

Revitalization of monasticism in the Republic of Macedonia after the fall of communism

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ABSTRACT

After the fall of communism and the act of independence of R. Macedonia (1991) big social and cultural changes has happened. These processes had influence on the religious situation and establishment of new shapes of personal religious experience. This research is attempted to find social and cultural reasons for revitalization of monasticism as a way of spiritual life. The so-called transitional period and establishment of democratic and pluralistic society has opened opportunities for entrance of different religion forms and interests in spirituality. Their lies the question: Does the crisis of cultural values in the new-formed State have enabled the formation of strong monastic network in R. Macedonia?

Anyway, the researches show that the period of "modern reverence" passes. The period of this euphoria ends and today people who enter the church accept the religious life more seriously. Also, the number of believers who visit

church due to religious reasons increase, which is different from the previous period when visiting church was related to practical reasons. Monasticism revitalization (especially in the last several years), turning towards spiritual religious practices and more frequent practicing of the confession, as ritual act, points out the fact that the percentage of convinced believers in Macedonia, increases.

Key words: monasticism, monk, hesychasm, spiritual life, revitalization.

1. Introduction

The revitalization of the monasticism as a spiritual practice is doubtlessly related to the process of the religion revitalization as social phenomena. Speaking about the phenomena of religion revitalization, it is necessary to relate it with processes of deep changes and huge social crises. Returning or renewing of the religion is slightly possible in the past flows of the social lives. It appears in the moments of essential social crises. If in the course of the crises a renewing of a religion appears, than usually the national feelings and interests are also renewed (Hamilton, 2003). This is pretty understandable if we know that religion and nationality are involved in Macedonia and also in the wider region. In these circumstances the believers accommodate their behavior to the norms of its own faith and also accommodate themselves towards their needs and interests. Due to it, religion revitalization is somehow linked to several huge social changes. The first change is in fact temporarily very close to the fall of the Berlin Wall and also the communism and Socialism fall, as world processes.

As soon as the starting euphoria from reaching the independency finished, in the first years of the democracy development, the country faced economic, political and ethnic crises. It was followed by a grabbing of the state capital and serious social crises in the so-called "transitional period" which still lasts! Also, political crises caused by the flow of national feelings and ethnocentrism in the frames of certain ethnic groups in R. Macedonia appeared.

As a result of that the conflict in 2001 happened. Therefore, the stated crises caused uncertainty of the Macedonian citizens which was followed by a feeling of fear and uncertainty. The crises that was felt on the society bases as well as on the whole social pyramid and caused disturbances in the spiritual life of the individual who searching for a way out of the crisis frequently returns to his own religion and forgotten values, among which the monasticism takes an important part.

The inclination for practicing spiritual life, outside the matrimony, outside everything, existed ever since the church exists. However, the monasticism has started achieving its form at the beginning of the 4th century. That is a period when as a result of the King Constantan's convert into Christianity, the church becomes more spread in the Byzantium Empire. In this moment the exile of the Christians calm down and also on this point the martyr's bloodshed stops. We can conclude that monasticism is somehow continuation of the martyr, after the official zing of the Christianity in Byzantium. By establishing the union between the state and church, martyr is not anymore required from the church members as it used to be previously, during the period of exiles. In these moments the appearance of the monasticism was necessary in order to awake the soothed conscience of the nominal Christians, reminding that God's Kingdom is not from this world, by reforming the present citizens', saint elements in the Church (Belinger, 2004). In this time the reaction of the world appears, as a note about the socialism, monk's revered personality who through their alienation rejects the world with a determination to say 'no' to something he wishes to say 'yes', to the sub creature. He denies by complete self-scarifying to that being, in order to be completely transformed with at least lowest passion. So, it is true that he denies, but how: Withdrawing from the people, in order to come back to them. Having priority of life in prayer over the social activities (taking care after sick, poor, etc) the monk serves to his close.

The tradition of the Orthodox monasticism has a great significance. It reveals the premises of the Christian culture and directs towards the sense of the monk's philosophy: the central position that is given to the human being as

a divine picture. Monks are the Christians who “have decided to apply the commandments of the Saint Gospel in the church literally, those who carried out the obedient testaments, poverty and wisdom”. During their life certain part of them were bestowed to see God, his divine grace. The former monasticism is based in the essence and beginning of the hesychasm. That is the philosophy of the hermits’ fathers as the original monks were called. Hesychasm has kept the lasting doctrines and spiritual elements of the monasticism.

The former monasticism has several significant features that were adopted by the Christian Church. These are: their religious services, their spiritual road, their pattern of saint. So, the monasticism during the centuries has gained a respect as elite of Christian spirituality and during its long history enjoyed high respect. Monk (comes from the Greek word “monas” that means alone) is a person that lives alone, but at the same time lives with God. He seeks and finds God inside himself. The unity with God that is the most important monk’s aim, in his life is a guarantee for his release from the sins and death. The pronunciation and repeating of Jesus name during the prayer is simultaneously related to the essential human’s philosophy functions. For the human being, for the hesychast God is found and is present in the heart, connected to his breath (Георгиева, 1993).

