

RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE IN REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA – ARE NATIONAL INTERESTS STRONGER THAN ECUMENIC CONSCIENCE

Before we start explicating the relation between national interests and inter-religious tolerance in Republic of Macedonia we'll review religious tolerance in theory and practice in Christianity and Islam, as two leading religious organizations in Republic of Macedonia.

Speaking about Christianity we'll pay most attention to Orthodox Christianity and its views towards religious tolerance, simply because this religious community is the one that is mostly present in Republic of Macedonia.

Such as great number of religious organizations, Macedonian Orthodox Church considers its religious truth as correct one, while others are incorrect, based on lies, which create distorted picture of the basic religious events in the past, present and future. Actually, it is in the spirit of the complete Orthodox Christianity (from worldwide point of view), and it doesn't leave space for another type of eternal truths. But, it doesn't mean that religious tolerance does not exist. It is present in Macedonian Orthodox Church, but almost completely because of practical reasons. That is so-called everyday tolerance that exists in ethnically mixed communities, such as Macedonian. But, it invokes the complete constellation of social relations in the state. If it aims to be part of wider social system, it should show sense of religious tolerance. Everything else is a risk and can involve

it in a situation of social (religious) conflict or in situation of complete separation of the church from the state.

As well as other Orthodox churches, Macedonian Orthodox Church substitutes the term tolerance with the term - Christian love. Even more, it is considered that expression tolerance is completely unsuitable and it doesn't express the sense of religious reconciliation and ecumenism. Anyway, we can divide this term into: dogmatic, church and state tolerance. Led by Christian maxim that love has to be given to every other human being, no matter to which religion it belongs, Macedonian Orthodox Church has kind attitude towards other religious organizations in the country, occasionally, offering and giving fraternal help.

Term love is not taken accidentally. That is much more than tolerance, what is simple accommodating towards "the others" and "the rest". Christian love forgives, allows different kind of opinion and is ready for compromise. In all religious organizations good relations can be created only through love and only with love certain differences and misunderstandings can be polished. In the name of love, peace and good will are required from the people.

Anyway dogmatic positions or Orthodoxy are clear. There is only one truth. Everything else is turning aside from the real path. On this point the following question appears: "to what level each of Orthodox churches keeps on dogmatic truths that are basically accepted?". It depends a lot on the social constellation in which this church exists and functions. It is considered that, compared to other religious communities, Macedonian Orthodox Church is the most tolerant one. Macedonian Orthodox Church considers its teachings obligatory only for its members, but not for the rest of the members of the social community who belong to another religion. Without

doubt, Macedonian Orthodox Church is one of the most tolerant religious organizations in the world of orthodoxy.

Conscious of its existing in multi-ethnic community, Macedonian Orthodox Church has always shown certain level of practical tolerance. But, the fact that Macedonian Orthodox Church is established as national church (church of the Macedonian nation) and it exists in that way in its national frames is doubtless. Somehow it limits its tolerance, but we can not say that Macedonian Orthodox Church 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, specially 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 Islamic national organization. The reason was simply because these three neighboring churches denied its autonomy, and even more its national prefix (Macedonian). If in certain periods Islamic religious community didn't "disturb" its national root than Macedonian Orthodox Church would have been pretty tolerant towards this community. On the other hand, in certain period, Macedonian Orthodox Church showed great dose of non-tolerance towards its sister-churches. Good evidence for this are latest events – efforts for creating a kind of self-announced Ohrid Archiepiscopacy, under direct jurisdiction and hierarchically determined by Serbian Orthodox Church. This intention destroyed relations between Macedonian Orthodox Church, on one side and Serbian and Greek Orthodox Churches, on the other side, so much that their mutual tolerance is on the lowest level. Reason for this situation is the fact that Serbian Orthodox Church and Greek Orthodox Church do not

recognize the national roots of Macedonian Orthodox Church. Therefore, very often Macedonian Orthodox Church involves in its own religious-national frames. It's characteristic that Macedonian Orthodox Church always have had 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 Catholic Church in Macedonia and Vatican. Why? The answer is pretty simple. Vatican official policy have never put in question national (Macedonian) roots of Macedonian Orthodox Church.

