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Who should take care of the poor? Religion and social welfare in America

Abstract *The purpose of this study is to examine the church-state relations in the United States from the perspective of the social welfare system. More precisely, we are questioning the way the conceptual foundations and practical activities of religious organizations influence the directions of social policy and shape the way of dealing with the poor. The first part of the text outlines the main features of religious life and social welfare system in America, while the second contains an analysis of the impact of basic moral and religious principles of the Reformed Protestantism and Roman Catholicism (the two most widespread religious traditions) and the ways in which religious organizations are taking part in the modern social welfare system in America.*

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Keywords: *religion, social welfare, the poor, America*

Religion is embedded in the deepest layers of social reality, its influence very much varying, depending on political, economic and cultural circumstances. Through its preaching and moral guidelines, religion forms the values, priorities and shapes decisions. In nations with high numbers of religious people, policies and political decisions will inevitably be strongly influenced by religion, directly or indirectly. Due to specific position that religion has in the today's American society, we have attempted to examine the ways that the two most widespread Christian confessions (Protestantism and Roman Catholicism) are interlinked with the basic postulates and practices of social welfare in this country. In parallel, the focus of our analysis will also be on direct effects of the involvement of religious organizations by the state in the provision of social welfare services and support.

The religious philosophy (especially of Protestantism) is deeply integrated into American political culture and is, from such a position, in different ways influencing the formation and functioning of political institutions. (Lambert 2008) On the other hand, religious organizations are characterized by two important features, entitling them to be qualified as very influential types of citizens' associations: (1) formal establishment (including the resources: organizational, financial, human, administrative

etc.) and (2) ideas that signify charity, virtue and goodness. While the former represents a necessary precondition for functioning in a modern society, the latter is a motivational basis for action aimed at welfare of the community. Having this in mind, the goal of this paper is to show the interdependence of the following dimensions of social life in the USA: (1) the welfare system, (2) the social aspects of religious teaching and (3) practical aspects of charity that are realized through the activities of religious organizations.

138 Narrowly focusing on the role of religion in social policy formation, we do not suggest that it is free from different sorts of political influence. In Marxist tradition, religious influence on people's behavior is seen as politically mediated and instrumentalised for different purposes. On the other hand, the direct impact of political factors (i.e. political parties, social movements, ideology, state institutions etc.) on social welfare policy is far reaching. However, although it will be acknowledged and incorporated in the main arguments in the text, political dimension will not be discussed separately as it is not the focal point of our study, concerned with the specific impact of the religious factors (teaching and practice).

Religion and Politics in the USA

Despite the formal separation of church and state, proclaimed already in the First Amendment to the Constitution, religion is important in the United States, not only in private life, but also in public sphere (Lambert 2008; Hays 2001; Wald & Calhoun-Brown 2011). For numerous Americans, confessional identification and religious routines represent an inseparable part of their daily lives and of their personal identities. In vast numbers, Americans believe in God, pray to God, contribute financially to churches, synagogues, temples, and take part in Sunday masses, morning prayers and other religious rituals. Over 80% of Americans define themselves in different ways as believers (Martin 2010: 60). Although some analysts predict the decrease of the importance of religion, statistics demonstrate a stability of the ratio of membership in church organizations in comparison with the overall population numbers, even since the 1950-ies, while some estimations assert that this ratio is higher now than it was during most of American history (Finke & Stark 1992: 239–241). However, religion in the US is not only the issue of private lives and personal identities; it is also a public, political issue, at least to the same extent as it is personal. Despite predictions, the processes of modernization have not succeeded in lessening the importance of religion

