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Aleksandra Djurić Milovanović  
*Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts*

Radmila Radić  
*Belgrade's Institute for Recent History of Serbia*

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# WOMEN IN THE SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH: HISTORICAL OVERVIEW AND CONTEMPORARY SITUATION

**Aleksandra Djurić Milovanović and Radmila Radić**

Aleksandra Djurić Milovanović is a senior research associate at the Institute for Balkan Studies of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts. She earned her PhD in ethnology and anthropology (2012) from the University of Belgrade. Her academic research has been focused on the anthropology of religion, religion and migration, and contemporary evangelical movements in Serbia and Romania. Recently, she co-edited the volume with Radmila Radić, *Orthodox Christian Renewal Movements in Eastern Europe*.

Radmila Radić is the Principal Research Fellow at Belgrade's Institute for Recent History of Serbia. Graduated, received her MSc and PhD degrees from the University of Belgrade, Faculty of Philosophy. The subjects of her interest include a relation of the state and religious communities, Serbian Orthodox Church history and religion in the Balkans. She published several books, surveys, and articles. Her latest book is *The Mission of the British Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia*.

## 1. Introduction

Research on the position of women in the Eastern Orthodox churches is still scarce. Some recent studies show differences among the various Orthodox Churches in Eastern Europe regarding women's issues.<sup>1</sup> The position of the women in the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) was addressed as late as in the 1990s, but this is still an insufficiently examined field.<sup>2</sup> Eastern Orthodox theologians have rarely discussed the problem of the position and role of women in the SOC. During the socialist era, they did not engage this topic, except in studies related to female monasticism.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, sociological and

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<sup>1</sup> See: Eva M. Synek, ed., "Roles and Rights of Women in European Orthodoxy," *Kanon* 17, 2005.

<sup>2</sup> See: Radmila Radić, "Stavovi o ženi u radovima pravoslavnih teologa," *Srbija u modernizacijskim procesima 19. i 20. veka*, 2, *Položaj žene kao merilo modernizacije*, Naučni skup, Beograd: INIS, 1998, 113-125; Poznanović B., "Žena u pravoslavnoj veri," *Feministička teologija*, ed. Svenka. Savić, Novi Sad, 1999; Grupa autora, *Uloga i mesto intelektualaca, laika i žene u Crkvi*, Beograd: Pastirsko savetodavni centar, , 2006/2015; Ksenija Končarević, "Žena u Pravoslavnoj Crkvi: pogled 'iznutra'", *Istina*, 3-4 (2000), 145-158; Zorica Kuburić, "Žena u pravoslavlju između teorije i prakse", *Zbornik radova Crkva u pluralističkom društvu*, Novi Sad: KAS i HKC, , 2009, 149-173; Patrijarh srpski Pavle, *Žena u Pravoslavnoj Crkvi*, Beograd: Izdavački fond Arhiepiskopije beogradsko-karlovačke, , 2011; Danijela Gavrilović, *Doba upotrebe: religija i moral u Srbiji (The Age of Use: Morality and Religion in Contemporary Serbia)*, Niš: Filozofski fakultet, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> Amfilohije Radović, "Istorija srpskog ženskog monaštva", *Glasnik SPC*, 44:20-7, 1963, 120-6; Amfilohije Radović and Hrizostom Vojnović, "Obnova i razvoj našeg ženskog monaštva", *Srpska pravoslavna crkva 1920-*

anthropological studies have only recently started to include the topic of women in religion and in the church in their research on religiosity in Serbia.<sup>4</sup> However, serious empirical research is still insufficient.

The aim of this contribution is to outline the position of women in Orthodox Christianity, to discuss the attitude of the SOC towards this issue and to summarize the changes related to it in the last 100 years.

In Serbia, research conducted in the last 20 years demonstrates that the profile of a believer as a basis for interpreting and understanding the functions of religion has changed. Religiosity, oriented towards traditionalism and rituals seems to be more significant than ecclesiality and personal faith. Sociologist Mirko Blagojević speaks of a shift during the post-communist period “from a professed atheism back to a professed faith.”<sup>5</sup> The level of religious practice has risen but it continues to be low according to various indicators, except in terms of celebrating major church holidays and performing rites of passage. Women have a primary role in all forms of religious practice; they visit places of worship more frequently, celebrate religious holidays more often, fast significantly more than men, pray and read religious literature with much greater frequency.<sup>6</sup>

The beginning of a more intensive research on gender in Serbia also contributed to the emergence of studies on the relationship between religion and gender. Anthropologist Lidija

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1970. *Spomenica o 50-godišnjici vaspostavljanja Srpske Patrijaršije*, Belgrade: S. Arh. Sinod SPC, 1971, 333-43; Amfilohije Radović, *Podvižnice Hristove ljubavi: žensko monaštvo, pouke*, Svetigora, 2009. There is a significant paper of Milica Bakić Hayden on female monasticism, *Women Monastics in Orthodox Christianity: The Case of the Serbian Orthodox Church*, The National Council for Eurasian and East European Research, [https://www.ucis.pitt.edu/nceer/2003\\_816\\_20\\_BakicHayden.pdf](https://www.ucis.pitt.edu/nceer/2003_816_20_BakicHayden.pdf)

<sup>4</sup>Lidija Radulović, *Pol, rod i religija. Konstrukcija roda u narodnoj religiji Srba*, Belgrade: Univerzitet u Beogradu, Filozofski fakultet, 2009; Svenka Savić, Rebeka Jadranka Anić, *Rodna perspektiva u međureligijskom dijalogu u XXI veku*, Novi Sad: Futura, 2009; Zilka Spahić Šiljak, *Žene, religija i politika*, I Sarajevo, MIC Zajedno, 2007. Marina Blagojević (ed), *Mapiranje mizoginije u Srbiji: diskursi i prakse*, Asocijacija za žensku inicijativu, Beograd, 2000. Milica Bakić-Hayden, „Postanje, drugo stanje i stanje danas“, in: *Mapiranje mizoginije u Srbiji: diskursi i prakse* II, Beograd: Asocijacija za žensku inicijativu, 2005, 322–339.

<sup>5</sup> Mirko Blagojević, “Religijsko-konfesionalna identifikacija i vera u Boga građana Srbije“, *Filozofija i društvo* XXIII (1), 2012, 44.

<sup>6</sup>According to the censuses after 2000 in the Republic of Serbia (without Kosovo and Metohija), among 95% of the population, who reported their religion, 85% are Orthodox Christians, approximately 5% are Catholics, around 1% are Protestants, and some 3% are Muslims. See Radmila Radić, “Pripadanje bez verovanja i poznavanja”, *Novosti iz prošlosti. Znanje, neznanje, upotreba i zloupotreba istorije*, Ed. Vojin Dimitrijević, Beograd, 2010. 107-126. However, sociologists of religion warn that expression of religious affiliation does not prove regular religious practice. Confessional and religious self-identifications are forms of traditional religiousness. Confessional identification is a wider concept of religiosity and it means recognizing and adhering to a specific religion, regardless of personal (non)religiousness. “For example, most Serbs will say that they are Orthodox Christians, in order to identify themselves with the confession of their grandfathers and fathers, although most of them are not personally religious or have any relation to the church.” Dragoljub B. Đorđević, “Religije i veroispovesti nacionalnih manjina u Srbiji“, *Sociologija*, Vol. XLVII, 3, 2005, 193–212.

