Christians) in the ecumenical movement.<sup>56</sup> The characteristic address of the Patriarch of Russia Alexy I (1877–1970) states multiple reasons why the Orthodox should not participate in WCC's assembly: among other things, ecumenical organizations "threaten to bring the Church closer to the earth than to heaven," because the Amsterdam Assembly "does not have a single dogmatic issue on the agenda."<sup>57</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Daniela Kalkandjieva, *The Russian Orthodox Church, 1917–1948: From Decline to Resurrection* (London — New York: Routledge), 307ff.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. L[ev]. Zander, "The Ecumenical Movement and the Orthodox Church", *The Ecumenical Review*, Volume 1, Issue 3 (1949): 267–276: 267–268, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1758-6623.1949.tb03068.x>; cf. also Viorel Ioniță, *Towards the Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Church: The Decisions of the Pan-Orthodox Meetings Since 1923 Until 2009*, Translated from Romanian by Prof. Dr. Remus Rus, *Studia oecumenica Friburgensia*, 62 (Freiburg — Basel: Institute for Ecumenical Studies — Friedrich Reinhardt Verlag, 2014), 34.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. "Пленарное заседание совещания глав и представителей автокефальных Православных Церквей в связи с празднованием 500-летия автокефалии

It is interesting that Velimirović was mentioned at this gathering in Moscow. Namely, during the discussion on the participation of the Orthodox in the ecumenical movement at the Moscow All-Orthodox Conference, Bishop Nicholai was mentioned as one of the pioneers of the ecumenical dialogue with non-Orthodox Christians. Metropolitan Nicodemus of Sliven<sup>58</sup> referred to Velimirović's connections with the Anglicans, which he established during the First World War, as it was published in the official report of the Conference (here is the provisional translation in English):

During the [First] World War, Nikolaj Velimirović, Bishop of Žiča, while he was in England, preached in various Anglican churches, and even received Communion in the Anglican Church. Serbian students at Oxford University did the same. The Serbian Patriarch Dimitrije took Communion with the Anglicans on Easter.<sup>59</sup>

However, the conclusions of the conference on ecumenism were negative. In a resolution adopted by the delegates gathered in Moscow on July 17<sup>th</sup>, 1948, the aspirations of the ecumenical movement embodied in the creation of the WCC were seen as contrary to the Christian ideals and tasks of the Church. Furthermore, until the seventh decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the matter regarding the participation of Orthodox Churches from Eastern Europe in the WCC did not change significantly.

It seems that political circumstances did not allow Bishop Nikolaj, mentioned in Moscow as an ecumenical activist, to be among the delegates to the founding assembly of the WCC in Amsterdam in 1948 and

Русской Православной Церкви, 9 июля 1948 г.," in *Деяния Совецания глав и представителей автокефальных Православных Церквей в связи с празднованием 500-летия автокефалии Русской Православной Церкви 8–18 июля 1948 года [В двух томах]. Том первый* (Москва: Издание Московской Патриархии, 1949), 86–314: 91–93.

<sup>58</sup> Nicodemus Piperov [Никодим (Николай) Николов Пиперов, 1895–1980]; Metropolitan of Sliven 1947–1980.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Митрополит Сливенский Никодим [Пиперов], "Действительность англиканского рукоположения," in *Деяния Совецания глав и представителей автокефальных Православных Церквей в связи с празднованием 500-летия автокефалии Русской Православной Церкви 8–18 июля 1948 года [В двух томах]. Том первый* (Москва: Издание Московской Патриархии, 1949), 292–314: 307.

to be included in the work and activities of this international ecumenical body, a global organization for the rapprochement of Christians.

**Amsterdam, August 22<sup>nd</sup> to September 4<sup>th</sup>, 1948:  
1<sup>st</sup> General Assembly of WCC**

At the WCC's first assembly in Amsterdam, there were 351 delegates, from 147 member churches. However, those constituting this world body were largely from North America and Western Europe; only 30 of the founding churches came from Africa, Asia, and Latin America. As for the Orthodox Church, there were Greek Orthodox Churches and representatives of the Orthodox diasporas in the Western hemisphere, but no single Orthodox Church from Eastern Europe—as Visser 't Hooft wrote in his *Memoirs*. There was no “Orthodox Slavdom,” and no Serbian Orthodox Church.

It seems that, as far as the participation of Bishop Nikolaj in the gathering of the WCC, as well as the participation of the Serbian Orthodox Church in ecumenical events in the years after World War II, like all Eastern European issues of that time, all eyes were on Moscow. This was indirectly acknowledged by the organizers of the first general assembly of the WCC in Amsterdam, who were aware that the Serbian Orthodox Church would have its representatives at the meeting only if representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church from the Soviet Union appeared there.<sup>60</sup>

At the time of WCC's first assembly, Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović was in the USA. He did not participate in the Amsterdam event, and he was not involved in WCC's foundation and work. On the other hand, it seems that what has been said is not entirely true, since Bishop Nikolaj was indirectly (or maybe somehow directly?) involved in the activities of WCC since the founding of this global ecumenical organization in 1948, as the only Orthodox bishop among the members of the Committee on Displaced Persons of the Church World Service—a body

<sup>60</sup> Cf. letters that Bell and Visser 't Hooft exchanged in April 1948 — WCC Archives, Box 42.0008. General Secretariat (1914–1995): Bell, George Kennedy Allen (1940–1956), file 3; cf. also Besier, *Intimately Associated. Part One*, 408–409.

established and operating closely with the World Council of Churches. So, in an official publication of this body from 1948, Bishop Nikolaj is mentioned.<sup>61</sup>

This body was founded and operated in close connection with the World Council of Churches<sup>62</sup>—something like a separate department, much like the various departments of the WCC that still exist today. The Church World Service took care of refugees and former prisoners of war, but it also took care of the education of clerics and the training of personnel of those Churches that suffered in the world war, or were endangered in a certain way in the post-war world.<sup>63</sup>

Interestingly, according to the available literature, in one source dated before the official foundation of the WCC—allegedly a letter from Bishop Dionisije to Dimitrije Najdanović (1897–1986) sent on February 24<sup>th</sup>, 1948, we can read:

Bishop Nikolai ... is a representative of the Serbian Orthodox Church in the World Council of Churches, and he works a lot there.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Church World Service, *“DP’s are People!” Protestant Program for Displaced Persons: Background, Current Program, and Future Plans of the Committee on Displaced Persons of Church World Service — the Coordinating Organization for Protestant and Eastern Orthodox Relief and Rehabilitation* (New York: Committee on Displaced Persons — Church World Service, 1948), [20]. On unpaginated p. 20 of this publication there is a list of members of this body — “Staff and Committee” — and among them, there is “Serbian Orthodox: Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović, New York.”

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Church World Service, *“DP’s are People!”*, 10.

Caring for refugees has been one of the main preoccupations of the WCC since the establishment of the organization and the existence of the Provisional Committee of the WCC; at the same time, Bishop Nikolaj took care of refugees and former prisoners of war — cf. Heppell, *George Bell and Nikolai Velimirovic*, 75ff; cf. also „Pisma“, SD, XIII, 757–758, 762.

<sup>63</sup> The activities of the Church World Service under the auspices of the WCC in coordination with other related organizations included, among other things, provision of scholarships for Serbian theologians who studied in Great Britain and the United States — cf. R. N. S., “World Relief: Theological Scholarship 1948–1949,” 7. As we already mentioned, Bishop Nikolaj tried to secure this support through his ecumenical contacts since the end of the war (cf. Heppell, *George Bell and Nikolai Velimirovic*, 68), and this support lasted for some time (cf. also R. N. S., “Relief for Eastern Churches,” *The Living Church: A Weekly Record of the News, the Work and the Thought of the Episcopal Church*, Vol. CXIX, No. 25 (December 18, 1949): 6).

<sup>64</sup> Cf. “Vladika Nikolaj: Život i delo,” SD, I, 769–803: 798.

Unfortunately, there is no further reference, and we have not found any additional information or integral content in this letter, so the context of this claim is not clear and remains unknown.

On the other hand, there is one so far unnoticed contribution of Bishop Nikolaj to the WCC's first assembly. In one of the official publications of the Amsterdam assembly, there is a section entitled "Evangelism in the Orthodox Church."<sup>65</sup> This is a 4-page account regarding the spiritual revival among Orthodox believers in Yugoslavia—about the movement of God-Worshippers (Bogomoljci; *Bogomolzee* in the text), written by Bishop Nikolaj.<sup>66</sup> This piece on the life and practice of God-Worshippers, their charismas, singing, miracles in the monastery of St. Naum, missionary journal *Misionar*, etc., is introduced as valuable and extraordinary:

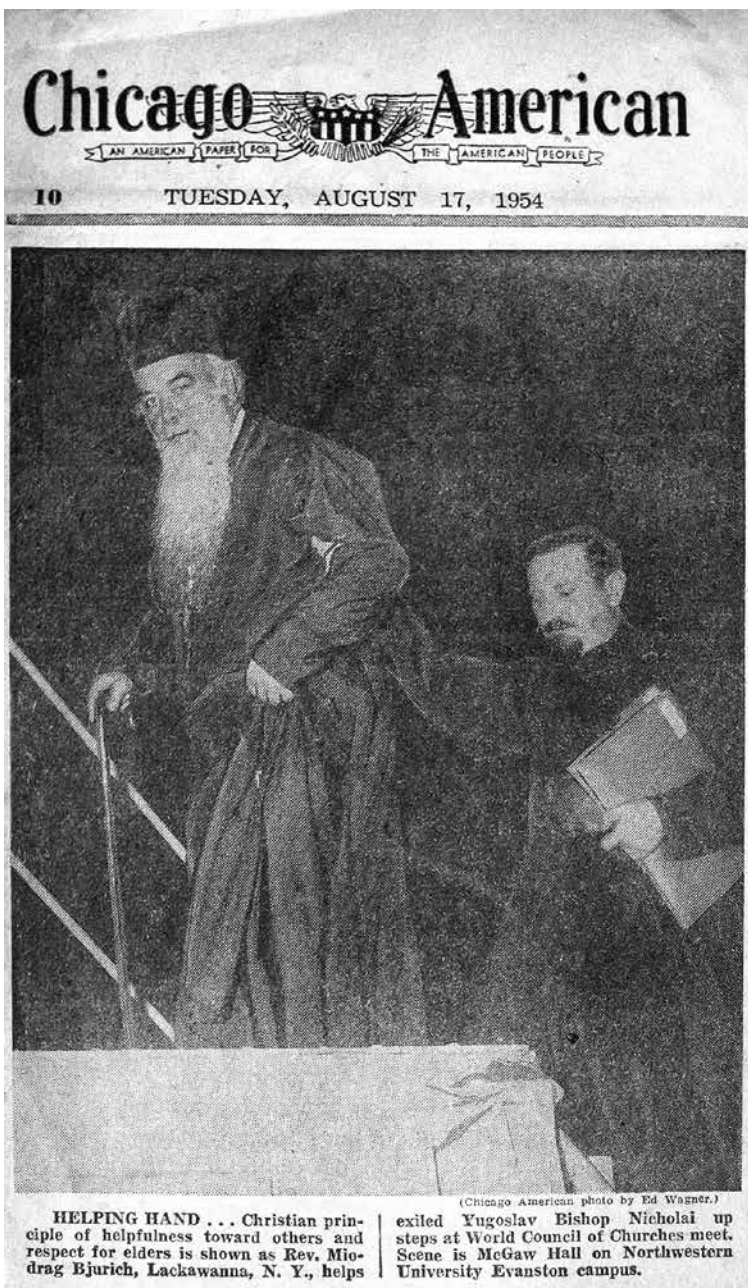
We are glad to have received from an Orthodox source a detailed account of the movement which grew up in Yugo-Slavia between the two wars. The ethos of this movement is so different from anything familiar in the Western churches that the brief extracts, to which we are limited by consideration of space, deserve the careful attention of all students of evangelism.<sup>67</sup>

So we could say that Bishop Nikolaj participated in WCC's first assembly and contributed to it—at least in an indirect way. In any case, after the Amsterdam assembly Velimirović remained active in the ecumenical dialogue. Although there is not a systematic record, some traces of his activities can be found. Velimirović was not officially involved in the work of WCC (or maybe he was—that question should be re-examined), but anyway, his interest did not disappear, and he had more suggestions for ecumenical activities. For sure he was interested in WCC meetings, giving suggestions for further actions. For instance, he was interested in the meeting of the Central Committee of the WCC at

<sup>65</sup> Cf. *The Church's Witness to God's Design: An Ecumenical Study Prepared Under the Auspices of the World Council of Churches* (Man's Disorder and God's Design — The Amsterdam Assembly Series, Vol. 2) (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1948), 130–133.

<sup>66</sup> "Information communicated by the Rt. Rev. Bishop Nicolai Velimirovic, of the Orthodox Church of Yugo-Slavia, now resident in America." — cf. *The Church's Witness to God's Design*, 130.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. *The Church's Witness to God's Design*, 130.



Bishop Nikolaj at the 2nd General Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Evanston in 1954 (*Chicago American*, August 17, 1954)

Lucknow from December 31<sup>st</sup>, 1952, to January 9<sup>th</sup>, 1953,<sup>68</sup> and he was involved in the work with DPs.<sup>69</sup> He was also concerned for the fate of the Orthodox,<sup>70</sup> as well as other Churches—e.g. the Old Catholic Church.<sup>71</sup> On a personal level, he maintained contacts with many Christians and churchmen from various denominations. And his interest in ecumenism remained vital.

Now we can understand why Velimirović was present during the 2<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly of WCC in Evanston in 1954 (10 years before the SOC joined the WCC)—against the decision of the Holy Synod of SOC<sup>72</sup>—and wrote so positively about this ecumenical gathering (here is a provisional translation into English):

It was indeed an event that was repeated for the second time—the first time six years ago in Amsterdam, Netherlands, and now in Evanston, Chicago. It will be repeated, until the ideal of the complete unity of the

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Heppell, *George Bell and Nikolai Velimirovic*, 85.

<sup>69</sup> In a few letters to Fr. Aleksa Todorović (1899–1990), Bishop Nikolaj mentioned the visit of a certain Mr. Waddams on January 13<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup>, 1953, in connection with some publications of Svečanik from Munich — and speculates whether it is related to the WCC or the Church World Service — but unfortunately, the context is not clear here either; cf. Velimirović, “Pisma,” *SD*, XIII, 687–688; 694. If that is Canon of Canterbury H. M. Waddams (Canon Herbert Montague Waddams, 1911–1972), with whom Velimirović corresponded during 1953 and 1954 (these letters are kept in the Archives of the Lambeth Palace — Individual Orthodox Churches: Serbia: Contacts: Serbian Bishops, Lambeth Palace Library, CFR OC 256/2, ff. 58–62, 63–68, 69), remains unknown to us. Unfortunately, we were not able to get to this material.

<sup>70</sup> On his concern regarding the Christian life of many afterwar displaced persons, as well as regarding Christians behind the Iron Curtain, cf. Heppell, *George Bell and Nikolai Velimirovic*, 76–79, 84–85. On displaced persons, cf. also Velimirović, “Pisma,” *SD*, XIII, 757.

<sup>71</sup> Lambeth Palace Library, London, Bell Papers 79, 140–142; cf. Heppell, *George Bell and Nikolai Velimirovic*, 74–75.

<sup>72</sup> The 2<sup>nd</sup> Assembly of WCC in Evanston was held from August 15<sup>th</sup> to August 27<sup>th</sup>, 1954. Two bishops of the SOC, Nikolaj and Dionisije, attended this gathering, contrary to the recommendation of the Holy Synod and Patriarch. According to a study of V. Đ. Mišina, Bishop Nikolaj gave a speech, and Bishop Dionisije presented a memorandum entitled “Persecution of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Yugoslavia under Tito’s regime” at the Evanston meeting — cf. Veljko Đurić Mišina, *German Đorić: patrijarh u obezboženom vremenu. Tom 2* (Slanci: Manastir Svetog prvomučenika i arhidakona Stefana, 2012), 60off.



Christian Church will be realized, according to the idea of the pioneers of the WCC. The event of our century! ...

Everyone could come to everyone, shake hands without presenting, and talk without resentment. Like they were relatives or longtime friends ...

In Evanston, one name brought all together and closer—Jesus Christ.<sup>73</sup>

Despite such assessments of the gathering in Evanston, and despite the consistent and lifelong ecumenical engagement of Bishop Nikolaj, in certain circles his authority—which is taken seriously not only within the Serbian Orthodox Church and not only among domestic researchers—is now used as a tool in the fight against the participation of the Orthodox Church in ecumenical dialogue, as well as to achieve other agendas. His thought is interpreted differently today. That alone is an additional justification for critical research on Bishop Nikolaj's attitude towards ecumenism. In order to see the real picture of the relationship and attitude of Bishop Nikolaj toward the ecumenical movement, we need to return to the reading of Velimirović's legacy,<sup>74</sup> that is, what he did and wrote during his life.

### Conclusion

Although Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović is often presented as a bitter opponent of ecumenical dialogue, or as a skeptic regarding ecumenism, especially after coming to the Diocese of Ohrid, such presumptions cannot find firm ground in his life and work.

