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Carrying Their Native Land and Their New Home in Their Hearts

Mihailo Pupin and Bishop Nikolai of Žiča between Their Native and Adopted Country

Abstract: The present study gives us an opportunity to look at the Christian heritage that the Serbian immigrants brought to the new land of Americas through the examples of Mihailo Pupin and Nikolai Velimirović, Bishop of Žiča, since these two names are indelibly inscribed in the history of the so-called *Serbica Americana*. The paper is divided into two sections dealing specifically with their Serbianism and Americanism to show that a distribution of love and loyalty between their native and adopted country functioned in a fruitful way. Based on a detailed analysis of their writings, the author suggests that Serbians and Americans remember Pupin and Velimirović because they enjoy the benefits of their remarkable contributions. The following aspects of Pupin's and Nikolai's lives are examined: their deep concern with the fate of Serbia during and after the First World War; their leading roles among the Serbs in the United States through their assistance in establishing Serbian churches and communities, through their scholarship funds, philanthropic work, etc. Their genuine care for Serbia and Serbs was in no way an obstacle in their adjustment to their adopted country.

Keywords: immigration, Serbia, America, inculturation, church, freedom, integration, identity

The close of the nineteenth and arrival of the twentieth century brought changes of fundamental significance for Christians. The settling immigrants had to make an effort to establish communication between two worlds that, unfortunately, had lived and operated completely cut off from one another for centuries. This effort encouraged many to preach and witness the Gospel in ways which met the cultural needs of the people in American society through

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the truth of the Church. This necessity was associated with a sincere concern for the ethnic component: being Serbian was not an impediment in their adjustment to their adopted country. As bishop Nikolai of Žiča, in his address on the first Minnesota Serbian Day, June 8, 1947, stated, "Serbians have become an organic part of America and have made their contribution to the development of America by their sweat, thought, and blood… Before the two world wars the Old Country looked upon America as its daughter. Now, after two terrible wars, they look upon America as their mother."[1]

As regards the Americas, there is a history of five waves of Serbian immigration. The first wave, a smaller one, took place before the Congress of Berlin of 1878, and is called "early immigration" (from 1815 to 1880). The second wave, somewhat larger, took place between 1878 and the First World War (1914). This second wave can be extended to include the First World War and it accounts for the largest part of the earlier Serbian immigrations. During this second, very important wave of immigration into the Americas, charitable organizations and Serbian institutions were established, Serbian churches and community centers were built. The third was the interwar wave of immigration, 1918–1941. The fourth took place during the Second World War and in 1945–1965. This war left the Serbian people and the Serbian Church in disarray. A large number of the Serbs who had been in refugee camps in Germany and Italy came to the Americas and thus became associated with the earlier Serbian immigrants, as the fourth major wave of migration to the USA and Canada. The fifth wave of immigration ensued after 1965.

An authentic inventor of symbiosis: Mihailo Pupin

Mihailo (Michael) Pupin (1858–1935) was, along with the scientist Nikola Tesla (1856–1943), a famous Serbian-American inventor. Pupin was also a renowned professor at Columbia University in New York and an honorary consul of the Kingdom of Serbia in the United States. In his book *From Immigrant to Inventor*, Pupin describes the spirit of the first immigrants after their arrival to the States, and before their thorough training in the arts and crafts and with sturdy physiques capable of withstanding the hardships of strenuous labor would begin.

> When I landed at Castle Garden, forty-eight years ago, I had only five cents in my pocket. Had I brought five hundred dollars, instead of five cents, my immediate career in the new, and to me a perfectly strange, land would have been the same. A young immigrant such as I was then does not begin his career until he has spent all the money which he has brought with him. I brought five cents, and immediately spent it upon a piece of prune pie, which turned out to be a bogus prune pie. It contained nothing but pits of prunes. If I had brought five

[1] N. S. Chanak, "Minnesota Serbian Day," *Serb World*, January/February 1990, p. 30.

