

THE
SPIRITUAL VALUES OF
YUGOSLAVIA

BY
PROFESSOR DENIS SAURAT

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FOREWORD

Professor Denis Saurat, a graduate of the University of Paris, Doctor of Letters, Chevalier of the Legion of Honour, is Professor of French Language and Literature at the University of London, the Delegate of the Universities of Paris and Lille in London, the Director of the French Institute in Great Britain, and Member of the Vetenskap-Societeten i Lund.

He was born at Toulouse in 1890. After studies at the Universities of Paris, Lille and London, he became Assistant in French in the University of Glasgow (1918-1919), English Master at the Bordeaux Lycée (1919-1920), Lecturer on English Language and Literature to the University of Bordeaux (1920-1922), Professor in that University (1922-1924), Director of the French Institute in Great Britain (since 1924). He was sent to French Equatorial Africa by General de Gaulle, as Organiser of Education (February to May, 1941).

Professor Saurat is the author of numerous works on the relationship between religion and literature: (*La Littérature et l'Occultisme*; *Milton et le Matérialisme Chrétien*; *La Pensée de Milton*; *Milton, Man and Thinker*; *Blake and Modern Thought*; *La Religion de Victor Hugo*; *Blake and Milton*; *Histoire des Religions*; essays in literary criticism: (*Tendances*; *Modernes*; *Perspectives*); on the war: (*The Spirit of France*; *French War Aims*; *Régénération*); biographical, religious, and philosophical works: (*La Fin de la Peur*; *The Christ at Chartres*; *Watch over Africa*); metaphysical essays: (*The Three Conventions*) and a volume of poetry (*L'Actuel*).

In his lecture, entitled "THE SPIRITUAL VALUES OF YUGOSLAVIA" of which this booklet is a reprint, Professor Saurat has given us a remarkable estimation of the Yugoslav national character. His thesis is that the Kossovo Epic Cycle offers us certain basic themes of a moral nature, such as the conception of the relationship between Man and God, which in their human depth and transcendental force may show our shattered world the path towards a civilisation of to-morrow.

During the sore trials to which our people is being submitted, such an evaluation, from the pen of the representative in Great Britain of the Universities of France, is a great solace and comfort.

VLADIMIR MILANOVITCH.

THE SPIRITUAL VALUES OF YUGOSLAVIA

In many of the heroic crises of their history, the Serbians have shown very pure examples of the application of the great formula: *il n'est pas nécessaire d'espérer pour entreprendre, ni de réussir pour persévérer*,—enterprise does not require hope, neither does perseverance require success.

In the events of the life of any people, it is possible to distinguish a sort of abstract rhythm, which is that of the soul of the people. If one probes a little further, one discovers that in the rhythm of its life, each people offers a variation of a universal rhythm, which is valid for all nations, but different in each. In the western hemisphere, in Europe and America, that rhythm is realised by the three great acts of Christianity—Incarnation, Crucifixion, and Resurrection.

But it is not only a matter of believing, of feeling, of thinking: it is a question of living. The history of the Serbian people during the 1914-1918 war offers the purest example of the Christian rhythm, that universal rhythm, lived in the flesh and inscribed on earth in characters of blood. The Serbian people has been the incarnation of an idea in its ethnological and physical realisation.

For a whole century, this idea of a nation of the South Slavs has been growing, and during the Balkan wars the Serbians very vigorously showed their will to live as a nation.

The Serbians possess a National Epic, telling us, in a synthesis of truth and legend, of their struggles against the Turkish invaders of Europe at the close of the Middle Ages. The Serbian people stood in the path of the invader. Should they let them pass? Or should they, weak and poor in numbers and armament, take up the sword against a vastly superior enemy?

There is an astonishing similarity between that Turkish challenge of the fourteenth century and the Serbian reply, and the German challenge of 1940 and the Yugoslav reply.

It is a grey bird, it is a falcon
Which comes from Jerusalem the Holy,
And which in its beak bears a letter.
It is not a falcon, it is not a grey bird,
It is the holy prophet Elias ;
It is not a swallow that he carries,
But a letter from the Mother of God.
He comes to seek the Tzar at Kossovo,
The letter he places at the Tzar's feet,
And this unique letter says to the Tzar
Tzar Lazar, O thou son of great forbears,
What sort of kingdom is it thy will to have ?
Wilst thou possess a kingdom in heaven,
Or wilt thou possess a kingdom on earth ?
And the Tzar chose a heavenly kingdom.