Radulović has conducted research on the social and cultural construction of gender in the folk religion of the Serbs in the 19<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The results showed that gender differences underlying the division of roles in the family influenced the pervasive idea that a woman was in charge of religious practice. Women, more than men, pray for other family members, go to church instead of them, and fast. Radulović also revealed that women were more frequent participants in pilgrimages than men. The ritual of pilgrimage indirectly legitimizes the patriarchal construct of a woman's role in the family and her image as the guardian of the nation and of religious traditions. Radulović found that most women experience religious visions and apparitions. The folk religion of Serbs does not rest on the hierarchical principle of gender, where, by redistributing the roles in the religious sphere, one gender occupies a lower position compared to the other. Radulović emphasized that national religion is the area of hierarchy of power in the traditional culture of the Serbs. However, men do not command absolute power in the area of the sacred, where androcentric hierarchy as well as the dichotomous understanding of power, are undermined. Lidija Radulović points out that the patriarchal culture in many ways mobilizes religious beliefs for the sake of its own reproduction and strengthening. She gives an example with beliefs and practices related to the ritual impurity of pregnant women and maternity. These women were burdened with many prohibitions and religious regulations for proper behavior, which aimed to ensure the health of the child, but which actually served to place women under control. The author also refers to the Orthodox discourse on motherhood, which formed the ideal motherhood model in the traditional Serbian culture. Magic is also alluded to, as one of the alternative aspects of religion in which women's sexuality preserved their power.<sup>7</sup>

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The general position of women in Christianity has been influenced by two archetypes of women, a positive and a negative one. It has also been defined by a patriarchal model of the relationship between a man and a woman, which was outlined in various biblical and patristic texts. In the Epistle to the Ephesians, Apostle Paul stated: "Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord." "For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior" and "Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything." (Eph 5: 22-25) In the First Epistle to Timothy, the author wrote: "Let a woman learn quietly with

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<sup>7</sup> Lidija Radulović, *Pol, rod i religija*, 46, 137; Lidija Radulović, (2010). "Feminizacija hodočašća u kontekstu revitalizacije religije u Srbiji," *Antropologija*, 10 (3): 39-48, 45.

all submissiveness” and “I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet.” (I Tim 2: 9-15) Later Tertullian admonished women: “You should always be in mourning, your eyes should be full of penitentiary tears so that you do not forget that it was you who ruined the human race.“ He also stated: “It is not permitted for a woman to speak in the church, neither to teach, nor to baptize, nor to offer bloodless sacrifices, nor to take upon herself any male function, least of all the priestly office.“<sup>8</sup> Saint John Chrysostom said that those who wanted their wife to be obedient as the Church was to the Christ should take themselves the same care for her as Christ had taken for the Church. Religion, in this case Christianity, has thus become a key factor in a patriarchal model, according to which women play secondary roles and are subordinate to men.<sup>9</sup>

In Serbia, a symbiosis between Orthodox Christianity and traditional culture has generated a specific national Orthodox religion.<sup>10</sup> Đoko Slijepčević points out that the Church in Serbia accepted, legalized, and protected a patriarchal social system with its rigidly defined generational hierarchy based on the principle of the voluntarily subjugation of the young to the elderly.<sup>11</sup> This system included the domination of men over women, a strict gender division of roles in the Church, in the family and in larger society, and the economic dependence of women on men. Within this system, a woman was perceived as an inferior being and the scope of female activities was limited to the household and the family. Furthermore, women were seen as carriers of traditional values.

In spite of the fading away of traditional society and the far-reaching political, economic, social, and cultural transformation since the end of the Second World War, the patriarchal system and mentality have survived. Because the family functions as the primary and often the most important source of religious education for the younger generations, the Church has always placed a special emphasis in cultivating a Christian family and regulating family life, wherein women’s roles are validated primarily as wives and mothers. Today’s attitude towards women in the SOC is largely formed around centuries-old patriarchal views.

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<sup>8</sup> Isidora Matejić, “Žena u pravoslavlju”, *Hrišćanska misao*, 9-12, 1998.

<sup>9</sup> Dragoljub B. Đorđević, “Pravoslavlje između neba i zemlje”, *Pravoslavlje između neba i zemlje*, Ed. D. B. Đorđević, Niš, 1990, 21.

<sup>10</sup> Zoran Gluščević, “Pravoslavlje i srpska tradicionalna kultura”, *Čovek i crkva u vrtlogu krize: šta nam nudi pravoslavlje danas?* Ed. Gordana Živković, Niš, 1993, 162.

<sup>11</sup> Đoko Slijepčević, *Istorija SPC*, 1, Beograd 1991, 453.

## 2. Attitude towards Marriage and the Position of Women in the Eastern Orthodox Church

The Christian Church has always considered marriage to be the oldest institution of the divine right. According to this definition, God had established marriage as a monogamous life-long relationship between a man and a woman. The family is of primary importance to both the Church and the nation, as it cultivates and transmits respect for the established social order and authority, without which neither a church community nor a nation could exist.<sup>12</sup> Christianity underlined the holiness of marriage by proclaiming it a sacrament. Marriage is seen as a harmonious coexistence between rationality, represented by the man, and feelings, which are more characteristic of the woman.<sup>13</sup> Although virginity is seen as a higher form of a regulated sexuality, marriage, in which sexuality is directed towards the creation of a new life, is blessed as a sacrament. Bearing children is not the only woman's mission in the marriage; woman is also responsible for improving the morality and culture of the matrimony as a "union of persons in love."<sup>14</sup>

In the early 1930s in Paris, Sergije Troicki, a professor at the Belgrade Faculty of Orthodox Theology, published a book, *Christian Philosophy of Marriage*.<sup>15</sup> Troicki wrote that in the Christian era, the West had accepted a "realistic" theory of marriage, while the East had accepted an "idealistic" one. This idealistic theory was developed by Saint John Chrysostom who wrote that a person not united by matrimonial relations did not represent a whole but solely a half, and described a husband and wife as one person. It was included in the official Eastern canonical collections. The 740 A.D. Ecloga defined marriage as a union of two people into one body or one being. In addition to Ecloga, this definition was included in the Slavic *Krmčija* (Kormchaya kniga, the Slavic adaptation of Nomocanon). Troicki wrote that this view had been accepted in numerous canonical testaments of the Eastern Orthodox Church, which agreed that marriage was a comprehensive and complete union of a husband and wife, even though they did not specify the bearing of children as the major objective of a marriage.<sup>16</sup> The Eastern Orthodox Church opposes polygamy but allows the second and third marriage in case of need, while the fourth marriage is forbidden. The Church also condemns the infidelity of a spouse.

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<sup>12</sup> Nikodim Milaš, *Pravoslavno crkveno pravo*, Beograd, 1926, 610.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Matejić, *op. cit.*

<sup>15</sup> Sergije Troicki, "Realizam i idealizam u nauci o braku", *Put* (Beograd), July-August, 1933, 2, , 72-77.

<sup>16</sup> Troicki ., *op. cit.*, 72-77.

Regarding the spouses' rights and duties, the Orthodox canon law states that a husband has a divine right to be the head of the family and the right to govern and command the family using “mainly gentle advice and avoiding harsh measures.” So, the man has the right to be respected and obeyed by all members of the family. According to the same right, the wife has to be an inseparable follower of her husband, helping him and obeying him in all situations. She acquires the name from her husband and exercises all rights of his social position.<sup>17</sup> Women, according to the canon law, do not have the right to be witnesses to a wedding and godmothers, while non-virgin brides are seen as unfit for marriage.

The Church accepted the regulations from the Greek and Roman legislation on the wearing of mourning clothes by women following their husbands' death; women were strictly forbidden to remarry during this period. “This was prescribed because of the respect which a woman was obliged to pay to the memory of her husband; and later the same was prescribed for the husband following his wife's death. When it comes to women, this was regulated in order to avoid arousing doubt regarding the paternity of the child who could have been born after the husband's death.”<sup>18</sup>

According to the Orthodox canon law, a husband could seek divorce: a) in case of his wife's adultery; b) if his wife plotted against his life; c) if the wife kills the conceived fetus inside herself; d) when the wife “entertains with strangers with wrong intentions”; e) when the wife oversleeps in other people's houses without a justifiable reason and her husband's knowledge; f) when the wife visits public places “not appropriate for a decent woman” against her husband's will. A wife could seek divorce in case of adultery and if her husband publicly plotted against her life, as well as in two other cases: if the husband openly induced her to fornication, or if he accused her of adultery publicly and wrongly.<sup>19</sup>

Orthodox theologians considered the Christian marriage to be a remedy against lust and a space of love, moderation, diffidence, and matrimonial purity.<sup>20</sup> In the mid-1920s, writers in ecclesiastical journals considered adultery to be the main cause of marital crises

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<sup>17</sup> Milaš, *op. cit.*, 665/6. In *Bračna pravila of SPC (Marital Rules of the Serbian Orthodox Church)* from 1933, in the section on the rights and duties of spouses, Article 69 states: “2) the husband is the head of the family and has the right and duty to manage the matrimonial cohabitation, to earn the living for the family; 3) the wife is obliged to live with her husband wherever he chooses if it is not illegal or immoral; she is obliged to help her husband in the household and with housework; and particularly to commit herself to bearing, cherishing and bringing up the children.” *Bračna pravila SPC* (expanded edition), (Beograd: Sv. Arh. Sinod, 1973).

