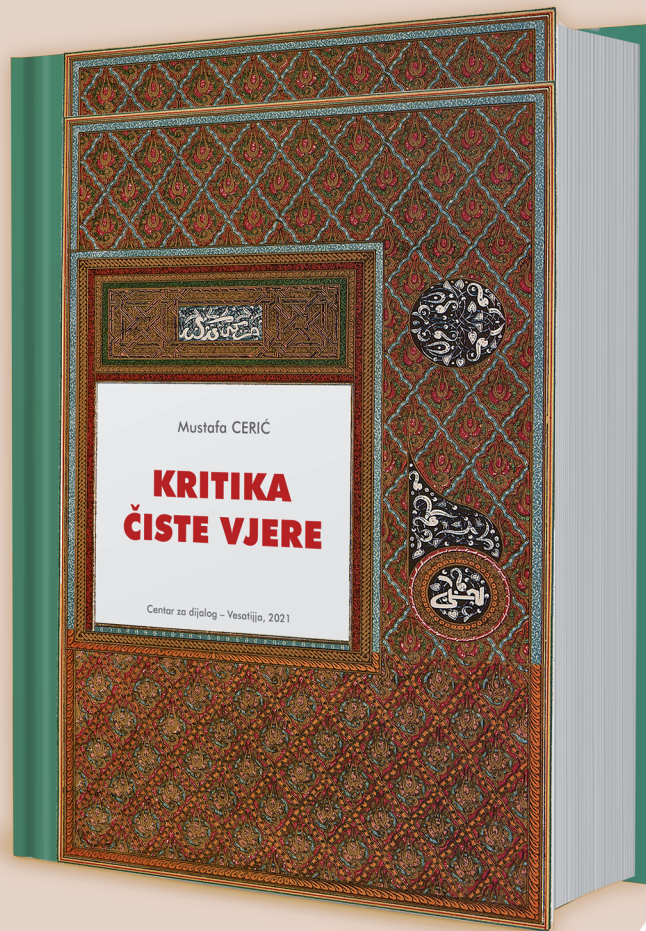
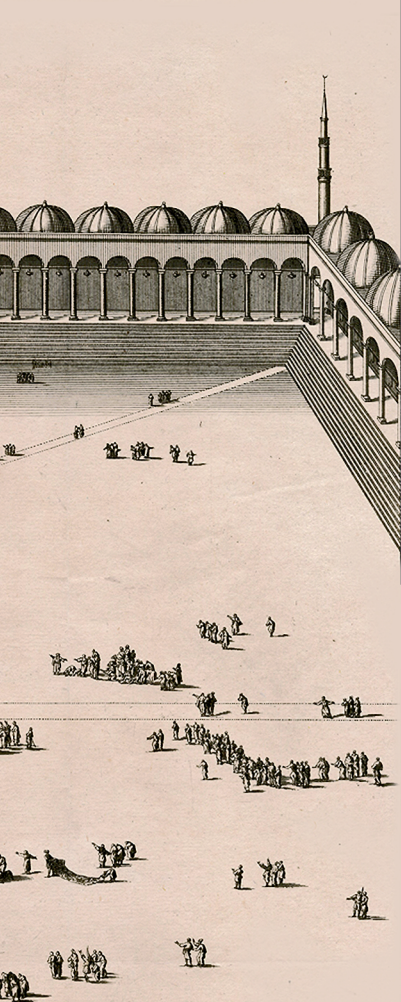


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**PRIKAZ
REVIEW**

Ahmed ALIBAŠIĆ

DO ČISTE VJERE PUTEVIMA SLOBODE I ZDRAVOG RAZUMA

Prikaz knjige: Mustafa Cerić, Kritika čiste vjere,
Sarajevo, Centar za dijalog – Vesatijja, 2021, 200 str.

TO PURE FAITH IN THE WAYS OF FREEDOM AND COMMON SENSE

Book review: Mustafa Cerić, A Critique of Pure Faith,
Sarajevo, Center for Dialogue – Wesatiyya, 2021, 200 pages.

TO PURE FAITH IN THE WAYS OF FREEDOM AND COMMON SENSE

Book review: Mustafa Cerić, *A Critique of Pure Faith*,
Sarajevo, Center for Dialogue – Wasatiyya, 2021, 200 pages.

It is difficult for any believer, especially someone who was the supreme head of a religious community for two decades, to silently observe how his faith is repeatedly abused and contaminated. Grand Mufti Mustafa Cerić is not someone who can/will remain silent in the face of many such efforts. Guided by the idea that the word is always the beginning (119), dr. Cerić is a tireless speaker and writer of impressive production. His education, leadership experience, writing talent, familiarity with classic and contemporary literature, and global involvement have made him a writer of authentic thought and a special category.