Bishop Nikolaj was definitely not an opponent of ecumenism, and he was not against the ecumenical movement nor against the participation of the Orthodox Church in ecumenical organizations, as in his pre-Ohrid period, as well as during his Ohrid period, as well as after the Ohrid period, or after WWII. It rather looks like there was no "shift of paradigm" in his viewpoints regarding participation in the ecumen-

<sup>73</sup> Cf. Ep. Nikolaj Velimirović, "Događaj u Evanstonu," *Sloboda*, 20. oktobar 1954. godine [= SD, XIII, 42–46: 42].

<sup>74</sup> Cf. Rastko Jovic, "Ecumenical Dialogue in the Perspective of the Serbian Orthodox Church," in *Orthodox Handbook on Ecumenism: Resources for Theological Education*, ed. Pantelis Kalaitzidis et al. (Oxford: Regnum Books International — WCC Publications, 2014), 357–364.

ical movement. Moreover, it seems he had a lifelong interest in ecumenism and was committed to ecumenical issues.

Certainly, Velimirović never spoke against ecumenical dialogue. There is no evidence that there is a single word in his opus directed against inter-Christian cooperation, nor any objection to fostering fraternal relations and dialogue with non-Orthodox Churches. Consequently, his attitude toward the World Council of Churches was positive, and it could be assumed that his view of the mission of the World Council of Churches was optimistic.

Velimirović did not stay away from the World Council of Churches, but was very interested in this inter-Christian organization: he tried to get involved in its work, to participate, to give his contribution. Although political circumstances hindered and prevented his formal engagement in the founding of the WCC, he still managed to cultivate close ties with ecumenical leaders. His closeness with the key figures of the post-war ecumenical movement, as well as the testimonies of his at least indirect involvement in the events that preceded and marked the formal foundation of the WCC, show that Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović was a respected and distinguished churchman in the ecumenical context of the time.



Bishop Nikolaj at the Second General Assembly of WCC held in Evanston in 1954 (Courtesy of Goran Veljković, Kragujevac)

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## Both in the East and in the West

*Some Aspects of Holy Bishop Nikolaj's Presence in North America  
(January 9, 1946—March 18, 1956)*

### **Bishop Maxim Vasiljević**

Western American Diocese  
of the Serbian Orthodox Church,  
Los Angeles

### **Introduction: The guardian of the Gate Between East and West**

*Look at our Lord and Savior. The East and the West met in Him in an extraordinary way. He was a perfect Easterner and at the same time a perfect Westerner. He was both a perfect Asian and a perfect American.<sup>1</sup>*

**W**hen I first read those words of Nikolaj Velimirović, Bishop of Ohrid and Žiča (1880–1956) in 1990, I—at that time a young student of theology—was gripped and wanted to know more about the theological vision that lay behind them. At that time, Nikolaj was laying in his grave in Libertyville, IL. When his earthly remains were brought back to Serbia (May 1991), I was blessed to be able to attend the event. The years after provided a perfect opportunity to learn more about this man and his vision so I began to explore it. Nikolaj was already described as “the most profound Serbian theologian of all times.” But he was also the leading pioneer of ecclesiological renewal and genuine ecumenism in the Orthodox Church in the twentieth century. My

<sup>1</sup> Bishop Nikolai Velimirovic, “To Be And To Do: Sermon in Grace Church, New York, March 6, 1946,” in: Episkop Nikolaj, *Sabrana dela*, vol. 13 (Himelstir 1986), 512–515.

quest intensified upon my arrival to USA in 2006 where I became interested in Nikolaj's "third and last American mission," namely the last decade of his life which he spent in the USA from January 9, 1946, till his death on March 18, 1956. A thorough and systematic study of his literary work during this mission is indisputably a challenging task. At least ten books of Nikolaj's wisdom—of intense interest and importance—were published in this period, together with a number of other articles, homilies, essays, letters, etc. Most of his writings have been collected and published in Serbian and so are readily accessible.

For Bishop Nikolaj America was not a new context. He was familiar with it, especially after his first (in 1915) and second mission (1921-23).<sup>2</sup> Nikolaj was a key figure in establishing the first Serbian Diocese in the USA and Canada and played an instrumental role in bringing Mardarije Uskoković as the first bishop of this Diocese.<sup>3</sup> The last decade of his life—the focus of this presentation—began with his immigration to the USA in 1946 (he arrived as a refugee after a tragic experience of WWII) and lasted until March of 1956. Writing daily about various topics, Nikolaj was also lecturing at seminary schools. God ended his earthly life in South Canaan, where he reposed at the beginning of Great Lent, early on Sunday, March 5/18, 1956.

<sup>2</sup> He stayed in the USA during 1915, where he gave many lectures, fighting for the unity of Serbs and South Slavic peoples. The mission was successful, so America sent twenty thousand volunteers to Europe to fight mainly on the Thessaloniki front. From the fall of 1921, he was the administrator of the newly established Serbian American-Canadian diocese (he organized it with all the organs according to church canons) when he spearheaded the initiative to build the monastery of St. Sava in Libertyville. He stayed in America until 1923, participating in peace conferences, ecumenical church meetings, and gatherings. At the personal invitation of his old friend Reverend Dr. William Manning (Rev. Dr. William Manning, †1949), whom he met in 1915, Bishop Nikolaj attended his ordination as the tenth Episcopal Bishop of New York in 1921. In 1927, Nikolaj visited America again. Bishop Irinej Dobrijević describes the nature of those visits and meetings with the Episcopalians. See Irinej Dobrijević, "Sveti Nikolaj srpski i svepravoslavni: Tri američke misije," in *Srpska teologija u XX veku: istraživački problem i rezultati*, knjiga 2, ed. Bogoljub Šijaković (Beograd: Pravoslavni bogoslovski fakultet, 2007), 28-34.

<sup>3</sup> See "Report and Proposals of Bishop Nicholai of Ohrid after Returning from America," in *Serbian Christian Heritage of America*, ed. Bishop Maxim (Vasiljević), (Los Angeles, CA: Sebastian Press, 2019), 312-326.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that the last decade of Nikolaj's life—spent entirely in America—was entirely marked by *literary, didactic* and *ecumenical* activity. It was at that time that he published his best literary and theological works, both in Serbian and the English language. From this period sprung his major works: more than ten books, numerous articles, essays, homilies, encyclicals, hymns,<sup>4</sup> newspaper articles, bulletins, notes, letters, etc. In the USA he published the following books: *The Faith of the Saints* (1949), *The Universe as Symbols and Signs* (*Simvoli i signali*, 1950), *The Land of No Return* (*Zemlja Nedođija*, 1950), *The Life of Saint Sava* (1951), *Kassiana: The Science of Love* (*Kasijana: hrišćansko poimanje ljubavi*, 1952), *The Lord's Harvests* (*Žetve Gospodnje*, 1952), *Splendor: The Science of Miracles* (*Divan: nauka o čudesima*, 1953), *The Only Lover of Mankind* (*Jedini čovekoljubac*, 1958), *Prayerful Poems: Monk Thaddeus and Others* (*Pesme molitvene*, 1952) and *The Lord's First Commandment and the Heavenly Pyramid* (*Prvi Božiji zakon; Rajska piramida*, 1959).

The difficulty of assessing Nikolaj's life from 1946-1956 is closely bound up with the problem of the historical sources which give us information about him. These sources are principally his correspondence—obviously autobiographical and inevitably reflecting his last phase of life. Thus the “search for the historical Nikolaj of 1946-1956” is marked by the search for actual facts echoed in his communication by exchanging letters. In reading his letters,<sup>5</sup> one becomes aware of the considerable haste (rush) in which his theological writings were prepared, as well as the strong desire he had for their clarity and quality.

<sup>4</sup> A special topic for research would be Nikolaj's poetry in the period 1946-1956.

<sup>5</sup> Over thirty notebooks of Bishop Nikolaj came into the hands of Bishop Atanasije of Herzegovina, most of them from 1941 onward, and mostly from the post-war American period of his life. Atanasije once said that he “carried some of these volumes secretly under his cassock, taped to his chest, due to communist persecution and confiscation of materials from the Serbian immigrants, especially from Bishop Nikolaj.” He received most of the volumes from Nikolaj's countryman and godfather Slavko Stoković, who received them from Bishop Dionisije (Milivojević) who in turn had taken them from Nikolaj's room in the Russian Seminary in South Canaan in Pennsylvania (cf. Episkop Atanasije (Jevtić) (ed.), *Sveti vladika Nikolaj Ohridski i Žički* (Kraljevo: Sveti manastir Žiča 2003), 536).

Specifically, from 1952 he hastened to achieve as much as possible.<sup>6</sup> Thus, his *correspondence* from 1946 to 1956 provides an extensive overview of his life, presents important testimonies about his character, and offers essential insights into his theology.

Unlike most writers of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, which dealt with mere moral or confessional theological topics, Nikolaj's opus wove together major areas of theology and indicated a remarkable paradigm shift and synthesis. Nikolaj's own theology is anchored in the mystery of Christ, and on that basis he developed an understanding of the Church that has had a profound *ecumenical* impact.

My object in this paper is limited to an attempt to look at the available material with attention fixed on two particular points. The first point is related to his ecumenical work: how are we to assess Nikolaj's ecclesial openness? The other point is related to his pan-Orthodox activities. I will proceed to examine the existing evidence as it appears in chronological order, bearing constantly in mind that the work of Nikolaj is a work of a theologian, a minister, a missionary, a writer, a poet, an apostle, a saint, a man of dialogue, who along with his many other attributes is regarded, with good reason, as an Enlightener of the Americas. My goal is also to elucidate the issue of Nikolaj's supposed "theological development": opinions are divided as to whether there is an evolution in his theological thinking or not. Is it true and justifiable to say that he gradually abandoned certain views and accepted others? Or is it more truthful—as I believe is the case—to hold that, without neglecting certain developments, his entire vision remained unchanged? The reason I am saying this lies in the fact that although there are the stages in the spiritual life, they express more the dynamism of one's life trajectory, which is never static or unchangeable. Even more, the vision proposed by the ecclesial experience does not stem from some "progressive maturing,"<sup>7</sup> but penetrates into the present by its own initia-

<sup>6</sup> For example, on February 6 of that year, he writes from South Canaan to Presbyter Aleksa Todorović in Munich: "I'm in a hurry for reasons you can understand, because I'm getting ready for the *Way*" (Episkop Nikolaj, *Sabrana dela*, vol. 13, 667).

<sup>7</sup> The spiritual life cannot be completely exhausted in a schema of "purification-illumination-perfection," because human life expectancy provides an insufficient time span for achieving salvation.

tive, “as a thief in the night” (cf. Rev. 16:15, Mat. 24:43,1 Thess. 5:2). As a minister of the Truth, Nikolaj lived eschatologically, and eschatology is not compatible with progress but with illumination which is a gift of the Holy Spirit. The extent to which this approach toward the life and teaching of bishop Nikolaj is permissible must be examined with special reference to the theology of the Church.

### *I. Ecumenical engagement*

The first encounter with Nikolaj’s genuine ecumenical activity takes place in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century with his three distinct American missions: 1915, 1921, and 1927.<sup>8</sup> A careful study of this activity reveals both the content and the method of his approach. The spreading of Nikolaj’s word about Jesus Christ to English-speaking Christians involved the use of concepts and paradigms taken from the modern environment. The spiritual and existential milieu of the people Nikolaj tried to address was that of the Americans in New York. His earlier stays in this metropolis paved the way for Nikolaj to be re-received into the American Christian community without hesitation. For this reason, in these first years, some believed that “through abiding in the Protestant communities Bishop Nikolaj might do more for the SOC and the Serbs, especially through his acquaintances and contacts with the representatives of other Christian confessions, primarily Protestants.”<sup>9</sup>

Indeed, soon upon his arrival to the USA on January 9, 1946, Bishop Nikolaj began to receive invitations to participate in different events, mostly conferences. The reputation of a renown and learned bishop who found himself anew in the “New world” incited invitations to a few ecumenical events, at three of which Nikolaj contributed major papers. Already on March 1, 1946, he delivered a sermon *On Inner Harmony* at the Holy Trinity church in New York which he began with the

<sup>8</sup> See Bishop Irinej (Dobrijevic), “St. Nikolai of Zhicha: A Contemporary Orthodox Witness,” in *Serbian Christian Heritage of America*, ed. Bishop Maxim (Vasiljević) (Los Angeles, CA: Sebastian Press, 2010), 155-164.

<sup>9</sup> Nemanja Andrijašević, “George Radin on Bishop Dr. Nicholai Velimirovich and the Serbian Orthodox Church in America,” *Nicholai Studies*, 1/2 (2021): 370.



words: “A quarter century ago, I preached in this church on behalf of the starving people of China.”<sup>10</sup> A month later (April 4, 1946), he delivered a sermon *New and Old Treasures* at St. John Cathedral in New York. This status and reputation brought to him on June 4, 1946, the honorary award “Doctorate of Sacred Theology” at Columbia University in New York for demonstrated “compassion, holiness, and great spiritual strength.”<sup>11</sup>

Whether addressing eminent gatherings or authoring articles for various audiences, Nikolaj was offering both simple and profound philosophical insights consistently. His words, spoken at the Anglican Church of Mercy in New York, in May (or March) 1946, with a title “To Be and to Work,”<sup>12</sup> broke new ground by raising frankly and very publicly the most important East-West relations with utmost discernment, inviting a calm reappraisal of it, and reconciling ontology and ethics. He reiterated there his hope that, if the proper conditions are satisfied, “America will astonish the world by its spiritual awakening and by its Christian strength and greatness, just as it has astonished the world by its material development and scientific inventions.”<sup>13</sup> He concluded with words of encouragement and Christian hope: “May our Merciful God grant you the mercy to go from glory to glory; may the Holy Spirit inspire you to be and to work according to the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>14</sup>

These first homilies in New York in 1946 were appreciatively acknowledged by many as an invitation to both Church and world lead-

<sup>10</sup> Nicholai Velimirovic, “On Inner Harmony,” in: Episkop Nikolaj, *Sabrana dela*, vol. 13, 593.

<sup>11</sup> More in: Bogdan Lubardić, „Dodela doktorata honoris causa episkopu Nikolaju Velimiroviću na Kolumbijskom univerzitetu,” in *Sveti vladika Nikolaj ohridski i žički*, ed. Atanasije Jevtić (Kraljevo: Manastirska eparhija žička, Manastir Žiča 2003), 200-206. Upon the announcement of the news of the honorary doctorate, he received a letter from the Church of St. Sava in London, in which the members congratulate him (at the address of St. Sava in Libertyville), and the first among the signatories was Slobodan Jovanović (Folder *Zica Simposion*).

<sup>12</sup> Bishop Nikolai, “To Be and to Do,” in *Serbian Christian Heritage of America*, ed. Bishop Maxim (Vasiljević), (Los Angeles, CA: Sebastian Press, 2019), 959-961.

<sup>13</sup> Bishop Nikolai, “To Be and to Do,” 961.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

ers to engage in a patient and fraternal dialogue. Such boldness has been an ecumenical blessing. Nikolaj has been certain and fearless in advocating what he understands to be basic ecumenical priorities, and in urging Christians of all traditions to draw the consequences of those principles. Hence, he showed a genuine concern for the whole universe, to which his entire life attests and which is exemplified by the following important words about America towards the close of his own life:

I came from the Old World to this New World. Which one of the two is better, the New one or the Old one? I cannot tell. However, the One Who revealed all truths told both you and me that a wise host brings both new and old things out of his treasury (cf. Matt. 13:52). Not just the new or merely the old, but both. Our Lord Jesus Christ honored the Old Testament and at the same time He revealed the New Testament to us. Now we, His followers, safeguard the one and the other as a singular Holy Book. The greatest wisdom consists in protecting the old and the new treasures alike. The separation of one from the other only leads to poverty, insecurity and confusion.<sup>15</sup>

His insights have offered new perspectives on the Church, particularly regarding the demands of evangelization and enculturation where-in he commends the practice of the Church Fathers.

During the course of his many visits he participated in peace conferences, church ecumenical meetings and gatherings. Among such gatherings we should mention the famous assembly of the World Council of Churches [WCC] in Evanston in 1954, which Nikolaj attended as an (un)accredited visitor and wrote a report. The content of Nikolaj's evaluation of the Council will not occupy us here in detail. It will suffice for our purpose to make a few observations concerning the magnitude and the message of this Council, since its importance did not escape the attention of later generations in the ecumenical movement.

