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THE UNREMOVED CONSEQUENCES OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR - CAUSES OF THE NEW SUFFERING OF THE SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

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Abstract: *The non-elimination of the consequences of occupation in some parts of Yugoslavia in World War II, as well as preventing and obstructing from the Yugoslav state the elimination of the consequences of the war suffering of the Serbian Orthodox Church, will prevent and disable the Church in certain parts of its canonical territory and endanger, destroy and confiscate its property. This will then lead to a new suffering of the Serbian people, while putting the legal successor state of Yugoslavia to additional temptations. Non-return of property to the Serbian Church will be especially in favor of secessionist forces that threaten the territorial integrity of Serbia.*

Keywords: *Serbian Orthodox Church, Yugoslavia, Serbia, occupation, property, usurpation*

INTRODUCTION

The revolutionary communist authorities in Yugoslavia, in an effort to establish a social order by their ideological standards, relied on some of the consequences of the occupation in World War II. Especially in policymaking on the national issue and in relation to the Church.

After taking power in the country - by conducting a revolution while waging a war for liberation from occupation - Yugoslavia's new governing nomenclature, legitimized as such during the Second World War, was not content with establishing a state order, only on the basis of a single, exclusive ideology, but it penetrated the civilizational frameworks of state jurisdiction and went about creating the whole social order.

In an effort to create a “new man” and a “new society”, the Communist authorities of Yugoslavia were breaking the threads of centuries-old spiritual continuity while establishing a national order that would lead to the creation of a different spiritual environment, but would also lead to different national and state maps in the South Slavic region. For this reason, the condition or the status created during occupation during the Second World War was maintained or used. In the final outcome, the highest cost of such a policy of the Yugoslav Communist state was paid and is still being paid by the Serbian nation, the Serbian state, and the Serbian Orthodox Church.

The consequences of such a policy are evident throughout the former Yugoslavia.

In relation to the latter status, service and mission of the Serbian Orthodox Church, they are especially visible in the areas occupied by the following countries: Bulgaria in what was then Southern Serbia; Albania, Italy and Germany in Kosovo and Metohija; and the Independent State of Croatia in a wide area of Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and parts of Serbia.

Retained consequences of the occupation in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

After Germany invaded Yugoslavia in 1941, Bulgaria, in accordance with the policy of the Axis Powers, occupied and annexed the territory of southern Serbia, except the western part of that province, southeastern part of central Serbia and the southern part of Kosovo.

Immediately after the occupation of these southern parts of Serbia, the Bulgarian occupiers expelled the Serbian bishops they had found - first the metropolitan of Skopje Josif and then the bishop of Zletovo-strumica Vikentije, while the third diocese in this area of Ohrid-Bitola was vacated at that time - and they began the persecution of priests who were Serbs and Russians (Slijepčević, 1969, p. 41). All others who declared themselves Serbs were persecuted in order to settle Bulgarians on their estates.

Bulgarian bishops and priests were brought in to replace the Serbian bishops and priests. And so, under the occupation, a new, Bulgarian church organization was established. And that will result in the destruction of Serbian features in this area. (Puzović, 1997, str. 3)

While there was a war for liberation from occupation from the outside, a revolution was waged on the inside. As part of the implementation of the socialist revolution, the Communist Party of Yugoslavia was also engaged in national constitution and establishment of a new federal unit in this area.

Following the decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, at the beginning of March 1943, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Macedonia was established, after which the establishment of regional party leaderships would be established. This, in fact, set out to establish new bodies of non-religious power.

The intention of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia to establish a new federal unit in the territory of South Serbia and to form a new nation in that area was announced at the Second AVNOJ Session at the end of November 1943 in Jajce, when a decision was made to build Yugoslavia on a federal principle. where Vardar Macedonia (formerly Southern Serbia) would be one of six federal units.

One of the then communist ideologues, Moša Pijade, would later explicitly say that this act “means the birth of Macedonia and the Macedonian people as an independent national

and state unit, and the introduction of Macedonia into the family of South Slavs and European peoples." (Pijade, 1965, str. 204).