<sup>18</sup> Milaš, *op. cit.*, 638.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> *Vesnik*, 198, September 15, 1957, 3.

and suggested educative books to women in order to prevent it. At the same time, they criticized the idea of marriage as a way to secure personal gain and satisfaction.<sup>21</sup>

According to most Orthodox theologians, the woman's place was within the family, and the household, next to her husband who was occupied by numerous "external duties and worries."<sup>22</sup> In 1894, *Hrišćanski vesnik (the Christian Herald)* described what a married woman should look like and how she should behave in order to deserve her husband's love. At all times, and particularly when waiting for her husband to come home from work, a woman should be clean, tidy, though modestly dressed, "with a loving smile on her lips, with the smile of happiness in her eyes." Also, the house should sparkle with cleanness and the husband should be greeted with a meal and a flower in a vase. Women were advised to "make the kitchen and the hearth the source of true satisfaction in each house."<sup>23</sup>

The husband, as the head of the family, is compared to a shepherd responsible for his children's destinies as well as for the spiritual life of the family as a whole. The wife, as the husband's spiritual assistant, must be a source of connubial and parental inspiration as well as of familial unity.<sup>24</sup>

There are noticeable discrepancies between public opinion and the teachings of the Serbian Orthodox Church. According to the Pew Research Center reports from 2017 and 2018, out of 19 Central and Eastern European countries, Serbia was in the sixth place in terms of acceptance of legal abortion, which was viewed favorably by 63 percent of respondents. About 70 percent of respondents supported the Church position allowing Orthodox Christians to divorce. Regarding the questions about homosexual behavior, prostitution, abortion, drug use, drinking alcohol, sex before marriage, using contraceptives and divorcing being morally wrong, Serbia, along with Bulgaria and Greece, was at the bottom of the list according to the number of respondents who had negative attitudes on these issues. Most respondents condemned prostitution, homosexuality and drug use, similarly to the respondents in the other surveyed countries. Only 45 percent of the respondents in Serbia believed that religiosity strengthened morality. However, 59 percent thought that the Church focused too much on money and power, and 64 percent believed that religious leaders should not have any influence on political matters. In Serbia, 69 percent of the respondents felt that women had the responsibility to take care of children, and 34 percent said that men should

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<sup>21</sup> Stevan Dimitrijević, "Porodica prvih hrišćana nekad i sad", *Hrišćanski vesnik*, 1, 1894, 7.

<sup>22</sup> Vitomir M. Vidaković, „Hrišćanska porodica“, *Vesnik Srpske Crkve*, January 1928, 5-11.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Svetigora*, 28, June 1994.



have higher employment rights. However, 65 percent of the respondents in Serbia disagreed with the statement that women had to always obey their husbands and 83 percent believed that an ideal marriage was the one in which both spouses earned money and took care of their children.<sup>25</sup>

Although the process of increasing religiousness and growing Church popularity was present in the Orthodox countries in Eastern Europe, four decades of communist rule left a legacy of profound ignorance of religion. Believers lacked knowledge of the basics of the church teachings; they did know how to behave in places of worship, etc. After an extended “exile,” as some theologians say, it was assumed that the reintegration of the faithful would be a long-term process with an uncertain outcome.<sup>26</sup> Research in Serbia indicates that although there is growing religiousness among the adult population, most Serbian citizens link religiosity with belonging to the nation and tradition, and not with God. A significant number of people are unsure of their religiousness. Most people either do not know the commandments of God or neglect them. A significant percentage of respondents in the polls do not think abortion is infanticide. Most Orthodox Serbs believe in the resurrection of Christ and celebrate Easter, but that they do not attend regularly church services and do not follow religious prescriptions. Many think the Church should engage in humanitarian work and not politics and, that there are considerable numbers of those who do not know exactly what role the Church has.<sup>27</sup> Priests themselves are often critical of the religious climate. They complain that modern believers approach God too selfishly and mechanically, without any spiritual

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<sup>25</sup> Pew Research Center (PRC), May 10, 2017, *Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe*, <http://www.pewforum.org/2017/05/10/religious-belief-and-national-belonging-in-central-and-eastern-europe/>; <http://www.pewforum.org/2017/05/10/social-views-and-morality/>; PRC, November 8, 2017, *Orthodox Christianity in the 21st Century*, <http://www.pewforum.org/2017/11/08/orthodox-take-socially-conservative-views-on-gender-issues-homosexuality/>; <http://www.pewforum.org/2017/11/08/orthodox-christians-support-key-church-policies-are-lukewarm-toward-reconciling-with-roman-catholic-church/>; PRC, Oct. 29, 2018, *Eastern and Western Europeans Differ on Importance of Religion, Views of Minorities, and Key Social Issues*, <http://www.pewforum.org/2018/10/29/eastern-and-western-europeans-differ-on-importance-of-religion-views-of-minorities-and-key-social-issues/> (accessed....).

<sup>26</sup> Sabrina P. Ramet, “A Checklist of Issues to Track“, *East-West Church and Ministry Report*, 2, 1994, 2–3.

<sup>27</sup> Dragana Radosavljević-Čiparizović, “Religija i svakodnevni život: vezanost ljudi za religiju i crkvu u Srbiji krajem devedesetih“, *Srbija krajem milenijuma*, Eds. S. Bolčić, A. Milić, Beograd, 2002, 215–248; Dragana Radosavljević-Čiparizović, *Religioznost i tradicija*, Beograd, 2006, 67; Dragoljub B. Đorđević, “Nekoliko razmišljanja o našoj crkvi“, *Peščanik FM*, 3, Beograd, 2005, 133; Mirjana, Malešević, “Pravoslavlje kao srž „nacionalnog bića“ postkomunističke Srbije“, Beograd, 2006, 99–121, <http://www.etno-institut.co.rs/>; Miroslav Ahtik, “Klerikalizacija Srbije“, *Republika*, XVI (2004), 340–341, 1–30 September 2004; Mirko Blagojević, *Religija i crkva u transformacijama društva*, Beograd 2005, 308; Mirko Blagojević, “Savremene religijske promene u Srbiji i proces integracije u Evropu“, *Filozofija i društvo*, 1/2006, 95–111; Mirko Blagojević, “Desecularization of Contemporary Serbian Society“, *Religion in Eastern Europe* XXVIII, 1 (February 2008), 37–50; Mirko Blagojević, „O sociološkim kriterijumima religioznosti. Koliko ima (pravoslavnih) vernika danas?“, *Filozofija i društvo*, br. 1, Beograd 2009, 9–36.

experience and preparation. The renown theologian Vladeta Jerotić wrote, “The Orthodox faith has weakened among our people, or it is so excluded that its roots are hard to recognize, it has remained or has become lukewarm, it is traditional only in the formal observance of some customs related to holidays (Christmas, *slava* or patron saint’s day, Easter eggs, etc.), without people understanding their meaning and without re-reading the eternal Book of Life—the gospel of Christ.”<sup>28</sup> Patriarch Pavle in his 2002 Paschal Encyclical spoke about an unacceptably low level of understanding of the Orthodox faith and rituals among the Serbs and the reduction of religiosity to folklore symbolism. “Orthodox traditional believers are prone to consider their religious duties optional and a matter of choice. According to this understanding, religious ceremonies can take part, but they do not have to. Such believers are characterized by the absence of need and awareness of the constant participation in the church and liturgical life.”<sup>29</sup> It can be claimed that the return of religion after the fall of communism has happened through a focus on tradition and under the influence of ideological, social and political factors rather than through the revival of personal faith and practice.

### 3. Abortion

The Christian Church considers a deliberately caused or executed abortion to be a sin and a misdeed to be punished. In the 4th century Saint Basil the Great wrote: “She who has deliberately destroyed a fetus has to pay the penalty for the murder...And those who give drugs causing abortion are murderers themselves, as well as those who accept the poison which kills the fetus.” The Church believes that the personality of an unborn child exists from the moment of conception and this attitude has not changed for centuries. As mentioned above, the matrimonial law considered a deliberate abortion to be a justified reason for a divorce.<sup>30</sup>

In 1892, at the suggestion of the Bishop of Timok, the Patriarchal Council of the Kingdom of Serbia decided that the clergy should react against the “evil” of abortion. In a 1894 text named *One of many evils that destroy us*, Deacon Vasa Živković warned that abortions represented murders and, in numerous cases, suicides (due to frequent abortion-

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<sup>28</sup> M. Ahtik, “Klerikalizacija Srbije“, *Republika*, XVI (2004), 340–341.

