RELIGION IN THE POST CONFLICT MACEDONIAN SOCIETY[1]

Zoran MATEVSKI[2]
Ss Cyril and Methodius University
Faculty of Philosophy – Skopje

Abstract: Religion is capable of mobilizing the social groups wishing to exercise power and influence in the Macedonian post conflict society, in which they feel marginalized. Hence, the identity crisis makes religious fundamentalism the most prevalent and most controversial ideology of contemporary times. The question which inevitably arises is: does the religious fundamentalism of the citizens adhering to different religions contribute to the incitement or mitigation of conflicts? R. Macedonia has lost its primacy as an ideal example of religious and ethnic coexistence. It is of essential and priority importance to find mechanisms, which, in conditions of crisis, divisions, conflicts and religious intolerance, would assume the role of instigators for spreading and proclaiming the positive norms and values. But using the revitalization of religion and the deep crisis of secularization, the political elites in the Macedonian state misused the religious feelings of their own citizens for the accomplishment of their goals and dark scenarios. After the conflicts ended with the mediation of the international community, R. Macedonia entered in a so-called post conflict period. From that moment on the political and religious elite started with the realization of the processes of interethnic and interreligious tolerance, a priority for the entrance in EU and NATO.

Keywords: post conflict society; religious fundamentalism; religious tolerance

Introduction

It's up to historical and sociological analyses to show and to prove how, from time to time, in all societies it comes to crisis and revival of religion. But, returning of religion doesn't mean necessarily returning of the church. Revival of religion follows deep societal crises. In such times, there is usually revival of national feelings and interests, which is understandable, as we know that the religious and the national feelings are interconnected. If it comes to revival of religiosity in time of crisis, then revival of religion ideology can also be

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expected. The believers don't adjust their behavior to norms of faith, but norms of faith are adjusting to their needs and interests (Hamilton 2001). When people find themselves in crisis, their interest for religion grows. Crisis is an open process which necessarily involves hope. Religion is one of the answers of the real challenge (crisis), which is a symbolic force with whose help individuals and groups of the people of the same age are solving their problems, or they easily adjust. The crisis is teaching people to pray, not just to think. Times of terrible natural catastrophes and social disasters are the golden era of faith. Then, the revival of holy can come: hopeless time and religious revival are going together.

The citizens in R. Macedonia use more mechanisms through which they try to find and keep their identity. Certainly, religion and nation are two powerful forms for belonging and identifying. According to a number of sociologists, the common and long lasting life of different ethnic communities on same geographic place such as Balkan is very important for creating one nation. But, this fact does not have a crucial role for weakening or losing the national interests and feelings. In spite of the long, mutual experience, certain ethnic communities keep their specific national characteristics. Accordingly, a nation doesn't live only from memories about its past, but also from its determination about future, a fact that may bring closer the members of that nation so that they build the future together. The awareness of their common past is usually complemented with the desire for common future. The past cannot be changed, but it can be learnt. The future cannot be learnt, but it can be changed. Therefore, when determining ethnic identity, we must take into consideration the voluntary desire for mutual life that is based on historical and social conditions.

Certainly, national sense of identity is followed by religious sense of identity. The religion is a classical saint (love all of the other nations as you love your own). A number of sociologists of religion emphasize that, in fact, the nation is an act of faith and believing. Through faith, the people understand better the characteristics of their own nation (McGuire 2002). Therefore in R. Macedonia, as a rule, the representatives of one nation are believers in the same faith (almost with no exception each Macedonian is Orthodox such as every Albanian is member of Islam). But, there are cases when representatives of different ethnic communities have the same faith. For example: Macedonians, Serbs or Vlachos have the same faith, even they belong to different nations. There may also be cases when more than one faith is present in the frames of one nation. Macedonian Muslims are typical example for this. All of this tells us that nation and religion should not be identified. Therefore we'll make a sharp division between religion and nation, since faith is one and only, while there are more nations.   .

