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EDITORIAL

The international scientific conference *Religion, Gender, Sexuality*, jointly organized by the Centre for Sociological Research and the Yugoslav Society for the Scientific Study of Religion (YSSSR), was held on June 24, 2016 at the Faculty of Philosophy in Niš. Sociologists of religion, anthropologists and religious scholars from Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Macedonia, the Netherlands and United States contributed to the fruitful discussions of the various relations of religion, sexuality and gender, especially the place and role of women in society within the framework of religious discourse.

Selected papers, having passed the regular peer review procedure, will be published in volumes 2 and 3 of the 2016 issue of the journal (courtesy of the organizers of the conference – Dragana Stjepanović Zaharijevski and Miloš Jovanović), and thus give a modest contribution to the growing interest of the scientific community for this important research topic.

Editor-in-Chief
Dragan Todorović

REVITALIZED ORTHODOXY AND LGBT PEOPLE IN CONTEMPORARY SERBIA

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Miloš Jovanović

University of Niš, Faculty of Philosophy, Department of Sociology, Serbia

Abstract. *The paper deals with the relation of the dominant religious confession in Serbia towards non-heterosexuality. After considering the attitude of Christianity in general, and Orthodoxy in particular, towards “different” sexual orientations, some of the statements of senior Church officials are cited as an illustration of that attitude. After that, some of the findings of the research of the Serbian population on the attitude towards religion and homosexuality are provided. A special form of religious nationalism that exists in Serbia is associated with the intensity and content of the negative attitude towards homosexuality. At the end of the paper the results of research attitudes towards homosexuality in 39 countries are presented, where special attention is given to the connection of religion with (non)acceptance of homosexuality.*

Key words: *LGBT, orthodox christianity, Serbian Orthodox church, Serbia.*

*I think that if the churches gave up the attempt to dictate sexual behavior
they would lose a lot of their reason for existing.
(Richard Rorty, in Zabala 2005, 79)*

The Serbian Orthodox Church was, until the attempt to organize the first Belgrade Pride Parade in 2001, indifferent to the issue of non-heterosexuality. The increased visibility of the LGBT population provoked the Church which reacted with hostility permeated by moralist and nationalist discourse (Jovanović 2013).

The dominant religious confession in Serbia denotes any expression of sexuality that is not directed towards the opposite sex and, at least in intention procreative, as a “sin”, “fashion imported from the West”, “deviation of human nature”, “something unnatural, sacrilegious and pernicious”, “sick” “abominable”, as a “(mental) disease”, “disorder”, ...

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Corresponding author: Miloš Jovanović

University of Niš, Faculty of Philosophy, Ćirila i Metodija 2, 18000 Niš, Serbia

E-mail: milos.jovanovic@filfak.ni.ac.rs

“The Serbian Orthodox Church stigmatizes contraception, reproductive rights, lectures on reproductive health, which are considered obscene” (Gavrilović 2009, 145).¹

The attitude of Christianity to all forms of sex is, according to Dag Øistein Endsjø, an absolutely negative one. Jesus and the Apostle Paul emphasized abstinence from sex as the best option. The answer to the question “Who would Jesus sleep with?” would be very simple: no one. If someone wants to act like Jesus, he or she is not supposed to have sex at all (Endsjø 2011).

“Orthodox canon law regarding sexual behavior was developed mainly to address problematic behavior. It is not a manual of good practice, therefore, but an indication of appropriate boundaries. Further, given the contextual nature of the canons, their application in varying social contexts and relationships requires the careful exercise of discernment and compassionate application by all parties involved (the tradition of *oikonomia*)” (McDowell 2011, 571).”

Orthodox Christianity’s hostile attitude towards sex should not be of any surprise – it was already one of the founding fathers of sociology, Max Weber, who in *Economy and Society* wrote that this hostility is self-explanatory when it comes to confessions which set otherworldly asceticism as the most valuable (Weber 1978, 602–607). He summarizes this at one point in his essay *Religious Rejections of the World and Their Directions*:

“The brotherly ethic of salvation religion is in profound tension with the greatest irrational force of life: sexual love. The more sublimated sexuality is, and the more principled and relentlessly consistent the salvation ethic of brotherhood is, the sharper is the tension between sex and religion (Weber 1946, 343).”