Following the decisions of the Second AVNOJ Session, eight months later, on August 2, 1944, the first ASNOM (Antifascist Assembly of the National Liberation of Macedonia) meeting was held, establishing a new federal unit within the Yugoslav state - the People's Republic of Macedonia. Established in the part of southern Serbia.

117 delegates participated in the assembly, but they were not elected by the people but delegated by the Communist Party and its organizations (Slijepčević, 1969, str. 31).

Such a set of circumstances, triggered by occupation and revolution, influenced church life in the area. In addition to emphasizing the new national designation and with territorial delimitation with the elements of statehood, the establishment of a separate federal unit within Yugoslavia also included the "independence" through the Church.

With the end of the Bulgarian military occupation, the consequences of the occupation were not eliminated; in particular, the condition of church life established under occupation has not been remedied. In late fall of 1944, the Bulgarian occupation authorities withdrew, but Bulgarian priests and clerks remained. They continued to sow hatred against the Serbs, being exponents of the forces that carried on the occupation. As they could not continue to hold this part of southern Serbia under their state authority, Bulgarians, through their priests, through culture and religion, worked to isolate this area from Serbia and its church organization from the canonical jurisdiction of the Serbian Orthodox Church. (Puzović, 1997, p. 3-4)

The situation found on the basis of the Bulgarian occupation will be used by the Yugoslav Communist authorities to establish its policy towards this area, in order to emphasize the proclaimed goal - "the birth of Macedonia and the Macedonian people as an independent national and state unit". The condition established in the church organization was especially used. And the aim was to support and nourish the non-church aspirations of separating the local church organization from the Mother Church, the Serbian Orthodox Church.

Upon the liberation of these lands from occupation, His Eminence the Mitropolit Josif of Skopje, on December 2, 1944, urges the Holy Synod of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church to use civil and military authorities to enable the archbishops of Southern Serbia to return with their refugee clergy as soon as possible to their regular duties. Holy Synod of Bishops on 16/3 January 1945 addressed a letter to the Commissioner of the National Committee on the Interior, requesting that he officially notify the civilian authorities in Skopje, Štip and Bitola of the return of the bishops, clergy and ecclesiastical authorities to their pre-war offices; and to assist them in arranging church life in these dioceses. The letter notes that some priests tried to return to their old neighborhood on their own, but "encountered various difficulties due to local circumstances and various often arbitrary understandings of the bodies of certain local authorities." (Sin. br. 37, 16/3. januar 1945).

The revolutionary authorities in the state ignored the petitions of the Holy Synod of Bishops (Puzovic, 1997, p. 6), because they had different plans. During this time, Bulgarian priests who remained in southern Serbia after the occupation ended and a small number of indigenous priests (Puzovic, 1997, p. 6) worked to separate dioceses in southern Serbia from the Serbian Orthodox Church. Particularly active in this business was Bulgarian Archimandrite Stefan, who remained in Skopje after the Bulgarian army retired, seeking to impose himself as a representative of the Macedonian Church. However, after some requests from

Skopje, the authorities had to expel him (Puzovic, 1997, p. 6). Thereafter, through Radio Sofia, it is announced that the Bulgarian Church entrusts the ecclesiastical administration in Macedonia to the priests Kirilu Stojanov of Skopje, Spiri Ličinovski of Debar (then in Skopje), Nikola Apostolski of Markovac (then in Skopje) and Metodije Gogov of Skopje. And it is these priests who will be the founding members of the “Initiative Committee for the Organization of the Orthodox Church in Macedonia” in early 1945. (Puzović, 1997, p. 6)

This committee telegraphed a report to the Holy Synod of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church that, on March 4, 1945, it “assembled” in Skopje, as it appeared, the “Macedonian Church People’s Assembly for discussing important issues of church-folk character”, and that delegates spoke “the unanimous desire of all Orthodox Macedonians to do what is necessary to proclaim the independent Macedonian Orthodox Church as soon as possible, ie. to restore the historic Archdiocese of Ohrid.” By saying that the decision made was “of historical importance”, it is sought “to help and finally put into effect their solution from a canonical and legal point of view”. (Report SASin, 1941-1946, p. 133)

The meeting of the Holy Bishops Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church could not be convened due to the absence of Patriarch Gavriilo, who was in German captivity, so regarding the current situation the Holy Bishops’ Synod convened a conference of bishops in Belgrade on March 12, 1945. The conference concluded that the work of the ‘Church-People’s Assembly’ in Skopje is considered to be non-canonical, and as such it cannot be judged, nor should it be discussed. (*SPC Gazette*, 10/1945). However, it was requested that Mitropolit Josif go to Skopje as soon as possible and get informed on the spot about what was really going on.