In his inspired report from the Second Meeting of the World Council of Churches held in Evanston, Illinois, 15-31 August 1954, Nikolaj begins by emphasizing the positive side: "the event of the century" in

<sup>15</sup> Nicholai Velimirovic, "New and Old Treasures," *Orthodoxy: Herald of the Serbian Orthodox Church* (October-December 1960), 41-42.

which “one name brought all together and closer—Jesus Christ.”<sup>16</sup> Deeply impressed by Florovsky’s statement, Nikolaj underlined his points. “As mentioned later (in the statement of Florovsky) the fact that if each denomination contains only a part of the Christian faith, only the Orthodox Church contains the totality and plenitude of the true faith, ‘which was transmitted to the saints once and for all’ (Jude 3).” To acknowledge this, Nikolaj must have first accepted the theological presuppositions formulated by Florovsky and worked with an ecclesiology of the Church Fathers. Yet, this does not prevent a certain dialectic between East and West while allowing Christ to be the focal point of unity between the churches. In Evanston, Nikolaj’s “ecumenical” sentiment was imbued with a deep pan-Christian mood, so he said: “One name brought everyone together and made them all *familiar*—Jesus Christ.”<sup>17</sup> Alluding to the theme of the assembly, Nikolaj elucidated that “hope in Christ is based on the true and whole faith, for it is written: first faith, then hope and then love, otherwise it is a house without foundation.” Furthermore, Nikolaj touches upon the important topic of eschatology. For him, the Church, particularly in her eucharistic synaxis, anticipates sacramentally the ultimate salvation of the whole creation. “The same applies to eschatology which was contained in that faith from the beginning. Without such faith, it is difficult to approach with truth the Christ who is considered as the complete Hope, as well as the eschatological Christ who is destined to accomplish human history and to be the eternal Judge.”<sup>18</sup> Regarding the thorny issue of unity, Nikolaj’s perspective is right when emphasizing that everyone must be prepared not to eliminate but to affirm the first millennium of the Church history in order to achieve unity. “The union of all the churches cannot be achieved through mutual concessions but only by adherence by all to the one true faith in its entirety, as it was bequeathed by the Apostles and formulated at the Ecumenical Councils; in other words, by the return of all Christians in the one and indivisible Church

<sup>16</sup> Nikolaj Velimirović, “Dogadžaj u Evanstonu” first published in review “Sloboda,” October 20, 1954, and reprinted in Episkop Nikolaj, *Sabrana dela*, vol. 13 (Himmelsthür, 1986), 42-46.

<sup>17</sup> Velimirović, “Dogadžaj u Evanstonu,” 43.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

to which belonged the ancestors of all Christians in the entire world during the first ten centuries after Christ. It is the Holy Orthodox Church.”<sup>19</sup> Just like Fr. Georges Florovsky, Nikolaj also believed that the new generation is called upon to show that the solution to the “ecumenical question” is in the *consummation* (fulfilment) of the Church, in the fullness of a Catholic tradition, true and intact, but renewed and growing.<sup>20</sup>



Bishop Nicholai leading the Procession at the funeral of Bishop William Manning Tenth, Episcopal Bishop of New York. On the left is president D. W. Eisenhower, St. John the Divine Cathedral, New York, New York, 1949 (Archive of the Serbian Orthodox Church in North and South America, Saint Sava Monastery in Libertyville, Illinois. The subjects in the Archive do not yet have catalog numbers)

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Georges Florovsky, *Ways of Russian Theology*, vol. 2 (Collected Works, vol. 4, Nordland Publishing Company, 1972), 301-308.

Next, from what has been said it is plain that those who claim that Nikolaj was “ecumenical” only in his first phase should definitely read more carefully some of the works he wrote during the last decade of his life. It is not easy to put a man under a category, a cliché. You would think that Nikolaj is an ultra-nationalist when at an ecumenical gathering, for example in Evanston in 1952, he hangs out with the heterodox (“heretics,” the vocabulary of some super-Orthodox) or condemns nationalism as paganism (“save us, God, of the godless Serbian nationalists”), etc. In general, the characterization of Nikolaj by nationalists is rude, superficial, and incorrect. Perhaps I may be best able to illustrate the ecumenical openness of this great teacher by reading his words in the concluding remark of his report from the Second Meeting of the World Council of Churches held in Evanston.

Since the world church movements for unification began, the Orthodox churches responded to the call with a lot of goodwill and friendly cooperation. As they did before Evanston, so they will certainly do after Evanston. Conferences like this have been of mutual benefit so far, because they served to get to know each other and create good will for friendly cooperation, in the practical field... They saw in Evanston how difficult it is to unite all Protestant groups, let alone with Orthodoxy. If they were surprised by the Orthodox Declaration, they should appreciate the honesty of the compiler of the Declaration. And we appreciate their well-known Protestant honesty.

Not accepting the sharp East-West antithesis nor the barren anti-Westernism represented among some Orthodox theologians, he was a theologian of the Catholic Tradition. This conciliatory attitude transpires through his letter to Winston Churchill on March 27, 1946, where he states that the Serbians, together with the Greeks, have been “*the guardians of the gate between east and west, and the very backbone of the Balkan peninsula.*”<sup>21</sup>

Since what was bequeathed to us by St. Nikolaj is useful for us today, it is necessary to emphasize the existential elements of his theol-

<sup>21</sup> Nikolaj Velimirović, “A Letter to Winston Churchill,” in: Željko Z. Jelić, *Nepoznata pisma svetog Nikolaja Srpskog* (Beograd: Zavod za unapređivanje obrazovanja i vaspitanja, 2009), 15. (Emphasis mine.)

ogy, such as the theme of freedom, history, etc., and on the basis of them to continue to achieve a necessary “synthesis” of his theology, as he had in his vision. When Nikolaj spoke at St. Vladimir’s Seminary on February 2, 1953, about the “The Orthodox Doctrine on Causality,”<sup>22</sup> he said:

Our religious mysticism is nothing misty, nothing nebulous, nothing obscure or mystified. It is our clear and perennial *doctrine of causality*. If we have to call this doctrine by an *ism*, we may call it *personalism*... Both naturalism and materialism are a teaching of blind fatalism without the smallest door of escape or the smallest window for sunshine. We Orthodox Christians must resist this blind fatalism, as all Christians should do, and defend our intelligent doctrine of personal causality of and in the world.<sup>23</sup>

In the above-mentioned talk he characteristically stated:

Christianity is a religion not so much of principles, rules and precepts, but primarily and above all of personal attachments, in the first place an affectionate attachment to the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, and through him to other members of the Church, the living and the dead... The benefits we are drawing from such personalism in the doctrine of causality are manifold... It helps us enormously toward educating and forming strong personal, or individual, characters. It inspires us with a spirit of optimistic heroism in suffering, self-sacrificing, and in enduring martyrdom for Christ’s sake beyond description, as testified in our Church history.<sup>24</sup>

Nikolaj’s engagement with the need for witnessing the Gospel in ways that meet the cultural demands of the people led him to the innovation of admiring contemporary works, meaningful even in our postmodern era. Throughout this overview, Nikolaj’s openness for the American context is obvious. In one of his “American” sermons in South Canaan, Pennsylvania, he talks about the difference between Orthodox and Protestants:

<sup>22</sup> Nicholai D. Velimirovich, “The Orthodox Doctrine on Causality,” in: Episkop Nikolaj, *Sabrana dela*, vol. 13, 385-390.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 385-386.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 390.

There is a big difference between us Orthodox and certain Protestant groups. They do not respect the Saints, because they think that the souls of deceased Christians unconsciously lie together with the bodies in the graves, waiting in the dust for the day of the Last Judgment when they will wake up... We are incomparably richer than them. We know, from the experience of the Church, that the departed are alive and conscious right now; and they take care of us, pray for us and wait for us with joyful love to join them in another world. We are grateful to America for declaring this day of remembrance / for the deceased / a national holiday. This day, like every Memorial Day in our calendar, is something more than just a memory. It is a living relationship, a sublime encounter of our souls with those who have presented themselves to us. It is a real encounter of love with love, and life with life. Yes, it is a day for wonderful inspirations.<sup>25</sup>

Nikolaj's ecumenism was closely tied with his pan-Orthodox sensibility. The next chapter will take up this subject.

## *II. Pan-Orthodox engagement*

As Fr. Alexander Schmemmann observed, "Bishop Nikolai was not just a great Serb. He is the manifestation of Orthodox spirituality for all Orthodox people and occupies a position among those who work to eternalize the Orthodox faith in America."<sup>26</sup> These non-exaggerated remarks of the late Fr. Alexander reveal the pan-Orthodox radiance of St. Nikolaj.

On a pan-Orthodox level, an eloquent example of his frankness and of his pan-Orthodoxy is his willingness to view the Serbian Orthodox Church in America within the context of the ancient all-Orthodox Canonical Tradition, which is most eloquently exemplified by his prophetic words:

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 99. A Sermon of Bishop Nikolaj, St. Tikhon Seminary, May 30, 1953 (On Christ's Martyrs in our Days), cited from personal notes.

<sup>26</sup> Alexander Schmemmann, "The Blessing of Bishop Nikolai," in *Serbian Christian Heritage of America*, ed. Bishop Maxim (Vasiljević), 78.

A time may not be far off when there will be a United Orthodox Church in America, which will include all the present Eastern national Churches in this country, a Church with one central administrative authority. I see in each of our now individual Churches a tendency toward such an end... And when by God's Providence the time will be ripe for the accomplishment of such a unity, I do not dare to doubt that the venerable heads of all our Orthodox Churches in Europe, Asia, and Africa, always led by the Holy Spirit, will give their blessing for the organization of a new autonomous sister Church in America.<sup>27</sup>

St. Nikolaj sensed that subjugating the Orthodox ecclesial experience to ethnic provincialisms (Hellenism, Serbianism, "Russian world," etc.) is not sustainable in the new world. He noticed that there was a movement among the Orthodox which wants one united Orthodox Church in America that would be faithful to the conciliar system of governance. This Church would encompass all the Orthodox Churches regardless of their ethnic roots. As Christos Yannaras remarks, this united Church would not hinder the local dioceses or parishes from continuing to function in their particular language, "but the central thrust of this Church will be a contemporary English-speaking Orthodoxy with a clear and dynamic theological and sociological independence that is capable of articulating metaphysical truths for contemporary man. This type of English-speaking Orthodoxy is capable of incorporating fundamental Orthodox tradition (theology, worship, and art). It will separate Tradition from ethnicism and psychological provincialism. It will elevate it to a dynamic catalyst for spiritual works in American society."<sup>28</sup>

A letter of Bishop Nikolaj in which he congratulates Greek Archbishop Athenagoras on his election to the Ecumenical Patriarchate, November 4, 1948, is highly indicative of his understanding of the role of the Ecumenical Patriarchate:

<sup>27</sup> Bishop Nikolai Velimirovich, "The Eastern Orthodox Church in America and Its Future," *Orthodoxy, Herald of the Serbian Orthodox Church in USA*, 1961, № 3. Reprinted and quoted from Episkop Nikolaj, *Sabrana dela*, vol. 13, 565-572: 571.

<sup>28</sup> Christos Yannaras, *The Meaning of Reality: Essays on Existence and Communion, Eros, and History* (Los Angeles, CA: Sebastian Press, 2011), 146.



November 4, 48

His Grace  
The Archbishop Athenagoras  
10 E. 79 Street  
New York, N.Y.

Your Grace  
My dear Athenagoras,

According to press informations you have been elected the Ecumenic Patriarch. I hope the news is true. I do not doubt that your elevation to the throne of St. John Chrysostom has been by God's good Providence.

Living in America for 18 years, you have been able not only to make many friends, but also to accumulate tremendous experiences and enlarge your horizons. And so armed with all necessary spiritual arms, you shall be able, I am sure, to be in reality Ecumenic, thinking, praying and caring for Orthodoxy in general, and not only of the small community of Czarigrad. Be sure, that you will have in the Serbian hierarchy a friend always ready for brotherly cooperation in every effort to promote the orthodox ideals in the world, to the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Among the Serbian hierarchs, I have had the privilege to call you my friend and brother for over a quarter of a century.

May the light of the Lord shine upon your new path and the protection of the Holy Virgin never fail you.

With best wishes and prayers I remain,

Your brother and servant in the  
Lord

*Bishop Nicholas*

Bishop Nicholas

A letter by Bishop Nicholai Velimirović in which he congratulates Greek Archbishop Athenagoras on his election for Ecumenical Patriarchate, November 4, 1948 (Archive of the Serbian Orthodox Church in North and South America, Saint Sava Monastery in Libertyville, Illinois. The subjects in the Archive do not yet have catalog numbers)

Living in America for 18 years, you have been able not only to make many friends, but also to accumulate tremendous experiences and enlarge your horizons. And so armed with all necessary spiritual arms, you shall be able, I am sure, to be in reality Ecumenic, thinking, praying and caring for Orthodoxy in general, and not only of the small community in Czarigrad. Be sure, that you will have in the Serbian hierarch a friend always ready for brotherly cooperation in every effort to promote the orthodox ideals in the world, to the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>29</sup>

A careful consideration of American “missiology” by Bishop Nikolaj helps us to adequately assess the complex position of the Orthodox immigration in America. Seen through his eyes,

The first settlers were very simple people, hard workers, farmers. They were just the kind of people who were authentic bearers of that threefold Christian ideal, i.e., of spiritual vision, of moral discipline and of competition in doing good. This was the backbone of their souls, inherited from their fathers in the old countries. They lived up to it as much as they could in this country under changed circumstances. And that was, and still is, their greatest contribution to building American civilization, along with their other contributions of sweat and blood—of sweat in mines and factories, and of blood on America’s battlefields.<sup>30</sup>

From this observation of Nikolaj springs a series of truths that are relevant to our subject. Thanks to their faith in God early immigrants were ready for sacrifice, and not because of some sort of ideology. “They never got rich in this rich country, for they had to divide their modest earnings into three parts: one part for their subsistence and the education of their children, a second part they sent to their families in the old country, and the third they gave to church, school, insurance, and charities.”<sup>31</sup> Faith in God and the Church expressively created the model for an élan of compassion among the immigrants, inspiring action and shaping our broader Orthodox social vision.

<sup>29</sup> Published in *Serbian Christian Heritage of America*, 235.

<sup>30</sup> Bishop Nicholai, “The Eastern Orthodox Church in America and Its Future,” 570.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

They built churches and called priests from the old country... They preserved their religious traditions. They cultivated the ancient virtues. They delighted in their national music and songs, in their national costumes and dramatic performances. Personally, I have a deep admiration for these old Orthodox generations in America, both for those who passed away in the faith, and for those who are still living by their faith. They have been a spiritual and constructive component of the New World's humanity. I dare say that in their own way they have been heroic generations no less than other national groups, now blended into one great American nation. In their modesty these humble people never expected a poet to laud them or a historian to describe them.<sup>32</sup>

This leads Nikolaj to a simple but astounding point.

Alas, the last of these old Orthodox generations is rapidly passing away. Their sons and grandsons, and their daughters and granddaughters are now coming to the field. And this new generation is American born. They speak good English but little or no Greek, Serbian, Russian, Romanian, Syrian or Albanian. And no wonder: They attend American schools, many of them served in the US military, they have grown in conformity with the American standard of living, their hearts are not divided between two countries. They are naturally Americans, and they intend to remain American. Accordingly, they have some demands respecting the Church of their fathers.<sup>33</sup>

Anticipating some of modern challenges, along those lines, Nikolaj recognizes the need of the younger generations.

They want English to replace national languages in church services. They desire to hear sermons in English. This is a legitimate desire. Our wise priests of every national Orthodox Church in this country are already preaching in both English and in their respective national tongue. They are in a difficult position at present, for they have on one hand to be considerate of the elderly (elderly generations of Moms and Pops) who do not understand English well, and on the other hand they are willing to respond to the desire and need of the younger generations. In this

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

matter I think evolution is better than revolution, for the Church is the mother of both the old and the young.<sup>34</sup>

These words of the leading Serbian theologian, Nikolaj Velimirović, sum up the position of the greatest number of Orthodox theologians in the second half of the twentieth century. His insights shed important light on our contemporary experience of time and history, our existence as human persons, and the complexities of our life in the *polis* and the *ekklēsia*.

Nikolaj wanted the valuable works of other non-Orthodox authors to be translated into Serbian, such as the book by Philip Schaff, *The Person of Jesus Christ: A Miracle of History*: “So that the additions to Svečanik are not only mine, I suggest that one of those intelligent colleagues of yours translate the famous book from German, Professor F. Schaff, *Die Person Jesu Christi das Wunder der Geschichte*.”<sup>35</sup>

Let me conclude this chapter by quoting Nikolaj’s *Story of the White Christ*.

*Once upon a time, long, long ago, the first Christian missionaries came to Scandinavia from the East. They were Syrians, with pronounced dark complexions.*

*The fair-looking Scandinavian chiefs and a multitude of people swarmed around them with great curiosity depicted on their faces excited by the strange external appearance of these missionaries. With conviction and zeal, the missionaries preached to them of Christ, the true God, who descended from his heavenly glory of sheer love for men, and who brought salvation to all mankind by His words, deeds, miracles, sufferings and the victory over death.*

*– What did He look like? – asked Scandinavian chiefs.*

*– Just like one of us, – the missionaries answered.*

*– In that case, said the chiefs, we can’t accept your God, although we like His teachings and His character as you described it, for we don’t like a black God. We are a white people, and our ancestors were white, and our gods are white too. In our sacred poetry, called Runas, all of our*

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Nikolaj Velimirović, Pismo proti Aleksi Todoroviću od 6. februara 1952. godine, in: Episkop Nikolaj, *Sabrana dela*, vol. 13, 667-669: 669.