Orthodox Christianity has a general stance towards homosexuality, which is reluctantly made public,³ unless the Church feels provoked.⁴ Orthodoxy’s standpoint is pervaded with

¹ All translations from the Serbian language sources are the authors’ own.

² Unlike *Akriveia* (ακρίβεια – precision, exactness) – a strict adherence to the canons with unconditional respect for Church doctrines and tradition – *Oikonomia* (οικονομία) is the principle of application of the canons in the Orthodox church which consists in of a pastoral attitude of condescendence and compassion, so that in some cases canon rules are not applied if that could lead individuals or groups away from the Church or cause their offense, thereby distorting God’s plan of salvation (i.e. recognition of the validity of baptism in the non-Orthodox confessions, resolving of fast for certain individuals, giving permission to marry with a spouse of a different religion, ...) (see: Brija 1999, 8–9, 195–198).

³ Since it is a “sin not to be named among Christians” (*Crimen inter Christianos non nominandum*). There is also the following formulation: *Peccatum illud horribile, inter Christianos non nominandum* – “that horrible crime not to be named among Christians”, which is probably the origin of the famous euphemism for homosexuality: “The love that dare not speak its name”, from the poem “Two Loves” by Lord Alfred Douglas, friend and lover of Oscar Wilde. “Guy de Roye (Guido de Monte Rocherii), archbishop of Tours and of Reims, in 1388 in *Manipulus curatorum* (of which a French version from Troyes in 1604 under the title *Le Doctrinal de Sapience* added that the reproach of sodomy is so vile that even the enemies of Jesus did not dare to accuse him of it at the time of his Passion, although they heaped every other kind of abuse on him) opined: ‘Of the vice of sodomy Augustine declares how detestable it is, saying that the sin is far greater than carnal knowledge of one’s own mother, as shown by the punishment inflicted on the Sodomites who perished in fire and brimstone from heaven. This sin, moreover, cries spiritually unto the Lord, whence in Genesis the Lord says: The cry of Sodom and Gomorrah has come unto me, for as Augustine says, by this sin the society which should be in us with God is violated when the very Nature of which he is himself the prime mover is polluted by the perversity of lust. . . It is indeed of such accursedness that not the act alone but the mention of it pollutes the mouth of the speaker, the ears of the listeners, and the very elements in general” (Johansson & Percy 1996, 174, emphasis M. J.).

a distinct moralistic overtone and condemnation (Jovanović 2011). The statement of the Holy Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church, announced on the occasion of the gay parade in 2010, contained the following:

“Given the current spiritual, social and political condition of our nation and state, we believe that certain media and certain non-governmental organizations, out of their own base, if not subterranean interests, have imposed this disagreeable topic on our entire society, a topic which is in essence irrelevant to us (Irinej 2010, 5).”

A moralistic constant is present in the statement of September 23, 2014 concerning the announcement of *The Pride Walk*, with “hard” economic discourse appearing for the first time in a communique coming from the Church. References to the costs of holding the LGBT gathering were very skillfully and manipulatively used at a time when one of the main topics in Serbia were the austerity measures in the public sector, which should be carried out by the Government:

Is the essentially absurd parading a reason enough for the state, stricken by poverty, to spend millions on providing a handful of its citizens and their guests for the “parade” that will take place on several hundred meters in downtown Belgrade? The Ministry of Interior must bring thousands of policemen from all over Serbia, **provide them with accommodation in Belgrade, daily allowances, meals**, and all that with the real possibility of their injuries and even threats for their lives. (...) 1. *Is the protection of private rights allowed and may it be exercised by humiliating and trampling on the moral feelings of the vast majority of Humanity?* 2. *Is, by a contempt for the Law of God and the moral order built into the human nature, human dignity realized?* 3. *If a gay sexual commitment is justified and should be propagated, based on what is the same not true for pedophilia (massively widespread in the western world), incest, bestiality and other ways of satisfying perverted sexual drives? Why is theirs a lesser right than your so-called right of sexual (dis)orientation?* 4. *Are you so blinded by your lust and egoism that you do not mind putting the entire Serbian state apparatus to your own use with **creating unsubstantiated material costs**; provoking your brothers and fellow citizens and causing so much unrest and rebellion, often with disastrous consequences for both sides?* 5. *Do you by your “parades” propagate only your “rights” or are you maybe trying to impose your style of living on others, especially unspoiled children and inexperienced youths, which is why, quite rightly – their parents and teachers are concerned?* (...) Be that as it may, one thing is certain: you have the right to parade, **but only at your own expense and the expense of your commanders**, no matter how they are called, for the parade and for security, but **not at the expense of Serbia**: bombed, destroyed, morally and economically crippled, impoverished, flooded, nailed to the pillar of shame... (Irinej 2014; bold emphasis M. J.)

The Patriarch has in a similar vein tried to exploit the situation “in favor of his cause” in the early autumn of 2014, when Serbia, due to heavy rainfall, was hit by catastrophic floods. On May 15 at the Cathedral Church in Belgrade, where he held the “first prayer to stop the rain”, he said: “This is not a punishment of God, but a warning to leave the way

⁴ “The views from the ranks of the Serbian Orthodox Church on homosexuality (*sic*) were always consistent with those present in Orthodoxy in general, although some Church officials considered the mere posting of that topic to be imposed by the ‘decadent West’” (Tucić 2011, 45).

of vice, wickedness and iniquity”, and added that an event which presents great lawlessness and abomination is preparing in Belgrade, “which makes them proud and assertive of their dignity and democracy, and all against God and the laws of life” (Tanjug 2014). Patriarch Irinej was certainly speaking of the *Pride Week*, scheduled for May 18 to 31, which was to end with a walk of the LGBT population through the center streets of Belgrade. Three days after the Patriarch’s statement, the Metropolitan of the Montenegro and the Littoral Amfilohije, in an appearance on *Nova TV*, explained the natural disasters in Serbia as God’s warning for the victory of the transvestite Conchita Wurst at the Eurovision song contest, and stressed that the floods in Serbia are actually a sign that “the Lord especially loves us” and that He is tempting us in order for us to return to the right path: “Watch what is happening in Europe at this moment. Who is getting priority? It is that unfortunate man, unfortunate woman, I do not know what it is called, who presents itself like Jesus. This promotes the destruction of human nature, human beings, and it is placed on a pedestal, a model for new generations and successors” (Pantić 2014). The Prime Minister of Serbia was among the first to respond, in passing, to the referred statement by asking “the clergy not to add oil to the fire”. The organizers of the *Pride Week* postponed that event with a short explanation:

“Due to the natural disaster that befell Serbia, the Organizing Committee of the Belgrade Pride Week, the volunteering team and numerous associates express deep sympathy and solidarity with the people of Serbia. Activists of the LGBT organizations are already in the field. They are helping in the defense against floods, collecting food, clothing, shoes and using all available means to assist the affected population. In this tragic moment, we consider holding any public events improper. Therefore, the Organizing Committee has decided to postpone all activities planned for Pride Week 2014. We are proud of the citizens of Serbia for the courage and humanity they have showed in the struggle with the chaos caused by the floods. We express our gratitude to the members of the police, army, gendarmerie, and all the volunteers who are selflessly helping in saving human lives. The Organizing Committee of the Belgrade Pride Week would like to thank everyone who has participated in the preparation of Pride Week and invites the LGBT community and all able people to focus their energies in the days to come on helping the population affected by the floods (Beograd Prajd 2014).”

The Serbian Orthodox Church is one of the more vocal opponents of any manifestations of homosexuality – in addition to regular condemnations of gay-parade and tolerance (or at least lukewarm disapproval) of its violent opponents,⁵ the Church responds to the presentation of same-sex relationships in the products of mass-culture and explicitly asks for the prohibition of art exhibitions with LGBT content from the executive authorities. Patriarch Irinej sent a memorandum to Prime Minister Ivica Dačić demanding a ban on an exhibition of photographs by Swedish artist Elisabeth Ohlson Wahllin that opened (and closed) in Belgrade on October 3, 2012.

