Orthodoxy in the Agora

Orthodox Christian Political Theologies Across History

Edited by
Mihai-D. Grigore and Vasilios N. Makrides

Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht

Table of Contents

Vladimir Cvetković

Saint-Savahood (*Svetosavlje*) between Political Theology and Ideology of Nationalism in Serbia

Introduction

Nikolaj Velimirović's definition of *Svetosavlje* or Saint-Savahood from 1953 as Orthodox Christianity of Serbian style and experience is one of the most famous definitions of this term[1]. The term *Svetosavlje* was coined in early 1930s by students of the Faculty of Theology at University of Belgrade who launched a journal of that name[2]. *Svetosavlje* or Saint-Savahood refers to a medieval Serbian nobleman and the first archbishop of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Saint Sava Nemanjić (1175–1236). By linking *Svetosavlje* to Orthodox Christianity, Velimirović's definition implies its universal character while also, by restricting it to national history, particularising the universal Christian experience. While a number of Serbian authors such as Dimitrije Bogdanović[3], Žarko Vidović[4], and Atanasije Jevtić[5] emphasise the universal Christian character of *Svetosavlje*, a number of international scholars such as Thomas Bremer[6], Basilius Groen[7], Klaus Buchenau[8], Maria Falina[9],

1 Nikolaj Velimirović, Predgovor delu Svetosavlje kao filozofija života, in: Justin Popović (ed.), Sabrana dela oca Justina u 30 knjiga [Collected Works of Father Justin in 30 Volumes], vol. 4, Belgrade 2001, p. 176.

2 Jelena Grbić, Svetosavlje – omen za numen pravoslavlja, in: Sabornost 7 (2013), pp. 145–158, at p. 149.

3 Dimitrije Bogdanović, Sveti Sava – predgovor delu, in: Id. (ed.), Sveti Sava. Sabrani Spisi, Belgrade 1986, pp. 9–28.

4 Žarko Vidović, Njegoš i kosovski zavjet u novom vijeku, Belgrade 1989.

5 Atanasije Jevtić, Sveti Sava i kosovski zavet, Belgrade 1992.

6 Thomas Bremer, Ekklesiale Struktur und Ekklesiologie in der Serbischen Orthodoxen Kirche im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert, Würzburg 1992.

7 Basilius J. Groen, Nationalism and Reconciliation. Orthodoxy in the Balkans, in: Religion, State & Society 26/2 (1998), pp. 111–128.

8 Klaus Buchenau, Svetosavlje und Pravoslavlje. Nationales und Universales in der serbischen Orthodoxie, in: Martin Schulze Wessel (ed.), Nationalisierung der Religion und Säkularisierung der Nation im östlichen Europa, Stuttgart 2006, pp. 203–232.

9 Maria Falina, Svetosavlje. A Case Study in the Nationalization of Religion, in: Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Religion und Kulturgeschichte 101 (2007), pp. 505–527.

Stefan Rodewald[10], and Julia Anna Lis[11] refer to *Svetosavlje* exclusively in the context of interwar and contemporary Serbian nationalism.

One way to approach *Svetosavlje* is to consider it neither a universal Christian programme nor an ideology of Serbian nationalism, but a form of political theology. *Svetosavlje* as political theology, however, cannot be subsumed under the theological legacy of Carl Schmitt[12] or Johann Baptist Metz[13]. Nor can it be reduced to theologically-informed politics. *Svetosavlje* is a form of political theology understood as critical inquiry into the connections between religion and politics broadly understood, including ideas, practices, affects, and histories[14]. In this broad understanding, *Svetosavlje* is not a single political theology, but rather multiple political theologies with explicit connections to Orthodox Christianity and, generally, but not exclusively, the Serbian nation.

This chapter analyses how Nikolaj Velimirović, Justin Popović, and Atanasije Jevtić perceived *Svetosavlje*. They represent three successive generations of Serbian theologians who are also spiritually connected because Nikolaj Velimirović may be considered as a spiritual guide of Justin Popović, and Justin Popović a spiritual mentor of Atanasije Jevtić. Although one may notice a certain continuity in their views on *Svetosavlje*, the differences in their theological focus also led to differences in their understanding of the concept. All three authors express a need for a new theological paradigm, criticise Europe and European identity in the context of their ecclesiological project, and formulate *Svetosavlje* as a form of ecclesial identity. However, they do so in different periods: Velimirović during World War I and the creation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes; Popović in the interwar period and during World War II; and Jevtić in the 1980s, during the dissolution of Socialist Yugoslavia. Thus, I will deal first with Velimirović, arguing that he employs Slavophile ideas and political Pan-Slavism for establishing *Svetosavlje* as a new ecclesial identity of the Yugoslav peoples. I will then turn to Popović, demonstrating that his synthesis between Russian religious philosophy and patristic thought is crucial for his understanding of *Svetosavlje*, which he then uses to fight

---

10 Stefan Rohdewald, Götter der Nationen. Religiöse Erinnerungsfiguren in Serbien, Bulgarien und Makedonien bis 1944, Cologne 2014.

11 Julia Anna Lis, Antiwestliche Diskurse in der serbischen und griechischen Theologie. Zur Konstruktion des »Westens« in den Schriften von Nikolaj Velimirović, Justin Popović, Christos Yannaras und John S. Romanides, Berlin 2019.