*heroes were white, and they fought against a black people in a far-off country called India. Therefore, go away from us in peace.*

*Greatly disappointed and saddened, the missionaries returned home and reported to their superior, the Bishop. The Bishop, being a wise man, used St. Paul's strategy, namely, to be to the Jews as a Jew, and to the Greeks as a Greek "for the Gospel's sake" in order to gain as many followers as possible (1 Cor. 9). Accordingly, they picked a team of blond, fair-looking missionaries, and sent them to Scandinavia.*

*Now when these new missionaries started to preach to the Scandinavians about Christ the Savior of the world, the Scandinavian chiefs asked them.*

- What did He look like?*
- Like one of us.*
- A white man?*
- Yes, a white man.*
- A white God?*
- Yes, a white God.*

*After this assurance was given, the Christian faith was introduced and established, without obstruction, among the Nordic princes and people of Scandinavia.<sup>36</sup>*

Nikolaj's approach—nicely illustrated in this *Story of the White Christ*—brought many fruits. Indeed, Nikolaj left his American counterparts with an impression of himself as an unbiased man, a man who was free of prejudice. According to Canon E. West, prior to the arrival of Archimandrite Nikolaj in 1915 the Anglican community had regarded the "exotic Orthodox faith" as something very remote. In his "Recollections of Bishop Nikolai," he writes that it was actually Bishop Nikolaj who revealed Orthodoxy to the other branches of Christianity in both England and America. The words of Metropolitan Amfilohije describe this in the most adequate way:

To reduce Nikolai to the level of some national bard would be a great sin against him. Bishop Nikolai's personality was too immense and too

<sup>36</sup> Nikolai Velimirovich, "A white Christ and a young Christ," in: *Episkop Nikolaj, Sabrana dela*, knjiga 13, 616.

complex for it to be condensed into any earthly equation or size. This is what many Serbs overlook. They especially overlook it when they view him through the defective and superficially understood prism of *Nebraska Srbija* (*Heavenly Serbia*), identifying him with chauvinism, absolutist nationalism, exclusiveness, and introversion into his biological existence, as it is said nowadays. Bishop Nikolai was and remains a great preacher of universal horizons, a philosopher, theologian, pedagogue, a rare wise-man and poet. At the very least he discovered the mystery of the greatest and universal One. In the universal, cosmic and super-cosmic he discovered the meaning of the smallest, of those who at first glance are the most insignificant. His wisdom and love were incarnated in everything: equally in a worm under the bark of a bush, in the constellations, or in pan-human existence. His care touched the invisible atom, the most despised creature, especially those who are most despised and lowliest among men. His care and love were pan-human care and love.<sup>37</sup>

### *III. Writing books and teaching theology*

If we consider the irregular conditions of Nikolaj's life in the USA, ten books in ten years and a multitude of other writings indicate a prolific writer. In this period, we have perhaps some of his best works. The variety of titles and topics indicates a writer of complex knowledge and strikingly profound insights: 1. *The Faith of the Saints*, (Pittsburgh, PA, Serb National Federation 1949); 2. *The Universe as Symbols and Signs*<sup>38</sup> (Libertyville 1950); 3. *The Land of No Return*,<sup>39</sup> 1950, published in Canada); 4. *The Life of Saint Sava* (1951, published by the Serbian American-Canadian Diocese); 5. *Kassiana: The Science of Love* (1952); 6. *The Lord's Harvests* (1952; second edition 1953); 7. *Divan (Splendor: The Science of Miracles, 1953)*; 8. *The Only Lover of Mankind* (his last, unfinished work,

<sup>37</sup> Metropolitan Amphilochius Radovich, "The Theanthropic Ethos of Bishop Nikolai Velimirovich," in *Serbian Christian Heritage of America*, ed. Bishop Maxim (Vasiljević), 130-131.

<sup>38</sup> As a sixteen-year-old, the author of the present study read this work of Nikolaj's while writing an essay in St. Sava Seminary in Belgrade.

<sup>39</sup> The main hero of the book is the warrior Spaso Spasović, through whose life drama Nikolaj manages to portray the Serbian attitude toward Nazism.

published 1958); 9. *Prayerful Poems: Monk Thaddeus and others* (1952); 10. *The Lord's First Commandment and the Heavenly Pyramid* (1959).

Bishop Nikolaj spoke not only at various American gatherings and settings, travelling across the U.S., but also visited a number of Serbian communities. He began publishing his first *books* (in addition to his numerous homilies) in America three years after his arrival in America. In 1949, he wrote a manual of religious studies for Sunday schools, *The Faith of the Saints*.<sup>40</sup> It is still a useful book for American converts into Orthodoxy today. Next, he writes a book *The Universe as Symbols and Signs*<sup>41</sup> (Libertyville 1950). It is a valuable popular writing showing (in a Wittgenstein-like way) that the meaning of the world lies outside itself.<sup>42</sup> The main character of the book *The Land of No Return (Zemlja nedodjija*, 1950, published in Canada) is the warrior Spaso Spasović, through

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Bozidar Dragicevich, *American Serb* (MA thesis, University of Minnesota, 1973), 117.

<sup>41</sup> On Dec. 31, 1951, he writes to Presbyter Aleksa Torodorović in Munich submitting to his discernment the editing and publication of the book *The Universe as Symbols and Signs (Simboli i signali)*. Cf. Pismo proti Aleksi Todoroviću od 31. decembra 1951. godine, in: Episkop Nikolaj, *Sabrana dela*, vol. 13, 665.

<sup>42</sup> "Where do we stand today after thousands of years of human thinking and searching? We stand before a raised but never satisfactorily answered question. Since men as men could not solve this mystery, could not we turn to some other source of knowledge? For instance, to the Holy Scripture. What does that Book of God say of the substance of which this world is made and moulded? Nothing. Absolutely nothing whatever. That means that the Creator of the world did not think it to be necessary to lift the curtain of this mystery of His. Nor did He as the incarnated Savior of the world reveal that mystery to men. If the Bible does not reveal anything of the essential substrata of the things of this world, it reveals very much, almost on every page, the significance of those things. The knowledge and wisdom that God revealed to man relate not to what the things are but to what they mean. According to the Book as understood by the Christian saints, we could even say, that the essence of things is their meaning. Therefore, the Holy Scriptures of God do not reveal anything about the essence of things and beings of this world, but they reveal much, very much, about their meaning. For humans, the necessary logic, which God revealed, does not refer to the essence but the meaning of things. The meaning of the matter is salutary literacy, which the heavenly Father proposed to all His children. It could even be said that the verbal essence of things is the meaning of things." (Nikolai Velimirovich, *The Universe as Symbols and Signs: An Essay on Mysticism in the Eastern Church* (South Canaan: St. Tikhon's Monastery Press 2014), chapter 19).

whose life drama Nikolaj manages to portray the Serbian attitude toward Nazism. In 1951, another work by Nikolaj was published in English, *The Life of Saint Sava*, by the American-Canadian Diocese. “A brilliant biographical work adorned with the author’s meditations, written in a rarely attractive style and in the most reverent manner,” wrote Fr. Boža Dragičević in the book *American Serb*.<sup>43</sup> This biography of St. Sava belongs to so-called “hagiographic realism.”

In the work *The Lord’s Harvests* (1952) the history of the Church is “explained as a continual chain of its victories, which Nicholai calls – the *harvests* of the Lord,” wrote Fr. Boža Dragičević in *American Serb*.<sup>44</sup> Nikolaj himself explained (April 30, 1952) the reason for writing this work: “Regarding the *The Lord’s Harvests*... the occasion was given to me by some local Protestant pastors, who constantly talk about the earthly paradise and the thousand-year kingdom of Christ. Before, I didn’t even think about that topic...<sup>45</sup> The book *Splendor: The Science of Miracles* (*Divan*, 1953) is a description of a spiritual movement in Serbia.<sup>46</sup> According to the late Bishop Atanasije, “although Nikolai’s last work, *The Only Lover of Mankind*, indicates that Christ remains his primary literary theme, the aforementioned two works, *Cassiana* and *The Centuries on Love*, are nevertheless the best, the most concise, and the most profound exposition of the Christological mystery of that very same Lover of Mankind—Jesus Christ—Who is the Same yesterday, today, and forever (Heb. 13:8).”<sup>47</sup>

Writing every day about diverse issues, Nikolaj was also teaching at the temporary Seminary school of St Sava in Libertyville, Illinois, and in Russian academies: The Holy Trinity in Jordanville, New York, and St. Tikhon in South Canaan, Pennsylvania, while at St. Vladimir Seminary he talked several times.

<sup>43</sup> Dragicevich, *American Serb*, 130.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> Nikolaj Velimirović, Pismo proti Aleksu Todoroviću od 30. aprila 1951. godine, in: Episkop Nikolaj, *Sabrana dela*, vol. 13, 676-677: 677.

<sup>46</sup> He planned to write this book earlier. See: Pismo proti Aleksu Todoroviću od 6. aprila 1951. godine, in: Episkop Nikolaj, *Sabrana dela*, vol. 13, 673-674.

<sup>47</sup> Bishop Athanasius (Yevtich), “The Christology of St. Nikolai, Bishop of Ohrid and Zhicha,” in *Serbian Christian Heritage of America*, ed. Bishop Maxim (Vasiljević), 154.



Fr. Alexander Schmemmann, dean of St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary and widely acclaimed as an ecumenical leader and teacher, thus described the significance of St. Nikolaj for St. Vladimir's:

There are only a few events in the life and work of St. Vladimir's Seminary that we can recall with greater joy and gratitude than the help we have received from Bishop Nikolai of blessed repose. We were but a very small and poor institution when Bishop Nikolai arrived and delivered lectures to our students. The memories of Bishop Nikolai's visits on the day of his patron saint are still vivid. We prayed to God together with him and for him. We were conscious of the fact that God had given us the privilege to be together with the most prominent Orthodox Bishop of the twentieth century. . . His help and understanding for our work was of great profit to us all. He forever remains a living part of our school.<sup>48</sup>

*Instead of a conclusion: Nikolaj as always the same*

The title of this work indicates that St. Nikolaj was always naturally, actively, and willingly anchored both in the East and in the West.<sup>49</sup> During his entire presence in North America from January 9, 1946 till March 18, 1956, this holy hierarch, as a person with such great sensitivity, was friends with everyone.

If we want to get to know a person—that is, a person as another identity—then we should not limit our judgment to what is visible, but ought to try to somehow “see” what cannot be seen with a naked eye. This means that various aspects of the Other (and other), that are not being revealed to us, have yet to be learned. In that sense, whenever we look at our neighbor, we also take into consideration what is not visible to the eye. In a personal encounter, one is always revealed more than our vision can discern because the truth about the encounter is above nature.

As the late Metropolitan Kallistos Ware said,

<sup>48</sup> Schmemmann, “The Blessing of Bishop Nikolai,” 78.

<sup>49</sup> See his already quoted words in a letter to Winston Churchill (“the guardians of the gate between east and west, and the very backbone of the Balkan peninsula”).

Without abandoning our tradition, we must make a leap of imaginative compassion, seeking to understand the doubts and hesitations of our contemporaries from within. That is why the testimonies of Dostoyevsky and Kierkegaard—yes, even Sartre—are of value to contemporary Orthodox theology. Only if we make this leap of intellectual and intuitive imagination can we provide the West with an Orthodoxy that speaks to the living man in his predicament and responds to his crying needs. The thinkers of the Russian emigration sought to make such a leap, which is why their writings caused great enthusiasm among the non-Orthodox.<sup>50</sup>

I have quoted this citation of Kallistos because it summarizes what I have discussed in this paper. To know Nikolaj, one must go out of one's own ideological box and stop speaking about him in a journalistic manner with a pious-ethnic rhetorical tone. Such attempts result in obscuring and undermining the spiritual, theological, and philosophical magnitude of Nikolaj as a thinker. Nikolaj has bequeathed a singular theological legacy that exceeds the established perceptions of his time. So, presenting Nikolaj as a "nationalist"<sup>51</sup> seems to involve a one-sidedness, calling for further clarifications and even corrections in order to do full justice to the ecclesial roots and ethos of his theology.

Given this picture and the scale of the activities, it is not surprising that St. Nikolaj led his life in an elusive and indeterminate way. A hugely influential minister and writer, Bishop Nikolaj eludes classifications and "periodization" (dividing his lifetime into periods of less and more development), variously linked with ecumenism, slavophilia, modernism, nationalism, etc. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, his theological train of thought grew stronger and was never broken. His appearance marks an era of change in the ecclesiastical and theological paradigm in Serbian theology, as a result of his spirituality, ecclesiastical work, and theological position. The amount of his written work alone is awe-in-

<sup>50</sup> Kallistos Timothy Ware, "Response to Nicholas Vasileidis," *Eastern Church Review* 4/2 (1972), 182.

<sup>51</sup> Metropolitan Amphilochius Radovich, "The Theanthropic Ethos of Bishop Nikolai Velimirovich," 134: "If we were to measure Bishop Nikolaj against his bitter and terse words, which he spoke and wrote about his people many times, and against that with which he rebuked and how he rebuked, he would be proclaimed as the greatest Serb-hater and anti-Serb among the Serbian people in their history."

spiring (it comprises thirty volumes), and the task of specifying the content of the various themes is quite complex.

Instead of offering a periodization of Bishop Nikolaj's theology—seeing it as a gradual abandonment of his alleged “Pro-Western enthusiasm-optimism” (supposedly characterizing his “early stage,” in which his thought allegedly “lacked the sacramental force of historical Christianity”)—I propose seeing him as a genuine and *completed* theologian in an active and fruitful dialogue with all forms of civilization and human culture (panhumanism, ecumenism, etc.). This assessment is not based so much on his “maturing” and “evolution” as his re-examination of the methods of how to bring the salvific news of Christ into all spheres of human life. So, he went through the spiritual *stages* of the life in Christ. Nikolaj's life reflects a vision of time called *kairos*, which is an intervention of “the last days” (Acts 2.17) into time. It is the end that “justifies,” that gives meaning to the past; all Christian hermeneutics depend on this *kairological* perspective. This explains why St. Nikolaj would switch from one idea to another.<sup>52</sup> Without being naïve or lost in “diluted thought schemes,” Nikolaj was perfectly aware that without theological awareness, sensitivity and criteria, the transmitting of the message of the Gospel into the world and time (the so-called “inculturation”) can be a very hazardous endeavor. So, the acceptance of history and culture in his case emerged through a critical, prophetic approach. Constructive dialogue and encounter with others stimulated further clarifications of his positions. There was no “shifting” from his fundamental principles, but only their clarifications, always with the help of the Church Fathers.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Vladimir Cvetković, “The Freedom from Passions and the Freedom for All: St Nikolai Velimirović on Democracy,” *Nicholai Studies* 1 (2021): 53-80: 75: “Velimirović is known for changing his opinions on numerous occasions, adopting vigorously certain ideas and abandoning them abruptly. Some of the ideas he adopted or developed in his early period, like the political ideas related to Yugoslavia and the unity of Orthodox and Catholics in one Yugoslav Church or about India as the most promising land for the Christian mission are abandoned, while some other ideas were developed in the course of his life and never renounced, like the idea of democracy.”

<sup>53</sup> Bishop Irinej Dobrijević, “St. Nikolai of Zhicha: A Contemporary Orthodox Witness,” 156: “Nikolai was himself the patristic embodiment of an Orthodox intel-

*Enculturation* is the key word for Nikolaj's approach, for it is always about adopting and transforming. All of his answers, solutions, and propositions have emerged from the inculturation of the Gospel into various historical conditions.<sup>54</sup> The dialectic between Orthodoxy and the West in Nikolaj's thought was a healthy and creative one. Nikolaj's awareness of the need for "enculturation"—that is, for preaching and witnessing the Gospel in ways which meet the cultural needs of the people—led him to the creation of highly exemplary and contemporary works, significant even in our postmodern era. His entire life struggle was a process of contextualizing the Evangelical message of the Resurrected Christ. His ardent desire was for the whole world to recognize the Orthodox salvific truth of the Resurrected God-Man Christ, Who is revealed and given in His Body, the Church.<sup>55</sup>

Therefore, the message we receive from Nikolaj is that in the new millennium, a proper inculturation of Christianity will be vital for the Church's existence. An essential consequence of Nikolaj's monumental work is the variety of expressions that stems from the unpredictability of his spiritual experience and is far from static. Startling as this may appear to many, this Nikolaj's experiential theology produced a theology as a surprise that continues to inspire many and perplex some people with its truths—often stunning but always insightful.

lectual, philanthropist, and hierarch, freely lecturing in the halls of the world's most pre-eminent universities, and as comfortable addressing royalty as the simplest of his faithful flock."

<sup>54</sup> According to Fr. Alexander Schmemmann, "the churches must constantly review and revalue their relations with a changing world order and only in so doing can the churches function as creative organisms." (Cf. "Rev. Alexander Schmemmann, Dean of Orthodox Seminary," *New York Times*, Dec. 14, 1983, Sec. B, 5).

<sup>55</sup> The same Nikolaj wrote: "The Balkan Christ is the same as the Jerusalem, the Sinai, the Russian, and the European Christ... Because He is one. The Balkan Christ is Christ in the Balkans, in the Balkan drama of life, in the Balkan costume, in the Balkan song and symbolism, in the Balkan sighs and tears and bloody graves, in the Balkan resurrection." Cf. Nikolaj Velimirović, *Iznad Istoka i Zapada*, in: Episkop Nikolaj, *Sabrana dela*, vol. 5, 793-810: 796.