> hundred dollars, it would have taken me a little longer to spend it, mostly upon bogus things, but the struggle which awaited me would have been the same in each case. It is no handicap to a boy immigrant to land here penniless; it is not a handicap to any boy to be penniless when he strikes out for an independent career, provided that he has the stamina to stand the hardships that may be in store for him.[2]

As Fr. Bozidar Dragicevich noted, in Pupin's heart, like on a tablet, names of the greatest figures of both American and Serbian history were engraved. "There was neither a contradiction between Pupin's Serbianism and Americanism, nor was there a conflict between his religion and science. Every single church, especially the church in his Idvor, decorated with beautiful icons of the Orthodox Saints reminded him of the secular colleges, especially that at Cambridge, which for Pupin was a 'temple of external truth.' As the Church has its saints, so science has its heroes and saints."[3]

Pupin also formulated the most crucial question related to the contributions immigrants make and how integral they are to the fabric of American society. "But what has a young and penniless immigrant to offer who has had no training in any of the arts or crafts and does not know the language of the land?" He replied laconically, "apparently nothing, and if the present standards had prevailed forty eight years ago I should have been deported. There are, however, certain things which a young immigrant may bring to this country that are far more precious than any of the things which the present immigration laws prescribe. Did I bring any of these things with me when I landed at Castle Garden in 1874?"[4]

Pupin also wrote that after some time, he felt that, "after all, there might be many things in America which were just as great as those great things of which the Serbian *guslar* sings in the national ballads of Serbia. Vila [a Serbian fairy] had succeeded in welding the first link between my Serbian traditions and the traditions of America."[5] Pupin also conveys the sentiments shared by early immigrants in their encounter with the Protestant way of living the faith. "The singing of hymns did not impress me much, and the sermon impressed me even less. Delaware City was much bigger than my native Idvor, and yet the religious service in Idvor was more elaborate. There was no choral singing in the church of Delaware City, and there were no ceremonies with a lot of burning candles and

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[2] Michael Pupin, *From Immigrant to Inventor* (New York–London: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1924), 1.

[3] B. Dragicevich, *American Serb* (Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the University of Minnesota, 1973), 42.

[4] Pupin, *From Immigrant to Inventor*, 1–2.

[5] Ibid. 55.

the sweet perfume of burning incense, and there was no ringing of harmonious church bells. I was disappointed…"[6]

When Pupin later picked out a Congregational Church for religious worship, he was pleased by "a harmonious musical background to the magnificent singing of the large choir", so he felt that the thrilling music was "tuning him up for the sermon which the great orator was about to preach."[7] He confesses the contrast between his first and later impressions. "Four years previously I had for the first time attended an American church service in Delaware City, and had carried away the impression that in matters of public worship America was not up to the standards prescribed by the Serbian Church. Beecher and his Plymouth Church changed my judgment completely. Beecher's congregation seemed to me like a beehive full of honey hearted beings."[8]

That Pupin was a child of the Orthodox Church is shown by his discernment between vocal and instrumental church music. "The Orthodox church permits no instrumental music. Those who have had the good fortune to listen to Russian choirs know the power and the spiritual charm of their choral singing. Serb choirs are not their inferiors. No music appeals to our hearts so strongly as the music of the human voice."[9]

Quite indicative of the differences between the two approaches to the mystery of faith, is Pupin's following account. About the middle of April that year, 1875, Pupin was on a farm in Dayton, New Jersey. The farmer, Mr. Brown, had an idea that the youth who had lived one whole winter in Norfolk Street, New York, needed spiritual regeneration.

> He was a very pious Baptist, and I soon discovered that in his everlasting professions of omissions and commissions he was even worse than that reformed drunkard whose sermons had driven me away from the Bowery Mission and its vigorous bean soup. Every Sunday his family took me to church twice and made me sit between the female members of the family. I felt that the congregation imagined that Mr. Brown and his family were trying their best to convert a godless foreign youth and make a good Baptist out of him. Mr. Brown seemed to be in a great hurry about it, because every evening he made me listen for an hour at least to his reading of the Bible, and before we parted for the night he would offer a loud and fervent prayer that the Lord might kindle his light in the souls of those who had been wandering in darkness. I know now that he had in mind the words of St. Luke, "To give light to them that sit in darkness," but at that time I fancied that he referred to my painting operations in the cellars and

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[6] Ibid. 52. It should be noted that the Serbian Singing Federation (1931) established a silver cup, a masterpiece of hand-wrought English sterling silver, in memory of inventor Mihajlo Pupin, a lover of choral singing and an admirer of the SSF.

[7] Ibid. 105–106.

[8] Ibid. 107.

[9] Ibid.155.

> basements of Lexington Avenue, and interpreted his prayers as having a special reference to me.

