

FLAMES AND SHRINES

The Serbian Church and Serbian Nationalist Movement in the 1980s

As noted in chapter 3, during the liberal phase of Yugoslav communism, that is, in the 1960s and 1970s, the Serbian Orthodox Church, as the League of Communists of Serbia had observed in the analysis quoted earlier, had emerged as the lone domestic carrier of Serbian ethnic nationalism. As a matter of fact, secular nationalists operating within the establishment were all purged (e.g. Dobrica Ćosić, Marko Nikezić, and Latinka Perović in Serbia and political leaders in Croatia mentioned earlier) so that the churches at home and exiled anti-Yugoslav groups remained the only opposition to the regime. The Serbian Church's role would be reasserted and strengthened in the 1980s, thanks to the worsening crisis in Kosovo. The third massive Albanian demonstrations in two decades broke out in Kosovo in 1981. This time the Albanians demanded a status of a federal republic for their province. The demonstrations of 1981, like earlier ones, were violent and accompanied with acts of terrorism. Thus, according to an observer, 680 fires attributed to arson broke out in Kosovo between 1980 and 1981.¹ The landmark Serbian sacred center in Kosovo, the patriarchate at Peć, was set on fire in the night on 15 March 1981. The fire destroyed the large 2,000-square-meter residential section along with valuable furniture, rare liturgical books, and some artifacts from the monastery's treasury. As the *Pravoslavlje* reported, the most precious valuables, rare manuscripts, and icons from the treasury had been rescued from the blaze by nuns and monks with the help of two local Albanian construction laborers employed by the monastery.² Patriarch Germanus were received by Vidoje Žarković, then the highest official of the Yugoslav Federation. Žarković promised an investigation, but the cause of the fire was never determined.³ The government of Serbia promptly allocated financial aid for the renewal of the shrine at Peć, and on 16 October 1983, the section damaged by the 1981 fire was solemnly reopened, with 10,000 pilgrims in attendance.

The Holy Assembly of Bishops held several sessions in Kosovo, while

church leaders frequently visited the troubled zone. After the incident at the old patriarchal seat, the media and public opinion in Belgrade and Serbia began to show increasingly interest in the crisis in the southern province. On Good Friday in 1982 a group of Serb Orthodox clerics led by the Archimandrite Atanasije Jevtić, then professor at Belgrade School of Orthodox Theology, released a document entitled "Appeal for the Protection of the Serbian Population and Their Sacred Monuments in Kosovo" (also known as the Appeal of 21 Serbian Priests). The appeal, an open letter, contained 21 signatures of prominent Orthodox clergymen and was addressed to the Presidency of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the Presidency of the Socialist Republic of Serbia, the People's Assembly of Serbia, and the Holy Bishops' Sabor of the Serbian Orthodox Church. The *Pravoslavljje* published the text of the appeal in full on 15 May 1982, and some Belgrade newspapers reprinted shorter versions. "The Kosovo issue," says the appeal,

is the issue of the spiritual, cultural, and historical identity of the Serbian people. . . . [L]ike the Jewish people who return to their Jerusalem in order to survive, the Serbian people are fighting once again the very same battle of Kosovo that our ancestors began to fight in 1389 at the Kosovo field. . . . And when it seemed that the battle has been won once and for all, Kosovo is being taken away from us and we are no longer what we are! . . . Without an exaggeration, it could be said that a planned *genocide* has been carried out against the Serbian people in Kosovo. The Albanian quest for an ethnically homogenous Albanian Kosovo free of Serbs is the evidence of genocide.⁴