In the period of relatively greater separation of the church from the state, realistic attitude that church should practice more religious studies, rituals and religious illumination for its members, is more and more present. Therefore we can expect that in future church practice would take bigger part in pure dogmatic-theological contents, what will make space for the rest of Christian and especially non-Christian religious studies, where, of course, the Islamic one is on the first place.

Now we'll start explaining the observation and practical functioning of Islamic religious community in Republic of Macedonia, regarding issue of religious tolerance. Basically, its theoretical - dogmatic tolerance doesn't differ from the one of Orthodox Christianity. But, since Islam, generally, gives greater possibility for applying tolerance, still there are differences between them.

Theoretical predisposition for what was said above can be found in The Koran. It says that in the faith there is not enforcing what means that Islamic religious community does tolerate those who have other religious beliefs. Recalling Koran, Islam says that everybody who believes in one God, in Day of Judgment and does good acts has chance to get their deserved award in Heaven. That means that Islam faith tolerates existing of Christianity and even more considers

that it is possible to get God's salvation in another (non-Islamic) way. In the frames of Orthodoxy there isn't such attitude, what means that, theoretically speaking, Islam is more tolerant.

In Orthodox Christianity there is one strong link between the church and nation (religious and national) what is different in Islam, where we have high level of connection between the faith and politic power. In the past and today there are great number of cases when politic leader is religious leader, at the same time.

Koran's religious principle that there is no coercion in the faith and maxims: "for you yours and for me my faith" confirms what was explained above. In that direction Islamic religious community emphasizes that neighbors should salute and help each other. Neighbors should visit each other, especially when one of them is ill or is in trouble. Also, neighbors should congratulate each other in moments of happiness and celebration, as well to express condolence in moments of sadness. This kind of behavior can be seen in ethnically mixed villages of Republic of Macedonia and suburbs of the bigger cities, where there are Orthodox and Islam believers live together. In this areas neighbors visit each other during religious holidays. Muslims visit Christians for Eastern and Christmas, as well, Christians go to visit them for their religious holidays. .

The case with mixed marriages is pretty interesting. Islamic religious community in Macedonia allows (tolerates) male Muslim believer to marry Christian female. But, a Muslim girl is not allowed to marry male who has another faith. Following data is also interesting: if Muslim man marries Christian woman she is not obliged to change her religion. In case she doesn't change her it, her husband should provide special room in their house, where she would practice her religious rituals. If her husband doesn't do it, woman is allowed to leave him. That means that even Islamic religious community

recommends religious endogamy it still allows religious exogamy in certain cases, by giving wide religious rights.

But, neither Islamic religious community in Republic of Macedonia nor Macedonian Orthodox Church allows woman to marry man who belongs to different religion. This attitude is caused by the social subordination of the woman, especially in villages.

Out of theoretical-dogmatic postulates that were previously mentioned explain the practical functioning of Islamic religious community in Republic of Macedonia towards other religious communities and especially towards Macedonian Orthodox Church. Because of its close connection with Albanian politic parties (no matter whether they participate in the government or not) the identifying of moral Islamic principles (in the face of Islamic religious community) and politics ideology (in the face of DUI, DPA, PDP etc) become more emphasized. Because of this direct connection with political elite, sometimes occur smaller or bigger oscillations on the part of tolerance towards Orthodox Christians. That's because, according to Islam all activities taken in order to make the influence Albanian politics parties stronger, are excused. That's the reason why the tolerance of Islamic religious community varies, depending on the social atmosphere in Macedonian society.

Even Islam is theoretically pretty tolerant, in our country it is closed and limited to itself, especially in less culturally and industrially developed areas, where it's specially conservative. Therefore most of the time Islamic religious community in Macedonia was on certain distance from Orthodox Christians.

However, leadership of Islamic religious community in 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 Macedonian Orthodox Church towards Islamic religious community. On this point most important characteristic is the oscillation in certain time and space dimension. It proves the fact that Islamic religious community as well as Macedonian Orthodox Church 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 Islamic religious community, nor Macedonian Orthodox Church have gone more far than this. As a reason for this, both religious communities usually mention the possibility of causing anger in certain number of believers.