in the US, and the European model of secularization has not grown roots on American soil (Berger *et al.* 2008). Compared to Western European countries, the US represents an exemption in terms of the importance of the role that religion plays in both private and public spheres (Prothero 2006). The explanations for the continued influence of religion in the US are to be found in the colonial past, when ethnic and religious loyalties represented the bases of social life, while religion was considered a ground for preservation of the identity of immigrants through centuries and was an important mechanism of establishing the relationships with local communities in the new surroundings. Moreover, the competitiveness present at the „religious market“, without a monopoly of one dominant religious group and without the state promotion, did not allow for passivity and lack of inventiveness, otherwise characteristic for religious organizations with guaranteed positions (North & Gwin 2004). Striving to attract new members, denominations have over time refined the techniques of proselytizing, marketing and promotion (Stewart 1989). One additional reason for persuasiveness of religion in everyday life is found in the fact that religion represents a counterbalance to extreme individualism and relativism that characterizes American culture (Prothero 2006). People go to church in search for a feeling of unity, so much missing from their everyday lives. In addition, religious teaching provides guidance and rules to be observed in life, and these are often missing in a culture that nurtures relativism toward values. Facing the uncertainty in almost all segments of their lives, a significant number of people in religion find peace, sense and direction. In addition, the neutral attitude of the state, actually the lack of preference towards one particular religious group, contributes to the vitality of religion in US, by preserving a wide choice to people who arrived there from different cultural traditions. The ideas of personal liberty and individualism are not antagonistic to faith, because in a country that prefers pluralism; religious organizations create the market, while individuals are able to make certain choices according to their needs. However, it should be noted that the liberty of religious choice is rather limed since, even in the pluralistic societies, mass media, political parties, governments etc. often politically instrumentalise religion for their own purposes (Silk 1989, 1998; Meyer & Moors 2005; Schofield-Clark 2007; Fowler *et al.* 2010).

The religious map of North America is rather interesting, one of the reasons being the fact that such religious diversity is rarely to be found. Not even one of the religions gathers at least a half of the religious Americans, although different Protestant denominations, taken together, are closing

that number (around 30% of Evangelicals, 18% members of the mainline Protestantism and around 10% of Black Protestants). Roman Catholics are somewhere over 20%, due to which they rank among the most numerous religious groups. There is also a little over 1% of Jews, while around 5% belong to other religions (other Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus etc.) (Wald & Calhoun-Brown 2011: 28). Just a bit over one fifth of the population have declared themselves as „secular“¹, which is significantly less when compared to most other developed countries. Doubtless, a religious diversity of large proportions is present, several waves of immigration having contributed to its development. The first settlers, i.e. the generation of founders, were mostly the Protestants from the British Isles. During those first years, the number of Roman Catholics was minimal (below 1% of population), while other religious groups were even less in numbers. The increase of ratio of Roman Catholics in overall population started between 1830-s and 1850-s, due to the influx of immigrants from Ireland and Germany² (Prothero 2006). The fast growth of Roman Catholics gradually brought about the spreading of the collective identity of the nation from almost purely „Protestant“ to Christian in a wider sense. Subsequent arrival of numerous Jews caused additional spread of national identity and culture, turning it into Judeo-Christian. The fast growth of the number of Muslims and their gradual integration has caused some of the authors³ to predict the development of the „Abrahamic“ collective identity (Wald & Calhoun-Brown 2011). The latest waves of immigration, mostly coming from Asia, have added to religious diversity. It should also be mentioned that each new immigration wave has opened specific problems related to integration, challenging the established forms of public life and culture, creating antagonisms and intolerance on the side of the early settlers, causing exclusion, marginalization and forced displacement of newcomers⁴. However, once it became clear that the new settlers will not just leave, the attitude towards them gradually started to change, allowing for an increased acceptance. Over time, in parallel with democratization and increase of religious tolerance, the newly arrived religious groups managed to fit in more and more easily.

1 www.electionstudies.org accessed on March 10, 2014.

2 There were also some other ethnic groups, but to the far lesser extent.

3 However, this hypothesis is rather controversial since especially following September 11, 2001 American openness to immigrants and their beliefs have, many times, come into question (Haddad *et al.* 2003: 298).

4 The massive arrival of Jews was closely followed by the growth of anti-Semitism, while nowadays the Muslim religious community is facing intolerance.

From the very foundation of the US, religion played an important role in public life; some authors are inclined to conclude that even the Constitution itself represents a specific fusion of rules of Christianity and of principles of civic life (*ibid.*). The Constitution pronounces the separation of state and church in a way of forbidding preference of any confession over other, or establishing any religion as the official one. Taking into account that religion is of exceptional importance for the majority of the US citizens, the separation does not comprise resentment towards religious influences. On the contrary, the fact that national anthem, legal oath in court, national stamp and currency bear the religious symbols is another argument in favor of the fact that the importance of religion in public life in the USA is officially recognized.

