

THE INTER-RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE OF THE ALBANIAN MULTI-RELIGIOUS SOCIETY. FACTS AND MISCONCEPTIONS

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Abstract

Every society seems to have some form of religion. This is one of the ways in which societies differ from each other. The division of society into distinct religious groups is characteristic of Albania, with some of the groups larger than others. Continuous foreign interventions and complete isolation for almost fifty years made Albanians preserve their value system nearly unchanged for several centuries until the present day. The basic principle of this rigid social organization, that is, the kinship system, has always been very strong. Their own social and family structure remained almost the same, and characterized by ancient habits and customs. This social system was basically a patriarchal one, although in southern Albania it was more flexible. The Catholic and Moslem Highlanders lived in the same tribal society and their everyday activities were regulated by customary law. Their reaction to the tradition of Albanian culture was not based on religious distinctions, but on the predominant patriotic feeling. This sort of social organization had some strong requirements such as: honor, the pledged word (bessa), faith, and loyalty. These were permanently supported and clearly identified within the Albanian tribes and family.

Regardless of the existence of three different religious groups; Moslems, Orthodox, and Catholics, Albania is a multi-religious society that enjoys inter-religious harmony. Throughout its recorded history, this country has never experienced religious conflicts.

Keywords: Religion, tolerance, coexistence, conflict

Introduction

Religion is considered to be one of the most important parts of many peoples' lives. Its holy mission is to serve as a source of social unity which should bring a harmonious coexistence among people. On the other hand, it is ironic to see how religion divides

societies. When different religious groups are mentioned in a multi-religious society immediately one thinks of religious conflict because of the simple fact that the conflict between these religions, as to who is the holder of the pure truth, is common in such societies. But this theory does not always fit the facts. With respect to such issues, I have been attracted by the case of Albania which can be considered as a challenge to many complex and controversial ideas, which explain the doubtful coexistence of various religious groups in a multi-religious society.

"Albania is one of the most ethnically homogeneous countries in Europe with Albanians in 1989 comprising ninety-eight percent of the population. Prior to World War II, about seventy percent of Albanians were Muslims, twenty percent Eastern Orthodox, and ten percent Roman Catholic. Albania is thus the only predominantly Muslim country in Europe." (Joel Krieger 1993, p. 15).

In choosing to study Albania, the argument I want to make and highlight is devoted to the religious issue: Regardless of the existence of three different religious groups: Moslems, Orthodox, and Catholics, Albania is a multi-religious society that enjoys religious harmony. Throughout its recorded history, this country has never experienced religious conflicts.

This paper has five sections. First, I will briefly outline some sociological assumptions that emphasize my ideas about the role of certain human values and of the Albanian social organization in providing an environment for peaceful coexistence. Second, I will consider the question of national unity and the fight of Albanians to protect their national interests. Here, I will emphasize the negative role of foreign intervention in its attempt to prevent the development of national consciousness among the Albanians and their unification. Next, the paper will attempt to analyze the view of the Albanian state toward religions mainly after the year 1923 up to the Second World War. The issues I will be concerned to explain the separation of state and religion during this period and several discussions on the field of education. Fourth, I will describe religion under communism, how the same maltreatment of all religious groups influenced their cooperation in the fight for the downfall of the communist regime. Lastly, I will put forward some conclusions that which will give a more general and clearer religious picture of the Albanian society, and some current tendencies related to this topic.

Sociological Assumptions

Every society seems to have some form of religion. This is one of the ways in which societies differ from each other. The division of society into distinct religious groups is characteristic of Albania, with some of the groups larger than others. The continuous interaction

within and between these groups is very important. It influences their attitudes toward tradition, history, myths, national culture, and so on. The role of the individual is also very significant. Individuals construct social networks around their various roles. During this process they develop cooperation, relations, agreements, disagreements, solidarity, harmony, unity or conflict. In the case of Albanians there is something which is quite peculiar to their society. Albanian folk culture, values, social relations, and cultural identity cannot be clearly understood outside their social organization.

In order to understand this mechanism it is useful to consider the Albanian social and family structure. In his careful analysis of the Albanian "special" structure of the society strongly based on clans (*fise*), Alexander Lopasic writes: "According to experts in Albania, this is the only tribal system to survive in Europe right to the present century, and it is a good example of a strict patrilineal system, according to which "a man has blood and a woman kin". (in: Tom Winniffrith 1992, p. 89). The word clan (*fis*) constitutes a group of individuals who are linked by the same blood in patrilineal system. It is significant to see how extensively this word was and still is used.

Continuous foreign interventions and complete isolation for almost fifty years made Albanians preserve their value system nearly unchanged for several centuries until the present day. The basic principle of this rigid social organization, that is, the kinship system, has always been very strong. Their own social and family structure remained almost the same, and characterized by ancient habits and customs. This social system was basically a patriarchal one, although in southern Albania it was more flexible. As a consequence, it was very difficult for Albanians to modify the traditional and patriarchal rules of their own life. The Catholic and Moslem Highlanders lived in the same tribal society and their everyday activities were regulated by customary law. Their reaction to the tradition of Albanian culture was not based on religious distinctions, but on the predominant patriotic feeling. Blood ties continued to remain holy and respectable among Catholics, Moslems, and Orthodox. This sort of social organization had some strong requirements such as: honor, the pledged word (*bessa*), faith, and loyalty. These were permanently supported and clearly identified within the Albanian tribes and family. The awareness of being linked by a common ancestor who determined blood ties between each member of the community has developed the idea of unity and harmony. This made sense not only among individuals who had family links, but also among individuals who were united by blood brotherhood. This special social structure characterized by such values disregarded religious differences and affiliation.

