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# SERBIAN PRESS AND EASTERN ORTHODOXY IN SERBIA IN THE 1980s

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## Introduction

The end of World War II and the establishment of communist rule in Yugoslavia placed the Serbian Orthodox Church in an extremely difficult position. The communist government regarded religious communities as dangerous ideological and political rivals and consequently tried to reduce their influence through various repressive measures. The abolition of religious education in schools and agrarian reform, which deprived religious communities of a large portion of their property, are only some of the methods employed by the regime to suppress the influence of the religious communities in Yugoslavia. Moreover, the Serbian Orthodox Church faced pressure from the authorities to recognize the autocephaly of the Macedonian Orthodox Church.<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, the 1980s witnessed a gradual revitalization of religiosity in Serbia. This process was closely linked to the grave crisis that followed the death of the charismatic Yugoslav leader Josip Broz Tito in

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<sup>1</sup> On the status of the Serbian Orthodox Church in socialist Yugoslavia, see: Radmila Radić, *Država i verske zajednice 1945–1970* (Beograd: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 2002); Dragoljub Živojinović, *Srpska pravoslavna crkva i nova vlast: 1944–1950* (Srbinje, Beograd, Valjevo, Munich: Univerzitetski obrazovani pravoslavni bogoslovi, Hilendarski fond, Zadužbina “Nikolaj Velimirović i Justin Popović”, 1998); Đoko Slijepčević, *Istorija Srpske pravoslavne crkve, knj. 3, Za vreme Drugog svetskog rata i posle njega* (Beograd: Catena mundi, 2018); Radmila Radić and Momčilo Mitrović, *Zapisnici sa sednica Komisije za verska pitanja NR/SR Srbije: 1945–1978. godine* (Beograd: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 2012).

1980. The crisis encompassed both economic and political dimensions. A key factor in the economic crisis was Yugoslavia's substantial foreign debt, which reached \$20 billion at the start of the decade.<sup>2</sup>

The bad economic strategy of the Yugoslav regime led to a noticeable drop in the standard of living. This was reflected in high inflation, a decline in purchasing power and shortages of consumer goods. In addition, Yugoslav society in the 1980s was hit by a grave political crisis. The Albanian rebellion in Kosovo in 1981 highlighted the extreme fragility of the Yugoslav multi-ethnic experiment. Although the uprising was suppressed by repressive measures, tensions in Kosovo persisted. In the following years, the Kosovo issue escalated into a major crisis that shook the very foundations of the Yugoslav system.<sup>3</sup>

In the early 1980s, relations between the Yugoslav republics deteriorated sharply. Tensions between republican elites came to the fore in the crisis surrounding the election of the influential Serbian politician Dragoslav Marković as a member of the Presidency of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (LCY) following the 12th Congress of the LCY in 1982. This brief crisis was resolved through a compromise between the Yugoslav party elites, although it did not eliminate the underlying discord between the Yugoslav republics. Moreover, in the following years, the ethnic tensions paved the way to the collapse of the multi-ethnic Yugoslav federation in the early 1990s.<sup>4</sup>

The grave crisis in Yugoslavia also had serious social consequences. Ethnic tensions in Kosovo during the 1980s destabilized the largest Yugoslav republic – Serbia – and triggered the ethnic mobilization of Serbs. Considering the important, if not, crucial role of Eastern Orthodoxy in the formation of the Serbian ethnic identity, the ethnic

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<sup>2</sup> Branko Petranović and Momčilo Zečević, *Jugoslavija 1918–1988: Tematska zbirka dokumenata* (Beograd: Rad, 1988), 1278; Suzan Vudvord, *Balkanska tragedija: Haos i raspad posle Hladnog rata* (Beograd: Filip Višnjić, 1997), 37; Slobodan Selinić, *Srbija 1980–1986: Politička istorija od Tita do Miloševića* (Beograd: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 2021), 115; Ljubiša S. Adamović, Džon R. Lempi and Rasel O. Priket, *Američko-jugoslovenski ekonomski odnosi posle Drugog svetskog rata* (Beograd: Radnička štampa, 1990), 134.