The priests' letter also revived the analogy between the shrines of Kosovo and Palestine made by the author Jovan Dučićs in "Letter from Palestine" published in the 1930s.⁵ In 1985, the Serb author Vuk Drašković published an open letter addressed to the writers of Israel, in which he refers to the Serbs as "the thirteenth lost and the most ill-fated tribe of Israel," calls Israeli writers brothers, and recites the Jeremiad applied to the current Kosovo situation: "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand be afflicted."⁶ The leading author Dobrica Ćosić drew parallels between the tragic historical destinies of the Serbs and the Jews, according to him, both martyr-nations and innocent victims of genocide.⁷ In the words of Ćosić, the Serb is "the new Jew at the end of the twentieth century."⁸ The professor of the Belgrade Theological School, Archpriest Žarko Gavrilović, wrote in his 1986 collection of essays that "the Serbian people and their Orthodox Church, are the greatest martyrs of humankind . . . no other people in the world, except the Jews, have suffered so much for their faith and nation, as the Serbs have suffered."⁹

On its 20 May 1982 session, the Holy Bishop's Sabor made public a chronicle of Albanian anti-Serbian activities in Kosovo since 1968. The bishops underscored that the document contained only a small part of the ma-

terial gathered by the Church.¹⁰ The chronicle also recorded official urges, interventions, and appeals released by church leaders, beginning with the patriarch's letter to President Tito of May 1969. Meanwhile, the *Pravoslavlj*e ran regular column about what was termed Albanian terror in Kosovo. According to the *Pravoslavlj*e's perspective on the Kosovo crisis, the roots of anti-Serbianism lie preeminently in religious hatred.¹¹ Between 1982 and 1986, the Church filed 12 petitions on alleged Albanian attacks on local Serbs and church property, addressed to authorities in Kosovo, Serbia, and in the Federation.¹² Archimandrite Atanasije Jevtić toured the country from Kosovo to Croatia, reporting from this trip in the church press he argued that Serbs were persecuted by Muslims and Catholics.¹³ In a 1985 interview, Jevtić warned that the spiritual power of the Kosovo myth might cause a Serbian nationalist volcano unless the government suppressed Albanian nationalism.¹⁴ Jevtić was echoed by his colleague, the theologian Dimitrije Bogdanović, who wrote in 1986 that "in spite of some anti-Albanian Serbian governmental policies. . . . Albanian irredentism has always been real force in the province. The exodus of Serbs and Montenegrins from Kosovo is the consequence of a genocide against one nationality!"¹⁵

As early as the mid-1980s, the Belgrade press began reporting daily from the restive province. It was the Belgrade press, the Archimandrite Atanasije had acknowledged, that "made the decisive shift in favor of the struggle for the Serbian truth about Kosovo."¹⁶ The leading Belgrade political weekly *NIN* applauded the Church-induced "struggle against oblivion" in an article that concluded: "For how can the Serbian nation exist at all, separated from its spirituality in the spiritual centers of the Peć Patriarchate, Dečani, Gračanica, and other shrines of Kosovo and Metohija?"¹⁷ In 1986 the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SASA) released a document cited as "Memorandum SASA." The document blamed Titoist policies, communist ideology, and non-Serbian ethnic nationalisms for the tribulations of Serbs and proposed a radical restructuring of the Yugoslav federation as a solution for the Serbian question.¹⁸ Church leaders quoted the Memorandum in sermons and interviews. Members of the Academy and authors of the Memorandum made pilgrimages to Kosovo and Jasenovac.

Religion and the Serb Nationalist Mobilization

Shrines were the powerful symbolic energizer of the Serbian nationalist movement of the 1980s. In addition to drawing public attention to the attacked shrines of Kosovo, in 1985 the Serbian Orthodox Church began to continue the 1935–41 construction of memorial church of Saint Sava, located atop the Vračar hill, where, as legend has it, the Turks burned the relics of Saint Sava in 1594. From 1935 to 1941, Saint Sava's memorial temple rose to 45 feet, with 515 concrete pillars and 48 marble columns

engraved with insignia of the Serbian kings and princes. Between 1960 and 1984, Patriarch Germanus, as he said in an interview, filed 88 petitions for the construction permit.¹⁹ A chronicle of the new church's construction noted that the rebuilding, allegedly, had become possible only after the death of Tito.²⁰ According to the patriarch's words at the 12 May 1985 consecration ceremony at the construction site, the new church would be the material evidence of how the Serbs, guided by Saint Sava's spirit, survived trials and catastrophes from Kosovo to Jasenovac.²¹