The idea of being Albanian helped Albanians confirm their own identity and social position. It also minimized and concealed potential religious conflicts. This relative coexistence has prevented deviant behavior of the different religious groups. Being united and very close to each other because of the rigid social and family structure, Albanians have been in permanent contacts fighting for the same question - to oppose foreign domination. Because of suppression by foreign interventions, the life of Albanians had been often very difficult. Under such circumstances, the life of each individual depended on that of others and, therefore, support and harmony among people was indispensable. This, in turn, developed a sense of security.

It is claimed by many sociologists that a society that has several religious groups tends to develop conflicts and disputes. Moreover, R. Serge Denisoff and Ralph Wahrman (1983) explain that for some sociologists this is true for societies based on kinship groups which are part of the tribes. In this case, it is necessary to have a strong central authority to resolve conflicts. My impression is that there are some other reasons which lead to disagreements and disputes among different religious groups in a certain society. According to holy norms of each religion, the only highest authority is God. If these groups do not consider God as the only authority, but attempt to force their views on one another, this serves then as a possible source of conflicts and disputes among them. The holy mission of all religions should not consider other authorities besides God. "Various religious bodies have attempted to force their views on others by having them incorporated into law." (R.S.Denisoff & Ralph Wahrman 1983, p.219). In this respect, it is probably correct to say that religious groups try to force their opinions upon others, that is, through law, not to create an alternative authority to God, but because they feel that their interpretation of God's will is the only correct one. It is clear that once religions enter the political arena for their own interests or in order to support certain social groups, conflicts among different religious groups become obvious and inevitable. They engage beyond what is to be considered spiritual.

The period up to the beginning of the democratic processes in 1990 was troublesome in many respects for Albanians. It was initially a time of constant protests and strong opposition to the foreign invaders: Roman conquest, Byzantine Empire, the five-century Turkish rule, fascist occupation, and later the catastrophe of the communist regime. Because of this, no radical changes have taken place in the lives of people belonging to certain religious groups. Thus, there was no ground for fundamentalism and fanaticism. They never became powerful forces which could destroy coexistence. Historically, believers of each group had the same "fate" which was always in the hands of the others. In addition, none of these groups had privileges which could serve as a source to start disputes because of differences in treatment. They could only share the

holy teachings of God and their own belief systems. According to Durkheim: "The content of belief systems - the ideas expressed, objects worshipped, ceremonies enacted, and values held sacred - all express the shared fate of believers." (in: Beth B.Hess, Elizabeth W.Markson & Peter J.Stein 1988, p.397). Fortunately, this made religions in Albania not to cause much unrest, but they were considered to be social stabilizer.

By not entering the political domain, religious differences did not contribute to political and social tensions. In this respect, one should maintain that social divisions were indeed more significant than the religious ones. Certainly, there is no simple answer to the question of why there were no religious conflicts in Albania and what people's strongest motives for their own existence were. A more detailed analysis of this fact will be given in the following chapters.

Religions and National Unity

I will focus on the contribution of all religious groups for the protection of national interests. Also, I will point out the negative role of the foreign intervention in order to prevent the development of Albanian national consciousness. There are several confused arguments for finding the national unity a problematic issue. One claim is that a characteristic of the Albanian national movement is the fact that this movement took part under the conditions of the split of the Albanian population into three different religions. Religious beliefs and divisions were considered to be a serious obstacle in the union of the Albanian people and its patriotic movement.

First, much of the writing on this issue is grounded upon an unacceptable logic which does not support this claim. It is true that the Albanian population was divided into three religious groups, but that does not necessarily mean that there existed hatred among them or that they represented different nationalities. Albanians were fully aware of their origin, blood ties, and compactness as a unique nation. Ethnic compactness was sufficient reason for uniting the whole population in the national movement. The religious feeling had never covered the Albanian national consciousness. One of the strongest evidence confirming this is the Prizreni League in 1878. Albanians from all different religions were assembled in order to defend the rights of the Albanian nation. This also shows the arrival of the Albanian nation and its people to political maturity. Furthermore, the Moslem population of the Albanians was mainly concentrated in the region of Kosovo. But, Kosovo towns became the centers of Albanian resistance to Ottoman rule and repression, and no religious sympathy was expressed on the part of the Moslems. Again, this is a clear demonstration of the political emancipation of the Albanian nationality and the solidarity of its people.