12 Carl Schmitt, Political Theology. Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty, Chicago 2006.

13 Johann Baptist Metz, Theology in the New Paradigm, in: William T. Cavanaugh et al. (eds.), An Eerdmans Reader in Contemporary Political Theology, Grand Rapids, MI, 2012, pp. 316–326; id., Two-fold Political Theology, in: Francis Schüssler Fiorenza et al. (eds.), Political Theology. Contemporary Challenges and Future Directions, Louisville, KY 2013, pp. 13–22.

14 Vincent Lloyd/David True, What Political Theology Could Be, in: Political Theology 17/6 (2016), pp. 505f., at p. 505.

communism, fascism, and capitalism of interwar Yugoslavia. Finally, I will explore Jevtić's understanding of *Svetosavlje* in the context of the so-called neo-Palamitic revival of Orthodox theology during the 1960s and of the dissolution of Yugoslavia.

Nikolaj Velimirović's *Svetosavlje*: European Nationalisms, Pan-Slavism, and Slavophiles

Nikolaj Velimirović (1881–1956) was a leading figure of the Serbian Church in the first half of the twentieth century. He held two PhDs from University of Bern, one in theology and another in history, as well as an honorary doctorate from Columbia University. He was the Bishop of Ohrid (now in North Macedonia) from 1920 till 1936, and the Bishop of Žiča (in Western Serbia) from 1936 until his detention by the Nazis during World War II, when he was deported to the Dachau concentration camp in Germany. After the end of the war, he did not return to communist Yugoslavia but emigrated to the United States, where he was dean of St Tikhon Russian Orthodox Seminary in Canaan, Pennsylvania, till the end of his life. He was canonised as a saint of the Orthodox Church by the Holy Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church in 2003.

In order to understand Velimirović's idea of *Svetosavlje*, it is important to examine the historical context in which his ideas were developed. Prior to the establishment of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes in 1918 and the Serbian Patriarchate in 1920, the Serbian Church was divided among several foreign powers imposing different ecclesial jurisdictions[15]. And before to the establishment of the Principality of Serbia in 1815, Serbia had been under Ottoman rule and the Serbian Church under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople. The political independence of the principality from the Sublime Porte led to the partial ecclesial independence of the Serbian Church in 1832, but the election of the metropolitan of Belgrade had still to be confirmed by the Patriarch of Constantinople. The Serbs in Hungary fell under the jurisdiction of the Metropolis of Sremski Karlovci, founded in 1690, which after 1868 enjoyed wider religious and cultural autonomy. After the abolition of the Patriarchate of Peć in 1766, the Serbian Church in Montenegro could escape falling under the jurisdiction of Constantinople. It remained autonomous until its integration into the Serbian Patriarchate. The Serbians in Bosnia and Herzegovina, however, remained under the ecclesial jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, because both countries were still within the territory of the Ottoman Empire. After the Austrian occupation in 1878, elections of the

---

15 BREMER, Ekklesiale Struktur, pp. 15f.

Metropolitan of Dabar-Bosnia had to be confirmed by the Austrian Emperor instead of the Patriarch of Constantinople. After 1828, Serbs in Dalmatia had gathered around the diocese of Zadar, which was controlled by the Austrian authorities, who constantly infringed on its autonomy.

The Serbian people experienced its division into several different states and even more ecclesiastical jurisdictions in different ways. Under the leadership of their intellectual elite, they began building their ethnic identity not on the basis of a common history and tradition, but on that of a common language[16]. Additionally, the ideas of the Enlightenment and the achievements of the French Revolution and of American republicanism, which propagated a transfer of political power from the monarch to the people, began to inspire a series of Serbian uprisings against foreign rule. Serbian ecclesial institutions began to adapt to new opportunities by ceasing to align themselves with the existing political authorities, but instead with the new factors on the political scene – the people or the nation[17]. During the nineteenth century, power within the church, which according to the medieval model belonged to the hierarchy or the episcopate, was transferred to the people – or, to be more precise, to the people's representatives at the synods. However, the resulting changes in the organisation of ecclesiastical authorities, and therefore the change in the church's self-understanding, led to deeper changes in perceived ecclesial identity. *The Encyclical of Eastern Patriarchs* of 1848, which claimed that the unmistakable truth of Christian dogma does not depend on church hierarchy, but is guarded by all people of the church as the Body of Christ, pointed to this renewed perception of the traditional model[18].

This turn to tradition had two consequences. The first consisted in positive changes in the process of decision-making regarding ecclesial and national issues. The decision-making process ceased to be a matter of a narrowly confined clerical elite, which, especially in the period under the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian rule, had protected ecclesial interests by concessions to foreign authorities. Now, authority came to reside in a wider consensus of the representative bodies, which sought to protect the interests of both laypeople and the clergy. The second consequence pertains to the identification of ecclesial and national identity and the assimilation of church's interests with those of the nation.

The construction of ecclesial identity on the basis of national belonging was not only a feature of the Serbian Church and other Orthodox Churches in the Balkans, but a common phenomenon throughout Europe. In a series of lectures held in

16 Miloš Ković, Znamenja pobede, uzroci poraza. Kontinuiteti i diskontinuiteti u srpskoj istoriji, in: Svetlana Kurćubić Ružić (ed.), Ka srpskom stanovištu, Belgrade 2014, pp. 149–170, at p. 160.

17 Cyril Hovorun, Meta-Ecclesiology. Chronicles on Church Awareness, New York 2015, p. 21.

18 Kallistos Ware, Sobornost and Eucharistic Ecclesiology. Aleksei Khomiakov and his Successors, in: International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church 11/2–3 (2011), pp. 216–235, at p. 221.