The Holy Synod nominated Branko Pešić of the Belgrade University Department of Architecture chief designer of the new cathedral. Pešić's project envisioned a neo-Byzantine church, allegedly one of largest in the world. It would be 65 meters from the floor to the top of the main dome, with 9 more meters for the cross atop the central cupola. The church would have two galleries, with the upper gallery 40 meters high. The church would be capable of receiving 11,000 to 15,000 people. In 1985, the costs of construction were estimated at 15 million US dollars. In the course of construction, the costs rose above all previous calculations.²² According to predictions, the new Belgrade Orthodox cathedral would be about the same size as Hagia Sophia of Constantinople, with even more ambitious program of mosaics frescoes, and other forms of arts inspired by the Serbian medieval sacred painting.²³ According to the chief designer Branko Pešić, the construction of the new cathedral at Belgrade was "certainly the world's greatest enterprise in church construction in this century."²⁴ The church would have 50 bells and 18 gilded crosses atop the temple's domes. The cross at the central cupola weighs four ton and is 40 feet high. The audience of 15,000 people is more than any other Orthodox church in the world can receive.²⁵ When the cupola was placed upon the church walls, the new church became the highest landmark dominating the capital city of Yugoslavia. In 1989, the *Pravoslavljje* editorial staff ran on the paper's front page a photograph of the rising giant towering above the Yugoslav Federal Parliament.²⁶

After opening ceremonies and the consecration in 1985, construction work at the Vračar hill resumed on 14 April 1986. The great enterprise mobilized the Serbs at home and abroad, and donations poured into the patriarchate from the faithful, churches, governments and other sources. Among the first who made donations were the ecumenical patriarch Dimitrios I of Constantinople, the premier of Greece, Andreas Papandreou, and the Catholic archbishop of Ljubljana, in Slovenia, Alojz Šuštar. Excursions, schools, and visitors from Yugoslavia and foreign countries came to Belgrade to see the rise of one of the largest Byzantine cathedrals in the world. In May 1989, the 40-foot-high golden cross was installed atop the main cathedral's cupola. On 25 May 1989, the first liturgy was held inside the unfinished church, with 100,000 people in attendance inside the temple and around it. On the occasion, the holy relics of the holy prince Lazar of Kosovo were transferred to the temple and exposed for the worship of the faithful. When the new temple acquired a cupola, a nationalist poet wrote on the

Pravoslavlje's front page: “[with] hope of the nearing harvest tenaciously shining, Saint Sava is rising atop the Vračar hill, and all wretched Serbia rises with him.”²⁷

During the 1970s and 1980s, 30 new churches were built in Serbia proper; the ancient monastery of Gradac in Serbia was renovated with government assistance; in the capital city of Belgrade alone, in addition to 32 existing churches, the Serbian church began rebuilding three new large churches; began new buildings for theological school and seminary; built eight parish houses; renovated three churches and one chapel; and finally, increased pressure for permits for new churches in the suburbs of several new cities (but city authorities denied a permit for the construction of a new mosque). In Croatia, a parish church-memorial was to be completed at historic Jasenovac and another one in the coastal city of Split (see more on this later); the new monastery of the Holy Three Hierarchs was built at Krka Seminary near Knin (Croatia); new churches were built in the Bosnian towns of Tuzla and Drvar and in Nikšić in Montenegro; the fourteenth-century monasteries of Morača and Piva in Montenegro were under renovation and conservation; and the Raška-Prizren diocese obtained permits for new churches in Priština and Djakovica and elsewhere in Kosovo.²⁸

