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## The figure of Patriarch Alexius I in the context of communication between the Serbian Diaspora and the Serbian Orthodox Church

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### Abstract

This article discusses peculiarities of trilateral relations between the Serbian diaspora in the United States, the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Moscow Patriarchate in the postwar period and in the 1960s. The work is primarily based on textual analysis of correspondence between Serbian American-Canadian Bishop Dionysius and Patriarch Alexius I. It examines the activities of the Serbian diaspora in achieving improvements in the situation of the Church in Yugoslavia, its attempts to influence the "Macedonian Church issue", as well as the contacts of bishop Dionysius with the ROC after the schism within SOC in America in 1963.

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*Keywords:* Serbian diaspora; the United States; Bishop Dionysius; Patriarch Alexius I; Serbian Orthodox Church; Patriarch Herman; schism

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### 1. Introduction

The current article mainly focuses on the aspect of communication within a religious environment during the Cold War. For the analysis, as a concrete example we have chosen the relation between Serbian American-Canadian bishop Dionysius (Milivojević), the representative of the Serbian diaspora, the Serbian Patriarchate and Russian Patriarch Alexius I during two time periods - the postwar period and 1960s, as they most clearly reflect the nature of communication. The choice of the parties is not accidental - this period is characterized by active involvement of

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Christian churches in the political realities of confrontation of ideology and regime. It is in this context that the problem of relations between the Orthodox Church and the national diaspora produced political and ideological resonance. Internal church conflicts that must have been regulated in compliance with the standards of canon law, attracted attention of external powers (both ecclesiastical and political, as well as social) and became part of a “big game” at the political level. The language of communication is of particular interest, notably, the mixture of historical narratives with actual ideological principles, selective appeal to certain norms of ecclesiastical law and secular legislation in order to fulfil personal or national ambitions. To our knowledge, the theme of the role of the Church Community in communication during the Cold War has not been previously studied in historiography. In this work we are going to carry out analysis of letters (primarily between Patriarch Alexius I and Serbian American-Canadian Bishop Dionysius) and other archive materials of the period and present this important aspect in the form of a specific case study.

## 2. Historical context

The rise to power of communists in postwar Yugoslavia gave a new round in the life of the Serbian diaspora in the United States. (Gilbert, 1961; Kosinski, 1982; Grečić, 2013; Lopušina, 2010) On the one hand, this period was marked by a new wave of Yugoslav migration – the influx of those who feared persecution by the new authorities for their participation in the events of the Yugoslav Civil War, as well as those who for ideological reasons did not want to recognise the Communist government and preferred or were forced to migrate, counting on the fragility of the Communist regime in Yugoslavia. In episcopate and clergy environment of the diaspora the Communist takeover was perceived as a direct threat to the existence of the Serbian Orthodox Church. The establishment of the new regime was followed by the Soviet propaganda of atheism, restrictions on the freedom of conscience, persecution of clergy and the Church property expropriation (Spasović, 1997).

The issue concerning the attitude towards the Soviet Union and the ROC was quite acute in the American church circles of the SOC. The liberation of Yugoslavia by the Soviet army and the restoration of the Patriarchate in Moscow were obviously welcomed in the Yugoslav diaspora. On the other hand, the traditional rejection of the Communist regime as antichristian was common to Russian emigration and Orthodox circles abroad. Anti-Serbian operations of the Comintern in Balkans in the epoch of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (A; Grishina, 2000; Djuretić, 2003), as well as actions of partisans against the Church during the Second World War (Mojzes, 1992; Slijepčević, 2002) caused rejection among conservative and nationally oriented Serbian clergy in the diaspora. Loyalty to the American government and society, in turn, implied refusal of the Communist system, which during postwar years was significantly exacerbated by the tension of the Cold War.

## 3. Data and analysis

American-Canadian Dionysius had to come into direct contact with Moscow Patriarch Alexius I in October 1945. The need for the direct contact was related to two factors - absence of Serbian Patriarch Gavrilo in Belgrade (he returned to Belgrade on 14 November, 1946), and the ambitions of the American - Canadian bishop, who believed that his intervention in the Church situation in Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is absolutely necessary. Independent church movement in Macedonia became a reality in the period of Bulgarian occupation during the war. Since 1944 there functioned "Organizing Committee for the establishment of an independent church in Macedonia and the renewal of the historical Ohrid Archbishopric" (Alexander, 1979, pp. 183-184; Slijepčević, 1969, p. 28; Zečević-Božić, 1994, pp. 17-27) The return of Macedonia to Yugoslavia for the SOC meant the restoration of the SOC's jurisdiction within the boundaries of 1918, which, however, was not in the plans of the local clergy, who collaborated with guerillas during the war. Despite the fact that the Synod of the SOC with Metropolitan Joseph at the head refused to recognize Macedonian autocephaly (Cepreganov and Shashko, 2010), Bishop Dionysius thought that the Moscow Patriarchate did not clearly express its position with respect to "Macedonian Church issue" threatening "the unity of the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Serbian people." (Volokitina et al., 2009, p. 215) In December 1945, Patriarch Alexius sent a response letter to Dionysius, saying that despite the demand of the Macedonians, the Moscow Patriarchate was not going to recognize their independence without the consent of the SOC. (Volokitina et al., 2009) In this case, Dionysius' claims were that the MP did not deem it necessary to

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