

Review Paper

UDC: 321.64

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10432608>

Received: 21 September 2023

Accepted: 10 October 2023

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PERSPECTIVES OF POST-CONFLICT THEOLOGY AS A FACTOR OF SECURITY IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

Abstract

Increasingly striking forms of instability, both regional and global, represent a kind of theoretical and practical challenge for Security Studies, but also for national security as a whole. With this paper, the authors wanted to put the contemporary theological thought of Political, and especially Post - conflict theology, at the center of scientific reflection, which in itself is a potential means of understanding new security phenomena, precisely through its own search for sustainable peace, prosperity and the development of regional cooperation between churches and religious communities, public institutions and believers of different identities and religious traditions.

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Key words: *theology, Political theology, Post - conflict theology, security, security studies, peace studies, stability.*

Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.

1. Peter 2, 17.

*O believers! Enter into Islam wholeheartedly and do not follow Satan's footsteps.
Surely he is your sworn enemy.*

Quran 2, 208.

Hatred never ends through hatred. Hatred ends through love. This is an immutable law.

Buddha, The Dhammapada

INTRODUCTION

After wars, economic devastation, political disagreements, national intolerance and conflicts at the level of differences in religious identities that befell the Western Balkans during the last decade of the 20th century, the states that emerged from the break-up of the former Yugoslavia continued on their own paths. Striving to create independent futures, political elites have continuously tried (and often succeeded) to further fragment and atomize the once common society within separate religious-national borders, continuing, more or less, to stigmatize "those Others" who do not belong, once, a seemingly complete set of values and ideas. Putting aside the fact that societies derived from the Yugoslav community form a unique cultural space, as well as that elected representatives of the Western Balkan countries strive for a common future (European Union), many political voices continue to produce noise of disagreement and misunderstanding on political, economic and even religious grounds plan.

On the other hand, the noticeable lack of desire of most representatives of religious communities for mutual dialogue, insufficient promotion of academic

interreligious programs, absence of quality religious media and overemphasized proximity to political elites, left empty space for various para-religious entities to present their own views. This implies mythologizing and retraditionalization of national - historical narratives, radicalization of public space and devaluation of the Other. We do not mean only formal and informal groups associated with centers for the spread of, for example, Islamic extremism, but also various NGO's and political organizations that link their activities to the Serbian Orthodox or Roman Catholic Church without their open approval or participation. If we add two more factors, namely the economic and social vulnerability of certain minority national communities, such as the Roma and a surprisingly large number of websites that promote religious and national intolerance in the languages of the Western Balkans, we conclude that peace can be easily disrupted by various politics and political actors.

With this paper, we wanted to put contemporary Political/Post-conflict theology in the foreground, not only as a field that theologians deal with, but also as a scientific discipline that operates and problematizes issues that we consider socially vital. In this sense, we understand Post-conflict theology in its contextual totality as Practical theology whose cultural significance is necessary for understanding the Western Balkans and its specificity. Also, we understand the basic postulates of Post-conflict Theology as a theoretical platform for researching strategic models of problem identification within Post-conflict societies, with special reference to the problems of human rights, peacebuilding and sustainable development.

TWO PATH'S?

The main task of Post-Conflict Theology is the continuous search for strategies that would ensure the coexistence of all citizens of the Western Balkan countries, as well as the strengthening of inter-confessional cooperation on issues that are relevant to the entire region. However, at the center of various initiatives, projects and aspirations of Post-Conflict Theology is *reconciliation*

between nations whose immediate history consists of war conflicts, religious persecution and various forms of political crises. At this point, we would like to ask a few questions: where are the place and role of religious institutions in the political reality, in which situations can religious communities publicly take political positions and what does history teach us?