Religious and national identity in the post conflict Macedonian society

In the context of this topic we'll make a short analysis about the relation between religion and nation. At the beginning, we'll emphasize the doubtless fact that religion and nation are two powerful forms of identification. These are strong mechanisms through which each person seeks his/her identity. The sense of identity is very important for every ethnic group in R. Macedonia. But these two forms of identity cannot have same intensity in same time. In order to intensify national sense, the religious one is to be weakened and vice versa. In a certain period, religious sense is stronger, while in other periods the national one, no matter whether we talk about members of Macedonian, Albanian, Roma or other ethnic community in Republic of Macedonia.

Solovjev is completely right when he says that religion is a classical saint, while the nation is a modern saint. Those who prefer religious filling are led through life by the following idea: "Love all nations as you love your own nation". Those who prefer national feelings are led by the following thought: "Love your own nation, before and above all" (Solovjev 1989). I agree with the statement that the people in R. Macedonia turn themselves more towards their historical past than towards their future. But, the nation does not live only with its memory of its own past, but also with a high level of concern about its future. The determination of its own future collects together the will of the members of certain ethnic community, and makes them deeply united. Usually consciousness about the mutual past is made complete with the wish for mutual future. The past cannot be changed, but it can be acquired. The future cannot be completely known, but can be changed.

A Great deal of sociological research, which refers to this subject, indicates an interesting fact. Believe it or not, they show that religion and nation do not have a logical connection. Additionally, here is the fact that religion is national and universal category. But, besides these strong facts, these social phenomena are in an unbreakable psychological connection and secret union! Only in period of national conflicts religious impatience is strengthened. Only in such cases, certain identification of nation and religion that is difficult to understand appears. That's not the case in the rest of "peaceful" times (McGuire 2002). Even religion and nation are two powerful forms of belonging and identifying: in order to strengthen the national feeling, the religious one has to be weakened. Asked "Who are you?" no one would answer: I'm Orthodox, Catholic, Muslim or Protestant. Almost everybody would answer: "I'm Macedonian, Serbian, Bulgarian, and Albanian" (Susnjic 1988). It leads us to the fact that during last several centuries, the situation has been changed in its root. But, the basic characteristic of modern time is the following, rather paradoxical fact. Twenty years ago, when religion came back in the social and every-day life, everybody expected that people would find themselves as subjects of their own faith. But, the opposite had happened: the need for belonging and identifying with the nation appeared to be much stronger than the religious identification and

participation (Milosavlevski 1997).

Now, we can discuss the question: is the national interest stronger than the ecumenical consciousness? If we want to answer this question we should find some kind of balance between the view that Macedonia is a flowery garden in which there is peace and good will among people from different religions, and the view that different, and sometimes contrasting, relations exist in our country. Basically, the countries in the Balkan region carry the burden of their past and history. That's the destiny of small countries which want to be big, at least in the history. In these two "kingdoms" meet and mix: Christian and Muslims. Also it is place of crashing two big civilizations (Christian culture and Byzantium civilization, from one side, and Muslim culture and Islam civilization, on the other side). Shall we expect a clash of the civilizations on this piece of ground, or multiculturalism, multiethnic living and the treasure of the differences will reign in the future (Huntington 1996). Speaking about this, we shouldn't forget that R. Macedonia carries the burden of previously mentioned issues. Macedonia is an area of religious, cultural, ethnic, social and ideological difference between Orthodox and Muslim believers and therefore it is not strange if misunderstandings, disputes and accidental conflicts are not only of religious character, but also of political, ethnic, cultural, historical, ideological and psychological character.

