RELIGIOUS STRUCTURE IN THE BORDER AREA OF
BANAT (VOJVODINA, SERBIA)

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Abstract. During the nineties people in former socialist countries began the return to religion,
because the collapse of socialism has left an ideological vacuum. In the new, clearly favourable
conditions for their sermons, propagating and spreading, religion in Central and Eastern Europe have
experienced a true renaissance. Observing religious structure in the border villages of Banat, we can
say that religion is closely linked to the nation, so the Serbian and Romanian villages are dominated
by Orthodoxy and Hungarian villages are dominated by Catholicism and Protestantism. It can be
concluded that the most dominant religion in this region is Orthodoxy, followed by Catholicism
which is amended with Protestantism, Islam, Judaism and some other religions, which are rare and
exotic for our region.

Rezumat. Structura confesională în zona de frontieră a Banatului (Voivodina, Serbia). De-a
lungul anilor 90’ oamenii din fostele țări socialiste au început să se reîntoarcă către religie, deoarece
prăbușirea socialismului a lăsat în urma sa un vid ideologic. În noile condiții, evident favorabile
pentru predicile lor, propagarea și răspândirea religiei în Europa Centrală și De Vest a cunoscut
 experiența unei adevărate renașteri. Observând structura religioasă a satelor din zona de graniță a
Banatului, putem spune că religia este strâns legată de națiune, astfel în satele sârbe și românești
dominantă este religia ortodoxă, iar în satele ungurești dominate sunt catolicismul și protestantismul.
Putem concluziona că cea mai dominantă religie este cea ortodoxă, urmată de cea catolică, în care au
loc converieri spre religiile protestante, islamice, iudaice și altele, care sunt rare și exotice pentru
regiunea noastră.

Keywords: religious structure, border area, demography, population, Banat, Vojvodina.

Cuvinte cheie: structură religioasă, zonă de frontieră, demografie, populație, Banat, Voivodina.

1. INTRODUCTION

Religion has found its place on the path between man and God. Existence of God is
not a scientific question for a long time but a matter of individual attitude towards life
(Giddens, A., 1993, Petrovich, O., 2007). Religion as a social institution and the faith of the
individual as his personal belief, are no longer on the same plane for some time now.
Religion is public, established and external, and faith is private, subjective and internal
(Rancour-Laferriere, D., 2003). There is a large gap between what is known about the
"objective" religion and ways of personal beliefs of the individual (Allport, G.W., James MR, 1967, Flere, S., Lavrić, M., 2007). Religiosity is a unique cultural phenomenon with socio-historical hinterland. Religiosity is taught in society and shared with others (Bogomilova, N., 2009). Culture of a society is a way of life of its members, a pattern of life and a way of behaving to which the members of that society comply (Anton, L., 2010). From the very beginning in religious practice there was a polarization on opposite categories - the sacred and the profane (Donahue, M.J., 1985, Jojic, B., 2004). The tension between the sacred and the profane persists, changing forms and patterns of expression, which gives individuals the ability to determine themselves to the religion or it leaves room for discourse reasoning about religious (Kuburic, Z., Kuburic, A., 2006). Religious behaviour may be defined as the attribution of holiness, or as a cult-ritual side of holiness (Blagojevic, M., 2004).

Regardless of the fact that they originate on the platform of peace and love for people, religions may also be a significant cause of conflicts and wars in the Balkans (Jevtic, M., 2002). History, unfortunately, knows about numerous wars waged in the name and on behalf of their religion. It is not only the interests of certain religious groups and the abuse of religious feelings by the political elite and other formal and informal social groups, although they too are important and dominant (Vrcan, S., 1995, Stark, R., 2001). The other reasons are the insufficient education and the exclusion of individuals who represent a real danger for the people of another religion (Beckford, J.A., Richardson, J.T., 2003), but also for the people's own social group and religion. Especially dangerous are fanatics who consider their faith as the only saving, and all others as Satanic and hostile.