We can answer such and similar questions from two angles - historical and political – theological. Historically, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, and especially the Christian Church as an institution, have been politically connoted throughout the centuries of its existence, either through Roman persecution or after the Edict of Milan in 313, not to mention the Crusades and conflicts that resulted from the Protestant Reformation XVI century, all the way to the political views of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the role of the Vatican in creating global policies today (Rahner 1992).¹ Taking into account the mentioned historical experience of the relationship between the church and politics / state, we can conclude: "Christianity is political, but does not have a 'political program.' It is revolutionary, but does not call for a change of political regimes" (Tsonchev 2018: 1). Seemingly contradictory, the position expressed is based on Scripture, because Christ himself proclaims the double message of his own teaching: on the one hand, the idea of legalism is present (Mt. 22, 15 - 22; Mk. 12, 13 - 17; Lk. 20, 20 - 26), but on the other hand, the Kingdom of God is not subject to the laws of this world (Jn. 18:36), that is, the sovereignty of God's rule cannot be limited by any adopted juridical norm or legality in any sense. However, the apostles Paul and Peter operationalize the stated position on the attitude and obligations of believers towards the state, which we most clearly notice in the Epistle to the Romans, as well as in the First Epistle of the Holy Apostle Peter. Saint Paul writes:

"13. Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.

¹ We must keep in mind that the terms *theological* and *political* at the beginning of the history of the Christian Church did not imply a strict distinction, nor were they used in the way that modern man does. For more information see: Punt, 2017.

² Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.

³ For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? Do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same:

⁴ For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.

⁵ Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake.

⁶ For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing.

⁷ Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour" (Rom. 13, 1 - 7).

Saint Peter sublimates the following: "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme" (1. Pet. 2, 13). On the other hand, Christ emphasizes his authentic Divine nature in the New Testament (Jn. 18, 33 - 37) and the apostle's John and Paul apostrophize the devil as the ruler of the earthly world (2. Cor. 4, 4; 1. Jn. 5, 19) concerning social and political relations (Rev. 12, 9). In support of the above, we have in mind the biblical example of Christ's temptation (Mt. 4, 1-11; Mk. 1, 12-13; Lk. 4, 1-13) in which political power takes a central place with which the devil has been at his disposal throughout human history. Further in the same Gospel, Jesus explains that we can find His Kingdom exclusively in us (Lk. 17, 20-21) that is, the Kingdom is not (only) a place or event, but a state of consciousness and heart of the believer who directs all his strength to God and His wisdom. Christ, therefore, expresses the view that the Kingdom of God can in no way be compared to any political platforms, ideologies or organizations, but is a strictly intrinsic aspect of God's uncaused grace that cannot

be adapted or modeled by no means. This leaves an open space for the interpretation and loading of various political and ideological discourses, from Christian anarchism to ultra-right fundamentalism: "As we see in the Gospels, Christ's kingship is inconsistent with traditional structures of power... But Jesus' reign isn't other-worldly. It isn't apolitical. It's just political in a radically different way" (Van Steenwyk 2012: 12). The stated radicalism of *the different* refers to Jesus' reign of love, sacrifice and justice for all, which completely deviates from our understanding and experience of power. Without earthly hierarchy, army or any form of coercion, the Kingdom of God is a state of peace, non-exploitation, coexistence and generosity, which for centuries has resonated with subversiveness, fear of losing socio-economic control and endangerment of former or current political concepts. Viewed from the extreme angles of the left and/or right, Christ's messages can be reduced to criticism of elites and the state, as well as disinterest in any form of earthly reign, with a focus on the disenfranchised and the sick. Both extreme political ideologies find in the state itself and in its potential or actual interventionism (primarily economic) the source of the abolition of the rights and freedoms of individuals, which implies their negative attitude towards political factors with frequent representation of radical rhetoric and anti-systemic actions.

With this short review, we wanted to shed light on the diversity of political-ideological interpretations of the biblical narrative, which ranges from Christian anarcho-socialism, through various Christian-Democrat and conservative parties, to extremist, nationalist and clerical movements whose social goals are often quite unclear. This draws a full circle of misread (rather, we would say tendentiously) read messages of the Gospel which, in the final analysis, seek to justify ideas and activities that have little or nothing to do with Christianity. Also, any political initiative that does not contain the ideas of love for human beings, cooperation, social responsibility and humanity cannot be originally Christian, nor can we look at it from the perspective of Political Theology, whose theoretical premises are contrary to any form of degradation of man, society and culture.