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

Solojev is completely right when he says that religion is classical saint, while nation is modern saint. Those who prefer religious filling are lead through life by the following idea: "Love all nations as you love your own nation". Those who prefer national filling is lead by the following thought: "Love your own nation, before and above all". I agree with the constellation that citizens of Republic

of Macedonia turn themselves more towards their historical past than towards their future. But, nation does not live only with its memory of its own past, but also with a high level of approximation about its future. Determination of its own future gathers the will of the members of certain ethnic community and makes them deeply united. Usually consciousness about mutual past is made complete with the wish for mutual future. Past can not be changed, but it can be acquired. Future can not be completely known, but can be changed.

If we make direct correlation between religion and nation, we can establish the constellation: one religion – more nations, one nation – more religious. That means that in the past one religious belief united the members of many nations. That refers to both – Christianity and Islam. Orthodox Christianity united the members of Russian, Serbian, Bulgarian, Greek or Macedonian nation. Also, Islam united members of Albanian, Bosnian, Turkish or other ethnic communities. These days the situation in which Macedonian nation unifies Orthodox Macedonians and Macedonians Muslims, becomes more actual. On the other hand, in Albanian ethnic community there are members of Islamic, Orthodox and Catholic faith.

In these modern times on the question “Who are you?” nobody answers: I am Orthodox., Muslim, Catholic or Protestant. These days the answer on this question is: I am Macedonian, Albanian, Turkish, Serbian or Croatian. Even more, all of them emphasize their ethnic identity, proudly. That means that in the last two centuries situation is changed from its root. Necessity to belong and identify with the nation is stronger then the religious identification and participation.

Great numbers of sociological examinations, which refer to this subject, indicate an interesting data. Believe it or not, they show

that religion and nation do not have logical connection. Additionally, here is the fact that religion is national and universal category. But, besides these strong facts, this 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.

Best soil for introducing religious and ethnic tolerance is civic society. It is supra-national society in which 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 then the values of the special ethnic community. However, the system of norms and values has to be risen on universal level. As well as there is separation of the state from the church, also it is possible to separate citizenship from national feature.

All human beings are equal in front of God, therefore religious and politics institutions should have equal attitude towards them. In this constellation, pretty adequate element is the fact that in Christian and Islamic holy books (Bible and Koran) there are mutual messages for valorization of human behavior. These are messages that cause action in the members of Islam, as well as members of Christianity and they have universal and general human character. Basic moral principle that is part of the Pentateuch can be found almost in the same form in The Koran. Islam and Christianity, as two universal religions, give perfect chance for creating general human religious

values, which in case are respected would make any kind of religious conflict impossible.

This implies that people and nation are historical facts, while religion is supra-historical and eschatological category. For the religion and church as its most important institution, the personality of the believer is most important, while for the nation most important is the spirit of belonging. If we try to make distinction between nation and religion, then we should say first that from temporary point of view, religion is before nation. The existence of religion is linked to the appearance of the human being, while nation exists in the last two hundred years. Therefore we can say that religion is constant social phenomena, while nation is temporary social phenomena.

Secondly, religion is more important than the nation, because it is more general. If you want to say that somebody is good person, you'll say that he is good Christian or good believer – belonging to Islam. Illustrating such constellation, in this situation you'll rarely say, that he is good Macedonian or good Albanian. The expression good believer creates picture of perfectly moral person.

Thirdly, from ethic point of view, religion stays above the nation. Religion is ethic category, while nation is ethnic category.

I would like to finish this part with Hajnc's thought, who says that equality of faiths and religious institution gives more chances for cohesive integration of the society; but the idea for creating one religion gives less chance for realization of integration in all segments of social life. If we succeed to actualize this in temporary dimension, we might conclude that in Republic of Macedonia there have never been any religious conflicts, since those were ethnic conflicts, caused by political aims.

Now, we can discuss about the question: are national interests stronger than ecumenical consciousness? If we want to answer this question we should find some kind of balance between the views

that Macedonia is flowery garden in which peace and good will of people from different religions reign and next view that in our country reigns the law of opposite and sometimes sharpened relations.