Through the history east monasticism obtained various forms. Basically, there are two forms of Orthodox monasticism. These are, from one side the hesychasts and the so-called cenobites, from the other side. While, the cenobites, as their name tells are directed towards the life in the community and in the center of their philosophy they put and developed the liturgy, the hesychasts practiced personal prayer. Therefore, the life of the hesychasts and their activities went on in extreme isolation from the world, in loneliness. In the past those were desert inhabitants who passed their loneliness in deserts, while in the modern times these are monks who exile from the urban reality and they find their loneliness in the frames of the monastery cells, mainly in the rural environments.

In R. Macedonia monks live in communities, in the frames of male and female monasteries that are located outside urban and rural environments. They

even live in communities; the spiritual leaders of the Macedonian modern monasticism (especially holy father Naum) consider that the hesychastic practices and the personal prayer are dominant in the Macedonian monks' lives. This is the essential feature that distinguishes Orthodox monasticism as a spiritual way of living from the Catholic monasticism in which mutual religious services take central place.

The word "isihia" in Greek means silence, peace, and quietness. The sense of hesychasm is to live quite, in silence, peaceful; the thought is fertilized with spiritual experience. That spiritual, internal experience should present the rebirth of the human being through his personal reveal of God with a constant prayer. In that direction A.Jeftik emphasizes that the basic characteristic of the philosophy of that period is the one that is not based only on theology, cosmology or anthropology but that's "theantropology" where the measurement for everything is neither God nor the human being, but God-human in which God and human being are present (Георгиева, 1993). Hesychasm primary refers to the inner calming down using a prayer. If we accept it in that way, hesychasm shows the sense of the Orthodox monks' moving life.

Accepted like that wide it covers many important elements of the early Christian tradition until 14th century, especially in Sveta Gora and on the Balkan Peninsula. Religious-spiritual life and theological-philosophic conflict in the 14th century, called "hesychastic conflict" has to be understood in the frames of the meaning of the hesychasm that was already mentioned. It will not destroy its name "hesychasm in a narrow sense". On the contrary it will show and prove that hesychasm is the most important phenomena of the Orthodox monk's life.

Hesychasts' philosophy has existential meaning. It arises from its basic target – saving the human being, understood as a person that is unique and irreplaceable. Every human being, separately through the road of acquiring and personal contact with God can "become similar to God". The basic learning of the philosophy of the hesychasm is the study of "theoseos", becoming similar to God. Human's soul with the act of God similarity doesn't nourish in God because in that case it'll turn into pantheistic mysticism. It keeps its difference and self-conscience. But, here's the key question: how it is possible to become similar to

God, how it is possible the human being to become as God? The answer directs us towards two central theories of the Byzantine philosophy: the theory of the individual and hesychastic anthropology.

2. Macedonian experience

Here we'll determine the characteristics of the monasticism in the Republic of Macedonia, after the Berlin Wall crashed and also after achieving the independency in 1991. If the culture is a long text, then in the semiotic system of the Macedonian cultural sub-context there is one closed historical period that we'll try to interpret as a religious monument that dates from the middle century, but today – once again passes its existential, cultural, artistic and visual regeneration. If through the visual language of the Macedonian Orthodox icon we can conclude that it is about transpose of literature, language or gospel truth, than speaking about the text of the Macedonian Orthodox monasticism we can confirm existence of a speech that narrates about the icon's text as it is seen in a mirror. In fact, the Orthodox monasticism lives the icon's text, their hierarchy, its canon paradigm, its complexity, not only in its form, but also in its content iconography. Therefore we can name the monasticism a living icon, living gospel which content is narrated by 20 Orthodox monasteries located in the Republic of Macedonia and by more then 80 monks who mutually write their own text, worthy for establishing the monks' orthodox "semiosis" in the frames of the whole semiotics of the Macedonian culture and art (Стојчевска-Антиќ и Златанов, 2004).

That principle is achieved through the asceticism of the prayer as a dialogue between the personal self and the other. In that dialogue the monk should recognize his road in order to penetrate in the deepness of the spirit, to reveal the personal drama and the best way to revive it. The other is necessary for achieving the personal I. The prayer is the most powerful tool for raising the spirit towards God, although the monk is a human being that considers himself to be one of the people. He, the monk necessarily sees himself in every human

being because according to the biology structure it is material and carries Adam's sin and as well as the other people, according to the Gospel suffers their dramas and ransoms them with praying silence. Macedonian Orthodox monk prays for all people, as he prays for himself. The love of the other asks its constant and real presence in the monk's being because the monk permanently seeks for the other in himself. The Monk as a living existence of the icon, gains the principle of wholeness through its prayer that holds the whole world. In fact, that's the love of the other that is not given in the space, but in the infinity, where there isn't limits (Mc Guire, 2002).