<sup>29</sup> Željko Simić, “Religijska kultura tradicionalnih pravoslavnih vernika“, *Teme*, 1–2/2005, 55–76.

<sup>30</sup> Milaš, *op. cit.*, 675; Article 94 of *Marital Rules of the Serbian Orthodox Church* from 1933 defines “the intentional abortion” as the cause of the dissolution of marriage. *Bračna pravila SPC* (an expanded and corrected edition), Beograd: Sinod SPC, 1973.

related deaths in Serbia at the time), which were both wrongdoings condemned by the Church.<sup>31</sup> In 1925, Bishop Simeon (Stanković) wrote about the deliberate abortion as a great evil, and he considered the opposition to the punishment of abortion to be extremely dangerous.<sup>32</sup> During the mid-1930s, at a conference of physicians in Belgrade a demand was voiced for the legalization of abortion, against which Doctor Dragomir Mirić published a fierce criticism in *Hrišćanska misao (Christian Thought)*.<sup>33</sup> At the beginning of the 1960s, when the issue of contraception and birth control was raised again, an author formulated the attitude of the Church to this problem as follows: “The attitude of the Church is clear: instead of controlling and limiting birth using various technical, chemical or physiological means, the church recommends spiritual mastering, self-discipline and sexual hygiene.”<sup>34</sup>

In the Constitution of 1946, the position of women in Serbia, as well as in the whole Yugoslav Federation, was, at least theoretically, determined by legal acts, based on principles such as social equality, voting rights, rights and obligations in marriage, the primacy of a civil marriage. The right to a legal termination of pregnancy was introduced in 1952 and since then it has been part of the legislation in Yugoslavia.<sup>35</sup> Since 1950, however, demographers have been warning of the falling birth rates, which in the 1980s, with the gradual collapse of the socialist regime and the rise of nationalism, created an atmosphere in which abortion was metaphorically linked to the “biological and moral collapse” of the nation.<sup>36</sup> At the end of the 1980s and during the 1990s, the SOC sought to have a say in the field of reproductive policies. At this time, a discourse on “national survival” was widespread, as well as the re-traditionalization of family relationships, which reemphasized the role of women as mothers and care-givers. A gap emerged between the earlier socialist rights to equality (and established socialist family policies) and the post-socialist social practices in relation to gender roles. Public debates on abortion that took place in Serbia in the early 1990s, preceding the adoption of a new Law on the Prevention of Pregnancy/Abortion in the Health Care Institution (1995), additionally influenced the intertwining of notions of gender, birth, and nation. The socialist law on abortion became a

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<sup>31</sup>*Hrišćanski vesnik*, 3, 1894.

<sup>32</sup>Simeon Stanković, “O pobačaju i kažnjivosti namernog pobačaja”, *Vesnik Srpske Crkve*, February 1925, 77-85.

<sup>33</sup>*Hrišćanska misao*, 8, Octobar 1935.

<sup>34</sup>*Vesnik*, 257, March 1, 1960, 3.

<sup>35</sup>Vera Gudac-Dodić, *Položaj žene u Srbiji (1945–2000)*, Beograd: Helsinške sveske, 2006, 34-36.

<sup>36</sup>Nevena Milanović, “Osnovne komponente reproduktivnih politika u Istočnoj Evropi i Srbiji”, *Etnološko-antropološke sveske*, 2013, 22 (22), 27-40.

metaphor for an alleged biological and moral collapse of the nation, and was used for the political renouncement of the socialist system.<sup>37</sup>

During the 1990s, two public discourses on reproductive policies emerged and were discussed in the mass media. One of the discourses advocated an abortion ban with reference to the teachings of the Orthodox Church, which was supported by various social groups, political parties, public and state institutions. This attempt of control of human reproduction was part of the project of the nation-state building and used a strong nationalist-demographic rhetoric.<sup>38</sup> The nationalist project utilized segments of the corpus of tradition (particularly the Serbian Orthodox tradition) to ensure an alleged continuity and protection of “national interests” in a period of social anxiety around national “survival.” It advocated a nationalist logic of social unity, and extolled traditional ideas of complementary gender roles, thus considering women who opposed the national project as “internal enemies” of the state. Demographic data on low birth rates were used as a scientific “proof,” often as part of a wider process of “ethnicization.”<sup>39</sup>

In the mid-1990s, *Svetigora*, a magazine for religion, culture and education published by the Metropolitanate of Cetinje, stated: “Due to the abortion and our society's lack of criticism to it, men and women confirm the worthlessness of a human person and women are treated as prostitutes. In the name of ‘women's rights,’ maternity today is reduced to an emotionless medical and economic ‘possibility’ and pregnancy to an unhappy medical complication of sexual intercourse. A woman is deprived of the status of a being who bears and feeds a new human life; she is devoid of the special protection she deserves as a true, holy home of all human beings.” In the same issue, Nedeljko Kangrga, Dr. Med. asserted:

Our female youth is becoming more and more immature and unprepared for the role of mothers, the bearers of life, by committing sins and desecrating all sacred things: the sacredness of maternity and the sacredness of life. Scorning chastity in the maidenhood and maternity in the married life, more than in other nations, many young women show a flagging morality and a misunderstanding of emancipation... The sacredness of matrimony and family will be more and more endangered; adultery will become a norm, and cynicism will be increasingly pervasive... To sum up, deliberate abortion means: murder, sin, violation of maternity, denying to an unborn child the human right to live, religious ignorance, gender inequality, breaching marital norms, committing a crime in the name of ‘family planning,’ opposing the Orthodox morality, an additional source of illnesses, social conflicts and a cause of a nation's

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

extinction. These are all evils that the Church has always fought against and has to continue to struggle with.<sup>40</sup>

The Holy Synod of the SOC in 1995 repeated its attitude towards abortion in its Nativity Encyclical.<sup>41</sup> “The women's lobby of Belgrade” organization made a protest against the SOC for denying women's rights to “freely make a decision about bearing children, that is to be masters of their own bodies.”<sup>42</sup> The Church responded with the following statement: “The Serbian Orthodox Church and Patriarch Pavle understand and know that the above words mean nothing to those for whom the God does not exist, and it should be understood that the Patriarch's words and the Nativity Encyclical are not directed to those people but to the ones for whom the evangelical Christ's words are the words of the eternal life.” The statement also emphasized that the SOC considers “the fetus to be a human being, and the abortion to be infanticide.”<sup>43</sup>

In the aftermath of 2000, when the regime of Slobodan Milošević was toppled and real processes of transformation and democratization began, the SOC started to exercise a more direct influence on public policies and institutions<sup>44</sup> Strong reactionary (and nationalist) currents gathered momentum, and they were sometimes supported by some representatives of the SOC: the right-wing movements “Obraz” (Honor),<sup>45</sup> “Nacionalni stroj” (National Machine),<sup>46</sup> “Serbian National Movement 1389”<sup>47</sup> and “Dveri Srpske” (Serbian Doors).

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<sup>40</sup>*Svetigora*, 33, November 1994, 57.

<sup>41</sup>Đorđe Vuković, “Još o abortusu kod nas”, *Svetigora*, Cetinje, 1995, 100.

<sup>42</sup> Nevena Milanović, 27-40.

<sup>43</sup>*Glasnik*, 2, February 1995.

<sup>44</sup>Rada Drezgić notes that Serbia, from a highly secularized society, in which religion and religious institutions were even more marginalized than in other parts of former Yugoslavia, over the course of only two decades has become a society with high rates of religious identification, while the SOC has gained a prominent place in public life. Even though the increase in religiosity and in the public profile of the Church occurred in a relatively short time span, their all-pervasive presence and influence in society is a result of a gradual process that can be divided into two phases. The first phase of limited influence of religion and the Church spanned from the late-1980s to the 1990s; the second phase, marked by a closer connection between religion and politics, began in 2000, after the change of Milošević regime, when the SOC increased its influence in public life. Throughout both periods, however, political elites used religion to legitimize their claim to power, while religious communities used nationalism for their own rehabilitation and reaffirmation. Thus, the national(ist) program as their common project has connected the high ranks of the Church with the centers of political power. Rada Drezgić, “Religion, Politics and Gender in the Context of Nation-State Formation: the case of Serbia”, *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 31, No. 6, 2010, 955–970.

