

**XXII International Scientific Conference „Legal days –  
Prof. Slavko Carić”  
“LAW AND JUSTICE”**

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The University of Business Academy in Novi Sad  
The Faculty of Law for Commerce and Judiciary in Novi Sad

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October 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> 2025 in Novi Sad

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## RELIGION AND CRIMINALITY (SECTS AND TERRORIST ORGANISATIONS)

### Abstract:

This paper observes the relationship between religion and criminality, considering that religion is considered the oldest contributing social factor to criminality. The relationship between religion and criminality represents a point of divergence in scientific studies. The conclusions drawn in this paper imply that the stance claiming there is no correlation between religion and criminality can be refuted, i.e., the stance claiming faith has an exclusively beneficial impact on people, regarding prevention of criminal activity, as well as atonement and rectification of the lives of perpetrators of criminal offences, can be confirmed. The negative impact of so-called religion (pseudo-religion) could be associated exclusively to destructive sects and terrorist organisations under the guise of religion. Why pseudo-religion? Because religion represents faith in the Lord and piety, while belief in fabrications and obscene ideas of perverse human souls cannot be referred to as faith and belief. For the purposes of this paper, these fabrications will be identified appropriately, as they do not warrant to be referred to as religious.

**Keywords:** *religion, criminality, sects, terrorist organizations, Orthodox Christianity*

### INTRODUCTION

As aforementioned, science is divided when it comes to the relationship between religion and criminality. Some dispute any correlation between religion and criminality whatsoever, others maintain that religious fanaticism constitutes one of the key criminogenic factors, whereas a third group argues that religion has a preventive effect and deters criminal activity.<sup>1</sup>

Antiquity, or more specifically, the dawn of Christianity, was marked by severe suffering. Christians were brutally tortured and murdered by polytheistic Roman rulers for professing their faith in Jesus Christ. The persecution of Christians ended in 313 AD, when the emperors Constantine I and Licinius promulgated the Edict of Milan, whereby Christianity became an official religion of the Roman Empire. Historical events since the Great Schism of 1054 within the Christian Church and its division to the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church, the conflict of secular and spiritual authority, the

<sup>1</sup> Bošković, M., & Marković, M. (2015). *Kriminologija sa elementima viktimologije*. Novi Sad: Pravni fakultet za privredu i pravosuđe u Novom Sadu, p. 147.

Crusades (1095-1270), the Catholic Reformation and Counter-Reformation, up until the greatest collision between Roman Catholics and Protestants in Europe, i.e. the so-called Thirty Years' War (1618-1648), defined the Middle Ages as the darkest historical period in terms of the influence of religion on criminality. Considering all traditional religions advocate for peace and love among individuals and the people, atonement and forgiveness, none of them invite their followers to commit criminal acts or engage in riots, wars and suicide missions. However, during the above-mentioned period there were those who, claiming religious motivation, played a significant role in exacerbating religious and racial hatred by inciting wars, and as a result, the most severe forms of criminality.<sup>2</sup> The above notwithstanding, entire religions cannot be proclaimed as indirect or direct driving forces of conflict over individuals who have renounced their faith.

Today, the relations between church and state remain generally harmonious, and these institutions complement each other in preventing crime. No innovations succeeded in rendering obsolete or erasing the 6<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Commandment – “You shall not kill”, “You shall not steal” and “You shall not bear false witness” (against your neighbour) – from either human conscience or the law.<sup>3</sup> The same applies to the saying “To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your shirt either.” (Luke, 6, 29), which serves as an ideal. Keeping in mind the Holy Bible's daily efforts to cultivate Christian virtues, we simultaneously follow the norms prescribed by the law, hence, those who act accordingly are incapable of doing harm. In places where people are devoted and the state recognises and supports Christian values, religion contributes to the reduction of crime among the population.