The phenomena of monasticism revitalization in the Republic of Macedonia after communism crash will be explained from several points of view. First of all we'll analyze how and how much the monasticism helped the Macedonian Orthodox Church to direct its believers towards real religious beliefs and practices. The basic characteristic of the religion revitalization in the R. Macedonia didn't increase the percentage of convinced believers, but the number of traditional believers, it is difficult to compare Orthodox nations with non-Orthodox ones because they are, averagely, less related to the faith and church. On this point Macedonians are not exception and among them we can hardly find ten percentages of real convinced believers (those who accept everything said by the Orthodox faith). If in people's home there is cross, icon lamp or religious calendar, it is not a religious indication because these saint things are more valuable souvenir than religious symbols. If somewhere the fact that Macedonian people are reverent is stressed (it is usually stated by the theologians), than they consciously are quite about the fact that this reverence does not have deep roots neither in the individuals' souls, nor in the collective conscience and theological culture. If that exists, the percentage of hesitant believers, agnostics or atheists will not be so high. We don't even have to talk about those who are linked to the old irreligious and pre-historic cults as well as pagan rituals (Matevski, 2005). Macedonian believers, do not only believe in Christian God, but also believe in other forms of beliefs (faith, ghosts, stars etc.).

This, once again confirms the fact that in the moments of social, economy, political and moral crises, the human being returns to certain ancient

beliefs and values (“religious revival”) of monasticism. It causes renewal of some repressed and frequently forgotten ideas, beliefs and values, in order to find their bastion and identity. In these moments saint (sacral) is less accepted as rational and it is more accepted as emotional. (Šušnjić, 1998). In the period of so-called “rational” culture the believers from the religion took its emotional and cognitive part. That’s because the saint way of life emptied the world of certain “sub knowledge” what makes chaos in people’s souls.

Secondly, we’ll analyze how much the revitalization of the monasticism influenced the relationships between the Church, as main institution of the religious socialization and the family as premier socialization group. In that direction we’ll try to answer the crucial question – whether there is conflict between these, two institutions, because in the last several years in the frames of the Macedonian publicity (mainly in the most popular Macedonian mass media) appeared the question: if the monks are young people seduced by the church or they access to this act, voluntary. Also, we’ll answer the question: if the parents should give to their own children blessing and permission for accessing monastic groups. In order to answer these questions we’ll analyze, on one hand, the attitudes of the Macedonian Orthodox Church higher religious representatives and on the other hand the attitudes of the monks, expressed in the deep interviews which subject were these issues.

High religious authorities share the opinion that Macedonian Orthodox Church is happy for the young monks and completely understands the reaction of their parents, but at the same time they are not able to return these young people to the saint life which they rejected voluntary. Parents’ attitudes are pretty normal, but they should be reasonable and also the problem should be accepted. The young monks in the monasteries are very satisfied with the conditions of rich spiritual monastic life and ascetics. All of them are adults and grown up persons who are determined to be monks. But, also there is attitude that states that not all of the parents protest, but certain part of them. In their explanations they say that there is reasonable misunderstanding between the parents and young people and also between themselves. In order to release their parents from pain, young monks are prepared to accept any compromise

but they can not reject the monastic life because in that type of living they see the sense of their existence. They are convinced that many of the abandoned values are the ones that are uniquely valuable. They acquire that it's worth living and sacrificing everything only for these values.

On the question: "What's parent's pain?" They express themselves with a contra answer: "What about children's pain and how they will solve the problem arising from the fact that their parents decided to solve it through discussion with the persons of the same age?". However, in order to overcome their pain, because they declare themselves as Christians, parents should carry that load. It means that they have to try to live with the way of living of their children, and try to understand it. Only then they'll become aware of how much the monk loves his close friends. On the opposite, every legal state, as well as ours, represents and prevents the interests of the adult citizens who enjoy the right and freedom of choice.

Regarding parents' blessing there are various opinions. The position of the monks' leaders is stating that it would be perfect if the parents give a blessing to the future monk. But, it means the same test of the parent in the church or at least high conscience for respecting the freedom of choice of their own child. Since in such cases it happens rarely, the Church in its saint canons has never related the act of accessing the monastery with the parents' blessing, not even in the families in which there is only one child. On the contrary, having experience with situations when parents disagree with the decision of the future monk, the Church anticipated penance for the parents until they repent as it is stated in the rule number 82 of the great trebnik. None of the parents can stand in the way of their children who access monk's life or to step on their way towards the monastery or due to that reason to exclude them from the inheritance. In case it is revealed that somebody does that, he should be hold away from the Church until he decides to repent. This rule refers also to the accomplices.