<sup>3</sup> Petar Ristanović, *Kosovsko pitanje 1974–1989* (Novi Sad: Prometej; Beograd: Informatika, 2019).

<sup>4</sup> Slobodan Selinić, *Srbija 1980–1986*, 13–43.

mobilization of Serbs in the 1980s spurred a revival of the religiosity of Serbs, as well as the improvement of the reputation of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Serbian society.

### Age of Distrust

The considerable influence of the Serbian Orthodox Church and the growing interest of Serbs in religion during the 1980s can be reconstructed with the help of an analysis of the Serbian press from that period. During the 1980s, the daily newspapers and magazines in Serbia carefully monitored the renewal of Serbian religiosity and the increasing influence of the Orthodox clergy on Serbian politics and society. Articles and comments in the Serbian press from the time indicate that the communist regime did not fully control this process, but tried to take advantage of it. Thus, in the final decade of communism in Serbia, a *modus vivendi* was established between the state and the church, which had both social and political ramifications.

The growing rapprochement between the state and the Serbian Orthodox Church was reflected in the meeting of two Serbian leaders – Dobrivoje Vidić (President of the Presidency of Serbia) and Dušan Čkrebić (President of the Parliament of Serbia) – with the Serbian Patriarch German in 1981. The regime and the state-controlled press wanted to demonstrate its intention to establish a *modus vivendi* with the Serbian Orthodox Church. To mend fences with the Serbian Orthodox Church, the regime in Serbia made several substantial concessions. According to an article published in the Belgrade weekly *NIN* in October 1981, the bulk of the contentious issues in the relationship between the Serbian Orthodox Church and the regime in Belgrade were settled. The government approved the construction of new churches and a new building for the Faculty of Theology in Belgrade, and resolved the issue of health care for monks, nuns, and students of the Faculty of Theology. Furthermore, as mentioned in the *NIN* article, the regime signaled its readiness to address another major issue in the relations between the church and the state in Serbia. The Serbian Orthodox Church had insisted for decades on resuming the construction of the Saint Sava Temple in Belgrade, which had begun before World War II.

Although the regime was still hesitant to fully approve this undertaking, it did agree to the construction of the St. Sava Center instead of the temple, which was intended to house several important institutions of the Serbian Orthodox Church (church archive, library, and treasury). The *NIN* journalist emphasized that the St. Sava Center would serve as a “temple of goodwill between the church and the state.”<sup>5</sup>

The same article, published in October 1981, detailed the session of the Presidency of Serbia on the relationship between the state and the Serbian Orthodox Church. This session also indicated the regime’s readiness to improve relations with the church. It was also noted that the attitude of the majority of priests towards the state was positive, and some municipal authorities were criticized for confiscating church properties. The President of Serbia, Dobrivoje Vidić, emphasized that the government would have to change many things to maintain the trend of normalizing relations with the Serbian Orthodox Church.<sup>6</sup> The journalist from the Belgrade magazine emphasized that good relations with the Serbian Orthodox Church were necessary, among other things, due to the significant influence of the church in the rural areas of Serbia. Nevertheless, reading between the lines reveals another reason that motivated the regime in Belgrade to improve its relationship with the Serbian Orthodox Church. The author of the article quoted parts of an address of Dušan Čkrebić, in which the president of the Serbian assembly spoke about the right-wing, conservative faction within the Serbian Orthodox Church – the God–Worshipper Movement (Bogomoljački pokret):

The God–Worshipper Movement – these are religious fanatics, religiously and ethnically exclusive (...) And we cannot be indifferent to them. There is also Amfilohije Radović, an assistant professor at the Faculty of Theology, a Greek student, whose speech at the funeral of Justin Popović was on the verge of a criminal offense and he was reprimanded for it. It should be said that there are not many of them, but they have a certain influence.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Dragan Jovanović, “Put dobre volje,” *NIN*, October 4, 1981, 24–25.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