Then Pupin proceeds to explain, in an amusing way, how the joy of life which during the day he inhaled in the fresh fields of the early spring was "smothered in the evening by Mr. Brown's views of religion, which were views of a decrepit old man who thought of heaven only because he had no terrestrial problems to solve. He did his best to strip religion of every vestige of its poetic beauty, and of its soul-stirring spiritual force, and to make it appear like a mummy of a long-departed Egyptian corpse. A Serbian youth who looks to St. Sava, the educator, and to the Serbian national ballads for an interpretation of the Holy Scriptures, could not be expected to warm up for the religion which farmer Brown preached."[10] Pupin concludes this narrative with a profound insight:

> One Sunday evening, after the church service, farmer Brown introduced me to some of his friends, informing them that I was a Serbian youth who had not enjoyed all the opportunities of American religious training, but that I was making wonderful progress, and that some day I might even become an active member of their congregation. The vision of my Orthodox mother, of the little church in Idvor, of the Patriarch in Karlovci, and of St. Sava, shot before my eyes like a flash, and I vowed to furnish a speedy proof that farmer Brown was wrong. The next day I was up long before sunrise, having spent a restless night formulating a definite plan of deliverance from the intolerable boredom inflicted upon me by a hopeless religious crank. The eastern sky was like a veil of gold and it promised the arrival of a glorious April day. The fields, the birds, the distant woods, and the friendly country road all seemed to join in a melodious hymn of praise to the beauties of the wanderer's freedom. I bade good-by to the hospitable home of farmer Brown and made a bee-line for the distant woods.[11]

Without in any way denying the reality and goodness of American religious background, Pupin holds that they are expressions of a lesser reality compared to his Orthodox tradition. His account is equally interesting as an illustration of the immigrants' perception of the new world now seen through the prism of their heritage. His life was marked by such events, and his understanding of his task became much more substantial.

> Princeton was unlike anything that I had ever seen up to that time. I had read about Hilendar, the famous monastery on Mount Athos, on the Aegean Sea, founded by St. Sava in the twelfth century. I had seen pictures of its buildings, where monks lived the life of solitude and study. Princeton, with its many monastic-looking buildings, I imagined was such a place, where young men were given every opportunity to study and become learned men so as to be able to devote their lives effectively to such work as St. Sava did.[12]

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[10] Ibid. 67–68.

[11] Ibid. 68.

[12] Ibid. 70.

An attempt at synthesis, that curious amalgam of the traditional and the modern, is evident in the following paragraph:

> One day, while reading in the Cooper Union Library, I saw quite near me an old gentleman standing and carefully scrutinizing what was going on. I imagined, at first, that he had stepped out of that painting. I looked again and found that the figure in the painting which I fancied had walked out was still there and that the old gentleman near me was undoubtedly the original from which the artist had painted that figure. The ambidextrous youth behind the library-desk told me afterward that the old gentleman was Peter Cooper, the founder of Cooper Union, and that he was one of the group of famous men represented in the great painting. He looked as I imagined the Patriarch of Karlovci must have looked. He was a striking resemblance to St. Sava, the Educator, as he is represented on an ikon in our church in Idvor. The same snowy locks and rosy complexion of saintly purity, and the same benevolent look from two luminous blue eyes.[13]

This testimony of Pupin's is important for yet another crucial reason: the exchange between his two identities. When he was making his first visit to Europe after nine years in the US, he wrote the following words which could serve as a recipe for a successful integration:

> As I sat on the deck of the ship which was taking me to the universities of Europe, and watched its eagerness to get away from the busy harbor of New York, I thought of the day when, nine years before, I had arrived on the immigrant ship. I said to myself: "Michael Pupin, *the most valuable asset which you carried into New York harbor nine years ago was your knowledge of, and profound respect and admiration for, the best traditions of your race*… the most valuable asset which you are now taking with you from New York harbor is *your knowledge of, and profound respect and admiration for, the best traditions of your adopted country*."[14]

When he arrived in Serbia in 1883, Pupin attended the funeral of a famous Serbian poet, Branko Radičević. His following words—with liturgical connotations—summarize the sentiment all Serbian immigrants could share:

> "On the way back we stopped at the church and kissed the icons of our patron saint and of St. Sava, and lighted two wax candles which mother had brought with her. I confessed to her that I felt as if a sacred communion had reunited me with the spirit of Idvor."[15]

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[13] Ibid. 77. Pupin will point to another difference between the new world and the old country (ibid. 84): "I understood why so many blacksmiths and other people of small learning made a great success as preachers in this country, whereas in my native village the priest, who prided himself upon his learning, was obliged to read those sermons only which were sent to him by the bishop of the diocese."