During the longer part of the country's history, the relationships between religious organizations and state used to be characterized with cooperation, especially in terms of mutual adjustments. The only exception was between the 1940-s and the 1970-s, when the separation was more pronounced, and the influence of religion in all social spheres less present than ever before or after. The engagement of religious organizations was restricted, by, for example, prohibiting the expression of religion in public schools, or by means of limiting budget spending on religious schools, etc. (*ibid.*) Since the 1970-ies, the cooperation has again been established, which is particularly apparent in terms of the renewal of financial provision to religious schools, in regard to increased freedom of expression of religious affiliation and in again permitting for religious symbols to be posted in public places. These changes occurred, in large part, due to the strengthening of neo-conservatism and the rise of political evangelicals in the late-twentieth-century politics (Katz 1989: 17–18).

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In favor of the thesis that the religion is an inseparable part of the American political life are also, for example, data related to the level of exploitation of religious affiliation in electoral campaigns (e.g. the issue of alleged secret affinity of President Obama towards Islam that his opponents used in electoral campaigns) or the linkage between political orientation and religious affiliation (e.g. the tendency of Jews and Black Protestants to support the ideas of the left; or closeness of mainstream Protestants and Roman Catholics to conservative positions) (Greenberg & Wald 2001).

However, in spite of the developed religious pluralism (especially after the liberalization of immigration policy in 1965, allowing easier admission of immigrants from very different religious backgrounds) and the fact that various religious groups have been influencing the basic features of social

justice, law, tolerance, protection of public goods and defining public policy, the influence that Protestantism has had, from the very beginning, on creating the political culture and key political institutions is still significant. Somewhat lesser, but by no means unimportant, is the mark left by the Roman Catholic community, particularly related to issues of social welfare and care of the vulnerable, especially the children.

Social welfare and care for the poor in the U.S.

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Before we move on to a brief description of basic characteristics of social welfare system and care for the poor, it is necessary to present some facts about poverty in the US. According to official statistics⁵, 15% of Americans lived in poverty in 2010, which is the highest number registered in last twenty years. Poverty is not evenly distributed. African-American and Hispano-American populations are especially vulnerable, with poverty rates above 25%, while the white population is in a much better position. Single-parent families (mother-headed families), children and elderly are in a particularly unfavorable situation. Despite its economic strength, the United States significantly differ from developed European countries in terms of social disparities and poverty rates (Smeeding 2006).

According to the Esping-Andersen's classification, welfare policy in the United States is of the liberal type, characterized by minimal social assistance and a narrow circle of beneficiaries (Esping-Andersen 1990). The amount of aid is measured and allocated according to precise criteria, primarily financial status and position of an individual in labor market. The basic idea is that welfare policy should not disturb market principles, but only serve as a support for existing market mechanisms (Čekerevac 2008). There are three main features of social welfare system in the United States. The first is *pragmatism*, in the sense that programs are created for practical reasons, in response to specific problems, and not derived from the pre-set national social security schemes, as is the case with most European countries. Another feature is the high degree of *decentralization*. In the basis of this kind of organization is the idea of subsidiarity, according to which the local authorities, as the closest to the citizens and well acquainted with their problems, are the most appropriate to be the first to engage in the implementation of social policy measures, while higher layers of government should be engaged only in a situation when other instances prove to be inefficient. The system is not universal on the national level, which results in significant regional differences. The third feature

5 <http://www.npc.umich.edu/poverty/> Accessed on 11 March 2014.

is the significant role of *private sector* in provision of social welfare, especially in healthcare, education and pension system, which further enhances the disparities in the access to these services (Puljiz 1997).

The nineteenth century English Poor Laws have made significant influence on main features of the anti-poverty policy in the U.S. The fundamental idea of these laws was that all forms of charity should be envisioned in terms of establishing discipline among workers and developing strong labor market (Martin 2010). In order to turn away as many people as possible from asking for support, conditions and requirements were rigorous (e.g. hard work in prisonlike factories), while the shaming, stigmatizing and even criminalizing the poor was a common practice. The New Poor Law (1834) has made some progress regarding the attitude towards the poor, in a way that it drew distinction between those who deserved support (sick, elderly, handicapped, etc.) and those who were able to work and therefore did not deserve help, despite their poverty⁶ (*ibid.*).