In 1987 Slobodan Milošević came to power in Serbia. In the same landmark year the Holy Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church issued an encyclopedic, richly illustrated atlas of the sacred Kosovo heritage entitled “Debts to God in Kosovo: Monuments and Symbols of the Serbian People. “It presented in text and pictures all the ancient shrines of Kosovo, or, as they were officially called, “debts to God and symbols and monuments of the Serbian people.” “This monograph, in 880 pages,” wrote the volume’s editor, the archimandrite Atanasije Jevtić, “contains the visible and verifiable historical, cultural, spiritual, and artistic artifacts and documents about achievements of Kosovo in Serbian, Balkan, and European culture and civilization.”²⁹ In April 1987 the Belgrade press published sensational findings according to which historic Orthodox churches and monasteries in Kosovo, including the famous fourteenth-century Dečani monastery, had been registered as mosques by the local Albanian administration.³⁰ In May 1987, the Holy Bishops’ Sabor changed its regular meeting place and held its annual session at the old patriarchate of Peć. Two more bishops’ assemblies took place at the Kosovo cities of Peć and Prizren. In October 1987, Patriarch Germanus, with the ecumenical patriarch Dimitrios I from Istanbul, visited the shrines of Kosovo. In 1987, the nationalist poet Matija Bečković published his elegy “The Kosovo Field,” charging the Albanians with “stealing Serbia’s memory and history.”³¹

From 1987 to 1990, the new leader of Serbia, Slobodan Milošević, pacified the restless Kosovo. The Church took advantage of this to rebuild its resources in the province. On 29 November 1990 the Church solemnly opened excavations and restoration of the Holy Archangels monastery near Prizren. On 16 May 1991 church dignitaries and cheering crowds of local

Serbs attended a ground-breaking ceremony at the Holy Savior Cathedral in the Kosovo capital of Priština. The new Holy Savior Cathedral, like the Saint Sava Memorial Temple at Belgrade, was viewed, as its designer said, as “conflict-mitigating architecture.”³²

The Church simultaneously carried out a dynamic program of pilgrimages, jubilees, and church-national festivals in preparation for the 600th anniversary of the battle of Kosovo in 1989. In 1983, the Church marked the sixty-fifth anniversary of the Entente’s forces breakthrough at the Salonica front, emphasizing the memory of World War I, underrated in communist Yugoslavia. In September 1986, the Church marked the 800th anniversary of the monastery at Studenica. More than 150,000 pilgrims paid tribute to the “mother of all Serbian churches,” the Holy Bogoroditsa church at Studenica in southern Serbia, where the Church’s founder, Saint Sava, served as the first head of the monastic community.³³ After a two-hour liturgy, the patriarch in a brief address emphasized that Studenica “had preserved the Serbian soul—the soul which lives on and today is again providing guidance for its children.”³⁴ Reporting from the Studenica pilgrimage, the Balkan correspondent for the German daily newspaper *Die Welt* wrote that “what was happening in the monastery of Studenica these days was a unification of the Church and the people similar to that in Poland when the Pope recently visited his homeland.”³⁵ In 1987, the Church joined the state in commemorating the 200th anniversary of the birth of the language reformer Vuk Karadžić (1787–1864). In 1988 and 1989, as an overture to the 600th anniversary of the Kosovo battle, the Church carried across Serbia and Bosnia the relics of the saintly prince Lazar. In 1989 the Church brought together 100,000 pilgrims on the occasion of the opening of the newly built Orthodox monastery at Knežija on Mount Romanija in Bosnia-Herzegovina. In 1990, Church and state came together to commemorate the 300th anniversary of the First Great Migration of Serbs under Patriarch Arsenius III.

