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Activities of Father Nikolai Velimirovich¹ in Great Britain during the Great War

Abstract: Nikolai Velimirovich was one of the most influential bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church in the twentieth century. His stay in Britain in 1908/9 influenced his theological views and made him a proponent of an Anglican-Orthodox church reunion. As a known proponent of close relations between different Christian churches, he was sent by the Serbian Prime Minister Pašić to the United States (1915) and Britain (1915–1919) to work on promoting Serbia and the cause of Yugoslav unity. His activities in both countries were very successful. In Britain he closely collaborated with the Serbian Relief Fund and “British friends of Serbia” (R. W. Seton-Watson, Henry Wickham Steed and Sir Arthur Evans). Other Serbian intellectuals in London, particularly the brothers Bogdan and Pavle Popović, were in occasional collision with the members of the Yugoslav Committee over the nature of the future Yugoslav state. In contrast, Velimirovich remained committed to the cause of Yugoslav unity throughout the war with only rare moments of doubt. Unlike most other Serbs and Yugoslavs in London Father Nikolai never grew unsympathetic to the Serbian Prime Minister Pašić, although he did not share all of his views. In London he befriended the churchmen of the Church of England who propagated ecclesiastical reunion and were active in the Anglican and Eastern Association. These contacts allowed him to preach at St. Margaret’s Church, Westminster and other prominent Anglican churches. He became such a well-known and respected preacher that, in July 1917, he had the honour of being the first Orthodox clergyman to preach at St. Paul’s Cathedral. He was given the same honour in December 1919. By the end of the war he had very close relations with the highest prelates of the Church of England, the Catholic cardinal of Westminster, and with prominent clergymen of the Church of Scotland and other Protestant churches in Britain. Based on Velimirovich’s correspondence preserved in Belgrade and London archives, and on very wide coverage of his activities in *The Times*, in local British newspapers, and particularly in the Anglican journal *The Church Times*, this paper describes and analyses his wide-ranging activities in Britain. The Church of England supported him wholeheartedly in most of his activities and made him a celebrity in Britain during the Great War. It was thanks to this Church that some dozen of his pamphlets and booklets were published in London during the Great War. What made his relations with the Church of England so close was his commitment to the question of reunion of Orthodox churches with the Anglican Church. He suggested the reunion for the first time in 1909 and remained committed to it throughout the Great War. Analysing the activities of Father Nikolai, the paper also offers a survey of the very wide-ranging forms of help that the Church of England provided both to the Serbian Orthodox Church and to Serbs in

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¹ His name is also sometimes spelled Nicholai or Nicholas in English, and Nikolaj in Serbian. His family name is also spelled Velimirovic or Velimirović, and Velimirovitch in French. The form used in this text – Nikolai Velimirovich is the one that he used himself when he signed his affidavit following the Second World War.

general during the Great War. Most of these activities were channelled through him. Thus, by the end of the Great War he became a symbol of Anglican-Orthodox rapprochement.

Keywords: Father Nikolai Velimirovich (Velimirović), pro-Serbian and pro-Yugoslav propaganda in Britain, reunion of the Orthodox churches and the Church of England

Nikolai Velimirovich (1881–1956) is the most influential churchman in the Serbian culture of the twentieth century. Ever since the 1910s when he published his first works he has ranked among the most popular authors in Serbia. His anticommunist position made him half-proscribed during the communist era in Yugoslavia, and he spent the last eleven years of his life in exile in the United States. The Serbian Orthodox Church canonised him in May 2003.² Some of his occasional statements made in the 1930s and particularly a book written in 1945, but published only posthumously in 1985, include anti-Semitic paragraphs. This gave rise to harsh criticisms,³ but later studies have placed his late anti-Semitic statements in their historical context.⁴

The main line that he advocated in inter-church relations was very liberal and focused on religious Christian ecumenism and a cooperation of the Apostolic churches, particularly between the Church of England and the Orthodox churches. In his early writings he advocated close cooperation with the Roman Catholic Church as well. Within the Serbian Orthodox Church he demonstrated a very unique interest often followed by admiration for the religious traditions of India and the Far East, for Hinduism as well as Buddhism. All these views earned him a range of opponents and enemies both within the ranks of the Serbian Orthodox Church and among mainstream authors of various backgrounds.⁵ Surprisingly, even some leftist authors pointed out his lack of Chris-

² His feast day is celebrated on 3 May. Radovan Bigović, s. v. "Velimirović, Nikolaj (Nikola)", *Srpski biografski rečnik*, vol. 2 (Novi Sad: Marica srpska, 2006), 122.

³ For this harsh criticism see Jovan Byford, *Denial and Repression of Antisemitism: Post-Communist Remembrance of the Serbian Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović* (Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 2008).

⁴ See a well-elaborated contextualisation by Zoran Milutinović, *Getting over Europe. The Construction of Europe in Serbian Culture* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2011), 147–168. The best historical work on the subject is Milan Koljanin, *Jevreji i antisemitizam u Kraljevini Jugoslaviji 1918–1941* (Belgrade: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 2008), 332–343. Koljanin demonstrates that from the end of 1939, as the war approached, both Bishop Nikolai and Patriarch Gavriilo of Serbia publicly supported the Jewish community. Some of their statements were even censored in the Yugoslav press, since the Yugoslav authorities sought to avoid any conflict with the Third Reich at that point. On this matter see also Bojan Aleksov, "Jovan Byford, *Denial and Repression...*", *American Historical Review* 114, no. 5 (Dec. 2009), 1568–1569.

⁵ In 1926 Dimitrije Kirilović claimed: "The faith of Njegoš and Mr. Velimirović, taken as a whole, may not be considered to be the faith of the Church, and therefore they have excluded themselves, since the Church itself has not done it." In his sermon delivered in December 1939, Platon Jovanović, Bishop of Bitolj and Ohrid, attacked Bishop Nikolai, implying that

tian Orthodox dogmatism.⁶ Both his ecumenism and his concept of panhumanism reached their climax during his stay in Great Britain and the United States in the course of the Great War, from 1915 to 1919. Concomitantly with that he developed a very systematic and rather successful pro-Serbian and pro-Yugoslav propaganda effort in Britain and the United States of America.

This paper is focused on Velimirovich's work and activities until 1919. The theologian and philosopher Bogdan Lubardić has identified three phases in the development of Velimirovich's ideas: the pre-Ohrid phase (1902–1919), the Ohrid phase (1920–1936), and the post-Ohrid phase (1936–1956). Taking the years 1919/20 as the main dividing line in Velimirovich's thought, he has also offered a more general division into the pre-Ohrid and post-Ohrid periods. While the first period of Velimirovich's ideas was pro-Western, the one that ensued was Orthodox and directed towards the East, but was also "above the East and the West".⁷ This paper, therefore, analyses the pre-Ohrid phase of Nikolai Velimirovich, which was pro-Western and increasingly Anglophile.

Studies abroad and the first stay in Britain

Velimirovich attended the grammar school in Valjevo from 1892 to 1898, and then a theological school in Belgrade from 1898 to 1902. During his studies at the Theological School he was co-opted into the circle of the priest Aleksa Ilić, the leader of the ecclesiastical reformist opposition and editor of the very influential journal *Hrišćanski vesnik* [Christian Herald]. Ilić took him under his wing and supported him in every possible way. By joining this circle Velimirovich became a part of the reformist church movement which was in open conflict with Archbishop Dimitrije of Serbia, and with the church hierarchy in Serbia. That essentially meant that he was now a part of the opposition to the "Russophile class", the main line in the Serbian Church in Serbia at the time.⁸ This opposi-

he was a sectarian and a heretic. *Politika*, 28 Dec. 1939, p. 12. Milan D. Janković, *Episkop Nikolaj. Život, misao i delo*, vol. 2 (Belgrade: Bishopric of Šabac and Valjevo, 2002), 672 and 697–699.

⁶ Jovan Skerlić (1911) claimed that Velimirovich had the "conscience of a Protestant" and the "imagination of a Catholic" and advised him that he should not read Renan if he wished to have a career in the Church. Svetislav Marić (1925) held that Velimirovich's All-Man was not identical to biblical Christ, but to a version of Christ combined with elements of Buddha and Socrates. Janković, *Episkop Nikolaj*, vol. 2, 15 and 668.

⁷ Bogdan Lubardić, "Nikolaj Velimirović 1903–1914", in M. Ković, ed., *Srbi 1903–1914. Istorija ideja* (Belgrade: Clio, 2015), 328.

⁸ See notes of Jovan Velimirovic on Nikolai Velimirovich in Janković, *Episkop Nikolai*, vol. 1, 6.

tion enjoyed the support of many political circles, including the Serbian court and King Peter Karageorgevich.

Nikola Velimirovich wanted to continue his studies, and under the influence of Ilić insisted to be sent to the West. He first went to the University of Halle, where he stayed from November 1905 to August 1906. Then he attended the Old Catholic Theological Faculty of the University of Bern in Switzerland from October 1906 to July 1908.⁹ In July 1908 he obtained a D.D. degree *summa cum laude* in Bern with his dissertation entitled “The Resurrection of Christ as the fundamental dogma of the Apostolic Church”, under the supervision of the Bishop of the Old Catholic Church, Eduard Herzog (1841–1924).¹⁰ When he returned to Belgrade in July 1908, he again wanted to continue his studies in the West and in spite of the opposition of the Serbian Church he secured another stipend through the Ministry of Education and owing to the connections of Aleksa Ilić. This time he went to England.

He arrived in Britain for the first time on 3 November 1908, and found lodging at 38 Sinclair Road, W. in London. A letter to his family informs us that his English was very limited. He complained about Englishmen: “Those who do not speak their language cannot communicate with them. I have a smattering of it and it is not easy. I have to sit down and study.”¹¹ Only scarce documents from this phase in his life have been preserved. Some of his surviving notes may date from this period. They contain quotes in English from George Tyrrell (1861–1909),¹² an Irish Catholic excommunicated from the Catholic Church for his modernist views in the same year when Velimirovich arrived in London. The notes reveal his interests in reformist and modernist theology. Archbishop Dimitrije cancelled his stipend previously approved by the Ministry of Education and he managed to stay in Britain only owing to the financial aid of his friends from the *Hrišćanski vesnik* and some minor help of his father’s. On 3 May 1909, Nikola Velimirovich wrote to the dean of the Faculty of Humanities in Bern from London explaining that after he had obtained the D.D. degree in Bern he went to London, “where I visited the great library of the ‘British Museum’ and prepared myself for the examination in the historical-philosophical section.”¹³

⁹ Urs von Arx, “Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović (1880–1956) and his Studies in Bern within the Context of the Old Catholic-Serbian Orthodox Relationship”, *Serbian Studies* 20/2 (2006), 312, n. 18.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 314.

¹¹ Arhiv Srbije [Archives of Serbia; hereafter: AS], Fonds NV – 19, pp. 1–2.

¹² AS, Fonds NV – 11, pp. 2–4.

¹³ Von Arx, “Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović”, 315. “Examination” refers to his second doctoral dissertation in Bern.

He continued learning English even after his departure from England, and he took a course in English syntax in Bern in the summer term of 1909.¹⁴

His first appearance in the British media took place in March 1909. In the leading Anglican weekly in the United Kingdom, *The Guardian*, the Anglican theologian Leighton Pullan published an article entitled “Problems of Reunion with the East”, stating: “We believe, as there is one Christ, so there is one Church.” At the end of the article in which Pullan discussed major theological differences between the two churches, he expressed his belief that “the East would move to meet the West”.¹⁵ Velimirovich reacted to this piece: “I should say that it is not an agreement on the problem of the *Filioque* or of Transubstantiation that is absolutely necessary in order to bring about reunion, but before all else an *entente cordiale*.” He was quite confident that the union was actually at hand: “The Eastern and Anglican Churches have already, therefore, in their existing confessions of faith a completely sufficient doctrinal foundation, not on which a union ought to be based, but on which it is actually based and actually exists.” For him the key issue of the reunion was not about theological issues but about *entente cordiale* or *unium cordium*, and in line with that he ended his reply with the following question: “Is not love mightier than the knowledge of the deepest mysteries?”¹⁶ Leighton Pullan replied to this and clarified that in his opinion both union of hearts and understanding of mutual differences were needed.¹⁷ The most important aspect of this opinion exchange is that Velimirovich appeared as a fervent proponent of the reunion of the Eastern Orthodox Churches with the Church of England and other churches as early as 1909.

From England, he again went to Switzerland, where he obtained another doctoral degree (PhD) in June 1909, and then returned to Belgrade.¹⁸ In 1909 he published a series of articles on Western theology in the *Hrišćanski vesnik*. They dealt with Catholic modernism, the work of the Anglican Bishop Brooke Foss Westcott, and the theories of Cardinal Newman.¹⁹ His knowledge of and sympathy for Catholic modernism and Anglican theology are clearly expressed

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Leighton Pullan, “Problems of Reunion with the East”, *Guardian* no. 3296, 3 Feb. 1909, 171.

¹⁶ Nikola Velimirovitch D.D., “Problems of Reunion with the East”, *Guardian* no. 3300, 3 March 1909, 340–341.

¹⁷ Leighton Pullan, “Reunion with the East”, *Guardian* no. 3301, 10 Mar. 1909, 398.

¹⁸ Von Arx, “Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović”, 314–315. Prota Aleksa Ilić, *Moji doživljaji sa dr. Nikolajem Velimirovićem i dr. Vojom Janjićem* (Belgrade: Private edition, 1938), 9–10.

¹⁹ N. Velimirović, “Velika kriza u rimokatolicizmu”, *Hrišćanski vesnik* [hereafter: HV] (Jan. 1909), 17–37; N. Velimirović, “Njuman i njegova teorija”, HV (March 1909), 186–203; N. Velimirović, “Anglikanski episkop Vestkot. Jedna glava iz engleske modern teologije”, HV (July-Aug. 1909), 533–543, HV (Sep. 1909), 625–638.

in these articles. When George Tyrrell died, the *Hrišćanski vesnik* published a very sympathetic obituary, which was probably written, or at least inspired, by Velimirovich.²⁰

It is sometimes claimed, without any evidence, that he spent the academic year 1908/9 at the University of Oxford and that he prepared a dissertation on George Berkeley there which he supposedly defended later in Geneva, or that he was awarded a PhD in London.²¹ Swiss library catalogues confirm that he indeed defended two doctoral dissertations and that both were published in Bern in 1910, but the second treats a quite different topic from the one usually mentioned. The first is on the resurrection of Christ.²² The second, however, is entitled “French-Slavic Struggle in Bocca di Cattaro [Boka Kotorska] from 1806 to 1810”²³ and it was submitted to the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Bern as his “Inaugural-Dissertation” for obtaining a PhD. His second doctoral degree was obtained in June 1909, again with *magna cum laude*, from the Faculty of Humanities in Bern under the supervision of Prof. Philipp Woker.²⁴ He left a testimony about some of his inner feelings during his studies. In a sermon delivered in 1927 at St. Luke’s, Camberwell, Velimirovich recalled: “I remember that when I was a student of Philosophy in Germany I was very much confused by all that was written of Philosophy. I was almost at the verge of suicide, as are many young people of today...”²⁵

On 4 December 1909, Velimirovich took his monastic vows and changed his name from Nikola to Nikolai.²⁶ It was precisely in that year that the dispute between the *Hrišćanski vesnik* and Archbishop Dimitrije²⁷ reached its peak and

²⁰ HV (Oct. 1909), 768.