Second, I am opposed to the claim that because of the growing threat of Serbs in the North and of Greeks in the South, the Moslems had to fight against them and seek to come to terms with the Turks. In contrast, I will now consider a position taken under such a situation by an Islamic sect known as Bektashism. It is of paramount importance to investigate the connection between religion and national identity which existed within the vision of this sect. By promising some privileges, Turks started to persuade some young Albanians to join the Turkish army in their battles against other countries. This caused much hatred among Albanians who considered such acts as open threats and strong pressure in order to achieve a full and forced Islamisation. As a reaction toward such ways and methods of Islamisation a considerable number of Moslems formed the Dervish sect of the Bektashi which became very widespread among the Albanians. So, for this Moslem sect the Albanian nation and its defense should be the main concern of all Albanians regardless of their religious affiliations. This seems to be the basic problem for Bektashism and its adherents. What is most striking however is the fact that, according to Derek Hall (1994), the leading personalities of this sect tended to be strong Albanian nationalists, and they played an important part in the Albanian national movement mediating among other religious groups, and especially by their contribution to preserving the Albanian language. Both authors Max Demeter Peyfuss (in: D. A. Kerr c1992) and Derek Hall (1994) repeatedly use such words as tolerance, liberal attitude and independent in order to show that this sect represented a more tolerant form of Islam compared to the rigid religious dogmas of the Turks. Observing this situation one comes to the conclusion that although Albania manifested religious divisions of its population, this country did not lack national unity. It is of course possible in the case of Albanians, Tom Winnifrith (1992) would maintain, to blame the foreign occupation both for what happened before and what happened after the independence of the country.

My **third** objection is to the claim that besides being divided by religion, the Albanians faced another serious obstacle: the division of the country into two main linguistic groups, the Ghegs inhabiting northern Albania, whereas the Tosks the South of it. It is true that there is such a kind of linguistic division in Albania. It is also true that the Ghegs had preserved a more rigid social structure than the Tosks and that they were less developed, but this distinction was not so deep so that one can observe two different cultures. This difference came as a result of the Greek influence in the South and the Ottoman interferences. At a closer look, it is natural to accept that such slight differences among the regions of Albania are also manifested in almost all countries. Alexander Lopasic approaches the case of Albania from a very realistic perspective: "The traditional values of the Albanians survived in many cases, demonstrating the strong feelings of

cultural identity that exists among one of the oldest social and ethnic groups in Europe." (in: Tom Winnifrith 1992, p. 90).

There is one more factor for consideration which contributes to the predominance of the Albanian national culture. The role of a common language was of great importance. According to many scholars, the Albanian language could survive because of the conflicting claims of Greek, Latin, and Slav and, in this respect, the Albanians were "lucky". The archeological evidence proves this fact as well. Stavro Skendi (1967) would further explain that the role of common language gave Albanians the sense of belonging to one and the same nation. Albanians were fully aware that they were distinct from the Turks and the Greeks.

Religions and State

The attainment of Independence in 1912 was considered to be a great victory of Albania after a five-century subjugation of Turkey. A provisional government was set up headed by Ismail Qemali. Nevertheless, though independence was proclaimed, a chaotic situation continued to characterize the Albanian society. In particular, the Catholics were overjoyed with the new Albanian independence. On the other hand, this independence was not well-received by all Moslems, because at the head of the Sublime Porte they had seen the state authority rather than a spiritual one. As a protest against this was the movement organized by some Moslems in order to tumble down Prince Wied (an Austrian) in 1914. This movement, which took the character of a popular uprising, was led by Haxhi Qamili and its aim was to force Prince Wied to leave Albania. Instead, an Ottoman prince would rule the country. Though Wied was not an Albanian prince, he, at least, could draw Albania toward the West. This act proves that, because of fanaticism, some Moslems could manipulate the crowd, and that this movement can be, without hesitation, called a bashibazouks' movement. In spite of that, it should be stressed that it is precisely at this time that many Moslem intellectuals and clerics took part in all progressive movements. Their greatest merit lies in the fact that they gave a great contribution in overcoming all political crises during the establishment and consolidation of the Albanian state. In the proclamation of the Independence, on the side of Ismail Qemali (a Moslem) were Luigj Gurakuqi, Nikolle Kacorri, and many others from all religions.

Within the range of our present purpose, it is necessary to estimate the relations of state and religion especially after the year 1920. By considering such relations of a special importance, Luigj Gurakuqi (an Albanian prominent intellectual) has provided us with accessible axioms, which should be taken into account while treating this problem. They are the outcome of his cultural and liberal formation as well as his profound knowledge of the cultural and religious characteristics of the Albanian people. Gurakuqi was among those intellectuals who stood away

from the narrow religious fanaticism and regionalist views. His sole aim was to try to bring together people from all religious sides. Bearing in mind the complexity of the Albanian society, it was not so easy for an intellectual to be acceptable in all religious communities. Gurakuqi was one of those intellectuals who became desirable, because he had clear, far-sighted cultural and political visions and, above all, national ones. In the periodical "The Star of Light" (Hylli i Drites 1944/5), it is pointed out that Luigj Gurakuqi had strongly supported the idea that all religions should be honored. He had openly declared such views on all religions when he participated in the Congress of Durres in the meeting for the formation of the government led by Turhan Pasha. Also, he had added that the question of the freedom and respect of all religions should be solved after the formula: "Free religions in a free state", and by rejecting, at the same time, the use of such words as: Moslem, Catholic, Gheg, or Tosk. Gurakuqi insisted that the Albanian state should be guided by such principles in dealing with the religious question. People should respect each other irrespective of their religions, while the state should, by no means, agitate different believers. The implementation of such principles is secured, according to Luigj Gurakuqi (in: Ora e Maleve 1923/32), by making just laws that guarantee religious freedom and respect, and by not allowing the state to meddle in believers' affairs. Gurakuqi could predict that the interference of the government is unfair and sometimes dangerous, especially in Albania, which is a typical multi-religious society. In my view, Gurakuqi was right to emphasize this fact, because once the state interferes it is possible for it to take sides which cause then grudges, confusions, and dangers. It is due to such reasons that Gurakuqi has always demanded that ministers and clerics of each religion, be it small or big, should be Albanian citizens by their origin, speak Albanian language, and enjoy all civil and political rights. He insisted to sanction them in the Albanian constitution, which defined the right for religious practices. Obviously, this is another attempt to institutionalize the mediating process of ideas, opinions, and human actions among representatives of different religious groups.