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

This trend in the Serbian Orthodox Church, personified by Nikolaj Velimirović, was also criticized in the statement issued following the aforementioned session of the Presidency of Serbia: "The Presidency of the Socialist Republic of Serbia considers the latest attempts to rehabilitate Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović, who was a known enemy of our socialist community and who was connected with the activities of God-Worshipper Movement, an expression of Serbian nationalism (...)." <sup>8</sup>

These harsh criticisms of the conservative factions in the Serbian Orthodox Church at the session of the Presidency of Serbia in the fall of 1981 suggest that the Serbian regime feared the strengthening of this current within the Serbian Orthodox community, which was strongly anti-communist. It can be assumed that by supporting the "moderate" wing of the SOC, led by Patriarch German, the regime sought to reduce the influence of the more radical segments of the Serbian Orthodox Church.

However, despite the regime's efforts to improve its relations with the Orthodox community in Serbia, the Serbian Orthodox Church was not satisfied with its status in Serbian society. In the early 1980s, the *Pravoslavlje* magazine, the organ of the Patriarchate of the SOC, severely criticized the way several Serbian state-controlled media reported on the Serbian Orthodox Church and its clergy. For example, in March 1982, *Pravoslavlje* reported on the frequent attacks on the Serbian Orthodox Church and its clergy. In this regard, *Pravoslavlje* cited the magazine *Komuna*, which in January 1982 published an article about a meeting of a local committee of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia, which criticized the Serbian Orthodox Church for meddling in politics, instead of focusing on souls. The *Pravoslavlje* journalist saw in this attitude a jealousy of the popularity of the Serbian Orthodox Church and its clergy in socialist Serbia: "Perhaps someone is disturbed that we are still a God-believing nation, that our youth are still interested in religion and secrets of life." <sup>9</sup>

A few months later, the organ of the Patriarchate of the SOC scrutinized an article in the Belgrade weekly *Ilustrovana politika*, which

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Obrad Simulov, "Neka se bave dušom, a ne politikom," *Pravoslavlje*, March 15, 1982, 6.

criticized the decision of parents from the small Bosnian town of Rudo to send their daughter to the Serbian monastery of Žiča. The *Ilustrovana politika* reporter highlighted the considerable anxiety of Rudo's residents about the resurgence of interest in religion. A local communist official was also quoted as calling the girl's parents "religious fanatics." The author of the article published on April 1, 1982, in *Pravoslavlje*, stressed that the text was malicious and described Serbian monasteries as "the brightest spots of our nation," "the sources of literacy, culture, and spirituality" of Serbs, and "the pivots of Serbian history." *Pravoslavlje* further pointed out that the *Ilustrovana politika* weekly condemned the parents of the girl who went to a monastery, while at the same time absolving parents of children who became drug addicts, alcoholics, and thieves of any responsibility.<sup>10</sup> A month later, *Pravoslavlje* also criticized an article in *Omladinske novine* for negatively portraying the monks in the Serbian monastery of Kaona in northeastern Serbia.<sup>11</sup>

The organ of the Patriarchate of the SOC continued its conflict with the Belgrade state-controlled press during the summer of 1982. First, the Belgrade daily *Politika* came under fire for estimating that only 7% of the Serbian population were believers. The *Pravoslavlje* magazine refuted this estimate, arguing that respondents did not give honest answers out of fear. The same issue of *Pravoslavlje* severely criticized an article published on May 15, 1982 in the magazine *Omladinske novine*, titled "New Wave Believers." This Belgrade youth magazine reported on the large crowd of young people in the Holy Trinity Cathedral in the Serbian city of Niš for Good Friday, suggesting that the religiosity of most of them was superficial, i.e. that young people either went to church "by accident" or because they were "being attracted by the mystique surrounding these space and events, the desire to stand out from the crowd and to be something special." The author of the *Pravoslavlje* article expressed doubts about the veracity of the responses of the young people surveyed, claiming that the *Omladinske novine* magazine intended to mock the Serbian Orthodox Church and its believers. The

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<sup>10</sup> Dragan Terzić, "Još povodom članka *Silom u manastir*: O jednom uzbuđenju," *Pravoslavlje*, April 1, 1982, 3.