Acts of destructive sects and terrorist organisations invoking religion are of importance from a criminological standpoint. Consequently, those who have renounced their faith can be divided into two groups. The first group consists of religious defectors, so-called manipulative individuals whose primary objective is to gain property through criminal acts, along with sect leaders, servants of the devil, who execute his will, as well as their followers. It is worth noting that there are exceptions to this rule. Manipulative individuals, sect leaders, teachers, and gurus who profess spirituality, yet undermine it, can be aware of the destructive nature of a sect and its true objectives. However, there are also those who find themselves in a state of spiritual delusion (theol. “prelest”). The same applies to the followers. Manipulative individuals primarily commit criminal offences against human property and health, whereas servants of the devil typically commit criminal offences against life and the body, sexual freedom, health, property and numerous other offences. In addition, some sect members are victims of manipulation, people who have strayed from spirituality but harbour no ill intentions, for which reason they cannot be considered manipulative individuals, or conscious servants of the devil. The second group constitutes terrorists acting out of distorted religious causes, i.e., extremely fanaticised followers gathered around a terrorist leader and recruits who are financially motivated to join terrorist formations.

### RELIGIOUS DEFECTORS (MANIPULATIVE INDIVIDUALS AND SECTS)

A famous quote by Lafayette Ronald Hubbard, author of science fiction novels and the founder of the most popular contemporary organisation – Scientology, also known as the Church of Scientology, reads: “If a man wants to make a million dollars, the best way to

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2 *Ibid.*, p. 147.

3 Ćirić, J. (1998). Religija i kriminalitet. *Arhiv za pravne i društvene nauke*, 54(4), p. 99.

do it would be to start his own religion". Presumably, those millions are obtained through abuse of the status of the church for tax exemption purposes, donations from wealthy devotees, unpaid labour of the members for the organisation, as well as illegal activities. Although material gain, which is indisputable, is frequently cited, the ultimate objective is the human soul itself, or to estrange one from their Creator and turn them over to the devil, which is precisely why sects are often said to prey on human souls.

There are manipulative individuals who are widespread in contemporary society and who, as a rule, act independently, adopt various titles, prophets, oracles, clairvoyants, mediums, mages, healers, etc. They appear across all forms of media, aiming to influence the opinions of religiously uneducated individuals lacking a strong religious foundation, by propagating their beliefs, doctrines, "revelations", quasi-skills and "positive" effects, and their appearances are highly prominent. The only aim of manipulative individuals is to acquire material gain, for which reason they are predominantly associated with various forms of fraudulent offences, as well as fraudulent medical practices and the dispensing of counterfeit medication. Individuals who instruct (impose on) others how to think, act, solve life problems and conflicts, treat their families, friends, and other people, which professions to pursue etc, can be dangerous as well. Despite having an adequate education, they are not members of the clergy, but merely humans who are prone to err. It is particularly worrisome if such individuals teach us to attract positive energy, profit or a partner etc., through visualisation and incantations.

Sects are defined as small groups of like-minded individuals who separated from the parent religion into a different, independent religious group. The most widely accepted classification groups sects according to the official religion from which they diverged and how they self-identify, namely Pseudo-Christian, Pseudo-Hindu and Far Eastern, syncretic and satanic sects.<sup>4</sup>

Despite having existed as early as the Apostolic era, contemporary sects have their origins in the Reformation and Protestantism. Namely, the opulent life within the Papal State instigated discontent among the people, with an emphasis on the sale of indulgences. The first one to rebel against the state of the Catholic Church was Professor of Theology Martin Luther in 1517, when he initiated a reformation movement commonly known as the Reformation. His religious doctrine was identified as Protestantism, and his acolytes – Protestants and Lutherans. However, Protestantism lacked unity among its followers, resulting in the emergence of a great number of new leaders, doctrines and communities. The basis for the emergence of all sects was the claim of Professor Luther that anyone can interpret the Holy Bible at their own discretion, which is exactly what happened – the interpreters disseminated their interpretations to others and thus formed various sects. Another contribution of Protestantism to the rise and growth of sects was Protestant Rationalism, which initially promoted veneration of the Bible, but ultimately evolved into criticism so severe that it culminated in the rejection of the Bible as the Holy Book. It is improbable that leaders of the Reformation desired this outcome, and yet they were certainly its indirect instigators, as they were the ones who provided the conceptual basis for the rejection of the Bible.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to various forms of crime, the early 1990s in Serbia gave rise to the emergence of sects. The Church had gradually lost its influence, which began in the communist era, and it is a known fact that sects can exist and act only in the absence of strong faith.

