

THE ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN WORLD



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CONTENTS



<i>Notes on contributors</i>	xī
<i>Editor's introduction</i> Augustine Casiday	xv
<i>Divisions of Middle Eastern Christianity</i> Alexander Treiger	xxi

PART I: ORTHODOX CHRISTIANITY AROUND THE WORLD

	I
1 The Greek tradition <i>Andrew Louth</i>	3
2 The Russian tradition <i>Vera Shevzou</i>	15
3 The Armenian tradition <i>Vrej Nersessian</i>	41
4 The Georgian tradition <i>Tamara Grdzelidze</i>	58
5 The Syriac tradition <i>Robert A. Kitchen</i>	66
6 The Assyrian Church of the East <i>Robert A. Kitchen</i>	78
7 The Arabic tradition <i>Alexander Treiger</i>	89
8 The Coptic tradition <i>Maged S. A. Mikbail</i>	105

9	The Ethiopian tradition <i>Osvaldo Raineri</i>	116
10	The Serbian tradition <i>Vladimir Cvetković</i>	130
11	The Romanian tradition <i>Dan Ioan Mureşan</i>	141
12	Orthodoxy in Paris: the reception of Russian Orthodox thinkers (1925-40) <i>Antoine Arjakovsky</i>	154
13	Orthodoxy in North America <i>Dellas Oliver Herbel</i>	164
14	Orthodoxy in Australia: current and future perspectives <i>Trevor Batrouney</i>	179
 PART II: IMPORTANT FIGURES IN ORTHODOX CHRISTIANITY		 187
15	Mary the Theotokos ("Birth-giver of God") <i>Mary B. Cunningham</i>	189
16	Ephrem the Syrian <i>Robert A. Kitchen</i>	201
17	Macarius (Macarius-Simeon, Pseudo-Macarius) <i>Marcus Plested</i>	208
18	John Chrysostom <i>Wendy Mayer</i>	213
19	Cyril of Alexandria <i>Norman Russell</i>	218
20	Dionysius the Areopagite <i>Alan Brown</i>	226
21	Babai the Great <i>Robert A. Kitchen</i>	237
22	St Maximus the Confessor <i>Melchisedec Törönen</i>	244
23	Sinai and John Climacus <i>Jonathan L. Zecher</i>	251
24	Cyril and Methodius <i>T. Allan Smith</i>	262
25	Photius of Constantinople <i>Adrian Agachi</i>	269

— Contents —

26	Barhebraeus <i>Hidemi Takahashi</i>	279
27	Täklä Haymanot <i>Getatchew Haile</i>	287
28	The Hesychasts: "political Photianism" and the public sphere in the fourteenth century <i>Dan Ioan Mureşan</i>	294
29	Nil Sorskii <i>T. Allan Smith</i>	303
30	Neagoe Basarab <i>Augustine Casiday</i>	310
31	Nikodemos the Haghiorite <i>Norman Russell</i>	318
32	Contemporary Athonite fathers <i>Graham Speake</i>	325
33	Elders of Optina Pustyn' <i>T. Allan Smith</i>	332
34	Saint Raphael Hawaweeny, bishop of Brooklyn: "The Good Shepherd of the Lost Sheep in America" <i>The Right Reverend Basil Essey</i>	338
35	Sergii Bulgakov <i>Paul Gavrilyuk</i>	345
36	Dumitru Stăniloae <i>Stefan Stroia</i>	352
37	Matta al-Miskîn <i>Maged S. A. Mikhail</i>	359
 PART III: MAJOR THEMES IN ORTHODOX CHRISTIANITY		 367
38	Ecclesiology and ecumenism <i>Peter C. Bouteneff</i>	369
39	Orthodox canon law: the Byzantine experience <i>David Wagschal</i>	383
40	The doctrine of the Trinity: its history and meaning <i>Aristotle Papanikolaou</i>	398
41	Orthodoxy and culture <i>John A. McGuckin</i>	411