The present nations in the Balkans belong to various religious groups. The dominant religions are Orthodox, Catholic and Islamic, and there are many sects and other religious communities (Sells, M., 2003, Blagojevic, M., 2006a). All of these religions and sects in their original orientation are in favour of peace and tolerance, but their practical impact on that is very small (Mitrovic, Lj., 2009). Instead of being a factor of unity and bringing people together, religion and religious feelings of individuals and groups of people are abused and used for political purposes, usually to achieve separatist, nationalist and global goals, ambitions, and the division of people in the Balkans. Instead of being an instrument of reconciliation, religious feelings of the people are very often used in the function of conflict and war (Ristic, I., 2005, Jakovljevic, D., 2007). The peoples in the Balkans have been exposed to this kind of blackmail and pressure for centuries. Many, under pressure, accepted another religion just to save their lives and livelihoods (Barjaktarovic, M., 2004). The division on religious grounds has often escalated into open hostility and conflict. Religion has, in the literal sense, especially in the time of Turkish occupation, and later in the First and Second World War and in the civil war in former Yugoslavia, divided closest relatives: parents and children, brothers and sisters. This division is so strong that all other links, especially those concerning the origin, culture, traditions and life in the same geo-space often weren’t sufficient enough to overcome and eliminate the division (Raduski, N., 2006).

In multicultural societies, within which different religions co-exist in a certain proportion, inevitably, and today even more often than before, the question of regulating the relations between majority and minority cultures arises. If they are based on religious background, it also means the issue of determining the relationship between minority and majority religious systems (Djordjevic, D.B., 2005). These issues must be resolved
primarily within certain social communities, but also internationally - on the planetary level. In recent times this, basically same problem, starts manifesting more and more at the international level (Jevtic, M., 2009). What is clearly observed as of late twentieth century, is precisely the inclusion of cultural factors in national and international policies and forming international relations (Jevtic, M., 2008). The cultural factor has in fact gained some political role in the series of regional conflicts.

If the early 80's showed visible signs of the political crisis of the former Yugoslav socialist system in the known events in Kosovo, in 1981, in the coming years not only the political, but the overall crisis will irrevocably deepen so at the very end and at the beginning of the next decade it reached its peak in the questionable survival of the socialist ideological substrate and political organization of the unified Yugoslav state (Bodrozic, Dj., 2005). Precisely in such socio-political context, burdened with the evident economic, political and crisis of generally accepted values, sociological researches and public opinion polls, in the still united Yugoslav state, in the transition from eighth to ninth decade of the last century revealed a distinct change in the religiosity of the population even in the Orthodox confessional homogeneous regions of Serbia and Montenegro (Blagojevic, M., 2003), which were very secularized environments, but also changes in the Orthodox population outside Serbia, in mixed and predominantly Catholic and Islamic religious and confessional areas (Blagojevic, M., 2008). The aforementioned detected changes of religion, not only in Orthodox but also in other religions, have a border theoretical significance for social scientists: they imply a wider change than increased level of religiosity of people and their intense attachment to traditional denominational organization. This suggests that there are changes in terms of re-evaluation of the overall social significance of traditional religious systems in the former Yugoslavia (Jevtic, M., 2008), and their importance for the then increasingly popular national corpus, in the direction of desecularization processes in the eve of the war and the disintegration of the country. From these studies one could draw several important conclusions about religion in general, regardless of the confession, but also about the Orthodox religion in the youth and general population.

During the nineties, in former socialist countries, the people began returning to religion, because the collapse of the socialism left an ideological vacuum (Blagojevic, M., 2006b). In the new, clearly more favourable conditions for their preaching, propagation and spreading, religions in Central and Eastern Europe experienced a real renaissance. Post-communist government, immediately after the introduction of political pluralism, undertook a series of legislative and other measures which greatly facilitated the work of religious organizations in their countries in relation to the time of socialism (Barker, E., 1999).

Desecularization has become an essential concept when it comes to religious changes, both in modern industrial and post-industrial societies, and post-socialist societies in transition. In addition to the law on the legal status of religious communities, freedom of conscience and religious organization, many educational, cultural, and social welfare institutions were established and restored. Religion gained an important place in the electronic and other media (Mitrovic, Lj., 2010), and efforts have been made, depending on the financial situation of individual companies, to make up the damage that occurred during the nationalization of their property to the religious communities. Churches in post-socialist societies are gaining a greater role in the field of religious education, concerns about
Religious structure in the border area of Banat

Religion has an important social and socio-psychological function, acting as an important integrating factor in the consciousness of each religious individual.