²¹ Notes of Jovan Velimirovic on Nikolai Velimirovich, 10. When Velimirovich became Bishop of Žiča in 1919, the ecclesiastical journal *Vesnik*, which, in a way, continued the traditions of the *Hrišćanski vesnik*, published his biography, claiming that he had defended a PhD on “Philosophy of Berkeley” in London. “Dr. Nikolaj Velimirović. Episkop žički”, *Vesnik. Crkveno-politički i društveni list* no. 6 (25 May 1919), 1.

²² Nicola Velimirovitch, *Der Glaube an die Auferstehung Christi als Grunddogma des apostolischen Kirche* (Bern 1910).

²³ Nicola Velimirovitch, *Französisch-slavische Kämpfe in der Bocca di Cattaro, 1806–1814* (Bern: Gottfr. Iseli, 1910).

²⁴ Von Arx, “Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović”, 315–316; HV (June 1909), 480.

²⁵ The sermon was delivered on 13 November 1927, and its content has been preserved in the Papers of Canon J. A. Douglas at Lambeth Palace Library. It has been quoted at length in Muriel Heppell, *George Bell and Nikolai Velimirović, The Story of a Friendship* (Birmingham: Lazarica Press, 2001), 31.

²⁶ HV (Dec. 1909), 926.

²⁷ Dimitrije Pavlović was Archbishop of Serbia from 1905 to 1920. In 1879 the Serbian Orthodox Church in Serbia became autocephalous and since then its head was titled “Archbishop of Belgrade and Metropolitan of Serbia.” In 1920 the Archbishopric of Serbia was

the journal published severe attacks on the Archbishop in each of its monthly issues. It was therefore not surprising that after his return to Belgrade Velimirovich faced an inimical church hierarchy which did whatever it could to prevent the post-validation of his D.D. and PhD degrees. Without at least one of the two degrees being post-validated, he could not apply for a teaching position. Apparently, he had to take some additional exams. It appears from his correspondence with Bishop Eduard Herzog that he expressed willingness to return to Bern to obtain habilitation, which would entitle him to become *Privatdozent* (university lecturer). Only Herzog's reply dated 3 January 1910 has been preserved, which means that Velimirovich wrote to him at the end of 1909.²⁸

He was finally appointed as junior lecturer (*suplent*) at the Seminary in Belgrade in October 1910. The sermon he held on St. Stephen's Day in 1910 (9 January) in Belgrade Cathedral had made him very popular. King Peter came to hear it, and those in attendance were so pleased that they shouted "Long live!" at the end of his sermon.²⁹ The sermon caused a sensation and was spoken of in Belgrade as an event of the highest cultural significance. Archbishop Dimitrije and other church dignitaries were very upset. They believed that Velimirovich's activities "introduced the Protestant spirit into the Serbian Church".³⁰ His articles on Catholic modernism and Anglican teachings in the *Hrišćanski vesnik* could only have strengthened such views. As a result, he was sent to Sankt Petersburg in Russia to become "more Orthodox" and he stayed there from January 1910 to May 1911.³¹ It was upon his return from Russia that he could take the position at St. Sava Seminary in Belgrade.

It was in 1911 that he published his book *Religija Njegoševa* (The Religion of Njegoš). It analyses the religious and theological views of Peter II Petrovich (1813–1851, Prince of Montenegro from 1830, Metropolitan of Montenegro from 1833), Montenegrin Prince-Bishop who has been considered the greatest Serbian poet. His play *The Mountain Wreath* (*Gorski Vijenac*) was immensely popular both in Serbia and Yugoslavia. In 1930 Vladeta Popović wrote: "The *Mountain Wreath* has had a success unparalleled by any other work in Serbo-

raised to the status of Patriarchate and Dimitrije became the first patriarch of the united Serbian Church (1920–1930).

²⁸ Von Arx, "Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović", 318.

²⁹ HV (Dec. 1909), 926.

³⁰ Notes of Jovan Velimirović on Nikolai Velimirovich, 12.

³¹ *Hrišćanski vesnik* published the information both about his departure for Russia and about his return: HV (Jan. 1910), 72; and HV (May 1911), 394. It seems that, in November 1910, he had to briefly return to Belgrade to take up the position of lecturer at the Theological Seminary. HV (Nov. 1910), 830.

Croatian literature.”³² This assessment was confirmed in later decades.³³ Therefore a re-evaluation of Njegoš could only have drawn a lot of attention and a potential storm of criticism. Velimirovich demonstrated that the views of the Prince-Bishop were quite unorthodox, especially those expressed in his poem *Luča mikrokozma* (The Ray of the Microcosm). At one point he even equated Njegoš’s teachings with those of Zarathustra (Zoroaster). Even so, he expressed much admiration for the poet. The way the book is written can easily lead the reader to think that the young monk sympathises too openly even with some heretical views of his favourite poet, who was an Orthodox bishop at the time he published his poems! Some of Velimirovich’s assessments of Njegoš inevitably strike us as speaking of his own inner world more than of the poet himself and as being his own projections more than analytical observations about the poetry of Njegoš. Thus, he says of him: “Njegoš is both an artist and a moralist, a sceptic and a theist, a pessimist and an optimist, a Darwinist and a Bible-believer.”³⁴ During his studies abroad, Velimirovich had become a true erudite and his learning is evident almost in every page of the book. That his stay in Britain left a clear mark on this work may be seen from the fact that he quotes or mentions Charles Dickens, Lord Byron, John Milton, Charles Darwin, Thomas Carlyle, Shakespeare and George Berkeley.

In 1910 the *Hrišćanski vesnik* published the news that Velimirovich had been offered the position of assistant professor (*dozent*) at the Theological Faculty in Bern and the position of editor of the *Revue Intenationale de Théologie*.³⁵ Bishop Herzog indeed wrote to him on 30 September 1910, asking him if he would be willing to assume the editorship of the journal.³⁶ Velimirovich must have mentioned this to his colleagues at the *Hrišćanski vesnik* and they immediately made use of it and published the news, clearly aiming to contrast young and promising theologians who had no positions in the Serbian Church with the Serbian episcopate, which was depicted by the Belgrade journal in a very unfavourable light. Another contributor to the *Hrišćanski vesnik* was Čedomir Marjanović, who had also earned a D.D. degree in Bern in 1904, and was also targeted by the episcopate and even suspended in 1910.

³² Vladeta Popović, “Introduction”, in P. P. Nyegosh, *The Mountain Wreath* by P. P. Nyegosh. Prince-Bishop of Montenegro, transl. James W. Wiles (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1930), 11.

³³ *Mountain Wreath* “is rightly considered the highest achievement in poetry among the South Slavs” (Dragiša Živković, “Romantizam u srpskoj književnosti”, in *Istorija srpskog naroda*, vol. V-2 (Belgrade: SKZ, 1994), 406).

³⁴ Nikolaj Velimirović, *Religija Njegoševa* (Belgrade: Štamparija “Sveti Sava”, 1911), 77.

³⁵ HV (Oct. 1910), 746.

³⁶ Von Arx, “Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović”, 320.

Upon his return from Russia, Velimirovich continued with his enormously popular sermons in Belgrade. He was openly supported both by the *Hrišćanski vesnik* and by King Peter, who continued to attend his sermons, but also by some politicians. In 1913 he was appointed Bishop of Niš. The appointment probably came as a result of mediation by secular authorities, which insisted on the Serbian Church including young and educated bishops into its ranks. Yet, to everyone's surprise, Velimirovich declined the appointment. As one of the reasons for declining the post, he cited his plans to go to Britain.

In late 1913 the decision was made to resume the publication of the *Hrišćanski vesnik* after a two-year break, with Velimirovich as a member of the editorial board and his friend Dr. Vojislav Janić as its editor. However, only the issue for January 1914 was published. The owner of the journal, Aleksa Ilić, came into open conflict with Janić and Velimirovich because of Janić's peculiar lecture given in Prague on the occasion of the celebration of the centenary of Njegoš. He advocated not only the political but also religious unification of Slavs and claimed that a group of young theologians in Serbia would like to carry out reforms similar to those promoted in the teachings of Jan Hus and Martin Luther. According to Aleksa Ilić's memoirs, he asked Velimirovich to prepare a written denial of Janić's claims for the next issue of his journal, but Velimirovich is supposed to have answered that he could not do it because Janić had delivered his lecture with his knowledge and approval. After that, Ilić stopped publishing the journal.³⁷ On the eve of the Great War, Velimirovich was, in some respects, too reformist even for a reformist journal.

Mission to the United States

Soon afterwards the Great War began and, in April 1915, the Serbian government decided to send Velimirovich to Britain and the United States. On 13 May 1915, Prime Minister Pašić informed his Minister Plenipotentiary in London, Bošković: "England is the state where I believe the most energetic action needs to be organised both for the sake of informing the public about our country, its needs, characteristics, wishes and hopes, and for the sake of working on the realisation of our unification with the Croats and Slovenes. This is the kind of work that demands many and very different forces. Dr. Nikolai Velimirovich will come [to Britain] for a short period and he will then proceed for America."³⁸ The Serbian priest was among the few persons in Serbia who had spent some time in Britain, spoke English, and had already been known as a good and very popular preacher. Since his target public in the United States were Yugoslav/South-Slavic immigrants, he was almost an ideal choice. The Yugoslav immi-

³⁷ Ilić, *Moji doživljaji sa dr. Nikolajem*, 20–27.

³⁸ AJ, Fonds 80, f. 2, 267.

grants in the United States were Orthodox (Serbs) and Catholic Christians (Croats and Slovenes), and a person with liberal theological ideas who could address both groups was needed. Additionally, he was already known as an open supporter of the bringing of various Christian churches together.

In May 1915 Velimirovich received 100 British pounds from the Serbian Legation in London for his mission to the United States.³⁹ In June Velimirovich was in the United States. Before his departure he completed a booklet entitled *Religion and Nationality in Serbia*, dedicating it “to the memory of the great Croatian patriot Bishop Strossmayer on the centenary of his birth (1815–1915).”⁴⁰ He was impressed by the fact that the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church in England worked together “in the same grand patriotic and national cause”. He found the same to be applicable to the Yugoslavs belonging to different Christian churches. The Orthodox Church, in his opinion, was “the best spiritual medium of the national ideal”, while the Catholic clergy “also proved themselves both nationalistic and patriotic”.⁴¹ He considered that the two “great bishops”, Prince-Bishop Peter II of Montenegro and Bishop Strossmayer of Djakovko, were “the mightiest champions of national union”.⁴² Arguing that differences between the two churches could be overcome, he optimistically claimed: “All we Yugoslavs are sure that there will be harmony and unanimity between the two priesthoods, the two confessions, and the two Churches in the future Serbian State.”⁴³ Robert William Seton-Watson prefaced the booklet, impressed by its author’s religious tolerance. He expressed considerable respect for the Serbian monk, claiming that he represented “in its best form the new spirit which is awakening in the Serbian Church and from which many expect a serious movement of internal reform.”⁴⁴

Upon his arrival in the United States, Velimirovich worked closely with Prof. Mihailo (Michael) Pupin. Pupin had established the Serb National Defence the previous year, and was Serbia’s honorary consul for the USA and Canada. Velimirovich was sent by the Serbian government to raise support from Serbian and other Yugoslav-Americans in the United States, which was neutral

³⁹ AS KSPL, f. II p. 1220/1915, Dispatch of the Royal Legation in London to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Serbia, London, 20 May [2 June] 1915. The dates in brackets are in the New Style (Gregorian calendar).

⁴⁰ Nicholas Velimirović, *Religion and Nationality in Serbia* (London: Nisbet & Co. Ltd., 1915), 4.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* 7–8.

⁴² *Ibid.* 12.

⁴³ *Ibid.* 23.

⁴⁴ R. W. Seton-Watson, “Prefatory Note”, in *ibid.* 3. The note was written on 15 June 1915.

at the time. His numerous lectures and speeches contributed to the fundraising effort in aid of Serbia.⁴⁵

His activities in the United States had one main aim which he himself defined. It was to show to Serb Orthodox Americans, as well as to Croat and Slovene Catholic Americans, that they could be Yugoslavs, and that their adherence to two different churches should not be an obstacle to their unification. During his stay in America, he became engaged in the publication of the New York-based weekly *Živa crkva* (Living Church), subtitled “Nedeljni glasnik slovenskog hrišćanstva” (Weekly herald of Slavic Christianity). Five issues of the journal were published, and each in fact was a separate pamphlet written by Velimirovich. The first issue is entitled “Sveti Jovan Hus” (St. John Hus). It was published on the 500th anniversary of the burning at stake of Jan Hus (1369 – 6 July 1415) for alleged heresy. The author’s high esteem for Hus may be seen from the following passage: “Professor Palimov, a very Orthodox Russian theologian, called the doctrine of Hus Orthodox. The Protestants call Hus their founder and leader. The enlightened Catholics call him their hero and role model. I think that Hus was formally neither Orthodox, nor Protestant, nor Catholic, but that in essence he therefore was at once all of the three. He was a Christian, a true Christian in action and deed. Like James and Philip, like Thaddeus and Andrew.”⁴⁶ The fifth and last issue is entitled “Two Churches in One Nation”. This was a reprint of Velimirovich’s pamphlet published in London under the title *Religion and Nationality in Serbia*, with some altered headings.

In keeping with his words from the last issue of the *Živa crkva* that the two churches could easily cooperate, he worked on bringing Catholic and Orthodox priests in the United States together. He visited New York, Chicago and California, and in July he organised “a congress in Pittsburgh known for the fact that it was the first congress in Yugoslav history in which Catholic and Orthodox priests took part together, and there they swore that they would work in harmony for the sake of national unity and religious tolerance.”⁴⁷ He also brought together American journalists of Yugoslav descent, who adopted the “Resolution of Yugoslav Journalists in America”. Its first point states: “Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, being one people by blood, language and national aspirations, will not be able to consider the European war over until the whole of it [people] is liberated from all of its current masters and united into one state.”

⁴⁵ Krinka Vidakovic Petrov, “The Serb National Federation: Champion of Serbdom in America”, in K. Vidakovic Petrov, ed., *Serb National Federation. First 100 Years* (Pittsburgh: Serb National Federation, 2001), 44.

⁴⁶ “Sveti Jovan Hus”, *Živa crkva* no. 1 (1915), 11–12.

⁴⁷ Milada Paulová, *Jugoslavenski odbor* (Zagreb: Prosvjetna nakladna zadruka, 1925), 235.