Now, we'll analyze the answers of the monks. According to them, regarding the monasticism there were, there are and there will be opinions and prejudices. But, the unnecessary mystifying should be stopped. In fact, the monk

is not a sub-creature and consequently monk's life should not be treated as a system and technique for creating sub-human being, that also create illusion, negative sample and men's caricature. The monk is a human being who leaves the urban environment and separates from the world in order to unify with God and to achieve the freedom once again. But, his leaving and rejecting of the world is not as important as his returning and new finding of the fullness in which center is the revealing and returning towards the human being and his whole life that can not exist and can not be possible without God and his love. The love, if it is just a human feeling and emotion or social care in great danger to be degenerated. The monk faces that empirically through the everyday crucifying in his personal life. Therefore it is correct that only the Orthodox ascetic anthropology gives an answer and hope for the tragic accident of the humanism.

On the question, why people can't or are not able to accept, or even more to believe the fact that somebody consciously and without any compulsion decides to devote his life to God, young monks answer: Nobody asks the people to believe, to grasp, to understand. It's irrelevant for this case. Eventually we can make a distinction between the phenomena of the middle-class mentality, from one side, and serving to God, as an imagined war against the Church, from the other side. As soon as the enemy is identified it is much easier to make personal defense strategy. But, the simplest and fastest way to manage this kind of problems is when the human being makes deep personal self-inspection to learn how to accept the pain, to know how to manage it, how to endure it and not to avoid it. So, it is not possible a human being not to be hurt, somehow and in different circumstances. It is necessary to develop the culture for carrying the cross in the sense of cherishing human's dignity. So, when somebody hurts us, we should not lose the love, because of the suffered pain, but to return in the same way. That's ascetics.

Regarding the widely accepted opinion that people, especially young ones become monks after suffering certain huge disappointment, young monks share the following opinion: if it is about huge and unfortunate love, is it possible the love to be so huge, but unfortunate? According to them it's

nonsense. They share the opinion that the life is a big glossary and secret and anyone that is interested to reveal that secret will discover that as much as one discovers, the less he knows. As a result of that, accessing the monastery is not an exile from the reality. They think that the Christian Gnosticism in its sense is apofactic, negative. There might be different explanations, but God calls for existence due to a single reason: to learn to love, to be like him. It means that the sense of our existence is the love, more exactly God.

In that sense the monasticism helped the believers as individuals and also the MOC as a collective organization to turn towards real values and to increase the number of the convinced believers in the Republic of Macedonia.

3. Conclusions

In the Republic of Macedonia most present are traditional believers who have very weak knowledge about the dogmatic attitudes in the Bible and rest of the religious texts. Here we talk about believers who nominally belong to the church and in the religious practice they are involved only in the part that is directly linked to the Macedonian values, rituals and traditions. One of the reasons for this situation is the bad organization of the MOC in the segment of religious instruction and sermon in the period of Sunday and holiday liturgies.

Anyway the researches show that the period of "modern reverence" passes. The period of this euphoria ends and today people who enter the church accept the religious life more seriously. Also, the number of believers who visit church due to religious reasons increase, what is different from the previous period when visiting church was related to practical reasons. Monasticism revitalization (especially in the last several years), turning towards spiritual religious practices and more frequent practicing of the confession, as ritual act, points the fact percentage of convinced believers whose number is the highest in the Orthodox religion in Macedonia, still increases.

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Ревитализација на монаштвото во Република Македонија по падот на комунизмот

АПСТРАКТ

Во Р. Македонија се случува големи општествени и културни промени по падот на комунизмот и чинот на прогласување на самостојна држава (1991). Овие процеси имаат влијание врз религиската ситуација во државата и врз воведувањето нови форми на индивидуално религиско искуство. Ова истражување е обид да се откријат општествените и културните причини за ревитализација на монаштвото како посебен начин на духовен живот. Таканаречениот период на транзиција и етаблирањето на демократско и плуралистичко општество ги отвори можностите за продор на различни религиски форми и интереси во духовниот живот. Од тука се поставува прашањето, дали кризата на културните вредности во новоформираната држава овозможи создавање силна монашка мрежа во Р. Македонија? Истражувањето покажува дека периодот на „модерното почитување“ поминало, периодот на оваа еуфорија. Се зголемува бројот на верниците кои ги посетуваат црквите од религиски причини, што е поразлично од поранешните времиња кога посетата на црквите беше во корелација и со одредени практични причини. Ревитализацијата на монаштвото (особено во последните неколку години), значи свртување кон духовните религиски ритуали и пофреквентно практикување на верата како ритуален чин, што не води кон фактот дека процентот на убедени верници во Република Македонија се зголемува.

Клучни зборови: монаштво, монах, исихазам, духовен живот, ревитализација.