4 Luković, Z. (2000). *Verske sekte – Priručnik za samoodbranu*. Beograd: Draganić, pp. 6-7.

5 Sestrinstvo manastira Svetog Stefana Lipovac. (2008). *Sekte*. (Retrieved on January 7, 2025) from: <https://borbazaveru.info/content/view/472/>

Sectarian activity fundamentally constitutes manipulative and sectarian actions where closed groups, and more and more frequently individuals, employ different methods and techniques designed to undermine tradition and family as the core unit of society, with the aim of illegally acquiring material and financial gain, increasing power and reputation, which, in turn, bears destructive consequences for the victims reflected in degradation or total obliteration of their identity, dignity and integrity. Such consequences can, therefore, have the following epilogue – murders, suicide, estrangement and aggression, abuse of narcotics, prostitution, etc. A French non-profit organisation, The European Federation of Centres of Research and Information on Sectarianism (FECRIS), defined sectarian activity as deceptive exploitation of the condition, ignorance and vulnerabilities of individuals which can result in consequences ranging from the loss of property to the loss of life.<sup>6</sup>

Individuals join sects for various motives. The paramount religious motive is certainly the need for spirituality, when people who lack religious education or are not firm believers may become easy targets for convincing leaders. In addition, other significant causes are disappointment of believers in the parent church, and (or) members of the clergy, family problems (misunderstanding, quarrels, domestic violence, death of a loved one), the need to belong somewhere, searching for answers, wanting to be “someone special” and numerous others.<sup>7</sup> These motives can also be emotional in nature.

The person invited to join a certain group is not always presented with completely truthful information on that group, its activities and objectives. The truth can vary between outsiders, members, those in the deeper inner circles, and up to the top of the sectarian hierarchy. If a group is capable of hiding the truth about itself during the recruitment of potential members, or even lying to them, it violates the constitutional right of the individual to be informed, which prevents people from making an informed and free choice. Groups deemed particularly dangerous are those who resort to deceit, hypnosis, coding and other means of so-called control of consciousness when recruiting, which represents the most perfidious way of violating human rights and freedoms.<sup>8</sup>

Many sects are said to attract new members by presenting themselves as benevolent and humanitarian, so as to avoid immediately frightening naive people, emphasising their fight for human rights and freedoms, non-discrimination, advocating aid and protection of socially disadvantaged categories of the population, environmental protection, etc. They are seemingly committed to freeing the world from conflicts, also known as the sectarian utopia. Members are most frequently recruited from lower social classes, or marginalised social groups, because they are the easiest to manipulate. However, there are exceptions to this rule, as every sect has its own target group. These may be people facing difficult life circumstances, vulnerable population categories, such as minors, rebellious or lonely social outcasts, the elderly who are mainly recruited for their property, individuals with disabilities, physical or mental illnesses, drug addicts, and the like. Children are targeted as well, and there is an example where a sect established kindergartens and schools in predominantly rural areas of economically disadvantaged countries by offering humanitarian aid, education, promoting and practicing yoga, meditation, and the Brain

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6 Pajić, T. (2022). *Tradicija na udaru sekti*. (Retrieved on January 7, 2025) from: <https://www.securitysee.com/2022/03/24/tradicija-na-udaru-sekti-odrzana-tribina-savremeni-pristup-problematici-sektnog-i-manipulativnog-delovanja/>

7 Luković, Z. (2000). *op. cit.*, pp. 8-10.

8 Dvorkin, A. (2010). *Deset pitanja nametljivom strancu – priručnik za one koji ne žele da budu zavrbovani*. (Retrieved on January 8, 2025) from: <https://svetosavlje.org/deset-pitanja-nametljivom-strancu-prirucnik-za-one-koji-ne-zele-da-budu-zavrbovani/>

Gym teaching program. While such extremes are not widespread in our country, a considerable quantity of “educational” materials designed for the youngest members of our society is still being made and distributed. On the other hand, sects may opt to offer their membership exclusively to intellectuals, as well as wealthy, influential people for the purpose of infiltrating into governmental structures and gaining power. Many members are recruited as a source of material benefit for the leader (or leaders) of the sect, as well as for a few select members, or to perform various types of work for the sect, commit criminal acts, and, in the worst-case scenario, be offered as a human sacrifice to the devil, whether through murder or suicide. Whereas the latter is common for satanic sects, it is not unlikely that other types of sects also practice this ritual.