The most massive in the sequel of jubilees was the 600th anniversary of the Kosovo battle. The June 1989 celebration was preceded by a year-long tour of the holy relics of the martyr of that battle, Prince Lazar, throughout Serbia, Montenegro, and Bosnia-Herzegovina. The jubilee’s conclusion took place on 28 June, St. Vitus’ Day, when, according to Belgrade press, a million Serbs gathered at the historic battlefield of Gazimestan. Slobodan Milošević delivered a speech to the crowd in which he used a phrase often quoted later, announcing new battles for Serbia, including armed ones.

In the 1980s, the Serbian Orthodox faith and Church were obviously coming back in public life. As early as 1982, the German daily *Die Welt* reported from Belgrade that

historical consciousness, national consciousness, and religion have penetrated politics in Serbia. The Kosovo myth is in the consciousness of every Serb. Kosovo has had a great impact on the Serbs, perhaps even greater

than the epic of the Nibelungens or the legend of Emperor Friedrich Barbarossa have on the Germans. The Kosovo theme is ubiquitous in Serbia today.³⁶

Religious and historical themes inspired singers and songwriters of urban rock music.³⁷ In 1987 *NIN* reported that on Christmas Eve (6 January) it was nearly impossible for the reporter to approach the patriarchate's church as crowds spilled all over the surrounding streets.³⁸ A sociological survey carried out in Belgrade in the mid-1980s showed that 21 percent of those included in the survey (about half of them were nonbelievers) thought that the Serbian Orthodox Church was the most trustworthy national institution.³⁹ In 1984, Belgrade press and television recorded an example of ethnic awakening through the shrines of Kosovo when a group of Partisan war veterans paid pilgrimage to the shrines under the guidance of the village priest. A scandal broke out afterward when the pilgrims, members of the League of Communists, were disciplined. After media uproar, they were readmitted.⁴⁰ In the ensuing years, pilgrimages from Serbia to Kosovo became frequent and included worship services and group baptisms near ancient monasteries.⁴¹ The Church also revived the traditional Saint Sava's Day—27 January. The traditional Saint Sava Day ball, the first since the 1945 communist takeover, took place on 27 January 1989 in the Hotel Yugoslavia. More than eight hundred guests turned out at the ball. The Belgrade daily *Politika* reported: "the traditional *svetosavski* ball shines with its old glamour. With the *Srbijanka* folk dance, the ball was opened by the ball hostess, Mrs. Nada Golubović and the archmaster architect Professor Branko Pešić, builder of Saint Sava's Memorial Temple. . . . [G]enerous donations were made for the construction of the Saint Sava's Temple."⁴²

Slobodan Milošević's personal attitude toward Serbian Church and religion remained ambiguous. Although the new national hero played the central role in the secular part of the 1989 Kosovo jubilee, Milošević did not attend the holy liturgy at the Gračanica church. He continued to avoid church services, even though at the same time elsewhere in Europe political leaders, especially former communists, flocked to churches and mosques. Nevertheless, the powerful tradition influenced the new Serbian leader. In 1991 Milošević's minister for religious affairs, Dragan Dragojlović, implied that Milošević had experienced some sort of moving spiritual experience or even a conversion. It occurred during the highest Serbian state delegation's 1991 visit to the thirteenth-century Hilandar monastery at the holy mountain of Athos in Greece. According to Dragojlović's article in a Belgrade weekly,⁴³ the Greek hosts took their Serb guests by helicopter to Hilandar. The ex-communist Milošević and his entourage came to the spiritual oasis founded by Stephen-Simon and Sava of the Nemanjić dynasty at a critical moment, disillusioned with Marxism, communism, and Tito's Yugoslavia, "which the Serbs embraced with faith and devotion as a long-desired com-

mon permanent home, in contrast to other Yugoslav nationalities, for whom Yugoslavia seemed to be only a provisional solution and transitional model toward formation of their ethnic states."⁴⁴ Milošević, Dragojlović, and other former believers in the communist utopia and Tito's idea of brotherhood and unity of the Yugoslav peoples had been in Dragojlović's words, "for a long time prisoners of a false ideology."⁴⁵ It is worth noting that Dragojlović, the communist-era commissioner for religious affairs, would become an outspoken convert to Serbian Orthodoxy and ethnonationalist ideologue of the 1990s.⁴⁶