London during World War I, the priest-monk Nikolaj Velimirović pointed to the danger European nationalism presented for Christian integrity. He claimed that the Early Church had triumphed over its worst enemies, Jewish patriotism and Roman imperialism, whereas Christianity in Europe had come to obediently serve the cause of European nationalism and imperialism[19]. Rendering themselves subservient to national or imperial aims, the churches in Europe were divided and particularised. This contradicted the universal nature of the church[20]. According to Velimirović, just as salvation for individual human beings depended on loving God and one's neighbour, so the salvation of any individual Christian community depended on its love of God and other churches[21]. The true identity of the church, unlike the identity of a nation, is seen by Velimirović as residing in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, which defines the church as »one, holy, catholic, and apostolic«. Thus, the attribute »one« refers not only to the numerical oneness of the church, but also to its unity[22]. The other characteristic of the church that Velimirović emphasises is holiness[23]. Holiness corresponds as qualitative pillar of the church's identity to the oneness or unity of the church as its quantitative characteristic. Holiness as the core of ecclesial identity, which derives from Christ's holiness, differentiates the church from any other institution or social group[24]. Velimirović feels a deep urge to identify nationalism as a danger to ecclesial identity and to establish the identity of the church on the traditional formulas introduced by the ecumenical councils. His critique of nationalism in the church was very broad, and was based on a comparison between the early church and the modern churches in Europe.

In his lecture »The Spiritual Rebirth of Europe«, delivered at King's College London in 1920, Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović argues that European civilisation would not endure unless it returned to the Christian religion, which for nineteen centuries had been the centre and principal guide of European civilisation[25]. In a short reconstruction of European identity, Velimirović ponders three reasons for Europe's decline: individualism, rationalism, and humanism. Individualism is problematic for Velimirović because it no longer treats salvation as an effort of the entire Christian community, but as an individual undertaking[26]. Rationalism, or the faculty of reasoning, is an uncertain foundation for building a civilisation, because it reduces

---

19 Nicholai Velimirovic, The Agony of the Church, London 2017, p. 77.

20 Ibid., p. 88.

21 Ibid., pp. 94f.

22 Hovorun, Meta-Ecclesiology, p. 11.

23 Velimirovic, The Agony, p. 125.

24 Hovorun, Meta-Ecclesiology, p. 12.

25 Nikolaj Velimirović, The Spiritual Rebirth of Europe, in: Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović, Sabrana dela [Collected Works], vol. 3, Šabac 2014, pp. 657–696, at p. 667.

26 Velimirovic, The Agony, pp. 92-93.

humans to only one of their faculties rather considering them as a whole[27]. According to Velimirović, the third chief pillar of modern Europe is humanism, which by rejecting Christianity has opened the door to various European ideologies, whether political, scientific, or economic[28]. Against image of Europe, Velimirović sets the projected image of the church in Europe. He replaces individualism with *sobornost'* or catholicity as the permanent and immutable feature of the universal Church. In contrast to Alexei Khomyakov and Russian Slavophiles who constructed the notion of *sobornost'* in opposition Roman Catholic legalism and Protestant rationalism, Velimirović opposes *sobornost'* to individualism – not only of the personal kind, but also to sectarian and national individualism[29]. In his critique of rationalism, Velimirović argues that logic or reason should not precede love, but follow it[30]. Drawing on Dostoevsky and Solovyev, and in response to the European humanistic project, which according to Velimirović finds its deepest expression in Nietzsche's idea of *Übermensch*, he develops the idea of the pan-human and pan-humanism.

Velimirović recognises the image of secular Europe, conceived in terms of humanism, rationalism, and individualism as basic elements of its identity, as a counter-image to that of the church. He combines his criticism of Europe with Slavophile and Pan-Slavic ideas in an attempt to build a new national and ecclesial identity of Yugoslav people. For Velimirović, the new Yugoslav national identity has already been achieved through the political Pan-Slavism that existed in the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. With the Slavophil idea of *sobornost'*, he intends to fight the confessional individualism of Orthodox Serbs and Catholic Croats and Slovenes. However, Velimirović does not remain within a restrictive Slavophilism in regard to social unity. Similar to Dostoevsky, he expands this unity into universal pan-humanism. Velimirović's idea of the pan-human (*Svečovek*) stands in opposition to Nietzsche's idea of *Übermensch*, which he sees as the final expression of European humanistic and rationalistic project.

Velimirović constructs a new ecclesiology of the Yugoslav people, relying on Serbian sacred history and its *lieux de mémoire*[31]. According to Velimirović, Serbian sacred history begins with St Sava, St Simeon the Myrrh-Gusher, and continues with St Prince Lazar, the Battle of Kosovo, the Kosovo Testament, and the martyrdom under the Ottomans. While the Kosovo narrative played a crucial role in the decades

---

27 Id., The Spiritual Rebirth, p. 677.

28 Ibid., pp. 686f.

29 Nikolaj Velimirović, San o slovenskoj religiji, in: Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović, Sabrana dela [Collected Works], vol. 4, Šabac 2014, pp. 315–325, at p. 319.