The book before us is a collection of forty essays published in the Islamic newspaper *Preporod* and on the website of the Center for Dialogue – *Wasatiyya* in the period 2016-2018. The foreword by Ekrem Tucaković faithfully summarized the entire content, so we will not repeat it here. The author addresses a multitude of topics, always returning to his central intention: to distinguish pure faith from human interpretations and practices that, for various reasons (e.g., time obsolescence, geographical foreignness, or simply wrongness), have become a veil or ballast to pure faith and resulted in the dismal appearance of "religious (non)believers" (93-95). At the same time, it uses the method of removing from religion everything that does not strictly belong to it.¹ The author himself says that "at first glance it looks both normal and understandable, but in history it was neither normal nor understandable" (138). On this occasion, we will emphasize some theses and parts of the book, leaving the reader to discover the rest on their own. Since I am neither a philosopher nor a theologian, I will not particularly dwell on the purely philosophical and expertly theological parts (e.g. 113-116), but rather on those that address every believer and the Muslim community (i.e. social Islamic thought).

There is something for everyone in these essays; for educated theologians and lovers of wise words in general, but also for believers ignorant of the theological debates for which dr. Cerić once upon a time received his doctorate before late Fazlur Rahman at the University of Chicago. I am referring here to the author's considerations on the support of honorable Khadija to the Prophet, peace be upon him, upon receiving the first revelation (71-72), Islam and immortality (83, 97), the consequences of belief in the Day of Judgment (180-181) and hedonism ("Hedonism is a sick passion that consumes human fertility", 88). These are the best explanations of those topics in a clear and accessible Bosnian language, which the author strongly advocates (126). As an example, we cite the consideration of modern man's search for happiness: "That modern man is not only unhappy, but also desperate for not being happy. And he is not happy because what makes him happy at first sight soon makes him unhappy. ... He is happy that he lives comfortably, but he is unhappy that his life is short. He would like to live after death, but he denies life in the other world. ... He would like to have more lives, but he sings 'you only live once'. This is the difference between those who are aware of two lives: one which is transitory and the other which is eternal, and those who think that there is only one fleeting life after which there is only one great nothingness. The former are happy in an unhappy transient life while thinking of eternal salvation, and the latter are unhappy in a happy transient life while fearing an inevitable, unhappy and irreversible end" (93-94). Equally enlightening is the author's questioning of the paradoxes of the modern world: "Why does man need to take care of animals if he is unable to take care of himself? Why ban the killing of animals if mass killing of humans is allowed? Why does man love animals if he does not know how to love man?" (88).

The author's unique profile gives these essays and

¹ It is said that Michelangelo replied when asked how he managed to carve David: I only removed what was not him in stone!

theses a special dimension and meaning. The call to ulama not to consciously or unconsciously produce half-truths and half-lies for personal gain (43) resonates more strongly when written by someone who has known the ulama for a long time and intimately. It is similar to the claim that the problem is not in the dictation of faith but in the "dictators of faith" (74), which the author obviously saw a lot of them; that dogma is a dead end as well as slavery of the mind (77); that *taqlīd* in belief is impermissible (78); that Muslim theologians are the biggest culprits that the Muslim faith is burdened with dogmatic- *taqlīd* thinking (78); that personal '*aqīdah*', even if it was from the greatest scholar, is a personal sip of pure water from the source of *Sharī'ah*, which can quench the thirst of that scholar but not necessarily the thirst of his students (84).

Grand Mufti Cerić deals not only with global challenges for pure faith, but also with local, Bosnian ones: "Now we see that the jewel of pure faith is being defiled by the dogma of vanity, wickedness, jealousy, envy, selfishness, hypocrisy and exclusivity" is more modest than before the global one: "I know, but I cannot do anything to prevent it. I know, but I am powerless to stop the darkness of vanity. I know, but I am frustrated that I cannot say what I really think. Not because of anyone's censorship, but because of self-censorship. ... I admit, it is hard for me that Marx is no longer guilty, it is all of us" (118-119). It is not the only place where the author addresses the issue of "collective impotence" that frustrates us all and forces us to make desperate moves that can only lead us to ruin, whether it is violent extremism, uncritical belonging or apathy. It would be useful for the author to devote himself more to the issue of overcoming this weakness on some future occasion. I am certain he knows much about it from his insights into literature and from personal experience. Community empowerment as a structural solution to Muslim frustrations could also be one of the themes of the author's upcoming memoir.

Whether he deals with global or local challenges of pure faith, the Grand Mufti does so as a thinker and a great advocate of understanding *faith as an ethical message under conditions of freedom* by means of *common sense*. Freedom is the second rule of pure faith (109). In fact, faith is freedom (198). Without freedom there is no knowledge of the Truth (159). Man has no choice but to choose, man has no freedom from freedom (199). Neither the Muslim authorities, nor the caliph himself, have the right to limit the freedom of the spirit and the freedom of the mind on major religious topics: "politics, that is, the state, even if

it was the Caliphate, has no right to dictate speculative dogma, because faith must remain pure from dogma, which is mentally changeable." , and which is, in fact, a policy dictate (102). The government, even if it is Muslim, has no right to interfere in the religious and doctrinal issues of Muslims: "Freedom of conscience and religion is one of the highest values of Islamic moral and ethical teaching" (104).