— Contents —

42	Ethics <i>Perry T. Hamalis</i>	419
43	Women in Orthodoxy <i>Vassa Kontouma</i>	432
44	Hagiography and devotion to the saints <i>James Skedros</i>	442
45	The <i>Philokalia</i> <i>Vassa Kontouma</i>	453
46	From Jewish apocalypticism to Orthodox mysticism <i>Bogdan G. Bucur</i>	466
47	Philosophy and Orthodoxy in Byzantium <i>Torstein Theodor Tollefsen</i>	481
48	Russian philosophy and Orthodoxy <i>Christian Gottlieb</i>	492
49	Modern Greek literature and Orthodoxy <i>David Ricks</i>	504
50	Russian literature and Orthodoxy: outline of main trends to 1917 <i>Alexis Klimoff</i>	517
51	Music in the Orthodox Church <i>Ivan Moody</i>	531
52	Orthodox Christianity and mental health <i>John T. Chirban</i>	547
53	Orthodox Christianity and world religions <i>Gavin Flood</i>	568
	<i>Index</i>	582

CHAPTER TEN

THE SERBIAN TRADITION

—◆—
Vladimir Cvetković

The Serbian Orthodox Church is an autocephalous Orthodox Church having the patriarch as its head and consisting of 3 archbishoprics, 6 metropolitanates, and 31 dioceses, counting more than 11 million people. It is the largest church in Serbia and Montenegro, and the second largest in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia. It has an archbishopric in Macedonia and dioceses in Western Europe, North America, and Australia. The Serbian patriarchate is ranked sixth in the seniority among autocephalous Orthodox churches after four ancient patriarchates (excluding the see of Rome) – i.e. Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem – and the Russian patriarchate.

The theological heritage of the Serbian Church is evident not only in written sources, but also even more in church art, architecture, and in the organization of the community, both as church and state. The history of the Serbian Church may be divided into six periods: the beginnings of the Christianization of Serbs, the period of the medieval Serbian state, the period under the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian rule, the period of the liberation of Serbia and the creation of the Yugoslav state, the Second World War and the Communist period, and finally the post-Communist period and the collapse of Yugoslavia.

THE BEGINNINGS OF CHRISTIANIZATION (NINTH TO TWELFTH CENTURY)

In a process that started as early as the fifth century, a large group of Slavic tribes, including Serbs, migrated southwards from the northern European territories and settled in the Balkan Peninsula. Being situated between two ancient cultures, Greek and Latin, both Christianized at that time, Serbs and other Slavs from the Balkans were exposed to their influences. The adoption of Christian faith among Slavs was a slow process that lasted for centuries (Deretić 1990: 6). The decisive element in their Christianization was the invention of the Slavonic script. The Byzantine model of the Christianization of the Slavs in their native language proved more successful than the efforts of Roman missionaries to spread the Christian faith in Latin. Two brothers from Thessalonica, Constantine (or Cyril, to give his monastic name), and Methodius,

who learned Slavonic from the Macedonian Slavs, were sent by St Photius, patriarch of Constantinople, to mission among Moravian Slavs. They accommodated the existing Glagolitic alphabet, already used among the Slavonic tribes, to a new alphabet known as Cyrillic. Important biblical texts and Christian liturgical books were translated into the newly invented alphabet.

The evidence that the Christianization of Serbs had already been started by Cyril and Methodius comes from the letter of Pope John VIII addressed to Duke Mutimir, the ruler of Serbia in the ninth century. This document shows that the Pope requested from the Duke to submit his people to the ecclesial jurisdiction of Methodius, the bishop of Sirmium (Sremska Mitrovica), instead of remaining under Byzantine jurisdiction (Deretić 1990: 7). The disciples of Cyril and Methodius, who established their schools in Ohrid in Macedonia, continued the process of Serbs' conversion to Christianity, while another group of their disciples located in Preslav in Bulgaria commenced the same process among Bulgarians.

The translation of the necessary liturgical books from Greek into Slavonic formed the foundation for the development of written language. The adaptation of the Old Slavonic texts translated by Cyril and Methodius to the local pronunciation led to the Serbian revision of the Slavonic language. The distinctiveness of the new revision is evident in Mary's Gospel (tenth/eleventh century), Vukan's Gospel (late twelfth century), and Miroslav's Gospel (c.1185) (Bojović 2008: 146).