[14] Ibid. 137.

[15] Ibid. 158–159.

Pupin's firm faith in God was his principal inspiration in life which he creatively assimilated in his lifestyle. He used to attend church services even while studying at Cambridge.

> "Every time I attended service in this glorious chapel I went away feeling spiritually uplifted. I attended regularly, although, as a member of the Orthodox faith, I was excused from all religious services. What the other students, belonging to the established church, considered a stern duty, I considered a rare privilege. The chapel gave me a spiritual tonic whenever I needed it, and I needed it often."[16]

Pupin wrote a programmatic article published in the *Sloboda* calendar for 1930 and there he identified the most important task of the Serbian immigrant organizations of that time:

> Our Church also needs young and highly educated priests. I am not saying that older priests should be shunned as old fashioned, but I do think that when the older priests retire due to their age, the new ones who replace them should be like apostles spreading the Serbian idea across the U. S., teaching new generations not only to preserve their loyalty and love for the blessed Serbian state, but also to embrace the ideals that have enabled our people to survive over five hundred years. One who knows these ideals is also proud of them. […] Every Serb in America should not only join the Serb National Federation, but also become a member of the Serbian Orthodox Diocese and support both organizations in any way they can. This kind of work will be rewarded economically and spiritually in the national progress of our people in this blessed country.[17]

Clearly, Pupin spelled out this task very lucidly: to educate immigrant children in the Serbian spirit and to develop a Serbian American identity.

While visiting his old country, Pupin was overwhelmed with invitations to attend concerts and festivals in many places of his native Banat. He was often called upon to say something about America, "and, of course, I spoke about my favorite subject: 'The American Doctrine of Freedom.'"[18] As Fr. Bozidar Dragicevich remarks, "one cannot conclude if Pupin was more proud while praising Lincoln and Franklin or wails exalting the names of St. Sava and Kraljevich Marko. His Serbianism inspired him with great respect for Americanism. Only he who carries his native land in his heart will be an honest and constructive citizen of his adopted land."[19]

As Serbian scientist and professor at Columbia University, Pupin worked closely with the clergy of the Serbian Church in North America, and played an important role in establishing Church-School congregations in New York,

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[16] Ibid. 173.

[17] Pupin, M. I., "Naše dužnosti", *Sloboda*, 1930, 19–20.

[18] Pupin, *From Immigrant to Inventor*, 61.

[19] Dragicevich, *American Serb*, 43.

Garry (Indiana), etc. He donated a commission to found a particular fund to aid the Serbian Church in America, and he personally gave $23,000 to the church to pay its debts in the building of St. Sava's Monastery at Libertyville, Illinois.

In 1909, Pupin invited representatives of all to a pan-Serbian assembly in Cleveland, Ohio, halfway between the Chicago and Pittsburgh centers. They founded a single organization: *Savez Sjedinjenih Srba Sloga*, known as "Sloga" or "Unity." The initials, four "S's, were chosen to coincide with the motto of the Serbian crest —*Samo Sloga Srbina Spasava* or Only Unity Saves Serbs. Pupin was elected president, but the union was short-lived, and a more truly national unity was not achieved until twenty years later. Nevertheless, Pupin persisted doggedly during this time to try to maintain Serbian-American solidarity.

A faithful interpreter of the soul of the people: Bishop Nikolai of Žiča in America

St. Nikolai (Velimirović), Bishop of Ohrid and Žiča (1880–1956), along with his many other attributes is regarded, with good reason, as an enlightener of the Americas. He was a theologian, a minister, a missionary, a writer, a poet, an apostle, a saint, and a man of dialogue. The renewed interest in this man and his works has resulted in the materialization of many articles for English-speaking readers who wish to become acquainted with this extraordinary person.[20] Many publications provide an extensive overview of his life, present important testimonies about his personality, and offer essential insights into his theology. All authors agree that the appearance of Nikolai Velimirović marks an era of change in the ecclesiastical and theological *paradigm* as a result of his spirituality, ecclesiastical work, and theological position.[21] The amount of his written work alone is awe-inspiring (it comprises thirty volumes), and the task of specifying the content of the various themes is quite complex. The significance and relevance of his books are time-resistant; moreover, his works gain in importance each day.