Bishop Nicholai with Faculty of St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary including Bishop John Shahovskoy of San Francisco, Metropolitan Andrei of the Bulgarian Church, and Archimandrite Jonah Stahlberg, New York, New York, 17 December 1947 (Archive of the Serbian Orthodox Church in North and South America, Saint Sava Monastery in Libertyville, Illinois.

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## Appendices

*Bishop Dionisije*

22 juni, 1945

Vase Preosvestenstvo:

Prilikom naseg sastanka u New York-u obavestio sam vas da sam molio Dr. Moacanina da mi dostavi adresu Nj. Svetosti Patriarha i Episkopa g. Nikolaja, kako bi stupili u direktnu vezu sa njima. Sad sam od Dr. Moacanina dobio sledeci odgovor:

"BISHOPS ITALY BY ALLIES. ADDRESS FOR THE MOMENT UNKNOWN."

Kao sto vidite, Vase Preosvestenstvo, oni nisu u Svajcarskoj, i sad ostaje da pokusamo preko Dr. Topalovica da stupimo u vezu sa njima.

Dolazim u Cikago 30-og juna iz jutra, i moracu da se vratim 2-og jula po podne. Neobicno mi je zao sto necu moći biti sa vama na proslavi 4-og jula u manastiru, ali sigurno cemo imati priliku da se vidimo za vreme mog boravka u Cikagu.

Sa iskrenim pozdravima i visokim postovanjem.

*Appendix 1*

Hoover Institution Library & Archives, Konstantin Fotić Papers, Box no. 44,  
Folder no. 23, Konstantin Fotić to Bishop Dionisije, 22 June 1945

*Bishop Griney*

June 22, 1945

Vase Preosvestenstvo:

Primio sam vase pismo koje ste mi poslali po g. Mihailovicu. Vas sekretar, g. Ristic, vec mi je govorio o g-nu i g-dji Cukic prilikom mog boravka u New York-u. Mozete biti sigurni da cu uciniti sve da im pomognem da dodju ovamo, a nadam se da ce me u tome pomoci i njihov dobar prijatelj g. A. Lane, bivsi americki poslanik u Beogradu.

Bilo mi je neobicno milo da cujem od vas, kao i od vases sekretara, o patriotskom stavu koje su Cukic i njegova gospodja imali, i poznavajuci ih dobro vec tolike godine to me nije ni malo iznenadilo. I zbog tih licnih veza ucinicu sto mogu, ali vi znate da to nece ici bez teskoca.

Od Dr. Moacanina dobio sam sledeci odgovor na moje pitanje o Nj. Svetosti i Preosvecenom Nikolaju, koji glasi: "BISHOPS ITALY BY ALLIES. ADDRESS FOR THE MOMENT UNKNOWN." Prema tome dok od njih ne dobijemo direktne vesti, pitanje njihovog dolaska ovde nije aktuelno. U vezi sa time, pre dva dana dobio sam od Milana Gavrilovica iz Londona poverljivim putem saopstenje da on smatra da bi njihov odlazak u zemlju znatno pojacao Titov rezim, i da bi za odbranu nasih interesa bila od velike koristi da dodju u Sjedinjené Drzave.

O svim nasim pitanjima trebalo bi obsirno da razgovaramo, i ja cu se jako radovati da vas pozdravim u Vasingtonu. U iduci petak, 29-og po poden, polazim za Cikago odakle se vracam 2-og jula. Na zalost nece mi biti moguće da budem na proslavi Libertyvillu 4-og jula. Prema tome ako je vama ne moguće doći ovamo iduce nedelje, mozemo se sastati na vasem povratku iz Cikaga.

Sa iskrenim pozdravom i dubokim postovanjem.

*Appendix 2*

Hoover Institution Library & Archives, Konstantin Fotić Papers, Box no. 44,  
Folder no. 23, Konstantin Fotić to Bishop Dionisije, 22 June 1945

OFFICE OF THE CHAPLAIN  
 HEADQUARTERS SPECIAL TROOPS TWELFTH ARMY GROUP  
 A.P.O. 655  
 July 10, 1945

The Rev. J. A. Douglas  
 6, Vicarage Road, S.W. 14  
 London, England

Dear Canon Douglas:

You will remember our conversation of a little better than two weeks ago in which you voiced concern over the welfare of His Beatitude, Gavrilo, the Patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church. When I returned to Wiesbaden, I discussed the problem of trying to locate this distinguished refugee churchman with American officers here. They seemed to feel that the best way to discover the true facts of the situation would be for me to go to Kitzbuhel and see if I could unearth him. You will recall that you thought he might still be in hiding.

When I arrived in Kitzbuhel I soon learned that the Patriarch's presence was known to all. Several chaplains and one Major General had called upon him.

He is living with the Archbishop Nikolai and several attendants in an eight room house near the edge of town. His secretary is Dr. Zhachov and previously there were some former members of King Peter's party in the Archbishop's entourage. King Peter's automobile is in their possession, and ready to take them away whenever a permit to travel can be given to them.

When I called in the house the afternoon of July 5th, I found the Patriarch in bed. He has not been well, although the vivacity of his conversation made it difficult for me to believe that he is now seriously ill. Unfortunately, Archbishop Nikolai was in Salzburg so that Patriarch and I had to rely on the French language for our conversation. My French is halting and his pronunciation is very difficult, at least for my ear, so it is quite possible that I may have missed many of the nuances of the Patriarch's thoughts, which would have been most interesting to you.

First, the Patriarch's face was lighted by a huge smile when I mentioned your name. Separated by 4 years of imprisonment and 6 years of war, he was not certain whether you would be alive yet, and he was most happy when I told him of your apparent health and continued activity in Anglican-Orthodox liaison work.

Then he launched into a long story of his troubles, personal, ecclesiastical, and political, from time that the Gestapo first seized him in (April 25, 1941) until his liberation by the U.S. Army (May 8, 1945). In the intervening four years he was

### Appendix 3

Hoover Institution Library & Archives, Konstantin Fotić Papers, Box no. 39,  
 Folder no. 7, [Chaplain, (Major) U.S. Army] Frederick A. McDonald  
 to The Rev. J. A. Douglas, 10 July 1945

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moved to 15 different localities, constantly in prison. One such locality was Dachau, where the Patriarchal party was confined for two months. Only Gavrilov's very bad health at that time enabled their imprisonment at that dread spot to be of such short duration. In other localities, they were sometimes jammed six or eight to a small room. Archbishop Nikolai was sometimes separated for months on end from the Patriarch, maybe only by one room, and yet they could not speak so much as a word together.

During this whole time, pressure was regularly placed on the Patriarch by Nazi administrators to force his sending a Pastoral letter which would urge the Serbian Faithful to cooperate with the German "politika". Steadfastly and courageously Gavrilov refused this demand. It is understood, of course, that he possesses no affection for Marshal Tito. He named archbishops and bishop after bishop who have suffered martyrdom from Tito's hands, and asserts that Tito has slain multitudes (1,600,000 dead in Serbia from war causes, he says), forced others to become Roman Catholics, and deported great numbers to exile in Siberia. He feels that any return to Yugoslavia now would mean his imprisonment or immediate death. Patriotically, he feels that as Head of His national church he must resist anyone who has shown enmity to his people, be it Hitler or Tito. He declares that the sorrows of his church have troubled him so that he would welcome death, but his sense of obligation to his sacred office require him to seek asylum in some place where, at a happier moment, he may give them the leadership and comfort which they need.

He wishes most of all to go to Switzerland (there is a Dr. Forster there who has a sanatorium near Lausanne where he feels he could regain his health), or directly to England. I explained to him that Switzerland and Great Britain are the two countries whose barriers are the most difficult now for foreigners to surmount, and suggested France, where arrangements for entrance of foreigners can be quite easily made. His great distrust of Communists, however, cause him to shy away from France. Failing entrance to Switzerland or your country, he hopes for a "laissez-passer" to Italy, so that he may visit General Alexander's Headquarters. General Alexander, I gather, used his name frequently in his psychological warfare broadcasts to the enemy and to the Serbs, and the Patriarch feels that Alexander has a good understanding of his problem.

I shall try to do what I can to aid the Patriarch here, but you doubtless will wish to do something through the Church of England channels. He is living at this address: Jochbergerstrasse 491/1, Kitzbuhel, Tyrol, Austria.

He sent a letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury a few days before I arrived, but I doubt if that letter will be delivered. Our Army postal system is closed to all civilians. However, he did ask me to relay his Blessing of Christ to you, and to ask you to do what you can for him and his four companions immediately, and to relate these circumstances to His Grace of Canterbury.

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Later I hope to write you concerning Adamatoff, the Russian priest of Wiesbaden. Until then, be assured of my eagerness to help in anything that will further the purposes of cementing our Oecumenical relations with other Christian groups.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

(Signed) Frederick A. McDonald  
Chaplain, (Major) U.S. Army

*London*

Jedan nas oficir koji je na sluzbi kod Amerikanaca pise 16. septembra 1945. godine:

"Juce sam posetio logor nasin oficira u Minhen (Leonrot platze, Luitpold caserne). Najveca beda koju sam video, tako da sam ceo dan bio neraspolozen. Ono sto je bilo kada su nas Saveznici oslobodili to je raj i bajka. Sada zive gore nego pod Nemcima. Cigareta u opste nemaju. Kada sam im ponudio jurisali su kao mi za vreme "marsa smrti" u Boholtu. Jedan paket kosta 50 maraka, ali oni nemaju ni jedan pfennig plate vec 6 meseci. Sapuna u opste nemaju. Odelo staro plavo iz zarobljenistva. Jelo strasno. Ruciao sam kod njih. Primaju na kazanu dve kutlace corbe (od krompira i malo mesa). Ni pomena o buteru ili melšpajzu. Hleb potpuno crn zarobljenicki. Stanbene prilike strasne, prljavo. Stalno pisu raporte Amerikancima sa kojima su na ratnoj nozi i cesto strajkuju gladju. Nemaju nikakve vesti od kuce.

Trpezarija: crn astal i prijav. Svi jedu zajedno sa Vladikom Nikolajem, koga sam video i razgovarao. Tek sam onda shvatio strahotu nase propasti. On zivi u jednoj maloj sobi. Vise kreveta mala kraljeva slika i nase Kraljice i Ikona Sv. Nikole. Ne moze da stoji potpuno na nogama jer je bio 3 godine u Dahau. Vode ga dva crkvenjaka. Umno je uvek vrlo jak i drzi govore za kralja po okolnim logorima. Kaze da bi zeleo da ide u London jer bi tu za nasu stvar bio od velike koristi. On me molio da se ova njegova zelja dostavi Nj.V. kralju.

U mozburgu ima jos jedan logor, ali kad sam video juce onu bedu i cudo, necu da ih obidjem, jer mi je tesko. Svi su me lepo primili ali vidim kod izvesnih malu zavist. Ovo je prirodno, jer da sam na njihovom mestu, cini mi se poceo bih da ubijam. Vi ni jedan u Parizu, pocev od D-ra Maceka pa do poslednjeg, u opste ne mislite na ove ljude. Da li je neko ovo dostavio Nj.V. kralju? Moglo bi se sa malo dobre volje uciniti da se njihovo stanje popravi. Ovi ovde (Amerikanci) ne shvataju njihovu situaciju i smatraju ih za kolaboratere. I ako su mnogi od njih u ropstvu vec od aprila 1941. godine.

U vece kada sam otisao na provod u Americki klub, mislio sam na neprevdu i bedu u koju su zapali nasi drugovi. A i ti kada odes negde na provod treba da se njih setis. Oni su pravi martiri.

Sve je ovo sto ti pisem vrlo opasno za mene jer ne bih smeo da se mesam u to, ali je potpuno nemoguce ovo sve ravnodusno gledati. Narocito zbog Nikolaja."

Ovo je pismo jednog naseg oficira koji je pre nekoliko nedelja iz Pariza otisao za Nemacku.

#### Appendix 4

Hoover Institution Library & Archives, Konstantin Fotić Papers, Box no. 39,  
Folder no. 8, A report made on 16 September 1945 by "our officer who is  
in the service of Americans"





12, Lennox Garden  
London, S.W.1.  
Great Britain

ZA KRALJA I OTADZBINU!

SLOBODA ILI SMRTI.

R A V N A G O R A

BILTEN UDRUŽENJA BORACA JUGOSLOVENSKE VOJSKE U OTADZBINI  
Izdanje sekcija u Velikoj Britaniji

Br.4 London, 1. novembra 1945. godine God. I.

"Mi no gubimo nadu, da će u ovoj hladnoj pomrećini koju prezivljujemo je nas narod čeci zora vaskrsa, kada će zlatna sloboda objasjati i njegov život."  
- Patrijarh Srpski Gavriilo -

KRSTENJE PRETSOLONASLEDNIKA JUGOSLAVIJE.

Danas, 24 oktobra 1945 godine, u 11,30 časova održano je svečano krštenje Pretsolonaslednika Jugoslavije, u kapeli Westminster Abbey.

Jos pre 11 časova počele su se skupljati velike mase sveta pred glavnim ulazom crkve, posto se znalo za krštenje koje je bilo najavljeno u svima većim Londonskim listovima.

Svečani oin krštenja održan je u maloj, Kraljevskoj kapeli koja je sastavni deo same crkve, i to na mestu koje se nalazi ispod same kupole, tamo gde se stavlja Presto engleskih Kraljeva prilikom Njihovog krunisanja. Engleski Kralj sa ova svečanu priliku ustupio je svome rođjaku, Kralju Petru, svoju crkvu; i prvi put u istoriji održan je jedan pravoslavni obred u Anglikanskoj crkvi. Vredno je pomena, a što je narocito vazno u vezi engleskog konzervatizma, da je dominantan položaj u kapeli imala ikona Svetoga Save, i da je Dean od Westminstera ovaj put bio u ulozi posmatraca, prepustajući svo pripreme oko krštenja nasa crkvi.

Svečanost je bila striktno privatnog Kraljevskog karaktera.

Nesto posle 11 časova počeli su da pristizu zvaničnici, engleske i nase kolonije. Kapela koja sve odiše Kraljevskom atmosferom i starim tradicijama carstva, gde su se krunisali svi engleski Kraljevi i gde su se vršili svi najvećani obredi engleske Imperije, bila je ispunjena tihim zvucima najsvetecanije Bahove muzike, koja je dolazila iz Kraljevskih orgulja, nomoga svedoka svih velikih događaja Engleske i svetske istorije koji su se odigravali u ovoj crkvi.

Medju prisutnim engleskim zvaničnima mogli su se zapaziti izmedju ostalih: Sir John Monck, Mr. and Mrs. H. S. Dueri, Non. Mrs. Rodney, Sir Peter and Lady Loraine, Lady Malchot, Non. Karin Rod, Duchess od Montoro, Lord and Lady Kensley, Lord and Lady Camrose. Medju prisutnim zvaničnima jugoslovenske kolonije bili su Dr. Slobodan Jovanovic, Krsto Miletic, Milos Bobic, Dr. M. Gavrilovic i Gospodja, Jovo Benjanin, Bogoljub Jevric sa Gospodjom, Gospodja, Jovo Nenad Krizogono, Oicla-Sajin, Mirosevic-Sorgo sa Gospodjom, Vladeta Milicovic, R. Knezevic, Dr. Ilija Jukic, V. Vilder, A. Avakumovic sa gospodjom, D. Lazarevic sa Gospodjom, V. Milanovic, A. Kuhar.

Tacno u 11,30 časova utole su se burne ovde je pred crkvom, znak da su dosli Visoki Gosti, a nekoliko trenutaka doznije ogromna crkva bila je ispunjena snaznim zvucima jugoslovenske himne; prisutni Jugosloveni su bili uzbuđeni; nekoliko srpskih Ministara i dva hrvatska Brisali su ooi, ootito uzbuđeni. Nebotiko trenutaka doznije na ulasku Kraljevske Kapela pojavljuju se oobiri Westminstersterka kapelana noseci jevan jedan Kraljevsko zedlo a ostali biskupske znake. Iza njih je dolazio paroh Londonske pravoslavne crkve Mileje Nikolic, pa dva engleska Biskupa, iza njih na rastojanju su dolazili Episkop Nikolaj i Grcki Metropolitiskog Germanos. Dalje, Nj. Svetost Patrijarh Gavriilo, Engleska Kraljica i Kralj Petar, iza njih u

*Appendix 6*

Hoover Institution Library & Archives, Konstantin Fotić Papers, Box no. 39,  
Folder no. 9, Bulletin of the Association of Fighters of the Yugoslav Army  
in Homeland, no. 4, London, 1 November 1945

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drugom redu, Kraljica Aleksandra i engleski Kralj; iza engleskog Kralja isla je Princeza Elizabeta, pa grčki Kralj Djordje i Prino Tomislav, dalje su dolazili Duchess of Kent sa svojom malom sarkicom, Archbishop of Canterbury, Dean of Westminster, Archmandrit Viros, ruski i poljski episkopi, Lord Bishop of London, adjutant Kralja Djordja VI, pukovnik Zobenica adjutant Nj. V. Kralja Petra, Dr. Pavle Jevtic sekretar pravoslavne crkve u Londonu i drugi.