As a result, in the terrible battle, against far superior forces, and through treachery—after a point at which the heroism of Lazar and the Serbian forces seemed in spite of all about to triumph,

Then the Turks fell in force upon Lazar,
And Tzar Lazar was stricken and fell dying,
And his army was stricken and died with him,
Seventy thousand soldiers, and seven thousand.
Everything came about as it was fated,
Came about in honour and in holiness,
And the plans of the Lord God were realised,
And the grace of the Lord God was realised.

Certain features of this ballad reveal to the full the Serbian soul. In particular, it is very interesting to observe the difference between legend and history. In the first place, the Serbian people does not exaggerate its own part ; nor does it embellish. Whereas in nearly all the heroic ballads of other countries, nations present themselves in a fantastically favourable light, the Serbian ballad tends to minimise Serbian heroism, and in addition judges generously, kindly, of the enemy.

Thus, historians tell us that there were one hundred thousand Turks at Kossovo, and only forty thousand Serbians. The legend insists that there were seventy-seven thousand Serbians. Who can give us the strange reason why the figure seventy-seven thousand was

to be preferred to the finer truth, that the Serbians numbered only forty thousand ?

The legend also tells us that Milosh Obilitch assassinated the Sultan Mourad by treachery, though history tells us that it was in the early stages of a battle which had already begun that the Serbian hero arrived, and, fighting with great vigour and spirit, forged his way to the enemy Sultan and killed him in loyal combat, himself being killed by the Sultan's guards. It might seem to us that history is far superior to the legend. But this would be a mistake. In the legend, there is a more subtle, a more mystical spirit. These things all take place on a spiritual plane : in the early stages of these great acts, there must be an element of treachery, just as there was a Judas before the crucifixion, just as if a deep, mystic need to give the enemy some advantage was felt.

In the same way, at the present moment, General Mihailovitch's recent appeal contains a passage on those Germans whose behaviour is noble, and who also are struggling physically and mystically against oppression. There is an implicit appeal to the latent greatness of the soul of the enemy, for it is fine to have a fine enemy.

It is also necessary to underline the fact that, at the commencement of the battle of Kossovo, the heroism of Lazar and his men seemed, for some time, about to triumph. In the same way, in 1914 and 1915, for a time the Serbians were victorious over the Austrians. Then, as at Kossovo, they were all destroyed :—

Everything came about as it was fated,
Came about in honour and in holiness,
And the plans of the Lord God were realised,
And the grace of the Lord God was realised.

In her book "*Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*," Miss Rebecca West writes :

"It was now necessary for the country to die. The soldiers retreated slowly, fighting a rearguard action, leaving the civil population, that is to say their parents, wives and children, in the night of an oppression which they knew to be frightful. Monks came out of the monasteries and followed the soldiers, carrying on bullock-carts, and on their shoulders where the roads were too bad, the coffined bodies of the mediæval Serbian kings, the sacred Nemanyas, which must not be defiled. So was carried King Peter, whose rheumatic limbs were

wholly paralysed by the cold of autumn ; and so too, before the retreat was long on its way, was Prince Alexander. The internal pain that had vexed him all year grew so fierce that he could no longer ride his horse. Doctors took him into a cottage and he was operated on for appendicitis. Then he was packed in bandages wound close as a shroud, and put on a stretcher and carried in the procession of the troops. . . . When they came to the foot of the mountains the weeping gunners destroyed their guns with hand grenades and burning petrol. The motor-drivers drove their cars and lorries up to a corner where the road became a horse-trail on the edge of the precipice, jumped out, and sent them spinning into space. Then all set out on foot to cross the five-thousand-foot peaks that lay between them and the sea."

Thus in 1915 the exact rhythm of the battle of the Kossovo ballad was repeated, and now once again this rhythm is being repeated. Once again the falcon comes from Jerusalem the Holy to put the great enigma before the whole Serbian people.

The Regent, Prince Paul, endeavoured in a reasonable way to negotiate for the best earthly kingdom that the people could have. But this time it was not merely to a King, to a Tsar, to a Regent, that the falcon brought the letter coming from the Mother of God. It placed the letter on the hearth of the Serbian people, in the hands of the men of Serbia, in the laps of the women of Serbia, in the hands of all the children. And the people unanimously chose, as the ballad predicted some centuries ago. Thus, this time, *it was a boy king* who became the symbol of the decision taken, and the nation inscribed yet another variant in the text of its ancient tradition.