Basically, Macedonia is country that carries the burden of its past and history. That's the destiny of small countries which want to be big, at least in the history. In there two heavenly kingdoms meet and mix: Christian and Muslims. Also it is place of crashing two big civilizations. Orthodox culture and Byzantium civilization, from one side, and Islamic culture and Muslims civilization, on the other side. Shall we expect conflict of the civilizations, on this piece of ground, or multiculturalism, multiethnic living and the treasure of the differences will reign in the future. Speaking about this we shouldn't forget that Macedonia is a part of wider region (Western Balkan) which carries the burden of previously mentioned issues. Macedonia is an area of religious, cultural, ethnic, social and ideological difference and therefore it is not strange if misunderstandings, disputes and accidental conflicts are not only of religious character, but also from 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 proof 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 can not 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 from the members of ethnic community that is near them. In that way real reasons for social crises are successfully hidden and also dislocates the attention of its members who are really guilty and should be expelled and punished. Therefore, highly accepted maxim is the one that says that one who can not converse, humanly with the believer of its own religion, would be even less able to do it with the member of another faith.

On this point, Dikram's sociological thesis is pretty actual. Paraphrased it would be as follows: if inside certain social community there is negative, demolishing energy that can disintegrate this community, then, this negative energy is directed towards neighboring social community. In that case "my" community is free of disintegration and internal conflicts. In order to save own tribe, the best thing to do is to attack the neighboring one.

In this direction, it's interesting to search for answer on the question: whether Macedonian Orthodox Church and Islamic religious community calm down or sharpen ethnic conflicts and problems. Since they are separated from the state, it is clear that they can not carry the main guilt for inter-ethnic problems in Republic of Macedonia. State and political parties in it are guilty for this. However, we can answer this question if we make detail analyses of the statements, declared by religious leaders in the last ten to fifteen years. Analyzes would show that their speeches differ from the religious teachings about peace and about conflicts. Anyway, these religious organizations can't be accused to be directly guilty for ethnic conflicts and problems, because they are not located on the main social road. They don't have influence on public life and public opinion as much as state and politics elite which do it through the means for mass communication. If it depends on Macedonian Orthodox Church and Islamic religious community, there wouldn't be

ethnic conflicts in Republic of Macedonia. They are present because it's not up to them. But, 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. It gives impression that religious organizations in Republic of Macedonia do not have enough power to speak in their own religious language, but in certain social-political moment speak in collective language of its environment, where ethnocentrism becomes ideology of modern time.

Therefore, the issue of involving religious education as optional subject in primary and secondary schools, is actual again. It was introduced in the schools, but year ago it was stopped. Even more, because in the system of education of Republic of Macedonia things are not established as they should be. Our education is established in a way which margins students' real values. There is crises of values in students' heads. They identify themselves more with army and state leaders and less with saints or philosophers. Main characteristic of history study books is the spirit of war and not the spirit of tolerance and understanding. Books are full of war and political history, while there is less about the history of civilizations' culture and religion.

Main principle of modern education should be the words of St. John Goldenmouth who said that it is not possible to wash own dirtiness with somebody else's dirtiness.

Each system of education is predicted to destruction if it doesn't incorporate conscience and the habit to dialogue, patience and understanding. We should teach our children about the advantages and values which arise from cultural difference. That education is in the spirit of treasure of the differences and complete

acquiring of “the other”, next to us. Dialogue and tolerance are leading idea in modern multiethnic social systems.

However, education in the frames of highest values and moral norms is not enough. If we take as a sample the moral rule “Love your neighbour as yourself”, we can say that this principle worth only if it suits humans’ practical activity. If it is opposite of human practical experience, that moral principle doesn’t worth. Inside human being doesn’t live only God, but also Satan. Therefor each person has its dark and bright side. Therefore, history of Orthodox Christianity and Islam in Macedonia do not have only bright sides, but also, at least, moments of crises. At the end, I would finish with two brilliant thoughts. The first one is by Napoleon for whom it was not enough to quarrel with all of the people that surrounded him in whole France, and he must have quarrel with all world nations. So, he said: I do not love anything and anybody, I am just a complete political being. Second thought is by Vuk Karadzic who describes a conversation between two persons: A: Who did extract your eye? B: My brother. A: That’s why it’s extracted that deeply.

It is difficult to predict how the relations, about we discussed in this text, will develop. That’s why the title of my paper has interrogative character. Of course, in case certain practical researches are done in the frames of this project, most of the questions from this text would be answered. Certainly, aspects of religious tolerance in Republic of Macedonia have special properties which differ from ones, present in the countries that surrounds us. Of course, there are also similarities. Answers on this issues will be given by the future researches.

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