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A century later, in 1935, the *Social Security Act* was adopted, which laid the foundations of the American welfare state⁷. The great economic crisis that struck the United States in 1929, drew attention to the fact that capitalist market economy without government intervention was not able to get out from the crisis on its own. Mass unemployment and almost arbitrary distribution of economic hardship have challenged the ruling beliefs about the nature of poverty. For the first time, the poor were seen as victims of the processes that went beyond personal responsibility, work ethic and dedication. Consequently, the ideas that it is necessary to increase the level of income security in times of crisis and to establish various social security schemes became prominent in this period. It is right to conclude that without the Great Depression of the 1930s, there would have probably be no Social Security Act of 1930-s. It should be noted, however, that this reform, at least partly, had to do with political expediency, i.e. to avoid or control radical and popular movement's (such as the militant movement of unemployed American workers during the Great Depression) demands for change (Piven & Cloward 1977).

Although the level of federal involvement in social and economic affairs enabled by the New Deal is rather exceptional in American history, it still

6 For the development of social welfare system in France, a good example is provides by Donzelo (1988).

7 In this system, a prominent place was occupied by program Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), also adopted in 1935. That program involved taking care of single-parent families, disabled or unemployed parents with minor children.

did not make a complete breakup with the past. Actually, compared to European welfare systems, the United States abandoned the values of individualism and *laissez-faire* economy to a significantly lesser extent. The social security system was not completed, and different categories of population remained excluded in one way or another (Bejaković 2000). The focus on building insurance system as a basic mechanism for protection of workers from risk of unemployment, illness, aging and death also remained. Thus, the redistributive effect of the introduced measures remained minimal and the work ethics was highlighted as the main value and principle. Finally, the system continued to stigmatize recipients of social assistance, subjecting them to various checks and conditioning. Members of ethnic minorities remained in a particularly disadvantaged position (*ibid.*).

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Although the level of security and protection attained in northern and western European countries has never been reached, the period between the 1930s and 1970s can be considered the golden age of social welfare in America. However, the oil crisis and economic stagnation and the resurgence of the right-wing politics in the 1970-s, were accompanied by a gradual reduction in social privileges, while the definitive break with the previous system was made in 1996, after the adoption of the *Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act*, PRWORA. New legislation has made significant changes in the US social welfare system. „Welfare“ approach was abandoned in favor of „workfare“ strategy. The fundamental goal of the newly introduced policy measures was to prepare the recipients of social assistance for employment immediately after the termination of the program. The basic idea was that the state aid programs should exist only as a temporary security net, not as a permanent arrangement for the poor. During the AFDC anyone with income below certain level, and who also met other requirements prescribed by law, had the right to permanent financial assistance. However, since PRWORA entered into force, obtaining financial aid was granted only for a limited period of time (no longer than five years), and only if the very strict conditions were fulfilled. One of the consequences of newly introduced measures was that a significant part of population was left both without state support and employment. On the other hand, the supported poor created a category of poor people who work in very difficult and uncertain conditions, and are exposed to different types of conditioning, harassment and abuse at work.

Period after 1996 was characterized by the general tendency to privatize social services, but with no intentions of returning to traditional concept

of a local charity, typical for earlier period. Transformation of social welfare system went toward the establishment of public-private partnerships in the provision of social services. In this system, religious organizations have gradually become important actors and partners of the state, accepting a good part of the burden of caring for the poor.

The Influence of Religion on the Treatment of the Poor in the United States – conceptual foundations and practical activity of religious organizations in social service provision

Social welfare programs contain responses to some of the key questions: Should we care about the poor? Who should take care of them and how? Who deserves help and who does not? Social programs and policies always reflect the values and understandings of the nature of poverty, its causes, as well as specific concepts of individual and/or collective responsibility for poverty alleviation. Even in the highly secularized societies, religious norms and values indirectly make influence on basic assumptions of social policy (Dobelstein 1986). Contemporary social policy of western countries bears a deep imprint of biblical principles and practices, given in a socially and politically mediated way (Stark 1996).

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The influence that religions have on welfare policy and the treatment of poor in the US are twofold at least. On one hand, there is a more or less direct impact of religious teachings and moral principles that are deeply embedded in the political culture and laws of this country. On the other hand, there is the practical work of religious organizations as social service providers. In the rest of the article, we focus on these two aspects, first taking into account the impact of the predominant Protestantism. Then we move on the effects made by the Roman Catholic Church and related organizations.