Rebecca West says :

"He had been educated, according to the democratic tradition of the Karageorgevitches, in the company of half a dozen boys of representative parentage, with whom he had to learn his lessons and play games on equal terms ; and these boys were accustomed to ring him up at Dedinye on a private line. Some time before the King had contrived to get the Telephone Company to put in a new private line without the knowledge of his *entourage*, and he had entrusted the number to one of these friends, a boy named Kostitch. All the morning of March the twenty-sixth the King sat in his room not daring to make a call, but waiting to snatch at any incoming message. At noon Kostitch rang him up, and the King asked him if it were

true that his people wanted to kill him. His friend answered that nothing could be less true, that it was Prince Paul and the Government that were hated, and that soon a revolutionary force would come to the Palace and set him free to rule over them in the moment of their rising against Germany. After this whispered announcement that he was to be asked to lead his country into disaster and could only look forward to death or imprisonment or exile, the young King was at ease."

This time, it was the people which communicated its will to the King. Without doubt it was also the people who took the decision when Tsar Lazar gave voice to it. Once again the grace of God was accomplished. But this time, we are as yet only at the heart of the inevitable rhythm and the end is as yet to come. The Serbian Nation, as Nation, has been annihilated once again. The great crucifixion has taken place. The people have gone down into hell. But the first sign of resurrection is already there. More than one hundred thousand Serbians, some say two hundred and fifty thousand—but who can tell, since this is all happening in the depths of the people and in the chaos of their mountains, even their leader probably does not know exactly how many—a large Serbian army is once again fighting on Serbian territory, and will fight till it delivers its country, and the nation is resurrected, when it will without doubt go on from strength to strength.

These are the facts known to the whole world. But to understand the immense significance of the heroism of the Serbian people, firstly for the immediate situation, further, for the future of Europe, and thus of the world, in a larger sense, it is necessary to indicate the importance of those facts in the spiritual condition of the world at the present moment.

It might be maintained that, as people, the Serbians are the only nation who are fully aware of what they are fighting for. In this immense conflict, no doubt the peoples of the Axis either believe that they are fighting to conquer the world or that they are fighting because they were soon to be attacked, but their leader, being cleverer than his enemies, attacked first. In fact, on the Allied side, the peoples know that they are fighting because they have been attacked, and cannot do otherwise.

Various statements are being made, true statements, on the people's part in this war. They are told they are defending democracy,

and this is true. But the peoples themselves are not very conscious of defending democracy, for in time of war democracy hides her face behind a very thick veil, and even in time of peace is a very gentle and quite commonplace maiden, whose faults are but too obvious, even though her qualities may be very real and very deeply appreciated.

The allied peoples are all being told that they are fighting to defend Christianity, and it is certainly true that if Germany triumphed, Christian principles would vanish completely from this world. But here again, the allied peoples are as a whole not conscious of fighting to defend Christianity, for they are scarcely Christian any more. They may be Christian officially, but in the vast majority any real faith has disappeared; and were the armies of the Allies to be restricted to true believers, they would be small armies indeed.

The fact is that the true causes of the war are spiritual, and the whole education of the peoples of the West in the course of the last century has taken them off the spiritual plane: even when they were believers, it has taught them to separate the spiritual plane from the temporal, and, in the great majority, this has resulted in an almost complete divorce from spiritual awareness.

Not so, however, with the Serbian people. Through the earthly oppression which they have suffered at the hands of the enemy of their religion, through their constant suffering, also through their life as a peasant mountain people, in contact both with the soil and heaven—in their soul, in their spirit, and above all in their flesh, the Serbian people have preserved that which is of prime importance for us all: a deep conviction that their religious beliefs are not separate from life, a conviction that there is no difference between spiritual and earthly planes. Their life takes place on both planes at once. This is why to them it is useless to accept an earthly crown, unless there is also with it a heavenly crown. For in truth there is only one crown, manifest both on earth and in heaven, and those who offer you an earthly crown, offer you merely a deceit, something non-existent, something which is merely a swift-vanishing show.

It is necessary here to underline the special nature of Serbian Christianity. In the first place, *it is a Christianity which has preserved a deep communication with the feelings and beliefs of the mass of the people.* As such, it represents the true spirit of democracy. Every Serbian fights to remain a Serbian, and that to him means, in the first place, the right to believe, and freely to proclaim, whenever it pleases

him, that which his father and his mother, the peasants and the mountaineers of whom he is sprung, have believed.

The Serbian Church has been accused, and will be accused again, of supporting superstitions of oriental or other derivation. There are indeed certain dangers here. But flesh and blood are made of dangers which at every instant have to be overcome. There has been a tendency in the West to forget that true religion must have a concrete foundation in the very facts of this world. Theology does not satisfy the common people, and the common people is right.



... it is a Christianity which has preserved a deep communication with the feelings and beliefs of the mass of the people.