30 Nikolaj Velimirović, Duša Srbije, in: Id., Sabrana dela [Collected Works], vol. 3, pp. 373–378, at p. 401.

31 Pierre Nora, Between Memory and History. Les Lieux de Mémoire, in: Representations 26 (1989), pp. 7–24.

of Serbian liberation from foreign rule throughout the nineteenth century, the references to St Sava predominated during World War I and the interwar period. St Sava is perceived as both a mediator for Serbian people before God on the eschatological level and, on the historical level, the founder of the Serbian Church as well as a consolidator of Serbia's medieval state and dynasty.

In the early works of Velimirović, references to St Sava served not only the purpose of unifying all Orthodox Serbs who lived in the newly founded Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes[32], they also provided a platform for creating a common Yugoslav identity as well as political and ecclesial unity. In the context of the Yugoslav project, Velimirović particularly emphasised the historical role of St Sava in linking the medieval Serbian state and nation with the church. According to Velimirović, the common national struggle and suffering of the Yugoslav people was inspired by the same Christian spirit, which animated both the Orthodox and the Roman Catholic faith[33]. The cause of World War I was the de-Christianisation of Europe's church, which failed to act in accordance with holiness as its basic principle[34]. Velimirović claimed that the national ideal of liberation and unification was best expressed through the idea of Yugoslavism, while the ecclesial ideal should be realised through the idea of holiness. Velimirović places St Sava at the very beginning of the common Serbo-Croatian-Slovenian history, as continued by Patriarch Arsenije Čarnojević, Karadjordje Petrović, Ljudevit Gaj, Valentin Vodnik, Ban Jelačić, Njegoš, and Štrosmajer[35]. According to Velimirović, St Sava reconciles Yugoslavism and holiness, the two ideals for which the new Yugoslav Kingdom, as well as the Yugoslav Church, should strive. His selective approach to history and construction of historical memory was to promote the ideal of holiness, once accomplished in the national Yugoslav history. He opposed this ideal to the secular and pro-European aspirations of the new state.

During the mid-1930's, Velimirović insisted that *Svetosavlje* or Savian nationalism should serve as evangelical platform for founding a Yugoslav national church. St Savian nationalism, unlike the nationalism that emerged from the Enlightenment and the secular tradition Velimirović severely criticised, is based on faith as its basic principle. While St Savian nationalism protects the integrity of the human person on its path to perfection, it also protects the organic uniqueness of nations, not allowing them to slip into imperialism or to vanish in internationalism[36]. According

---

32 Radmila Radić, Serbian Christianity, in: Ken Parry (ed.), The Blackwell Companion to Eastern Christianity, Oxford 2007, pp. 231–248, at p. 238.

33 Nikolaj Velimirović, Two Churches and One Nation, New York 1915, p. 14.

34 Id., The Agony, pp. 124f.

35 Id., Two Churches and One Nation, pp. 5–8.

36 Id., Nacionalizam Svetog Save, in: Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović, Sabrana dela [Collected Works], vol. 9, Šabac 2014, pp. 309f.

to this nationalism, all people on earth, regardless of blood, language, and religion, are one people of God and, as such, brothers. Although this might seem odd, especially considering subsequent crises over the Concordat, for Velimirović, *Svetosavlje* and St Savian nationalism signified the foundation of the Yugoslav national and ecumenical project. Velimirović opposed the Pope's power over Catholics in Yugoslavia, because he perceived it – similarly to the ecclesial rule of the Constantinopolitan Patriarchate over the Orthodox Serbs in the Balkans – as an expression of imperial policy in the form of ecclesial imperialism. For Velimirović, *Svetosavlje* was therefore both a political and an ecumenical project. As a political project it began as an anti-imperialist struggle for the political liberation and unification of the Yugoslav peoples, while as an ecumenical project it was meant to enable liberation from the sees of Rome and Constantinople, the dominant ecclesial powers of the time, and to establish a common Yugoslav Church.

Justin Popović's *Svetosavlje*: Russian Religious Renaissance, Asceticism and Church Fathers

Justin Popović (1894–1979) took his monastic vows as soldier of the Serbian army during World War I. He studied later for a BLitt degree in Oxford (the highest supervised degree at that time) and received his doctorate in theology from the University of Athens. He taught at the Orthodox seminaries of Sremski Karlovci, Prizren, and Bitolj and became a professor at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology (University of Belgrade) in 1934. After the end of World War II and the communist party coming to power, he was expelled from the university together with two hundred other professors. He lived till the end of his life in the monastery of Ćelije, near Valjevo in western Serbia. He was introduced into the diptych of the Orthodox saints by the Holy Synod of the Serbian Church in 2010.

Similarly to Velimirović, Justin Popović criticised nationalism in the church. He argued that the church is the God-human organism, not a human organisation, and as such it cannot be divided along national lines[37]. He claimed that on their path through history, many local churches, including the Serbian Church, were reduced to agents of nationalism, and he urged church representatives to cease to be servants of nationalism, and to become high priests of the one, holy, catholic, and Apostolic Church[38]. According to Popović, the goal of the church is »supra-national, universal, panhuman: to unite all people in Christ, regardless of nationality, race,

---

37 Justin Popović, Unutrašnja misija naše Crkve (realizacija Pravoslavlja), in: Hrišćanski život 9 (1923), pp. 285–290, at p. 287.

38 Ibid.

and class«[39]. Popović rejected the nationalism and national emancipation on which the Balkan churches built their ecclesial identity. He replaced such distortions by emphasis on ascetic practice as the chief element of ecclesial identity. According to Popović, asceticism abolishes divisions and leads to catholicity or *sabornost*.