⁵ On the Republic Square in Belgrade on June 30, 2001, among the opponents of the first announced (but never held) gay-parade were the “students of the Theological Faculty and other Orthodox youth“, the center of the city was plastered with posters that read: “Gather all Orthodox for a spiritually healthy Serbia. Stop the anti-Christian homosexual immorality and perverse orgy”, a priest, Žarko Gavrilović, “coordinated actions of his members and made statements to journalists in the following style ‘The satanists should be stopped, these are perverse orgies’” (Miletić 2001, 24–25).

“I wait for the state to do its work, for the officials to react. This is a shame, this is horrible, this is a scandal!”, stated Patriarch Irinej for the *Alo!* newspaper with regard to the announcement of the exhibition *Ecce homo* by Elisabeth Ohlson Wallin in Belgrade. Among the provocative photographs are the parodies of The Last Supper scene, which shows Jesus in high-heels with Apostles substituted with transexuals, and the scene of The Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus is surrounded with homosexual leathermen. ‘I really don’t know what else to say. We have nothing against anyone expressing their views, but if someone smears one’s own city, state, religion – that is simply a disgrace. What else has to happen for officials to react?!’, added the Patriarch (S. S. and J. R. 2012, 23).”

In addition to the above scenes from the Bible, the Swedish artist’s photographs also re-contextualize: the Annunciation (with the Archangel Gabriel delivering a test tube of semen to a lesbian couple), the Birth of Jesus, the Baptism of Jesus, Jesus’ Entry into Jerusalem (which depicts him on a bicycle at the head of a Gay Pride march), criticisms against scribes and Pharisees (“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites...”), the kiss of Judas, Jesus being weighed down by the cross, The Crucifixion, Mary holding Jesus (Pietà), Jesus showing himself to the women and Heaven.



Fig. 1 Elisabeth Ohlson Wallin – “The Last Supper”

The intention of the exhibition author, Elisabeth Ohlson Wallin, was to, as a believer and a lesbian, question the “war against the LGBT population” which is led in the name of Jesus, who “accepted the rejected and helped them” (23). It is, thus, ironic, writes Derek Jay, that the mainstream Christianity cannot cope with the LGBT people, given that Jesus identified with the subversives of his day (Jay 2009: 158).

Regarding the relationship of religion and the negative attitude towards homosexuality in Serbia, the findings of a survey from 2008, conducted by the Center for Free Elections and Democracy (CeSID) and the Gay Straight Alliance, are indicative. *Table 1* shows the

distribution of the attitude towards homosexuality (positive, neutral and negative) with types of believers:

Table 1 Attitude towards religion and non/acceptance of homosexuality
(data from: Gej strejt alijansa & CeSID 2008, 10)

Attitude towards religion	Attitude towards homosexuality		
	Positive	Neutral	Negative
I regularly go to Church (religious temple)	4%	23%	73%
I occasionally go to Church (religious temple)	11%	20%	69%
I am not religious, but I celebrate some of the Church holidays	14%	26%	60%
I am not religious (atheist)	19%	31%	50%

Table 2 contains data on the distribution of the aforementioned attitude towards homosexuality according to the degree of the respondent's (dis)agreement with the policies of the Church:

Table 2 Relation toward Church policies and attitude toward homosexuality
(data from: Gej strejt alijansa & CeSID 2008, 10)

Attitude towards church policy	Attitude towards homosexuality		
	Positive	Neutral	Negative
Strongly disagree	60%	32%	8%
Disagree	25%	52%	23%
Neither agree nor disagree	6%	42%	52%
Agree	1%	20%	79%
Strongly agree	1%	6%	93%

In the 2010 survey, almost $\frac{2}{3}$ of the respondents (64%) agree with the claim "I think the Church is right in condemning homosexuality", in comparison to 60%, which is the finding from the 2008 survey (Gej strejt alijansa & CeSID 2010, 8).