A general ground for future success was the religious policy of Ahmet Zogu-the first king of Albania between 1923 and 1939. Leaving aside Zog's emotions and psychology about religion in general, it is my opinion that in religious affairs Zog's policy aimed at strengthening the unity of various religious groups. Being aware of the peculiarities of the Albanian society, the attitude of Zog toward religions was nationalistic. Having an intimate knowledge of his people, Zog wanted to keep them together. This would be then very important for the strengthening and preservation of his power. Impartiality seemed to characterize his domestic policy.

Though Zog was a Moslem, he decided to separate state and church and recognized no official religion in the country. This separation was absolute, and his aim was to put all religions

under control. But, it should be mentioned that the religious freedom existed for all religious groups. Although Zog was not that indifferent toward religion, he was in favor of a strong state and its dominant role over religions. After the year 1924 Zog encouraged the efforts of the Albanian Orthodox Church to achieve its independence, that is, the autocephalous status. In spite of the constant sabotage of the Greek government, Zog's attempts helped the hierarchy of the Albanian Orthodox Church win their independence.

Besides, during the rule of King Zog the educational system in Albania was nationalized. In relation to this field, Zog was in search of an educational system that would better suit for Albania. In order to establish educational facilities in Albania Zog, as Bernard Jurgen Fischer (1984) comments, decided to undertake an ambitious program that aimed at introducing a network of primary schools throughout the country. He also started to reform the system of selecting students to study abroad. In addition, Jesuits and Franciscans could run a number of schools especially in the northern part of Albania.

According to the historical documents of the time, some of Zog's cabinets included a majority of Christians. In my opinion, these measures are a credible act undertaken by Zog, which served as a source of unity among the ordinary strata of the population. On the other hand, though Zog was a Moslem his acts show that he was not so enthusiastic for a particular religion. In spite of his political goals, Zog wanted to reach a more balanced power among different religions by not allowing privileges on the side of any particular religious group. In the field of education his choices seemed to have been very reasonable, though he was not the only one who propagated the establishment of a national school.

It is important to mention that in the Catholic schools, which were run by the Catholic clergy, children of all religious groups were educated. While in the state laic schools, intellectuals who had graduated from the Western universities, were teaching various subjects for both Moslem and Christian children. So, everything was considered to be as common property. To be realistic, there was ground on both sides for grudges to exist, but they were invisible and internal. They stemmed from remnants of fanaticism, which was not completely wiped out. Although it could be ascertained that kind of uneven development existed among cities in Albania at that time, one can speak of the predominance of non-fanaticism among believers. Common schools were the best example of the existence of social harmony.

In general, the feeling of patriotism did not eliminate the feeling of the religious faith. On the contrary, this feeling helped people from all religious sides understand better that the Almighty God who is the God of peace teaches them to follow the path of peace and tolerance.

Unfortunately, once the communists came to power they could identify themselves with patriots by taking also the leading role in this national liberation war. Many people became disillusioned, while non-Communist Albanians who joined the Partisan movement found themselves under very strict orders to act. The Partisan movement, which was a reaction to the Italian and German occupations, gradually took on a communist character. Soon, the victory became bitter, since Communists betrayed the ideals and dreams of the Albanian population.

Religions under Communism

The end of the Second World War found Albania subjected to the communist dictatorship led by Enver Hoxha after the Yugoslav and Soviet model. Once they seized power, the Communists decided to attack all religious institutions. The first to suffer from this subjugation were the clerics, mainly the progressive and the nationalist elements.

The first measures taken by communists in order to weaken the activity of the clergy were the total closure of periodicals, magazines and other publications, as well as schools which were run by the clergy itself. This was followed by the unprecedented repression of clerics with severe punishment including torture and executions. Clerics were mostly sentenced by manipulating trials or without taking them to court at all. In cases where the authorities were unable to take them to trial where doctrines could be confronted, communists invented accusations that were totally false such as: agents, saboteurs, ex-collaborators with fascists, and so on. The closure of periodicals, the arrest and punishment of many eminent clerics who enjoyed a great reputation among the people, alongside the execution of many innocent intellectuals caused a great hatred of the conscientious strata of the population against the communists, the system and, of course, against some special individuals who were considered as criminals. But, one thing should be mentioned here. Even if the communists had allowed the publication of periodicals, the clerics would certainly have not engaged in such activity, because of the terrible communist censorship that existed in Albania. Clerics were aware that they could not write whatever they wanted and, moreover, they could not publish hymns or praise the communist system, which had declared a death sentence on God. By shooting eminent clerics and intellectuals as well as with the imprisonment of the most active and capable part of this group, and by excessively restricting the possibilities for social activity of each individual or group of individuals, the communists aimed at officially eradicating the belief in God. Certainly, this process required time, and a historically appropriate moment was needed. It was undertaken in the period of the Cold War and only at the moment that self-isolation had taken its perfect form.