<sup>11</sup> Milutin Knežević, "Ima li granica uvredama?," *Pravoslavlje*, May 1, 1982, 3.

author concluded the article by expressing his conviction that “our church is not without a future and that young people have not abandoned God.”<sup>12</sup>

In a similar vein, two years later, *Pravoslavlje* cast doubt on the findings of a survey that reported that 98% of students in the northern Serbian province, Vojvodina, believed that science would triumph over religion. *Pravoslavlje* disputed the sincerity of the surveyed students’ responses, denouncing such surveys as “a kind of psychological and moral pressure [on children].”<sup>13</sup>

In the first half of the 1980s, the Serbian Orthodox Church expressed dissatisfaction not only with the media coverage of the church and its clergy, but also with artistic representations of the Serbian Orthodox Church that portrayed it negatively. In May 1980, the organ of the Serbian Patriarchate condemned the portrayal of Serbian Orthodox clergy in Veljko Bulajić’s feature film *A Man Who Should Be Killed* and in a theater play directed by Dejan Mijač, which was being performed at the Serbian National Theater in Novi Sad.<sup>14</sup> In late 1980, priest Dragan Terzić published a critical review of Dobrilo Nenadić’s novel *Dorotej* in *Pravoslavlje*, which in 1978 had received a National Library of Serbia’s award. In Nenadić’s novel, Terzić saw an overt criticism of the Serbian Orthodox Church. He remarked: “The whole book is permeated with such vulgarisms and sacrilege that we are surprised by the fact that the publisher did not also think of the religious members of our society, whose religious feelings were hurt by this book.”<sup>15</sup>

In March 1982, Bishop Simeon condemned, in *Pravoslavlje*, Goran Stefanovski’s drama *Wild Meat*, which had been broadcast on Television Belgrade in prime time in February of the same year. Bishop Simeon perceived this drama not only as an attack on the clergy but also on the *slava* (a Serbian Orthodox tradition of celebrating a family’s patron saint).<sup>16</sup> A year later, *Pravoslavlje* revisited Veljko Bulajić’s film *A*

<sup>12</sup> Mitar Milovanović, “Bog u anketama i dušama mladih,” *Pravoslavlje*, July 1, 1982, 10.

<sup>13</sup> “Prva petoletka vojvođanske ateizacije,” *Pravoslavlje*, April 15, 1984, 6.

<sup>14</sup> Dušan Petrović, “To nije lik srpskog pravoslavnog sveštenika iz 1942. Godine,” *Pravoslavlje*, July 1, 1980, 5–6; “Čovek koga treba ubiti,” *Pravoslavlje*, May 15, 1980, 10.

<sup>15</sup> Dragan Terzić, “O Doroteju,” *Pravoslavlje*, December 15, 1980, 11.

<sup>16</sup> Episkop Simeon, “Povodom drame Divlje meso,” *Pravoslavlje*, March 15, 1982, 5.

*Man Who Should Be Killed*. Bishop Simeon not only denounced the way the Montenegrin bishop Sava was portrayed in the movie but also claimed to have identified hidden satanic messages in Bulajić's work, concluding his text by claiming that the film confirmed "that Satan exists and controls human souls."<sup>17</sup> In the same issue of *Pravoslavlje*, priest Dragan Terzić denounced the TV comedy *Doktorka na selu* for, among other things, scornfully mocking the Holy Archangel. In this regard, Terzić noted that there were no sanctions for such invectives against the church and Orthodoxy: "It seems that everyone has the right to publicly portray the church, religion, priests and believers whatever he likes, being aware that he could not be held accountable for it. It is an area where everyone has absolute freedom of thought and expression."<sup>18</sup>