The cult of the martyrs that occupied a central place in *Octoechos*, *Menaion*, or *Synaxaria* served as a model for the hagiographical genre. One of the early Slavonic examples of this genre, unfortunately no longer extant, is the martyrdom of the Serbian Prince Jovan Vladimir of Duklja (990–1016), written a short time after his death. It served as inspiration for the author of the "Chronicles of the Priest of Duklja" (*Letopis popa Dukljanina*), written in the last decades of the twelfth century but preserved only in a sixteenth-century Latin translation under the titles *Libellus Gothorum* or *Regnum Slavorum* (Stephenson 2000: 119).

The Serbian iconography of this period developed as a mixture of Byzantine and Western stylistic expressions. However, in Zeta and Boka Kotorska on the Adriatic Coast, Romanesque influence often prevailed. The uniqueness of Serbian iconography is evident in the paintings of the rotunda of the Church of St Peter and Paul (eighth/ninth century) in Ras (modern Novi Pazar, Western Serbia) (Djurić 1995: §2). The main characteristics of this period were the synthesis of Cyrillo-Methodian tradition with the Latin cultural influences that spread to Zeta from the Apennine Peninsula and the influences that pervaded in Raska from the Byzantine provinces.

MEDIEVAL SERBIA (c.1200–1459)

The foundation of the powerful Serbian state and the establishment of the autocephalous church were followed by the creation of a unique literary, architectural, and iconographic style. The rise of the medieval Serbian state began with Grand Prince (Župan) Stefan Nemanja (1165–96), the founder of the Nemanjić Dynasty. Stefan Nemanja's second son, Stefan Nemanjić (1196–1228), was crowned king by Pope Honorius III in 1217, while the youngest son, Sava Nemanjić (1174–1235), became the first archbishop of Serbia in 1219 with the permission of the Constantinopolitan Patriarch Manuel Sarentenos.

St Sava expanded the Cyrillo-Methodian traditions to major areas of social life. At the level of church organization, St Sava extended the borders of the autocephalous archbishopric of Serbia to the borders of the Serbian state and founded seven new dioceses alongside the existing three Greek dioceses (Ras, Prizran, and Lipljan). He established the cathedral of the archbishopric in the monastery of Žica where it remained until 1257, when due to the threat posed by Tatars and Kumans it was transferred to the monastery of Peć (Kosovo i Metohia). The close linkage that St Sava established between the church and state allowed the Serbian Church to prosper during the political and economic growth of the Serbian medieval state which reached its peak during the reign of King Stefan Uroš IV Dušan (1331–55). The medieval Serbian state spread from the Danube and Sava to the Adriatic Sea, the Aegean Sea, and the Ionic Sea as far as the Bay of Corinth. However, the territorial expansion of the Serbian state was not followed by the expansion of the Serbian Church, due to Dušan's intention to rule as a pan-Orthodox emperor. In 1346 the Serbian archdiocese was elevated to the rank of patriarchate so that the newly elected Patriarch Joanikije II could crown Dušan the "Emperor of the Serbs, Romaioi [Greeks], and Bulgarians."

At the level of theology, as St Sava outlined in his sermon given in Žića (1221) the task of Serbian Orthodoxy was to preserve and disseminate the Christian teaching in the form defined by the apostles, church fathers, and the seven ecumenical councils (Jevtić 1992). St Sava continued the earlier enterprises of translating the works of the Greek church fathers into Slavonic, initiated by the holy brothers, Cyril and Methodius. The work of translating the church fathers became the most creative theological endeavor and the Monastery of Chilandar on Mount Athos, established by St Sava and St Simeon in 1189, became the most prominent center of this activity. The most significant figure of the Serbian tradition of translation was the elder Isaija, the translator of Dionysius the Areopagite. In the famous Resava school, established by Despot Stefan Lazarević in Manasija Monastery and led by Konstantin the Philosopher (of Kosteneć) in the fifteenth century, the early Slavonic and Serbian translations of the church fathers were revised in accordance with the Greek originals.