Desecularization in the former Yugoslavia during the 70’s first engulfed the Catholic homogeneous areas. This was delayed for a decade in the Orthodox homogeneous areas, which are most susceptible to secularization - they were engulfed in the late 80's and early 90's. The reawakening of holiness in Serbian Orthodoxy took place under the sign of the return to ancestral faith and reaffirmation of religion, which was accompanied by re-aggregation around traditional religious institutions (Vrcan, S., 1995). The dispute of some sociologists, whether significant changes in the religious life of post-socialist societies, societies in transition, represent the result of increased number of believers or only a freer expression of religious feeling in them, is a bit redundant (Waters, M.S. et al., 1995).

In conditions of general democratization of social life, surely there are so called old-new believers and situations that previously latent believers now freely manifest their religiosity, but this does not exclude a real increase in religiosity. Sociologically speaking, the chances for the revitalization of religion multiply to the extent in which secular responses miss. Most people in this region were, over the past decade, in their daily life forced to gain comprehensive experience generated by indefinitely prolonged social, political and economic crisis and the crisis of morality. All this was dramatically increased with the long exclusion from the world and because of the war whose culmination was the bombing of Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. It goes to prove that during the nineties most of the population has experienced extremely negative experiences, which range from a sense of existential threat and poverty, insecurity and uncertainty, hopelessness, to the fear of dying in a war psychosis. In such (non)conditions universal questions of human life and death, and therefore religion inevitably resurrect (Kuburic, Z., Stojkovic, N., 2004). Comparing the attitude toward religion in materially rich countries, which were not at war for a hundred and more years, it can be concluded that this relationship is moving from atheism, through complete indifference, to the lukewarm attitude towards religion.

![Fig.1. The share of atheists in the total population (%) of the border municipalities of Banat in years 1991 and 2002.](image)
Religiosity is not a typically rural phenomenon; the revitalization of religion is tied to the city, educated and young generation (Radisavljević-Ćiparizović, D., 2005). Almost 60% highly educated people are religious, a fact unthinkable some twenty years ago. The stabilization of the situation of religious changes is shown through the almost complete absence of sex differences in religiosity toward religious self-valuation. Age as a feature also shows a previously observed trend that shows that religiosity is the first question of our youth and our last question of age. The young generations show high religiosity, they are more religious than the middle generation, but not more that the oldest generation.

The rise of the Serbian Orthodox Church and other religious communities, from their decades-long isolation in the area of privacy, and gradual inclusion into the public political life, is clearly reflected in the level of everyday life (Flere, S., Klanjšek, R., 2008). The media promotion of the church and its representatives is greater, the interest in enrolment of both sexes, at the Theological Faculty is increased, and the ecclesiastical literature and publishing experience their revival. The revitalization of religion and the Church in Serbia is thus undisputed phenomenon.

The rehabilitation of religiousness in Serbia coincided with the collapse of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. At the beginning of the last decade of the twentieth century new borders were established, and thus the border areas. Numerous studies show the problems of border regions in Serbia. Among them demographic problems such as depopulation, immigration, aging, etc. stand out (Todorović, M., Bjeljac, Ž., 2009, Đerčan, B. et al., 2010, Todorović, M., Drobnjaković, M., 2010, Miljanović, D. et al., 2010). These problems occur in other parts of Europe as well, as demonstrated by studies in neighbouring countries (Aneuţa, C., Brujan, L.B., 2008, Bajmoc, P., 2008, Tóth, J., Dövény, Z., 2010). One of the types of activities aimed at finding solutions for the revitalization of the border regions is a detailed demographic analysis, based on which a conclusion on the available human resources can be drawn. Part of this complex analysis is the religious structure of the population, which is precisely the subject of research in this paper. The aim of this study is to show the changes in the understanding of religion that occurred in the last decade of the twentieth century.

2. METHODOLOGY

The religious and ethnic structures of population are the only structures that are based on a subjective belief. These two structures are closely related, though they do not match always. Since Vojvodina is one of the most ethnically heterogeneous regions of Europe, it is understood that the religious structure of its population is very similar. For the analysis of this demographic characteristic on the territory of Vojvodina seven census data that had the question of religion are available. The first two censuses were conducted by the Statistical Office of Kingdom of Hungary (1900 and 1910), then the statistical service of the Kingdom of SHS1 (1921), the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1931), FPRY2 (1953), SFRY3 (1991) and FRY4 (2002). In a series of post-war censuses, the question on religion appears only three times, in years 1953, 1991 and 2002. In accordance with constitutional

1 Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes
2 Federal People’s Republic of Yugoslavia
3 Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia
4 Federal Republic of Yugoslavia
provisions, citizens, during all the censuses, were allowed to fully express their opinion on religion freely, except when it came to children under the age of fifteen years, for which the answer on this question was given by one parent, adoptive parent or guardian. Since the chronological arrangement of the census does not provide an optimal continuity, this time in the analysis the results of the last two censuses will be used.