The Holy Synod of Bishops, as the official ecclesiastical executive, held a session the same day, at which it adopted the conclusions of the Episcopal Conference and decided to refer the whole matter to Mitropolit Josif of Skopje, as the bishop in charge.

Mitropolit Josif writes a letter to the commander of the city of Belgrade the next day, March 13, informing him that he intends to go to Skopje to assume his bishop’s duties. He thereby requests that he be issued the necessary “announcement” for the trip, that the competent state authorities be advised to provide assistance as necessary, and to make available immediately and prepare for the residence and work of the church offices of the Metropolitan buildings in Skopje, and if it is incapacitated for housing, another building or a decent apartment and office space should be made available. (Sin. No. 360, as of 13. March 1945)

Four days later, on March 17, the minister of the Interior, Vlada Zečević, once a priest himself, responded to the letter. A letter officially addressed to the Holy Synod of Bishops states that “for the time being, no announcement may be issued for a trip to Skopje to His Eminence Mitropolit Josif.” At the same time, interfering with church authority, he made a recommendation: “We think that at this time it is better for the Holy Synod of Bishops to call a number of priests from Macedonia, who would submit a report on the state of the Orthodox Church, both in the Diocese of Skopje and the whole of Macedonia. “ And then he offers state aid for the organization of that meeting. The Minister of Police writes: “We voluntarily take it upon ourselves that until this meeting between Mr. bishop and priests from Macedonia come as soon as possible in Belgrade in the presence of bishops, members of the Holy Synod of Bishops.” (Government of DFJ, MUP, No. 173/a, as of 17. March 1945)

The letter unambiguously points to the conclusion that the new, communist authorities of Yugoslavia seek to maintain the existing situation resulting from the occupation, with the

aim of disrupting the unity of the Church; that is, they are behind the forces that are causing the schism in the Serbian Orthodox Church.

Two days later, at its session of 19/6 March 1945, the Holy Synod of Bishops thanked the Minister “for expressing his readiness” to mediate a meeting with priests from Macedonia (*SPC Gazette*, 10/1945). And on the same day, they sent a letter to the Presidency of the Government of the Democratic Federation of Yugoslavia, reporting on the difficulties and obstacles to returning bishops and priests to their places of service, especially in Macedonia. The Government is once again requested “to immediately approve and facilitate the return of the priests and clergy from Macedonia to their places of service, as agreed by the peace agreement with Bulgaria” (Sin. br. 428 / zap. 135, as of 19/6 March 1945).

Still not allowed to return to Skopje, Mitropolit Josif went, at the end of March, to Vranje, the temporary seat of his diocese, to be able to get informed more closely about the situation in Southern Serbia, ie in his own Diocese of Skopje. But his bishop’s service was not without interference there. A street demonstration was organized against him on March 26 in Vranje.

Upon his return to Belgrade, on April 2, 1945, Mitropolit Josif, by an official document, informed the Holy Synod of Bishops that “in the spirit of the decision of the Patriarchal Executive Board”, on March 30, 1945, a Church Court was established for the Diocese of Skopje and that it was temporarily housed in Vranje until the opportunity arises to move to Skopje. Two days later, the Synod took note of this (SASin Report, 1941-1946, p. 134). But unfortunately, the opportunity to relocate the Church Court and Mitropolit Josif to Skopje never again arose.

All the temples and all the property of the Serbian Orthodox Church in that newly created republic were usurped.