Data analysis from the *European Values Study*, carried out on national probability samples in 31 European societies, shows that social distance toward homosexual persons was predicted by the Eastern Orthodox religion (Štulhofer & Rimac 2009). The data from this survey (EVS) relating to Serbia show that the religiosity of the respondents directly correlates with higher levels of distance towards homosexuals (as well as ethnic and religious distance). It is very interesting that people who declare themselves "spiritual" show lower levels of distance compared to "in-churched"⁶ believers (Gavrilović 2013: 103).

As for the place of religion in the social life of Serbia, public opinion surveys, from 2000 onwards, regularly show that citizens rank the Church very high (sometimes the highest) on the trust scale (Bešić 2011; Gallup Balkan Monitor 2010; Müller 2011).

⁶ On the notion of an "in-churched" believer, see: Blagojević 2009b.

“Surveys demonstrated that individual religiousness in many Orthodox countries was much lower than in a large number of Western European countries, but that, at the same time, confidence in the church was much stronger. This high level of trust in the church was only loosely connected to individual religiousness and individual, active church attendance (Pollack 2001, 148).”

So, very appropriately, Radmila Radić writes of the Church as “The Sole Winner of the Transition in Serbia” (Radić 2010).

“It has been found in almost all of the ex-communist countries of Eastern and Central Europe that in contrast to social anomie and to the chaos caused by the collapse of the political and economic system, religion and the Churches are relatively strong factors in the fields of culture and social organization (Tomka 1995: 24).”

Specific aspects of the revitalization of religion in Serbia – its presence in the public and institutional sphere – are not questioned (Blagojević 2009a), and there is, almost unanimous, agreement that the dominant form of religiosity of the citizens of Serbia, in accord with the broader processes of retraditionalization, is: “traditional belonging without believing” (Đorđević 2009, 62).

It could be concluded from the above that religion in this region primarily serves as a powerful identity marker confirming denominational ties to ethnicity (“Orthodox Serb”⁷) rather than a source of spirituality or “giver” of meaning/sense that refers to the transcendent. In this regard, in the case of the Serbs, one can more readily speak of confessional identification, instead of religiosity.⁸

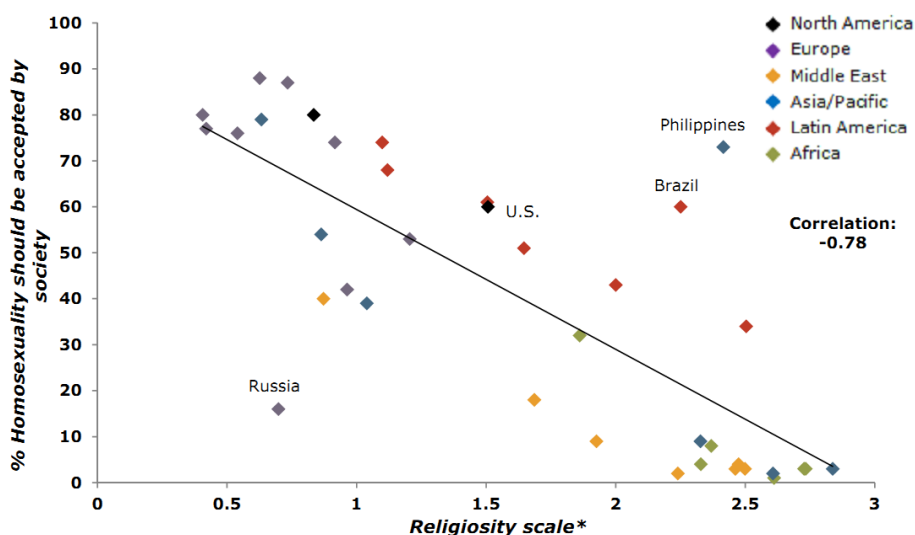
“[When] Orthodoxy and SOC enter the post-socialist, conflict and cultural public scene, several specific social functions of religion can be found: it gives a specific identity to the community and integrates individuals into the collective; in conflict situations it mobilizes people into the collective opposed to another collective on a religious and national level. If the conflict endangers the whole culture of a community, religion and church represent a unique resource of resistance and safeguarding of culture and tradition. When the individual and his feelings are put in the forefront of observation (...) religion has a psychological-emotional or compensatory function (Blagojević 2012, 26).”