The resolution was signed by 22 journalists working for Serbian and Croatian journals in America.⁴⁸

He made a deep impression on the Serbian and other Yugoslav communities in the United States. In March 1917, a year and a half after his departure from the United States, Jelena Lozanić-Frothingham (Helen Losanitch Frothingham) visited the Serbian Club in San Francisco and saw the paintings and photographs of King Peter, King Nicholas of Montenegro, St. Sava, Ivan Gundulić, Nikolai Velimirovich and Savka Subbotić.⁴⁹

Velimirovich left New York for London on 3 September and arrived in London on 13 September.⁵⁰ He described his activities in the United States in a letter to the Serbian Minister in London. "I informed our people of the struggle of the Serbs which has begun one hundred years ago, and which is to be completed now, and to be completed with the liberation and unification of all of our people. ... I asked them ['our people'] to declare themselves freely against Austria and for Serbia. And the people did. And, I felt that my mission was thereby accomplished."⁵¹ On 16 September, he counselled with the Legation if he should return to Serbia, and the Legation forwarded his question to Serbia. Two days later, the reply came from Prime Minister Pašić, who decided that both Pavle Popović and Nikolai Velimirovich were to stay in London.⁵²

Mission and work in Britain. Propaganda for and promotion of Serbia and the Yugoslav idea

Velimirovich came to London in May 1915, briefly stayed there, and then left for the United States. In the spring of 1915 there was a group of Serbian intellectuals in London. The former Serbian diplomat and minister of finance in several cabinets, Chedomille Miyatovich, had been living in Britain since 1889. In August 1914 one of the ideologues of the Yugoslav literary movement in Bosnia, Dimitrije Mitrinović, also came to London and settled there permanently. In May 1915 Pavle Popović and his brother Bogdan Popović, both professors of

⁴⁸ AJ, Fonds 80, 40-375, "Rezolucija jugoslovenskih novinara u Americi".

⁴⁹ Jelena Lozanić-Frothingham, *Dobrotvorna misija za Srbiju u I svetskom ratu* (Belgrade 1970), 156. Helen Losanitch Frothingham, *Mission for Serbia: letters from America and Canada, 1915-1920*, ed. Matilda Spence Rowland. New York: Walker and Co., 1970

⁵⁰ Pavle Popović, *Iz dnevnika* (Belgrade: Zavod za udžbenike, 2001), 236. AJ, Fonds 80, 40-372/374, 40-376.

⁵¹ AJ, Fonds 80, 40-376, N. Velimirovich to the Serbian Minister, London, 15 Sept. 1915. It appears that Velimirovich used New Style dates in his letters since the Legation informed the Prime Minister on 3 [16] September that Velimirovich had returned from the United States (AJ, Fonds 80, f. 2, 409).

⁵² AJ, Fonds 80, f. 2, 404, Draft of Pašić's reply to Bošković, 4 [17] Sept. 1915.

Literature at the University of Belgrade, joined the group. Additionally, the Serbian geographer Jovan Cvijić was in London from February to July 1915.⁵³ All Serbs in London were formally or informally attached to the Serbian Legation, and most of them, including Velimirovich, the Popović brothers and Cvijić, had been sent there by the Serbian government.

At the end of September and in October of 1915, Velimirovich attended some of the meetings of the Yugoslav Committee in London. The Committee, set up in Paris on 30 April 1915, had its seat in London. It was presided over by Ante Trumbić and its members were Croat, Slovene and Serb politicians and cultural workers from Austria-Hungary. Its aim was the liberation of the Yugoslav areas of Austria-Hungary and their unification with Serbia.⁵⁴ Although Trumbić was its president, the most influential member of the Yugoslav Committee in London was Frano Supilo.

By the time Velimirovich came back from the United States, a serious crisis had already erupted between the Yugoslav Committee and the Serbian Legation in London. Serbian Minister Mateja Bošković and the brothers Professors Pavle and Bogdan Popović came into conflict with Frano Supilo, the leading Croat in the Yugoslav Committee who was suspected by the Serbian Minister of having a narrowly Croatian standpoint. Serbian Prime Minister Pašić had to send the Serbian politician and President of the Serbian Royal Academy, Prof. Jovan Žujović, from Paris to London, to try to mediate between the two groups and bring about mutual understanding. The Croat members of the Yugoslav Committee all sided with Supilo,⁵⁵ and all the leading “British friends of Serbia” and future Yugoslavia (R. W. Seton-Watson, Henry Wickham Steed and Sir Arthur Evans), who held Supilo in high regard, almost stopped any communication with Bošković because of the conflict. The Serbian envoys sent to London by the Serbian government were divided.

Bogdan and Pavle Popović supported Bošković, while Velimirovich and Žujović advocated a conciliatory line and maintained regular contacts with British friends of Serbia. That was also the official line requested from the Serbian envoys in London by Prime Minister Pašić in his dispatch of 19 September 1915.⁵⁶ Žujović considered Father Nikolai’s activities as very important and noted in his Diary that he would report to Prime Minister Pašić that the main credit for the consolidation within the Yugoslav Committee should be given to

⁵³ Ljubinka Trgovčević, *Naučnici Srbije i stvaranje Jugoslavije* (Belgrade: Narodna knjiga and SKZ, 1986), 327–333.

⁵⁴ Dragovan Šepić, s. v. “Jugoslavenski odbor”, in *Enciklopedija Jugoslavije*, vol. 4 (Zagreb 1960).

⁵⁵ See Žujović’s diary entry of 10 [23] Sept. 1915 in Jovan Žujović, *Dnevnik*, vol. 2 (Belgrade: Arhiv Srbije, 1986), 191.

⁵⁶ Žujović, *Dnevnik*, vol. 2, 191–200.

Velimirovich and that he should stay in London.⁵⁷ Christopher and Hugh Seton-Watson also noticed that at that time Velimirovich, “surprisingly, had good relations with Yugoslav exiles in London”,⁵⁸ R. W. Seton Watson, in a letter to Mabel Grujić of 19 September 1915, complained about the conflict between Supilo and Bošković and at the end of the letter mentioned that Father Velimirovich was back from the USA and that “perhaps he may save the situation”.⁵⁹

The conflict took place at the most critical point for Serbia. In October 1915 the Central Powers attacked the country and soon occupied it. During these weeks Velimirovich vacillated between enthusiasm and utter despair. On 22 September 1915 he wrote to R. W. Seton-Watson and expressed great satisfaction with the way the Serbian Flag Day had been celebrated in London: “It was a real joy for me to look everybody in London, in the Centre of the World, with a Serbian flag on the breast. A hundred years ago nobody in this great town did know even that there is a nation with the name ‘Serbs’. What a change.”⁶⁰ On 29 October he wrote to Seton-Watson that Serbia “fought and died once for Christianity”. That was 500 years earlier. Serbia was “again fighting and dying for Christianity and Civilisation”, and she was “looking upon to the Leader-Nation of Christianity and Civilisation”. He asked if England would help his country which was “not fighting only for Serbia but at the same time for India and Egypt”. He appealed to “the most Christian people of the World” for help, and warned: “We are your unique friend between Hamburg and Baghdad.”⁶¹

Velimirovich was so well placed in London society that he had lunch with Lord Bryce on 15 October 1915, on which occasion he warned him that the collapse of Serbia would mean that the British Empire would be threatened because Turkey would be organised by Germany.⁶² Žujović soon went to Paris and was followed by Velimirovich. It was there that they received news of the fall of major Serbian towns. The atmosphere was very depressing and even Velimirovich began to doubt if his Yugoslav policy was good for Serbia. Žujović noted down his doubts in his diary entry for 11 November 1915: “Father Nikolai keeps

⁵⁷ Žujović’s diary entry of 3 Oct. 1915, Žujović, *Dnevnik*, vol. 2, 200.

⁵⁸ Hugh and Christopher Seton-Watson, *The Making of a New Europe*. R. W. Seton-Watson and the last years of Austria-Hungary (London: Methuen, 1981), 152.

⁵⁹ R. W. Seton-Watson and the Yugoslavs. *Correspondence 1906–1941*, vol. 1: 1906–1918 (London and Zagreb: British Academy and the Institute of Croatian History, 1976), 241.

⁶⁰ R. W. Seton-Watson and the Yugoslavs, vol. 1, 243. School of Slavonic and East European Studies [hereafter: SSEES], London, Collection of R. W. Seton-Watson [SEW] 7.1.5, Nicolay Velimirovich to Dr. Seton-Watson, London, 23 Sept. 1915 (names are spelled as in original letters).

⁶¹ *Ibid.* 251. Hugh and Christopher Seton-Watson, *The Making of a New Europe*, 152. SSEES, SEW, 7.1.5, Fr. Nicholay Velimirovich to Dr. Seton-Watson, London, 29 Oct. 1915.

⁶² Žujović, *Dnevnik*, vol. 2, 209.

asking himself: have we not, by working for Yugoslavia in England, worsened our position? Should we abandon that work (and he should go home), or should we continue it (and he should go to London)?”⁶³ After the occupation of Serbia, her leading politicians, the king and the regent, and what was left of her armies crossed Albania to the coast and were transported to Corfu in January-February 1916, where the troops were recuperated and a reorganised army was later sent to the Macedonian front. By December 1915 Serbia was fully occupied. In the autumn of 1915, the Serbian envoys abroad had asked if they should return to Serbia. At the beginning of 1916 they had nowhere to return, and the Serbian government needed them even more to appeal to foreign governments and public opinions for all kinds of aid for Serbia.

Therefore Velimirovich stayed in London and continued to cooperate with the Yugoslav Committee. On 16 February 1916 the Committee established a task force for dealing with volunteers, which included Ante Trumbić, Frano Supilo, Velimirovich, Bogumil Vošnjak, Franko Potočnjak and Nikola Stojanović.⁶⁴ The volunteers mentioned in this entry from Nikola Stojanović’s diary are probably Yugoslav volunteers from Russia.

In January 1916 the Serbs from the Kingdom of Serbia in London formed an unofficial “Tuesday group”. Its meetings held every Tuesday were attended by the following persons: the Serbian Minister to the UK, Mateja Bošković, and, from September 1916, his successor Jovan Jovanović Pižon;⁶⁵ the Popović brothers, Nikolai Velimirovich, and Tihomir Djordjević.⁶⁶ Nikola Stojanović, a Serb from Bosnia and member of the Yugoslav Committee also used to come, as well as the Slovene Dr. Niko Županič who was a resident of the Kingdom of Serbia since 1907.

The fall of Serbia prompted Velimirovich to appeal for help with British officials. On 27 January 1916 he approached Bonar Law, then serving as Secretary of State for the Colonies, urging him to help sending British ships to the Albanian coast to transport the exhausted Serbian troops to Corfu. He said that the people of Serbia could understand that there was no help to save Serbia from being defeated, but that they could not understand why it should take so long for the ships to arrive.⁶⁷

⁶³ Ibid. 221.

⁶⁴ Nikola Stojanović, *Dnevnik (od godine 1914. do 1918)* (Belgrade: Istorijski institut, 2015), 284.

⁶⁵ Jovan M. Jovanović came to London on 17 Sept. 1916, and submitted his credentials to the King on 6 Oct. Jovan Jovanović, *Dnevnik (1896–1920)* (Novi Sad: Prometej and Belgrade: RTS, 2015), 159 and 169.

⁶⁶ Trgovčević, *Naučnici Srbije*, 104.

⁶⁷ Dragoljub Živojinović, *Nevoljni ratnici* (Belgrade: Zavod za udžbenike, 2010), 155.

In January 1916 Velimirovich sent a message to the Archbishop of Serbia, Dimitrije, informing him that a new appeal for help needed to be prepared for the British public. He asked the Archbishop for permission to put together such an appeal on his behalf, which would be similar to the one that had already been issued earlier. The Archbishop replied on 9 February, asking Father Nikolai to wait until his upcoming visit to Britain.⁶⁸ The Archbishop indeed came to Britain and was very well received by the primates of the Church of England. On 23 April 1916, on Easter Day, the Bishop of London played host to the Archbishop of Serbia at St. Paul's.⁶⁹ The whole visit had been largely prepared by Velimirovich. Bogumil Vošnjak recalled one impressive detail in particular: "The way the English clergy led the head of the Serbian Church triumphantly through the Westminster Church will remain unforgettable to me. There was some mystical half-darkness and it seemed like an ancient victorious campaign in an age-old setting."⁷⁰ During this visit Archbishop Dimitrije accepted to be patron of the Anglican and Eastern Association.⁷¹

In London, Father Nikolai found a room in Saville Row with a Serbian tailor by the name of Milan.⁷² In April 1916, the owners of an office space at 39 King Street, St. James's, offered him to use the property free of charge. He was only required to provide written guarantees from the Legation in case of damage being done in the offices and the Legation immediately provided guarantees.⁷³ With the help of an American lady, Miss Pack, Velimirovich set up the Serbian Information Bureau on the premises, and he also received visitors and prepared lectures and sermons there.⁷⁴ Several preserved letters of Velimirovich from late 1917 and 1918 have letterheads with the above address and the title "Serbian Information Bureau".⁷⁵ The Bureau consisted of two rooms, a small flat and a shop on the opposite side. As B. Vošnjak recalled, "that shop was the real centre of Father Nikolai." His assistant at the Bureau was Dušan Janjić, a barber, whose

⁶⁸ AS, KSPL, f ii, r 124/1916, Letter of the Serbian Legation in Rome to the Serbian Consulate General in Geneva, dated 21 Jan. [3 Feb.] 1916, and the reply, dated 9 Feb.

⁶⁹ "The Metropolitan of Serbia at St. Paul's", *Church Times*, 28 Apr. 1916, 404.

⁷⁰ Bogumil Vošnjak, *U borbi za ujedinjenu narodnu državu* (Ljubljana, Belgrade and Zagreb 1928), 179.

⁷¹ "The Anglican and Orthodox Churches", *Church Times*, 1 June 1917, p. 467.

⁷² Stephen Graham, *Part of the Wonderful Scene. An Autobiography* (London: Collins, 1964), 120.

⁷³ AS, KSPL, f ii, r 393/1916, Letter of N. Velimirovich to the Serbian Royal Legation dated 25 Apr.; and *ibid.* f iv, r 93/1916, Copy of a letter by the Legation to Sidney Straker and Squire Ltd. dated 25 Apr. 1916.

⁷⁴ Vošnjak, *U borbi za ujedinjenu narodnu državu*, 182–183.