During the first post-war regular session of the Holy Bishops’ Council of the Serbian Orthodox Church, one evening, on May 10, 1947, Chief of the Cabinet of Josip Broz Tito, General Ljubodrag Djuric (until March of that year, Commander of the City of Belgrade) and the Prime Minister of the Republic of Macedonia Lazar Kolishevski went to see Patriarch Gavrilo. For more than two hours, they tried to convince the patriarch that the Serbian Orthodox Church relinquish its canonical jurisdiction in the territory of that new state federal unit. In his first speech, Djuric argued that, allegedly, the Macedonian people “also want to organize their church at their discretion and to have their own church authorities and bodies.” And Kolisevski, trying to find reasons for what was being asked, argued that “the people and the clergy” were divided, so “some want autocephalia and the other autonomy.” Kolishevski noted that they were “rightly looking for it” and Djuric was “energetically supporting” it. Threats also ensued: if the Serbian Patriarchate did not yield to these demands, that some renowned Bishop Boris would be brought from Macedonia, “who would be ready to put himself into the service of the Macedonians”, and that Metropolitan Joseph, if he appeared in Macedonia, would be lynched. (SASin Report, 1941-1946, pp. 156-158)

Patriarch Gavrilo firmly opposed these pressures, arguing that the claims made had no basis. He reported on this to the highest authority of the Serbian Orthodox Church, and the Holy Council of Bishops approved such a resolute position of His Holiness “that the Serbian Orthodox Church in Macedonia should not yield to the matter and that the church order should be preserved as it has existed for centuries.” (SASin Report, 1941-1946, pp. 159)

An important fact in the conversation presented is that the leading word, in the effort to obtain, apart from the canons of the church, a “church self-sufficiency” in the newly formed Yugoslav federal unit was held by high state representatives. They base their activity on the heritage of the occupation.

Representatives of the Yugoslav state do not hide that they are behind the alleged “church demands” of what was once Southern Serbia. Thus, for example, at a meeting with Patriarch Vikentije on January 30, 1952, a senior representative of the Federal Religious Commission openly stated that the issue of the church in NR Macedonia was “not only a church issue, but also a state one, because it is an integral part of the decision of the Macedonian national issue” (AJ, 144, 5-88).

Proponents of “church autonomy”, when they could not obtain the consent of the canonical church to their demands and blackmail, attempted to bring the Serbian Orthodox Church to *fait accompli*. After the death under the suspicious circumstances of Patriarch Vikentije, who did not agree to the key demands of the state and the alleged church circles from Skopje, in Ohrid, from October 4-6, 1958, under the auspices of the Communist authorities, a new illegitimate “church-folk council” was held, which declared itself a legislative body, in order to subsequently “renew” the Archdiocese of Ohrid. During the first regular session of the Holy Bishops’ Council of the Serbian Orthodox Church, held from June 3 to June 19, 1959, the President of the Federal Religious Commission, Dobrivoje Radosavljevic, invited the newly elected Patriarch German and other members of the Holy Bishops’ Synod to dictate what decisions the government expects from the church council. The most important requirement was that the Synod “should proclaim and accept the created state” (Puzovic, 1997, p. 58), which meant that the “Macedonian Orthodox Church” was granted - (self-proclaimed) autonomy.

The highest body of the Serbian Church, under pressure from the state, accepted the request, and since 1959, non-canonically proclaimed, there exists - the autonomous Macedonian Orthodox Church.

But it did not end there: there were new demands. In 1967, the autocephaly of the Macedonian Orthodox Church was proclaimed. Again, there followed the pressure of the government to accept the created state. But the Church was no longer able to yield. That request was denied. (Janjić, 2018, pp. 630-667)

On the non-removed consequences of the occupation, the created schism is maintained up to our time. Meanwhile, based on national exclusion, the schism produced consequences that would complicate the position of residents who continued to declare themselves Serbs in this former Yugoslav federal unit. And this will often be one of the “strained” lines in relations between Serbia and the former Republic of Macedonia, today’s Republic of Northern Macedonia.

Legalized Albanization of Kosovo and Metohija under the occupation

During the Second World War, in the area of Old Serbia, especially in the Kosovo-Metohija area, there was a change in the ethnic image at the expense of the Serbs. With the help of the Italian and German occupiers and the territorial claim of Albania, there was executed an increased Albanization of this area (Glišić, 1991, str. 277).