Islam and Christianity are part of the Eastern faiths, but they do not exclude each other. Judaism, Christianity and Islam use different names for same God. Probably, that's because they want to show and prove their difference. But, also they allow believers of different religious to pray and confess in same Holly Temple. Believe it or not, problems appear when internal misunderstandings and conflicts occur inside these religious and ethnic communities. Due to economic, political, social and cultural reasons, problems and difficulties that cannot be solved inside the community do appear. In that moment as a kind of rule, they seek for the scapegoat. Who would that be? Certainly, in these cases, they are searching for the victim in someone among the members of the ethnic community that is near them. In that way, the real reasons for social crises are successfully hidden, and the attention is turned away from its members who are really guilty and should be expelled and punished. Therefore, the highly accepted maxim, according to which the one who cannot talk humanly with a believer from his own religion, would be even less able to do it with a member of another faith. On this point, Durkheim's sociological thesis is valid. Paraphrased, it would be as follows: if inside a certain social community there is negative, demolishing energy that can disintegrate this community, then, this negative energy is directed towards the neighboring social community. In that case "my" community is free from disintegration and internal conflicts. In order to save one's own tribe, the best thing to do is to attack the neighboring one (Durkheim 1995).

Religious tolerance in the post conflict Macedonian society

Conscious of the fact that it exists in a multiethnic community, the Macedonian Orthodox Church-Ohrid Archbishopric (MOC-OA) has always shown a certain level of practical tolerance. But, the fact that MOC-OA is established as a national church (church of the Macedonian nation), and it exists in that way in its national frames is beyond doubt. Somehow it limits its tolerance, but we cannot say that MOC-OA doesn't show evident manifestations of practical religious tolerance. It practiced tolerance as much as it was needed, suited to the time and space in which it functioned. In certain historical moments this religious organization intended and tried to be distanced from other religious organizations, especially when its national interests are in question. In some periods, its attitude towards Greek, Bulgarian and Serbian Orthodox Church was more unfriendly than its attitude towards the Islamic Faith Community (IFC). The reason was simply because these three neighboring churches denied its autonomy, and even more its national prefix (Macedonian). If in certain periods the Islamic religious community didn't "disturb" its national root, then MOC-OA would have been pretty tolerant towards this community. On the other hand, in a certain period, MOC-OA showed great dose of non-tolerance towards its sister-churches. Therefore, very often MOC-OA involves in its own religious-national frames. It's specific that MOC-OA has always had a sense for recognizing and tolerance towards other religious organizations which didn't put in question its national interests. Typical example for this is its particularly tolerant attitude towards the Catholic Church in Macedonia and Vatican. Vatican's official policy has never put in question the national (Macedonian) roots of MOC-OA.

Even Islam is theoretically pretty tolerant; in R. Macedonia it is closed and limited to itself, especially in less culturally and industrially developed areas, where it's especially conservative, therefore most of the time the Islamic Faith Community in R. Macedonia was at a certain distance from the Orthodox Christians. However, the leadership of IFC in R. Macedonia invests efforts to modernize its own religious organization. It tries to make it more open towards its Islam believers, as well as towards Orthodox Christians and other people who practice another religion. Trying to do this, it faces certain difficulties. Among the rest is also the difficulty that comes from the reserved attitude of MOC-OA towards IFC. On this point, the most important characteristic is the oscillation in certain time and space dimension. It proves the fact that Islamic religious community as well as MOC-OA practices religious tolerance as much as it is necessary in that moment. That means that here we have dosed tolerance in time and space. Neither IFC, nor MOC-OA has gone further than this. As a reason for this, both religious communities usually mention the possibility of causing anger among certain number of believers. On this point, MOC-OA, as an institution with Orthodox believers has always shown practical tolerance, but of a limited level, because it has remained firmly in its national frames. Unlike the Orthodox religion, where there's strong link between the church and the nation, in Islam there is high level of connection between the faith and political power. This analysis searches for the answer to the question whether these two most

important religious institutions in Republic of Macedonia (MOC-OA and IFC), by "not showing aloud" (or even supporting) manipulation with religious feelings, actively participated in solving the conflict in 2001.