<sup>45</sup> In 2012, “Obraz” was banned with a decision of the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Serbia. See Nevena Milanović, 27-40.

<sup>46</sup> The Constitutional Court of the Republic of Serbia banned the “Nacionalni stroj” on June 2, 2011. Nevena Milanović, 27-40.

<sup>47</sup>A litany was organized on April 7, 2014, to require from the state of Serbia to ban abortion by law. After the liturgy in the Cathedral church, the litany headed to the Assembly, where prayers were read and banners held. This litany was organized by the right-wing movement *1389*, and the support of the Church was taciturn—the clergy did not take part in it, although the organizers were allowed to use the icon of the Virgin from the

These organizations have extolled the so-called nationalism of St. Sava, the principle of blood and honor and have emphasized Orthodoxy as an indispensable category of Serbian identity. They claim to represent “anti-globalism, anti-communism and monarchy” and they condemn “homosexuals, lesbians, feminists and other secularists,” thus partaking in the redefinition of the notion of Serbian femininity by seeking to control women’s reproductive behavior, re-interpreting Orthodox forms of marital life, and the desirable roles of men and women.<sup>48</sup>

After the introduction of the *Law on Biomedical Assisted Fertilization* in 2005, the SOC did not make a public announcement, although it published a number of texts about artificial insemination in its official newspaper *Pravoslavlje* (Orthodoxy) and on its website. The most discussed issues within the motherhood discourse of the SOC are the issues of artificial insemination, infertility, and surrogate mothers. Motherhood is presented as a desirable ideal for each (Serbian) woman. There is also a division within the Church: some of its representatives advocate the justification of biomedical assisted fertilization and new reproductive technologies, considering it as a Church duty to celebrate each new life, while others oppose it. Although they have different attitudes, both groups emphasize the female “reproductive nature” wherein the former insists that it should be achieved at any cost, and the latter expresses views that some women are not “destined” to be mothers.<sup>49</sup>

In March 2000, the Holy Synod of the SOC demanded from the clergy to refuse communion and to ban from church services all doctors and medical staff involved in the termination of pregnancy. The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Belgrade supported this decision of the Holy Synod, while the Serbian Medical Association responded that forbidding pregnancy terminations could not solve the problem of population decline and that abortion was regulated by the public law. According to a 2013 survey, the socialist-time acceptance of abortion has not disappeared in Serbian society; despite the strong anti-

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sanctuary. When this litany was repeated during the Feast of Annunciation in 2015, it received a “conditional blessing” from the patriarch (the condition was minimal--there was to be no violence). Danica Igrutinović, “Caru božije: javni istupi Srpske pravoslavne crkve u vezi sa Paradom ponosa i pitanjem abortusa u toku 2014. godine”, *Mediji, religija, nacionalizam i tranziciona pravda*, eds. Dubravka Valić - Nedeljković, Nikola Knežević, Srđan Sremac i Dinko Gruhonjić (Novi Sad: Centar za istraživanje religije, politike i društva, Odsek za medije Filozofskog fakulteta u Univerziteta u Novom Sadu, , 2015), 41-52, 47.

<sup>48</sup>Nevena Milanović, 27-40.

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*

abortion rhetoric of the Church and nationalist politicians, only 33 percent of respondents oppose pregnancy termination.<sup>50</sup>

In the last few years, the SOC has been more assertive in propagating and glorifying marriages and traditional patterns of marital relations as “firm” values to which the society must return. It has raised the issue of abortion in relation to the nation’s negative demography.<sup>51</sup> The topic of abortion appears in the epistles of Serbian patriarchs. In 2013, the Assembly of the SOC announced that it supported an initiative of devout doctors for ban of abortion, except in cases of medical complications.<sup>52</sup> The Assembly appealed to the conscience of parents, educators, civil servants and all who command social influence to “do everything that can be done among us, in spite of material deprivation, to celebrate life as the greatest gift of God and make it an alternative to the unconscious cult of death in the contemporary Western civilization.”<sup>53</sup> In the Paschal Encyclical of 2017, Patriarch Irinej dealt with the issue of abortion and the high rate of mortality in Serbia. He said that every year in Serbia, the population of a large city disappears due to mortality which was much higher than the number of births, and reiterated the well-known anti-abortion views of the Church.<sup>54</sup> In his 2018 Christmas letter, Metropolitan of Montenegro Amfilohije criticized the right to abortion, calling it “infanticide, manslaughter, the murder of Christ and God.” He stated that “it is not by chance” that this right “was legalized in the time of atheism.” “It’s not surprising that at the same time Mother’s Day was replaced by the celebration of Woman’s Day.” According to him, the womb of a woman was created to be a workshop of life. “By killing conceived children, a mother’s womb turns into a death workshop,” he concluded.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>50</sup>Danijela Gavrilović, *Doba upotrebe/ religija i moral u Srbiji* [The Age of Use: Morality and Religion in Contemporary Serbia], (Niš, 2013), 89.

<sup>51</sup> Drezgić observes that “the official religious discourses on abortion represented primarily a demographic problem, a threat to the biological survival of the nation, and only secondary a moral issue related to the Christian dogma of holiness of life. Drezgić, Rada. „Orthodox Christianity and Gender equality in Serbia: on reproductive and sexual rights“ in *(In)equality and Gender Politics in South-Eastern Europe*, eds. Christine Hassentab & Sabrina Ramet (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 297-321.

<sup>52</sup>“This was the first time that SOC officially requested that the state should radically change its law on abortion. The request, however, was represented not as an independent initiative by the Church but as mere support that the Church was giving to devout physicians who allegedly demanded a ban on abortion. Interestingly enough, neither the state nor the Physicians’ Association has any record of such an organization or of such a request.” Drezgić, , *op. cit.*, 297-321.

<sup>53</sup> *SPC: Treba zabraniti abortus*, June 4, 2013. <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/drustvo/spc-treba-zabraniti-abortus/549h7j3>

<sup>54</sup> <http://mondo.rs/a999549/Info/Drustvo/Uskrsnja-poruka-patrijarha-Irineja-protiv-abortusa.html>, April 13, 2017.

<sup>55</sup> <http://rs.n1info.com/Vesti/a354526/Amfilohije-u-poslanici-kritikovao-abortus-Deda-Mraza.html>, January 5, 2018.

#### 4. Children

The Church regards motherhood as the main woman's vocation in her “life mission.” The purpose of motherhood is to prolong and expand the family, nation and humanity. Consequently, the woman is the pillar of the family, “strength, joy and consolation” to her husband and children, a caregiver and a guardian of the ancestors' religious and moral values, including the traditions and customs of the family and the nation.

In his *Missionary Letters* (1932), Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović advises mothers how to bring up their children: “If only you had taken a special educator for your children on time to teach them how to behave according to God's law! You would have children, not monkeys and parrots. For monkeys can learn how to play instruments and parrots can learn how to talk, but only human sons and daughters can be taught how to behave according to Gods' law... Thus, children should be firstly taught the most important things, for what is learnt in youth cannot be easily forgotten. Things of secondary importance can be learnt later, and it is not a pity if they are forgotten. However, if the most significant things are not learnt, or poorly learnt, or learnt and forgotten, then the sound of the piano silences the prayer, and French talk is used to ridicule the parents!”<sup>56</sup>

Eastern Orthodox theologians generally underline the importance of the religious education of small children up to the age of 12.<sup>57</sup> At this age, the family, especially the mother, have the most significant role in passing basic Christian norms and postulates to the children.

The role of the mother as transmitter of spiritual values to her descendants gained its importance after the World War II as one of the very few venues still available to the Church to keep its spiritual influence among people. In 1952, Bishop Simeon emphasized that a mother should transfer the knowledge about God to her children from their earliest age, teach them prayers and bring them up in the Christian manner.<sup>58</sup>

#### 5. Education, Work, and Position of Women in Society

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<sup>56</sup> Episkop Nikolaj, *Sabrana dela, Misionarska pisma (1932-1934)*, VIII, Diseldorf, 1978, 271.

<sup>57</sup> V. V. Zjenjkovskij, “Novo vreme, novi zadaci” (a Russian professor's article taken from the magazine of the Orthodox Theological Institute in Paris), *Put*, 6, 1934.