⁷⁵ AJ, Fonds 80, 40, 601-602; SSEES, SEW, 7.1.5, Nicholai Velimirovic to Dr. Seton Watson, 5 Dec. 1917.

nickname was Def.⁷⁶ It had a shop window with Serbian publications, pictures and maps. There was also a cellar beneath the shop. Father Nikolai received visitors in that room, and it was there that he prepared his lectures and wrote his letters. One of his most frequent visitors at the Bureau was Dr. Niko Županič, a Slovene ethnographer who had moved to Serbia in 1907, and worked as museum curator in Belgrade.⁷⁷ Father Nikolai was also very active in the Serbian Relief Fund, where he was a member of its sub-board for education together with Prof. Pavle Popović.⁷⁸

A note on Father Nikolai's activities was published in *The Bookman* at the very end of the war. It summarised many of his wartime activities in England. "While the Serbian Government was at Nisch, father Nicholai was sent on a mission to the United States, and he is now in England in charge of the Serbian Information Bureau. He is one of those who look after the welfare of the Serbian boys who, to the number of three hundred and seventy, are being educated in England and Scotland for various professions, including the priesthood."⁷⁹

In Britain Velimirovich had to face residues of Serbia's previous image developed after the 1903 assassination of King Alexandar Obrenovich and his wife Draga by Serbian army officers. The regicide had caused a break-off in diplomatic relations between 1903 and 1906 and was far from forgotten. Moreover, many circles in Britain were suspicious that an enlarged Serbia might become Russia's puppet state. The problems arising from the British perceptions of Serbia may be seen from a letter written for Velimirovich by Natalia, the former Queen of Serbia. He saw her during his visit to Paris in November 1915. Since she had converted to Roman Catholicism, he urged her to go to England to work in Catholic circles for Serbia. She did not rule out that possibility,⁸⁰ but in the end she only wrote a letter of endorsement for him recommending him to Bishop Vaughan. In the draft of the letter dated 6 December 1915 she explicitly referred to British fears that Serbia might become too close to Russia. She recommended Velimirovich and emphasised that he "would be very happy to clarify to you a misconception that may exist between England and Serbia, a misconception which is of old date, and which has caused many troubles that should be avoided in the future." The misconception in Britain was "that Serbia is a servile tool in the hands of Russia and that for this reason her expansion could become a danger to Europe in a foreseeable future. Not only has Serbia never been a tool

⁷⁶ Jovanović, *Dnevnik*, 443. Vošnjak, *U borbi za ujedinjenu narodnu državu*, 179, mistakenly claims that Dušan Janjić was the brother of the priest Dr. Vojislav Janić, since Dušan was from Banat and Vojislav from Kraljevo.

⁷⁷ Vošnjak, *U borbi za ujedinjenu narodnu državu*, 166–167.

⁷⁸ AS, KSPL, f iv, r 535/1916.

⁷⁹ *The Bookman* no. 325 (Oct. 1918), 2.

⁸⁰ Žujović, *Dnevnik*, vol. 2, 223.

in the hands of Russia, she in fact was often sacrificed on her behalf." The former Queen of Serbia insisted that Russia disapproved of religious tolerance in Serbia and feared the potential unification of Serbia with Catholic areas because of "infiltration of Catholic Slavdom among schismatic Slavs in the Balkans".⁸¹ In parallel with Queen Natalia's efforts, it seems that in late 1915 Velimirovich himself wrote an article refuting the claim of German Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg that Serbia was the "vanguard of Russia".⁸²

He was also engaged in a quite different mission. In the course of 1916 many Britons were sceptical about the prospect of a multi-religious Yugoslav state. As one of the excuses for British official circles' undecided stance on the Yugoslav question, many cited that Russia would be against such a state. Velimirovich was therefore desperate to find a Russian intellectual who would send an article in favour of the Yugoslav cause to British journals. For this purpose he turned to the Serbian envoy in Sankt Petersburg, Prof. Aleksandar Belić, who had been sent there with the same task as the one Velimirovich had been charged with in London. In August 1916 he asked Belić to find a Russian who would write a text "on the Serbian (or Yugoslav) question for English newspapers", suggesting Maxim Gorky or Andreyev.⁸³ Belić finally got the article from V. Kovalevsky, but Velimirovich considered that it was "insufficiently well argued, un-Western and Slavic", and therefore expressed concerns that it might not achieve the expected results among the British public.⁸⁴ In the end the article was published in Seton-Watson's *New Europe*⁸⁵ and in the Irish journal *Tuam Herald*. Velimirovich became more optimistic and informed Belić that, although only just published, the article "would undoubtedly make a big impression".⁸⁶ Before that he tried to have Kovalevsky's article published in *The Times* and *The Daily News*, but both papers rejected it.⁸⁷

In most of his pamphlets Velimirovich discussed the question of the unification of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. At the very end of the war he offered

⁸¹ AS, Fonds Jovan Žujović [JŽ], no. 59 [Dnevnik u Parizu (Sep. 1915 – Oct. 1917)], 427–428. The draft of the original letter is in French, AS, JŽ, no. 255.

⁸² Ibid. 443 (Žujović's entry for 2 Jan. 1916).

⁸³ Arhiv Srpske akademije nauka i umetnosti [Archives of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts; hereafter: ASANU], Fonds A. Belić [AB], part II, no. 14386-IV-101, Nikolai Velimirovich to Mr. Belić, London, 4 Aug. 1916.

⁸⁴ Ibid., Nikolai Velimirovich to Prof. A. Belić, London, 1 Oct. 1916.

⁸⁵ V. Kovalevsky, "Russia and the Jugoslav Idea. From the Russian", *New Europe* 3 (2 Nov. 1916), 79–83.

⁸⁶ ASANU, AB, part II, no. 14386-IV-101, Nikolai Velimirovich to Mr. Belić, London, 6 Nov. 1916.

⁸⁷ SSEES, SEW, 7.1.5, Father Nicholas Velimirovic to Dr. Seton Watson, London, 2 Nov. 1916.

a comprehensive overview of the Yugoslav idea in *The New Age*, a literary and modernist weekly open to radical and socialist political thought. Its editor was the influential Alfred Richard Orage, who was very interested in religious and spiritual issues, even in the occult.⁸⁸ In this article Velimirovich claims that the Yugoslav idea has a fourfold meaning: spiritual, moral, cultural and political. In corroboration of the first meaning, he argues: “The striking proof that the Yugoslav idea is a spiritual idea lies in the fact that a long series of great Yugoslav divines, both Orthodox and Roman Catholic, were the principal founders and most enthusiastic defenders of this idea in modern times.”⁸⁹ For the second point he exploits propaganda binaries developed during the Great War. “The difference between the two codes of morals – that of the ruling classes in Austro-Hungary on the one hand, and the Yugoslavs, like the Czecho-Slovacks – is as beyond any hope of reconciliation as black and white.”⁹⁰ Still, he admits that “the Yugoslav ethics, as ideal and as practice, though naturally not perfect, is a serious, constructive and promising ethics.” As far as the cultural aspect of the idea is concerned, he projects his own then preferences and sees in the Yugoslav idea “an ethnical and a pan-human tendency. A combination of both is considered as all-saving.”⁹¹ Velimirovich’s writing about the political aspect of the Yugoslav idea demonstrates that during his stay in Britain he had absorbed the political reasoning of British foreign policy. “It has been said and truly, that the Yugoslav State will be a bulwark between Central Europe and the East; also, that such a State will be of great commercial importance for France and Great Britain; also, that it will be a guarantee of the future peace of the Balkans; also, that it is in the best interest of Italy to have such a neighbour instead of having Turkey and Austria-Hungary. All this is quite right, even if looked at from the external point of view. But a Serbian peasant looks at it from an inner point of view, from inside the building, and finds that the building is solid and strong as it can possibly be.” At the end he clarified what he meant by the adjectives “ethnical” and “pan-human” in the previous section: “The ethnical—which means the freedom and union of the Yugoslav nation, the pan-human—which means federation of the Yugoslav State first of all with all the neighbouring national free States, and then with all the free national and ethnical human units on the globe.”⁹²

In the following sections some of the most important activities of Father Nikolai Velimirovich in London will be discussed.

⁸⁸ For the activities of Orage and his friendship with Mitrinović see Philip Mairet, *A. R. Orage. A Memoir* (New York: University Books, 1966, first published 1936), esp. Mairet’s “Reintroduction” on pp. v-xxx.

⁸⁹ Father Nicholas Velimirovic, “The Yugoslav Idea”, *New Age* 23, no. 24 (10 Oct. 1918), 377.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.* 378.

⁹² *Ibid.*

Velimirovich, “the Kossovo Day Committee” and the celebrations of “Kossovo Day”

Soon upon coming to London Velimirovich developed close relations with R. W. Seton-Watson. Just before his departure for the United States he wrote to thank him “for all you have done for me and for my dear country”.⁹³ In September 1915 he wrote him a personal confession inspired by his book *The Balkans, Italy and Adriatic*.⁹⁴ He expressed regret that the Foreign Office was unwilling to accept a new Yugoslav state and claimed that every Serbian soldier of that day was saying: “We Serbs, Croats, Slovenes – and later Bulgars too – must be all united in a free and democratic state.”⁹⁵ Their relations seem to have become very close by the spring of 1916, when Velimirovich, in a letter to R. W. Seton-Watson, expressed his particular joy at the fact that the latter had given his son his “unworthy name”.⁹⁶ Three months later the efforts of R. W. Seton-Watson and other friends of Serbia resulted in the celebrations of “Kossovo Day”, as *Vidovdan* (St. Vitus’s Day) was called in Britain.

The visit of Prince-Regent Alexander Karageorgevich to London in April 1916 also significantly contributed to the Serbian cause. He was received very cordially by King George V and leading British statesmen.⁹⁷ Since the Serbian Minister in London, Bošković, by that time had very strained relations with influential British members of Serbian societies, it was Velimirovich who wrote to R. W. Seton-Watson about the details of the visit and asked him to arrange special meetings and visits for Prince-Regent Alexander and for the Prime Minister of Serbia, Nikola Pašić.⁹⁸

Efforts of British friends of Serbia to help her cause following her defeat and the exodus of her Army across Albania at the end of 1915 reached their peak in mid-1916. The defeat of Serbia had brought many Serbs to Britain, and testimonies of British nurses and medical doctors who had helped suppress typhus epidemics in Serbia in 1915 were available in numerous books and memoirs. They all had one thing in common: a great sympathy for Serbia.

In mid-1916 Velimirovich was already well known in many circles of London political and cultural life. In June 1916, the League of the Empire asked

⁹³ SSEES, SEW, 7.1.5, Nicolas Velimirovitch to Dr. Watson, London, 8 May 1915.

⁹⁴ R. W. Seton-Watson, *The Balkans, Italy and the Adriatic* (London: Nisbet, 1915).

⁹⁵ SSEES, SEW, 7.1.5, Nicolas Velimirovich to Dr. Watson, London, 17 Sept. 1915.

⁹⁶ SSEES, SEW, 7.1.5, Nicholaj Velimirovic to Dr. Seton-Watson, London, 24 Mar. 1916. Cf. Hugh and Christopher Seton-Watson, *The Making of a New Europe*, 166. R. W. Seton-Watson’s eldest son was born on 15 February 1916. His full name was George Hugh Nicholas Seton-Watson.

⁹⁷ See Čedomir Antić, *Neizabrana saveznica* (Belgrade: Zavod za udžbenike, 2012), 290–292.

⁹⁸ SSEES, SEW, 7.1.5, Nicholaj Velimirovic to Dr. Seton-Watson, London, 26 Mar. 1916.

him to deliver a lecture and to that end sent an invitation through the Serbian Legation.⁹⁹ Only one week after the invitation was sent, he delivered an address entitled "The New Ideal in Education".

His role was crucial for the celebration of Kossovo Day organised by the British friends of Serbia to give moral encouragement to Serbia. The commemoration of Kossovo Day began on 28 June, on the very anniversary of the battle, when a service was held at the church of St. Mary-le-Bow, Cheapside. All arrangements for it had been made by Rev. Fynes-Clinton. Father Nikolai was the officiating priest, "assisted by fathers Illitch and Lukovitch of Cambridge". This commemoration was intended for the Serbian colony in London but members of the diplomatic corps and the British War Office were also present. Father Velimirovich read several letters of support, including the letter from the Archbishop of Canterbury in which the highest Anglican prelate stated: "Our thoughts go out in admiration and sympathy to our friends and Allies, the brave-hearted people of Serbia. In the cause of honour and freedom, for which we and all our Allies are fighting, they have suffered untold misery and wrong."¹⁰⁰ Four days later another service was held at the chapel of the House of Charity in Soho with the permission of the Bishop of London. Father Nikolai Velimirovich officiated again. The report of the Kossovo Day Committee claims: "It was the first time that a Serbian priest had celebrated the Orthodox Liturgy in an Anglican Church."¹⁰¹ This, however, does not seem to be correct in view of the report of *The Church Times* on the service held in the church of St. Mary-le-Bow four days earlier.

The Church Times announced the events related to Kossovo Day. The commemoration was to be held under the slogan: "For Serbia. Think of Serbia. Pray for Serbia. Restore Serbia." It had three main events: 1) Service of intercession at St. Margaret's with a sermon by Nikolai Velimirovich; 2) "A solemn memorial service for all the Serbs and British who have laid down their lives for the Allies' cause, in Serbia", at St. Paul's Cathedral; and 3) Service of intercession for Serbia at Chapel Royal, Savoy.¹⁰²

On 2 July St. Margaret's church, in which Velimirovich was already famous, held its own "service of intercession for the Serbian nation". The service was followed by an address by Father Nikolai in which he paid special tribute to the British women who had lost their lives "in succouring the poorest and most persecuted people of this planet". He also thanked the Kossovo Committee for making it possible for Serbs to commemorate Kossovo Day in Britain, since it

⁹⁹ AS, KSPL, f iv, r 93/1916, Letter of the League to the Serbian Legation dated 9 June 1916.

¹⁰⁰ "Kossovo Day. Tributes to Serbian Fortitude", *Times*, 29 June 1916, p. 3.

¹⁰¹ *Kossovo Day (1389–1916). Report and two lectures* (London: Kossovo Day Committee, 1916), 14.