In the following years, *Pravoslavlje* persisted in denouncing anti-religious trends in Serbian society. In May 1984, an article entitled "Church and Socialism" listed the most striking examples of anti-theism, i.e. anti-religious indoctrination in Serbia, primarily in Serbian schools. The author underlined that children were taught in schools that God did not exist and were being pressured not to go to church. In addition, he expressed his deep displeasure with media coverage of the church and clergy in Serbia.<sup>19</sup>

In March 1985, the organ of the Patriarchate of the Serbian Orthodox Church stressed that the Serbian media were "full of atheistic attacks on believers." However, unlike earlier articles, the criticism was more moderate since the article called into question the responsibility of the regime for these media attacks on the church and believers. Moreover, the author of the article praised the decision of the Television Belgrade to air *the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom* by Serbian composer, Stevan Mokranjac.<sup>20</sup>

This article in the *Pravoslavlje* magazine signaled a significant change in the status of the Serbian Orthodox Church within Serbian society. This shift was also indicated by media coverage of the church and religious issues. In the mid-1980s, the Belgrade press frequently reported

<sup>17</sup> Episkop Simeon, "Povodom filma Čovjek kojeg treba ubiti," *Pravoslavlje*, March 15, 1983, 3.

<sup>18</sup> Dragan Terzić, "O Doktorki," *Pravoslavlje*, March 15, 1983, 3.

<sup>19</sup> Dragan Terzić, "Crkva i socijalizam," *Pravoslavlje*, May 1, 1984, 6–7.

<sup>20</sup> Žarko Gavrilović, "Crkva i informisanje," *Pravoslavlje*, March 1, 1985, 3.



on the resurgence of religiosity in Serbian society, especially among the youth. Although the state-controlled press as a rule emphasized the superficiality of the new wave of religiosity in Serbia, there were no outright attacks on the Serbian Orthodox Church and believers. These articles were fairly impartial and were often based on scientific, primarily sociological, research into the religiosity of Serbian society in the 1980s. Given that the press at that time was under strict control of the regime, the impartiality of these articles indicates that the communist regime in Serbia had by then substantially modified its previous attitude towards the Serbian Orthodox Church, and even towards religion.

### On the Road to Desecularization

In July 1984, the Belgrade weekly *NIN* published an article on the growing religious fervor among Serbia's youth, highlighting the large number of young people who spent Good Friday at the city's main church, the Cathedral Church of St. Michael the Archangel in Belgrade. In addition, the article contained statistical data that confirmed the growing interest of young people in religion. It noted, among other findings, that a survey conducted in Subotica (northern Serbia) indicated that 41% of high school students were religious, as well as that the research conducted in Belgrade revealed a notable decline in the proportion of youth who did not attend church, in comparison to the research conducted in the 1970s.<sup>21</sup> In the same year, the *NIN* weekly published the findings of the research carried out by the Belgrade Institute of Social Sciences, which indicated that roughly 20% of Belgraders identified as religious. Nevertheless, this research suggests significant deviations from traditional religious dogmas. The article stated that only a limited number of those who declared themselves as believers accepted the theological interpretation of the world.<sup>22</sup> The leader of this research project concluded that the process of secularization in Serbia had stopped, stressing at the same time the indications that the process

<sup>21</sup> Slobodanka Ast, "Ujed anđela," *NIN*, July 29, 1984, 18–20.