In February 1967 Enver Hoxha and communists began their severe campaign against all religious practices and institutions. All places of worship, mosques, and churches were closed. Albania became the first atheist state in the world, and the setting up of the Atheist Museum was considered a symbol of the attempts of the people to "voluntarily" abolish religious practices. According to Tom Winnifrith (1992), in the field of religion Enver Hoxha went further than his colleagues in other countries of Central and Eastern Europe. In other words, Enver Hoxha and the Albanian communists were totally against religion. "The regime justified this stance on the ground that the Catholic clergy was "the most organized and most active" religious body in the country and moreover was allied, through its link to the Vatican, with the "imperialist and aggressive West." (Peter R. Prifti 1978, p. 152).

The falsity of communists' accusations against clergy are also described by Derek Hall (1994) when stating that it was argued by the regime that religions in Albania were a divisive force which also represented the interests of Albania's enemies such as: Italy, Serbia, Greece, and Turkey. In particular, the Catholic Church was attacked as an instrument in the hands of the Vatican. Again, Peter R. Prifti would write: "In this attack, the Stalinist leaders in Tirana were apparently helped by a number of circumstances, more or less peculiar to Albania, including the historical friction between religion and Albanian nationalism, a largely uneducated clergy, the identification of religion with the backwardness of the country, and the fact that Albanians had never been a deeply religious person." (Peter R. Prifti 1978, p. 165). In my opinion, the so-called peculiar circumstances analyzed by Peter R. Prifti with reference to religion in Albania lack solid ground. Most of the Albanian clergy were educated in the West and Turkey, and the backwardness of the country had nothing to do with the positive or negative role played by religions. Besides, it would be incorrect to assume that the Albanian people were not deeply religious, because entering the spiritual world of a certain person is a difficult task. These circumstances described by Peter R. Prifti seem to be invented rather than true. The same circumstances were often cited by the communists in order to justify their ban of religious propaganda and institutions. By eradicating religious faiths, the spiritual world of the people was completely destroyed and, therefore, people thought of only the basics of life, that is, their day-to-day survival needs. In so doing, Communists deliberately wanted to prevent people from thinking of other necessities in their lives.

Nevertheless, the total closure of religious institutions in Albania was not accompanied by a fierce reaction from any international bodies such as the United Nations. The paradox is that though Albania was a member, it had violated the principles of the United Nations sanctioned in its Charters since 1948. This shows that big states and politicians took no interest in small

nations. It is not justifiable to say that Europe at that time had more serious problems to solve or prevent. It was only the Vatican that protested against the abolition of religion in Albania. But, when the Vatican raised its voice in defense of religions in the country, a new wave of repression began against clerics and believers. Although in Albania there was no foreign literature that could clarify these freedoms, the country, indeed, inherited a rich tradition of ideas and thoughts, which found expression in the periodicals published before the Second World War. The colossal contribution of many famous religious and non-religious figures was still alive. People based their optimism and hopes on the evidence of religion, which was testified by clerics and different believers who did not accept the denial of God even when confronted with death.

By abolishing the three religions, Enver Hoxha set the conditions for very close relations among people representing different religious groups. This is precisely one of the reasons that in a historically appropriate moment, as in 1990, they could create a powerful and unique force for the downfall of communism. Cooperation among people took such great proportions that could, without hesitation, be considered as brotherly unity and a real ecumenism. This ecumenism was the best example of people's harmony. The fact that in 1989 the religious institutions were the first to be opened (before other institutions such as: political institutions, different associations, and so on), clearly shows how important the role of religious faith was and the social harmony that existed among all religious groups during the period of communist rule.

In fact, the communist regime had propagated, as its great achievements, some of the social phenomena of Albanian life. Mixed marriages, that is, marriages between people of different religions, the return to some of the ancient traditions allegedly harmed by religious faiths, and names given to children such as: Ilir, Teuta, Agron, Greta, Arian, and so on, are some of these "achievements". "Nationally, parents were discouraged from giving their children names which held any religious connotation; and official lists of Illyrian and other appropriate names were published." (Derek Hall 1994, p. 45). The communist system became proud of freeing people and their mentality and culture from religious prejudices, and pretended to be the promoter of a modern art and culture called by them the art and culture of socialist realism. Besides this, it praised the creation of a system where citizens feel equal and, while progressing, the existing differences would be completely wiped out. If you make all people poor it is quite easy to say that they are all equal. Also, to force people to express that they were all equal, according to the official opinion of that time, was quite easy. Meanwhile, the privileges for one category, the ruling class, indicated totally the opposite.

During the period of the communist system in Central and Eastern Europe the martyrdom of believers was many times greater than the period of the first three centuries of the Christian era. This martyrdom obviously influenced political life in resisting in the face of torture, and by prophesying in the manipulated trials. This happened to many priests who openly declared not only the end of communism, but also its weakness. Priests made it public that, even banned, religious faith is stronger than communist dogmas. This was the reason why many priests who were taken to trial did not fear death. Of course, in expressing this they did not mean that they liked death, because every Christian believes in eternal life, but this clearly showed that their belief in God was so powerful even under such brutal persecution. So, the resistance in this aspect was much greater than the other aspects foreseen by the communist penal code for politics and propaganda against the state. As a result, it should be said that religious evidence had such a strong influence in the political thinking of the citizens for two reasons: **first**, the clerics of different religions never denied God, and very often their trials turned to open accusations against the communist system. In other trials, a number of intellectuals and ordinary citizens denied their ideals and principles by lacking the courage to resist. But, such behavior is understandable since it was in order to save their families from persecution or to save themselves from severer punishments; **second**, in order to hope for the triumph of liberty people need sparks, that is, something which "moves". In this context, the greatest light was that evident. Through such evidence, it was foreseen that communism as a system would not last long, and a new generation was being educated which would take it upon itself to pull down communism and its structures.