¹⁰² *Church Times*, 30 June 1916, 612 d.

was the first time that they could not do it in Serbia.¹⁰³ Father Nikolai's sermon delivered on that occasion was entitled "Serbian saints and sinners".¹⁰⁴ It was a special token of respect for Velimirovich that *The Church Times* published its integral version.¹⁰⁵

Most of the activities related to Kossovo Day were coordinated by the Kossovo Day Committee summoned through the initiative of Dr. Elsie Inglis and Dr. R. W. Seton-Watson, with Seton-Watson and Rev. Fynes-Clinton as its honorary secretaries. The Committee had fourteen British and only two Serbian members: Father Nikolai and Milan Ćurčin.¹⁰⁶ The climax of the commemoration took place on 7 July when a grand memorial service was held at St. Paul's Cathedral. At the service the Serbian national anthem was sung by Serbian boys studying in Britain. Besides the highest representatives of the diplomatic corps, the service was attended by the British Prime Minister, by Sir Edward Grey, heads of the British Army, the highest government officials, and relatives of the British doctors and nurses who had lost their lives in Serbia.¹⁰⁷

During the ceremony at St. Paul's Cathedral Velimirovich was paid special respect by the Church of England, one in a series of tributes that would be bestowed on him over the following three years. In a letter to his wife May, R. W. Seton-Watson noted: "Father Nikolai in his cope took his place in the procession, and Mrs Inge [wife of the Dean] told your mother that it was the highest place of honour ever accorded to a foreign ecclesiastic in the Cathedral. A lot of big bugs attended..."¹⁰⁸ The report of the Kossovo Day Committee contains the following description: "The Archbishop of Canterbury addressed the congregation, and in the choir, in the gold embroidered robes of the priest of the Orthodox Church, sat Father Nikolai Velimirovic, the exiled priest of a scattered nation."¹⁰⁹ The Croatian politician and member of the Yugoslav Committee Hinko Hinković left a testimony on how the service was perceived by the Yugoslav colony in London. "That 'parastos',¹¹⁰ which was attended by numerous members of parliament and of the diplomatic world, was particularly interesting for us Yugoslavs because we saw among Anglican clergy also the current

¹⁰³ "Celebration of Kossovo Day", *Times*, 3 July 1916, 11 c.

¹⁰⁴ *Kossovo Day (1389–1916). Report and two lectures*, 14.

¹⁰⁵ Fr. Nicholai Velimirovic, "Serbian Saints and Sinners. An address given at St. Margaret's, Westminster" [on Sunday, 2 July 1916], *Church Times*, 14 July 1916, 45–46.

¹⁰⁶ *Kossovo Day (1389–1916). Report and two lectures*, 11.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.* 15.

¹⁰⁸ Hugh and Christopher Seton-Watson, *Making of a New Europe*, 175.

¹⁰⁹ *Kossovo Day (1389–1916). Report and two lectures*, 14.

¹¹⁰ A Serbian word of Greek origin denoting a memorial service for a deceased person.

Bishop of Ohrid, Fr. Nikolai Velimirovich, in rich Byzantine, gold embroidered robes.”¹¹¹

The Kossovo Day Committee published its own 36-page report on the 1916 commemoration of Kossovo Day in Britain. In addition to a number of church services held, lectures, presentations, meetings and exhibitions were organised throughout Britain. Kossovo Day Circular was printed in 85,000 copies, and R. W. Seton-Watson’s address and pamphlet in 25,000 and 50,000 copies respectively. The press cuttings covering the commemoration of Kossovo Day that the Committee collected reached the number of 408.¹¹² Another pamphlet with the same title, *Kossovo Day (1389–1916)*,¹¹³ has on its front cover the image of “Tsar Lazar” as a saint. This 32-page publication is a collection of descriptions and appreciations of the Battle of Kosovo compiled from various monographs published in Britain, Austria, Germany, France and Russia, and it also contains some early modern texts, and translations of Serbian and Croatian authors such as Chedomille Miyatovich and Franjo Rački. Velimirovich’s bio-bibliography by M. D. Protić attributes a three-page prefatory note to this pamphlet to Velimirovich and also considers him an editor of the pamphlet.¹¹⁴ The following words are found in the pamphlet: “During 500 years under a criminal régime Serbia found always in this memory of Kossovo an immense source of force, virtues, and life. She celebrated Kossovo Day both in the time of darkness, and in the time of light and freedom. Well, at the present moment, suffocated and abased by the Christian Sultans, Serbia will look back towards her greatest day in history, towards Kossovo Day, and will live.”¹¹⁵

Celebrations of Kossovo Day continued in 1917 and 1918. Velimirovich’s typed speech written for Kossovo Day in 1917 has been preserved in the Collection of R. W. Seton-Watson.¹¹⁶ The subsequent celebrations were not as spectacular as those in 1916, but became a regular practice. *The Cambridge Daily News* left a testimony of the effects of the 1916 campaign conducted by the Kossovo Day Committee: “Kossovo Day – as every schoolboy now knows, thanks of the energetic educational effort of the committee set up last year – celebrates a great struggle of the Serbs against their Turkish oppressors, and

¹¹¹ Hinko Hinković, *Iz velikog doba. Moj rad i moji doživljaji za vrijeme svjetskog rata* (Zagreb 1927), 279.

¹¹² *Kossovo Day (1389–1916). Report and two lectures*, 17–25.

¹¹³ *Kossovo Day (1389–1916)* (London: Polsue Limited, 1916).

¹¹⁴ Milisav D. Protić, “Bio-bibliografija, 1902–1941”, in Janković, *Episkop Nikolaj*, vol. 3, 630, item 209.

¹¹⁵ “Prefatory Note”, in *Kossovo Day (1389–1916)*, 5.

¹¹⁶ SSEES, SEW, 5.3.1. The speech signed with the initials “N. V.” is entitled “A Nation’s Celebration of Supreme Sacrifice. The Serbian Kossovo Day”. It covers seven full typed pages and one paragraph on the eighth page.

has been the chief historic inspiration of the national poets and ballad writers. Those who have heard Father Nikolai Velimirovich on the subject have realised something of what it means to the Serbs."¹¹⁷ What the celebrations of Kossovo Day meant for the knowledge of Serbia among the Allies was elaborated in the leading British evening newspaper: "Formerly the world in general knew little of Serbia and nothing of 'Kossovo Day'; now newspapers in England, France, Italy, and America refer to the day, and innumerable friends whom the last three years have taught to know and love the Serbs join with them in keeping this anniversary."¹¹⁸ Needless to say, Velimirovich took a very active part in all these commemorations.¹¹⁹

Famous preacher

During his stay in Britain Velimirovich earned his high reputation primarily by his sermons and public lectures. Stephen Graham describes the impression that Father Nikolai made on him in 1915. "He spoke arrestingly as if he had just arrived with a message. No compliments, no clichés, no wishful thinking, his words made the speeches of the other clerics from the platform seem dim, as if they told of a faith which once existed."¹²⁰ A few paragraphs later, Graham added another vivid description: "He was gentle, persuasive, original, like a page of the Gospel read for the first time. The Spirit of Truth was pilgrimaging among us."¹²¹

He was already known as a good preacher when, in March 1916, *The Times* announced that he and Stephen Graham would deliver five lectures at St. Margaret's Church, Westminster. Nikolai's previous speeches had made a strong impression on the rector of the Church, a well-known Anglican priest, Canon William Hartley Carnegie. In order for Velimirovich to deliver lectures in Anglican churches, special permission was needed. And he was granted one: "With the leave of the Bishop of London, and the approval of the Archbishop of Canterbury, he gave lectures at St. Margaret's, Westminster, and other churches."¹²² St. Margaret's is situated in the very heart of London next to Westminster Abbey

¹¹⁷ *Cambridge Daily News* no. 9016, 29 June 1917, 3 a.

¹¹⁸ "Kossovo Day. The Conditions of the Slavs in 1389 and to-day", *Westminster Gazette*, 28 June 1918.

¹¹⁹ "Serbia's Day", *Westminster Gazette*, 28 June 1918; "Kossovo Day. Tributes to Serbian Fortitude", *Times*, 29 June 1918, 3.

¹²⁰ Graham, *Part of the Wonderful Scene*, 101.

¹²¹ *Ibid.* 103.

¹²² *The Anglican and Eastern Churches: A Historical Record 1914–1921* (London: Published for the Anglican and Eastern Churches Association by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1921), 16.

and has been the church attended by members of the British Parliament. The purpose of these one-hour lectures was “to promote understandings of the Slav peoples on the deeper level of their thought and feeling”. Velimirovich’s lectures were scheduled for 30 March, and 6 and 12 April.¹²³ They further strengthened the respect that he already enjoyed in the Church of England. Commenting on his lecture of 6 April 1916, *The Church Times* described his command of English language as “wonderful”, and added that even “more remarkable were the fervour of the man and his alertness of mind, to say nothing of his inspiring and prophetlike appearance”. The lecture was on Slav Orthodoxy and the preacher used Tolstoy’s example and his excommunication to explain what he considered to be an essential feature of Slav and Orthodox Christianity. In his opinion: “Slav Christianity is not juristic like the Roman, nor scientific like Protestantism, nor reasonable and practical like Anglicanism, but dramatic. It is not self-sufficient. It is founded in suffering, and every man who suffers while holding the optimistic hope of Christianity is in a way a founder of the Church...”¹²⁴

The congregation at St. Margaret’s consisted of top British politicians. Graham writes that MPs and their wives listened to father Nikolai “intently”. He also admits that his Serbian friend “was the hero, he had the first place, but it was fine to have the second place.”¹²⁵ Indeed, such was the impression his sermons made that *The Church Times* expressed the wish that they should be fully printed, and they indeed were, as a separate pamphlet.¹²⁶ Recollections on these lectures are also provided by a Yugoslav. Bogumil Vošnjak states in his memoirs: “In the vicinity of the English Parliament Englishmen and Englishwomen stood before the church doors in long queues. There were a lot of people. The church was filled to the brim. Russian church music was played. Father Nikolai spoke about [Christian] Orthodoxy. It was a song full of faith, love, and nationalism. He stood at the pulpit like Hus in a black frock.”¹²⁷

The Kosovo Day commemorations significantly raised interest in Serbia in Great Britain. By the end of 1916 Velimirovich was already so well known and popular that he received almost daily requests to give lectures and sermons all across the United Kingdom. Relatively detailed data survives on his activities in November and December 1916, and it may give a glimpse of his overall endeavours in Britain.

¹²³ “Russian and Serbian Religion”, *Times*, 15 Mar. 1916, 12 c.

¹²⁴ “Slav Orthodoxy. Father Nicolai Velimirovitch at St. Margaret’s Westminster”, *Church Times*, 7 Apr. 1916, 338.

¹²⁵ Graham, *Part of the Wonderful Scene*, 105.

¹²⁶ Rev. father Nicolai Velimirovic, *The Religious Spirit of the Slavs. Three lectures given in Lent, 1916. Sermons on subjects suggested by the war. Third series. St. Margaret’s Westminster* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1916), 40 p.

¹²⁷ Vošnjak, *U borbi za ujedinjenu narodnu državu*, 177.

On 2 August, he was in Stratford-on-Avon where he delivered a lecture at a conference on “the national life of the Allied countries”. All the Allied countries were represented on that occasion. Velimirovich presented Serbia’s case together with R. W. Seton Watson.¹²⁸ Two months later he was invited by Scottish Women’s Hospitals (SWH) to visit Scotland in November 1916. The Serbian Legation, most likely Milan Ćurčin, prepared a short biography of Velimirovich at the request of SWH.¹²⁹ In the biography it was stressed: “Here in England there is hardly a Serbian name so well-known lately as the name of Father Nicholas, whose sermons in St Margaret’s, Westminster were a great success, and whose preaching all over the country is propaganda in the best sense of the word to bring knowledge of the Serbian people to this country.”¹³⁰ Father Nikolai was receiving many requests to address various audiences in Scotland, and Scottish Women’s Hospitals also made a rather busy schedule for him. Miss Cragie of SWH had to telegraph to M. Ćurčin in order to kindly ask Velimirovich not to make any other arrangements since “much [has] already [been] arranged” by SWH.¹³¹ Apart from preaching at various churches, speaking in public meetings and attending various receptions, he was also to visit the Serbian boys in Edinburgh, and George Heriot’s School there. Two programmes of his visit have been preserved. He was to spend sixteen days in Scotland (12–28 November), to visit Edinburgh, Glasgow and Aberdeen, and was scheduled in advance to have 16 different appointments.¹³² He wrote to the worried Ćurčin from Glasgow on 20 November to inform him that up to that moment “nothing bad has happened. May God help me from now on as well!”¹³³

In July 1917 the Church of England bestowed on Father Nikolai Velimirovich the highest possible honour. He was invited to deliver a sermon at St. Paul’s Cathedral. *The Church Times* was particularly pleased about this invitation and the following words were published in this leading Anglican journal: “Bishops and priests of the Orthodox Eastern Church have not seldom assisted in the sanctuary at liturgies and offices of the English rite. But never before has a priest of the Orthodox Church preached in the cathedral church of London, though the preacher of last Sunday morning has already spoken from the pulpits of many parish churches. By their invitation to Fr. Nicholai Velimirovic the

¹²⁸ “Belgium and Serbia. Spirit of the small nations”, *Birmingham Daily Post*, 3 Aug. 1916, 3 d.

¹²⁹ AS, KSPL, SPA f. X p. 3, pp. 6–10, Letter of Muriel Cragie to Ćurčin, Edinburgh, 15 Oct. 1916, and an unsigned reply to Miss Cragie [probably by Milan Ćurčin] dated 20 Oct. 1916, with an enclosed biography of “the Rev. Father Nikola Velimirovic, D. D.”. In subsequent letters Miss Cragie is signed as “press and meeting organiser”, *ibid.* 12.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.* 10.

¹³¹ *Ibid.* 33.

¹³² *Ibid.* 21, 23.

¹³³ *Ibid.* 34, Velimirovich to Ćurčin, Glasgow, 20 Nov. 1916.

Dean and Chapter of St. Paul's have given great satisfaction to Churchmen." The journal also stressed that two years had passed since Father Velimirovich came to England "as an informal representative and interpreter of his Church and his people", and made an assessment of what he had accomplished. *The Church Times* ranked Velimirovich as the most successful promoter of Serbia, and mentioned only Chedomille Miyatovich, former Serbian Minister to the Court of St. James, as a person who had done anything similar for Serbia in the past. "We are not unmindful of the services rendered to Serbia by her diplomats, notably by M. Mijatovic, when we say that none has done more than the single-minded priest and monk, and learned theologian, who has already won for himself and for his people so many warm friends in the land of his exile."¹³⁴

The sermon was scheduled for 10.30 a.m. Sunday, 23 July 1917.¹³⁵ It was fully reproduced in *The Church Times* covering almost one full four-column page. The sermon was dedicated to Christ's sacrifice with the following introductory paragraph: "Inviting me to preach in this mountain-like, Sion-like *sanc-tum sanctorum* of the Anglican world, the Dean and the Canons of St. Paul's have honoured both my Church and my nation because, I presume, of their sacrifices. For the highest ideal of the Eastern Church is sacrifice, and Serbia's sacrifice has gone almost beyond the limits of the possible, as you all know."¹³⁶

The sermon made Velimirovich a person in high demand. Not only the Anglican but also the Presbyterian and other Christian churches wanted to host him. His sermon at St. Paul's "was rapidly followed by invitations to preach and speak all over the country, and in each case the Diocesan Bishops gave him the necessary permission, among whom were the Archbishop of York, and the Bishops of Winchester, Oxford, Peterborough, Birmingham, and Edinburgh." The Church of England made another unusual concession. Its bishops allowed Velimirovich and other Serbian priests "to celebrate the Holy Liturgy according to the full Orthodox rite. Services were regularly held on Sundays for the refugees in London in the Sisters' Chapel of the House of Charity, Soho."¹³⁷

It seems that not only Velimirovich's public respect but also his political connections grew over the months and years spent in London. An episode with Stephen Graham may perhaps serve as an illustration. Having learnt that Graham had been conscripted and was about to be sent to France, Father Nikolai decided to act. In October 1917 he wrote to the Serbian Minister in London about "one of the greatest friends of Slavdom in this country", and urged him to try to persuade the War Office against deploying Graham to France, and into

¹³⁴ *Church Times*, 27 July 1917, 76 a.