The Kossovo Ballad is not inscribed in tomes of theology, but in flesh and blood. The philosopher Bergson, whom many Serbians who have visited France have followed, has taught the world that the minute concrete events which occur in man's brain, in his flesh and blood, on the fields and in the mountains, are nothing more than the intrusion on our perception, the minute but concrete realisation by us, of immense events occurring in the spiritual world, extant in an ever vaster field which reaches to infinity, and thus to God Himself.

It is not the duty of the Church to suppress what it calls the superstitions of the common people, but on the contrary, to support

the popular beliefs and from them extract their spiritual value, that mystic sense of ultimate things which such beliefs do contain; and this despite the circumstance that it is the ignorance and way of thought of the peasant soil which has preserved them, for the people preserves its great eternal intuition instinctively, in a way which is nearly animal.

Our priests should extract from that soil the treasures which are hidden there. Churches do not fulfil their true function by denying or rejecting those treasures. The Serbian Church, through the circumstance that its priesthood has always been recruited from the peasantry, has well understood this truth, which, if Christianity is to survive, is essential.

Beliefs do not require merely intellectual elaboration: above all, they require flesh and blood, provided that the flesh is cherished with due regard for superior forces. No doubt but that there is room for some improvement in the spiritual world of the Serbians. But among them, the original force of Christianity is to this day living and productive. There are very few other countries of which so much could be said. And far from having to combat these populist tendencies of the Serbian Church, other churches will succeed in their indispensable task of re-christianising Europe and America, by imitating them, each in a manner suited to its own people.

Thus, for the Serbians, religion and democracy are one and the same thing; the right of every man to believe what he chooses. It is for this reason that the Serbians are fighting, with a full consciousness of what they are about—to remain Serbians, which for them means to remain religious in their own way. To what degree each individual among them is aware of these matters, it is difficult to say. But it is possible to say that all are aware of this conscious desire they all have, to remain that which they are. The two principles, Christianity and Liberty, are in the Serbian soul united in a synthesis which probably exists nowhere else, and, as they see life, that synthesis occurs on the material plane at the same time as it occurs on the spiritual plane.

The rhythm of Serbian national life is the fundamental rhythm of the Christian religion, with its three acts: incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection. The circumstances of history have resulted in that universal rhythm being revealed to the common people better and

more clearly in Yugoslavia than anywhere else. The people is ready to accept death, because it knows that death is not the end of life. This is the reason why hope is not essential to enterprise, nor success to perseverance. There is no need to hope for success in this world, for success on the material plane. But there is always hope for the individual on the spiritual plane, since success on the higher plane is certain and absolute.

But this is not the sole import of the rhythm. The Ballad of Kossovo follows the Gospels. The falcon comes from the Mother of God. It is the Mother of God who puts the question and sends the message, because the Mother of God, as tradition tells us, was the sole witness who never doubted, even in the most terrible moment of the Passion. The Mother of God knows that the Resurrection will come, even when all the disciples forget this. The Serbian people received and understands this mystery of the Mother of God. Now it is on earth that resurrection takes place, since it is on earth that the crucifixion took place. Christ exists not merely in history between the year '0' and the year 33 A.D., but in eternity—that is to say, in the whole world, in every nation, in every man. The Passion is reproduced in its rhythm in every person. The rhythm of Kossovo is but a part of the rhythm of the life of Christ. Thus, a Serbian defies death, because he believes in Resurrection. The nation apparently done to death, will return to life, triumphant in this world, because Christ rose from the tomb and is establishing His kingdom in this world, that kingdom which began by being not of this world, but against which the doors of hell cannot prevail.

After the disaster of Kossovo, and because of that disaster, the Serbian people remained alive and never ceased growing, and in the nineteenth century it rose again and became a Nation. Through its resistance and its death in 1914 and 1915 the Serbian nation after 1918 became a great nation. Because of its crucifixion and its present struggle, the Yugoslav nation in the world of to-morrow will be one of the truly great powers, both spiritually and temporally.

The Serbians, the Yugoslavs, all who have joined in body and spirit the army of Mihailovitch, themselves have proved that they have profoundly comprehended that there are some things more important in life than the interests of the individual, or national interests. That corner of the South-East of Europe shall therefore once again become one of the pillars of the civilisation of the future.

That is a portion of the rhythm of the resurrection of the world after its present crucifixion. In the Serbian people the ancient beginnings of our civilisation are still real. The Christian spirit which is so often found in a dessicated state in other lands—though not in all other lands—is with them living, like a young plant which has before it a long life and great fecundity. In a spirit of emulation, possibly of rivalry, other peoples will admire, study and imitate the vigour of the Serbian people.