In addition to field research in the preparation of this work, the historical method (archival records), analytic interpretation of researched literature and other materials, statistical analysis of population census in years 1991 and 2002, mapping, graphical method, quantitative and qualitative content analysis and the comparative method were used. Most of the work was done in the cabinet (i.e. processing and data analysis) and drawing of maps was done in program called ArcGis 9.3.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The religious structure of the population of Banat changed according to the changes in ethnic structure (Kicošev, S. et al., 2006). Throughout the observed period a dominance of several major religious groups is clearly evident. Of the major ethnic groups in Banat members of the Orthodox religion are Serbs, Macedonians and Romanians, Hungarians are Catholic, and formerly a part of Germans, Slovaks are Protestants, previously a part of the Germans (Lutherans), or part of the Hungarians (Calvinists) (Kicošev, S., 1997, 2004, Đurđev, B.S., et al., 2009). The number and proportion of members of other religions is far behind these religions. After the Second World War there is a considerable number of persons who are not believers (atheists).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Municipality</th>
<th>Novi Kneža-vac</th>
<th>Čoka</th>
<th>Kikind</th>
<th>Nova Crnja</th>
<th>Žirišta</th>
<th>Sečanj</th>
<th>Plandište</th>
<th>Vršac</th>
<th>Bela Crkva</th>
<th>Border area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Islamic 1991</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>638</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>327</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judaic 1991</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Protestant 1991</td>
<td>1.991</td>
<td>8.405</td>
<td>259</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>1.086</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>762</td>
<td>541</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>3.389</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>1.602</td>
<td>1.237</td>
<td>278</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>1.778</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>714</td>
<td>545</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>2.915</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>586</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>1.047</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others 1991</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>6.70</td>
<td>4.038</td>
<td>457</td>
<td>1.077</td>
<td>988</td>
<td>1.662</td>
<td>5.949</td>
<td>2.564</td>
<td>17.756</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the municipality of Novi Kneževac most numerous inhabitants are Serbs and the Orthodox religion is dominant. According to the 1991 census there was 7,945 Orthodox’s and they accounted for 57.5% of the total population. By the next census the number of Orthodox Christians has increased by 513 so the proportion rose to 65.2%.

The share of Catholics decreased from 35.3% (1991) to 29.9% (2002). The decline in the number of members of the Catholic faith came as a result of reducing number of Hungarians and Croats in the last census. As for other religions Protestants whose share ranges from 0.6% (1991) to 0.4% (2002) should be mentioned. In fourth place in terms of numbers are the members of the Islamic religion with a share in the both lists of 0.1%, while the number of members of other religions is almost negligible. According to the 1991 census there were 3.8% atheists, and that number dropped to only 0.2% by the 2002 census.

From these characteristics we can conclude that in the municipality of Novi Kneževac religious structure of the population follows the characteristics of the national structure, that is, increase or decrease of the number of members of certain religious groups is a direct consequence of population trends in one or more ethnicums.

In the municipality of Čoka situation is somewhat different, but in accordance with the prevailing population. As the most numerous populations in this municipality are the Hungarians, Catholicism has the most followers. Of all the population, by the census from 1991, 8,528 persons were Catholics, 60.0% of all the believers, or 55.8% of the total population in the municipality. By the next census, the number of members of the Catholic religion has been reduced to 7,224, so the share of the population that have a religion of some kind dropped to 54.9%, and the share in the total population to 52.2%, which is in line with the decline of total population, particularly by reduction in the number of Hungarians and Croats which make the most part of Catholic believers.

In second place are the Orthodox’s. Orthodox religion, according to the census of 1991, is professed by 5,224 people who made 36.8% of all believers, or 34.2% of the total population in the municipality. The last census recorded a population increase which professes the Orthodox religion for 300 persons. Thus, on the 2002 census there was 5,524 Orthodox’s who made 42.0% of all believers, or 40.0% of the total population in the municipality of Čoka.