Medju ostalim uglednim zvanicama u samoj Kraljevskoj kapeli bili su jos zapazeni Princeza Jelena sa Princem Bevolodom i Princeza Romanovski-Pavlovski (Princeza Jelena je bila u uznoj Kraljevskoj poverci), H. R. H. the Princess Royal and the Earl of Harewood, H. R. H. Princess Andrew of Greece, H. R. H. Princess Helena Viktoria, Earl of Atholne and Princess Alice.

Pre pocetka samog obreda engleski Kralj i Kraljica sa Princem Elizabetom zauzeli su svoja mesta sa desne strane kapele, a sa leve su zauzeli mesta Kralj Petar, Kraljica Aleksandra, Princeza Asazija i Prino Tomislav.

Prestolonaslednik je bio u rukama dadilje, engleskinje, koja je stajala odmah iza Nj. Svetosti Patrijarha, kod stola gde se vrilo krsenje.

Svetonik Nikolic je poceo sa "Blagoslovi Vladiko" a veliki ruski hor je odgovarao. Potom je Episkop Nikolaj prisao engleskom Kralju i upitao ga za ime Njegovog Kunceta, a Kralj Djordje je odgovorio "Aleksandar". Potom je Princeza Elizabeta sislala se podijuma, gde se nalaze kraljevska mesta, i uzela svoje Kuncce (engleski obicaj da bude dva kuma) dok je Nj. Svetost vratila mirropomazanje sa Svetim Jelejom i ostale radnje, a na kraju je doslo "pogru-zavanje" u vodu, naata se najmladji Karadjordjevic poceo uporno da brani i malo da place da bi se vrlo brzo umirio. Engleski Kralj je tada sisao sa svoga mesta i uzao Prestolonaslednika u ruku, da bi ga tako drzeciog nosio iza Nj. Svetosti Patrijarha koji je po starom pravoslavnom obicaju tri puta obisao sto na komu su bili Sveti darovi. Taj momenat bio je najjači ultiak sa celog krsenja; engleski Kralj drzi u narucju svoje Kuncce, Jugoslovenskog Prestolonaslednika, Kralj Djordje se celo vreme smesio i sa velikom paznjom drzao svoje Kuncce.

Posle završenog obreda krsenja Nj. Sv. Patrijarh je centi tao obračunjuci sa prvo Jugoslovenskoj, a potom Engleskoj Kraljevskoj kuci; zatim se povorka uputila istim redom iz kapele, kroz crkvu, ka izlazu, gde se Kralj Djordje VI zadržao u kracem razgovoru sa Kraljom, Kraljicom i Princem Tomislavom, koji su ih donije ispratili, da bi se ponovo vratili i primili gostitanje jugoslovenske kolonije.

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Krsenje Prestolonaslednika izazvalo je kod prisutnih Jugoslovena mnogo iskrene radosti i okrepilo mnoge nade. Svi prisutni Jugosloveni osjecali su radost sto se svetili dom nasog mladog Vladara ovim spazij; sto se on ucvrstuje rodbinskim vezama sa engleskim vladarskim domom i tradicionalnim prijateljstvom engleske crkve.

Prisustvo engleskog vladarskog doma okrepiljuje nasu nadu da nismo zaboravljeni i ostavljeni, i da ce protekli problem oslobodjenja nasog naroda ispod teskog jarma i robovanja mrazu i tira niji biti pravilno resen. Prisustvo Nj. Svetosti Patrijarha Savrila i Preosvećenog Vladike Nikolaja-muconika i stradalnika iz Dohau-uverava da nas mladi Vladar ide krepko tradicijom svetlih Nemanjickih vladara i svojih svetlih predaka cvrsto odrzava vezu sa svojom crkvenom i narodnom, a prisustvo svih jugoslovenskih drzavnika i jugoslovenske kolonije u Londonu uverenje je ne samo velike narodne ljubavi prema mladom Kralju no i izraz tih velikih nada, koje se polazu na Kraljev udeo u spasavanju svog naroda.

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PATRIJARH I EPISKOP NIKOLAJ U ENGLESKOJ

Oktobra 16 stigao je u London Nj. Svetlost Patrijarh Srpski Gospodin Gavriilo. Nekoliko dana iza toga stigao je nas poznati propovednik Nikolaj Velimorovic. I jedan i drugi, posle teskog tamnovanja a naročito u cuvenom mucilistu "Dahau" oni su stigli izmureni i prvi put poceli slobodno da disu vazduh.

Nj. Sv. Patrijarha docekali su, izaslanik Nj. V. Kralja potpukovnik G. Zobenica adjutant i kapetan svestenik gospodin Miloje Nikolic u ime crkvene opatine u Londonu.

I Nj. Sv. Patrijarh i Preosvećeni Vladika Nikolaj bili su gosti Nj. V. Kralja.

Odmah po svome dolasku Visoki gosti otisli su da ucine zvanicnu posetu poglavaru Anglikanske Crkve, Konteberskom Arhiepiskopu Dr. Fiseru. Susret poglavara dveju crkava bio je vise nego srdačan i prijateljski. Oni su razgovarali i pretresali aktuelne dogadjaje iz crkvenog zivota, kao stari prijatelji.

Duhovna svezina i osećaj sigurnosti da ce pravda pobediti nepravdu, sloboda nasilje, nasi crkveni velikodostojnici i zezvali su svuda paznju i neprikrivene simpatije.

Srpska crkvena opatina "Sv. Save" u Londonu priredila je veliki prijem u cast dolaska Nj. Sv. Patrijarha u hotelu "Abrant" 19 oktobra u 4 sata po podne.

Ovome casu - prijemu prisustvovao je Nj. Kralj Petar II sa Kraljicom Aleksandrom i celokupna Jugoslovenska kolonija u Londonu. Od strane Engloza bili su prisutni Konteberski Arhiepiskop Dr. Fiser i Biskup londonski, kao i prestavnici Knjizevnog zivota sa engleske prestonice, kao i prestavnici bratske poljske vojske sa gospodinom Tarnovskim ministrom spoljnih poslova poljske vlade.

Prijemu su prisustvovali prestavnici: Francuske, Groke, Rumunije i drugih prijateljskih nacija.

Sutra dan 20 oktobra u 13.30 h. odrzana je sluzba Bozja u Anglikanskoj crkvi "Grosvenor Chapel". Po završenoj sluzbi Bozjoj Nj. Sv. Patrijarh održao je sledeću besedu:

"Blagodaran sa Gospodu Bogu sto mi se dala ova prilika da posetim veliku i slavnu prestonicu Velike Britanije i da dam oduske osecajima duboke blagodarnosti koju gaji za ovu zemlju celokupan moj srpski narod. Velika Britanija je i ovoga puta mudro, dostojno i uspesno izvršila svoju veliku misiju prema ugrozonoj Evropi i celom svetu od Pruskog militarizma.

U teskim oasovima, koji su pocetkom 1941 godine nastupili za nas, mi smo imali da izaberemo put kojim smo morali poci u izvanredno teskim okolnostima.

Mi smo bili svesni da se nas narod i nasa Otadzbina ne mogu odupreti navali (bijedi) koja je tada vec bila preplavila veci deo Evrope. Drugim recima, mi smo imali ili da se priklonimo nasilju i nemackoj najezdi, ILLI DA SE DRZIMO PUTA KOJI JE ZAHTEVALA NASA CAST, NASHA SAVEST I NASHA DUZNOST.

Mi smo izabrali ovaj drugi put koji je znasio nase samoubistvo, ili kao sto sam rekao uoci 27 marta 1941 godine, mi smo izabrali put Carstva Nebeskog. Mi nismo ni hteli ni mogli da u teskim i sudbonosnim momentima IZNEVERIMO NASE STARE I OPROBANE SAVEZNIKE, koji su nam u prvom Svetskom ratu ucinili tolika dobra. Stoga smo katogoricki odbili zloglasni pakt sa namertom na slobodu Evropskih naroda. I kada smo se odlucili da idemo putem savesti, casti i duznosti nase, mi smo imali i neki znacak nade da ce nasi neprijatelji imati koliko toliko osećanja ovcnosti i pravda. Nismo mogli ni pomisliti da jedan veliki evropski narod koji se naziva civilizovanim moze doci sa onolikom mrzjom i onakvim namerama i da nas ne pobedi u bitci, nego da nas potpuno istrebi. I u toj moznji, koja nije imala nikakvog zdravog osnova, neprijatelj je sta vise pokrenuo i sve nase susede sa ciljem da protiv naseg naroda svugde i na svakom

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metu svoje uzase krvi i smrti.

Okupatori sa svojim necovecnim i nehrišćanskim postupcima uspeali su da predaju smrti više od četvrtine našeg naroda, da pretvore u zgariste i pepeo sve naše najsvetije ustanove, tako da je u ovom strasnom ratu naš narod srazmerno postradao daleko više nego makoji drugi narod.

Na blagodarci na prvom mestu velikoj milosti Gospoda Boga i našim moćnim saveznicima, a na prvom mestu istrajnom i hrabrom britanskom narodu, naši neprijatelji su potpuno porazeni i rat je završen pobedom.

DANAS TU POBEDU SLAVE MNOGI POBEDIOCI, ALI NE I MOJ NAROD. DANAS SE MOJA OTADZBINA NALAZI POD JEDNOM TESKOM I BOLNOM MOROM, KOJA GUSI ŽIVOT I NIŠTI SADA SVE NAŠE VEKOVNE TEKOVINE I VREDNOSTI. ALI MI NE GUBIMO NADU DA ĆE U OVOJ HLADNOJ POMRČINI KOJU PROZIVLJUJE NAŠ NAROD DOĆI I ZORA VASKRSA, KOJA ĆE ZLATOM SLOBODE OBASJATI I NJEGOV ŽIVOT. NADAM SE, PONAVLJAM, DA ĆE NAŠI MOĆNI SAVEZNICI UČINITI DA I NAŠA OTADZBINA UŽIVA PLODOVE VELIKE POBEDE, JER NAM JE DOBRO POZNATO, DA JE CILJ SVIH UJEDINJENIH NARODA BIO I OSTAJE BLAGOSTASE I DEMOKRATSKA SLOBODA SVIH NARODA NA SVETU.

U taj nadi ja upucujom u ovom svetliom hramu tople molitve Svevišnjem Gospodu Bogu za pobedu dobra u celom svetu.

Sa iskrenom molitvom prizivam blagoslov Gospoda našega Isusa Hrista na ovaj naš molitveni skup, kao i na ceo britanski narod i njegovu otadžbinu.

28 oktobra bila je večernja služba u crkvi "Sv. Pavla" kojoj su prisustvovali: Nj.Sv. Patrijarh i Vladika Nikolaj.

Posle službe održao je dvnu besedu i pozdrav Din Aleksandar. Donosimo samo izvod iz te besede.

"Grecni smo sto možemo pozdraviti danas u našoj sredini Srpskog Patrijarha Gavrila i Episkopa Nikolaja, čija se recitost čula na ovoj predikaciji pre mnogo godina i čije se besede ja dobro sećam. Srpska crkva i srpski narod prošli su kroz velika stradanja. Drzeci visoko stvar slobode - i to ne prvi put - oni su svima nama dali veli primer hrabrosti i izdržljivosti. Razbijeni, ali ne uništeni, oni su ponova izašli u novu eru bezbednosti, mira i nezavisnosti, koje možemo još jedan put, pa i sada, da zahteva novu postojanost i hrabrost ..."

Iznedju ostalih priredbi koje su u ime od strane naših prijatelja Engleza, značajna je večera koju je priredio "United University Club".

Ovoj večeri prisustvovali su: Nj.V. Kralj Petar II i Preosvećeni Vladika Nikolaj. Od strane Engleza prisustvovali su predstavnici političkog i javnog života.

Na istoj večeri, koja je bila najintimnija govorili su, pored Engleza i Nj.V. Kralj Petar u ime jugoslovenske zooljubive i demokrat-ske omladine, koja je danas osuđena od jednog protunacionalnog režima da traži privođenje u tuđini.

Govor Kralja Petra bio je burno pozdravljen od prisutnih. Posle Kralja govorio je Zicki Episkop Nikolaj, koji je izazvao od prisutnih. On je govorio o uništenju onih prijatelja Engleza koji su prošlog rata bili u Engleskoj studijama.

Podigao je svoju levu ruku, čuveni propovednik i uzviknuo je: "Evo, pogledajte koliko imam pratiju na ovoj noći, vratite mi, nama više u životu onih koji su prošlog rata predstavljali a koliko stotina studenata u ovoj zemlji." Apelovao je da pomognu uspinjavanje i školovanje naših mlade i studenata koji se nalaze rasuti po celavoj Evropi.

Cololupna engleska štampa registrovala je dolazak naših crkvenih Velikodostojanstvenika sa dobrim komentarima.

Samo za tebe, Luku, Dučića, kao i za vladike  
Dr Irinaja i Dionisija.

Njegova Svjetost Patrijarh Gavriilo stigao je ovde pre ostprilike dve nedelje. Njegov dolazak ovde imao je ~~mnixixixi~~ za cilj krštenje prestolonaslednika. Osim toga imao je da obavi i dva dva posla: da izmiri majku i sina i vaspostavi bližu saradnju između Kralja i predstavnika političkih stranaka. U prošli utorak saopšteno je da je viza istekla i da Patrijara se vratio u sredu preko Francuske u Italiju. Želi da budenogde bliže našej zemlji.

Rezultat njegovog puta i boravka ovde ovaj je:

1. Krštenja jesu zvanične strane dan privatnog karaktera. One je obavljene ipak svečano i lepo. U ovome je njegov dolazak potpunog uspeha.

2. Izmiranju majke i sina pristupio je odmah. Jaz je bio već previše veliki i on se nije dao premestiti. Majka ga je stavila bila pred svršeni čin kao što se videlo i iz listova. On je s njome imao dug sastanak u prvu subotu po dolasku, a već sutra, u nedelju, dok je on služio veliku službu u grčkoj crkvi, svet je čitao našu sramotu. Pored svih nesreća i ovako nas nije mogla mimoići. U ovome Patrijarhov dolazak nije uspeo i pored najbolje volje samoga Patrijarha. Ovo je jedan od teških udara i njegove posledice nisu još i nikako ispriljene. Nije tu samo pitanje novca.

3. Patrijara je odmah po dolasku nastojao uporno da Kralj uzme inicijativu i pozove potpisnike memoranduma na zajednički dogovor, da on već sada počne poštovati princip da Kralj vlada ali ne upravlja, da se drži izvan stranaka i iznad njih ali da ostavi njih da rade, jer su mu one i najbolji štiti i zaklon. U ovome je naišao na otpor kod tašte s kojom je došao u oštar sukob. Ona se obratila na srpske političare, a oni ih je snažno uzela u odbranu i izopse je pravu da govori o ljudima koje ne poznaje i o naređu koji ne razume. Došlo je tu do vrlo teških reči. Patrijara je tražio od Kralja da odstrani žene iz politike. Kralj je obećao Patrijarhu ipak da će pozvati političare na sastanak kome bi i on, Patrijarh, prisustvovao. Rečeno je da će sastanak biti u ponedeljak ili utorak, pa je odložen za četvrtak, i na kraju za petak, 2. novembra. Ovo odlaganje protumačeno je tako da se htelo naređiti da izbegne prisustvo Patrijarha na sastanku i pošto je došlo posle onog sukoba pripisano je uticaju iste ličnosti. Patrijara je morao da putuje u sredu veče a sastanak je održan juče. Sastanak je otvorio Kralj i održao je dobar govor. Apelovao je na sve da se pristupilo sležno radu na slobodi naređenoj i pozvao je potpisnike da se sporazumeju i s Dr Mačkom. Kao što se vidi, Patrijarhovi naperi imali su uspeha, i ako ne konačnog, što je prirodno. Naravno, opasnost da se ponovo ne poćegne istim uticajima, stoji još. Zato ni moramo svi i dalje ostati uporno na principu borbe za punu demokratiju i prave naroda, da rešava slobodno svoja pitanja, i najjasnija.

O rezultatima rada vladike Nikolaja, koji ostaje ovde još nekoliko dana, jer je došao posle Patrijarha, moći će se suditi u punoj meri kad ode i on. Još sada se može reći da bi bilo od neocenjive koristi kad bi mogao ostati ovde. On je pomogao Patrijarhu kod Kralja, ali je naročito pomogao da se obnovi prijateljstvo Anglikanske crkve i naše, upravo da se počne podizati iz ruševina. Naišao je ovde sada na najbolje razumevanja, i već je dobio izvesna obećanja, napr. u pitanju školevanaja mnogih naših studenata rasutih po Evropi.

Moramo raditi što se može i uporno, i ako sme svesni da će našo pitanje naći rešenje samo u rešenju anglo-američkih i sovjetskih članova.