BETWEEN PUBLIC AND POLITICAL THEOLOGY

Along with the socio-political changes that inevitably affected the relationship between the public and the theological (Forrester 2004), since the mid-1970s, Public Theology has gained its theoretical outlines, focusing on the development of dialogue towards the church, academia and society as a whole (Tracy 1981), that is, towards the problem of human rights and freedom (Gustafson, Juviler 1999). It should be emphasized that Public Theology is not doctrinal, hence, it treats equally the problems that arise, both inside and outside the churches. Then, Public Theology is deeply interdisciplinary and transcultural, geared towards multidimensional social reality. It is also inevitably critical - polemical, dialogically oriented towards the opinion and influence of the media. Finally, the aspiration of Public Theology is a practical application in illuminating and resolving social issues that are important for religious communities, state institutions, and individuals (Kim 2011). We see the common features of Public and Political Theology in the constant interest in the common good, humanization and dialogue between different social entities for the sake of peace and the promotion of human and minority rights. Then, Political and Public Theology often present their own social platforms as intermediaries between distant positions, attitudes, or norms. In the end, although Political Theology is more oriented towards state institutions, both theologies exist and encourage the development of the civil sector and its controlling social role.

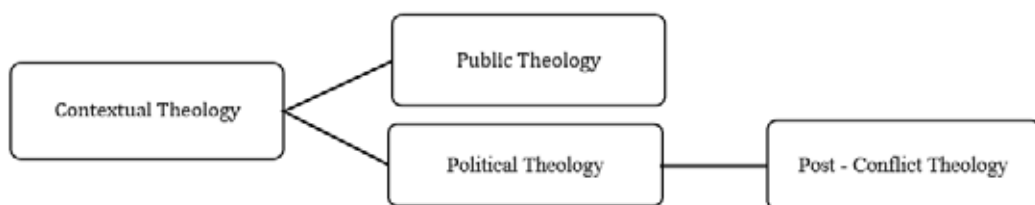


Figure 1: From Contextual to Post-Conflict Theology

Although we can state that Public Theology covers too wide a range of issues and areas of research, we can conclude that Political and Public Theology have

something to contribute to post-conflict societies that strive for sustainable peace and the development of democratic dialogue. We especially consider it important when we have in mind the political, national and religious tensions in the Western Balkans and the future accession to the European Union and its political, economic and social agenda.

SECURITY AS A THEOLOGICAL CHALLENGE

From the outbreak of the Cold War on September 11 to the civil unrest during President Donald Trump's term in the United States and the new cooling of NATO-Russia relations, to mention the most striking episodes, the notion of security in international relations has become crucial. If we add to that the wars in North Africa, the smoldering Middle East crisis, and then the wave of migration and the pandemic caused by the Kovid-19 virus, it is quite clear that the search for security and sustainable peace must be strategic, systemic and regionally / globally coordinated. Taking into account the different theoretical approaches to the problem of security (Williams 2008) and its multidisciplinary scientific background, the focus of our research is, as we have previously emphasized, in the broadest sense, the relationship between faith and peace, and especially the interdependence of state and religious institutions in the current and future implementation of security policies in the Western Balkans. In other words, we are focused on the procedural relationship of *faith - peace / reconciliation - security* through the prism of modern postulates of Political theology.