Nikolai's work in North America has not been sufficiently studied. From the autumn of 1921, he was the administrator of the newly established Serbian Diocese (with all the Church organs and in accordance with the Church canons) of the United States and Canada, and he remained in America until 1923. Following the Second World War he returned to America, and spent the final years of his life—his longest sojourn—in the United States, until his death. During

[20] The manner in which the person of Nicholai is perceived in some circles today announces that it is high time to stop speaking about him in a journalistic manner with a pious-ethnic rhetorical tone. This, actually, results in obscuring and undermining the spiritual, theological, and philosophical magnitude of Nicholai as a thinker.

[21] See *Treasures New and Old. Writings of St Nikolai of Ochrid and Zhicha*, ed. Bishop Maxim (Vasiljevic) (Los Angeles: Sebastian Press, 2010).

the course of his many visits he participated in peace conferences, church ecumenical meetings and gatherings (the meeting of the World Council of Churches, WCC in Evanston in 1952), at conferences of Christian youth of the world, and at Pan-Orthodox councils. He participated in Christian heterodox Church events, like, for example, the ordination and installation of his old friend (since 1915), Rev. William Manning as the tenth Episcopalian bishop of New York.

The Holy Assembly of Bishops (*Sabor*) of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Belgrade sent the Bishop of Ohrid, Nikolai Velimirović, to investigate the possibility of organizing a diocese in the U.S. and Canada in 1921. When he arrived in America, Bishop Nikolai informed the Russian Metropolitan that, by decision of the Holy Assembly of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church, he was to assume the administration of the church for Serbians in the United States and Canada. Nikolai's visit to America in 1921 marked the first time that any Serbian hierarch had come to the New World. Nikolai impressed all who heard and saw him with his speeches, sermons, and appearances. "Exceptional language, crystal-pure, rich phrasing. Like a skillful blacksmith Father Nikolai systematically hammers in his arguments heavy as mallets on an iron anvil."[22]

Thus, in 1921, Bishop Nikolai founded the first diocese of the Serbian Orthodox Church on the North American continent. At that time, Bishop Nikolai appointed Archimandrite Mardarije Uskoković as his deputy and assigned to him the duty of creating a diocesan center along with the construction of a monastery. In October 1923, Bishop Nikolai Velimirović resigned from his duties of administering the American-Canadian Diocese. The first Serbian immigrants in America showed their patriotism during the First World War. Bishop of Ochrid remarked that patriotism is a prevailing feeling among them.[23]

It is clear that the new political and economic conditions of twentieth-century mankind have exerted relentless pressures on Orthodox life, compelling its adaptation to the new circumstances. And so, the Orthodox Church

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[22] Božidar Puric, *Biografija Boze Rankovica: Doprinos istoriji srpskog seljenistva u Severnoj Americi* [Biography of Boza Rankovic: Contribution to the History of Serbian Immigration to North America] (Munich 1963), 94.

[23] "The former wartime Volunteers are especially held in esteem. Immediately following them are those who gave their hard-earned dollars to the Serbian Red Cross or for the orphans. I must immediately add that they truly sacrificed a great deal, considering their pain and poverty. If one considers the sacrifice just in money—leaving blood aside—then the Serbs in America sacrificed more, comparatively speaking, than any other part of our country. No matter who collected the money, or when it was collected, they always gave. Those who didn't have it, borrowed it humbly and gave—wanting to do no less than their brothers, wanting to help their brothers" ("Serbian Church-School Congregation of Saint Sava Cathedral in Milwaukee: Brief History", *Dedication of St. Sava Serbian Orthodox Cathedral* (Milwaukee 1958), 9).

has wandered into developmental currents that are unfamiliar and hitherto unknown in its history; the effects still need to be examined.

Nikolai has bequeathed a singular theological *legacy* that exceeds the established perceptions of his time. The events that took place in Serbia after Nikolai's lifetime—that is, in the second half and particularly at the end of the twentieth century—led to the emergence of a contemporary and creative Orthodox self-consciousness following a complex and painful period of "Babylonian slavery" with all its repercussions. As Metropolitan Amfilohije Radović observes: "Bishop Nikolai was from the very beginning a European man, but one who was pan-Slavically and pan-humanly inclined. He followed the theological, spiritual, scientific and social currents of his time."[24] Hence, he showed a genuine concern for the whole universe, to which his entire life attests and which is exemplified by the following important words about America shortly before his death:

> I came from the Old World to this New World. Which one of the two is better, the New one or the Old one? I cannot tell. However, the One Who revealed all truths told both you and me that a wise host brings both new and old things out of his treasury (cf. Matt. 13:52). Not just the new or merely the old, but both. Our Lord Jesus Christ honored the Old Testament and at the same time He revealed the New Testament to us. Now we, His followers, safeguard the one and the other as a singular Holy Book. The greatest wisdom consists in protecting the old and the new treasures alike. The separation of one from the other only leads to poverty, insecurity and confusion.[25]

Bishop Nikolai was aware that in America, since the nation's founding, people have wrestled with what it means to be free. But politics—which continually speaks about human rights and human dignity—is indifferent to the supposed freedom of the human person. That is why he points out that the dignity of man—in other words, the superior value of man—has real and eternal meaning only if you know and acknowledge the Kingdom of Heaven as the true fatherland of all men, from which we originated and to which we are returning as children of one common Father, Who is in heaven. And freedom is most useful, joyful, and sacred if you exercise moral discipline over yourself and practice competition in doing good.[26] St. Nikolai's point of view generates a dynamic understanding of human dignity in comparison with the static opinions prevailing in the West (in both secular and theological approaches).

> America is constantly sounding the sympathetic watchwords: "dignity of man" and "liberty of men and nations." But the deepest meaning of these watchwords can be found in the sacred teaching of Him without Whom we can do nothing.

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[24] Metropolitan Amfilohije Radovic, "The Theanthropic Ethos of Bishop Nikolai Velimirovich", in *Treasures New and Old*, 128.

[25] See in *Treasures New and Old. Writings of St Nikolai of Ochrid and Zhicha*, 8.

[26] Ibid.

> That meaning is found most explicitly in the threefold program of our Orthodox Church: spiritual vision, moral discipline, and competition in doing good.[27]

However, people do not adopt a political viewpoint because such a thing is rational or moral. This problem is critical because the moral relativism and individualism that undergird the social education of our time have imposed upon us social and psychological conditions that tend to dissolve the integrity of our personal being into ontically separate individualities and personalities alienated from communion and relation, so that the human's irreplaceable and unique personhood, which only flowers in true communion and the call to relation, becomes lost. For this reason, Nikolai addresses a new prophetic call to a dialogical theology:

> These are the fundamentals upon which you can build your individual and communal happiness. And you have received these fundamentals as a glorious heritage, never to part with. By practicing this spiritual heritage in your daily life, you will become an adornment to America. And through you all Americans will come to know and appreciate our ancient Church of the East and her spiritual heroes, whom we are praising today."[28]

For Nikolai, everyone, ancients and moderns, in East and West, has need of the fullness of grace which is offered liturgically by the Orthodox Church. At the same time, Nikolai left his American counterparts with an impression of himself as an unbiased man, a man who was free of prejudice. According to the Canon N. West, prior to the arrival of Archimandrite Nikolai in 1915 the Anglican community had regarded the "exotic Orthodox faith" as something very remote. In his "Recollections of Bishop Nikolai", he writes that it was actually Bishop Nikolai who revealed Orthodoxy to the other branches of Christianity in both England and America.

As Dr. Zorka Milich from St. Sava Serbian Church in New York City described him, "…many parishioners of our generation remembered him as a saintly, gentle, kind, brilliant man whose words were measured and profound. He preached in our church, broke bread with his parishioners, and spoke in serene and tranquil tone."[29] This tone is reflected in the following line by Nikolai.

> "Personally, I have a deep admiration for these old Orthodox generations in America, both for those who passed away in the Faith, and for those who are still living by their faith. They have been a spiritual and constructive component of the New World's humanity. I dare say that in their own way they have been heroic generations no less than other national groups, now blended into one

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[27] Bishop Nicholai, "The Eastern Orthodox Church in America and Its Future," vol. XIII of *Sabrana dela* (Collected Works) (Himelstir 1986), 572.

[28] Ibid. 572.

[29] Cf. Natalie Mihajlov Ratzkovich, "St. Sava's Cathedral of New York," *Serb World*, Sept/Oct. 2014, p. 11.