### Appendix 7

Hoover Institution Library & Archives, Konstantin Fotić Papers, Box no. 39,  
Folder no. 10, Unknown sender to Konstantin Fotić, no date

1 maj 1946

Vase Preosvestenstvo:

Molim vas da me izvinite sto sam malo zadržan sa odgovorom, ali sam bio jako zauzet u vezi sa dolaskom avijaticara. Njihova misija, iako nije dala ono sto smo mi očekivali, ipak je nesumnjivo imala koristi, jer je imala vrlo dobar publicitet u stampi, a u isto vreme ovi vredni i dobri mladici zainteresovali su mnoge ugledne politicare za Drazinu stvar. Na zalost, stav zvaničnih je u znaku očekivanja razvoja situacije na konferenciji u Parizu, i to je nasa velika tragedija da mi moramo da sluzimo za potkusurivanje medju velikima, pa ma kakve ideje i principa bili u pitanju.

Sto se tice pasosa Preosvećenog Nikolaja, nije mi sasvim jasno sta on zeli. Da li on ima jugoslovenski pasos, i u opste kakve putne isprave ima? Ako ima nas pasos, ili kakvu drugu putnu ispravu, ja mislim da ne bi bilo tesko dobiti vizu za Kubu ili Braziliju, a posto takvu vizu dobije, mogli bih traziti produzenje boravka ovde. Ja cu, razume se, uciniti sve sto mogu da Preosvećenom omogucimo boravak ovde, ali mi je potrebno da znam tačno kakav je njegov status. Napominjem da bih mogli da mu nabavimo i nas redovan pasos od poslanstva u Madridu, koji jos uvek funkcionise kao Kraljevsko Poslanstvo. Mogao bih isto tako traziti vizu za Grcku, koju verujem da mi Grci nebi odbili.

Zato, molim vas, budite dobri pa mi odgovorite na sva ova pitanja, a ja cu odmah preduzeti potrebne korake.

Molim vas da sa Visoko Preosvećenim Nikolajem primite moje postovanje i iskrene pozdrave.

#### Appendix 8

Hoover Institution Library & Archives, Konstantin Fotić Papers, Box no. 44,  
Folder no. 24, Konstantin Fotić to Bishop Dionisije, 1 May 1946.  
[The second page of this document is not relevant to Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović  
and is not reproduced here]



СРПСКА ПРАВОСЛАВНА ЕПАРХИЈА  
ЗА СЈЕД. ДРЖАВЕ АМЕРИКЕ И КАНАДУ  
SERBIAN EASTERN ORTHODOX DIOCESE  
FOR UNITED STATES OF AMERICA AND CANADA  
SERBIAN ST. SAVA MONASTERY  
LIBERTYVILLE, ILL.  
U. S. A.

Маја 7 19 46

Иважени Господине Амбасадоре

Примио сам Ваше драго ми писмо на чему најсрдљивије захваљујем, а нарочито ми мило то што су браниоци Дражини-амерички авијатичари, имали тако леп пријем у Вашингтону. Видим да је почео да функционише и нови Њу Јоршки Одбор за одбрану Дражину. Богу хвала. Сада се и због конференције у Харизу, управо због њезиног новог неуспеха, и околина председника Трумана почиња да освешћује и да увиђа са ким има посла. Ја чврсто верујем, да ће ова ситуација морати разбистрити а пре, а после, у колико пре - у толико боље.

У повледи Пасоша Његовог Преосвештенства Епископа Николаја ствар стоји овако: Он дефинитивно не жели да се враћа у Југославију. Он нема југословенски пасош него је у Америку дошао са неком врстом енглеског пасоша - пропустницом, или неким документом о идентификацији. Шаљем Вам један примерак фотостатик копије да имате, ако где затреба. Али несрећа је у томе, што Енглези не даду даље визе његовом пасошу. То значи, они му олудимају право повратка у своју земљу, што опет значи: Епископ Николај губи основу правну с којом је дошао у Америку као визитор. Отуда треба да нађемо нову земљу, која ће му издати свој пасош, или да визирају овај пасош који има сада Епископ Николај. Када би му издали нови пасош, било би боље, јер на садашњем пасошу стоји, да је енглеска виза канцелована, само што ја тај последњи део пасоша нисам фотографисао, да не би сметало када тражимо нови пасош негде.

Ја Вас молим, учините све да набавите за њега неки други пасош, на коме би Американци продужили визиторску визу за годину дана, а докле ће мо пробати да израдимо стални боравак овде.

У прилогу шаљем Вам и његаве потребне фотографије за пасош, и једну копију његовога садашњег пасоша, да се можете послужити ради ове ствари.

Изволите Господине Амбасадоре и овом приликом примити уверење мога поштовања и срљачан поздрав.

Његово Преосвештенство Епископ Николај Вас, такође, срљачно поздравља.

С благословом

*Епископ Димитрије*

Његовој Екселенцији  
бившем Амбасадору  
Константину Фотићу  
Вашингтон, Д.К.

Appendix 9

Hoover Institution Library & Archives, Konstantin Fotic Papers, Box no. 3,  
Folder no. 21, Bishop Dionisije to Konstantin Fotic, 7 May 1946



20 maj 1946

## Vase Preosvestenstvo:

Pre dva dana bio sam u State Departmentu (Visa Division), da tamo licno sa g. Traversom i Belovskim razgovaram o produzenju boravka Preosvecenog Nikolaja. Receno mi je da je za produzenje boravka jedino nadležno Immigration Office u New Yorku, i da Preosveceni treba da se tome officu obrati do 14-og juna, to jest, mesec dana pre nego sto vaznost ulazne vize istice.

Prema tome, Preosveceni Nikolaj treba da se obrati tome officu u New Yorku, koji mu moze proiziti boravak do mesec dana pre isteka certificate of identity, to jest, do 1-og oktobra 1946 g.

Ja bih savetovao Preosvecenog da tako postupi, i da trazi od New Yorkskog Immigration offica produzenje boravka do 1-og oktobra, sto ce nam dati vise vremena da trazimo mogucnosti da dobijemo koju drugu ispravu. Na zalost, moj grecki prijatelj vec mesec dana nije u Vasingtonu, i vrati ce se tek pocetkom juna meseca. Po mom misljenju, on bi bio naj pogodniji da nam pomogne, ali u njegovom odsustvu ja nisam hteo ovu stvar da diskutujem sa njegovim cinovnicima. U State Departmentu takodje mi je receno da Preosveceni ne mora licno da pretstave kod Immigration offica, vec moze i pismom da se obrati. Bilo bi dobro da zamoli nekog od svojih prijatelja u New Yorku da se kod Immigration offica zainteresuju za ovo produzenje, ali oni misle da za to nece biti teskoce. U medjuvremeno, ja sam od Visackog trazio da izda jedan nov pasos, Preosvecenom, pa kad ga dobijemo moze biti da ce americke vlasti priznati vaznost toga dokumenta.

*Appendix 10*

Hoover Institution Library & Archives, Konstantin Fotić Papers, Box no. 3,  
Folder no. 21, Konstantin Fotić to Bishop Dionisije, 20 May 1946

20 maj 1946

Dragi Visacki:

Molim vas da budete ljubazni da izdate jedan pasos za tri godine za Preosvećenog Vladiku Nikolaja Velimirovica. On je rođen 23 decembra, 1880 g. u Valjevu od oca Dragomira i majke Katarine Filipovic. Ovde je došao sa jednim engleskim certificate of identification, čija važnost istice 1-og novembra ove godine.

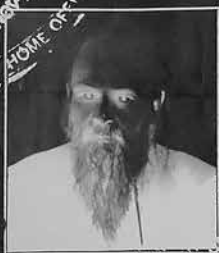
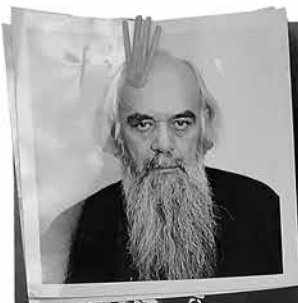
Zika vam je sigurno slao isecke o pisanju američke stampe povodom Drazinog procesa. Njegova tragedija izazvala je ovde mnogo više simpatije nego što smo ovde mogli očekivati. Avijaticare, koje je Draza spasao, spontano su se odazvali i učinili su sve što su mogli da mu pomognu. U New Yorku je obrazovan komitet vrlo uglednih ljudi, koji traže pravedno sudjenje za Drazu, i njihov rad imao je vrlo velikog odjeka u američkoj štampi. Videli ste da je američka vlada dva puta intervenisala u Beogradu, i na ovu drugu intervenciju još nije dobila odgovor.

Procitao sam memorandum Dragisin. Sta ce te; danas je vreme kad svaki misli da je bio u pravu, a kako se događaji razvijaju to nije ni čudo.

Srdacno vas pozdravlja.

*Appendix 11*

Hoover Institution Library & Archives, Konstantin Fotić Papers, Box no. 3,  
Folder no. 21, Konstantin Fotić to Ljubiša Visacki, 20 May 1946



Signature of *Nikolai Velimirovich*  
 Signature du titulaire

*Bishop Nikolai Velimirovich*

**DESCRIPTION.**  
**SIGNALEMENT.**

Age 64  
 Age  
 Height 5 ft. 6 in.  
 Taille  
 Hair Greyish.  
 Cheveux  
 Eyes Black.  
 Yeux  
 Face Round.  
 Visage  
 Nose Regular.  
 Nez  
 Special peculiarities  
 Signes particuliers

Remarks  
 Observations

This Certificate must be endorsed with an ~~Exit~~  
 Permit for Embarkation and Viséd by a British  
 Consular Authority abroad for return to the  
 United Kingdom.

*NBh*

Signature of the issuing authority,  
 Signature de l'autorité,

*J.B. Hughes*  
 H.M. CHIEF INSPECTOR,  
 IMMIGRATION BRANCH,  
 HOME OFFICE,  
 10, OLD BAILEY,  
 LONDON, E.C.4.

H.M. Chief Inspector  
 RECEIVED NOV 23 1945  
 IDENTITY FEE  
 7/6  
 8312

(S.O.A. 6664) Wt. 18192/338 3,000 7/46 C.T. Gp. 680

I.B. 113

No. V. 8333

Date 2nd November, 1945.

Authority issuing certificate:—HOME OFFICE.  
 Indication de l'autorité qui délivre le certificat

Place of issue of certificate:—LONDON.  
 Lieu où l'on délivre le certificat

**CERTIFICATE OF IDENTITY.**  
**CERTIFICAT D'IDENTITE.**

Valid until 1st November, 1946.  
 Valable jusqu'

The present certificate is issued for the sole purpose of providing the holder with identity papers in lieu of a national passport. It is without prejudice to and in no way affects the national status of the holder. If the holder obtains a national passport this certificate ceases to be valid and must be surrendered to the issuing authority.

Le présent certificat est délivré à seule fin de fournir au titulaire une pièce d'identité pouvant tenir lieu de passeport national. Il ne préjuge pas la nationalité du titulaire et est sans effet sur celle-ci. Au cas où le titulaire obtiendrait un passeport national, ce certificat cessera d'être valable et devra être renvoyé à l'autorité qui l'a délivré.

Surname VELIMIROVICH  
 Nom de famille.  
 Forenames Nicholai  
 Prénoms.  
 Date of birth 23rd December, 1880  
 Date de naissance.  
 Place of birth Valayo  
 Lieu de naissance.  
 Nationality of origin Serbian  
 Nationalité d'origine.  
 Surname and forenames of Father VELIMIROVICH Dragomir  
 Nom de famille et prénoms du père.  
 Surname and forenames of Mother PILIPOVICH Katarina  
 Nom de famille et prénoms de la mère.  
 Name of wife (husband) \_\_\_\_\_  
 Nom de la femme (mari).  
 Names of children \_\_\_\_\_  
 Noms des enfants.  
 Occupation Bishop of the Serbian Church.  
 Profession.  
 Former residence abroad Salzburg.  
 Ancien domicile à l'étranger.  
 Present residence in the United Kingdom 41, Upper Grosvenor  
 Résidence actuelle dans le Royaume Uni.  
 Street, London, W.1.  
 Police Registration Certificate  
 Certificat d'enregistrement délivré par la Police.

The undersigned certifies that the photograph and signature hereon are those of the bearer of the present document.  
 Le soussigné certifie que la photographie et la signature apposées ci-contre sont bien celles du porteur du présent document.

**VISAS AND ENDORSEMENTS.**

BARCLAYS BANK LIMITED  
FORM PP

... was permitted to land at ... on the 22nd October, 1945, on condition that he should not enter any employment paid or unpaid, or change his employment, without the consent of the Ministry of Labour and National Service; and should not remain in the United Kingdom longer than two weeks.

**Foreign Exchange for Travelling Expenses.**  
*No entries to be made on this page except by a Bank or Travel Agency in the United Kingdom.*

Date	Serial Number of Exchange Control Application Form (For refunds, the word "Refunded.")	Amount issued or refunded (Sterling equivalent to nearest £)	Status of Bank or Travel Agent issuing exchange
7/1/46	T020391	£10—	BARCLAYS BANK LIMITED

*Wm Cottrell for*

H.M. Chief Inspector of Immigration  
(2)  
- 2 NOV 1945  
HOME OFFICE

Admitted at New York, N. Y., on **JAN 14 1946** under Paragraph Section 3, Immigration Act of 1924, for *6 mos*

*S. J. Swail*  
Immigrant Inspector.

Seen at the Foreign Office, London.  
Visa good for travelling to *United Kingdom until February 8<sup>th</sup> 1946.*  
Valid for the Single Journey only

Date **8 NOV 1945**  
Passport Office.  
*W. Sturms* Director.

PASSPORT

Appendix 12

Hoover Institution Library & Archives, Konstantin Fotić Papers, Box no. 3,  
Folder no. 21, Certificate of Identity issued to Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović  
by the Immigration Branch of British Home Office

Madrid, 25 Maja 1946 godine.

Dragi Gospodine Ambasadore,

Ovoga časa sam primio Vaše pismo od 20.o.m.sa podacima Preosvetenog Episkopa g. Nikolaja Velimiroviča. Zaboravili ste da mi pošaljete najglavnije, fotografiju. Kada mi je već šaljete molim Vas poslati mi je u tri primerka. Isto tako treba mi podatak o mestu zavišajnosti, sa srezom i banovinom kojoj mesto pripada. Istovremeno mi javite koju vrstu pasoa želite: običan, služben ili diplomatski.

Sa najvećim interesom pratim Vaš rad u Americi, koji iskaže mnogo ispred nas u Evropi. Energični ste, vredni, odlučni, a rekao bih i složni, pa se stoga vide i rezultati. Povodom Dražinog procesa vidim da ste uspeli da zatalasate američku štampu i javnost. Treba izdržati u toj i takvoj napetosti, i gurati Amerikance da uvide da su zemlju predali na upravu razbojnicima.

U prilogu Vam šaljem prevod članka koji je objavljen u ovdašnjem najvećem dnevniku "Ya" na osnovu materijala koji sam im dao. U tom smislu doneli su članke i drugi prestonički i provincijski listovi. Ovdašnja štampa i javnost sa velikim interesom prati sve momente u Dražinom slučaju. Najveći nedeljni ilustrovani časopis "Mundo" doneo je Dražinu sliku na koricama.

Sa Odborom u Londonu sam tako reći u neprekidnim vezama i oni mi šalju sve što je od interesa. Kosta je vredan i u stalnoj smo prepisici kako službenoj tako i privatnoj. Uskoro treba da vidim šta će biti sa mnom. Sve je sada u rukama Odbora. Ja sam doterao vodu do mlina, a oni sada treba da je nateraju na mlin.

Od Zike nemam nikakve vesti već tri meseca. Pisao sam mu 15 marta i to ne pismo nego knjigu; zatim 3 i 29 aprila. Nemam odgovora pa čak ni na konkretna pitanja odnosno njegovih najbližih saradnika iz 27.III. Neznam da li me je zaboravio ili zanemario.

Vi ste jedini od koga sam dobio jednu refleksiju na Dražin memorandum, a dobra Vam je. Neznam šta je sa njim, i od njega nemam vesti od februara. Verovatno je negde u Italiji. Iz Belgije sam dobio jedan vrlo interesantan prikaz o duševnom stanju kod naših bivših ratnih zarobljenika i svih ostalih u Nemačkoj koji neће da se vrate u zemlju. Neznam ko ga je napisao, jer nema ni naslova a ni potpisa. Počinje sa "Pobedonosni prelaz savezničkih trupa preko Rajne bio je za sve naše ljude..." i t.d. Ako ga nemate javite mi pa ću Vam ga prepisati. Vrlo interesantna opažanja kako su se na psihu naših ljudi reperkutovali svi naši spoljni i unutarnji momenti od časa kada se nemačka sila slomila.

Zena mi je preležala zapaljenje pluća, a ja umalo ne zaglavih od jednog bezazlenog zapaljenja ~~pluća~~ zuba. Hvala Bogu sada je sve dobro.

Nađam se da Vam je Zika saopštio moju poruku iz mog pisma od 29.pr.m. odnosno Vašeg brata, g. Milana.

Cim budem dobio fotografije poslatu Vam traženi pasoa.

Srdačno Vas pozdravlja



### Appendix 13

Hoover Institution Library & Archives, Konstantin Fotić Papers, Box no. 3,  
Folder no. 21, Ljubiša Visacki to Konstantin Fotić, 25 May 1946

THE RT. REV. BISHOP DIONISIJE



SERBIAN EASTERN ORTHODOX DIOCESE  
 FOR UNITED STATES OF AMERICA AND CANADA  
 SERBIAN ST. SAVA MONASTERY  
 LIBERTYVILLE, ILL.  
 U. S. A.