At the level of the church canonical legislation, St Sava commenced the practice of writing legislative and canonical works, by producing the *Typikons of Karyes*, *Chilandar*, and *Studenica*. The masterpiece of this canonical genre was the *Nomocanon* (*Zakonopravilo* or *Kormčiya*), a work on civil law combined with canonical exegesis of juridical texts (Bojović 2008). Another legislative document in medieval Serbia, *Dušanov zakonik* ("Dušan's Law Codex"), issued by Emperor Dušan, was one of the first legal documents in medieval Europe that regulated issues of everyday life.

At the level of Christian literature, St Sava further developed monastic hagiographical work. By writing the life of his father Simeon Nemanja in the hagiographical genre, St Sava successfully combined the Byzantine model of emperors as wise rulers and defenders of Christianity with the model of devoted monk and spiritual figure. The first model served to confirm the Christian legitimacy of Serbian rulers that later established the holy lineage of the Nemanjić Dynasty, while the second model of ascetics and solitaries that was imported from Mount Athos and Sinai to medieval Serbia emphasized the salvific power of ascetic and monastic Christian life

(Popović 2006: 332–33). Many literary successors of Sava, such as Stefan Prvovenčani (the First-Crowned), Domentijan, Teodosije, and Archbishop Danilo II applied the same models, writing hagiographies of pious rulers or church dignitaries from Stefan Nemanja to Prince Lazar. The model of ascetics and solitaries usually associated with Hesychast practice is evident in the lives and works of the elder Isaija, his disciple Siluan, and Romilos of Ravanica (1375) (Radović 1981: 114). The distinctive characteristic of these works was the luxuriant ornamentation and the sophisticated vocabulary that created a unique literary style called “pletentie slove” (word-weaving), dominant in the Serbian literature from the time of Domentijan, the hagiographer of St Sava.

The celebration of a family patron saint (*Krsna slava*) is another particular facet of the Serbian medieval tradition connected with the name of St Sava. There are two possible explanations of this custom. According to the first hypothesis *slava* derives from the communal (*saborny*) baptism of families and even of whole settlements (Radić 2007: 241). The second hypothesis finds the origins of *slava* in the Athonite custom of consecrating loaves (*artoi*) on festal days. It is thought that this custom was brought to Serbia by St Sava (Velimirović 1995: 5–10).

Serbian medieval Christianity reached its most original theological expression in the iconographic and the architectural styles of medieval monasteries, which were mainly the foundations of Serbian rulers, beginning with Stefan Nemanja and St Sava. The three main architectural styles in Serbian medieval architecture are the style of the Raška school (late twelfth to late thirteenth centuries), the Serbian-Byzantine or the Vardar school style (late thirteenth to late fourteenth centuries), and the style of the Morava school (1371–1459).

The Raška school exemplifies the golden age of Serbian iconography, which begins with the fresco paintings of Studenica and Sopoćani and ends with the iconography of Mileševa and Morača. Due to its monumentality and plasticity, this style is usually associated with the Hellenistic ideals of beauty in the classical art and referred to as a “Renaissance” before the Renaissance. The single nave basilicas with a central dome, like those in Chilandar, Studenica, and Žiča, are the major architectonic feature of this style (Djurić 1995: §3.1).

The cross-in-square churches with one central dome or five domes – as in the monasteries of the Mother of God of Ljeviš, Gračanica, the holy apostles in Pećka patrijaršija, Lesnovo – represent the Serbian-Byzantine style or the Vardar school. In the iconography of these monasteries there is apparent the classicism and academism developed under the influence of the Palaeologan renaissance. The distinctive elements of this style are the reverse perspective, emphasized by introducing myriad figures in the foreground of main iconographic scenes, as at the King’s Church of Studenica, and the holy royal lineage of the Nemanjić Dynasty in the form of the tree of Jesse, which shows the intention of Serbian rulers to replace the Greek emperors on the throne of the Orthodox Empire (Djurić 1995: §4.1).

The Morava style, most obvious in the monasteries of Ravanica, Ljubostinja, Kalenić, Manasija, and the church of Lazarica in Kruševac, is characterized by the semi-domes added to the sides of the cross-in-square churches of the Serbian-Byzantine school, followed by the relief decorations and colors on the facades. Nobility and melancholy in the iconographic expressions are the distinctive marks of this style. Royal nobility and knighthood are evident in the frescoes of Resava

(Manasija) Monastery (founded by Despot Stefan in 1408), where the heavenly court is depicted to resemble the court of the despot. The melancholy is unambiguously expressed in the iconography of Kalenić, where the restrained light that makes transparent shadows creates a melancholic atmosphere (Djurić 1995: §5.2).