Popović considers, as Velimirović also once did, nationalism as a danger to ecclesial identity. But unlike Velimirović, who criticised the nationalism of all European churches, Popović's critique was restricted to the Orthodox Church and focused on its ascetic tradition. A number of Velimirović's ideas, formulated as a counter-narrative to the secular image of Europe and directly inspired by the Russian religious renaissance, were more thoroughly developed in the works of Justin Popović. In addition to Dostoevsky's critique of the Enlightenment, Popović appropriates other ideas from Russian religious philosophy, such as the ideas of integral or »living« knowledge, all-unity, and Theo-humanism. Linking these ideas with the teachings of the Church Fathers, he opposes them to European rationalism, individualism, and humanism. Popović borrows the idea of integral knowledge from Russian religious thought, but unlike both the Russian religious thinkers and Velimirović, Popović attempts to prove its continuity with the monastic and ascetic tradition of the Christian East, particularly with authors such as Macarius of Egypt (in the fourth century) and Isaac the Syrian (in the seventh century). Another Russian idea that Popović »baptises« in the patristic tradition is the idea of all-unity, which he connects with *sobornost'* as »organic unity« in the church. In contrast to Vladimir Solovyev and in accord to Aleksey Khomiakov, Popović develops the idea of all-unity not as metaphysical ideal, but as concrete liturgical and catholic churchhood. The main idea of Popović's thought is the concept of the God-Man[40], which he formulates on the basis of the Chalcedonian dogma of the indivisible unity of Christ's two natures and partly in opposition to modern European humanism. Popović argues that European humanism stands for a revolt against the recognition of godliness in the human being, while God-Man liberates the forces of godliness in that same human being, imprisoned by the tyranny of humanism, empowering them to realise themselves in their immortal fullness[41]. According to Popović, the realisation of all human potential and the true unification of God and human beings is possible only in the person of the God-Man because he is a personal unity of two natures, divine and human.

From the mid-1930s and especially during World War II, St Sava and *Svetosavlje* also occupied Justin Popović's scholarly interest. Unlike Velimirović's writings from

---

39 Ibid., p. 286.

40 On the concept of God-man/Theanthropos in the Russian school, especially in the thinking of Vladimir Solovyev, see Evert van der Zweerde's contribution in this volume.

41 Justin Popović, Highest Value and Last Criterion in Orthodoxy, in: Justin Popovic, Orthodox Faith and Life in Christ, Belmond, MA 1994, pp. 70f.

the mid-1910s to the mid-1930s, which mostly refer to the St Savian ideal as the basis for building the Yugoslav social and religious unity, Popović's references to St Sava are not limited to the cause of Yugoslav unity, but aspire to proper ecclesial identity. He maintains that only the St Savian determination to engage in ascetic struggle could save the Serbian episcopate and priesthood from being immersed in nationalism and materialism. He solves the dilemma of whether the new Yugoslav society should be oriented towards West or East by offering the example of St Sava, who had directed the Serbian national soul, divided between the two worlds, towards the God-Man Christ. Like Velimirović before him, Popović identifies the Christian orientation of Yugoslav society with a *tertium quid* or a *dritter Raum*, a third realm between East and West[42]. Unlike Velimirović, for whom in a wider cultural sense the East was Asia and the West was Europe, and for whom in a narrower ecclesiastical sense the East was identified with the Constantinople Patriarchate and the West with the see of Rome, Popović remains indeterminate on this issue. He opposes the St Savian God-Man to European man, but he does not mention anything in the East that would stand in obvious contrast to the European man of the West.

In the late 1920s and early 1930s, Marxist ideas spread throughout the University of Belgrade, and in 1932 a group of students from the faculty of theology launched the journal *Svetosavlje* in order to counter the dissemination of revolutionary ideas among the students[43]. Popović, who had been assistant professor since 1934, reacted to the emergence and spread of these ideas in his article *Rastko and Contemporary Serbian Youth*[44]. As he had once contrasted the St Savian God-Man to the European man, he now opposed the St Savian God-Man to the new Soviet revolutionary man. Justin refers to Rastko, or St Sava, as the greatest revolutionary among Serbian or Yugoslav people because he rebelled not against social and political injustice but, in the name of eternity and immortality, against death.

At the end of the 1930s, in his sermon »A Fight for the Serbian Soul«, Justin Popović emphasised that only by following St Sava and his faith in Christ could the Serbs defeat the communist (red) international, i. e., the capitalist-fascist (yellow) international. He stood against Dimitrje Ljotić's fascist movement »Zbor«, for recruiting some of the Orthodox clergy. He warned those clergymen that if as priests of the Savian Church use violence to achieve their goals, they would

---

42 Tanja Zimmermann, Der Balkan zwischen Ost und West. Mediale Bilder und kulturpolitische Prägungen, Cologne 2014, pp. 8–13.

43 Jelena Grbić, Svetosavlje – omen za numen pravoslavlja, in: Sabornost 7 (2013), pp. 145–158, at p. 149.

44 Justin Popović, Rastko i savremena srpska omladina, in: Svetosavlje 12 (1935), pp. 58–61.

immediately become inquisitors and, like the medieval Roman Catholic Church, convert Christianity to inquisition[45].