<sup>58</sup> E. G. Simeon, “Majko, neguj dušu tvoga deteta”, *Glasnik*, 11-12, November-December 1952, 256-258.



In patriarchal societies of the Balkans, women were poorly mobile both socially and geographically and they had extremely limited employment possibilities.<sup>59</sup> In the late 19th century, the ecclesiastical circles in the Kingdom of Serbia opposed the rise in education of girls and young women and their inclusion in social life. In 1894, *Hrišćanski vesnik* (*The Christian Herald*) published an anonymous text, *One of our evils*. It defined the evil as follows: “Sons must be educated. However, daughters want to learn more than sewing, kitchen jobs and housework, and they thus neglect their true importance and vocation, since all they care about is to thoroughly learn a modern language and conversation in order to marry an official, a doctor, a lawyer or a wealthy man... We can now see daughters playing the fortepiano or prettying themselves up and using makeup in front of the mirror, reading Zola’s and Kock’s [Paul de Kock] novels, we meet them in theaters and on promenades.”<sup>60</sup>

In the early 1920s, Pero Slijepčević, a Germanist and a historian close to the Patriarchate though not a theologian, held a lecture in Sarajevo at a meeting of the Agricultural Girls Cooperative (Privredna Zadruga Devojaka).

Dealing with the topic, *The role of women in our culture*, he said: “It seems to me that the role of a woman in a nation's culture will always remain mostly private, aesthetic and humanitarian. Women are the strongest in these areas; they are stronger than men... A woman cannot succeed out of a union of any kind. A harsh game is dangerous for her. In addition, nature has given her the affection for homemaking. Finally, she is the opponent of war... As for the present age, I think that it is of utmost importance to start from the foundation, from the common people, to continue what we already have and to help our women to be ideal homemakers and housewives.”<sup>61</sup>

However, although the SOC strove to keep the traditional patterns of male-female relationship and the position of women in society, new ideas were breaking through, though slowly and with difficulties, and gradually affecting the patriarchal code of conduct. The main bearers of the ideas regarding the necessity of modernization in gender relations, of legal equality of women and of new relationships within the family were the small, educated social class of townspeople. The SOC regarded these tendencies as consequences of external negative influences. A text of Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović titled *Contemporary Problems – Changes in Understanding the Family*, published in 1926, is the best example of the attitude of the SOC towards the modern processes in Europe at the time. He pointed out: “If there are

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<sup>59</sup> Ljubodrag Dimić, *Kulturna politika Kraljevine Jugoslavije 1918-1941*, 1, Beograd, 1997, 55-6.

<sup>60</sup> *Hrišćanski vesnik*, 4, 1894, 187-188.

<sup>61</sup> Pero Slijepčević, *Uloga žena u našoj kulturi*, Sarajevo, 1923, 16.

any changes on the European Continent, they can be found in the intellectual class, and these are all negative (unwillingness to bear children, poisoning the fetuses, increasing aspirations for the emancipation of women, mutual repulsion of husbands and wives, divorce, crimes, leaving the children with the maids, children's coldness towards their parents and vice versa).<sup>62</sup>

Bishop Nikolaj also wrote about the education of women in *Missionary Letters*, in *The Letter to a mother: on beauty queens*: “So what is there to say about the educated and uneducated people in our times? The crisis of being educated is one of the main numerous modern crises. Who knows whom we can call educated—a lady from the town or a shy mountain shepherdess! We cannot agree on this unless we return to the common people's idea of education and say in harmony with the voices of million people: *an educated person is the one who has spotless reputation*.<sup>63</sup> The ones without reputation are not educated wherever they live, whatever their position might be and no matter how much knowledge they have.”<sup>64</sup>

In *The letter to an educated woman, ridiculed for going to the church* Bishop Nikolaj says: “Visit the homes of sadness as frequently as you can. Visit the graveyard. Think about Christ's cross and cherish it frequently. And think about the end of life. All this will help you to be firm in your praying mood and to reach a complete victory.”<sup>65</sup>

In the interwar period, Miloš Parenta<sup>66</sup> was one of the most vocal Serbian Orthodox theologians about the position and role of a woman. He highlighted woman's abilities as a spiritual educator, guardian of folk and religious customs, leader of various religious organizations and charity institutions, “the rectifier of the spiritually misled and the morally

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<sup>62</sup>*Vera i život*, 5, May 1926, 67.

<sup>63</sup> In Serbian *obrazovanje* (education) and *obraz* (cheek) have the same root. Figuratively, *obraz* means honour, reputation and a good name (translator's note).

<sup>64</sup> Episkop Nikolaj, *op. cit.* 128-9.

<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>66</sup> Miloš Parenta (1867 - 1944) completed the eight-dimensional gymnasium and Orthodox seminary in Zadar (then the Austro-Hungarian Empire). He studied at the Protestant Theological Faculty in Vienna. He was a professor at the Gymnasium and Orthodox seminary in Zadar. At one point, he was the personal secretary of the Serbian Metropolitan Mihailo. During the First World War he was imprisoned. After the war, he was elected for the Vice President of the National Council for Zadar and Northern Dalmatia. Parenta was the member of the Radical Party of Nikola Pašić. Until his retirement in 1927, he was a lecturer and rector at St. Sava Seminary and the editor of *Glasnik*, the SOC official journal. Between the two wars, Parenta was an active associate of the YMCA in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Miloš Parenta lost three of his children during the war. All of them were members of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia and active in the antifascist movement. Radmila Radić, „Bogoslovija Sv. Save u Sremskim Karlovcima – između Sinoda SPC i Ministarstva vera Kraljevine SHS (Seminary of St. Sava in Karlovci - between the SOC Synod and the Ministry of Religion of the Kingdom of SCS)“, *Zbornik radova naučnog skupa Srpska teologija u dvadesetom veku*, ed. Bogoljub Šijaković, 2, Beograd, 2007., 239-248; *Mesta stradanja i antifašističke borbe u Beogradu 1941-44. Priručnik za čitanje grada*, eds. Rena Rädle, Milovan Pisarri (Beograd, 2013), 114.

lapsed.”<sup>67</sup> Parenta criticized the position of women in villages, particularly in some parts of Montenegro, where women were exposed to exhausting labor, to underrating and belittling in the family and society. A woman was considered to be “simply a worker” and was expected to perform the hardest jobs in the household and in the fields. On the other hand, in towns, as Parenta says, the liberation of women was exaggerated, primarily under the influence of the Western culture. Emancipation of women was a common subject, as well as their political role and the establishment of women's political parties.<sup>68</sup>

Parenta wrote that, according to the Christian teaching and the Church life, a woman was certainly not a lower being but a “beloved mother, sister and wife.” A woman is equal to a man, the image of God (Gen 1: 27; 5: 2). A woman is a helper to her husband, and as the helper she is his equal companion in the earthly life and the heir of the eternal life (I Peter 3:7). In the Christian Church the woman is summoned and acknowledged, just as the man is, to endeavor for God. (I Cor 7: 14) There is no male or female, all are one in Jesus Christ (Gal 3:28). The Christian Church gives a woman equal moral rights and moral dignity as to a man.”<sup>69</sup> Parenta also fought for protecting women from hard and exhausting work, particularly in the industrial labor, as well as for liberating women from any work “out of the scope of family work.”<sup>70</sup> He did not discuss the hard work of nuns in monasteries since martyrdom represented “one of the main characteristics of Serbian spirituality,” particularly in the monastic life.

Parenta's attitudes about the women's issue were somewhat separated from general rather conservative approaches in the SOC. They can be interpreted as a consequence of his studies at the Protestant Theological Faculty in Vienna, as well as his closeness to the ideas of YMCA (The Young Men's Christian Association) and his long-standing work for this organization. Still, one could not claim that he had a great influence in the SOC circles. Furthermore, Parenta was in a long-lasting conflict (for several reasons) with one of the leading SOC theologians of the time, Justin Popović.

The attitude towards women's social position in the Orthodox religious system is fairly rigid and traditional. Changes in the global social system have had little impact on it. However, we could also notice attitudes within the Church which are based on Christian principles of understanding, harmony, and marital solidarity. Such attitudes are held by

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<sup>67</sup> Miloš Parenta, “Zadaci žene u crkvi”, *Glasnik SPP*, 21, November 1(14), 1926, 324-326.

