



HOW DOES PATRIARCH PAVLE'S DEPARTURE AFFECT THE SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH AND THE SERBIAN PEOPLE?

The Serbian Unity Congress invited Archpriest Dr. Radovan Bigovic, President of the Christian Cultural Center and Professor of Divinity to comment on a few questions regarding the Serbian Orthodox Church and religion today.

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English Version

What does the departure of Patriarch Pavle mean?

Patriarch Pavle was undoubtedly the most favored, the least controversial, and the most respected figure in the recent history of the Serbian people. He was the head of the Serbian Church in a very difficult period in its history. Since his election for the Patriarch in 1990, people respected him as a holy man of God. He was a true role model for, and a symbol of, Christian clergymen and church heads. He was modest, calm, wise, with his entire being devoted to God. He never uttered a bad word about anyone. He measured everyone and everything by the Gospel.



Toward himself he was strict and toward others kind. All he had he unselfishly gave to others. For that he did not seek praise nor accolades. He reconciled Serbs amongst themselves. Thanks to him the so-called American schism was rectified. During his leadership, although it was a dramatic period of war, the Serbian church experienced its revival. Patriarch Pavle was and is respected not only by the Orthodox, but also members of other religions, as well as other Orthodox people and Orthodox Churches.

The people showed their love and respect best on the occasion of his funeral. About one million people came to pay their respect during four days of last rites. To this day people continue to come and visit his tomb in the monastery Rakovica in Belgrade. Many church delegations and representatives and heads of foreign states attended the funeral. He was respected by all, regardless of political beliefs, age, profession; even by atheists as a moral and spiritual leader.

Is Patriarch Pavle's departure a conclusion of an era for the Serbian Orthodox Church and the beginning of another? How would you describe them?

No doubt that with the death of Patriarch Pavle ends one epoch of the Serbian church and now a new epoch begins. Now the Church will exist in new, completely changed social conditions. It is now present on almost all continents. A great number of Serbs lives throughout the world. The task of the Church is to see that these people remain Christians and preserve their faith, culture and national identity. Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, where most of the Serbian people live, declared their will to join the European Union. The Church must analyze the new historical reality and give adequate responses to contemporary challenges of its people. The primary role of the Church in all times is to Christianize people and the world, but also to take care of the people's other needs with which she was entrusted (language, culture, social problems, education, etc.).

Does it influence the way people see their faith today, and the role of the Church in everyday life as well as its general role in society?

Serbs as other people interpret religion in different ways. Some understand the faith as part of national ideology and tradition, others as a theoretical view of the world, the third as a kind of therapy, and probably most interpret the faith as a way of life. It is obvious that today the Orthodox faith is being renewed among the Serbian people. The church is experiencing its renaissance and revival. According to all research institutions it is the Church which enjoys the greatest confidence in the nation and state. Besides its spiritual role it also plays very important cultural, educational and social roles. It should be particularly noted that today the Serbian Orthodox Church is an institution, which along with other things has an integrative role among Serbs who are divided along all plains.



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