¹³⁵ *Church Times*, 20 July 1917, 57 a.

¹³⁶ Father Nicholas Velimirovic, D. D., "The Sacrifices of Nations. A sermon preached at St. Paul's Cathedral, on the seventh Sunday after Trinity", *Church Times*, 27 July 1917, p. 73.

¹³⁷ *Anglican and Eastern Churches: A Historical Record*, 17.

sending him instead to Salonika so that he could write about Serbs. He asked the Minister to do that “through our friends at the War Office”. If necessary, he suggested, Prince Regent Alexander of Serbia should telegraph asking that Graham be sent to Salonika. All interventions, including Velimirovich’s, failed, and Graham was deployed to the frontline in France. Disappointed, Velimirovich could only say at some point to Graham: “Is it possible England sees in you only a bayonet?”¹³⁸ Even so, the tone of his letters reveals a man who is well connected and very well informed, a man influential enough to ask such a favour, and even to involve the ruler of a country in the effort!

Velimirovich’s preaching talent was noticed by Serbian literary critics as well. In December 1917, Pavle Popović completed his book *Jugoslovenska književnost* (Yugoslav Literature). Although he was sometimes at odds with Velimirovich’s propaganda activities in Britain, he had to add a paragraph at the end of the section dealing with literary criticism. “There is,” he states, “a distinctive form which has recently arisen suddenly and unexpectedly. That is church oration. It has been cultivated with a lot of gift by Nikolai Velimirovich. He has modernised this form, giving it a certain philosophical breadth, literary tone, and patriotic feeling.”¹³⁹

It is worth mentioning that he was given another great honour at St. Paul’s during his visit to Britain in December 1919. *The Church Times* announced that a special service would be held at St. Paul’s on 18 December 1919. The full title of the service was: “Solemn Service of Supplication for Eastern Christians suffering and in danger in Russia and the Near East and of Thanksgiving for the liberation already accomplished, and for the reunion of Serbian race.”¹⁴⁰ It was also announced that the preacher would be “Right Rev. father Nicholai Velimirovitch, bishop of Zica, Serbia”. Chedomille Mijatovich attended the service and sent a dispatch to the *Politika*. He emphasised that in the history of St. Paul’s Cathedral only one thanksgiving mass was held for a foreign nation: for the United States of America.¹⁴¹ He further reported about the sermon: “I saw it, and was later even more confident in my belief that his sermon had made a deep impression on the audience.” He ends his lengthy report with the following lyrical passage: “I left the Cathedral to fight the darkness, rain and wind again. But I took from it heavenly light in my soul and warm joy in my heart.”¹⁴² *The Church Times* was also full of praise for the Bishop of Žiža: “Bishop of the Church of Serbia, stood before the high altar of St. Paul’s to lead a great congre-

¹³⁸ AJ, Fonds 80, f. 40-393, N. Velimirovich to J. Jovanović, London, 6 Oct. 1917. Graham, *Part of the Wonderful Scene*, 153.

¹³⁹ Pavle Popović, *Jugoslovenska književnost* (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1918), 149.

¹⁴⁰ “Services and Meetings”, *Church Times*, 12 Dec. 1919, 588 c.

¹⁴¹ Čedo Mijatović, “U katedrali Sv. Pavla”, *Politika*, 3 Jan. 1920, 1.

¹⁴² *Ibid.* 2.

gation in thanksgiving to God 'for the deliverance of our Eastern brethren from the chains of darkness and oppression,' spoke to that congregation of the need of Christian unity, and from the gates of the choir gave his blessing to men and women of several countries and of the Orthodox and English communions. The thoughts of England aroused first in his Serbian school have developed into an intimate knowledge and a great love; Nicholai Velimirovic has been bidden to the task of forging a strong link between the Churches of Serbia and of England, and has become one of the most powerful and persuasive advocates of the great cause of unity."¹⁴³ The sermon was subsequently published by the Faith Press.¹⁴⁴ In his sermon Bishop Nikolai strongly preached for Christian unity or, as he said: "The angels of the churches are sounding the trumpets summoning to unity. Lost will be, in this world and in the world to come, whoever does not hear the sounding trumpet of the angel of his church."¹⁴⁵

Three weeks later, he delivered a lecture at King's College, London. After the lecture the College Dean, Rev. W. R. Matthews, presented Bishop Nikolai with a watercolour of the interior of St. Paul's Cathedral. Referring to the sermon(s) that Velimirovich had delivered at St. Paul's, he said: "It was an historic occasion, for, I am told, you are the first person, not being in formal communion with the Anglican Communion, that has preached from the pulpit of our Metropolitan Cathedral."¹⁴⁶

Velimirovich positively surprised his British friends by his openness to all Christian churches and particularly to Roman Catholicism. Stephen Graham remarked that Father Nikolai was "very friendly towards Roman Catholics, had nothing against them, and certainly did not want to convert anyone who was already a Christian. In the spiritual anxiety of the war, with Christians arrayed against Christians, there was a singularly attractive quality of Fr Nikolai."¹⁴⁷ Bogumil Vošnjak mentions that Nikolai, in addition to having had close relations with the Church of England, also had links with the Catholic Church in England. "Cardinal Bourne highly appreciated Nikolai Velimirovich and was in touch with him all the time."¹⁴⁸ Henry Wickham Steed told Father Nikolai that Frano Supilo expressed readiness to convert to the Orthodox faith. In Septem-

¹⁴³ "The Churches of the East. Intercession and Thanksgiving at St. Paul's", *Church Times*, 24 Dec. 1919, 622.

¹⁴⁴ Nicholai Velimirović, "The Principle of the Eastern Orthodox Church. A Sermon preached in St. Paul's Cathedral", *The Spiritual Rebirth of Europe* (London: Faith Press, 1920), 43–60.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 59.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 42.

¹⁴⁷ Graham, *Part of the Wonderful Scene*, 103.

¹⁴⁸ Vošnjak, *U borbi za ujedinjenu narodnu državu*, 177. Vošnjak is referring to Cardinal Francis Alphonsus Bourne, Archbishop of Westminster from 1903 until his death in 1935.

ber 1915, Velimirovich shared this information with J. Žujović, and they both agreed that such requests should not be made of Croats.¹⁴⁹

Velimirovich had already been known as a good preacher in Serbia in 1910–1914. His reputation in Britain grew throughout the Great War. Upon returning to Yugoslavia, he continued to be respected as a great orator and is still sometimes considered “the greatest orator in the history of the Serbian people”. He has even been described as the “Serbian Chrysostom”.¹⁵⁰ Since he did not have a proper predecessor in Serbia who could have served as a model to him in this field, one can only assume that his stay in Britain in 1908/9 influenced his oratory, and that his second stay during the Great War encouraged him to hone his oratorical skills.¹⁵¹

Booklets and pamphlets

During his wartime and immediate post-war activities in Britain (1915–1920) Velimirovich published at least ten booklets and pamphlets. Furthermore, in New York he edited the journal *Živa crkva* (Living Church). In four out of five issues of this journal published in New York, Velimirovich is credited as author, and it is clear that he was also the author of the third issue entitled “Christianity and War. Letters of a Serbian to his English Friend” since it was later republished in England under his name. Two of the issues are in English¹⁵² and three are in Serbian. This means that in 1915–1920 Velimirovich published at least twelve booklets and pamphlets in English. Some of them contain three or four of his lectures delivered throughout Britain, and some are single lectures or addresses.

The target audience for Velimirovich was quite different in the United States and in Britain. In the former, he primarily addressed Serbs, Yugoslavs and other Slavs living in the States. In the latter, he addressed Britons of the highest circles, including MPs, ministers, opinion makers, dignitaries of the Church of England and other churches, university teachers and humanitarian workers. What is impressive about his sermons and lectures is not only their quantity but even more their quality. A publication of St. Margaret’s Church was not likely to be widely distributed. Yet, it was quite enough if a booklet with three of

¹⁴⁹ Žujović, *Dnevnik*, vol. 2, 196.

¹⁵⁰ Radovan Bigović, *Od svečoveka do bogočoveka. Hrišćanska filozofija vladike Nikolaja Velimirovića* (Belgrade: Raška škola, 1998), 72. Chrysostom means “golden-mouthed” in Greek.

¹⁵¹ He was aware of the importance of sermons as early as 1902. Bogdan Lubardić, “Nikolaj Velimirović 1903–1914”, 331.

¹⁵² *Christianity and War. Letters of a Serbian to his English Friend*, *Živa crkva* no. 3 [New York], 31 p. Rev. N. Velimirovich D.D., *Two Churches in One Nation*, *Živa crkva* no. 5 [New York], 16 p.

Velimirovich's lectures delivered in that church reached the MPs who attended the church and their family members.

His booklets and pamphlets were published by various societies, and in some cases were supported by the Serbian Legation. Upon the publication of the booklet *Serbia in Light and Darkness* the Serbian Legation purchased 400 copies and sent them to Velimirovich's flat.¹⁵³ Many of his activities were coordinated with the Serbian Legation and he represented the Legation officially at the meetings related to church affairs. *The Church Times* announced the public meeting of the Anglican and Eastern Association to be held on 27 October 1915, in which would take part the Secretary of the Russian Embassy and Nikolai Velimirovich "representing the Serbian Legation".¹⁵⁴ The speakers at the meeting which marked the ninth anniversary of the Association included Dr. Seton-Watson, Leighton Pullan, Father Nikolai and Stephen Graham.

Another impressive fact concerns the forewords to some of his booklets. They were written by very prominent Britons including: Robert William Seton-Watson, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Archbishop of York, the Bishop of London, and Canon A. J. Douglas. In revising his booklet *Serbia in Light and Darkness* he had the help of Rev. G. K. A. Bell, subsequently Bishop of Chichester. All of these names belonged to the highest ranks of the Church of England at the time. He also delivered many lectures in Catholic and Presbyterian churches, and a foreword was written by Rev. Alexander Whyte, Principal of New College in Edinburgh.

It seems that his interpretation of the Lord's Prayer was particularly popular. It had three editions, and the Archbishop of York, Cosmo Gordon Lang,¹⁵⁵ stressed in his foreword: "It has an originality of spirit, method, and language which distinguishes it from any other interpretation of the Lord's Prayer which I have read."¹⁵⁶ *The Church Times* announced the publication of this booklet. "A month or two ago there appeared in the columns of the *Men's Magazine* one of the most remarkable contributions ever made to it. It was impossible that it should be allowed to remain there. *The Lord's Prayer: a Devout Interpretation* (C.E.M.S., Church House, – Westminster, 6d.) has now been issued separately, and the Archbishop of York commends it to a wider public."¹⁵⁷ The booklet was reprinted in 1917 and 1918. That it was popular may be seen from a foreword to

¹⁵³ AS, KSPL, f iv, r 82/1916, Reply of the Secretary of the Serbian Legation to the publisher Longmans, Green & Co. dated 24 June 1916.

¹⁵⁴ *Church Times*, 15 Oct. 1915, 384.

¹⁵⁵ Cosmo Gordon Lang was Archbishop of York from 1908 until 1928, and then Archbishop of Canterbury from 1928 until 1942.

¹⁵⁶ Foreword of the Archbishop of York to Nicholai Velimirovic, *The Lord's Prayer. A Devout Interpretation* (London: Church of England Men's Society, 1916).

¹⁵⁷ *Church Times*, 24 Nov. 1916, 468 b, c.

another publication devoted to a similar topic, *The Lord's Commandments*. The Lord Bishop of London says therein that Father Nikolai "won all our hearts," and adds: "His little book upon 'The Lord's Prayer' has been widely read, and I much hope his accompanying volume will find as many readers."¹⁵⁸

Relations with the Church of England and other Christian churches

The commemoration of Kossovo Day in June/July 1916 was done with the clear support and blessing of the Church of England. Another indicator of how close relations had become between the two churches came in the autumn of 1917. In late 1917 the Church of England had a 104-page *Molitvenik* (Prayer book) printed in Serbian and in Cyrillic in London "as a gift of members of the Church of England to the Church of Serbia". The Prayer book is prefaced by the following note of Randall Davidson, Archbishop of Canterbury, written in October 1916: "I think it gives cause for thankfulness, and is also a matter of good omen, that at this time of supreme crisis the Church of England should aid the work and worship of the Church of Serbia by the publication of this book. The Serbian people have been passing through a valley of humiliation and sorrow, and we value the privilege of outstretching a helpful hand."¹⁵⁹

The Church of England adapted two prayers for being "used in the English churches on the anniversary of the Battle of Kossovo". One of them, "For the Departed", was adapted from the Liturgy of Serapion. It was a prayer to the Lord for "the men and women who have laid down their lives in bringing succour to the wounded and sick, together with all those who have been slain in defence of Serbia." The other, "For Those in Adversity", was adapted from the Liturgy of St. Mark. It addresses the Lord: "Have compassion upon the oppressed people of Serbia; strengthen and defend the Bishops and the Clergy in body and soul"¹⁶⁰ The prayers were in use in Anglican churches in 1917 and later. *The Times* clarified that the Prayer book was compiled by Velimirovich, that it was meant for the Serbian Army, and that 10,000 copies would be sent to Serbs in Salonika, Corfu and elsewhere.¹⁶¹ *The Church Times* also informed its readers that "the prayers have been arranged and written in Serbian for the Society by Father Nicholas Velimirovic, chaplain to King Peter."¹⁶²

¹⁵⁸ Foreword by the Bishop of London to Nicholai Velimirovic, *The Lord's Commandments, etc.* (London: Church of England Men's Society, 1917).

¹⁵⁹ *Molitvenik* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1917), 3.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 104.

¹⁶¹ "A Serbian prayer-book", *Times*, 12 Jan. 1918.

¹⁶² "Dispatch of 10,000 prayer books to Serbian troops", *Church Times*, 14 Dec. 1917, 514 c.