The Battle of Kosovo between the Ottoman invaders and the Serbian army in 1389 was a spiritual milestone in the history of the Serbian people. The Serbian ruling class, who embraced Christianity as a Byzantine "cultural" model, long before it became a religion of the common people, deliberately chose the fight to inevitable death over surrender to the Ottomans. The involvement of Prince Martyr Lazar and Serbian troops in the fight with numerous Ottomans was from the beginning condemned to sure defeat. The defeat of the Serbian army and the death of Prince Martyr Lazar and other noblemen in the Kosovo battle were perceived as a Christian sacrifice and martyrdom. The cult of the Prince Martyr Lazar was established not long after the battle. His uncorrupted body located in the Monastery of Ravanica is considered as one of the signs of his sanctity. The prince's martyrdom was conceptualized in the Kosovo vow, which is a categorical imperative for the Serbian people to incline toward the kingdom of God, rather than to the earthly wealth and power. The sacrifice and martyrdom of Prince Lazar and his army is identified with Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac, by which he attained alliance with God. Similarly, the result of the martyrdom of Prince Lazar and his army is the everlasting alliance between God and the Serbian people (Gavrilović 1989: 6).

After the Serbian army was defeated in Kosovo, the Serbian state continued its decline until the final conquest by the Ottomans in 1459.

The synthesis of the tradition of St Sava with the tradition of the Kosovo vow, as the climax of Christian belief, characterizes medieval Serbian Christianity.

THE PERIOD UNDER OTTOMAN AND AUSTRO-HUNGARIAN RULE (1459-1804)

From the conquest of the medieval Serbian state by the Ottomans to the time of national revolutions, the Serbs lived in a territory divided between the Ottoman Empire and the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. In the Ottoman Empire, the Serbian Church was under constant oppression. The Turks abolished the Serbian patriarchate in 1461 and submitted the Orthodox believers to the patriarchate of Constantinople. Nevertheless, the metropolitanate of Montenegro and the Littoral became the ecclesial successor of the patriarchate of Peć, and the metropolitan gained the title "Exarch of the Holy Throne of Peć." Even after the conquest of Montenegro by the Turks in 1449, the metropolitanate, which was never brought under the Turkish rule, continued its mission as the Serbian Church.

Despite the fact that many bishops in Serbia were Greeks after the abolition of the Serbian patriarchate and its subjection to the patriarchate of Constantinople, Orthodox Christianity preserved the national identity of Serbs as their chief characteristic. The growing cult of St Sava as a Serbian saint inspired a national revival and nourished resistance against the Ottomans. Thus, in 1594 the Ottoman ruler of Serbia, Sinan Pasha, burnt the relics of St Sava in Belgrade in order to pre-empt any possible rebellion against the Ottoman Empire. The spiritual and intellectual life of the Serbs in the Ottoman Empire was in every respect disastrous. Many churches

were turned into mosques, while the building of new churches and the renovation of the old were prohibited. A short spiritual awakening happened during the renewal of the patriarchate from 1557 until its final abolition by the Turks in 1766. The first patriarch of the re-established patriarchate, Makarije Sokolović, who was also the brother of Grand Vizier Mohamed Sokolović, united all Serbian regions with around forty dioceses under his spiritual and ecclesial directorship. The greatest accomplishment of Serbian theology happened under Patriarch Pajsije Janjevac (1614-47), who inspired the revival of the hagiographical literature and entered into theological debate with Pope Urban VIII concerning the questions of the procession of the Holy Spirit (Jovanović 1992).

The constant persecutions of Serbs by the Ottomans caused migrations from south Serbia, Macedonia, and Kosovo to the north, across the Danube and the Sava rivers. As a consequence of the Austro-Turkish War (1683-99), the Serbs led by Patriarch Arsenije III Čarnojević migrated to Vojvodina and South Hungary up to Budapest, where the emperor Leopold granted autonomy to the Orthodox Church. The center of the Serbs' church life in the Habsburg monarchy was in the metropolitanate of Karlovci, established in 1691, elevated to the level of patriarchate in 1848 and extant until 1920 (Bremer 1992: 15-65).