> great American nation. In their modesty these humble people never expected a poet to laud them or a historian to describe them."[30]

Nikolai's "third and last American mission", namely the last decade of his life (1946–1956), which he spent in the USA from January 9, 1946 until his death on March 18, 1956, was a very fruitful period of his life. The end of the Second World War failed to reward the sufferings of Nikolai and return him to his people; therefore, he came to the United States. Upon arriving in America, he was received as a guest by Bishop Dionisije in the Monastery of St. Sava at Libertyville, Illinois. The last years of his life he spent in St. Tikhon, the Russian Monastery at South Canaan, Pennsylvania, as a Professor of the Theological Seminary.

America was not a new context for him. He was familiar with it, especially after his first (in 1915) and second mission (1921–23). Nikolai was a key figure in establishing the first Serbian Diocese in the USA and Canada and played an instrumental role in making Mardarije the first bishop of this Diocese. The last decade of his life—the focus of this overview—began with his immigration to USA in 1946 (he arrived as a refugee after the tragic experience of the Second World War) and lasted until March 1956. Writing on a daily basis, Nikolai was also lecturing: at the temporary Seminary school of St. Sava in Libertyville, at Russian academies: The Holy Trinity in Jordanville and St. Tikhon in South Canaan in Pennsylvania, and several times at St. Vladimir Seminary. His earthly life ended in South Canaan.

In 1946, the confessor Nikolai moved to America for the last time. Having recuperated from an aching back and leg problems, the exiled Bishop began lecturing, as usual, in various educational institutions. In June 1946, he was awarded for his academic excellence his final Doctorate of Sacred Theology from Columbia University.

From 1946 to 1949, Nikolai, always loyal to his Serbian people, taught at the St. Sava Seminary in Libertyville, Illinois. Realizing the need for American-born Serbians to have an Orthodox catechism in English, he published *The Faith of the Saints* (1949). In 1950, he wrote an essay on Orthodox mysticism in English, *The Universe as Signs and Symbols*, and a book in Serbian entitled, *Zemlja Nedodjija* (The Unattainable Land). In 1951, his last book written while teaching at St. Sava's was, aptly, *The Life of St. Sava*. According to the words of the distinguished professor Dr. Veselin Kesich,[31] this book reveals something about [Bishop Nikolai] himself in his meditation on the end of St. Sava's Life: Sava withdrew to his House of Silence in Studenica and offered a prayer to God to let him die in a foreign country Why did he pray for this? Bishop Nikolai considers several reasons: Sava's protest against political disorder at home, his appeal

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[30] Bishop Nicholai, "The Eastern Orthodox Church in America and Its Future," 572.

[31] Veselin Kesich, "Introduction" to St. Nicholai Velimirovich, *The Life of Saint Sava* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1989).

to the conscience of his people, and his conviction that he would work for their salvation from the outside. These three reasons probably influenced the Bishops decision to come to America and not to return to Yugoslavia after the war.

Nikolai did not forget his Serbian flock, as he published, in 1952, *Žetve Gospodnje* (The Harvests of the Lord) and *Kasijana* (Cassiana), a story of a penitent. In 1953, he wrote *Divan* (Conversations), a book on the *Bogomoljci* and their miracles. His final book, *Jedini Čovekoljubac* (The Only Lover of Mankind) was published posthumously in 1958. Bishop Nikolai's final undertaking was the Serbian Bible Institute, which published a series of seven short tracts on various theological topics: *Christ Died for Us*, *Meditations on Seven Days*, *Angels Our Elder Brethren*, *Seven Petitions*, *Bible and Power*, *Missionary Letters*, and *The Mystery of Touch*.

In 1951, Bishop Nikolai moved to St. Tikhon's Russian Orthodox Monastery in South Canaan, Pennsylvania. There he spent the last five years of his earthly life as a professor, dean, and eventually rector of the Seminary. Being all things to all people, Nikolai published articles in Russian for the God-seekers at St. Tikhon's. His ease and facility with languages was amazing to all. Nikolai could read, write, and speak fluently seven different languages. Besides his activities at St. Tikhon's, Bishop Nikolai lectured at St. Vladimir's Seminary in Crestwood, New York, as well as at the Russian Orthodox Seminary and Monastery of the Holy Trinity in Jordanville, New York.

In 1951, Bishop Nikolai came to St. Tikhon's Seminary first as a professor and finally, with the death of the former Rector, Bishop Jonah, as Rector of the Seminary. There he lived out the last years of his life as an example of humility, as well as an elder to the monastics at St. Tikhon's Monastery. To the students of the Seminary, the old Bishop was a loving father figure whom they would never forget. To the laity and faithful of the monastery parish, as well as all who came in contact with the Bishop, he was a hierarch in whom they saw manifest the grace of God. And to all, he was an example of humility. During his years as an educator at St. Tikhon's Seminary Bishop Nikolai was seen to be a very unusual person in that his courses were profoundly simple, informal and very warm. His requirements were very basic: he taught, you learned, and he corrected.