In the structure, at least, of his book *St Savian Philosophy of Life*, published in 1953, Popović relies on Velimirović's vision, revealed in several articles written during the 1930s. Velimirović pointed out that anyone referring to St Sava should also refer to his visions of church, state, education, army, family, art, culture, and monasticism[46]. The chapters of Popović's book are dedicated to St Savian philosophies of the world, progress, culture, society, values, norms, and education[47]. According to Popović, the St Savian philosophy of the world is based on two principles: 1) the world is an epiphany; 2) man is called to serve God[48]. In his treatment of St Savian philosophy of progress, Popović claims that man is truly human only through the God-Man, the only one to have linked progress with human immortality[49]. According to Popović, St Sava founded St Savian culture by leading medieval Serbia not towards the East or West, but towards the God-Man[50], who is the perfect unity and *sabor* of God and man[51]. In monastic fashion, Popović identifies the evangelical virtues by which humans attain the likeness of Christ – such as faith, love, hope, prayer, fasting, and meekness – with the instruments of St Savian philosophy of culture. According to St Savian philosophy of society, society should adapt itself to the church as its eternal ideal. In fact, the church should be the godly-human Person of Christ, extended through space and time. In the chapter »St Savian philosophy of values and criteria«, Popović argues that the God-Man is the highest value, since he was the only one who solved the problem of life and death, showing in his personality »the embodied and hypostasised immortality and life eternal«. Finally, in the last chapter of his work, Popović displays the St Savian philosophy of education, based on the principle that the God-Man as perfect God and a perfect man should be the goal and purpose of education. Finally, he concludes that St Sava, as a saint gaining perfection in the partaking to the God-Man, is the greatest enlightener of the Serbian people, because for Popović education is essentially devoted to the facilitation of holiness.

---

45 Id., Svetosavsko sveštenstvo i političke partije, in: Žički blagovesnik 12 (1940), pp. 20–24; 13 (1941), pp. 16–21.

46 Nikolaj Velimirović, Veliki jubilej naroda srpskog – Proslava sedamstogodišnjice smrti Svetog Save, in: Kalendar Srpske pravoslavne Patrijaršije, Belgrade 1935, pp. 74–77; id., Nacionalizam Svetog Save, pp. 308f.

47 Justin Popović, Svetosavlje kao filozofija života [Saint-Savahood as Philosophy of Life], in: Id., Sabrana dela oca Justina u 30 knjiga, vol. 4, Belgrade 2001, pp. 175–266.

48 Ibid., p. 191.

49 Ibid., p. 207.

50 Ibid., pp. 211–213.

51 Ibid., p. 219.

The *Svetosavlje* exposed in *St Savian Philosophy of Life* is cleansed of all ideological elements. When pointing to Serbian national history, he omits all events that are not evangelical or connected to Christ. Like St Sava himself, who wrote the *Vita* of his father Simeon the Myrrh-Gusher in order to demonstrate that the ideal of holiness is achievable by members of his nation, Popović refers to St Sava and his work as the historical realisation of universal Christian principles under conditions of national particularity, and he commends that work as worthy of emulation in pursuit of holiness. For Popović, pursuing any national or ideological goal other than St Savian holiness means failure to achieve one's divine-human vocation.

Atanasije Jevtić's *Svetosavlje*: Byzantine Tradition, Bishop-centric Ecclesiology and Athonite Monasticism

Atanasije Jevtić (1938–2021) held a PhD in theology from the University of Athens. He pursued an academic career, at first as a lecturer at the Orthodox Institute of St Sergius in Paris, then professor of patristics and dean of the theological faculty in Belgrade. He was elected Bishop of Vršac in 1991, after which he was translated to the see of Zahumlje and Hercegovina, which he occupied from 1992 until his retirement in 1999.

Jevtić's writings on St Sava have a completely different orientation from comparison to the works of his predecessors and spiritual fathers, Velimirović and Popović. As a result of the historical-critical method applied to St Sava's literary work, Jevtić's writings not only reveal St Sava as a Chilandar monk, an abbot of Studenica monastery[52], the first Serbian archbishop[53], a capable ecclesiastical diplomat, and a theologian[54]. They also shed light on the theological milieu and spiritual practices of St Sava's time[55]. Therefore, Jevtić refers first of all to St Sava, the historical figure, and then to the term *Svetosavlje*. The focus of Jevtić's writings, however, is not only historical, for they propagate a certain theological programme. Jevtić adopted the theological ideas that emerged in the 1960s in the so-called Athenian school, whose most famous representatives are John N. Zizioulas, Christos Yannaras, Panagiotis Nellas, and Nikos Nissiotis. The Serbian monks and theologians who studied at that time in Athens, such as Atanasije Jevtić, Amfilohije Radović, Artemije Radosavljević, and Irinej Bulović, also belong to this school. This school or the movement of the restoration of Orthodox theology was deeply inspired by

---

52 Atanasije Jevtić, Dve studeničke besede Svetog Save, in: Id. (ed.), Bog Otaca naših, Hilandar 2009, pp. 121–141.

53 Atanasije Jevtić, Žička beseda Svetog Save o pravoj veri, in: Id. (ed.), Bog Otaca naših, pp. 89–120.

54 Id., Eklisiologija Svetog Save, in: Id. (ed.), Bog Otaca naših, pp. 224–239.

55 Id., Sveti Sava u tokovima Kirilo-metodijevskog predanja, in: Id. (ed.), Bog Otaca naših, pp. 147–154.

Russian émigré theology, characterised by the return to the tradition of the Church Fathers. As Pantelis Kalaitzidis argues, its theological interests included eucharistic ecclesiology, Christocentric anthropology, theological anti-Westernism, personalism, and the theology of personhood, theocentric humanism, mystical theology, and apophaticism, Hellenocentrism and Byzantinism, as well as the insistence on the restoration of monasticism and the existence of the ontological character of the Orthodox ethos[56]. By the beginning of the 1990s, however, when most of Jevtić's articles on St Sava were appearing, the movement's focus was shifting towards eschatology and its dynamic interpretation, towards ecclesiological themes, such as the place of the episcopal office in the church, the role of monasticism (especially Athonite) in the restoration of church life, and liturgical renewal and revalorisation of the mission[57]. Jevtić was not a passive recipient of these theological trends, but an active participant in their emergence and promotion.