In this direction, it's interesting to search for the answer to the question: whether MOC-OA and IFC pacify or sharpen ethnic conflicts and problems. Since they are separated from the state, it is clear that they cannot carry the main guilt for inter-ethnic problems in R. Macedonia. The state and the political parties in it are guilty for this. However, we can answer this question if we make detailed analyses of the statements, declared by religious leaders in the last ten to fifteen years. Analyses would show that their speeches differ from the religious teachings about peace and about conflicts. Anyway, these religious organizations can't be accused of using the same language as their environment, where ethnocentrism becomes ideology of modern time. They don't have influence on public life and public opinion as much as state and political elite do through the means of mass communication. If it depends on MOC-OA and IFC, there wouldn't be ethnic conflicts in R. Macedonia. They are present, because it's not up to them. However, they are not completely free of responsibility. If they are not responsible for what they said, they are responsible for not saying what they had to say. There is an impression that religious organizations in R. Macedonia do not have enough power to speak in their own religious language, but in certain social-political moment they speak with the language of ethnocentrism (Matevski 2007).

After the fall of communism, a relatively large number of sects and religious extremist groups as Wahhabism groups have entered Macedonia. This movement has started to become a "trend", and every day it attracts new members. Wahhabism has penetrated in high schools, universities, and families, almost everywhere. The ideology of Wahhabism (founded in the XVIII century in Saudi Arabia), is based on the belief that the Islamic world should again dominate the world, which, according to them, has been working to destroy the Islamic religion. Macedonian Muslims practicing Islam practice a traditional autochthonous, gentle spirit of Islam, while vehabism, as a radical sect constitutes a threat to democracy and religious diversity in Macedonia, and promotes conflict. Wahhabism excludes religious tolerance between its Muslims in Macedonia, and promotes interfaith hatred between Albanians and Macedonians. These radical Islamist elements are supported by millions of dollars with Arab-Islamic associations and foundations. This radical ideology made efforts to take control under IFC. The radicalism in Islam has also affected the political stage in R. Macedonia and the political elite in this country: there is uncontrolled liberalization of religious space, possibility of infiltration of radical elements in Islamic institutions and organizations in Macedonia, indifference of some structures and institutions of the country in order to spotted Muslims (in the context of the global fight against terrorism), and increasing interest for religious values. In the 2001 war in Macedonia, the effort in the Albanian army to infiltrate Wahhabi soldiers and play an important role (as a project imported from Bosnia) was successful. While in Kosovo, this project did not succeed, in R. Macedonia

there is a military unit named "Mujahidin". This is a period of great need to restore faith and interreligious tolerance, which is a problematic issue in the Macedonian society. Racism on religious topics and islamofobism R. Macedonia are inspired by the global anti-Islamic euphoria.

Republic of Macedonia, during the year 2001, suffered armed conflict on its territory, as last in the row, following the break-up of former Yugoslavia, ten years ago. The most visible characteristic was the ethnic component of the conflict, between ethnic Macedonian majority and ethnic Albanian minority in the country. The inter-ethnic relations in the country, in all of the previous ten years of transition, were characterized as tense, but constantly improving (like solving of the problem for higher education on Albanian language, directing public funds for improvement of the infrastructure in dominantly ethnic Albanian areas, etc.). Therefore, for most of the people in the country and many abroad as well, the start of the armed conflict was surprising. However, it happened, brought at least 150 casualties and a total of 170,000 displaced people. It severely deteriorated the existing inter-ethnic relations. On the other hand, the very small number of civilian casualties during the conflict and the massive displacements before any military activity in most of the mixed villages, showed that the majority of the population was not ready to take up arms and fight for whatever cause (especially against their neighbors from another ethnicity). This gives a ground for the belief that inter-ethnic relations are not completely destroyed and it is possible to improve them, by confidence building activities and other measures.

Finally, we can conclude that the religious tolerance in R. Macedonia has the following characteristics:

- There is a practical tolerance
- There is no any dogmatic tolerance
- There is a dosing tolerance
- There is a declarative tolerance
- The religious tolerance is a condition for entrance of R. Macedonia within the structures of EU and NATO.
- The religious tolerance has been directly related to the democratization of the Macedonian society.