Protestantism

Protestants were the first to arrive on US soil and their teaching made a deep influence in virtually all spheres of social life (Skocpol 2000). Analysts of the relationship between religion and state in the United States noted that the Bible strongly influenced those who led the War of Independence and wrote the Constitution (Lutz 1984). The marks of Puritan heritage can still be found in the conceptual foundations and practical measures of social policy in United States.

A good overview of social teachings of reformed Protestantism, Roman Catholicism and Lutheranism is given by Kahl (2005: 119–120). Protestantism developed a specific attitude towards poverty and insisted on values of hard and disciplined work, which should provide material well-being. According to Jean Calvin's teaching, material success is a sign of God's blessing, while poverty has quite the opposite connotation. The worker is the closest to God, while the poor are the furthest (Kahl 2005; Martin 2010; Veber 2011). Considering the importance ascribed to work within this teaching, it becomes clearer why in countries with Protestant tradition the workshops represented the basic institutions of social welfare and why was hard work a prerequisite for remunerations. Unlike Roman Catholic hospitals, schools and orphanages, whose creation was an act of mercy of the wealthy classes seeking to secure their place in Heaven, in Protestant-influenced schemes the work of poor was exploited in workshops. A reflection of these ideas can be found in modern US social legislation, where the policy of social assistance is conditioned by training for subsequent employment⁸.

Protestant teaching emphasizes the values of independence, personal responsibility and self-reliance. In such a value system, *individualism* and *self-sufficiency* in hard work prevail upon the values of compassion, solidarity, mutuality and charity. This value system is reflected in the basic concepts of social welfare in predominantly Protestant countries, such as the United States, with focus on work contribution (training for employment) and negative attitudes towards various forms of charity that are seen as potentially leading to unintended consequences such as laziness and welfare mentality (Kahl 2005). The emphasis on individualism and self-sufficiency influenced the development of competitiveness and weakening of care and compassion for those less fortunate in market competition. Such value foundations were a good basis for the formulation

8 In *The Tragedy of American Compassion*, a very popular book in conservative circles in the US, Olasky (Olasky 1992) has tried to highlight the problems that raised as a result of abandonment of traditional values of work, individualism and self-sufficiency. He argues that a system where welfare recipients live at the expense of hardworking people is unjust. The author actually reaffirms the thesis that underprivileged are to be blamed for their own situation and that they need a change of values. Olasky made a number of critical remarks at the expense of the social welfare system, whose effects on welfare recipients are much smaller than traditional direct and intimate relationships that representatives of local religious communities have had with protégées, on whose moral development and training for independent living they worked, allowing and encouraging them to free themselves from the vicious cycle of poverty and dependence (*ibid.*: 224). The same author in an article published in the U.S. Today (1997) writes: „Private charities are not always effective, but at least they have a chance to be effective. State social welfare programs are notorious for their inefficiency“.

of main principles of social policy in accordance with the *laissez-faire* doctrine, as is the case with PRWORA, whose main characteristics were: limited duration, strict requirements associated with work engagement, control of behavior, especially sexual promiscuity of program recipients, etc. (Hudson & Coukos, 2005; Chunn & Gavigan, 2004).

Following the logic of the Calvinist concept of *predestination*, one might ask why the poor should put the effort to improve their position when their fate is already outlined. The success of an individual, who managed to rise from the bottom, is actually a sign that he was elected from the very beginning, but was not visible at the start. Calvinist concept, which lays in the very basis of the „American dream“, does suggest, on one hand, that the poor should blame themselves and not others for their own failure (and curse), but on the other, it opens the opportunity for them to prove that they are chosen with their hard work and success (Veber 2011). Some authors are inclined to argue that the drastic reforms of social welfare that took place in 1996 were the result of revival of this aspect of Protestant theology. The consequence is the creation of a new social class – the poor who work (Martin 2010).

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Skepticism which has roots in the Puritan worldview influenced the formation of distrustful and cynical attitude of Americans toward those in power. The role of social state is seen as harmful, as it supposedly jeopardizes individual freedom. Therefore, its influence should be limited to the role of a „night watchman“ of property and security of citizens. (Wald & Calhoun-Brown 2011) Accordingly, belief that an important role in maintaining social life should be given to the local community, market and civil society organizations, including religious organizations, is widely accepted. (Diamond 1977) Considering the fact that state intervention in social affairs is incompatible with the doctrine of self-help and local solidarity, we should not be surprised that national social welfare system similar to those established in Scandinavian countries with Lutheran tradition has never been developed in any country where Puritan Protestantism played an important role (Kahl 2005).