The Albanian state was formed in 1913 in the compromise of the great powers around the Otrant Gate, in order to prevent Serbia to have an access to the sea. And then Albania

will be not only a dam for Serbia's eventual departure to the sea, but also a course of action to undermine Serbia. After World War I, Albania was restored to the same borders, and Italy would be recognized to have a "special status" to preserve Albanian independence. This status gave Italy the opportunity to interfere in Albania's internal affairs, and also to foster Albanian aspirations for territorial expansion at the expense of Serbia, that is, after the First World War, the emerged South Slav states. (Glišić, 1991, str. 280)

On April 7, 1939 Italy invaded Albania. Having established a personal union with Albania, it intensified the propaganda and activities of the Albanian emigration with the aim of overthrowing the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. And since 1940 there has been a plan to settle Metohija with Italian citizens who are originally Albanians and with Italians from Sicily. (Glišić, 1991, str. 280)

When the invasion of Yugoslavia took place in 1941, Italy, as one of the three major levers of the Axis Force, began to hold much of the Yugoslav territory under occupation. Among other things, in Old Serbia it held Metohija and most of Kosovo. Due to the Trepca mine, the Kosovo-Mitrovica, Podujevo and Vucitrn sections were held by Germany. And Vitina, Kacanik, part of the Gjilan district and Sirinic parish were handed over to the occupying authority of Bulgaria.

The state of occupation provided an opportunity for Albanianization of the Serbian country. Albanians joined the occupation armies and occupation authorities to "clear" as much space as possible for their expansion, that is, for the seizure of Serb land and Serb property. The occupation authorities, however, felt it helpful that Albania had its own soldiers for their ends. Only Serbia, Serbs and others who did not consent to the occupation were the victims.

For the purpose of such occupation and conquest goals, from the very beginning of the war in April 1941, there started killing of Serbs, looting and burning of Serb villages, destroying of Serbian cultural and spiritual heritage, churches, monasteries, schools and cemeteries, seizing of Serbian land and other property.

Under the strikes were first the settlements of colonists, houses and estates of Thessaloniki volunteers and colonists, to whom the state authorities, after liberating these regions from centuries-old Turkish occupation and occupation in the First World War, after the agrarian reform carried out, granted free land; and then the homes and properties of indigenous Serbs. Simply, it targeted the expulsion and killing of Serbs in order to house Albanians on their property. In that first raid alone, in April and May 1941, all the settlements in Metohija were burned, except for Vitomirica and Dobruša, where armed resistance was organized; but, unfortunately, they were also burned in the fall of 1941. In the first months of the war, Serbs were expelled from the vicinity of Prizren. About 65% of settler houses were set on fire in Peć. And in the districts around Uroševac, after the robberies, the Albanians confiscated all the land allocated to the Serbs by the agrarian reform. (Glišić, 1991, str. 282)

It is estimated that no less than 10,000 Serbs were killed in Kosovo and Metohija between 1941 and 1944. In addition, about 40,000 people were expelled from the Italian occupation zone in the same period, about 30,000 people sought permission to emigrate from the German occupation zone, and about 25,000 from the Bulgarian occupation zone. Thus, about 100,000 people were expelled or evicted. (Glišić, 1991, str. 285)

Albanians immigrated to the usurped Serbian estates. It is estimated that some 75,000 Albanians crossed into Kosovo and Metohija during the war. Only a small number returned

to Albania, and all others were granted the status of citizens of Yugoslavia. (Bataković, 2007, str. 155)

The occupation created by genocide, war crime and ethnic cleansing was first legalized by the Communist authorities of Yugoslavia, even before World War II ended, on March 6, 1945, by the decision of the National Committee for the Liberation of Yugoslavia (No. 153) on provisional prohibiting the return of colonists to their former places of residence (*DFJ Official Gazette*, No. 13/1945). The decision emphasizes that “temporary repatriation of colonists to their former places of residence” is not allowed, but does not explain why this is done. The aim was to perform a revision of the allocation of land between the two world wars. This will be confirmed by the Law on the Revision of Land Allocation to Colonists and Agrarian Interests in Macedonia and the Kosovo Metohija Area (*Official Gazette of the DFJ*, No. 56/1945), adopted on 3 August 1945, when the provisional general decision to ban the colonists seized to be in force.