The historic pilgrimage to the holy mountain empowered the disenchanted Milošević and his ex-communist comrades with new spiritual and ideological impulses and, perhaps even more important, armed them with new myths and symbols without which they could not maintain the momentum of their movement. The Belgrade delegation arrived at Hilandar as the local monastic community, financially supported by the Belgrade government, was undertaking renovations of the monastery's church and residential section. The monks thanked Milošević and warmly received the guests. Milošević and Dragojlović looked with awe at the legendary monastery's grape tree. The tree, legend has it, was planted eight centuries ago over the tomb of the founder of the Serbian kingdom, Stephen Nemanja, who became Simon the monk. The Saint Simon grape tree is believed to heal infertility. As Dragojlović explained, the pilgrimage to Hilandar helped him and Milošević to overcome their sense of loss, emptiness and disenchantment. At Hilandar, wrote Dragojlović, "standing under the Saint Simon's grape tree, leaders of new Serbia came to believe, that even if the sacred tree planted by the Serb king some day stops bearing fruits, Serbia, Greece, and the Orthodox faith will survive and continue to live forever."⁴⁷

Milošević's 1991 pilgrimage to the holy mountain accelerated Milošević's conversion to Serbian myths. Milošević's minister for religious affairs, Dragojlović, presented himself through his poetry as a religiously and ethnically awakening Orthodox Serb and argued that Serbia and the Serbian state should honor the Serbian Orthodox Church and protect it as a state religion against expanding Islam and papacy.⁴⁸ Milošević himself was torn between his close associates, such as Dragojlović, who became faithful Orthodox and as such represented his Socialist Party's "right" faction, and a whole array of "leftists," or national-socialists, represented, notably, by his spouse, Mira Marković.

Several "national programs" that appeared in Serbia in the late 1980s outlined the new role for the Church and religion in society. In June 1989 a group of Orthodox clerics and laymen released a document entitled "A Proposal of Serbian Church-National Program" (PSCNP).⁴⁹ The Serbian Orthodox Church, the PSCNP argued, must be recognized according to its traditional historic role as a leading national institution; Church property confiscated by the communists must be recovered; the Church should return in public life, "for there cannot be a strong state without a strong Church."⁵⁰

The PSNCP did not call for a breakup of Yugoslavia. Instead it demanded “mutual respect among groups that worship God in different ways” and legal guarantees for the religious, cultural, and national rights of the Serbs who live outside Serbia. Yet the document urged caution concerning the euphoric quest unfolding in the western Catholic Yugoslav republics aimed at joining the (western) European Union. “We do not want to be servile junior partners of western Europe and blind emulators of alien models; we want a truly Christian Europe, with a genuine and creative theodemocracy instead of a formal, arid, Western democracy,” the document concluded.⁵¹

Another Serbian church-national program, somewhat broader in scope and presented as a scholarly article, was elaborated by a professor at Belgrade’s Orthodox Theological School, Archpriest Mitar Miljanović, in the Christmas 1991 issue of the *Voice of the Church*.⁵² Writing about “[t]he Serbian Orthodox Church’s patriotic agenda under contemporary conditions,” Miljanović points out that “the Serbian Orthodox Church is not only a religious organization, but also a leading national institution committed to the cause of national unity—national leadership is the Church’s historical mission as a national church and national institution.”⁵³ According to this Orthodox theologian, the nationalist or patriotic agenda of the Serbian Orthodox Church contains the following eight themes, ranked in order of importance: (1) the national history of the Serbs; (2) Kosovo; (3) World War II and in particular the memory of the concentration camp of Jasenovac and Ustaša genocide of Serbs; (4) the memory of World War I; (5) the issues of Serbian national culture; (6) the Serbian Orthodox Church, its social status, and historical role; (7) the lifestyle, customs, and value system of the Serbian people; (8) the cult of and the status of churches dedicated to Saint Sava, the saintly founder of the Serbian Orthodox Church.