In his early work *On Following the Holy Fathers* (1962), Jevtić perceives the works of the Fathers as a continuation of the mystery of Christ[58]. Similarly, in his inaugural lecture at the Institute of St Sergius in 1969, Jevtić identifies the Holy Fathers with »the teachers of the path that leads to life« in agreement with the troparion to St Sava[59]. Adherence to the Fathers and to the Holy Tradition was a constant in the works of Jevtić, including his those on St Sava. The Holy Tradition is the main theme of three of Jevtić's articles, written between 1985 and 1986 »St Sava in the Currents of Cyrillo-Methodian tradition«, »The Ecclesiology of St Sava« and »Two Sermons of St Sava from Studenica Monastery«. The tradition in his articles has a twofold meaning. On the one hand, Jevtić emphasises the ontological and soteriological character of tradition as handing down one and the same eternal Truth and Life[60]. Jevtić links the mystery of Christ (as mystery of Truth and Life) to the idea of the divine economy of salvation, which appears in the forefront in the *Lives of Saint Cyril and Methodius* and in the two St Sava's sermons delivered at Studenica monastery[61]. Jevtić considers the economy of salvation as the basis of St Sava's ecclesiology. According to Jevtić, the divine economy of salvation consists, for St Sava, in the coming of the Son of God into the world, an event that was »prophesied by the Prophets, proclaimed by the Apostles and confirmed by the Fathers«[62]. This aspect

---

56 Pantelis KALAITZIDIS, New Trends in Greek Orthodox Theology. Challenges in the Movement Towards a Genuine Renewal and Christian Unity, in: Scottish Journal of Theology 67 (2014), pp. 127–164, at pp. 130f.

57 Ibid., p. 128.

58 Atanasije JEVTIĆ, O sledovanju Svetim Ocima, in: Id. (ed.), Bog Otaca naših, pp. 30–52, at p. 38.

59 Id., Bog Otaca naših, in: Id. (ed.), Bog Otaca naših, pp. 11–29, at p. 28.

60 Id., Sveti Sava, pp. 148–150.

61 Id., Dve studeničke, p. 129, 136.

62 Id., Eklisiologija Svetog Save, p. 229.

of tradition, handed down as the truth of the divine economy, bears dogmatic and universal character.

On the other hand, Jevtić highlights the significance of the Cyrillo-Methodian and St Savian tradition for the historical and spiritual memory of the Serbian people and for their identity. According to Jevtić, Saint Cyril and Methodius and St Sava connected Slavs and Serbs with the existing tradition of the church, i. e., with Christ, the Apostles, and the Holy Fathers, and they introduced them into the existing church-canonical and political milieu of the Byzantine world[63]. At the same time, Jevtić considers these saints to have been apostles because they propagated not national or religious particularism, but ecclesial and catholic pleroma[64]. In the footsteps of his predecessors Velimirović and Popović, Jevtić argues that St Sava proved by his apostolic mission that the Church of Christ was the property neither of Rome nor of Constantinople[65]. Jevtić emphasises that true identity of the Serbian people is manifested only in the church[66]. Jevtić stressed this in the context of awakened nationalisms in Yugoslav society, which led to the collapse of a common state only a few years later.

Jevtić connects the idea of St Sava's apostolicity among Serbian people with St Sava's episcopal office. Jevtić pursues his investigation of St Sava's episcopacy through the lens of the episcopocentric (bishop-centric) ecclesiology promoted by Metropolitan John N. Zizioulas[67]. Jevtić links St Sava to the Apostles not only as founder of the Serbian Church, but also as a bishop because, according to the patristic ecclesiology promulgated by Jevtić, each bishop is successor to all the apostles and the living image of Christ among priests and people[68]. Jevtić adds a new and significant element to the bishop-centric ecclesiology of Zizioulas, one that is also emphasised by Velimirović and Popović: St Sava's sainthood. In his sermon delivered at Žiča Monastery on Ascension Day, 1221, St Sava referred to his episcopacy as holiness, because every bishop had been consecrated into his office by the Holy Spirit[69].

Finally, Jevtić emphasises the ascetic aspect as one of the main features of St Sava's legacy, claiming that St Sava's theology and ecclesiology originate from his Athonite spiritual experience[70]. The tendency to underline the special role of Athonite monasticism in the restoration of modern church life is another feature of the Athenian

---

63 Ibid., p. 238.
64 Ibid., p. 236.
65 Ibid., p. 238.
66 Jevtić, Sveti Sava, p. 151.
67 Id., Eklisiologija Svetog Save, p. 226.
68 Ibid., p. 236.
69 Jevtić, Žička beseda, p. 107.
70 Id., Dve studeničke, p. 138.

theological school, especially of Christos Yannaras and John Romanides. Jevtić fits into this trend because he also emphasises the significance of Athonite monastic practices for reviving monastic life in post-Communist Serbia. Jevtić points to the observation of Domentijan, a biographer of St Sava, that St Sava »wanted to transfer every spiritual pattern of the Holy Mountain into his fatherland [Serbia]«[71]. Jevtić perceives St Sava as a successor of the Cappadocian, Sinaitic, Studite ascetic and monastic tradition, and as the forerunner of Athonite Hesychasm[72].