Tendency of using „moral“ arguments in public discourse is also partly a result of Puritan heritage. *Moral approach* can be noticed, among other things, in the attempt to accurately determine who deserves welfare help on the basis of individual personality characteristics and degree of compliance with moral norms. For example, there is a discretionary right to reject up to 20% of requests for help, on the basis of relevant officials assessment. Another example is a practice of moral appropriateness

checks of female social assistance recipients (men night visits were banned and sanctioned) (Hudson & Coukos 2005). One example of racial and gender bias associated with allocation of social assistance is the stereotype of the „welfare queen“ – African-American woman with many children that manages to extract large amounts of social assistance while driving a Cadillac (Martin, 2010). These and other similar stereotypes have only fueled the already existing hostility of wider population against social welfare users, which eventually resulted in a drastic change in legislation.

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The influence of Calvinistic doctrine proved to be strong and persistent, with some decline in times of crisis, like the 1930s Great Depression, when a sudden impoverishment of larger number of people obviously without personal guilt and responsibility shook the deep-rooted beliefs. However, with the resurgence of economic life, the dominant opinions again drew near the Protestant principles (Hudson & Coukos 2005; Weaver, Shapiro & Jacobs 1995). A relatively easy return to old ideas and interpretations speaks in favor of the thesis of perseverance and influence of Puritan Protestant teachings in American political culture.

Roman Catholicism

As a religion, Roman Catholicism has a long history of charity and caring for the disadvantaged. When it comes to poverty, the starting belief of this religion is that wealthy individuals can express their love to God and receive blessing by helping those in need. It is the duty of the wealthy to help, even though the poor do not have a special right to that help. The act of charity actually provides salvation for the donor, while the positive effect that it has on the recipients is of a secondary importance. One of the key values of Roman Catholic ethics is *sharing and communalism* (Duncan & Moore 2003). The poor are seen as a part of community, not as someone who does not belong to it, and consequently the resources that are produced within community should be accessible to them as well. In many countries, Roman Catholic Church had a prominent social role as a provider of aid to disadvantaged population. Roman Catholic schools, hospitals, orphanages and other similar institutions century spread all over Europe during the nineteenth, becoming the forerunner of the later established welfare state. This tradition is very different from the Protestant practice of engaging the poor in the workshops (Kahl 2005). While in some countries, such as Ireland, the Roman Catholic Church entered into various agreements with the state, in the nineteenth

century United States it established an independent social security system which operated in parallel with the state (Fahey 1998).

In the US, Roman Catholic Church was one of the first that offered help to those in need, keeping continuity with the early seventeenth century tradition of establishing hospitals and orphanages. However, until the mid-nineteenth century, the aid has been provided sporadically (Dege-
neffe 2003). Roman Catholic charities began to develop particularly during the second half of the nineteenth century, when the number of poor Roman Catholic immigrants (mostly from Ireland) started to grow rapidly. The situation was especially difficult in New York City, and the representatives of Roman Catholic religious communities realized that the stigma will expand to them as well if something is not done. It was then that Roman Catholic schools, hospitals, orphanages, shelters and other facilities for the most vulnerable started to open in great numbers. Concern was that in the context of the dominant Protestantism and the presence of other religious options, Roman Catholic population would start to fall apart. Roman Catholic clergy raced to take care „of their own“ so that they do not fall under the influence of Protestant institutions and teaching (*ibid.*: 377–379). Special attention was given to education of children in Roman Catholic institutions, and mercy and care for children steadily became recognized characteristics of Roman Catholic identity in America. These organizations merged gradually into the so-called *New York System*. At the end of the nineteenth century, working together, Roman Catholic organizations were positioned as the largest provider of social services in the US. Over time, they gained political influence and managed to obtain a number of legislative solutions, most of them directly related to child protection.

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When the *New Deal* shifted a significant part of care for the poor to the authority of public institutions, representatives of Roman Catholic organizations expressed dissatisfaction, stating that the poor were their concern. Certainly, a negative reaction was partly caused by the concern of job loss of staff dealing with vulnerable population. Under the new conditions, especially since the 1960-ies, when it was realized that government agencies were not sufficient to meet all the needs, Roman Catholic organizations were once again engaged in the system through subcontracts with public authorities and continued service provision. In this period, Roman Catholic organizations started to provide assistance also to members of other religions and to those who were religiously undecided. In the 1990-ies, public funds were securing over 60%

of the budget of Catholic Charities USA, an organization that today represents the largest system of private social provision in the country (Brown & McKeown 1997: 194).