According to this document, the Church set out to be a guide for the Serbian people in the time of the great transformation in Europe. The Church, Miljanović explains, “has always held that its mission is to lead the Serbian people and evaluate their history and culture.”⁵⁴ Miljanović points out that a coherent national-church program is needed. He gives his support to the PSCNP, proposing that Church leaders issue an imprimatur for the program. He concludes that the Serbian Orthodox Church will be carrying on its traditional “mission of national church and national institution, regardless of which particular political, social, and economic system will come out of the current social change.”⁵⁵

According to sociological surveys of religiosity, the currents of the 1980s were ambiguous. In the 1980s in Yugoslavia, the Serbian Orthodox Church had the most unfavorable distribution of priests per number of believers: one Orthodox priest provided services for 5,714 Orthodox believers, whereas the Catholic Church had one priest for every 2,239 Catholics; the Islamic Community had one imam to assist 1,250 Muslims.⁵⁶ Despite the relative advantage of ethnic Serbs as the major Yugoslav nationality, the Catholic Church was the largest Yugoslav religious institution. In 1986, for example,

the Serbian Church had 27 bishops, 3,084 priests, monks, and nuns, 4 seminaries, and one theological school. At the same time, the Catholic Church in Yugoslavia had 36 bishops, 5,500 priests, monks, and nuns, 7 theological schools, and 22 seminaries, let alone the Church abroad, the Catholic publishing houses, and the Church press that dwarfed the Orthodox church resources.⁵⁷

In 1984, the newspaper of the Alliance of Socialist Youth of Serbia, *Omladinske novine* (Youth Paper), revealed the results of its study entitled "Social Activism of the Young." According to this project, 77 percent of the polled in the age group 12 to 18 declared themselves atheists. The percentage increased to 81 percent in the older age groups (18 to 27).⁵⁸ A University of Zagreb study showed a slight decline of religious affiliation during the decade 1975–84.⁵⁹ According to this research, the relative number of non-religious is ordinarily high among Orthodox Serbs, including Serbs living outside Serbia. Whereas 70 percent of the interviewees of Orthodox background said that they did not believe in God, only 30 percent of Catholics and 40 percent of Muslims made such a declaration.⁶⁰ The number of self-declared atheists was highest among Yugoslavs by nationality (45 percent), followed by the Serbs (42 percent), while only 12 percent of the interviewees of Croatian background said they were nonreligious. Another survey, entitled "Status, Consciousness, and Behavior of the Young Generation in SFR Yugoslavia" polled a sample of 6,500 respondents and revealed an overall decline of religiosity during the period between 1953 and 1985–86. Thus, among the Orthodox the decrease was 35.5 percent to 28.9 percent; the decrease was for the Catholics 25.2 percent to 21.9 percent and for the Muslims 15.6 percent to 13.4 percent.⁶¹ The sociologist of religion Srdjan Vrcan noted that church leaders, clergy, and lay movements had become overall more active and visible in the public sphere, while at the same time nothing had changed concerning general trends of secularization.⁶² In other words, people did not seek God more or less than before, while ethnic nationalism was growing and mainstream religious organizations were seeking to influence sociopolitical changes at the moment when the end of communism could have been envisioned. The "conversion" of Slobodan Milošević is highly instructive because it exemplifies the character of "religious revival" in Serbia in the 1980s. Milošević remained indifferent toward God and despised the clergy, but he was moved by the Serb anger over the Albanian uprising in Kosovo. This emotional charge was enhanced with the frustration over the status of Serbia in the Yugoslav federation and the appeal of Serbian tradition, history, and ethnicity.