The metropolitans of Karlovci promoted the Enlightenment by introducing western education in the schools established in Sremski Karlovci (1733) and Novi Sad (1737) (Turczynski 1975). However, in order to avoid Roman Catholic influences, the curricula had been exposed to Russian impact that caused changes in the liturgical language (Serbian Slavonic was replaced by Russian Slavonic, called Church Slavonic), practice, and theology (Đurović 1999). Baroque influence became evident not only in church architecture and iconography, but also in the literature and the theology of Jerotej and Kiprian Račanin, Gavril Stefanović Venclović (1680-1749), and others (Pavić 1972). The Serbian Enlightenment provided the means for the attainment of political self-consciousness, reflected in the processes of the creation of a national language started by Zaharija Orfelin (1726-85), and of the rediscovery of a glorious medieval past begun with Jovan Rajić (1726-1801) (Barac 1955: 60-64).

The main characteristics of this period are the deterioration of Serbian medieval culture caused by the occupation of the Serbian lands by foreign rulers and the disturbance of the existing balance between eastern and western influences resulting in the prevalence of the latter.

THE PERIOD OF THE LIBERATION OF SERBIA AND THE CREATION OF YUGOSLAVIA (1804-1941)

The political expression of the Enlightenment was national liberation and the creation of the modern independent state. In the case of Serbia this idea was for the first time outlined by Sava Tekelija in 1790 and embodied in the Serbian revolution led by Karadjordje Petrović in 1804 (Djordjević 1965: 18). The final attainment was first the independent principality of Šumadija in 1817, and ultimately the independent Serbian state proclaimed in 1878 at the Congress in Berlin. Many clergymen like Deacon Avakum, impaled in Belgrade in 1814, or Bishop Melentije of Niš, hanged with his clergy in 1821, took an active role in the rebellion against the Ottomans.

Dositej Obradović (1739–1811), the first minister of education in Karadjordje's Serbia, attempted to fashion the newly established institutions on the model of modern European states by introducing ideas of Enlightenment rationalism and humanism. The creation of the Serbian national culture culminated with Vuk Stefanović Karadžić (1787–1864), who reformed the literary language, replacing the Church Slavonic with a local dialect more comprehensible to the people. For both of them the acceptance of modern European ideas was seen as a form of continuity with medieval cultural beginnings and as a remedy for the backwardness forced upon Serbs by the Ottomans, while the Serbian Church regarded these cultural changes as an interruption of tradition (Popović 1963). Serbian theology was exposed to double external influences since the clerics from Vojvodina attended western universities, while clerics from Serbia were mainly educated in Russian ecclesial academies. At the end of the nineteenth century, Russian influence prevailed and theological currents such as Slavophile criticism of western values and the philosophy of All-Unity became dominant in Serbian theology (Kalezić 1994). However, the Slavophile ideas of pan-Slavism contributed to the unification of the southern Slavs (Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes) in the kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1918 and led to the restoration of the Serbian patriarchate by merging the patriarchate of Karlovci and the metropolitanate of Belgrade in 1920. In the same year, the first generation of students was enrolled at the faculty of theology of Belgrade University.

The leading Serbian theologian at the beginning of the twentieth century was the bishop of Žiča, Nikolaj Velimirović (1880–1956). Educated in Bern, Oxford, and St Petersburg, Bishop Nikolaj was a severe critic of western secularism, but at the same time a proponent of good relations with western churches, especially the Old Catholic and the Anglican (von Arx 2006). In his theological work Bishop Nikolaj regarded the simple spirituality of the medieval Serbian peasants as the ideal form of Christianity. According to his opinion, the mission of re-baptizing the West and Christianizing the East (Asia) therefore belongs to Serbian Christianity, which incorporates the active western principle and the contemplative eastern principle. Bishop Nikolaj conceptualized the philosophy of *Svetosavlje* ("Saint-Savaism") based on the cult of St Sava as the quintessence of the Serbian Orthodoxy, which maintains the inseparable link between the modern Serbian people and their Orthodox tradition. In the 1930s he became the leader of a pietistic folk movement *Bogomoljci*, historically important because it provided monks and nuns for the deserted Serbian monasteries (Aleksov 2010: 177–80).