<sup>68</sup> Parenta, “Ženin društveni položaj”, *Glasnik SPP*, 18, September 15(28), 1927, 276-278.

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

<sup>70</sup> Parenta, “Hrišćanska socijalna zaštita majke i deteta”, *Glasnik SPP*, 16, June 12(25), 1938, 382-384.

professors Vladeta Jerotić and Predrag Samardžić, priest Ljubomir Ranković, theologian Matej Arsenijević, etc. In general, one cannot speak of a unique, homogeneous discourse regarding this issue. An increasing number of views are emerging which perceive a woman's position in marriage and in society in accordance with contemporary social equality based on Christian principles.<sup>71</sup>

In 1938, at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Belgrade, the number of enrolled students was 340, out of which there were 32 female students. According to data from 2013, there were 1832 students, out of which females accounted for 30 percent.<sup>72</sup> In 2012, a study on the students' motivation for choosing to study theology was conducted at the faculty. The survey included 160 undergraduate students, 125 boys and 35 girls. When asked about the point of time when they had decided to devote themselves to theology, the majority of the respondents (118 or 74 percent) reported that they had chosen to study theology immediately after high school, 29 respondents (18 percent) at the age from 21 to 26 and 13 (eight percent) after the age of 27. Among female respondents, there was a more pronounced later determination for the study of theology, 17 percent versus 5 percent.<sup>73</sup>

The increase in the number of female students was partially affected by the deficit of religious teachers in the period of introducing religious teaching at schools in Serbia at the beginning of this century. However, women as lecturers are still rare at the Faculty of Theology in Belgrade. Out of 43 professors and assistants today, there are only four women, appointed as foreign language teachers. Women account for a third or a quarter of all students at the Faculty of Theology, but many of them choose to obtain only a Master's degree and rarely apply for doctoral studies. Women who graduate from the Faculty of Theology can reach only the level of religion teachers at schools in their professional careers. The job of a religion teacher is usually performed under a contract and not on a permanent basis, with a constant threat of losing the position.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Žikica Simić, "Međusupružnički odnosi i nasilje nad ženom u braku u diskursu Pravoslavne crkve", *Religija i tolerancija*, Vol. XII, 21, January-June, 2014, 59-81.

<sup>72</sup> Sandra Gucijan, *I devojke studiraju teologiju (Girls study theology, too)*, May 4, 2013, <http://www.politika.rs/scc/clanak/256739/I-devojke-studiraju-teologiju>

<sup>73</sup> Ksenija Končarević, "Kako do indeksa Pravoslavnog bogoslovske fakulteta" [How to become a student of the Faculty of Orthodox Theology], May 17, 2012, [http://www.spc.rs/sr/kako\\_do\\_indeksa\\_pravoslavnog\\_bogoslovske\\_fakulteta](http://www.spc.rs/sr/kako_do_indeksa_pravoslavnog_bogoslovske_fakulteta).

<sup>74</sup> *Sudbina prvih žena profesora na Bogoslovskom fakultetu (The fate of the first women professors at the Faculty of Theology)*, December 26, 2018, <http://www.carsa.rs/sudbina-prvih-zena-na-bogoslovskom-fakultetu/>; <http://borbazaveru.info/content/view/11258/1/>

## 6. Woman's Role in the Church and Attitude to Feminism

Serbian Orthodox theologians often state that Eastern Orthodoxy does not consider women to be naturally and biologically inferior beings in relation to men, and that it is rather Western theology that treats a woman as an incomplete man. Some of them refer to the words of Thomas Aquinas (13<sup>th</sup> century): “A woman is the fast-growing weed, she is an imperfect man whose body develops faster only due to its inferior value.”<sup>75</sup> According to some Orthodox theologians, the consequence of this attitude in the Western society was the birth of the feminist movement which demanded the ordination of women.

The Eastern Orthodox Church fiercely opposes the possibility for a woman to be a priest. It believes that a man and a woman are not interchangeable and that they have different roles and gifts. The Nomocanon of Photius, the standard canon rule of the Eastern Orthodox Church states: “a woman does not become a priestess.” Orthodox theologians have continuously reiterated views that the priest in the altar is the icon of the only High Priest, Christ, who was a man. If a woman became a priestess, it would nullify Christ's manhood and paternal role of the Father in the Holy Trinity. The other person in the Holy Trinity is the God Son, not the God Daughter. Christ is the husband while the Church is his bride.”<sup>76</sup> They are particularly critical of “the false female emancipation” in the form of “free love.” *The Christian Herald* wrote about this as early as in 1894.

Some of the Serbian Orthodox theologians believe that female emancipation could be accepted as long as it equalizes men and women in their moral and civil rights, since this position is in accordance with Christian principles regarding the moral equality of all people. However, “the emancipation of women corrupts the physiological difference between a man and a woman and radically inverts their mutual relationship in family and society, their different tasks and roles and the complete social order and social development for which these tasks and roles are a prerequisite. Thus, we must condemn it and reject it as an ominous western novelty.”<sup>77</sup>

The political role of a woman, as a consequence of the “false emancipation” is strongly condemned as well as the establishment of women's political parties. This is what M. Parenta wrote about this: “As if partisanship has not excessively poisoned all of our social and civil life, but it wants to use women's political parties to contaminate family life, too!...

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<sup>75</sup> Jovan Stančić, “Socijalni položaj žene u istoriji”, *Svetosavlje*, 2/3, 1934, 121-126 and 15-21.

<sup>76</sup> I. Matejić, *op. cit.*

<sup>77</sup> Parenta, “„Ženin društveni položaj”, *op. cit.*

Similarly to the female emancipation, the aspiration for a political role of women is also the morbid acceptance of harmful Western cultural influences...<sup>78</sup> Parenta also thought:

The emancipation of women in Europe has embarked on a wrong and fatal road. It is not satisfied with the equalization of women and men in terms of civil rights, but it wants to completely level women and men. This equalization is opposed to the different tasks of men and women in the family and society and to the attendant physiological realities which correspond to these tasks. Contemporary false culture wants to make a man out of a woman, and a woman out of a man. Hermaphroditic types would lead to the destruction of family and humankind... Instead of becoming wives and mothers, which is their mission and desire mostly, women are forced to compete against men and fight for various social positions... If women of a certain nation make an unreasonable and exaggerated effort, the human characteristics of this nation will be held back.<sup>79</sup>

Most people in the SOC believed that the lack of faith and religious life and, consequently, moral weakness were the reason for the increased number of divorces in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in the interwar period. "If she wants to have the same rights as a man (if she does not already have them), a woman has to fight for a healthy Christian marriage and family. The relationship between spouses in Christian terms will enable a woman to take part in all parts of society and particularly in the part which she should be in charge with, that is which best corresponds to her spiritual and physical nature," it was written in *Svetosavlje* in 1937.

Women's Christian Movement (the first and only organization in a series of similar women's organizations and movements in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia with Christian characteristics) was created in Belgrade on March 21, 1920. Its operation was modeled after the YWCA - Young Women's Christian Association (established in England in 1855) and the members practiced humanitarian and charitable activities. Its aim was to "raise the morale through Christ's religion," to help the poor and deserted children, the elderly men and women and destitute families, to establish Christian social institutions: kindergartens, youth centers, orphanages and shelters for the elderly.<sup>80</sup> Women's Christian Movement organized lectures and observances, raised money for poor children and orphans, for kindergartens, sent poor children on summer holidays, etc.<sup>81</sup> The Movement maintained close relations with the representatives of the SOC. For a long time, the president of WCM was Danica Ž. Djordjević, and the secretary was Darinka Janošević, a teacher in the First Women's

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<sup>78</sup> Parenta, "Hrišćanska socijalna zaštita majke i deteta", 382-384.

<sup>79</sup> Parenta, "Evropska moralna kriza", *Glasnik SPP*, 14, July 15(28), 1928, 213-215.

<sup>80</sup> Archives of Yugoslavia, Ministry of the Interior Affairs of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, 14-61-179-186.

<sup>81</sup> *Vreme*, December 13, 1930, 9.