Albanians have not had a long history as an independent state, and because of this reason it was difficult for them to think that they would find a generation which could take it upon itself to face up to the troubles of their country. It was also difficult to think that freedom could be gained without the intervention of a foreign power which would force the Tirana communist government to resign, and would then allow political pluralism in Albania. The progressive ideas and thoughts of clerics who had also put forward to the platform for the establishment of an Albanian state, would significantly help the predomination of the idea that Albanians were masters of their own destiny, and that the setting up of a modern state would be difficult, but attainable.

At present, now that the works of clerics of the three religions are gradually being discovered (and this is only the beginning), it is becoming clear how important their role was. After the year 1990, freedom of religion was totally restored. All religious communities practice their own beliefs in exemplary harmony and tolerance according to the old traditions of the

country. The events which took place in Albania after 1990 run counter to the previous explanations given by many political scientists that the process of democratization brought about the revival of old ethnic and religious conflicts, because, as Renee De Nevers (1993) maintains, the democratization provides a good opportunity to expand the political participation of different groups. It is also true that during the communist period stability in multiethnic or multireligious countries was maintained by coercion. Algis Prazauskas (1991) is extremely influential in promoting this idea adding that coercion for communist regimes implied the elimination of the possibility for the political mobilization of different groups. In fact, the transition from authoritarian regimes to democracy was accompanied by a sharp increase in ethnic or religious movements. The case of former Yugoslavia, the republics of Central Asia, and other parts of the former Soviet Union prove this.

In contrast, in Albania the process of democratization brought different religious groups closer than ever. The factors I have tried to explain in the previous chapters are the best evidence of the harmonious coexistence among believers. This inter-religious harmony did not start recently, nor was it imposed by authorities for any reason or interest. It is a natural continuation of the historical coexistence, which dates back to the beginning of the Ottoman conquest. This explains why the process of democratization in Albania, unlike many Eastern and Central European countries, did not bring about the revival of religious or historical hatreds, or even any trace of separatist ideas by any of religious groups or between Ghegs and Tosks. Slight differences that existed among them did not weaken their strong conviction in their Albanian identity. After the restoration of all religious beliefs in Albania, it is very important to maintain and further promote the harmonious coexistence among all believers, which contributes to the social stability of the country and the spiritual serenity of its people.

One of the aims of the concluding chapter is to consider this spiritual serenity. Among other objectives, my aim is to bring the reader from the historical tour of religion in Albania to such spiritual serenity.

Conclusion

The final part of this paper restates the central argument that Albania is a multi-religious society with relative religious harmony and peaceful coexistence. I will represent different, although related, arguments supporting this claim.

The factors summarized below will perhaps be in less detail, the intention being to create a clear overall picture of the whole topic. First, I will consider the necessity for spiritual serenity as one of the holy aims of Albania's different religions propagated by many different clerics. Because religion has torn apart so many other nations and states, one has to take into

account the role of clerics in praising the necessity for spiritual serenity among citizens. Second, I will try to advance some of my ideas about the current situation of Albania's religious groups.

Religious belief has always been a spiritual need of many people. Human soul needs religious belief in order to realize its potential. In a given society one may find many characterized by common aims and interests. To reach a harmonious coexistence these people should be guided by moral principles, which find their expression in moral law. It is necessary for human society to be subjected to moral law which, in turn, enables people to differentiate what is good or bad, just or unjust, moral or immoral, and so on. This moral law that becomes part of many peoples' lives is a religious belief. Religious belief is, according to Hafiz Ali Kraja (1983), the pillar of the order of mankind that supports social life and encourages a love between believers. It also helps many people get rid of injustice, jealousy, and malice. In this context, it is religion that serves as a spiritual and moral discipline of different believers, and characterizes people's lives and activities. Believers have their own religious principles, and respect for the various religions help them develop and promote the moral virtue. This moral virtue teaches believers how to avoid hatreds, hostilities, evil, and so on, and becomes a premise of reaching a general harmonious environment. By enjoying this harmonious life, Moslems, Orthodox, and Catholics can ensure national love toward each other. National love contributes to the preservation of the independence of each religion and promotes spiritual serenity. This spiritual serenity is one of the major aims of our modern world, which is quite often destroyed by wars, ethnic conflicts, and religious turbulence. It is of course natural, as Hafiz Ali Kraja (1983) writes that all these phenomena have their own historical causes, which disrupt the peaceful coexistence of people. This is likely to become more obvious in multi-religious societies, which tend to be unstable.

Were there such historical causes that threatened the peaceful coexistence of its people in the case of Albanian multi-religious society? What were the factors that prevented religious conflicts in such a typical multi-religious society? Let us turn back to facts as a possible basis for argument.