Once someone becomes a member, the sect shapes them to its own liking with the intention to completely detach them from reality and common sense. The members are required to adhere to the group's strict rules and fully submit to and obey the leader. Any contrary opinions are not tolerated. Given that one of the goals is to disintegrate the family, members are compelled to sever ties with their relatives, especially if those relatives cannot be persuaded to join the sect. By joining the sect, members become estranged from their families and friends, abandon their studies or quit their jobs to succumb to the program of the sect, which, as a rule, cannot be reconciled with family life, education, previous employment, and old friendships. Obvious exceptions include the teachings of the sect and socialisation with other members, as the member and all their time are expected to be devoted to the sect. Sects strip their members of personal property, assuring them that this deprivation will make them worthy of redemption, salvation, a “better” life after death (the same manipulation is used to drive members to suicide), or guaranteeing that the sect will take care of them for the rest of their lives.

Destructive sects have complete authority over their members and exercise tyranny, exploiting them in every aspect – physically, mentally and financially. Members constantly suffer abuse, from beatings and rape to exhausting, strenuous work, and there are frequent instances of members being coerced into begging and prostitution for the benefit of the sect. In this state of numbness, members cannot easily muster the strength to leave the sect, which, in turn, employs every possible means to retain them as long as they continue to provide benefit.<sup>9</sup> Certain sects do not allow members to leave, so those who wish to leave are subjected to criminal abuse ranging from threats and physical violence to murder. Members may be threatened directly, but more frequently they are intimidated through threats of harm to their families and loved ones. Some sects may be compared to traditional organised criminal groups;<sup>10</sup> however, sectarian rituals such as satanic initiations and sacrifices, provoke a considerably greater level of outrage.

Sect membership leaves a mark on physical, mental and spiritual well-being. Physical well-being may be threatened by inadequate healthcare provided by persons lacking formal qualifications, or even by rejecting certain medical interventions that contradict the sect's religious beliefs, which can lead to latent outcomes. By registering, religious communities legalise their doctrines and convictions, which is indicative of the potential danger such groups pose. In terms of physical consequences, severe and incurable infectious diseases such as Hepatitis C and AIDS are inevitable, as they result from drug abuse, or more specifically, sharing needles and other contaminated items, as well as promiscuity. To put it mildly, the psyche is damaged by mental manipulation.

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9 *Ibid.*

10 Ćirić, J. (1998). *op. cit.*, p. 108.

Activities of satanic sects cannot be overlooked when it comes to crime, as well as the devastating effect they have on the individual, society and state security.<sup>11</sup> There are no registered satanic sects in Serbia, for which reason satanists are not institutionally organised. This was not the case in the United States of America, when the so-called Church of Satan was admitted into the National Council of Churches in 1970 based on the right to freely exercise religion guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution.<sup>12</sup> Satanic sects believe their mission is to destroy Christianity, and their actions are in direct contradiction with Christian teachings. Their followers desecrate graveyards, monuments, and churches, they break and invert crosses, torture and kill animals to drink their blood during rituals and sacrifices. These acts are identified as vandalism, minor and harmless offences, and are mostly defined as socially unacceptable, which is misleading, as they are in no way harmless. With their minds clouded, perceptions distorted and under the influence of alcohol and drugs, sect members are capable of almost anything, often beginning with seemingly minor acts. Their activities are clandestine, and information about them becomes public only after catastrophic consequences have occurred. Satanists are not necessarily organised in groups, with many of them practicing satanism independently using available literature. One example of satanic ritual sacrifice was reported in Novi Banovci in 2007, when a young man killed and dismembered his friend and his five-year-old nephew, disposing of their body parts in the Danube. When searching the perpetrator's basement, the police discovered walls painted in red and black, with satanic symbols and literature, while the backyard was filled with buried remains of dead cats. Human sacrifice is often preceded by killing animals, likely to "practice" and appease Satan. A more recent example was recorded in 2024 in Novi Sad, when the parents first poisoned their toddler sons aged one and three, after which they jumped from the seventeenth floor of a skyscraper. The man is assumed to have been a sect member who persuaded his wife to join. Experts established a direct connection between this event and a certain sect. Proving the correlation between suicide and sects can be challenging, as was the case in 2021 when three young boys who were schoolmates committed suicide in the Banjica forest, Belgrade, within a short period of time from one another. Even though it was never officially confirmed, it is believed to have been the doing of a sect. Given that mental manipulation and coercion are difficult to prove, the instigators often go unpunished. Sectarian activity can be highly destructive in closed social groups, such as prisons and military barracks,<sup>13</sup> since members of the military have unrestricted access to weapons. Two mass murders in military barracks of Vranje and Šabac in June 1993 are etched into our national memory, committed by soldiers on military service who were members of the Black Rose sect. Following the massacres, both of them committed suicide.