At the very end of the war Velimirovich helped Serbian Prime Minister Nikola Pašić to save his face because some British officials boycotted him. In October 1918 a new conflict between Pašić and the Yugoslav Committee became evident. The Prime Minister of Serbia came to London on 2 October 1918. British circles were under the strong influence of British Serbian/Yugoslav friends, the Serbian opposition and the Serbian Minister in London Jovan Jovanović, who were all emphatically against Pašić.¹⁶³ Velimirovich accused Jovanović and his associates of having created in London an atmosphere of ill will towards Pašić, but he was also critical of Pašić and obviously had more sympathies for the points of the Yugoslav Committee than Pašić.¹⁶⁴ Yet, he decided to facilitate communication between Pašić and British officials. He first supported the Serbian government at the requiem mass at a Greek church in London, and then set up a huge meeting with prelates of the Church of England. On 12 October 1918 Pašić gave a special dinner at Claridge's Hotel. All guests were presented with a souvenir: a leaflet with the image of a window of the twelfth-century Serbian monastery of Studenica on its front cover, and an ethnographic map of future Yugoslavia inside. It also contained a short history of the Serbian Orthodox Church with a note at the end: "There are 40 Serbian theological students now being educated at Oxford and Cuddesdon."¹⁶⁵

In his speech Pašić thanked the Church of England for all it had done for Serbia during the Great War. "May it be (he ended) that, by the aid of the Almighty, this work of charity for the Church of Serbia may be the foundation stone on which may be placed the *rapprochement* and the definite union of our two Churches for the good of all humanity." This announcement must have been made in collaboration with Velimirovich who had been a proponent of the union of the two churches since at least 1909. It certainly made an excellent impression on Anglican prelates. This occasion also provided an apt opportunity to honour top Anglican officials who had helped Serbia so much during the war. By order of King Peter many of them were awarded the Order of St. Sava. "The first class was given to the Archbishop of Canterbury, and the Bishops of London and Oxford; the second class upon the Archbishop of York, the Revs. Dr. W. H. Frere, C. R., Canon W. H. Carnegie, H. J. Fynes-Clinton, and Dr. Hermitage Day."¹⁶⁶ A malicious comment of Minister Jovanović, who was not even invited to this ceremony, should be seen in the light of the mutual animosity between him and Pašić.¹⁶⁷ Contrary to most Serbian and Yugoslav emigrants in London,

¹⁶³ For more detail see Antić, *Neizabrana saveznica*, 438–455.

¹⁶⁴ Jovanović, *Dnevnik*, 533, diary entry of 27 Sep. (10 Oct) 1918.

¹⁶⁵ AS, KSPL, SPA, f. X.

¹⁶⁶ *Anglican and Eastern Churches: A Historical Record*, 26.

¹⁶⁷ Jovanović, *Dnevnik*, 534, diary entry of 29 Sep. (12 Oct.) 1918. He implied that Pašić offered Velimirovich the position of a bishop in Serbia in return for this service.

Velimirovich remained loyal to Pašić throughout the Great War. After all, it was Pašić who had sent all the Serbian envoys to London.¹⁶⁸ Velimirovich also followed quite loyally the instructions he had been given in 1915, which was to promote the future Yugoslav state and to maintain close relations with the Yugoslav Committee.

A very important action that brought the two churches together was the education of future Serbian priests which the Church of England gradually took on itself. In October 1917, at Velimirovich's instigation, Rev. H. J. Fynes-Clinton in cooperation with Rev. L. Pullan arranged that four Serbian students should be sent to Oxford.¹⁶⁹ This was the same L. Pullan with whom Velimirovich had discussed the question of the reunion of the two churches in *The Guardian* in 1909.¹⁷⁰ The Archbishop of Serbia endorsed this scheme and asked the Archbishop of Canterbury to bring as many seminary students over to England as possible. A cordial support for this scheme followed from the Church of England and, with the help of Rev. Canon W. H. Carnegie, "The Serbian Church Students' Aid Council" was set up with the Archbishop of Canterbury as its president and the Archbishops of York and Dublin as its vice-presidents. By July 1918 the Council was supporting eleven Serbian students at Oxford, and twenty-eight younger seminarians at Cuddesdon College near Oxford. The Council estimated the annual costs of this scheme at 10,000 pounds.¹⁷¹ In January 1918 St. Stephen's House, Oxford, became a Serbian Theological College. The scheme was continued after the war and, in October 1919, the Anglican and Eastern Association, which had taken over managing the scheme from the Council, established its own Hostel of St. Sava and St. George at 16 Parks Road, Oxford, with fourteen students from Serbia.¹⁷²

Another vivid proof of how close relations between the two churches had become during the Great War may be gleaned from Father Nikolai's letter to *The Times* published in January 1919. The letter was about the Serbian priests killed during the war in occupied Serbia, particularly in the Bulgarian occupa-

¹⁶⁸ Until Pašić's death in 1926, Velimirovich was considered to be politically sympathetic to his Radical Party. Milan Jovanović Stoimirović, *Portreti prema živim modelima*, 65.

¹⁶⁹ "Theological Students from Serbia in England", *Westminster Gazette*, 7 Mar. 1918.

¹⁷⁰ For more on Leighton Pullan and on Anglo-Catholic stream within the Church of England see Mark D. Chapman, "The Church of England, Serbia and the Serbian Orthodox Church during the First World War", in Vladislav Puzović, ed., *Pravoslavni svet i Prvi svetski rat* (Belgrade: Pravoslavni bogoslovski fakultet Univerziteta u Beogradu, 2015), 385–401. For Anglo-Catholicism see Mark Chapman, *Anglicanism. A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 75–93.

¹⁷¹ Publication of the Council with the list of its members on the cover page, and a report on the back page, AJ, Fonds 83, f. 73, no. 6, "Nikolai Velimirovich and Vojislav Janic".

¹⁷² *Anglican and Eastern Churches: A Historical Record*, 23.

tion zone. At the end of the letter he conveyed the appeal of the Archbishop of Serbia “to the English clergy to mention the Serbian clergy martyrs in their prayers.”¹⁷³

When Velimirovich returned to Serbia, he sent a private letter to an English churchman, excerpts from which were published in *The Church Times*. The letter reveals the gratitude he felt for the help provided by the Church of England but also the effects of the aid sent to Serbs. In the letter he states: “It will interest you to know that many of my clergymen who were interned in Austria-Hungary are still wearing the English clergy clothes which they received while in Austrian camps last year in parcels from England. It was due, as you will remember, to the appeal of the Bishop of London through *The Church Times*. They are most grateful. They keep saying ‘We should not know what to wear, even now, had we not these English coats.’ Is it not curious to see a priest of the mountains wearing a coat which was worn by some English dean in the magnificent cities of England? Even coats have their life adventures like men.”¹⁷⁴

In December 1919, at Lambeth, Nikolai Velimirovich, by then already a bishop, summarised what he believed had contributed to strengthening the friendship between the Church of England and the Serbian Church, and cited four things: 1) the help provided to deported Serbian clergy in Austria; 2) the aid to the Serbian students in England; 3) the gift of tens of thousands of Serbian prayer books by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge to the Serbian troops; and 4) the prayer made for the Serbs throughout England.¹⁷⁵

The Church of England found in Father Nikolai Velimirovich an able, learned and committed advocate of church unity, and this Church had been in search of such a man in Eastern Churches for years. During the years of the Great War, the British alliance first with Serbia and then with the Hellenic Kingdom seemed to have opened the possibility for church union. At the beginning of 1919 Dr. Percy Dearmer optimistically echoed the expectations raised in many quarters of the Church of England during the war: “Fr. Velimirović’s sojourn in this country, preaching in and receiving Communion in our own Church, had been a wonderful means of cementing brotherhood with the Serbian Church. While the Metropolitan of Athens, who had been in England too, was bearing back to Greece the same message of fraternal love. The possibility of reunion with the East was becoming greater and greater.”¹⁷⁶

¹⁷³“The Serbian Church”, *Times*, 6 Jan. 1919.

¹⁷⁴“Letter from Bishop Nicholai”, *Church Times*, 18 July 1919, 54.

¹⁷⁵ *Anglican and Eastern Churches: A Historical Record*, 20–21.

¹⁷⁶“Reunion Conferences”, *Church Times*, 11 Apr. 1919, 351.

Bishop Bury gave an introductory address before Bishop Nikolai's sermon at St. Paul's Cathedral in December 1919. It revealed the kind of respect the Bishop of Žiĉa had earned in the ranks of the Church of England:

I do not think that any Bishop of our own Communion – not to speak of the other Orthodox Dignitaries who have been welcomed from time to time – have ever had the same reception here in London, and there is good reason why this should be so. Bishop Nicholai, as well as having endeared himself to us for his own sake, has been vividly representative to us all through the war, as he is still, of the Spirit of Serbia... I only hope Serbia knows what she owes to him – at no distant date I hope to find out for myself, and if necessary to tell both people and Church what they owe – but we know what Serbia owes to Bishop Nicholai, and not only Serbia but the whole Eastern Church, including Russia, in whose future I still proclaim myself a firm believer. We too know here, in our own Anglican Church, what we owe to the Bishop, for while he is, in a sense, like one of our own clergy in his service to us, he has done what none of our own clergy could have done in the same way, helped us to look outside our own boundaries, wide as they are, into the fuller life of the whole Catholic Church of Christ.¹⁷⁷

In addition to forging the Anglican-Orthodox rapprochement, Velimirovich significantly contributed to a radical change in British views on the impact of religion on potential South-Slav unity. Before the Great War, the Catholic-Orthodox divide among the South Slavs had been seen as very strong. Father Nikolai's overall activities combined with the activities of the "British friends of Serbia" during the Great War considerably relativised the importance previously attached to religious differences among Yugoslavs.¹⁷⁸ This was probably the most relevant achievement Velimirovich made in promoting the Yugoslav cause in Britain.

Influence of British cosmopolitanism

During his four years in Britain (1908–1909; 1915–1919) Velimirovich met the most prominent British theologians, clergymen, writers, scholars and humanitarian workers, but also illustrious persons from all corners of the British Empire, including the Bengali poet Tagore and Muslim sheiks from India. Additionally, in London he also met prominent Slavic intellectuals who had left Austria-Hungary, the most prominent of them being the Czech Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk. This cosmopolitan experience influenced him strongly. He also maintained close relations with the Serbian ex-diplomat Chedomille Miyatovich and the writer Dimitrije Mitrinović, who both were sympathetic to universalist

¹⁷⁷ Velimirović, *Spiritual Rebirth of Europe*, 45–46.

¹⁷⁸ Cf. James Evans, *Great Britain and the Creation of Yugoslavia. Negotiating Balkan Nationality and Identity* (London and New York: Tauris Academic Studies, 2008), 66–67.

ideas, and both endeavoured to re-conceptualise Christianity as a cornerstone of new universalism. Velimirovich's ideas gradually evolved and can be followed through his texts published or prepared during his stay in Britain.

In April 1916 Israel Gollancz, professor of English literature at King's College, prefaced a collection of essays in honour of Shakespeare on the occasion of the tercentenary of his death. He made a selection of texts on Shakespeare which included well-known authors such as Thomas Hardy, John Galsworthy, Rudyard Kipling, and Sir Rabindranath Tagore. Besides Anglo-American authors he added writers from Allied and neutral countries. Among them were Henri Bergson, Romain Rolland, Émile Verhaeren, Maurice Maeterlinck and Henryk Sienkiewicz. The two contributions by Serbs in the collection were written by Nikolai Velimirovich and Pavle Popović, and a paragraph on "Shakespeare and Yugoslavs" in Serbian in Cyrillic was also included.¹⁷⁹ Velimirovich defines Shakespeare's spirit as panhumanist and the artist himself as someone who knew "to find out essential good", and thanks to him also the British nation knows the same. "Their principle is not to *uniform* the world, but to multiply their own spirit by learning and understanding all other spirits in order to be just towards all. Their way is going not towards the Super-man, but towards the All-man; not towards Nietzsche, but towards Shakespeare." For him the real founder of the multicultural Empire was Shakespeare and since the Bible reached Britain "there has been no similar *panhuman* document read on this island as Shakespeare".¹⁸⁰ It is obvious that British cosmopolitanism had made a huge impression on Velimirovich. His political dreams are clearly expressed in his comparison in this text between Dostoevsky's *vsechlovek* and Shakespeare as a pananthropos. "That is the reason why these two grand races, the Anglo-Saxon and the Slav," Velimirovich writes, "are secretly gravitating by their soul towards each other, in spite of all possible temporary divergency of politics. Their ideal is the same – panhuman."¹⁸¹ Indeed, the Great War brought about unprecedented interest in Britain in Russian literature and philosophy, as well as the Eastern Orthodox Church, and Velimirovich was one among several authors who could now dream that this interest would materialise not only as a temporal military alliance but also in the development of spiritual links. Another one was

¹⁷⁹ Nicholas Velimirovic, "Shakespeare – the Pananthropos", in Israel Gollancz, ed., *A Book of Homage to Shakespeare. To commemorate the three hundredth anniversary of Shakespeare's death* (Oxford University Press, 1916), 520–523; Pavle Popović, "Shakespeare in Serbia", *ibid.* 524–527; Срђан Туцић, "Шекспир и Југословени" [Srdjan Tucic, "Shakespeare and the Yugoslavs"], *ibid.* 528.

¹⁸⁰ Velimirovic, "Shakespeare – the Pananthropos", 520 and 523.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.* 523. In its review of this book, the highly esteemed *Spectator* quoted only a few contributors and among them twice Velimirovich: "A Book of Homage to Shakespeare", *Spectator*, 27 May 1916, 661.

his friend Stephen Graham, who did a lot to bring Russian and British cultures closer to one another during the war. The Bolshevik Revolution made any rapprochement of the two cultures hardly possible. This is echoed in the second sermon Velimirovich delivered at St. Paul's.

From his second sermon at St. Paul's one learns which British theologians and preachers particularly influenced him. On that occasion he said: "Speaking from this sacred place, from which the shining stars of your church, like Dr. Liddon, Dean Church, and Dr. Robertson used to speak, I am trying to speak, though not so eloquently as they did, at least in the spirit in which they spoke, and in which they would speak were they now amongst us."¹⁸² In the same sermon he elaborated on his favourite topic: the need for church unity. He outlined three main reasons for unity. 1) Love. "With all of you we shall feel more perfect, more alive", he claimed. 2) The Peace Conference failed to rely on higher powers. Velimirovich held churches responsible for that, not politicians. "It is not their [politicians'] fault, I am sure. It is the fault of the Church being many instead of being one." With one and united church the "white race" would be able to "solve the seemingly insoluble problems of boundaries, of League of Nations, of Labour and the rest." 3) With Russia lost peoples of the Near East and "unredeemed Greece" faced rising Islam. "Therefore they are looking to Great Britain as the champion of Christendom at the present moment." He expressed his belief that "Serbia and all her Yugo-Slav brothers" were "being set free thanks not only to your [Britain's] material and military help, but also to your steady prayers for her in this place [St. Paul's Cathedral] and in hundreds of other of sanctuaries of yours during the last four years." But many anxieties were yet to come, and to meet them rapprochement would not be sufficient, "but real unity" would.¹⁸³ In Britain, his ideas on church unity expressed as early as 1909 only gained momentum. Moreover, everything that the Church of England did for the rapprochement with the Orthodox Churches seemed to indicate that unity was far from impossible to achieve.

