

RELEVANCE OF RELIGION IN THE REGION**Qani Nesimi¹**¹ *Faculty of Philosophy, University of Tetova***Abstract**

Religion exists throughout the history of human civilization. Religious aspects have existed in all socio-economic forms of human societies, for which exist many historical evidence and oral traditions, starting from the times of Mesopotamia, Egyptian Pharaohs, Palestine-Israel, Ancient Greece, Middle Ages and up to nowadays. Throughout history, religion has been modified the most in some religious traditions under the influence of usual practice of certain geographical toponyms, but also the continuity of time in which it reached new rules of life. Throughout history religion, not rarely has been the main criterion of the value system of many civilizations. Often times it was the basic criteria of political, economic and moral values. In the region in which we live and work there are religions, cultures and different ethnicities. A historical development of the peoples in this region knows of periods when religions were received differently by the society. In certain periods, religion has been more strongly expressed and represented in periods of societies. There have been numerous changes of different religions and different religious educations. Religion has a particular importance in the creation of the Albanian identity, also.

Keywords: *religion, society, Albanians*

“Verily, We shall send down to you a weighty Word”
(Quran, Surah Al-Muzzammil, Ayat 5)

I Thank the Almighty God that enabled here in the Balkans to be present the world powers, especially the US, because if it were not for them, today, at the University of Tetova, we could be hardly able to meet.

Dear participants,

The Balkans is an arena full of colors and languages of different religions, a global geographical part, in one hand, although it's a piece of land that (geographically) falls in Europe, it is not considered really European. On the other hand - although it is considered to be an eastern part, yet it is not an Asian land. The Balkans is a world in itself. It cannot be imagined without some languages - religions, cultures etc. All these have played their role in this region, establishing the identity of this region, regardless of its positive or negative role. Without Islam, Christianity, or Catholicism and Orthodoxy, without Judaism, and without paganism and dualism (Manichaeism) definition of the Balkans would be incomplete.

Religion, besides its potential for positive effect, has as much potential for negative effect. It can do well to man, and it can also do even worse. It can make peace in one country, it can also cause war. The Balkan wars between Serbs and Bosnians, Serbs and Albanians, Albanians and Macedonians, Serbs and Croats, Greeks and Albanians, it can be both of national dimensions, and of religious dimensions, whether be it direct or indirect, motivating the war, or supporting it. All this, in my opinion, depends on the use of religion, and the manner of its treatment. So, he who believes and practices the religion depends on how he uses it. But he who shall give or take a religious decision depends on what circumstances and with what conviction did it, or how serious is he in his position.

In essence religion is a concept developed within the framework of divine revelation and prophetic transmission. The constitutive Islamic tradition, and also of the other heavenly religions, calls the religion extraordinary divine gift, beneficent and freedom giver. The religion is a divine system which enables the reasonable people to direct their feelings and do good deeds.

Having represented the foundation of meaningful human life and society, religion is highly functional in social and psychological aspects of life. Therefore there appears a phenomenon which cannot be neglected. History, in every era, speaks of close relationship between religion, man and society. The phenomenon of religion has existed in every human society and has significantly influenced the formation and change of mental and social systems. Therefore, the claim that positive development of science would avoid the need for traditional religions and that people will marginalize the idea of religion proved to be unfounded and unrealistic. A similar situation is being experienced with the globalization and challenges that humanity is experiencing.

The period in which we are, is an arena of huge human "progress and development", which brings with it fundamental changes in thinking and conceiving of phenomena. Especially traditional developing societies, as observers of scientific and technological development, industrialization, urban life, new educational processes and huge development of contact tools between people, are experiencing a psychosis and a confused tremor and unconsciously take different forms of behavior, which essentially represent servitude and certainly not a partnership.

All this mess also affected religion as the epicenter of man's social and psychological life. Religion, as an important factor in social change, through faith and ethical values is likely to affect society's efficiency and peace, but on the other hand it can also slow the social change and development as well as create dynamics of clashes. Because of this, it's very important for religion to spread in a right way and as a whole which will be embraced by man and society realistically, will put a balance and will promote real tracking of changes.

Natural and universal character of religion actualizes the transcendence of its source, because He who created man knows best the nature of the subject to whom religion is dedicated. As a result, religion that will be in balance with the nature of human beings must also have the immanent or intra-historical realistic dimension, which would be of man's age.

As a result, the US is a model for the world in achieving democracy, a model which should be followed by the whole world and especially by the Balkans, i.e. the people who live in it. This is seen in everyday life, in education (with mixed schools, such as at Stanford Seminary), politics

(in presidential elections a senator with the Islamic dress was elected) etc. So this place is free, in other words it regularly fights the complexes present in society. In this context I would mention some examples about the US role in the preservation of religious and social values in the Balkans.

I will mention a very important person for the US, namely one of the founders and the 3rd US President, Thomas Jefferson, who among other things was dealing with the Noble Quran, the Muslim holy book. In the library we can find the book titled "The Qur'an" by Thomas Jefferson. In this regard, Professor Denise A. Sellberg has done research in this regard and has published her book titled "Thomas Jefferson's QUR'AN – Islam and the Founders". The author in this work analyzes and discusses Jefferson's thoughts, which inter alia states that neither pagan, Mohammedan (Muslim) nor the Jew, not even the atheist cannot be excluded from civil rights in society, from participating in government policy or because of their religion.