Freedom, however, is not enough to find the Truth and recognize the meaning of existence. In freedom, a person can rely on common sense, "which is not the most perfect measure of things in this world, but it is one of the best and most reliable measures for the mental and spiritual health of a person" (144). After the experience with the Moroccan charlatan who, in the fall of 2010, swayed Bosnia and Herzegovina for weeks, the Muslim public with its quackery and conspiracy theories in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is encouraging to hear that the Qur'an exudes "rational and scientific optimism" (164). That gift of God is threatened by the rapturous Sufi who thinks he is a saint in Heaven and the dumbed-down literalist who thinks he is a saint on Earth (145). Among the challenges of pure faith through attacks on common sense (pseudo-Selfism or pure literalism, Sufi elitism and agnosticism), the author does not expressly mention rigid traditionalism, although the entire series actually deals with that challenge more than any other. I assume that the author wanted to avoid labeling that often helps in understanding but also creates strong animosities that interrupt the dialogue.

And this series is an implicit criticism of the ossified tradition because, when freedom and reason come together, there is no place for inherited attitudes, no matter what *madhhab* it is about. Thus, we read "that the Qur'an is the only holy book that hints at the possibility of salvation even for those who are not called 'Muslims' if their beliefs and actions are in the spirit of the general idea of *tawhīd* and beneficial action in the world" (152-3). No less unorthodox is the author's positive valorization of Abu Bakr al-Rāzī, Abu 'Alā al-Ma'arrī and Abu Ḥayyān al-Tawhīdī (68, 156) or his assessment that the *fatwa* of Shaykh al-Islam Mustafa Sabrī, which provides a standard Sunni answer about the status of sinners, was given in the "spirit of the Murjīte doctrine" (178). Finally, for the traditionalists, Abu Ḥamid al-Ghazālī cannot be guilty of anything, not even the "self-imposed ban on practicing philosophy" after which Muslims became dependent on other people's philosophies (86).

The author locates the main culprit for the decadence of Islamic civilization in the loss of a free mind, in the state of spiritual and intellectual unfreedom that occurred after the

reduction of knowledge to strictly theological knowledge, that is, the exclusion of natural sciences and applied knowledge from the corpus of commendable knowledge (153-154, 159). It is time for Muslims to understand that knowledge and science are not sins, but ignorance and indolence (180) and that human reason was not created to prove its weakness, but its power (163).

At a time when faith is increasingly perceived as magic or a platform for additional national mobilization and identification, the apostrophizing of Islam as an ethical message, which "requires an active, not passive, attitude towards public morality" is no less important (181-182). This awareness of the obligation to spread the light of pure faith around oneself seems to be one of the motives for the author's writing and speaking (196). If it were not for all kinds of abuses of pure faith, this elementary bond between faith and morality should not even be emphasized considering the obvious connection between faith in the Day of Judgment and human action (180-181). One of the expressions of pure faith as ethics is the rule of law, a nomocracy that we lack today because in the post-communist era, power is held by either "ignorant idealists or knowledgeable realists who know how to usurp power based on the principle of the rule of the party will of an interest group". While Muslims have nomocracy only in their memory, it can be found though in Europe and North America (134, 139).

At the very end, as befits, and in accordance with the author's invitation to read critically, here are a few remarks and suggestions. I am not sure that the affirmation of the Bosnian language must be (and should) be at the expense

of sociology in our education (126). Salafis can hardly be said to be "guardians of the religious and cultural memory of the Muslim community" (83). Traditionalists have that ambition. Finally, can religion be put on the same level as artificial faith and culture (54)?

Grand Mufti Cerić gave us a series of bold philosophical-theological-social essays that, despite occasional pessimistic tones (88-89), encourage us to free ourselves from dogmatic fear and with confidence in the last vow with the Lord, relying on our own common sense, make a strong step towards the path of self-empowerment for the benefit of the general human good. So, God helped us!





ILUSTRACIJA - Nova džamija kraljice majke (*Yeni Valide Camii*), koja se obično naziva *Nova džamija* (*Yeni Cami*), dominira trajektnim pristaništem u Eminönü na južnom kraju istanbulskog mosta Galata preko Zlatnog roga.

ILLUSTRATION - The New Queen Mother Mosque (*Yeni Valide Camii*), commonly called the *New Mosque* (*Yeni Cami*), dominates the ferry docks in Eminönü at the southern end of Istanbul's Galata Bridge over the Golden Horn.