Figure 2: The relationship between faith, peace and security

We emphasize that the term religion / theology does not only mean personal beliefs and individual members of a particular religious organizations, nor just religious institutions and their official theologies, but a whole set of ideas, activities and initiatives involving all interested participants - from the Government, through the non-governmental sector and individual participations, to the security sector. In that sense, it theologically encompasses the religious / ethical as a certain normativity which implies the ideas of peace and progress, which are not possible without organizational security policy in modern society. By this we mean, not only objective measures of protection, but also the subjective feeling of security or endangerment of citizens (*National Security Strategy, 2019*), that is, the psychological-affective aspect that may be more or less expressed in individuals or groups. In this segment, we believe that Theology can achieve a lot, not only through Political or Public Theology, but also through the activities of Applied Theology, which includes Pastoral Counseling, Christian Pedagogy and humanitarian work, especially with refugees and displaced persons.

In the document *National Security Strategy from 2019*, which is analyzed by the authors Forca and Nikač in their scientific paper *Comparative Analysis of National Security Strategies of the Republic of Serbia*, the risks, challenges and threats to security are listed, as well as national interests in relation to which there is a national and institutional consensus:

<i>Security Challenges, Risks and Threats (SNB 2019)</i>	<i>National interests (SNB 2019)</i>
1. Armed aggression on RS;	1. Preservation of sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity;
2. Separatist aspirations in RS;	2. Preservation of the interior stability and security;
3. Unlawfully unilateral declared independence territories of AP KiM;	3. Preservation of the Serbian people and national minorities and their cultural, religious and historical identity;

<p>4. Armed rebellion;</p> <p>5. Terrorism;</p> <p>6. Proliferation of weapons of mass destruction;</p> <p>7. Ethnic and religious extremism;</p> <p>8. Intelligence activities;</p> <p>9. Organized crime;</p> <p>10. Mass illegal migration;</p> <p>11. Problems of economic development of RS;</p> <p>12. Problems of demographic development in RS;</p> <p>13. Infectious epidemics and pandemics diseases;</p> <p>14. Energy Security in RS;</p> <p>15. Incomplete delimitation process the state of the former SFRJ;</p> <p>16. Consequences of natural disasters and technical-technological accidents;</p> <p>17. High-tech crime and endangering information and communication systems.</p>	<p>4. Preservation of peace and stability in the region and the world;</p> <p>5. European integration and membership in the European Union;</p> <p>6. Economic development and overall prosperity;</p> <p>7. Preservation of the environment and natural resources of the RS.</p>
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Table 1. National security challenges and goals

Authors: Forca; Nikač, 2020.

Having in mind the entire research, the following points are very important for this paper: *religious and ethnic extremism and terrorism, preservation of the Serbian people and national minorities and their cultural, religious and historical identity, as well as preservation of peace and stability in the region and the world.* These threats and interests can also be treated through the

theoretical prism of Political Theology as one that advocates an open society of dialogue and equality and against social extremism, especially when we talk about religiously motivated violence that can result in terrorism and war. Also, in the Western Balkans, and especially in the territory of the Republic of Serbia, minority national communities (Hungarians, Slovaks, Croats and Bosniaks) nurture their cultural and religious identities through non-Orthodox churches and religious communities (Reformed Christian Church, Evangelical Churches, Roman Catholic Church and Islamic communities) which speaks in favor of the view that religion can become a stabilizing factor among different nations and states of the region. Having in mind the multipolarity of the modern world, the number of centers of political power and the changed circumstances under which the global economy is developing (Dragišić, 2021) we believe that religion can be a transformative force that will lead society to a more certain future, while Political Theology is an intellectual-spiritual resource that is, practically, inexhaustible and current.

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA, KOSOVO AND METOHIA, MONTENEGRO

The entire area of the Western Balkans, as a geographical, political and cultural entity, it has been in focus since the early 1990s and bloody conflicts between members of the common state, in which religious narratives played an important role in inciting and maintaining hostilities. The most striking examples are, in the first place, Bosnia and Herzegovina, with its three constituent nations, then Kosovo and Metohia, where the Albanian majority fails to address accumulated problems and shortcomings in the field of human rights and institution building and Montenegro, which has undergone a specific form of change of government. It is certainly not our intention in this paper to recall facts from the recent past that are quite well known, but to shed light on the current situation from a slightly different angle and to provide certain alternatives, encompassing Political Theology at the center of the ideas of common security and future cooperation within the European Union.