Father Justin Popović (1894–1979) was another great theologian of the twentieth century. Adopting the criticism of western humanism from the Slavophile stance, Fr Justin proposed the concept of Theo-humanism ("Godmanhood") not only as a remedy for dis-incarnated western civilization, but as the only true and authentic existence of man. He developed further the heritage of St Sava into the philosophy of *Svetosavlje* as both a national paradigm and a distinctive form of Orthodoxy marked by the Serbian historical and spiritual experience.

The return to the authority of the fathers, which started with Nikolaj Velimirović by his writing of the *Prologue from Ohrid* and continued with Justin Popović's twelve volumes of the *Lives of the Saints*, later became a general tendency in the Serbian theology of the twentieth century.

The period from liberation to the Second World War was a time of national prosperity in which all sectors of public life were structured and developed according to western models. As a reaction to western ideological domination, Russian pan-Slavonic ideas gained popularity among the intellectual elite of South Slavs and led in the last instance to the creation of the kingdom of South Slavs (Yugoslavia). At the level of theology, the western methods and themes that prevailed in Orthodox theology in previous centuries were replaced by the interest in the Greek, Slavonic, and Russian patristic heritage.

THE SECOND WORLD WAR AND THE COMMUNIST PERIOD (1941-90)

The Second World War brought again the persecution of the Serbian Orthodox Church, especially in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Macedonia. Due to their religious and national identity, many Orthodox Serbs died in the concentration camps of Jasenovac and Jadovno in the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) (Buchenau 2004: 65-74) and many of them were subsequently venerated as new martyrs. Four Orthodox bishops, more than 220 priests, and almost 1 million Serbian Orthodox believers lost their lives, while more than 250,000 Serbs were forced to convert to Roman Catholicism in NDH (Jevtić 2002). Patriarch Gavriilo Dožić and Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović were imprisoned by the Gestapo and transferred to the concentration camp at Dachau. In Montenegro, the Communists killed Metropolitan Joanikije and more than 120 priests and monks during the war. The persecution of the Orthodox Church was continued by the Communist regime in the first years of Tito's Yugoslavia.

Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović could not return to Yugoslavia at the end of the Second World War and he immigrated to the USA, where he died. Fr Justin was removed from Belgrade's Faculty of Theology in 1945 and exiled to the Ćelije Monastery. The Faculty of Theology, expelled from the University of Belgrade by a decree of the Serbian Communist government in 1952, continued to work under the patronage of the Serbian Church.

It seemed that the Yugoslav pro-Enlightenment policy during the 1960s gained support in some Orthodox circles, because its modernism followed by technological development had been seen as a continuation of the "modernity" of medieval Serbia (Buchenau 2005: 76-79). These voices came particularly from the members of the Association of Priests (*Udruženje sveštenika*), an organization established in 1948 with the support of the Communist government. The effect of these ideas was the dismantlement of the Serbian Church. Firstly, the Serbian Orthodox diaspora in Western Europe and America accused the church in Serbia of collaboration with the Communist regime and proclaimed itself independent in 1964. St Sava Serbian Orthodox School of Theology was established in Libertyville, Illinois, for the education of Serbian clergy in America. Secondly, in 1967 as a nation-building project and with the help of the Communist authorities, Macedonian clergy and dioceses in the republic of Macedonia seceded from the Serbian patriarchate and founded the autocephalous Macedonian Orthodox Church.

Fr Justin Popović was a severe critic of the Communist regime and in his *Memorandum* he described the persecution of the Serbian Church. His spiritual

disciples Metropolitan Amfilohije Radović and bishops Artemije Radisavljević, Atanasije Jevtić, and Irinej Bulović followed him in his uncompromising criticism toward both Communism and western secularism. As students in Greece during the 1960s, they acquainted themselves with Greek and Byzantine heritage and took an active part in the Palamite renaissance that was critical toward western theological and cultural tenets.