The great problem of our civilisation is going to be the restoration of a living Christianity. In the Western world, our Christianity had become a theory: we do not even try to apply it either in economic life or in social life, let alone in politics or international affairs. Here, the Serbians appear in their full historical strength, because the world, and in particular the people in Europe and America, has not properly faced this problem. The other Western peoples, already wearied of Christianity, may not in themselves have the courage once again to try to apply the essential principles of life to their social and political forms of organisation.

The Serbians, in the full youth of their race, can play an essential historical part because they still possess a vigour which will allow them to look upon their material problem from a spiritual point of view. They have preserved the necessary forces after their recent turbulent growth and their misfortunes. From their basically Slavonic race, they have inherited that striking Slavonic aptitude of endeavouring to embody abstract ideas on the plane of material organisation—that aptitude of which the example recently given by Russia has astounded the world. Thus, it is probably the Slavs who will have the honour of being most active, and possibly the leaders, among those who try to apply the principles of Christianity to the reorganisation of the political world after the war. Thus, throughout their whole fateful career, the Serbians will have realised the rhythm expressed in their own history by the Kossovo epic, and made true in an integral manner in the life, death and resurrection of Christ.

Everything came about as it was fated,
Came about in honour and in holiness,
And the plans of the Lord God were realised,
And the grace of the Lord God was realised.



... even their leader probably does not know exactly how many ...
(See pp. 7, 8).

These words of Professor Saurat are not unworthy of comment. They are a faithful observation of the reality of mass guerilla warfare in a country which is not merely occupied by the troops of four enemy countries, but is furthermore divided into ten different parts. All authorities emphasise that although there is a core of resistance in the heart of Yugoslavia, where Mihailovitch's writ holds, the warfare in Yugoslavia as a whole is characterised by the "invisibility" of the army. This must not be superficially mistaken for a sign of the weakness of Mihailovitch's command, or the Yugoslav resistance. It is a necessary pre-requisite for the successful warfare of lightly-armed forces against a heavily-armed invader. It was foreseen by Mihailovitch and as far as feasible prepared for. It is a necessary quality of such an army, which is invisible, that it should be fluid, not precisely countable.

It is wise to judge by results. Yugoslavia was invaded, to secure lines of communication for the Axis, in particular, towards the Caucasus, and, via Crete, towards Egypt. Yugoslavia, with the uncountable army of Mihailovitch, still bars the way.

THE YUGOSLAV FRONT

In "occupied" Yugoslavia open warfare has never ceased.

In March, 1941, Yugoslavia refused to become a party to any German military plan. The enemy then attacked Yugoslavia, to secure important lines of communication. Through Yugoslavia runs the railway to Trieste, through the mountains of Slovenia. Through Yugoslavia run the railways to the Dalmatian coast. Through Yugoslavia runs the railway to Salonica, passing through Serbia and South Serbia, which is on the route to Crete and Rommel. Through Yugoslavia runs the railway to Bulgaria and Turkey, passing through Serbia.

Those lines of communication are still not safe for the enemy. The war in Yugoslavia continues.

In the mountainous heart of Yugoslavia a co-ordinated front exists, and there General Drazha Mihailovitch, Minister of War and Commander-in-Chief, maintains an "Isle of Freedom."

Elsewhere, throughout Yugoslavia, armed resistance, pugnacious obstruction, insidious sabotage continue relentlessly, and the enemy have to confess that they are foiled.

This frustration of German plans, by maintenance of a permanent Yugoslav front, is a colossal thing. The open front in the heart of an occupied country has its sure foundation in the whole country, which has become one uninterrupted, unseen, underground front.

How is such military action organised in Yugoslavia? Not by the printed word, but by the spoken word. In Yugoslavia, the ancient tradition of reciting national history in epic verse has never disappeared. In Yugoslavia, a living tradition of the spoken story has never died. In Yugoslavia, every lyric song tells some story, is used for some special meaning.

One more factor: in Yugoslavia there is a living tradition of silent, underground help to those who organise and fight. In those parts of the country "occupied" by the enemy, Mihailovitch's men move with comparative ease, unknown and unseen by the stranger.

With us Yugoslavs, organisation against the enemy has never depended on the printed word, but merely on the presence of men, bearing their own message. We are able to operate as we do against the enemy because we work with the tacit understanding and unity of the broad masses of our whole people, because we have become one living Yugoslav Army.

(Signed) VILDER,

Director,

ROYAL YUGOSLAV GOVERNMENT INFORMATION DEPARTMENT.