Michael E. Martin (1992) shows his ability to describe the complexity of Albanian history when he states: "It is characteristic of Albanian history that it is part of other people's history." (in: Tom Winnifrith 1992, p. 70). This refers to the historical claims of outsiders on Albania, which date back to the early history of its people. Albania has spent so much time under foreign domination, while its people have always been left at the mercy of Great Powers. Nevertheless, Albanians succeeded in preserving their identity and winning their

independence. Fortunately, as Derek Hall (1994) explains, the national identity of Albanians has tended to coincide with origin, race, and language, rather than with religion. Here it is relevant to note the opinion of Roberto Morozzo Della Rocca (1994) that religions allowed Albanians to preserve their national identity. All religions were devoted to the fate of their nation. Albanianhood and patriotism stood above religions, and they remained the only protagonists of Albanian life. Also, according to Roberto Morozzo Della Rocca (1994), the Albanian patriotism stemmed from the denial of the national identity by foreigners. Constant foreign threats developed a sense of national pride and feeling. Foreign interference endangered the existence of the Albanian state and tried to oppress the national aspirations of its people.

It is claimed that religious distinctions in Albania have obstructed the process of unification and attempts at independence. This, to a certain extent, can be accepted, but only when the foreign influence is considered. In Albania religion has never been a criterion for dividing people. One cannot find evidence that religious beliefs have urged the Albanians to fight against each other. If there have been differences in status between Moslems and Christians (as we have seen), this came as a result of Turkish conquest and the self-interested actions of foreign powers. It became clear to all Albanians that the process of conversion was not simply a phenomenon without consequences, but it was a mass conversion. The masses had to accept this conversion in order to survive and gain something materially, while aristocrats either wanted to advance their career, or preserve existing privileges. Mostly, peasants could be easily persuaded by false promises and "tricks" of the Turks. It is hard to say that many people voluntarily embraced Islam. Conversion was more a forced process rather than a conviction of ordinary people.

In the course of events, obstruction or oppression was used against Catholics, whereas Ottoman influence proved in general to be a serious obstacle to progress in Albania. In fact, these factors caused difficulty in unification and brought about some regional differences, but they did not divide people in terms of religion. Could one then, under such circumstances, ascertain internal quarrels or a latent state of conflict at that time? If possible, this happened as a result of fanaticism induced by outsiders, but the fact that such quarrels never became visible shows the maturity and tolerance of believers and their clerics in promoting these values. "In the struggle for Albania's national awakening all three religious elements took part, each in its own way and each according to its strengths and weaknesses." (Stavro Skendi 1967, p. 469).

It is important to reevaluate the attitude of the Bektashism sect in the reconciliation of religion and patriotism in Albania. Roberto Morozzo Della Rocca (1994) is very careful in underlining their contribution. He points out that their tolerance toward other religions, according to their principle of the existence of only one God, confirms their honest attempts to bring all religions together. As it can be seen, the question of coexistence and religious tolerance was not dedicated to one person or to a particular religion. This was related to the tolerant spirit of believers of all religions and their attempts to maintain stability within the country. Tolerance was seen as a moral principle. Clerics knew that religious peace could contribute to the political stability of Albania.

It is also necessary to mention the serious attempts made by Albanian patriots and intellectuals in order to fight for their national ideals and interests. Historical cooperation, which, in my view, did not happen by chance, helped Albanian intellectuals and patriots unite. One could find references for such cooperation in Albanian tradition. In this respect, their national ideal was stronger than their religious feeling. For example, the Congress of Manastir in 1908 supports this claim. The commission set up to compose the Albanian Alphabet consisted of: Mithat Frasheri, chairman of the Congress, Luigj Gurakuqi, vice-chairman, Hile Mosi and N. Vrioni, secretaries, while Gjergj Fishta was chairman of the Commission for composing the Albanian Alphabet. These intellectuals came from each of the religious communities. Although Gjergj Fishta was a cleric, he did not dedicate his main work of religion, but to the national issue. He became famous in the field of linguistics and literature. Alongside Fishta, Ndoc Nikaj made his contribution in literature and history. Also, in the field of linguistics one should mention such personalities as: Rrota, Gazulli, and so on. In addition, Hafiz Ali Ulqinaku, Myrteza Hoxha, Marin Sirdani, Shtjefen Gjecovi, and Frano Bardhi contributed to other fields such as: ethnography and lexicography. In the field of artistic literature, one could not find creations which appeal to religious divisions. By translating religious books such as: The Bible, The Old and The New Testament, and Kurani, one of the objectives of the Albanian intellectuals and clerics was to spread the Albanian language. The same significant role was played also by many periodicals such as: Feja dhe Kombi (Religion and Nation), Kultura Islam (The Islamic Culture), Hylli Drites (The Star of Light), and Zani i Nalte (The Loud Voice).

The implementation of the customs laws, regardless of religious affiliation, has to be considered. Geographically speaking, the Code (Kanun) of Scanderbeg incorporated both Moslem and Catholic areas. The Code of Lek Dukagjin registered the oral traditions of the customary law of the people of northern Albania, Moslems and Catholics. This was an ethical

code of people's behavior which included materials and strict norms of every aspect of life such as: family relations, marriages, property, honor, home, the given word, damages, and many laws about violation as well. This code has always been in force, no matter what historical or political events occurred in the country. All Albanians absorbed the Albanian tribal customs without any distinction. "The teachings of Islam and Christianity, the Sheriat and Church law all yielded to the Canon of Lek which was probably little more than old tribal law with a few new provisions designed to check or reform old usage for enforcing punishment." (Bernard Jurgen Fischer 1984, p. 3). Unlike in other Balkan countries, religion was not identified with rationality. There are no written documents which show that the beliefs of a particular religion were considered to be rational, and the others not. Historically speaking, no criteria for discriminating rational or irrational beliefs emerged, and Christians and Moslems tried to understand each other.