<sup>22</sup> Stevan Nikšić, "Bog 1984. u Beogradu," *NIN*, September 9, 1984, 16–19.

of a “religious renewal” had begun.<sup>23</sup> In early 1987, *NIN* again underscored the growing interest of young Serbs in religion, reporting that churches in Belgrade were overcrowded on Christmas Eve.<sup>24</sup>

In the mid-1980s, the prestigious magazine *Duga* also covered the resurgence of religiosity in Serbia. An article published in May 1984 highlighted the large number of young residents of Belgrade who attended Belgrade churches on Good Friday.<sup>25</sup> Besides, in early 1987, *Duga* emphasized the growing interest of young people in Serbia in theological studies.<sup>26</sup> In March 1988, *Ilustrovana politika* also reported on the increase of religiosity in Serbian society. A large increase in the consumption of candles in churches, huge crowds in churches on the major religious holidays, as well as the rise in the sales of religious publications in Belgrade bookstores were taken as proof of the growing interest of Serbs in religious customs. Moreover, an Orthodox priest was quoted as pointing out the considerable rise in baptisms and church weddings in Belgrade. *Ilustrovana politika* also featured an interview a Belgrade neurologist, who perceived the return to religion as a manifestation of a crisis of rationalist thought.<sup>27</sup>

The tangible proof of the regime’s changing attitude towards the Serbian Orthodox Church was the decision of the authorities to allow the resumption of construction of the Saint Sava Temple in Belgrade. It was the top priority of the Serbian Orthodox Church and consequently, the SOC insisted on it in every conversation with the representatives of the Serbian regime. After World War II, the communist government decided to halt the construction of the Saint Sava Temple, which had begun before the war. In the early 1980s, the regime proposed to the Serbian Orthodox Church that instead of the temple, the Centre of Saint Sava would be built on the same site, which would house the Museum of the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Patriarchal

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<sup>23</sup> Stevan Nikšić, “Kraj ateizacije,” *NIN*, September 9, 1984, 16–17.

<sup>24</sup> Ivan Kovačević, “Božićne poruke,” *NIN*, January 18, 1987, 17–18.

<sup>25</sup> Rajko Đurđević, “Zašto mladi sve više odlaze u crkvu? Mali vernici velikog petka,” *Duga*, May 5–19, 1984, 28–29.

<sup>26</sup> Vanja Bulić, “Petokraka na slavskom kolaču,” *Duga*, December 27–January 9, 1987, 16–19.

<sup>27</sup> Slobodan Reljić, “Bogoiskateljstvo nije nova partija,” *Ilustrovana politika*, March 22, 1988, 25–27.

Library, and the Museum of Frescos. Serbian Patriarch German, however, rejected and continued to insist on the resuming of the building of the Saint Sava Temple. The turning point came in May 1984, when Dušan Čkrebić was elected as the President of the Presidency of Serbia. According to Čkrebić's memoirs, soon after he was elected, he convinced powerful Serbian political figures to agree to restart the building of the St. Sava Temple. He notified Patriarch German about this decision after the meeting of the Holy Council of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church in May 1984:

With considerable excitement, I informed Patriarch German and the members of the Synod that the Serbian Orthodox Church can proceed with the building of the temple (...) This news seemed shocking. The dignitaries of the Serbian Orthodox Church did not hide their joy and satisfaction, but remained calm [...] Thus, I practically lifted the ban and enabled the resuming of the building of the Saint Sava Temple. This, at least in part, preserved the honor of my generation, which found the strength to cancel a political decision of its predecessors [...] <sup>28</sup>

The permission to continue the construction of the Saint Sava Temple was not the only concession granted by the regime to the Serbian Orthodox Church in the 1980s. In addition, the church received permission to build a new building for the Faculty of Theology in Belgrade, and the state also financially supported this undertaking. <sup>29</sup> Moreover, at the request of Patriarch German, a road was constructed from Novi Pazar (a city in southwestern Serbia) to the famous medieval monastery Đurđevi Stupovi. <sup>30</sup>

In 1989, the Belgrade students' magazine *Student* welcomed the government's decision to continue the building of the St. Sava Temple. The author of the article in the *Student* magazine rejected the claim that the construction of the St. Sava Temple was an "act of nationalism," and refuted the notion that Belgrade did not need such a gigantic sacred building. He put forward two arguments against this thesis: first, he emphasized that the proportions of the temple matched the

