

RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY AMONG ALBANIANS

In this paper it is dealt with the phenomenon of diversity as a very interesting one that is, almost an unique feature of the inter-religious co-existence among Albanians in their moment of culmination. In this point of view, efforts have been made to further explain some aspects of this theme that are as interesting as complex. Up to now, these aspects have passed unnoticed or they have not been brought to light as they should.

Tracing the historical evolution of the diversity, the author dwells with the main causes of its spread. No so rarely, in a vague and simply declarative way, it is insisted that they should be looked for in the severe rule of Ottoman authorities. Based on documents and contradicting statements of the advocators of this thesis themselves, in fact, the reasons of the diversity's spreading as well as those of the islamization should be looked for and be found, though with any exception, only in the measures of mere economical character applied.

It is difficult to accept that these double-believers are considered authentic crypto Christians. The hidden character of this phenomenon is extremely relative. The term crypto Christians used by foreign authors and which has entered in our literature as well, does not represent an adequate reflection of their real situation under the ottoman rule as it is actually noticed, very rarely. The term in question is used in the scientific jargon, after the Second World War. Even in the other people of the Balkans, this category of hesitating believers was called as in Albanian: double-believers with the respective words in Serbian: *shareni*; in Greek: *pacali*.

The term pleurae-confessional rightfully reflect their position. They were called as they were in reality and as they were well known in the people in the midst of which bloomed this form of bi-believing: double-believers and no crypto Christians or hidden

Christians. If we can express it with actual terms, they hid their belief in front of tax-collectors and recruitment clerks, not in front of their compatriots.

The inter-religious co-existence widely practiced in the most various forms, has deeply entered into the tissues of Albanian society since from the early times. It had assumed a multi-colored outlook of pluri-confessionals, with various dimensions and forms. Families of pluri-confessionals, where one brother was Christian and the other one was Muslim, survived. They lived under in a roof and they shared everything except faith. Also, pluri-confessional couples resulting from mixed marriages, despite having different faiths, they had in common the conjugal bed. On this basis, pluri-confessionalism has bloomed in the wide meaning of this word. Often the term pluri-confessionality in the historical literature represents only a narrow aspect of it.

Gjon Kastrioti, as the bishop Fan S. Noli portrays him, results to be the typical example of a pluri-confessional in the wide meaning of this word. From this characterization of the well-known biographer of Gjergj Kastriot, it is not excluded the son of Gjon. Therefore, the National Hero of Albanians himself, Gjergj Kastriot Scanderbeg, as the name that he bore up to the end of his life testifies, was like his father, a simple Albanian, a typical plury-confessional in the wide meaning of this term.

It is believed to be of interest, differently from the so far imaginations, their explanation in this paper especially in relation of the time dimensions, and why not, of space ones the religious plury-confessional. Historically inter-religious in plury-confession among our predecessors is neither a specific phenomenon of the ottoman society, nor one of the Albanian world. This impression is created by the fact that it bloomed and survived only in such tolerant environments, by resisting the intolerant challenges from many sides.

Plury-confessionalizm, as Th. Ippen stated, came from unmemorable times, since from the time of Orthodox-Catholic rivalries. In support to these conclusions, the paper brings sufficient and convincing historical evidences. Crypto Orthodoxies in Cyprus, after coming from the Venetian Catholic rule under that of the Muslim ottoman rule, preferred to convert

themselves into Orthodoxy and even into Islam. Whereas in Cyprus, crypto Catholics refusing Orthodoxy preferred to convert into Muslims. In the first centuries of the ottoman rule in Albania, there existed a very wide mass of plury-confessionals, who survived from the time when the ottomans came and up to the 17th century. In our opinion, it is carried out in reality the converting of the catholic population into a Muslim one at a fast rate and in these dimensions. Thus, within several decades, there was carried out the converting in masses of Albanians into Islam, what was not possible to be carried out in such dimensions for more than two centuries.

Complete converting of plury-confessionals in fast rates into Islam concerned the highest Catholic authorities. With extremely severe measures of the first Assembly of Arben, they tried to oppose this process.

But, the taken decisions did not yield the expected results, on the contrary, they influenced on a controversial direction. Plury-confessionals, carriers of this in-between or double belief, in Albania, during the ottoman period like in all Turks' empire did not find themselves in the midst of life and death, in front of an alternative without a way out, as did the Muslims in Spain, or Islamized Slavs and Greeks in the Pachalik of Belgrade or Crete, after the reestablishment of the Christian rule in these countries. Due to the intolerance of the new Christian rulers against the *Moriscs* and *Turkushs* as well Islamized Greeks and where there is not encountered an analogue phenomenon like the plury-confessionalism called crypto-Christianism, on crypto-Muslimanism.

Under the new Christian rulers there was no room for such a category of discriminated Muslims. Death or massive banishment, there was no middle way of "crypto - Muslimanism" for them. Impose of Christian power did not leave a single way out for such a possibility, it went beyond it. All this represents a very expressive indicator of the existence of tolerance on one side and the exercise of an extreme intolerance on the other side. Therefore, the inter-religious plury-confessionalism among Albanians, differently from the other countries survived and resisted all the intolerant challenges from all directions.