A decrease in the total number of Protestants is observed, and an increase of the percentage share in population groups that profess religion and in the overall population of the municipality. The number of members of the Protestant religion has decreased from 405 (1991) to 373 persons (2002). In the same period the proportion of Protestant believers kept the value of 2.8% of the total number of believers, while the proportion in the total population of the municipality increased from 2.6% to 2.7%.

In the municipality of Čoka live a very small number of people who profess the Islamic religion. Their number decreased from 23 (1991) to 16 persons (2002), and in the same period the proportion has declined by 0.1%.

As for the atheists it can be observed that 670 residents in 1991 said they were not believers and they then made 4.4% of the total population in the municipality. By the next census, this number had been drastically reduced to only 13 people who have made 0.1% of the total population. The reasons for this large fluctuation of the population when it comes to religion can be found in political instability and preparations for war on national and religious grounds in the early nineties in former SFR Yugoslavia.
In the municipality of Kikinda is dominated by Serbs. On this basis it can be concluded that the dominant religion is Orthodoxy. Orthodoxy is the religion most Kikinda municipality inhabitants profess and an increase in the number of supporters is recorded. According to the census of 1991 there were 46,566 Orthodox Christians who made 81.1% of all believers, or 66.8% of the total population in the municipality. In the last decade, between two censuses, the number of Serbs including the number of Orthodox believers increased. In the census of 2002 there were 51,979 registered Orthodox Christians who made 84.1% of believers in Kikinda, or 77.6% of the total population.

The Catholic religion confesses a smaller population and their numbers through the last two censuses decreased. The number of Catholics has decreased from 10,448 (1991) to 9,313 persons (2002). During this period, the proportion varied from 18.2% to 15.1% of the total number of persons who profess one of the religions mentioned above, and when it comes to share in the total population, the ratio varied from 15.1% to 13.9%. This decrease is the result of the decreasing number of Hungarians and Croats in the municipality of Kikinda.

In the period between the last two censuses the number of Protestants increased. According to the census in 1991, there were 239 persons of the Protestant religion, who made 0.4% of all believers, or 0.3% of the total population. The following census records an increase of this share to 0.4%.

In the municipality of Kikinda there are a noticeable somewhat larger number of people who profess Islam. Their number was reduced from 170 (1991) to 99 (2002), and the share fell from 0.2% to 0.1%.

The census in 1991 registered as many as 8,235 persons or 11.8% of the population who were not believers. In the next period there was an awakening of national consciousness and confession of religion becomes almost a right and obligation of all citizens. So the last census recorded a large decline in population in this category of up to 7,669 persons, and the share of the total population declined from 11.8% (1991) to 0.8% (2002).

In the municipality of Nova Crnja Serbs, throughout the observed period, amounted to an absolute ethnic majority and it is expected that the Orthodoxy is the most professed religion in this municipality. The dominant religion in the municipality of Nova Crnja is Orthodox. The census of 1991 recorded 10,515 persons of the Orthodox faith who made 77.0% of the total number of believers, or 72.3% of the total population in the municipality. Then a period characterized by depopulation process during which a decline in the total population in the municipality follows. The population of Orthodox Christians is reduced, but they are still the leading religious group with 9,510 persons or 77.9% of the total population that professes some kind of religion, or 74.9% of the total population of the municipality.

Catholicism is the second most common religion in this municipality. According to the census of 1991, 3,049 people with a share of 22.3% of all believers, or 21.0% of the total population confessed Catholicism. In the last decade between two censuses the number of Catholics decreased by 396 persons, and the proportion was 21.7% of the total number of believers, or 20.9% of the population of Nova Crnja municipality.

The number of inhabitants that confess some kind of Protestant religion marked a slight hesitation, but the share of Protestants in the total population of the municipality maintained a constant value of 0.3%.
The number of atheists in the municipality of Nova Crnja recorded an extremely large drop between the two censuses. With 426 individuals who made 3.0% of the total number of inhabitants in 1991, the number decreased to 17 individuals who made only 0.1% at the last census.

We note a similar situation in the municipality of Žitište. The majority of the populations are Serbs who also achieve a majority of the Orthodox religion, and if we add Romanians to them the Orthodox religion dominance is even greater.