If we wanted to list specific security risks, it would certainly be *legal* and *illegal migration*, which includes not only migration caused by wars (Afghanistan, Syria, Libya, Iraq), but also the so-called. “Brain drain” which for a long time, affects all countries of the Western Balkans.² Although economically understandable and legally indisputable, the migration of the citizens of the Western Balkans to countries, mostly Western Europe and the United States, for a longer period of time it slows down the development of home countries, gradually reducing GDP and directly affecting the impoverishment of citizens. In that sense, there is a clear correlation between poverty and the emergence of radical religious and political ideas that find a suitable ground for a part of the population precisely as compensation for the loss of security that existed until then. Political theology, for its part, can provide alternatives in understanding processes that, on a spiritual and ethical level, suppress extremist processes through the promotion of common theological and ethical premises of world religions, and in particular Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

Then, relying on the above, the countries of the Western Balkans affected by migration processes face a double problem: on the one hand, it is an extremism by foreign factors, primarily those individuals and groups who continue to arrive in Europe and who have participated in the conflicts in North Africa, Asia and the Middle East under the flags of various terrorist organizations. On the other hand, the high percentage of refugees from remote areas encourages the presence of domicile extremist groups that use the situation to spread extreme right-wing ideologies that include religious exclusivity, nationalism and clericalism. In other words, any theology / ideology that advocates hatred, separation and conflict is a perversion of the original message of religions and serves exclusively for political purposes. This is especially true of the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as Kosovo and Metohia, where the processes of radicalization have been taking place for the last thirty years.

² Significant scope of migration includes countries outside the Western Balkans, such as Poland, Slovakia and Croatia.

When we speak about preserving the cultural, religious and historical identity of national communities in Serbia, as well as Serbs in the region, the role of Political Theology is quite clear: the promotion of diversity as an inalienable value. In that sense, the advantages of a multicultural society are immeasurable, with the constant reminder that the nations of the former Yugoslavia have lived with each other for centuries, having a common past, it is inevitable that they will share a common future. Religious communities and religions in general can positively contribute to that future only if they actively and dedicatedly tackle their own problems and then responsibly point out everything that is positive, humane and noble in different spiritual traditions.

A special place in this paper is occupied by the situation in Montenegro and the position of the Serbian Orthodox Church in that currently divided country. Namely, after the death of the Metropolitan of Montenegro Amfilohije, the litigation that led to the change of the thirty-year rule of the Democratic Party of Socialists and the enthronement of Metropolitan Ioannicius, the spirits in Montenegro became even more agitated. On the one hand, the non-canonical so-called The Montenegrin Orthodox Church, as a direct political project of the former government, strives to take the place of the Serbian Orthodox Church in the spiritual space of the nation, while on the other hand, the Serbian Orthodox Church, as the religious community with by far the largest number of members, still remains without the rights that all other religious communities have. In the described, in many ways false caused legal, political and ecclesiastical vacuum, different, often extreme, voices are heard, which bring additional confusion to the already existing situation.

Why do we think this is a false dilemma? The answer is simple: because there has been only one, indivisible and recognized Serbian Orthodox Church in Montenegro for centuries, with its archbishops, clergy and believers. Also, the status of her property must not be disputed by any government, nor can this issue be resolved on a daily political level. The path to gaining autocephaly is defined by Church law, and no non-governmental organization or association

of any other type can be qualified as a “church”, at least when we talk about the community of Orthodox churches. What can Political Theology say about this situation? First, it is necessary to maintain the principle of separation of state and church guaranteed by the Constitution of Montenegro. Therefore, state institutions cannot interfere in the election of representatives of religious communities, because that is their autonomous legal right. Secondly, we are witnesses that the interference of state and party structures in the activities of religious communities directly causes destabilization, and then radicalization, which ultimately leads to extremism in a certain area. Third, the violation of peace and security, whatever the goals, are completely contrary to Orthodoxy and its mission in the world.