Perhaps one of the most striking characteristics of his classes was that he taught solely in the English language, at a time when very few courses were taught in that language (and these usually by outside lecturers). This often caused friction with other faculty members, but Bishop Nikolai held fast to his position, for he knew the importance, for the seminarians, of hearing lectures in their native language. Indeed, without this use of English, much of the subtlety of his teachings would have been lost from memory. The use of English extended even to the monastery church, and on most occasions, he would preach in that language. Parishioners often complain about this, but his answer was: "You have learned and heard enough. It's time for [the seminarians] to learn something."

Bishop Nikolai's classes, sermons, and conversations were always geared to his audience, be they students, professors, theologians or simple parishioners, and his vocabulary never went beyond the comprehension of his hearers. For him, class could be any time. Anything said to him could be turned around and assigned a deeper meaning. He would always take examples from conversations in class, at the dinner table, or that which occurred as he walked about the grounds, and would always introduce examples from the Holy Scripture, relating them to life at hand.

Bishop Nikolai fell asleep in the Lord while in prayer during the night between the 17th and 18th of March 1956, in his humble cell at St. Tikhon Russian Orthodox Seminary. He was seventy-six years old. He was given an honorable Orthodox Christian burial service in St. Sava Serbian Orthodox Cathedral in New York City; as pious Christians from all parts of the world came to hear eulogies in honor of one of the greatest hierarchs of the entire Orthodox Church in the twentieth century. From New York City his body was transferred to Libertyville, Illinois, just north of Chicago, to St. Sava Serbian Orthodox Monastery. He was laid to rest on the south side of the monastery church, on March 27, 1956.

Conclusion: Carrying native land and new home in their hearts

In return for its hospitality, the Serbian Orthodox Church granted America not only material culture but also distinguished scientists, such as Pupin—and holy persons, such as Nikolai of Žiča.

We find the following aspects of Pupin's and Nikolai's lives impressive, as they were, a) deeply concerned with the fate of Serbia, they tried to help her as much as they could during and after the First World War (and Nikolai after the Second World War); b) they also played leading roles among the Serbs in the United States; c) a number of Serbian churches in America remember them as their benefactors; d) a number of Serbian students in science and theology benefited from their scholarship funds; e) both, doubtless, were faithful Serbs; f) they were, to a certain extent, representatives of the Serbian nation in the New World from the very beginning of their career in America; g) and yet their concern for Serbia and Serbs was in no way an impediment in their adjustment to their adopted country; they adjusted to it with such surprising speed and sincerity that everyone must admire them.

Both Pupin and Nikolai had a sense for history. "Not a single history of the American Serbs would be complete if it did not describe everything the Serbs in America have done for their first Homeland from the beginning, down until today," Bishop Nikolai wrote.[32] Mihailo Pupin emphasized the need of

[32] See Bishop Sava (Vuković) of Šumadija, *History of the Serbian Orthodox Church in America and Canada, 1891–1941* (Kragujevac: Kalenic Press, 1998), XIV.

adjusting to America with astounding promptness and earnestness. At the same time, Nikolai's awareness of the need for "inculturation"—that is, for witnessing and preaching the Gospel in ways which meet the cultural needs of people—led him to create highly exemplary and contemporary works, significant even in our postmodern era. His entire life struggle was a process of contextualizing the Evangelical message of Christ with an ardent desire for the whole world to recognize the Orthodox truth of Christ.

Today, Serbian Orthodoxy in America considers the dynamic pulse of its Eucharistic life as the measure of its maturity and achievements. Presently, it has over 140 parishes, 15 missions, and 15 monasteries, as well as a School of theology. This Church has achieved a significant ecclesiological-societal level that faithfully reflects an *ecclesial* consciousness. This awareness is maintained through indistinguishable ecclesial and ethnic components, which have important consequences in the unfolding history and life of the Church. The Church continues to fulfill Nikolai's (Velimirović) and Mihailo's (Pupin) vision of the need for the "inculturation".

The work of these two figures is a living proof that the Serbian Christian cultural heritage is far more than the remembrance of the past; it is key to understanding the present and a resource/prolegomenon for the future.

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