<sup>28</sup> Dušan Čkrebić, *Život, politika, komentari* (Beograd: Službeni glasnik, 2008), 266–271.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 273.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 277–278.

significance of St. Sava, and second, that until then Belgrade did not have a church that would meet the growing needs of the believers. The article concluded with the statement that “the Serbian people deserve this temple.”<sup>31</sup>

This article published in April 1989 hinted that the resuming of the construction of the temple had its fierce opponents. A few months later, an article in the *Komunist* magazine, the organ of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia, indicated that opponents of strengthening the role of the Serbian Orthodox Church existed also at the very heart of the system. The *Komunist* article commented on an advertisement for a magazine of the Šabac diocese, *Glas crkve*, published in the most reputable Serbian daily newspaper, *Politika*. The *Komunist* article criticized the *Politika* daily for advertising the conservative church magazine, focusing in particular on its content. The *Komunist* journalist was particularly struck by Nikolaj Velimirović’s article in the advertised issue of the *Glas crkve* magazine, in which Velimirović referred to Marx as a “red beast” and Marxism as “an enemy of Christianity, European civilization, and the human race.” The entire article by Nikolaj Velimirović was, according to the *Komunist* journalist, a “militant anti-Marxist tirade.” The *Komunist* columnist questioned why *Politika* would publish this kind of advertisement, but offered no answer.<sup>32</sup>

Nevertheless, the answer was quite obvious. The *Komunist* magazine was the mouthpiece of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia, whereas the Belgrade daily *Politika* was under the control of the Serbian leadership, namely Serbian leader Slobodan Milošević. During the years of the so-called anti-bureaucratic revolution, Serbia progressively moved to the right, distancing itself from the Yugoslavia shaped by the 1974 constitution. The “*awakening of the people*” in Serbia (*dogaćanje naroda*) and the ethnic mobilization in Serbia, generated chiefly by the mounting ethnic tensions in Kosovo in the 1980s, separated the Serbian political class from the Yugoslav establishment bringing it closer to the right-wing opposition circles in Serbia as well as to the Serbian Orthodox Church. An indicator of the growing closeness of the Serbian

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<sup>31</sup> Nevenka Milošević, “Beograd dobija svoju katedralnu crkvu,” *Student*, April 15, 1989, 14.

<sup>32</sup> Ljubomir Radović, “Otvorene karte,” *Komunist*, July 28, 1989, 19.

political class and the Serbian Orthodox Church in the late 1980s was the frequent contact between the leaders of the Serbian regime and the Serbian Orthodox Church, which was covered by the Belgrade press.

In June 1986, *Pravoslavlje* published an article about the celebration of the 800th anniversary of the Studenica monastery, which was attended by the Vice-President of the Presidency of the SR of Serbia, Vukoje Bulatović. In his speech on the occasion, Bulatović underlined that “there are few nations that can boast of such a monument.”<sup>33</sup> In May 1987, the President of Serbia, Ivan Stambolić, hosted a dinner for the members of the Holy Council of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church, which was also attended by Patriarch German. In an interview with *NIN*, Patriarch German emphasized that the meeting with Stambolić was “full of understanding and mutual respect” and he thanked the President of Serbia for the permission to continue the building of the Saint Sava Temple.<sup>34</sup> Two years later, the *Politika* daily published information on the front page about the meeting between Stambolić’s successor, President of Serbia Slobodan Milošević, and Patriarch German. On Christmas 1990 (January 7) a high-level delegation, headed by Serbian Prime Minister Stanko Radmilović, visited Patriarch German in the hospital. This information was also featured on the front page of *Politika*.<sup>35</sup>

Frequent interviews of Serbian Orthodox Church leaders with Belgrade’s non-church press were another indicator of the rapprochement between the Serbian Orthodox Church and the regime. In May 1983, the renowned *NIN* journalist Aleksandar Tijanić interviewed Amfilohije Radović, then assistant professor of the Faculty of Theology and later Metropolitan Bishop of Montenegro and the Littoral. In the introductory part of the interview, Tijanić described his interlocutor as educated and persuasive, but noted that he was a representative of the “hard-line” faction in the Serbian Orthodox Church.”<sup>36</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Vukoja Bulatović, “Veliki dan Studenice,” *Pravoslavlje*, June 1, 1986, 8.