The seizure of land from the Serbs was legalized as well as its allocation to the Albanians!

The decision and subsequent laws of the Yugoslav communist state encouraged the alteration of the ethnic image of Kosovo and Metohija, to the detriment of the Serbs.

Thereon, the progressively changing (for the benefit of Albanians) ethnic image of Kosovo and Metohija and other neighboring areas - which was greatly contributed by the high birth rate - will be further stimulating for new migrations from Albania. It is estimated that only in one decade, after a quarter of a century since the end of World War II, in the period 1971-1981 more than 30,000 Albanians from Albania were settled in Kosovo and Metohija (Blagojević, 1991, str. 425).

The process of emigration, mostly by the Orthodox population, under pressure, continued with no end, and the influx of new population was even greater. For example, within six decades, between 1921 and 1981, the population in Kosovo and Metohija increased by 360%. (Petrović, 1991, str. 150).

In addition to maintaining the situation from the occupation and building a new state and social order on such a state, the communist government authorities also sought to prevent and hinder the restoration of church and religious life.

As soon as the war ended, the Serbian Church requested from the new state authorities to allow the work of its Theology in Prizren. On that occasion, on July 3, 1945, Interior Minister Vlado Zecevic reported to the Holy Synod of Bishops that the building of the Theological Seminary in Prizren was “occupied for the needs of military authorities.” But he also feels that “this issue should not be highlighted for now,” the issue of renewing the work of Theology. He explains, “as the main reason for this is the fact that more than 75 percent of the inhabitants of Siptar live in Prizren today, which, if the theology were opened, would not have been properly understood at this time.” (*Zadužbine Kosova*, 1987, p. 793)

The latter reports by the Raska-Prizren bishop Vladimir to the Holy Bishops' Synod of Bishops indicate that Yugoslav state authorities were also resorting to church property. Bishop Vladimir, on December 28, 1945, reports that upon his arrival to episcopal duty in Prizren, he visited the civic authorities and asked for the usurped confiscated property to be returned from them, and then stated: “Unfortunately, I did not succeed” (*Zadužbine Kosova*, 1987, p 794). In a report dated January 5, 1946, he reiterated what he had done and wrote: “Immediately upon my arrival in Prizren, I took steps to have handed over to me by the local

authorities the church property they had taken. These include the Diocese, the Theology Building and other buildings belonging to it. Then all those things that were taken from the Church Court - 3 typewriters, and from the Theology building, such as furniture and books ... “ He goes on to say: “I received a categorical answer to this that this is not the property of the Church and that they have it as a national authority and that all this has been handed over to the Committee of National Communities ”(*Zadužbine Kosova*, 1987, p. 794). And in the report of May 9, 1946, he said: “... I find that every complaint is futile and ineffective, because, despite the complaints and protests, the government pursues its policy and pursues its goal of impoverishing and incapacitating the Church for whatever action.” (*Zadužbine Kosova*, 1987, p. 794)

Here, as in other parts of Yugoslavia, the state authorities prevented or hindered the reconstruction of demolished and damaged churches and monasteries. (Janjić, 2018, str. 222).

This is further evidenced by a letter sent by the Bishop of Raska-Prizren Pavle on November 13, 1959, to the Holy Synod of the SPC on the occasion of the punishment of two believers, with 15 days in prison, only because they attended worship at the ruins of a church in the village of Suvi Lukavac. near Peć. On this occasion, Bishop Pavle writes: “Not only in this village, but in several villages, even entire parishes, in this diocese we do not have an Orthodox whole temple, but only ruins. If such an interpretation of the law is not the arbitrariness of individuals, then it would mean that the law only forbids us Orthodox from worship, because of our attitude to freedom, the temples have been destroyed in the last two wars and before, in the Turkish era. We can't believe that the Law on Religious Communities has this in mind.” (ERP Archives, 2008, p. 164)

The consequences of such acts or omissions by the Yugoslav communist state authorities were in favor of those forces that worked for the ethnic cleansing and separation of Kosovo and Metohija from Serbia, as well as other neighboring areas, that meanwhile were becoming increasingly Albanian.