It is necessary to return to the beginning: to equalize the rights and obligations of all religious organizations by law, that is, to finally define the status of registered churches and religious communities in Montenegro. Start an open and transparent dialogue between the state of Montenegro and the Serbian Orthodox Church regarding future relations that include not only the legal framework, but also democratic principles, tradition and history. Then, include in future talks other churches and religious communities that have existed on Montenegrin soil for centuries.³ In the end, move away from party / ideological goals that are incompatible with Christianity and do everything so that the people of Montenegro, no matter what nation or religion they belong to, have the same status in the future as free believers *and* citizens.

Our opinion is that only in the way of respect and equality of the states of Montenegro (but also Serbia) can they achieve the desired social goals of joining the European Union, whose standards regarding religious and civil liberties have not been questioned for a long time.

³ The natural partner of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Montenegro is the Roman Catholic Church with its diplomatic capacity.

CONCLUSION: POLITICAL AS POST-CONFLICT THEOLOGY

Having in mind the existing image of the world, attention, especially media attention, is directed towards the expansion of extremist ideas and movements that provoke disbelief, and then fear. There is little or no talk of religious peace initiatives and their, unfortunately, limited results. The question is: what can theology and religion do to build peace in general, both in post-conflict societies and globally? Every religious teaching can be instrumentalized in a certain way that has changed from time to time, but there is always a political, geostrategic and / or economic agenda behind it that has never had much to do with religion and ethics. When we turn our attention to post-conflict societies, it is clear to us that they are particularly sensitive, especially if the previous conflict had to do with certain religious-theological ideas or institutions. In such societies, in which citizens have survived the great sufferings of war, Post-Conflict Theology has the task of providing resources for building a sustainable peace based on faith. This implies inclusive messages that reveal the meanings of social motives and cultural norms that redefine the context of the religious, which moves from the personal to the general (good), which implies reconciliation, understanding of the Other and hope. Post-Conflict theology is a particularly articulated call for the social responsibility of believers, involvement in decision-making, openness to the public and actual recontextualization of the Gospel. Some of the most important goals of Post-Conflict Theology are:

1. Emphasizing the necessity of reconciliation which implies the entire cultural and social totality;
2. Peacebuilding through interaction between individuals and groups involved in the conflict;
3. Connecting local communities based on similar needs and values;
4. Insisting through civic initiatives on harmonizing the social goals of political and religious elites;

5. Deideologization and humanization of political and media space;
6. Dynamics of interethnic interaction on the basis of forgiveness, acceptance of diversity and open dialogue.

Although all of the above may sound like a set of unattainable values and ideals, we must never forget that at the end of every conflict, talks, negotiations and the search for ways that would lead us to peace and coexistence await us. So, let's start the search now.

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PERSPEKTIVE POST-KONFLIKTNE TEOLOGIJE KAO FAKTORA BEZBEDNOSTI NA ZAPADNOM BALKANU

Sažetak

Sve markantniji oblici nestabilnosti, kako regionalni, tako i globalni, predstavljaju svojevrsni teorijsko – praktični izazov za Studije bezbednosti, ali i za nacionalnu bezbednost u celini. Ovim radom autori su želeli da u centar naučnog promišljanja stave savremenu bogoslovsku misao, odnosno Političku teologiju, koja po sebi, jeste potencijalno sredstvo za razumevanje novih bezbednosnih fenomena, upravo kroz sopstvenu potragu za održivim mirom, prosperitetom i razvojem regionalne saradnje između crkava i verskih zajednica, državnih institucija i građana i na kraju, vernika različitih identiteta i verskih tradicija.

Ključne reči: *Politička teologija, Post - konfliktna teologija, bezbednost, studije bezbednosti, mirovne studije, stabilnost.*