Sects recruit members using various manipulation methods. A famous sectologist states that sects employ teams of experts, psychiatrists, psychologists and sociologists, as well as lawyers and IT specialists, who have a deep understanding of the human mind and are able to manipulate it with ease. While sects used to recruit primarily people from their close surroundings or those who exhibited the same interests, the internet and digital platforms have become the preferred manner of finding potential recruits nowadays, usually based on the information people make available online, the pages and content they like and

11 Ivanović, M. (2008). *Religioznost i kriminalitet*. Beograd: Institut za kriminološka i sociološka istraživanja, p. 69.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 70.

13 Dimitrijević, V. (2011). *Od utopije do košmara – Pravoslavlje i sekte: opšti pregled*. (Retrieved on January 8, 2025) from: <https://svetosavlje.org/od-utopije-do-kosmara-pravoslavlje-i-sekte-opsti-pregled-pravoslavlje-i-sekte-knjiga-i/23/>

the comments they leave, not realising they are exposing themselves to danger. Emotional manipulation or blackmail by a partner who is a sect member is highly prevalent. However, manipulating the human psyche represents the most insidious method of recruiting new members and a means of retaining them within the group.

Despite their worldwide popularity, yoga and meditation – promoted as beneficial for physical and mental health, concentration and spiritual well-being – can also serve as highly dangerous tools for abuse aimed at mental destabilization. Namely, certain yoga movements are believed to induce a detachment of the soul from the mind and body, while meditation involves deep, uninterrupted focus on an imagined object, with the meditator aware solely of the object rather than their own mind and body.<sup>14</sup> Yoga and meditation are strongly promoted by New Age, which propagates the idea that divine enlightenment is the sole necessity of every man and can be attained through yoga, meditation and other metaphysical techniques. The individual is thus deluded into believing they are a divinity, developing some sort of psychic powers in the process.<sup>15</sup> According to psychiatrists, this constitutes the most severe mental illness: schizophrenia.

Field experts claim that the top of the hierarchy is occupied by New Age, the religion of the New World Order. The New Age movement was founded by occultist Alice Bailey in 1945. However, its origins trace back to the era of Helena Blavatsky and Henry Olcott, the creators of theosophy.<sup>16</sup> New Age promotes itself as a religion that is supposed to replace all other religions. This “new spirituality” serves a unique purpose – to undermine the family, the existing state and religious institutions. Hence, the goal is to establish a single religion that would reconcile and integrate all other world religions. It is a unique blend of Eastern sects predominantly involving manipulation through drug abuse. It’s hardly an overstatement that drugs can maintain entire nations under control, which is exactly the goal of this organisation – establishing absolute control. Under the New Age, the New World order would become a fully rounded system – one nation, one world government, one world army, one world police, one world court, one world central bank with a common currency, one world tax system, one education control system, one system of forced birth control...<sup>17</sup> One man would be governing this establishment. Namely, in 1922 Alyssa and Foster Bailey founded the Lucis Trust in New Jersey, a seemingly non-profit service organisation. In that same year they founded the Lucifer Publishing Company, which was later renamed to Lucis Publishing Company following public pressure across the United States arising from a perceived misinterpretation of the original name. The Baileys believed that Lucifer was wrongly equated with Satan and that he was actually an angel who brought light into the world. This non-governmental organisation holds consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council and actively disseminates information on the UN, highlighting the importance of their activities and goals and supporting their programmes through educational materials, seminars and meditation.

It is estimated that there are around 120 groups of this type in the Republic of Serbia, and approximately 500.000 people directly or indirectly affiliated with them. These numbers are not cause for concern, as public awareness is increasing, people are returning to their faith, and it is therefore unlikely that these groups will survive in the long term.