According to the census in 1991 there were 14,837 Orthodox Christians and they made 73.4% of all believers, or 65.1% of the total population of the municipality. By the following census the number of supporters of the Orthodox religion has increased by 201 persons, so that the Orthodox Christians accounted for 78.2% of all believers in the municipality, or 73.7% of the total population according to the census in 2002.

The number and proportion of Catholics is declining. Their number decreased from 4,222 (1991) to 3,397 persons (2002). During this period there was a reduction in their share in the total religious population, from 20.9% to 17.7%, while the share of the total municipal population decreased from 18.5% to 16.6%.

Protestant religion, according to the census in 1991, was professed by 1,098 inhabitants that made 5.4% of total believer in the municipality, or 4.8% of the total population. By the next census the number had decreased by 320 persons, and the proportion of the total population to 3.8%.

Islam was, according to the census in 1991, confessed by 0.2% of the total population and, according to the latest census, that number was significantly reduced and the share was reduced to symbolic 0.1%. The percentage of residents who profess Judaism, or religion that is of Oriental origin that is not listed, makes only 0.1%. The number of atheists is in great decline. Of 1,530 persons reported in 1991, the number decreased to only 20 persons per census of 2002. In the same period the proportion varied from 6.7% to 0.1%.

The municipality of Sečanj is a Banat bordering municipality where Serbs form the majority population and there are a lot of Romanians. How these two nations generally profess the Orthodox religion, it is understandable that it is the dominating religion in this region. Population that confesses Orthodox religion has almost stagnant value. For eleven years it decreased by 173 persons. According to census of 1991 the Orthodox’s have made 80.6% of all believers, or 70.0% of the total population in the municipality. By the next census year, this share has, despite a reduction in population, increased to 83.5% of believers or 77.8% of the total population in the municipality.

The number of inhabitants who profess Catholicism recorded a negative trend. According to the census in 1991 they accounted for 18.5% of believers, or 16.1% of all residents. By the next census the number of Catholics decreased by 542 persons, their share in the total number of believers has dropped to 15.9%, and the share of the total population dropped to 14.8%.

Protestant religions are in the third place by the number of individuals who profess them. However, the number of adherents of these religions is declining. Of 89 believers who made 0.6% of all believers, and 0.5% of the total population in 1991, this share has decreased to 0.4% of believers, and 0.4% of the total population in the municipality of Sečanj.
The share of atheists in this municipality also recorded a drastic reduction, and it is safe to say that this trend was influenced by the form of government before the census in 1991, the change of government, military events and the awakening of national and religious consciousness in the period after that year. Thus, the proportion of atheists ranged from 7.9% (1991) to 0.3% (2002).

In the municipality of Plandište majority of the population professes Orthodoxy. The Orthodox Christians made, according to the census of 1991, 77.4% of believers, or 66.5% of the total population. In the period that followed there was a decline in the absolute number of Orthodox Christians, but as the total population declined, the proportion of Orthodox Christians has risen to 79.7% of believers, or 71.1% of total population of the municipality of Plandište.

The number and proportion of Catholics is declining. During the observed period the number of persons of the Catholic religion has declined for 326. The share of 16.0% of all believers and 13.8% of the total population, recorded in the 1991 census, dropped to 14.1% of all believers in the municipality and 12.6% of the total population in the 2002 census.

The Protestants recorded a slight increase in the total population share of the municipality Plandište. According to the census in 1991, 762 Protestants made 6.1% of all believers, or 5.2% of the total population, while the proportion in the total number of believers in the 2002 census was reduced to 6.0%, and the share in the total population increased to 5.3%.

The number of inhabitants who profess Islam dropped from 41 to 9, and the share decreased from 0.3% (1991) to 0.1% (2002), and according to the latest census no new residents who professes Judaism were recorded.

The number atheistic population in this municipality is very sharply reduced between the two censuses. According to the census in 1991 atheists made 3.2% of the total population and in the 2002 census that share have dropped to only 0.1%.

In the municipality of Vršac the two largest ethnic groups are Serbs and Romanians. When you know that most of the inhabitants of these nations profess Orthodoxy, it is a logical assumption that Orthodox faith has an absolute dominance.