Also, the Institute for Training and Development (ITD), from March 7 until March 27, by enabling a group of 15 persons from Macedonia and Kosovo to travel to the US and make cultural exchanges and various experiences, carried out one of the projects of the US State Department titled Faith and Community: A Dialogue with Eastern Europe.

Personally I would like to mention two important things that have left a great impression on me in this training.

The first was the lack of complexity in people, even in the biggest and the highest institutions such as universities, for someone who is of different ethnicity, race or religion. I think that we who live, especially in the Balkan Peninsula, mostly need to eradicate that feeling, which is very emphasized, the excommunication of others from our environment because they are not like us, they doesn't think like we do, they doesn't believe like we do, etc.

And the second was the state's secular system, which was a state separated from the church, but the state itself was "religious", and nowhere I could see or at least hear about any decision that was anti-religious. The President of the American secular state takes the oath on the holy book, while the US dollar contains religious words. The same can be seen in the words, conversations, election debates of candidates for US president. So, I would agree with the idea of Pope Benedict XVI, who in his visit to the United States (April, 2008), among others, said that Europe should take for its model the American secular system.

Also, another activity from the US, was the American experience brought by the observed Imam Yahya Hendi (founder and president of "Clergy Beyond Borders", non-profit association which is committed to the establishment of interreligious dialogue and cooperation), who on March 8, 2015, Sunday, at 10:00 at the Painted Mosque in Tetova, where the Imam ended his lecture by providing relevant and useful information for Muslims in the United States, their freedom and religious guarantees, organization and functioning of the excellent cooperation and relations with all other communities of American society.

We should also mention the role of American Embassy here in Skopje in solving the crisis at the Seat of Islamic Religious Community in Skopje, during the putsch on IRC on May 4, 2015, which was aimed at destroying the Islamic Religious Community in RM, which was also supported and planned by the government of Macedonia. This evil was stopped by the US Embassy, namely by Mr. Bailey, the American ambassador in Skopje.

Meanwhile, Albanians, as an important factor for peace in the Balkans are holders of two great universal religions, Islam and Christianity. Many details of the material and spiritual culture of the Albanian people prove that religious affiliation (Catholic, Orthodox and Islamic) makes their national identity richer and more compound. But there is no doubt that the bi-religious affiliation also has its negative side, which makes Albanian national identity vulnerable, if any of these religions would be favored by political and state institutions.

Another moment that negatively affects and contributes to the destruction of religious and national harmony is the highlight and accentuation of religious feelings. For this reason, the Albanian renaissance intellectuals will make an intellectual battle to reduce the highlighted awareness at the level of the natural religious consciousness. Anti-clericalism of revivalists does not contain anti-religious or irreligious attitude, because the majority of them were religious and believers, regardless of their level of religious concentration.

In fact, their opposition was concentrated against a highlighted religious conscious, which impedes the development and consolidation of national consciousness, exercising disintegrating influence in the process of national integration and spiritual unity of Albanian people. Neither the maxim of Pashko Vasa that "the religion of Albanians is Albaniansm" should not be understood as an anti-religious or irreligious opinion, but it should be understood within time and semantic boundaries of the age he lived, and always bearing in mind the question to which this maxim is referred to.

Vasa, taking into account the political and expansionist circumstances that dominated at that time in the Balkan Peninsula, doesn't expresses an anti-pietism or infidelity. But here he wishes to express the feeling of non-divisions and non-clashing, which is very evident in the previous lines the aforementioned author writes. Consequently, before the author came to the maxim "the religion of Albanians is Albanianism" he writes as follows: "... Albanians! You are killing each other/and are scattered all over, "," ... a foreigner comes and occupies your fireplace/makes you feel ashamed you, your wife and your sister; and after you earn money/you forget the given word of your ancestors... " " ... Let's die like men who did before/and not be ashamed in front of the Lord".

If we had to say to two or three words in this connotation for Macedonia, it is a state (November 2016) where there is no religious, linguistic, national or educational justice. Macedonian political elite wanting to form or create a Macedonian state, namely Slavic, has favored the Macedonian Orthodox Church, through which Macedonians are not only favored religiously, but also nationally. Everyone who is an Orthodox is also a Macedonian (though there

are those who are Bulgarians and Serbs). With this are discriminated the Muslims, the majority of whom are Albanians, so Albanians are discriminated both religiously and nationally by the Macedonian government.

This is seen in religious, educational and financial marginalization of Albanians by the Macedonian government who are the second constituent nation after Macedonians in the country: by failing to recognize the Albanian language as an official language, not giving the right portion of the budget that belongs to the Albanian taxpayers, by not funding the education system in proportion to the Macedonians, not returning of the waqf (endowments) to the Islamic Religious Community in Macedonia, whose vast majority is Albanian, and almost all of them are Muslims.

Therefore all social and state authorities in the Balkans and Macedonia should think of religion. This does not mean that everyone must believe. Faith is an individual matter. But to use religion positively, and to be at the service of society, it should be treated seriously, not as something that deal backwards, naive, primitive and uneducated people. This kind of thinking, in my opinion, is the result of a very naive and ignorant approach to religion.

And as a result, it may go out of control, not because religion is something bad, but because religion is something big and it cannot be kept closed. To my opinion, countries of the Balkans should not exploit religion for their political goals, but they should invest equally in this regard. Only in this way the stability in the country is created. On the contrary, even when religious communities remain silent against state injustice it's a danger itself, not to mention the making of any activities in that direction. In this way we also preserve the society from the presence of radical groups who are worrying our society.