

**Fr Zoran Krstić, PhD**

Orthodox Theology Faculty of the University of Belgrade

UDK: 348

Primljeno: 3.06.2010.

Kratki naučni članak

## CHURCH BETWEEN THE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE CIVIL SECTOR

*This article comes up with an attempt and suggestion to define the most common concepts that are being in use when the relationships between the state and the Church are considered in a contemporary, civilised society, about which content there is misunderstanding and disagreement. The notion private is understood in a different way particularly in the West to the one in the East, due to diverse historical circumstances during the last 50 years. The private as a basis holds freedom which is an elementary presumption of faith.*

**Key Words:** *Individual, Private, Public, That of State, Communal, Free Will*

Our modest contribution to the analysis of a complex and yet current topic regarding the relation between the Church and the state, would be primarily consisted in clarifying and giving suggestions for appointing certain notions that we treat as the basic ones, which usage cannot be avoided, but yet their content offers disagreement, misunderstanding and confusion. Those basic notions would be: individual, private, public, of the state and communal. Suggestion for defying the content of these notions we recognize as a possibility to impeding many misapprehensions.

The above cited notions that we will try to define, have particularly become fashionable in the last decade of the 20 century, which came along with the fall of the communism in the Eastern Europe. From that time on the differences in their interpretation started to emerge which reflects and conveys upon the relationships between the state and the Church in these countries as well as upon the understanding of Church position in society. Religion in these countries, including of course Serbia and Montenegro, re-conquers its importance, incorporates afresh in the public life, demanding its appropriate standing. Some theorists used to name this process as God's reprisal, God's revenge-seeking, deprivatization of faith. And just about the above mentioned notion *private* is there the biggest

misunderstanding and diverse interpretation in the West as well as in the East. In the West (indeed after the centuries of fight and ambiguity) this notion, within religion, means that privacy belongs to and derives from the freedom of every individual and thus cannot be imposed or denied by the government or the state. Being understood in this sense, the *privacy*, namely the freedom of faith, belongs to one of the greatest achievements of modern man in regards to totalitarianism and absolutism known to the medieval countries. Let's remind ourselves of the regulation that *to whom the region belongs, namely territory, theirs is religion*, i.e. religious qualification of the supreme determines religious recognition of the subjected ones, which was just one step ahead (even a positive one at the time) in rising above the religious conflicts that were shacking Europe in the 16 and 17 century. In the East, however, during the communism period, the notion *private* was understood in a different way. Religion being a private matter meant its public and social ban, as to a ban to the public manifestation of religious feelings. The faith could be manifested in strictly and for that purpose absolutely designated rooms, such as church and home. In this case the private was identified with a secret and individual. Solution to this problem could be in following – *the private* is conflicting to the notion *that of state*. In the same way it does not identifies itself with *individual*. Faith, as we have already said, implies freedom, a free decision of every person. Does one need to be reminded that the Creed of the Councils in Nicaea and Constantinople begins with the verb believe in the first form of singular – **I Believe**, I believe and that is an expression of **my** free will. One's faith can be individual, solitary, that only that person, the only one in the world, believes in such a particular way, but normatively that person is collective, as to expressing himself in community with other people. And as such that person further on remains private, i.e. chosen and wished by the very individuals. This is the fact that the state should absolutely revere and thus, by the law, has to supply room and presumptions for making these private initiatives and choosing possible, under the elementary condition by which this singular or collective choosing does not jeopardise the social interest. The characteristic of a modern state, developed, besides, upon multi-centurial religious conflicts as an attempt for their solution is, in a religious sense, neutral, secular state, which does not imply atheism, as neutrality is often understood. Neutral for the state means to have equal relations towards all citizens and their organizations that respect the law. A union, can be called the Emperor Constantine's symphony between the state and the Church is not a feature of a modern state and that is the fact which the Church should value positively for her own good. Thus the faith and the Church are being protected from a self-will and violent interference by the state into the church life. The relationships between the state and the

Church in a modern state are regulated by the law but not by anyone's good or evil will. Check up, even casual, into a political and church history of modern Serbia in the 19 and 20 century illustrates that in those, never to the end determined relationships of a symphony between the state and the Church, the Church always suffered and turned out to be one of the services in the civil administration, subjected to a minor or total control by the state, but never other way round. In this statement we refer to the research of Slobodan Markovic on the problem of clericalism in Serbia. In fact, the Orthodox Church in concern to the state did never hold a power to inflict its will, for it demands a vast economical and political might, which the Church has never possessed nor has she inclined towards it. In that sense, for the sake of the Church freedom, a natural space of the church acting and scope is a *society*, which is again, the notion different to the one *of state*. Society, civil society, is a space outside the state governance and economy in which all the actors are equal where there is not any enforcement and power, for a legitimate force is a characteristic for the state but not the civil sphere. A civil space implies that all the citizens and their organizations in it equally plead for what is important to them.

In this sense, the title we named this article *Church Between the Public and Private Civil Sector* displays itself as a false dilemma which could be used in a final delimitation and explanation of the notions we mentioned.

*The private* – means free, what would be my private decision in which no one, not even the state, can interfere when it comes to the faith and Church membership. The faith remains private even when expressed *individually* or *collectively*. It is also expressed in public, apart when is being persecuted, and thus expressed secretly. So, private and public are not contradictory notions but the public is in contradiction with the secret, and what is private can be public as in the case of faith. As private, faith does not imply enforcement neither negation from the government, but as such expresses itself and acts within the scope of society, on the ground of own formation and within the common framework of the positive legislation.

In conclusion we would like to emphasise yet again how important and crucial for the faith is a free decision, and to express hope that the times of persecution for peoples' opinion and belief, for the reason of their privacy, are well far away behind us, but much the same, for the sake of the same freedom, that the various forms of theocracy or the state religion that intrude faith with the help of government, are also behind us.

## Bibliography:

1. Petru Joanis, *Χριστιανισμός και κοινωνία*, изд. Βανιας, Thessalonica, 2004
2. Kalaidzidis Pantelis, *Ορθοδοξία & Νεωτερικότητα*, ed. Ινδύκτος, Athens, 2007.
3. Марковић Слободан, *Црква и политика*, Српска православна црква у Србији и држава: клерикализација или цезаропапизам.

Markovic Slobodan, Church and politics, The Serbian Orthodox Church in Serbia and the State: Clericalization or Caesaropapism.

[http://www.filg.uj.edu.pl/~wwwip/postjugo/texts\\_display.php?id=117](http://www.filg.uj.edu.pl/~wwwip/postjugo/texts_display.php?id=117),

25.04.2008.

## Зоран Крстић

### Црква између јавног и приватног друштвеног сектора

#### Резиме

*Рад представља покушај и предлој дефинисања појмова који се најчешће користе приликом разматрања односа државе и Цркве и места Цркве у савременом, цивилном друштву, а око чијеј садржаја постоји неразумеваше и неслагање. Посебно се појам приватно различито разумева на Западу и Истоку а услед различитих историјских прилика у последњих 50 година. Приватно као основ има слободу која је и основна претпоставка вере.*

**Кључне речи:** индивидуално, приватно, јавно, државно, друштвено, слободна воља