In his work on St Sava, Jevtić to a certain extent follows Velimirović's counsel that a proper way of writing about St Sava must always include discussion of Sava's teachings on church, state, education, army, family, art, and monasticism, and therefore he is also following Popović, who writes about St Savian philosophy of the world, of progress, of culture, of society, of values, norms, and of education. Velimirović's focus on the state, society, education, and family is absent in Jevtić's works, because the latter's emphasis is on St Savian thinking on church and monastery. However, Jevtić's interest in other St Savian philosophies, to use Popović's term, is revealed through these categories. Jevtić portrays the St Savian world as Jesus Christ's economy of salvation, St Savian progress as an eschatological orientation of history, St Savian culture and education as a sacred tradition and »adherence to the Fathers«, St Savian values as holiness and likeness to Christ, which are a product of spiritual life and ascetical practice, and St Savian society as the church, which is a model and ideal for all human communities and institutions, whether state, society, or family.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that the three Serbian theologians reflect differently on the role of St Sava in Serbian history, depending on their theological focus and orientation as well as their historical context. Velimirović thinks of St Sava and *Svetosavlje* in terms of political pan-Slavism and Slavophile theological ideas, attempting to project the characteristics of the church defined by the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed – oneness, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity – to all spheres of social life. Popović relies on the ideas springing from the Slavophile movement and the Russian religious renaissance, such as God-Manhood, integral knowledge, and *sobornost'*. Like the Slavophiles, he employs them in his critique of European humanism, rationalism, and individualism. Popović, however, »baptises« these Russian ideas in the ascetic thought of the early Church Fathers. Belonging to the

---

71 Ibid.; see also Domentijan, Žitije Svetog Save, Belgrade 1865, p. 205.

72 Jevtić, Dve studeničke, p. 139.

so-called Athenian theological school of the 1960s, Jevtić, like the other members of this school, develops his theological discourse in accordance with the neo-patristic synthesis, episcopocentric ecclesiology, and Athonite ascetic and monastic practices.

The historical context of Velimirović's, Popović's, and Jevtić's reception of St Sava is as important as their affiliation to the theological trends of their time. Velimirović writes in the midst of the creation of the common state of the southern Slavs and the first years of its existence. He perceives St Sava as the forerunner of Yugoslav political and ecclesial unity and as an opponent to every kind of ecclesial imperialism. Velimirović attempts to incorporate *Svetosavlje* into the foundations of the new Yugoslav state and the new Yugoslav Church. Therefore, Velimirović employed *Svetosavlje* both for the restoration of the church's identity and for the transformation of a community based on a common language into a community sharing the same faith and historical memory. Yet Velimirović also acknowledges the importance of lower forms of social engagement on the way to holiness, such as national heroism or the ingenuity of church leaders in linking church and state in all spheres of public life.

Popović writes about St Sava immediately before, during, and after World War II, when Yugoslav society was at an ideological turning point and when the communist model of the state and its aggressive atheism had prevailed. Popović's model of *Svetosavlje* as political theology, therefore, is still within the framework of the Yugoslav state, but it also opposes the dominant socio-ideological paradigms of the time: Western, humanist, and capitalist ideology as well as Soviet atheist and communist ideology. In his works, *Svetosavlje* is presented both as the idealised model of the Christian past and the future and universally desired image of a Yugoslav society. Although St Sava is a historical figure and a national leader, *Svetosavlje* has been kept clear of any national element that deviating from or contradicting evangelical principles. National history is oriented towards places of historical memory exhibiting an exclusively Christian ethos. It thus becomes a type of sacred history, in which holiness is the basic principle and the measure of all things. Popović insists on ascetic struggle and the virtuous life as sole criteria of personal and communal progress. By placing St Sava and *Svetosavlje* in the perspective of national history, but in an eschatological perspective transcending history, Popović separates *Svetosavlje* from the national principle. Its relationship to national history remains limited to the extent to which the eschatological element dominated history.

Jevtić writes about St Sava and *Svetosavlje* in the years preceding the breakup of Yugoslavia as well as during the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s. Therefore, Jevtić frees *Svetosavlje* from any political agenda and any state framework. For Jevtić, the church is the only existing reality. By following Bishop Sava, who established the independent Serbian Church in order to strengthen Christianity in the medieval

Serbian state, Bishop Atanasije Jevtić rebuilt the church in Zahumlje and Herzegovina during the war in order to strengthen Serbian ecclesial identity in post-Dayton Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Regardless of the differences between them, all three authors underline the importance of the ideals of holiness and sainthood epitomised by St Sava. They also praise St Sava's role in founding an independent Serbian Church, regardless of whether they see this role as an expression of ecclesiastical anti-imperialism, a Theo-humanist orientation over the dominant social and ecclesial models, or an episcopocentric ecclesiology. Irrespective of the theological agenda applied to it, *Svetosavlje* remained an inspiration for some of the most impressive political theologies in twentieth-century Europe.