Conclusion

Considering the religious pluralism, I would pay attention to the differences between the religious varieties which testify to the existence of many different religions, as well as the pluralism which means: a relatively peaceful coexistence and cooperation of different religions. The goal of the horizontal line on the cross in Christianity, i.e. the religious dialogue is neither the creation of a certain single world religion as a syncretism of the various religions, nor a simple endurance of one next to the others (in accordance to the principle 'separate but

equal') which was a way for an excuse and "covering" of the racial segregation in USA until the 50s in the last century. And, nowadays, this is practiced in the Balkan countries where the religious freedom is interpreted as a simple existence of one next to the others, without a mutual dialogue and meetings, the excuse being most often that a meeting here has been most often a military one.

The church should not boast with the fact that nowadays statistically there are more people in the churches and the rest of the sacral buildings, that the rituals are more practiced, that scripture lessons have been implemented in the schools, etc. We should always ask ourselves what kind of religiosity has become dominant among the people, since if once we had a seeming atheist; nowadays we mainly have a seeming believer. Bogomilova points out the so called phenomenon "believing without belonging" and "belonging without believing" (2005), which is especially important for the past communist and statics societies. The phenomenon "belonging without believing" is especially present in our society because for many Orthodox Macedonians the religiosity is equal to practicing of the ritual without an essential knowledge of Christianity. It often has some outer meaning without any broader inner sense. The clerical official persons in R. Macedonia should stand up for a real original religion and religiosity and to prevent it from its ideologization and befouling it with earthly interests. On the other hand, the scholars who deal with religion should point out the mechanisms that enable such an ideologization as well as an ideologization of the social environment and the structures that have been cherished. It should be especially insisted on those features of religion that are in a positive correlation with the principles of tolerance, pluralism and multiculturalism.

If, as a starting point, we take into consideration the conclusion that the tolerance is such a model of behavior that allows the validity of another principle, then we can list the theses below referring to the above mentioned topic. Tolerance means patience, bearing, allowed stepping back from the usual rule. Interpreted in a sociological manner, the tolerance is patience, bearing of the beliefs of the others, allowing for other principles to be valid, even if they are not in accordance with our own, and which still must be respected in the spirit of the civil freedom and the public opinion. In short, the tolerance means allowed stepping back from one's own beliefs. Aware that it exists in a multicultural society, the MOC-OA has been always expressing a certain degree of practical tolerance. MOC-OA has been as much tolerant as it was necessary in compliance with the time and the space within which it has existed and acted. As for the IFC, its tolerance has been restricted, due to the very close connection with the Albanian political parties, regardless of whether they are participants in the government or not. Because of its direct connection with the political élite there are lower or higher oscillations in the tolerance towards the Orthodox Christians. Consequently, the tolerance of the IFC varies depending on the socio-political circumstances in the Macedonian society. At this point, it should be very interesting to point out the role of the MOC and IRC during the conflict in R. Macedonia in the year of 2001. It is undisputable that both the religious and the political circles do not have enough courage for a thorough analysis of the

causes, motivations and the consequences of that conflict. This can be done only by the scientific circles. The scientific analyses show that the 2001 conflict does not have typical characteristics of a religious conflict. As in many other cases and circumstances, the religious feelings were abused for political goals. The future analyses will show whether, at what extant, and in what way have the religious feelings of the citizens of both the Christian and Islamic religion been abused.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, the countries from the Balkan region entered a deep and dramatic social crisis. There are a few crucial social characteristics which are common for countries from West Balkan. Firstly, this is the extremely high link between the religious and ethnic personal identification. Secondly, it is the high degree of connection between the religious and political elite. These characteristics were a precondition of the bloody interethnic conflicts in the region. All serious sociological research proved that these conflicts didn't have typical characteristics of religious conflicts. But using the revitalization of religion and the deep crisis of secularization, the political elites of the West Balkan states misused the religious feelings of their own citizens for the accomplishment of their goals and dark scenarios. After the conflicts ended with mediation from the international community, the countries from the region entered in a so called post conflict period. From that moment on the political and religious elite started with the realization of the processes of interethnic and interreligious tolerance, a priority condition for the entrance in EU and NATO.