Analyzing the table showing the population of Vršac based on confessional structure we see that Orthodox population is dominating. The 1991 census recorded 44,566 persons who professed Orthodoxy; they made 89.9% of the total number of believers, and 76.5% of total population. By the next census the total population of the municipality has reduced and the number of Orthodox Christians has risen to 45,927. From this an increasing share of the total number of believers at 91.7% and an increasing share of the total population at 84.5% has emerged.

The number and share of inhabitants of the Catholic religion is in decline. According to the 1991 census there were 4,131 Catholics, and they made 8.3% of the total number of believers, or 7.1% of the total population. The following census records a deficit of Catholics of 962 persons; their share in religious inhabitants fell to 6.1%, and share in the total population of the municipality fell to 5.8%. This reduction in the number and share of Catholics in the religious structure of Vršac is the result of somewhat faster reduction in the number of Hungarians and Croats.

Population of the Protestant religion marked a positive trend. The 1991 census recorded 541 of them, with a share in a group of believers of 1.1% and slightly smaller
share of the total population of the municipality. The increase in population of the Protestant religion, although a minimum of only 4 people, however, positively influenced the fact that the share of these religious groups hold a value of about 1.1%, and the share of the total population of Vršac has remained at the previous level.

The number of inhabitants who profess Islam dropped from 217 to 127 and from 0.4% to 0.2% of the total population of the municipality. The number of members of the Judaic community in both lists was 2, which is the minimum share that is not statistically significant.

The number of inhabitants who are not religious fell from 2,822 (1991) to 280 (2002) and the share in the total population declined from 4.8% to 0.5%.

For the municipality Bela Crkva the dominance of the Orthodox faith is also characteristic. Along with the reduction of the total population in the municipality the number of Orthodox Christians has reduced, but they are still the largest religious group.

According to the 1991 census in the municipality of Bela Crkva 18,894 inhabitants who professed orthodoxy lived, and they made 90.6% of believers, or 79.7% of the total population. The following census recorded a deficit of 1,961 of individuals, but as in the same period there was a significant reduction in the total population, the proportion of Orthodox Christians believers in the total number had risen to 91.1% and the share in the total population of the municipality to 83.1%.

In the observed period the number of Catholic inhabitants recorded a deficit of 343 persons. Their share in the total number of believers ranged from 8.1% (1991) to 7.3% (2002), and, in the same period, their share in the total municipal population has declined from 7.2% to 6.6%.

The Protestants recorded a decline in the absolute number and percentage share. In the observed period, the deficit was 41 persons, due to a decline in the total number of inhabitants in the municipality, the proportion has dropped slightly.

Islam is professed in both lists by 43, or 42 persons, and the share in the total population remained unchanged, with the value of 0.2%. The number of atheists here has dropped by as much as 330 persons, and they now make 0.3% of the total population of Bela Crkva.

When the religious structure in the border villages is observed, in the municipality of Bela Crkva, as well as in all the previously mentioned municipalities, religion is closely linked to the nation, so that in Serbian and Romanian villages Orthodox Church dominates, in the Hungarian villages the dominant religions are Catholicism and Protestantism.

4. CONCLUSION

The revitalization of religion and Church in Serbia is an undoubted phenomenon. In the former Yugoslavia this process first appeared during the 70’s in Catholic, and in the late 80's and early 90's in Orthodox homogeneous areas, which, as most susceptible to secularization, lagged for a decade in desecularization. The reawakening of holiness in Serbian Orthodoxy took place under the sign of the return of ancestral faith and reaffirmation of religion, which was accompanied by re-aggregation around traditional religious institutions.

The investigated area that included nine municipalities in the border area of the Serbian part of Banat was not directly affected by the war during the breakup of
Yugoslavia. But indirectly this area certainly felt the consequences of war in the form of immigration. Settlers, mostly Serbs that profess Orthodoxy, in conditions of pervasive religious awakening of the nineties, prompted an increasing number of Orthodox believers, while at the same time the number of Catholics decreased.

When observing the religious structure in the border villages of Banat, religion is closely linked to the nation, so that the Orthodox Church dominates in Serbian and Romanian villages, and Catholicism and Protestantism dominates in Hungarian villages. It can be concluded that the most dominant religion in this region is Orthodox, followed by the Catholic religion which is amended by Protestantism, Islam, Judaism and other religions, exotic and rare in our region.

Whether the economic growth and opening of the country to the world, which has been achieved between the two censuses, will reflect on the reduction in the number of believers will be shown in the results of a new census and emerging surveys.

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