A specific form of religious nationalism that is present in Serbia definitely affects the intensity and the specific content of the negative attitude that exists towards homosexuality (Sremac et al. 2015).

⁷ “When I asked people why they feel Orthodox, I usually got the answer: ‘I am Orthodox because I am a Serb’. Sometimes I was able to hear the revert stance: ‘I am a Serb because I am Orthodox’. However, my informants were well aware that there are Serbs who are not believers, and also those who have opted for another faith (for example, members of various sects). But for them these infidels were not real Serbs, not as Serbs should be. In short, the only real Serb is an Orthodox Serb” (Bandić 2010: 62). “Orthodoxy for Serbs remains, first and last of all, the faith of identity; one could say faith of national identity” (Bogdanović 1991, 36).

⁸ “Confessional identification is a broader concept than religiosity and it stands for the recognition and adherence to a particular religion, regardless of personal (non)religiosity. For example, most Serbs will say that they are Orthodox, that they identify with the confession of their ‘ancestry’, although most of them are not personally religious, nor currently tied to the Church” (Đorđević 2005, 195).

The research of the *Pew Research Center* on the acceptance of homosexuality from 2013, carried out in 39 countries on a sample of 37653 respondents, amongst other findings, shows that there is a strong relationship between a country's religiosity and opinions about homosexuality. The survey shows there is far less acceptance of homosexuality in countries where religion is central to people's lives (some notable exceptions are Russia, which receives low scores on the religiosity scale, which would suggest higher levels of tolerance for homosexuality, yet, just 16% of Russians say homosexuality should be accepted by the society; conversely, Brazilians and Filipinos are considerably more tolerant of homosexuality than their countries' relatively high levels of religiosity would suggest [Pew Research Center 2013]). *Graph 1* shows a quite strong correlation (-0,78) of the religiosity scale and agreement with the attitude "Homosexuality should be accepted by society":



Graph 1 Less Tolerance for Homosexuality in More Religious Countries
(Pew Research Center 2013, 4)

All of the aforementioned testifies to the fact that religion in Serbia, as in most of the world, is not connected in a positive way with non-heterosexuality, moreover, it is most often oppositionally positioned, with the fostering of, at least, an unsympathetic attitude.

* Religiosity was measured using a three-item index ranging from 0-3, with "3" representing the most religious position. Respondents were coded as "1" if they believe faith in God is necessary for morality; "1" if they say religion is very important in their lives; and "1" if they pray at least once a day. The mean score for each country is used in this analysis. Religiosity scores for the U.S., Britain, France, Germany, Spain and Japan are from the Spring 2011 Global Attitudes Survey.

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REVITALIZOVANO PRAVOSLAVLJE I LGBT POPULACIJA U SAVREMENOJ SRBIJI

Rad se bavi odnosom koji dominantna religijska konfesija u Srbiji ima prema neheteroseksualnosti. Nakon razmatranja stava koji hrišćanstvo, a posebno pravoslavlje, ima prema „drugačijoj” seksualnoj orijentaciji, navode se neki od stavova visokih crkvenih zvaničnika kao ilustracija navedenog stava. Zatim su predstavljeni neki od nalaza istraživanja stanovnika Srbije o njihovom odnosu prema religiji i homoseksualnosti. Poseban oblik religijskog nacionalizma koji postoji u Srbiji se dovodi u vezu sa intenzitetom i sadržajem negativnog stava prema homoseksualnosti. Na kraju rada su navedeni rezultati istraživanja stava prema homoseksualnosti u 39 zemalja, gde se posebno razmatra povezanost religije sa (ne)prihvatanjem homoseksualnosti.

Ključne reči: *LGBT, pravoslavlje, Srpska pravoslavna crkva, Srbija.*