Gymnasium in Belgrade, who had previously studied in England. In 1924, they filed charges to the Ministry of Religion and the Ministry of Education of the Kingdom of Serbia against Serbian philosopher Branislav Petronijević, who was sent by the YMCA and by the Priesthood Association of the SOC, stating that the professor wrongly educated young people and led them down the wrong path. In his public lectures, Petronijević claimed that men had originated from fish, as anthropologist Max Westenhöfer from Berlin had also stated.<sup>82</sup> Since 1928, Princess Olga Karađorđević was the patron of the Movement. The Movement had branches in the eastern parts of the Kingdom of SCS where Eastern Orthodox population prevailed. Their most important success was the opening of a food bank for poor children under the patronage of Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović in 1937. In 1935, Women's Christian Movement joined the Yugoslav Women's Association.

When it comes to the texts on family, upbringing of children and position of women in the interwar period, Eastern Orthodox theologians criticized primarily the relationship towards family and children in the Soviet Union. They criticized the marital morality, liberation of women, legalization of abortion, introduction of the system of collective childcare, education of children at special institutes, as well as the principle of the so-called free marriage and free love.<sup>83</sup>

In 1931, Maksim Savić wrote about the position of women in the Soviet Union: “There has been no greater humiliation of women in the whole history... In Russia today, young people are just egoists who consider girls and young ladies to be a game which should be freely hunted. In such occasions, it is impossible for a girl to remain chaste. A woman has to have a particularly strong character in order to resist various traps in life. In the past, the chastity of a girl was appreciated, while today it is considered to be a prejudice and a remnant of petty bourgeois principles.”<sup>84</sup>

Seventy years later, the SOC continues to call for modesty in female clothes. The Church newspaper *Pravoslavljje* advises “Christ-loving mothers and sisters” to harmonize their whole lives, as well as their dressing style, with the complete moral law of the Eastern Orthodox Church and not to succumb to modern fashions.<sup>85</sup> Women's clothes should be in accordance with Christian teachings on modesty and chastity. “Instead of being a 'covering

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<sup>82</sup>*Vreme*, April 21, 1924, 5; March 23, 1924, 6.

<sup>83</sup> V. G. Bradarić, “Feminizam i Sveto Pismo”, *Svetosavlje*, VII, 1937, 25-32; P. Poposki, “Brak i žena kroz istoriju i budućnost,” *Svetosavlje*, January-February 1940, 29-40.

<sup>84</sup>*Glasnik SPP*, 19, 1931, 300.

<sup>85</sup>*Sveti Knez Lazar*, 3/2 (14/15), Prizren, 1996; *Pravoslavljje*, 703/4, July 1, 1996.

for our disgrace,' today's manner of dressing emphasizes what should be hidden. It looks as though we had forgotten the warning from the Old Testament that 'A woman shall not wear a man's garment, nor shall a man put on a woman's cloak, for whoever does these things is an abomination to the LORD your God'" (Deut 22:5).

Eastern Orthodox theologians see the ideal image of a woman in the combination of a faithful wife, hard-working housewife, "loving mother," "good patriot," devout Christian and diligent teacher. This image of the ideal woman from the viewpoint of the SOC has not been changed in the previous hundred or more years, despite to considerable alterations in the female status. However, it is difficult to determine to what extent this image was influenced by Christianity and to what degree it was defined by the patriarchal tradition. In the past three decades, sociological research and population censuses have shown a growth of religiosity among Serbian population, and particularly among women. However, "women still perform secondary and technical jobs within the church; good deeds and charity work are reserved for them" such as the service of a priest's wife, education (even though only a couple of women work at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology as professors, which is justified by stating that there is an insufficient number of women with the high academic titles in the field of theology), publishing and journalism, caritative activities and art work, among others.<sup>86</sup> At the same time, various youth right-wing organizations have organized gatherings in the past few years, where conservative gender relations are being propagated. The rights-wing activists often use Orthodox imagery and voice statements such as "the fall came through Eve, and the salvation came through the Mother of God;" "a woman can save herself through bearing children, being faithful and obedient to her husband; "freedom is in the submissiveness to God, in the love for the one from whose rib she was made by God's will;" "the Church considers every relationship between a man and a woman outside marriage to be sexually immoral;" women in Orthodox Christianity have an honorary and high position (for example, the Mother of God is considered to be the most sublime human being; there are more than 3000 women saints in the Eastern Orthodox Church); covering the head is a symbol of the woman's submissiveness to her husband and the church; the wife's obedience to her husband is a condition for marital peace and happiness; the SOC is not against women wearing trousers if this is due to the nature of their jobs, traveling, etc., but it opposes

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<sup>86</sup> B. Poznanović, "Žena u pravoslavnoj veri," *Feministička teologija*, Ed. Svenka Savić, Novi Sad, 1999, 91–97.



wearing trousers because of fashion and “the misunderstanding of gender equality;” television, computers, and even books are “dangerous for the health of female youth.”

## 7. Concluding Remarks

The religious change that began in the 1980s and strengthened after 2000, has established the Church as “a permanent public voice and a strong representative of religious solutions to various civilian issues.” As some researchers have emphasized “religion has once again become a constituent part of Serbian nationalism,” but it appears that the non-secular leadership has turned its activities more towards the state policy and less towards its pastoral duties. On the other hand, political and state factors support the Church as an institutional element of the unstable state identity and as the nation’s “moral compass,” while at the same time trying to limit its potential impact as a potential rival. Various polls and surveys in the last two decades have shown that the increased religiousness of Serbs has more to do with their ethno-national identification and with their conformism with the prevailing ideological and political climate rather than with their deep personal beliefs and values. This “new religiosity” remains largely detached from Christian teachings and knowledge of the history of Christianity and Orthodoxy, which explains the persistent dominance of secular beliefs and values.

Although the process of literacy, enlightenment, and improvement of the position of women began in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, more significant influences on the social liberation of women in Serbia began only after the Second World War. The communist ideology promoted the position of women in the new socialist society through literacy, employment, and emphasis on more equitable gender relations, while cracking down on the traditional patriarchal culture.<sup>87</sup> The Orthodox Church, however, continued to nurture traditional views of women and their roles and duties in line with a patriarchal, hierarchical structure of power. Orthodox morality is in many ways consistent with the patriarchal morality that regulates the overall conduct of women; it is remarkably stable, and changes in the global social system have little impact on its established organization and functioning.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Ž. N. Simić, *Diskurs Srpske pravoslavne crkve o ženi i njen položaj u društvu*, Doktorska disertacija, Univerzitet u Nišu, Filozofski fakultet, 2014, 264, <http://nardus.mpn.gov.rs/handle/123456789/4004>, 12 January, 2019.

<sup>88</sup> B. Poznanović, “Žena u pravoslavlju“, *Mapiranje mizoginije u Srbiji: diskursi i prakse*, I, Ed. Marina Blagojević, 205-215.

The SOC has not developed more systematic attitudes accounting of the modern advancement of gender equality in society and the family and for the changing roles of women.<sup>89</sup> Views of women's emancipation, of women's participation in the work of the Church, of marriage, motherhood, abortion and other similar topics have largely remained unchanged. When it comes to spousal relations (violence, obedience, suffering), conservative attitudes prevail among the SOC hierarchy and clerics.<sup>90</sup> The SOC defends firmly the unacceptability of premarital intimate relations even when they represent a phase preceding a monogamous marriage. Also, it fiercely condemns a freer behavior of changing partners. The attitude of most SOC representatives is that only women and their egoism expressed through vanity and hedonism are to be blamed for the spread of abortion and the decline in birth rates in Serbia. Women's motherhood is thus seen as a patriotic function. However, some Orthodox theologians have recently blamed men as equal culprits for abortion and low birth-rates.<sup>91</sup>

Only recently and occasionally have the Church circles recognized that a woman could perform a range of social activities by participating in the administration of the parish and episcopacy, through charity, intellectual and artistic work, and monasticism. Although a woman cannot be a priest, she can work as a religious teacher in primary and secondary schools, which is also a significant novelty. To some extent, the deficit of religious teachers and the growing number of female students at the Faculty of Theology were also advantageous during the period of introducing religious teaching in public schools in Serbia at the beginning of 21<sup>st</sup> century. Overall, however, it seems that traditional conservatism regarding women's status and roles prevails within the SOC. Furthermore, there is not a critical mass of devout women who can advocate for the improvement of women's position within the Church.

Translated from Serbian by Tamara Samailović. Ina Merdjanova assisted with editing.

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<sup>89</sup> Simić, *Diskurs Srpske pravoslavne crkve o ženi i njen položaj u društvu*, 259.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 267.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 266.

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