14 Luković, Z. (2000). *op. cit.*, p. 72.

15 Manastir Podmaine. (2015). *Joga – opuštanje ili okultizam*. (Retrieved on January 20, 2025) from: <https://manastirpodmaine.org/joga-%C2%96-opustanje-ili-okultizam/>

16 Pastuović, D. (2013). *Sekte i moć manipulacije*. Beograd: Riznica, pp. 115-116.

17 Ćirić, J. (1998). *op. cit.*, p. 105.

## “RELIGIOUS” TERRORISM

In both public discourse and literature on terrorism, there is a marked tendency to associate mainly political and, therefore, terroristic violence exclusively with Islam, viewed as the only religion inherently grounded in violence.<sup>18</sup> This extreme subjectivity is evident in the tendency to view the behaviour of others as extreme, while rarely perceiving our own behaviour in the same way.<sup>19</sup> For instance, if a follower of Islam commits a crime, they are almost invariably labelled a terrorist, whereas a follower of another religion who commits the same crime is more unlikely to be viewed as a psychopath, mentally ill, manipulated or, circling back to the initial premise, a convert who abandoned their original faith for Islam and committed a terrorist act.

The oldest form of terrorism is considered to be terrorism “in the name of faith” or so-called religious terrorism, typically manifesting itself in fanaticism and extremism. At this point, it is important to draw a clear distinction between radicalism, fundamentalism, fanaticism and extremism as opposed to terrorism. Professor Dragan Simeunović maintains that extremism pushes the boundaries of acceptability, and once these boundaries are exceeded, extremists become terrorists or criminals. It is therefore incorrect to equate fundamentalist believers with fanatics, fanatics with extremists, or extremists with terrorists; any deviation that results in violence exceeds the boundaries of faith and cannot be considered religious.

Terrorism is classified according to its programmes and objectives, the means and methods employed, and the type of agent involved – the subjects of terrorism. When it comes to programmes and objectives, in addition to ideologically motivated and ethno-separatist terrorism, there is terrorism grounded in religion, which is central to this paper. Religious terrorism comprises sect terrorism and terrorism based on the interpretation of great religions.<sup>20</sup> One such example is the Aum Shinrikyo syncretistic sect. The sect committed two sarin attacks, one in 1994 in a residential area of Matsumoto and in 1995 in the Tokyo subway. Reputable members of the sect, consisting of two medical doctors, a Doctor of Physics and two atomic physics students brought bags of liquid sarin into the subway and performed the attack. Namely the Aum Shinrikyo became an official religious organisation in 1989, which would imply that it did not pose a threat to the state and society. Following the attack, the organisation was marked as terroristic. The fact that various organisations can acquire the status of official religious communities, while hiding under the guise of benevolence and goodwill, is deeply concerning. Terrorism based on interpretations of great religions is exemplified in the most widely known terrorist organisations, for instance, Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State. Despite originating from the Muslim civilisation,<sup>21</sup> members of such formations are not Muslims. Terrorism is wrongly associated exclusively with the Islamic world, or even a segment of Islam followers, despite the fact that it can arise as a deviation within any religion. This was the case with the members of the Ku Klux Klan, an organisation of white racists, who committed crimes (from whipping, desecration and rape to murder), targeting African Americans, in the name of a perceived defence of the white race and Protestantism. Members of the Ku Klux Klan were known for their white cloaks and pointy hoods with masks covering their faces, as well as burning crosses. They viewed

18 Subotić, M. (2010). Određenje savremenog ekstremizma. *Vojno delo*, 62(3), p. 307.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 299.

20 Bjelajac, Ž., & Dragojlović, J. (2024). *Organizovani kriminalitet*. Novi Sad: Pravni fakultet za privredu i pravosuđe, pp. 110-111.

21 Subotić, M. (2010). Geneza islamističkog ekstremizma. *Vojno delo*, 62(4), p. 394.

the desecration of a sacred relic as symbolic of the light brought by Protestant Christianity, reflecting the extent of their misinterpretation of faith.