In that way, as well as in the rest of the modern societies, the government was considered to be holy. Today, the holy, in visible or invisible manner, is part of the government. as the closer the state authorities and institutions are to religion, the more successful their rule. State authority is not self-selected in the political battle, but is blessed by the church majesty. It is based on two principles: on the historical and practical acting and also in God's mind. The holy and the worldly are in perfect harmony and any attack on the worldly would also mean attack on the holy. (Stanovćić 1998). In order to understand this better, it would be interesting to mention certain characteristics of cultural specifics of Balkan area. From a historical point of view, the Balkan area, where later R. Macedonia was created as an independent state, is burdened even today with authoritative political culture. It gives mark to all politics and religious events and relations (maybe because of the strong and long-lasting domination of the empire, like the Ottoman one). After the fall of communism, people from R. Macedonia started living in time and circumstances that were in collision with the authoritarian political culture, on the one side, and democratic political culture, on the other side. The result of this epochal collision influenced greatly how religious and ethnic conflicts would be realized. Pointing at the parallel existence of elements of authoritarian and democratic political culture is extremely important for the genesis of these conflicts. The territory of ex-Yugoslav republics in ethnic, religious and cultural sense is pretty heterogeneous. In these heterogeneous circumstances, the religious element should be appreciated since it is deeply in the root of the tradition, and divides people into different groups. More precisely, traditions of all of the three ex-Yugoslav religions in which also orthodoxy

belongs, also possess elements of authoritarian acting. All of that influence the whole society (Ćebić 1988).

The best soil for introducing religious and ethnic tolerance is civic society. It is supra-national society in which the basic measure is the citizenship. In the frames of this type of society, basic human values become more general. Generalization of the values and norms goes towards the level of creation of universal human rights and values. With this, inherited ethnic rights and linked habits, moral and legal norms fall. Universal values and norms followed by human rights and freedoms are wider than the values of the special ethnic community. However, the system of norms and values has to be risen on a universal level. Just as there is separation of the state from the church, it is also possible to separate citizenship from national feature.

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РЕЛИГИЈАТА ВО ПОСТКОНФЛИКНОТО МАКЕДОНСКО ОПШТЕСТВО

Зоран МАТЕВСКИ

Апстракт: Религијата може да ги мобилизира општествените групи што сакаат да практикуваат моќ и влијание во македонското постконфликтно општество, во кое се чувствуваат маргинализирани. Оттаму, кризата на идентитетот прави верскиот фундаментализам да биде најдоминантната и најконтроверзната идеологија на денешницата. Прашањето што неизбежно се поставува е: дали верскиот фундаментализам на граѓаните што припаѓаат на различна вероисповед придонесува кон поттикнување или смирување на конфликти? Р. Македонија го загуби своето повластено место како идеален пример на верски и етнички соживот. Од основна и приоритетна важност е да се најдат механизми кои, во услови на криза, поделби, конфликти и верска нетолеранција ќе ја преземат улогата на ширење и прокламирање на позитивни норми и вредности. Но, со користење на ревитализација на религијата и длабоката криза на секуларизацијата, политичките елити во македонската држава ги злоупотребија верските чувства на своите граѓани за постигнување на свои цели и мрачни сценарија. Откако конфликтот заврши со посредство на меѓународната заедница, Р. Македонија влезе во таканаречен постконфликтен период. Оттогаш политичката и верската елита почнаа со реализација на процесите на меѓуетничка и меѓуверска толеранција, основен предуслов за влез во ЕУ и НАТО.

Клучни зборови: постконфликтно општество, верски фундаментализам, верска толеранција