The survival of the Serbian Church during the difficult years of communism was due to the diplomatic skills of Patriarch German Đorić (*sed.* from 1957 to 1990) who managed to maintain basic ecclesial life.

THE POST-COMMUNIST PERIOD AND THE COLLAPSE OF YUGOSLAVIA (1991-PRESENT)

The collapse of Communism led to the violent eruption of suppressed national feelings and to the disintegration of Yugoslavia. Freed from the ideological restraints of the atheistic regime, the Serbian Church suddenly found herself entangled in bloody wars. It coincided with the enthronement of Patriarch Pavle Stojčević (1914–2009), the forty-fourth patriarch of the Serbian Church. The wars in Croatia and Bosnia (1991–95), and later in Kosovo (1998–99), led to pogroms against the Serbian clergy and people and their flight from territories where they previously lived as well as the destruction of many churches. Even since the three-months bombardment of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro) by NATO in 1999, when UN forces took control over Kosovo, more than 150 churches and monasteries were destroyed, 1,200 people killed, 240,000 people expelled, and 211 Orthodox cemeteries desecrated. Just in the few days following 17 March 2004, militant Albanians burnt 35 churches and monasteries, some of them dating from the twelfth century (Ivanović 2008: 230).

Since the early 1990s, church life has begun to blossom. More churches have been built in Serbia in the last two decades than in the whole previous century and in Montenegro alone 200 churches have been erected. At the initiative of Patriarch Pavle and the mediation of Bishop Irinej Gavrilović (b.1930), formerly bishop of Niš and now patriarch of Serbia, the rupture with the Serbian Orthodox Church in the USA was healed. The agreement reached between the Serbian patriarchate and the Macedonian ecclesial authorities in Niš in 2002 promised to solve the Macedonian schism by granting to the Church of Macedonia autonomous status, but it was later overruled by many Macedonian bishops. The Serbian Church remained in canonical communion with the Macedonian bishops who signed the agreement and one of them, Bishop Jovan of Veles, was recognized as the Archbishop of Ohrid by the Serbian patriarchate in 2005.

Theological learning began to flourish since the beginning of the 1990s when many seminaries – such as Cetinje, Montenegro (1992), Kragujevac, Serbia (1997), and Krka, Croatia (2001) – were opened or reopened. The Serbian Church also established the Academy of Arts and Conservation in Belgrade in 1993. One year later, the seminary in Foča (Bosnia) was elevated to the rank of an institution of higher learning, becoming the third theological faculty of the Serbian Church, after those in Belgrade and in Libertyville, Illinois. The decisions of the Serbian government to introduce catechism in primary and secondary schools in 2002 and

to return the faculty of theology to the University of Belgrade in 2004 marked a positive step in the further development of the theological learning in Serbia. Meanwhile, newly founded diocesan publishing houses have contributed to the revival of theological literature and they have directly influenced the renewal of spiritual life in all its forms, including monasticism.

Serbian theology has continued with the patristic revival commenced by Fr Justin Popović and continued by his disciples. From the beginning of the 1990s, Metropolitan John Zizioulas' theology of personhood and Eucharistic ecclesiology became the most influential stream in Serbian theology, being propagated by the professor of dogmatics at Belgrade's faculty of theology, Ignatije Midić, bishop of Požaravac and Braničevo (see Cvetković 2009). Since the canonizations of Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović and of Fr Justin Popović (2010), Serbian theology has been focused more on investigation of their immense theological legacy. The theology of St Justin the New especially promises to give an impetus to contemporary Orthodox thought.

Finally, the election of the new patriarch, Irinej, in 2010 sends positive signals concerning the involvement of the Serbian Church, not only in solving problems within her canonical borders, but also in opening a new chapter with Roman Catholics and other western Christians.

The last decades were the most disturbing period for the Serbian Church and her people, who experienced four wars and lived in at least four states without changing their place of inhabitation. Nevertheless, it was also the most fruitful period for the church and her spiritual growth, which can be seen as a reaction both against the former Communist repression of religious life and against the radical secularism inevitably linked with the consumer mentality that came from the West after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

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