The role of religious organizations in provision of social services

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Until recently, religious organizations in the US were not able to receive funding from the state directly for the implementation of social programs. However, with the adoption of the aforementioned Act in 1996, and a special section called *The Charitable Choice*, as well as the *Faith Based Community Initiatives Act of 2001*, funding of religious organizations from public budget was fully legalized, provided that it was not used for spreading religious teachings, but only for the provision of contracted services (Martin 2010: 61; Cnaan, Boddie 2002: 224–225).

One of the consequences of changes in social legislation in 1996 was that the charity associations began to play an increasingly important role in compensating services from which the state withdrew. In accordance with the desires of conservative circles, America began to return to traditions of self-help on the level of local community. The basic idea was to return to voluntary work based on the principles of problem solving within the community, through the (in)formal networks of support, reciprocity and solidarity. However, the processes of modernization and individualism present in American society made civic participation less vibrant than before. Changes in lifestyle, influence of popular culture and mass media, frequent internal migration, lack of free time and weakening of civic virtues have further contributed to the fading of civil society (Putnam 2000). In addition, despite the problems created by supposedly inefficient bureaucracy, it was clear that a return to the old mechanism of charity is no longer possible. Total transfer of care for vulnerable groups to local community and weak civil society was neither possible nor desirable. Therefore the concept of the so-called public-private partnerships was applied, making civil society organizations and private firms subcontractors in the implementation of social programs financed from the public budget. Social support organized in this way, respected the principle of subsidiarity as civic associations, religious organizations and professional associations were the first instance to be contacted by citizens in case of need. Only in cases when civil society organizations and local communities are not able to cope with large-scale problems, higher levels of government take charge.

One of the arguments in favor of greater involvement of religious groups and associations in social care, was that the widespread individualism reduces solidarity and reciprocity that are essential for functioning of a community. It was assumed that this type of organizations is best suited to develop solidarity, compassion, and mutual assistance among community members. What is expected of religious organizations is to participate in the reconstruction of broken social networks and to strengthen depleted social capital in the community.

Under the strong pressure coming from conservative circles, the new legal framework PRWORA enhanced the role of religious organizations as social service providers by giving the opportunity of assistance choice (*Charitable Choice*). This means that public institutions got the chance to select religious organizations which would be financially supported from the state budget for their provision of social services. And while many religious organizations already had some form of humanitarian activities, such attitude of the state encouraged them to professionalize in certain domains and thus widen the conditions for their own action. Although many religious organizations assumed the role in providing social services, Roman Catholic associations were particularly successful. For example, Catholic Charities USA (founded in 1910) is currently the largest private provider of social services in the United States, with more than 1,400 organizations, 283,000 employees and volunteers, the circle of users that exceeds 12 million individuals, and a budget of over two billion dollars. Services provided by this organization cover a broad area of social work, from organizing soup kitchens, psychological counseling, (in)formal education, employment support, family support, healthcare, programs for integration of migrants, help for the homeless, help for the victims of violence and users of psychoactive substances etc. (Degeneffe 2003; Cnaan Boddie 2002: 224–225).

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Despite the positive attitude of most Americans toward the activities of religious organizations and their recognized contribution to the development of social welfare in the past, their inclusion has encountered much criticism, especially from the secular left (Skocpol 2000). One of the objections made to this type of engagement argued that, despite their contribution in the field of social care and assistance, it was not their main goal, but a tool which helped these organizations to spread their teachings and gain new followers (Fahey, 1998). Another cause of dissatisfaction was the fact that in this way the principle of separation of church and state would be put in question. Then, the concern was raised about the potential bias and discrimination based on religious affiliation of the prospective

assistance recipients, staff employed in these organizations, as well as about violation of basic democratic principles and human rights, etc. Doubts have also been expressed in terms of the capacities of certain religious organizations (especially the smaller ones) to perform a given job (Chaves 2001). Although the majority of citizens approve the inclusion of religious organizations in social activities, as shown in a survey conducted by the Pew Institute, still a significant number did not agree with the inclusion of non-Judeo-Christian groups, such as Muslim Americans, Buddhist Americans, Nation of Islam or the Church of Scientology. The public attitude indicates the potential danger of unequal treatment of organizations and associations of different religious orientations⁹ (Skocpol 2000).