He seems to have been under the significant influence of Rabindranath Tagore. In their search for the spiritual self, they both were fascinated and disenchanted by British culture. British cosmopolitanism impressed both of them, but they also witnessed lust for material gains and a civilisation that seemed to be losing its spiritual grounds. They both identified two faces of Britain and Western Europe. As Tagore summarised it in his essay on nationalism in Japan: "Europe is supremely good in her beneficence where her face is turned to all humanity; and Europe is supremely evil in her malefic aspect where her face

¹⁸² Velimirovic, *Spiritual Rebirth of Europe*, 57–58; he added that he was "glad to call" some members of the present chapter of St. Paul's Cathedral "my personal friends".

¹⁸³ Velimirović, *Spiritual Rebirth of Europe*, 53–57.

is turned only upon her own interest, using all her power of greatness for ends which are against the infinite and the eternal in Man.”¹⁸⁴

The legacy of Velimirovich’s British cosmopolitan experience is best summarised in an article of his published in *The New Age*, “Indian Panhumanism”,¹⁸⁵ which he probably submitted for publication during his visit to Britain in December 1919. The article begins with a quote from Tagore: “There is only one history – the history of man.”¹⁸⁶ He sees the freedom of the will as the beginning of human tragedy. He speaks very highly of the traditions of Hinduism and is impressed that it knows not “of the two great enemies of mankind”, and these are narrow-minded nationalism and unscrupulous imperialism.¹⁸⁷ The experience of the Great War had left a deep mark on Velimirovich’s religious views. He was profoundly disheartened by what had happened in Europe. “The World War is the proof that Christ has been once more crucified by Nationalism and Imperialism, and that he has to ask for refuge among those of more pan-human spirits.”¹⁸⁸ Disillusioned with Europe, he finds India to be the most apt new refuge for Christian teachings, openly asking why Krishna should not be called “our great prophet”. The Christian religion has become “a lost jewel in the West”, and he therefore asks: “Why should not India bow and take it [Christianity] up, and brush it up from the dust, and make it perfect?”¹⁸⁹

This article was an introduction to his major work in Serbian – *Discourse on Pan-Human*, a literary work written in allegorical form and published anonymously. Its main character, *Ananda Vran Gavran*, travels around the world in search of Pan-Human. This *Pananthropos*, whom Velimirovich found in Solovoyov and Shakespeare but also in religious teachings of the East, can best be found in true Christianity. Since that kind of Christianity has been abandoned in the West, he finishes his Serbian book with the following words: “And Pan-Human boarded a ship which sailed the Pacific Ocean. And his face glowing with light was turned towards Asia. And it was night. And the stars were in the sky. And the Asian magi examined the stars, and with great excitement they spotted a new star, which announced to them the coming of the King from exile.”¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁴ Sir Rabindranath Tagore, *Nationalism* (San Francisco: The Book Club of California, 1917), 84–85.

¹⁸⁵ Nicolai Velimirovic (*Bishop of Zica, Serbia*), “Indian Panhumanism”, *New Age* 26, no. 8 (25 Dec. 1919), 125–128.

¹⁸⁶ Cf. Tagore, *Nationalism*, 119.

¹⁸⁷ Velimirovic, “Indian Panhumanism”, 126.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.* 127.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.* 128.

¹⁹⁰ *Reči o svečoveku* (Belgrade: S. B. Cvijanović, 1920), 338.

For Bishop Nikolai's enemies in Serbia, this was too much. His second sermon at St. Paul's, a lengthy praise of it in the *Politika*, and now his new book, and they were enraged. The new book, as every allegory, could be interpreted in more ways than one. It led his enemies to publish a text in rhyme on the front page of the leading Belgrade daily *Politika*. It was entitled "Pan-Human in Belgrade" and signed with a pseudonym. The text implied that the proper place for Ananda Vran Gavran, the main protagonist of Velimirovich's book, was a lunatic asylum, and that the author of the book equated Christ, Muhammad and Brahma.¹⁹¹

Velimirovich continued to hold Eastern traditions in high esteem. When, in November 1926, Tagore visited Belgrade, one of his hosts was Velimirovich. He greeted Tagore in the Belgrade premises of the Young Men's Christian Association and called India "a Christian country without Christ" which gave the world people "whose greatness is admired by all".¹⁹² During his years in Ohrid, where he served as bishop (1920–1936), he was more focused on the mystical traditions of Orthodox Christianity. Yet, his fascination with Eastern teachings did not vanish. In the 1930s, while showing Lake Ohrid to the writer Grigorije Božović, Velimirovich said: "This is Tibet."¹⁹³

As Predrag Palavestra noted: "From England, where he found refuge during the First World War and where, apart from energetically working for the national cause, he pursued an interest in pan-Slavic pan-humanist ideas and the spiritual conflict between Eastern and Western philosophy, Velimirovich returned as a neo-Christian poet of the moralist philosophy of Pan-Human."¹⁹⁴

Recollections of Velimirovich in the Church of England

Some of Father Nikolai's Serbian contemporaries in London were not too happy about the extent of his influence and his abilities. The role of the Orthodox Church in Serbia prior to the First World War was not prominent in spite of the fact that it enjoyed the status of state church.¹⁹⁵ Even high-ranking clergymen

¹⁹¹ Felet, "Svečovek u Beogradu", *Politika*, 31 Jan. 1920, 1–2.

¹⁹² "Tagora u hrišćanskoj zajednici", *Politika*, 17 Nov. 1926, 6.

¹⁹³ Janković, *Episkop Nikolaj*, vol. 1, 187.

¹⁹⁴ Predrag Palavestra, "Doba modernizma u književnosti", in *Istorija srpskog naroda*, vol. VI-2 (Belgrade: SKZ, 1994), 388. Velimirovich's criticism of Europe's materialism intensified in the interwar period. For the evolution of Velimirovich's political and cultural ideas in the interwar period see Milutinović, *Getting over Europe*, 156–167.

¹⁹⁵ The Archbishop of Serbia, Dimitrije, complained to Bogumil Vošnjak (*U borbi za ujedinjenu narodnu državu*, 179), that the Serbian government did not even inform him about the Concordat with Vatican in 1914. On the low prestige of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Serbia prior to the First World War see Chedo Mijatovich, *Servia and the Servians* (London:

had to admit that something was not right with religious sentiment in Serbia and that “rechristianizing” was needed. Stevan M. Veselinović, director of the Theological Seminary, wrote in 1909: “As a matter of fact, party politics have done visible harm to the purely religious sentiments of the mass of the Servian people. It is everyone’s hope that the Church will succeed in purifying the stagnant atmosphere of the Servian nation if she devotes herself to her apostolical mission of rechristianizing the Servian peoples.”¹⁹⁶ It was almost inconceivable that a simple monk could play any socially or culturally significant role. In the absence of the nobility and industrial magnates, the high society of Serbia on the eve of the Great War consisted mostly of university professors, army officers, civil servants and diplomats. That a monk could surpass them in influence in Britain was not an easy pill to swallow. For this reason, the Serbian Minister in London, Jovan Jovanović, or the Serbian envoys, professors Bogdan and Pavle Popović, were often very suspicious of Velimirovich. The most sympathetic Yugoslav assessment of his work came from a Catholic Slovene, Bogumil Vošnjak, rather than from a Serb. Vošnjak described Nikolai’s propaganda efforts as something peculiar, something that made him look like an apostle: “It was not propaganda in the simple sense of the word; it was something reminiscent of the activity of an apostle who influences the masses through the secrets of religion.” He deemed his activities in Britain “so comprehensive, so multifaceted, and so universal that it was a veritable miracle.”¹⁹⁷ A Dalmatian member of the Yugoslav Committee, the famous sculptor Ivan Meštrović also had a high opinion of Velimirovich and not so high of the other Serbian envoys in London. As recorded in his memoirs: “Father Nikolai Velimirovich, a monk, and a former student in England, has also come. A young man then, but very well-read and unusually gifted as an orator and preacher. These older Serbian gentlemen somewhat look down on him, but he is more useful for the Serbian and general cause than all of them put together. He is closer to us in terms of ideas, is more broad-minded and more considerate. And while they only speak of Serbia and Serbdom, and of some Greater Serbia, the monk speaks both of Serbia and the Serbian people and of Yugoslavs and a future Yugoslavia.”¹⁹⁸ R. W. Seton-Watson had a similar opinion. His short note accompanying Bishop Nikolai’s article written for *The New Europe* reads: “During the dark days of war and exile no one did more to in-

Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons, 1908), 48–53. Milan Jovanović Stojimirović, *Portreti prema živim modelima* (Novi Sad: Matica srpska), 1998, 17–18.

¹⁹⁶ S. M. Veselinovitch, “Religion,” in Alfred Stead, ed., *Servia by the Servians* (London: William Heinemann, 1909), 157.

¹⁹⁷ Vošnjak *U borbi za ujedinjenu narodnu državu*, 177 and 184.

¹⁹⁸ Ivan Meštrović, *Uspomene na političke ljude i događaje* (Zagreb: Matica hrvatska, 1969), 58.

terpret to this country the soul of Serbia and the spirit of the Orthodox Church than Father Nikolai Velimirović.”¹⁹⁹

Velimirović's activities during and after the Great War, and Anglophile sentiments were not forgotten in Britain. On 12 March 1919, prior to his departure from England, Father Nikolai was presented with a pectoral cross by his English brethren in Christ. On that occasion, the Archbishop of Canterbury said the following: “During his exile in England he had been regarded with growing affection and respect, as one who was essentially a spiritual guide. By his words and his pen he had taught many lessons, he had gained many friends, and the cross which they were offering him would be the symbol and the reminder of English friendship. Destined to be a leader in Church and State in his own country, it was no small thing that Father Nicolai should know England and English life and thought. There were links between the two countries, but the strongest link of all was the time that Father Nicolai had spent here. Ideas of union were in the air, we knew not to what they would grow.”²⁰⁰

During his first post-war visit to the UK, at the end of 1919, a series of honours and praises were bestowed on him. This visit, which he made in his capacity as Bishop of Žižica,²⁰¹ provides evidence of the respect he had gained in Britain. In November 1919, shortly before his departure for Britain, he had been awarded an honorary D.D. degree by the University of Glasgow.²⁰² He arrived in Britain on 12 December and, four days later, was received by British King George V.²⁰³ On 18 December he delivered his second sermon at St. Paul's Cathedral. Finally, on 9 January 1920 he delivered a lecture at King's College, London. The Vice Chancellor of the University of London, Dr. Sydney Russell-Wells, felt obliged to say before his lecture that Velimirović was “the type of man the University of London delights to honour. Had it been our practice to confer Honorary Degrees I have no doubt that, long ere this, had he been willing to accept the title, he would have been numbered among the Doctors of our University.”²⁰⁴

¹⁹⁹ Nikolai Velimirović, “Freedom's Reality and Delusions”, *New Europe* (1 Jan. 1920). The article was republished in Velimirović, *Spiritual Rebirth of Europe*, 61–80.

²⁰⁰ “A Parting Presentation”, *Anglican and Eastern Churches: A Historical Record*, 20. The Archbishop's words in this report are not in quotations marks but have been paraphrased. Before this presentation, it was thought that Father Nikolai should be awarded a Lambeth D.D. or an honorary Oxford D. D., but Fynes-Clinton soon learned that only British nationals were eligible for the former, and only priests of the Anglican Church for the latter, see M. Heppell, *George Bell and Nikolai Velimirović*, 12–13.

²⁰¹ He was elected Bishop of Žižica in April 1919.

²⁰² “Glasgow Honorary Degrees”, *Evening Telegraph*, 18 Nov. 1919, p. 4 d.

²⁰³ “Court and Personal”, *Yorkshire Post*, 17 Dec. 1919, p. 6.

²⁰⁴ Velimirović, *The Spiritual Rebirth of Europe*, 13.

In 1921, the Anglican and Eastern Churches Association published a report entitled *The Anglican and Eastern Churches: A Historical Record 1914–1921*. A substantial part of the report bears the heading “Our relations with Serbia”, of which more than a half is devoted to the activities of Father Nikolai. It becomes evident from the report that relations between the two churches during the Great War essentially were relations between the Church of England and Nikolai Velimirovich. As far as the “close intercourse” between the two churches is concerned, the report assesses that he was “the chief personality in this rapprochement”.²⁰⁵

In 1940 Harold Buxton, Bishop of Gibraltar, recalled Nikolai Velimirovich who “made impression on all of us by his serious commitment and his Christian sermons, but also by his efforts to offer young Serbian seminarists a necessary theological education”. He also mentioned other bishops who had co-operated with the Church of England in the interwar period, such as Irinej Djordjević, Bishop of Dalmatia, Dr. Irinej Ćirić, Bishop of Bačka, and Dr. Dositej Vasić, Metropolitan of Zagreb, and the Serbian churchmen Kosta Luković, Dušan Stojanović and Branislav Kovandžić.²⁰⁶ This Anglophile current in the interwar Serbian Orthodox Church was undoubtedly something for which Nikolai Velimirovich had paved the way with his activities during the Great War.

In his obituary *The Church Times* called him a “friend of Britain” and pointed out that he had been “an outstanding figure in the rapprochement between the Church of England and the Serbian Orthodox Church”.²⁰⁷ Bishop George Bell echoed the respect that Nikolai Velimirovich had earned in England in his lifetime but particularly during the Great War when he said in his eulogy at the memorial service held in the Serbian church in London in September 1956: “In the midst of all the noise and traffic, the conflict of politics and the wars of nations, he always stood for the eternal... He was a prophet of God, not only of God’s mercy, but of God’s judgment.”²⁰⁸

He was still remembered in Britain at the beginning of the twenty-first century. In 2001, Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Wales, subsequently Archbishop of Canterbury, wrote in his foreword to M. Heppell’s book: “Bishop Nikolai Velimirović was, for several generations of British Anglicans, one of that group of unmistakable moral and spiritual giants who brought something of

²⁰⁵ *Anglican and Eastern Churches: A Historical Record*, 16.

²⁰⁶ Harold Bakston, “Odnosi između Engleske crkve i Srpske pravoslavne crkve”, *Danica* no. 7 (1 Jan. 1941), 2.

²⁰⁷ “Death of Bishop Velimirovich. Friend of Britain”, *Church Times* no. 4,859, 29 Mar. 1956, 13.

²⁰⁸ Heppell, *George Bell and Nikolai Velimirović*, 92–93.

the depth and challenge of the Orthodox world in the West.”²⁰⁹ Finally, in 2016, during his official visit to Serbia and the region of the Western Balkans Prince Charles delivered a speech in the Parliament of Serbia and made special reference to Velimirovič and his sermons at St. Paul’s: “1916 is also the centenary of St. Nicolai Velimirovič’s visit to England where he became the first Orthodox Christian to preach at St. Paul’s Cathedral.”²¹⁰

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²⁰⁹ Ibid. 5.

²¹⁰ “Speech by HRH The Prince of Wales at the Parliament Building, Belgrade. Published on 17th March 2016”, <https://www.princeofwales.gov.uk/media/speeches/speech-hrh-the-prince-of-wales-the-parliament-building-belgrade>

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