19 јуни 1946

УВАЖЕНИ ГОСПОДИНЕ АМБАСАДОРЕ,

У вези са нашим разговором за пасош Његовом Преосвештенства епископа Николаја, шаљем Вам три његове фотографије да их доставите у Мадрид. Пасош би требао да буде антилатиран т.ј. да буде из времена пре гласања за монархију у Југославији.

Независно од овога извештавам Вас да, ако се ствар продужетка боравка епископа Николаја не сврши у Винзору, у Канади, да ћемо ових дана пренети цело питање у Монреал. Молим Вас кад Вас будем о овоме известио да напишете једно писмота мошњем америчком генералном конзулу да одобри легални улазак епископу Николају у Америку. Овде мислим на права свештеника који иста добијају без квоте.

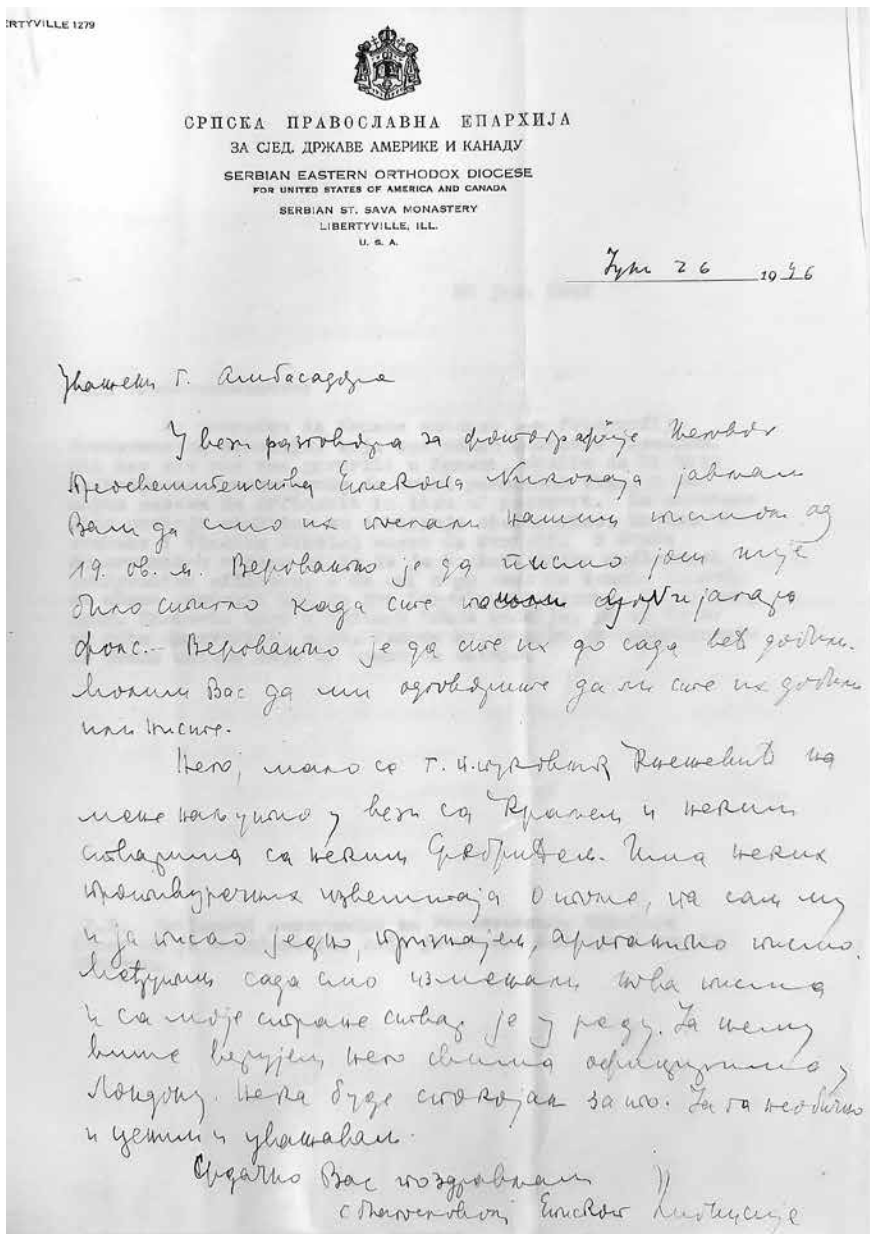
Изволите господине амбасадоре и овом приликом примите уверење мог поштовања.

С благословом,

Његовој Екселенцији  
 Амбасадору,  
 Е. КОНСТАНТИНУ ФОТИЋУ  
 ВАШИНГТОН

## Appendix 14

Hoover Institution Library & Archives, Konstantin Fotic Papers, Box no. 3,  
 Folder no. 21, Bishop Dionisije to Konstantin Fotic, 19 June 1946



## Appendix 15

Hoover Institution Library & Archives, Konstantin Fотиć Papers, Box no. 44,  
Folder no. 24, Bishop Dionisije to Konstantin Fотиć, 26 June 1946

28 juni 1946

УВАЖЕНИ ГОСПОДИНЕ АМБАСАДОРЕ,

I veći sa našim razgovorom za pasosa Petrovom Pre-  
 dragi Visacki: da ih dostavite u Madrid. Pasos se trebalo  
 da bude ispredativan u. I. da bude na vreme na pre glava

Tek sad sam dobio prilozene slike od Episkopa Nikolaja,  
 i koje vam saljem radi njegovog pasosa. On se vam bitu vrlo  
 blagodaran da mu pasos sto pre dostavite.

Srdacno vas pozdravlja,

Ukratko, da nemo ovih iznani...  
 o ovome naravno da napisete jedno  
 listomatomšom američkom generalnom konzulu da osigura le-  
 talni ulazak episkopu Nikolaju u Ameriku. Ove nedelje na  
 strana svetjenika koji neta ovih, a u bez kate.  
 Izvolite gospodine ambasadore u ovom prilikom pri-  
 nite uverenje mog kontovana.

u blagoslovom,

NYTOVOJ EKSELENCIJI  
 АМБАСАДОРУ,  
 В. КОНСТАНТИНУ ФОТИЋУ  
 ВАШИНГТОН

Godpodimu  
 Ljubisi Visackom  
 Calle de Alvarez de Baena 8  
 Madrid, Spain

## Appendix 16

Hoover Institution Library & Archives, Konstantin Fotić Papers, Box no. 3,  
 Folder no. 21, Konstantin Fotić to Ljubiša Visacki, 28 June 1946



29 juni 1946

Vase Preosvestenstvo:

Po povratku iz Kanade zatekao sam fotografije Preosvećenog Nikolaja, koje sam odmah dostavio Visackom. Ali kao što smo već govorili u Kanadi, mislim da bi bilo najbolje za Preosvećenog da traži permanent viza, i da mesto pasosa da affidavit in lieu of passport. Za svestena lica postoje olaksice za dobijanje stalne vize, kojima bi svakako i Vladika Nikolaj mogao da koristi. U State Department-u receno mi je da je to isključivo nadležnost Immigration office-a, a da oni mogu samo da zamole konzula da ubrza postupak kad se sve formalnosti ispune. U ostalom, ppuk. Knezevic bice u Chicagu iduce nedelje, pa ce te se sa njim dogovoriti, a ja, razume se, stojim na raspolozenju za svaku uslugu koju bi mogao da ucinim.

P.S. Prilozeni memorandum za Preosvećenog Nikolaja doneo mi je Drinjakovic, koji je prosle nedelje dosao iz Minnhena.

*Appendix 17*

Hoover Institution Library & Archives, Konstantin Fotić Papers, Box no. 44,  
Folder no. 24, Konstantin Fotić to Bishop Dionisije, 29 June 1946

26 avgusta 1946

Vase Preosvestenstvo,

Danas sam dobio od g. Vissackog Vas pasos koji Van saljem u prilogu sa nadom da ce Van moci poslužiti i molim Vas da budete ljubazni da mi potvrdite prijem.

Nezam da li ste videli moje pismo objavljeno u "New-York Times-u" od 23 ovog meseca. Za svaki slucaj saljem Van jednu kopiju; nadam se interesovace Vas.

Molim Vase Preosvestenstvo da primite uverenje moga dubokog postovanja

njegovom Preosvestenstvu  
 odinu Dr. Nikolaju Velimirovicu  
 Episkopu Zickom  
 Libertyville  
 (Ill)

*Appendix 18*

Hoover Institution Library & Archives, Konstantin Fotić Papers, Box no. 44,  
 Folder no. 24, Konstantin Fotić to Bishop Nikolaj, 26 August 1946

Манастир Св.Саве

Либертивил,Ил..

авг.28.1946 год.

Драги Господине Министре,

Примио сам послати папир у реду.Веома сам Вам  
благодаран на учињеном труду.

Примио сам и прочитао и Ваше лично писмо "Бу-  
Јорк Тајмсу".Ја не знам,да ли сте ишта написали тако  
класично јасно.

Бог нека Вас сачува у здрављу и снази.

Дубоко Вас поштује и срдечно поздравља,

олани Вам

*Н.С.Николас*

Његовој Екселенцији

Господину К.Фотићу,

Б. Амбасатору Југославије.

П.С.Молим Вас поздравите г.  
Николића.Не знам ни где  
је сада Његов пашеног ни-  
ти да ли су Његови још на  
планини.

*Appendix 19*

Hoover Institution Library & Archives, Konstantin Fotic Papers, Box no. 44,  
Folder no. 24, Bishop Nikolaj to Konstantin Fotic, 28 August 1946

## List of Contributors

(in alphabetical order)

**Nemanja Andrijašević** is currently a doctoral student at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology, University of Belgrade, where he also graduated and obtained master's degree. The field of his scientific interest and research includes: life and work of Professor Dr. Đjoko Slijepčević, history of the Serbian Orthodox Church in the Federal Republic of Germany and Africa and religious life of Orthodox Serbs in the German camps from 1941 to 1945.

**Dragan Bakić** is a senior research associate from the Institute for Balkan Studies of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts. His research interests focus on history of Serbia, Yugoslavia and the Balkans during the era of the world wars, especially diplomacy, foreign policy and security, and British foreign policy towards Danubian Europe. Of late he works on the Serbian right-wing in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia within the scope of a nationally-funded project of which he is the principal investigator. He is the author of *Britain and Interwar Danubian Europe: Foreign Policy and Security Challenges, 1919-1936* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017).

**Phillip Calington** is a deacon of the Russian Orthodox Church and a lecturer at the St. Tikhon's Orthodox University in Moscow. His general research interests include Church history, liturgics, dogmatic theology and patristics. He has published works and spoken at international conferences in the topics ranging from a study of the Canons of the Orthodox Church, St. Justin Popovic, Orthodox view on ecology to the Russian Old Believers. In 2021 he defended his doctoral dissertation (an in-depth study of the first Greek Catholic liturgical book printed after the Union of Brest) with distinction at the St. Sergius Orthodox Institute in Paris, and is preparing this work for publication.

**Vladimir Cvetković** is a senior research associate at the Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory of the University of Belgrade (Serbia). His research interests include Patristics, Ancient and Byzantine Philosophy, and Modern Orthodox Theology. He is co-editor (together with Alex Leonas) of the *Subsidia Maximiana*, a subseries dedicated to studies of the work of Maximus the Confessor as part of the *Instrumenta Patristica et Mediaevalia Series* (IPM), published by Brepols. His recent books include: *Justin Popović: Synthesis of Tradition and Innovation* (2021, in Serbian), *Thought and Mission of St Justin Popović* (2019, edited together with Bogdan Lubardić in Serbian) and *From “Merciful Angel” to “Fortress Europe”: The Perception of Europe and the West in Contemporary Serbian Orthodoxy* (University of Erfurt, 2015).

**Aleksandar Đakovac** is an Associate Professor at the Orthodox Theological Faculty of the University of Belgrade and teaches at the Department of Systematic Theology. He researches in the areas of dogmatic theology, patristics, ethics and the social role of the Church. His recent books include: *The Same Yesterday and Today and Forever* (2020, in Serbian), *Spoken and Unspeakable: Discursiveness of Asmatic Ontology in the Aporetics of St. Maximus the Confessor* (2018, in Serbian), *Heavenly Jerusalem and the Secular Kingdom: Essays on the Church and Secularism* (2018, in Serbian).

**Rastko Lompar** is a research assistant at the Institute for Balkan Studies of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, and a PhD student at the University of Belgrade. His research interests include fascism, history of right-wing movements in Yugoslavia and the relationship between fascism and religion. His latest book is *Dimitrije Ljotić: Teacher or Pharisee?* (2021, in Serbian).

**Slobodan G. Markovich** is Full Professor at the School of Political Science of the University of Belgrade and at the Institute for European Studies in Belgrade. He has been Research Associate at LSEE/LSE since 2012, and at LSE IDEAS since 2018. He has been the head of the Centre for British Studies at the School of Political Science in Belgrade since 2017. His published monographs include a book on Freud’s pessimism:

*Pessimistic Anthropology of Sigmund Freud* (Belgrade, 2012), and a monograph on British-(Balkan) Serbian relations: *British Perceptions of Serbia and the Balkans 1903-1906* (Paris, 2000, in English). His (co-)edited collections of papers in English include: *Freemasonry in Southeast Europe from the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries* (Belgrade, 2020) and *British-Serbian Relations from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries* (Belgrade, 2018). He has been the coordinator of annual meetings “Psychoanalysis and Culture” since 2016. His research interests include: Construction of Identities in the Balkans, intellectual history of Southeast Europe, British-Balkan Relations, psychoanalytic anthropology, and history of European pessimism.

**Srećko M. Petrović** (1978) is a PhD student at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology at the University of Belgrade (Serbia) and the editor of the *Nicholai Studies* journal. He is the managing editor of the “Christian Sources” series published by the Christian Cultural Center “Dr. Radovan Bigović” (edited by Aleksandar Đakovac). His research interests include Patristics, the History of Christianity, Modern Orthodox Theology, Ecumenical Theology, and the History of the Ecumenical Movement.

**Radmila Radić** is Principal Research Fellow at Belgrade’s Institute for the Recent History of Serbia. Her research has focused on the church-state relations in former Yugoslav state, the history of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Balkan social history. She has written and co-written several books as well as numerous scientific articles. Her most recent works include: Aleksandra Djurić Milovanović and Radmila Radić, *Orthodox Christian Renewal Movements in Eastern Europe*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2017; Radmila Radić, *The Mission of the British Young Men’s Christian Association in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia*, Beograd: INIS, 2019; Radmila Radić and Neven Vukic, “Ecumenism Divided. Christian Churches at the Fault Lines”, Odak, S., & Grozdanov, Z. (Eds.). (2022). *Balkan Contextual Theology: An Introduction* (1<sup>st</sup> ed.), 45-78, Routledge Studies in Religion, Taylor & Francis, 2022.

**Dragan Šljivić** graduated from the Faculty of Political Science in Belgrade and received his PhD from the University of Erfurt, Germany. His research interests include Democratisation, Church–State rela-

tions, Cultural History of Orthodox Christianity and Modern Orthodox Theology. He is the author of *Between Vox Populi and Vox Dei: The Orthodox Church and Embedding Democracy in Bulgaria and Serbia* (forthcoming).

**Miloš Timotijević** is a curator of the National Museum in Čačak (Serbia). The main areas of his scholarly interest include modernization processes in the Balkans, military, social and cultural history of Serbia in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The most important works are: *The century of doubt: religiosity in the Čačan region: 1886-2008* (2009, in Serbian), *Modernization of the Balkan city: (1944-1989): a comparative analysis of the development of Čačak and Blagoevgrad in the era of socialism* (2012, in Serbian), *Dragiša Vasić (1885-1945) and the Serbian national idea* (2016, in Serbian) and “Haliyard” *Mission: War propaganda, bombing of Serbian cities and evacuation of allied airmen in 1943-1944* (2020, in Serbian).

**Maxim (Vasiljević)** is the Bishop of Los Angeles and the Western American Diocese of the Serbian Orthodox Church. He graduated from the Faculty of Orthodox Theology, University of Belgrade, in 1993. He completed his Master of Theology at the University of Athens in 1996, and then three years later, in 1999, at the same university, he defended his doctorate in the field of Dogmatics and Patristics. He worked for a year on his post-doctorate in Paris and the Sorbonne in 2003-04 in the field of Byzantine History and Hagiography. Bishop Maxim was a Professor of Patristics at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology of the University of Belgrade and was teaching Christian Anthropology, Byzantine Philosophy, Canon Law, and Dogmatics at various universities and schools. Currently, he is teaching at Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology (Brookline, MA, USA). Bishop Maxim’s recent scholarly books include *Theology as Surprise — Patristic and Pastoral Insights* (New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press 2018), *Diary of the Council: Reflections from the Holy and Great Council at the Orthodox Academy in Crete* (St. Herman of Alaska Monastery, 2016), *Symeon the Metaphrast: Biography, Redaction, Theology* (2020, in Serbian).

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