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The building of partnerships with other civil society organizations and governmental agencies (*ibid.*) was seen as a way to avoid these traps of the involvement of religious organizations in state affairs.

Despite present debates on advantages and negative aspects of inclusion of religious organizations in state affairs, large organizations such as the Salvation Army, Catholic Charities USA, and Lutheran Services in America or Jewish Family Services have been active social service providers for a long time. The current trend of devolution of responsibility for social issues from the federal to the lower levels of government has a positive effects on building firmer ties between government and religious organizations in the form of public-private partnerships. However, it does not go without complications, which are largely a consequence of exceptional variety of organizations, their legal statuses, organizational forms, teaching and dominant practices that are hampering their work in the public sphere (Dobkin-Hall 2007).

Concluding Remarks

In America, unlike European countries, religion maintained a privileged position and important role in both private and public spheres. As we have seen, the influence of religious factor is expressed indirectly, through religious teachings deeply incorporated in the political culture and the basic principles of the organization of social and political life, but also

⁹ Results of research conducted in 2001 showed that citizens are in large numbers (75%) supporters of funding of religious organizations from government sources, but there the favoring of Judeo-Christian concept was also present, so that the only half of respondents expressed a positive attitude towards equally distributed money to other religious organizations (PEW Forum on Religion and Public Life). Studies also show that the largest part of funding from the budget went right into the hands of the Judeo-Christian organizations (Prothero 2006).

directly, through the actions of religious organizations in solving problems faced by the poor.

As it was demonstrated, Roman Catholic and reformed Protestant understandings of the main causes, consequences and approaches in treatment of poverty significantly differ. In short, while for Roman Catholics the very act of mercy is important and has a role important for the benefactor; Protestants emphasize diligent work as a way to salvation, while the help for the poor is limited by the assessment of their moral suitability. For Roman Catholics, poverty is a heavy burden that the entire community should take care of through charitable activities, while Protestants emphasize personal guilt and responsibility for the miserable situation of an individual. The principle of operation of Roman Catholic organizations is *caritas* – assisting without much discrimination, while for the Protestants the main tool is test and punishment of the workshop.

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The similarity of these two religious traditions is primarily reflected in the rejection of state authority and in the importance given to civil society and local initiative. This resulted in the fact that the system of social care at the national level has never been developed, neither in Roman Catholic countries, nor in the countries dominated by reformed Protestantism in a way it was achieved in countries with Lutheran tradition, which was open for the impact of higher structures of government (Kahl 2005). The development of the social welfare system in America generally followed Protestant principles. They are also present in the aforementioned changes that directly include religious organizations in social services provision. Social assistance that is received is not necessarily citizens' right motivated by social solidarity, but it includes in itself religious connotations and social teachings of the Churches.

Despite the undeniable changes that are the result of the establishment of welfare state in America, social policies and practices aimed at reducing poverty still carry the traces of strong religious influence from the past, and also the current efforts of religious groups to capture and maintain their position in the public sphere. Attitude of the state towards religious organizations can be seen as a function of its relation to social care system. In a country where the dominant principle is individual responsibility and where the local level is seen as the primary field of solving social problems, the significant presence of religious organizations appears as a logical result of such policies.

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Ko treba da se brine o siromašnima? Religija i socijalna zaštita u Americi

Apstrakt

Namera ovog rada je da ispita odnos religijskih organizacija i države u Sjedinjenim Američkim Državama iz perspektive sistema socijalne zaštite i brige o siromašnima. Konkretnije, postavljamo pitanje na koji način idejne osnove i praktično delovanje religijskih organizacija utiču na pravce formulisanja socijalne politike, odnosno oblikovanje odnosa države prema ugroženim kategorijama stanovništva. U prvom delu se skiciraju osnovne karakteristike religijskog života i socijalne zaštite u Americi, dok je drugi deo rada posvećen analizi uticaja osnovnih moralno-religijskih pretpostavki reformskog protestantizma i katolicizma (kao dve najrasprostranjenije religijske tradicije u SAD) i načina na koji se religijske organizacije uključuju u savremeni sistem socijalne zaštite u Americi.

Ključne reči: religija, socijalna zaštita, siromašni, Amerika