If one turns to the present-day reality, religious diversity and hatred present an alarming spectacle in our modern world. This was quite obvious in the former Yugoslavia, Northern Ireland, Lebanon, the former Soviet Union, and elsewhere. Generally speaking, religion today tries to reinforce ethnic consciences and nationalism.

Since the earliest days of recorded history religion, like nationality, has served as a powerful basis for the rise of certain conflicts and other issues related to them. The disintegration of authoritarian control has been accompanied by the emergence of nationalist, ethnic, and religious conflicts in Europe and other parts of the world. In the Balkans, churches are very often instrumental in preserving the national identity. Therefore, the relationship between ethnicity and religion becomes rather complex. Connor Cruise O'Brien (1988) argues that religion, at least, can attempt to place certain inhibitions on the destructive potential of nationalism, although in all holy books of religions, it is stressed that the real people of God are not only a category of people, but are all those of whatever religion, language, culture, or race. Instead of moderating any sort of territorial or religious nationalism, it seems as if religion today tries to exacerbate it. Having considered this reasonable statement, the country that comes to mind is Greece.

Albanians have very frequently been subject to fierce prejudice, rejection, and discrimination by the Greeks because of religious differences. During the last two decades, Albanian refugees have been forced to change their names and convert to Orthodox in order to secure, at least, a temporary stay in Greece because of their difficult economic conditions. In Greece, it is not tolerated by the Greeks that Moslem Albanians carry their names and religion even when they do ordinary jobs. Nationality and religion are clearly identified with

each other in this country, and the Greek authorities make use of religion as a social, political, and economic basis. The change of religion is a basic right of people, which is practiced in a strictly individual manner, but not by coercion. If a Greek citizen does it voluntarily, he/she will be publicly lynched. Recent pressures of the Greek extremist circles on the Albanians working there make one believe that this process resembles that of forced conversion to Islam undertaken by the Turks. What differs is that the Turks could employ force within the territory of Albania, while the Greeks make the young Albanians change their names and religion outside Albania by taking advantage of the difficult economic situation of the country.

There have also existed some ideas about the possibility to have a massive change of religion among Moslem Albanians. These groundless ideas were initially expressed by some pseudo-intellectuals, allegedly to be closer to Europe. In my view, these are extremist and servile attitudes, which cannot find support by Albanians. To think of a massive religious alteration means to incite inter-religious conflicts, which will lead then to national suicide. Politicians, or clerics should not abuse the equal right of men to enjoy their freedom of religion.

Being a strong solid state with inter-religious traditional culture, it is difficult to accept that Albania will become Bosnia, Lebanon, or Northern Ireland. National identity or identification had a very strong impact on the Albanian population. In this country, there have always been serious attempts to praise religious tolerance among the various religious groups. Starting from the rule of King Zog up to nowadays no political party had or has a specific religious affiliation, and no extremist religious organizations ever existed. In several elections that have taken place in the country people have voted for the candidate's integrity, irrespective of his/her being Moslem or Christian. Clerics in Albania never mobilized certain political circles to intervene on their behalf to establish dominance over a religious group. Being always suppressed by foreigners, Albanians tried to preserve their existence and to secure, at least, a minimum of material life in order to survive. There was no time for them to articulate their religious interests at the cost of each other. The absence of religious interest-groups made it possible to avoid religious conflicts, because no particular social groups were supported. This is also one of the reasons that explain the lack of such religious conflicts during the transition period in Albania.

Although the relations among all religious groups in Albania have traditionally been characterized by harmony and tolerance, one cannot overemphasize that they may never be

passed beyond control. It is my final intention now to express a humane hope for the strengthening of peaceful coexistence among different religious groups in this country.

Being a multi-religious society (but not a multi-national one), Albania presents a rather complex religious picture. All religious groups should develop, protect, and promote tolerance, understanding, and harmonious coexistence. In the inter-religious tolerance rests the mutual desire of solving problems. This requires maturity and determination. Since the Albanian population consists of Moslems and Christians, all religions should be free to exercise their cult and enjoy all legal rights such as: freedom of worship, education, and religious institutions. None of the religions should be official, but believers should be equally treated in order to give them the possibility to practice their religious rites. All religions and their respective believers must break down fanatic traditional religious loyalties and move away from narrow religious identification toward a common identity as citizens of a particular state. It is necessary that none of the religious groups think that they are different and, therefore, they must have a dominant position.

Perpetual attempts should be made by political bodies to have satisfactory representation of all communities at all levels of social, economic, and political life. There should be no religious fear and no blind prejudices about the rule of the Moslems or Christians. Internal solutions of problems should not be based on force but on consensus. Since nationality and not religion led Albanians to the sense of identity, it is of common interest to promote dialogue, compromise, and tolerance. In our civilized world these will bring people of different religions and nationalities together. In this context, the religious equilibrium should be permanently supported in order then to contribute to the equilibrium of civilization. The current social structure of Albanian society, luckily, seems to be a guarantee for the peaceful coexistence between religious groups in the country. Political interests that became predominant after 1990 avoided issues of a religious nature. In addition, the absence of religious parties and special interest groups serves as a basis for maintaining peaceful coexistence in the country.

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