After the NATO aggression against Serbia in 1999, for the sake of the final abduction of Kosovo and Metohija - that most populous part of the European space by Christian Orthodox landmarks - the Serbian Orthodox Church was the only Serbian institution that survived in this province but continued to suffer. From the aforementioned 1999 alone until the illegal declaration of independence of Kosovo in 2008, 156 Serbian Orthodox churches and monasteries were destroyed or seriously damaged (Janjić, 2013, p. 256).

Hidding of the genocide in the NDH

The Serbian Orthodox Church came out with the information that about 1,200,000 of its believers were killed in World War II (Janjić, 2018, p. 25). In addition, it has suffered enormous material damage (Janjić, 2018, p. 25). And when, after the end of the war, the restoration of ecclesiastical life was to begin, the new revolutionary authorities resorted to the seizure and usurpation of church property, and to the hindrance and obstruction of its activities.

The communist authorities made it impossible to rebuild the temples destroyed in the war and then forbade worship and liturgies at the ruins of those temples; in addition, they prohibited religious rites in private homes if they were intended for multiple persons: for example, if baptism was organized for several children (Janjić, 2018, pp. 112-113; 207). They were obviously trying to suppress faith in the people.

Not only did the state authorities prevent the reconstruction of the temples that were destroyed and damaged under the occupation, but in some cases they themselves sought to complete their demolition. Various excuses have been made for this; so, for example, they used to say that the temple was inoperative and that it threatened the safety of the citizens, or that it was not adequate for the place where it is found to have ruins ... (Janjić, 2018, str. 216)

For this reason, the Holy Bishops' Council of the Serbian Orthodox Church in 1961 made the decision: "That the Holy Bishops' Synod act with the competent national authorities not to demolish the Orthodox temples that were destroyed in the war, but to protect them and provide them with material assistance for reconstruction." By the same decision, the diocesan authorities were asked to provide "concrete information on the destroyed and damaged churches in the war" (ASbr. 24 / Zap. 47, May 19, 1961). Based on this request, we may conclude that the Church itself did not have complete insight into how many of its temples were demolished and damaged in the war.

A priest and former university professor Dimšo Perić writes that there have been almost no meeting of SPC archbishops with representatives of state authorities where they did not seek permission to renovate, repair or erect a temple on the grounds of demolished temples, return to the Church nationalized church buildings, protect church interests... (Perić, 1991a, p.7). In particular, he points to the activities of the bishop of Simeon of Gornji Karlovac, who used every opportunity to ask the state authorities to enable the reconstruction and erection of churches in the war destroyed in the area of his diocese. He also addressed the federal authorities in Zagreb and the federal authorities in Belgrade. Certainly, based on his continuous insistence, but also on noticeable dissatisfaction with the believing people, the state authorities in 1960 compiled an overview of the condition of the Orthodox churches in the Gornji Karlovac Diocese (municipalities: Karlovac, Sisak, Gospić, Ogulin, Rijeka and Pula). The facts gathered, presented at the session of the Croatian Religious Affairs Commission on December 10, 1960, were incorporated into the information of the Federal Religious Affairs Commission, no. 9 for September 1961. (Perić, 1991)

State authorities concealed information about demolished and damaged Orthodox churches and other church buildings in World War II. A confidential report of the State Religious Commission, intended for internal use only, of November 25, 1963, states: "774 church buildings were completely destroyed or seriously damaged in the war (churches 665, monasteries 37 and chapel 72). 341 churches were demolished in the territory of FR Croatia alone (...). The Diocese of Gornji Karlovac had 184 churches before the war, out of which 49 (...). are now in use (November 23, 1963). In the whole country the SPC built or upgraded 57 churches and chapels (of which 39 in Serbia alone and 12 in Macedonia) and small religious communities (Adventists and others) had rebuilt over 150 places of worship. In the FR of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the SPC had built 3 churches (87 destroyed in the war)." (Perić, 1991a, p. 7)

The Holy Synod of Bishops, on the basis of reports from the competent bishops, from 1985 to 1988, collected information that in eight of the nine Serbian Orthodox dioceses (missing were data for the Diocese of Dabrobosan) in the NDH area alone 527 churches were damaged and another 338 church buildings were damaged during the war (Mileusnić, 1996, str. 380).