Faith does not recognize animosity and enemies, only human beings and brethren. Distinguishing true religious motives and the methodology behind the wars waged in the name of faith and liberation from those rooted in other motivations, such as political, geopolitical, economic, and the like, is hardly a challenge. Terrorism has become a political weapon, and religion is used as a pretext to justify the underlying objectives. In reality, religious terrorism is fictitious, since religion and terrorism do not go hand in hand. Suicide missions taking innocent victims, kidnappings, brutal live-streamed murders of captives and other heinous acts perpetrated by terrorists cannot be labelled religious. Terrorism grounded in religion can exist solely from a subjective viewpoint of terrorists claiming religious motives, despite having abandoned faith. Terrorism motivated by money cannot be considered religious in nature either, and recruits who are financially encouraged to join such formations cannot be considered devotees, especially given the connection and cooperation between terrorist and organised crime groups. Furthermore, it stands for a fact that terrorism is more frequently manifesting itself as a form of organised and transnational organised crime and aims to achieve certain political, financial and other goals.<sup>22</sup> Individuals who have abandoned the source of their faith and humanity, especially for money, are not believers, for which reason they cannot qualify as religious terrorists. An objective and impartial mind, taking all of the above into account, could never accept the association of faith with terrorism. These two words cannot stand next to one another. It is sheer terrorism masquerading as a liberation struggle.<sup>23</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Religious freedom can pose a threat when abused, disguised under the label “religious”. Sects and terrorist organisations undermine the state, society and the Church and it is abominable to equate them with religious organisations. The state cannot remain silent in protection of its citizens, which implies the most appropriate response would be to amend the legislation, but also to undertake stricter measures. A related Russian law comes into mind as an example, as well as a well-known and frequently cited French law which incriminates mental manipulation.

Blasphemy and the unforgivable sin of suicidal sacrifices often practiced among members of sects and terrorist organisations, are regarded as sacrificial offerings, reflecting yet another one of their distorted convictions. Suicide may indeed be seen as a form of sacrifice, but not to God – rather, to the Devil. Those who take their own lives do not attain a martyr’s crown, but eternal suffering, for they forfeit every possibility of atonement and forgiveness.

Support in this matter also comes from the Serbian Orthodox Church, which established a body tasked with monitoring the activities of heretical organizations, sects, and non-canonical groups. Alongside the Serbian Orthodox Church, its clergy, and monastic community, an honorable mention goes to the Association for the Stabilization

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22 Matijašević, J. (2008). Organizovani kriminalitet – pojam, karakteristike, uzroci i metodi suprotstavljanja. *Pravo – teorija i praksa*, 25(1-2), p. 87.

23 Subotić, R. M., & Milenković, R. M. (2018). Borba protiv terorizma iz ugla redefinisane bezbednosne paradigme i teorije politike. *Vojno delo*, 70(2), p. 478.

of Youth 'The Wall,' which works in cooperation with clergy, healthcare professionals, and educators, with the support of the police.

Although all sects are dangerous and harmful, their members are by no means beyond redemption—quite the opposite. Faith, in its primordial sense, offers the most direct form of help, untainted by interpretations that arise not from God, but from sinful men.

Members of the religious community, theologians, and criminologists alike agree that genuinely devoted individuals are not inclined toward criminal acts, as opposed to the non-devout. Yet, God is merciful and does not desire the death of the sinner, but rather their return. Even sinners have the right and opportunity to come back under the protection of the Church, to atone, confess, and start their life anew, as Christians.



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## RELIGIJA I KRIMINALITET (SEKTE I TERORISTIČKE ORGANIZACIJE)

### *Apstrakt:*

Rad je posvećen relaciji religije i kriminaliteta, budući da se religija smatra najstarijim socijalnim faktorom uticaja na kriminalitet. U nauci su podeljena mišljenja o vezi religije i kriminaliteta. Na osnovu izvedenih zaključaka, smatramo da se u potpunosti može osporiti stav da između religije i kriminaliteta ne postoji povezanost, odnosno da se može potvrditi stav da vera samo blagotvorno utiče na čoveka u pogledu sprečavanja vršenja kriminala, ali i pokajanja i ispravljanja života izvršilaca krivičnih dela. Negativan uticaj, nazovi religije (kvazireligije), vezali bismo isključivo za destruktivne sekte i terorističke organizacije koje se pozivaju na religiju. Zašto kvazireligija? Religija predstavlja verovanje u Gospoda i pobožnost, a verovanje u izmišljotine i sumanute ideje bolesnih ljudskih duša, ne može biti vera i verovanje. U radu ćemo ih nazvati pravim imenom, jer ne zavređuju da se nazivaju verskim.

*Ključne reči: religija, kriminalitet, sekte, terorističke organizacije, pravoslavlje*

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