<sup>34</sup> Svetislav Spasojević, “Sve će doći na svoje mesto,” *NIN*, July 5, 1987, 20–23.

<sup>35</sup> “Slobodan Milošević primio patrijarha Germana,” *Politika*, June 24, 1989, 1; “Božićna poslanica patrijarha Germana,” *Politika*, January 7, 1990, 7.

<sup>36</sup> Aleksandar Tijanić, “Šta je večito, a šta prolazi,” *NIN*, May 8, 1983, 19–20.

The common elements of interviews with prominent dignitaries of the Serbian Orthodox Church (Patriarch German, Bishop Amfilohije Radović, and Atanasije Jević) published in the Belgrade press towards the end of the 1980s were the issue of Kosovo and the process of the normalization of relations with the Serbian regime. In an interview with *Duga* on Christmas Day 1989, Amfilohije Radović stressed that the building of the St. Sava Temple was “evidence of deeper renovations.”<sup>37</sup> A year later, in an interview with *NIN*, Bishop Amfilohije remarked that the Serbian leaders “understood the vital interests of the people,” expressing hope that such a trend would continue.<sup>38</sup> In an interview with *NIN* on June 25, 1989, Patriarch German conveyed a similar message: “The current change in the attitude of the Serbian leadership towards the Serbian Orthodox Church is the beginning of close cooperation for the common good of all.”<sup>39</sup>

### Conclusion

The Serbian press coverage of the Serbian Orthodox Church and religious issues in the early 1980s reflected the considerable reservations of the Serbian public and the Serbian regime about the Serbian Orthodox Church and religion in general. Articles published in the organ of the patriarchate of the Serbian Orthodox Church, *Pravoslavlje*, expressed significant dissatisfaction with the Serbian Orthodox Church’s status in Serbian society at that time. In the second half of the 1980s, however, the communist regime in Serbia chose to strengthen ties with the Serbian Orthodox Church. This reconciliation coincided – unsurprisingly – with major upheavals in former Yugoslavia during the late 1980s, particularly the escalation of ethnic tensions in Kosovo. Despite profound ideological differences, the Serbian Orthodox Church and the communist regime in Serbia (in particular after Milošević came to power in 1987) shared similar views on the Kosovo crisis. This enabled the development of a close alliance between these two centers of power

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<sup>37</sup> Rajko Đurđević, “Stid će spasiti svet,” *Duga*, January 7–20, 1989, 24–27.

<sup>38</sup> Milorad Vučelić, “Sabor i dostojanstvo,” *NIN*, January 7, 1990, 15–17.

<sup>39</sup> Milo Gligorijević, “Kosovske lekcije iz istorije,” *NIN*, June 25, 1989, 4–6.

in Serbia. In an interview with *Duga* in August 1989, professor of the Faculty of Theology Atanasije Jeftić emphasized that it was the Kosovo crisis that contributed substantially to improving the relationship between the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Serbian regime, arguing that due to the escalation of tensions in Kosovo, the Serbian leadership better understood the position of the Serbian Orthodox Church on the Kosovo issue.<sup>40</sup>

In addition, scientists and journalists observed an increase in religiosity in Serbia, especially among young people. Given the significant role of Eastern Orthodoxy in the formation of the ethnic identity of the Serbs, the ethnic mobilization of the Serbs – driven largely by the Kosovo crisis in the 1980s – contributed enormously to a renaissance of religiosity in Serbia. In the years that followed, this phenomenon fundamentally changed the status of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Serbian society.

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