The differences in the figures regarding damaged Serbian shrines should be understood in the context of the situation as it was after World War II. At the end of the war, it was not

possible to determine the condition of all the temples; and, in addition, some of the dioceses did not have their own bishop and did not have enough priests. In addition, there were no uniform census criteria: some reports listed only parish and branch churches, but not chapels and monastery temples. (Mileusnić, 1996, str. 380)

With the destruction of the churches, everything else in them was destroyed or looted: clothes, church books, icons, ecclesiastical items, various church-artistic valuables, church inventory. Among other things, archives and church libraries were destroyed or looted. The destruction of Serbian shrines continued after the war. Communist authorities peacefully continued the church-destroying activities of the Croatian Ustashas in the war (Mileusnić, 1996, str. 381).

The Yugoslav Communist authorities concealed the extent of the suffering of the Serbian people and the Serbian Orthodox Church in the territories occupied by the Independent State of Croatia in the first days after the occupation of Yugoslavia in World War II. The fact that the genocide against Orthodox Serbs in the NDH is true - although this genocide was of such magnitude, as also described by the then Third Reich Special Envoy to the Balkans (1940-1945) Herman Neubacher, that it was "one of the most terrible" mass killings of world history" (Neubacher, 2007, p. 85) - was a taboo topic in socialist Yugoslavia (Avramov, 1996, p. 321). The casualties were of such magnitude that 50-80 percent of Serbs were "exterminated" in some places, and in some places more than 90 percent of Serb homes were destroyed and torched (Janjić, 2018, str. 27-28).

An undoubted reason to conceal and remain silent over the undoubted truth of the terrible Serbian suffering is the official strategy elaborated in the highest political forums of the FNR / SFR Yugoslavia, which was then transmitted to science. (Avramov, 1996, p. 321).

The disguise of the truth - which was in many respects obvious - proclaimed the Communist state's policy towards the national question in Yugoslavia under the motto of "brotherhood and unity." This meant, among other things, the retention of the many consequences of the occupation and building of new interpersonal and inter-ethnic relations on such a legacy.

The non-elimination of the consequences of genocide and occupation in World War II in the territories of the then NDH led to a gradual weakening of the Serbian national being in most of their centuries-old habitats; and this was an additional factor in the weakening of the Serbian Orthodox Church in these canonical areas. This is further obvious from the fact that Serbian Orthodox theology in Sarajevo could not renew its work until the outbreak of the new war in 1992 in Bosnia and Herzegovina, (Janjić, 2018, pp. 767-768).

Many of the Serbian churches demolished in World War II remained unbuilt, where for some of them the traces were completely obliterated that they existed at all, and then in the last decade of the twentieth century there were new, civil wars and a new great suffering.

On the basis of the data collected up to 1997, in the civil wars in the territory of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, from 1991 to 1995, 212 churches (parishes, monasteries, branches and chapels) were demolished, 367 churches (parish, monasteries, branches and chapels) were damaged, 111 parish homes and other church buildings were destroyed and 107 parish homes and other buildings damaged. Thus, a total of 797 churches and church premises were demolished and damaged in these two former Yugoslav republics in the civil wars in the last decade of the 20th century alone. (Mileusnić, 1997, str. 235)

The weakening of the position of the Serbian Orthodox Church, as the spiritual headquarters of the Serbian people, as well as of the entire Serbian national being, was in favor of secessionist forces in Communist Yugoslavia, who sought to form a state-forming entity, reaching out to Serb ethnic territories, especially those that had been occupied.

And the suffering of the Serbian Orthodox Church and the endangering of the rights of the Serbian people in the newly created states on the ruins of Yugoslavia will bring new temptations to the central Serbian state, because Serbia is obliged to protect its people and the Church, which gathers and serves the Serbian people spiritually.

CONCLUSION

The Yugoslav communist government used the retained state and unremoved consequences of the Second World War occupation to achieve its goals, based on the ideology it followed. This led to new casualties for the Serbian Orthodox Church and the people who fell victim to the occupation. Further, this led to the dissolution of that state itself, Yugoslavia; which in turn, through the continuity of the suffering, led to new adverse consequences.

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