

Paul Mojzes ed., Religion and the War in Bosnia. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998. 294pp.

The idea for collecting and publishing this set of nineteen essays on the role of religion in the war in Bosnia grew out of a panel with a similar title organized by Paul Mojzes at the 1994 annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion in Chicago. Most of the essays had been written before the fighting in Bosnia ended. The nineteen essays are grouped in the three categories of "contextual issues," "the religious factor in the war" and "reconciliation." According to the editor's preface, a main goal of this volume is to shed "more light than heat" on an emotional and divisive issue (ix). That goal has been met, due in part to three key aspects of the methodology behind the solicitation of the essays.

First of all, nine of the essays, that is just over half, were written by residents of the former Yugoslavia, while three more were written by authors with roots there who now reside in the United States. At one level, some of these articles simply make available in English the perceptions of each of the major religions of the area in their own terms. The article by Dimitrije Kalezic, the dean of the Serbian Orthodox seminary in Belgrade, for example, unself-consciously reiterates the feeling of centuries-long suffering as the people of God at the hands of other religions that is at the core of Serbian Orthodox identity. Sulejman Masovic, a professor at Zagreb University, eloquently describes the sense of abandonment that Muslims in Bosnia felt at the lack of response to their plight on the part of the West. While one might differ with some of the conclusions drawn in those essays where authors are not critical of their own tradition, by presenting the dominant self-perception of the religious groups in their own terms this volume provides an important first step to understanding the role of religion in the war in Bosnia.

A second aspect of the solicitation process, emphasis on critical analysis, provides for more penetrating insights. Contributors living outside of the region added an important element of analysis in terms more familiar to Western readers. In the first section on "contextual issues," Francine Friedman, a professor of political science at Ball State University, provides a clear outline of the development of the Muslim nationality in Bosnia, closing with important observations about the tension both within and without Bosnia between seeing Alija Izetbegovic, the President of Bosnia, as a leader of Bosnian Muslims or as the leader of a multi-ethnic state.

Lenard Cohen of Simon Fraser University, British Columbia, also a political scientist, traces the recent history of secularization in Bosnia to argue that religion played little role in the start of the war, although as the war continued its importance increased as part of "elite strategies of ethno-political mobilization." (44) Cohen points out the importance of (mis)perceptions in the politics of the area, namely how one side's strengthening of religion was seen as threatening to others.

Paul Mojzes in his article emphasizes the collective nature of religion as a unique feature of Balkan religious culture, as opposed to the individualistic, take-it-or-leave-it attitude toward religion

prevalent in the West. Without assigning guilt equally, Mojzes points out concisely how all three sides have aligned their traditions with narrow, nationalistic goals.

An important caveat is raised by Gerald Shenk's contribution. Shenk, professor of Church and Society at Eastern Mennonite Seminary, originally delivered his piece at a conference on Christian Faith and Human Enmity in Pecs, Hungary, in August 1995 where both Catholic and Orthodox representatives from the region were present. In the face of pressure to both assign and downplay questions of collective guilt, Shenk made the provocative claim that trying to assign guilt might, in fact, "be a detour, avoiding the deeper struggle to assess the impact of such incivility and irreligion on morality, character, and human dignity at large." (105)

For contributors living in the region, critical analysis meant being self-critical of their own tradition. Some authors were able to do so, with results that are richly rewarding for the reader. Radmila Radic, history professor at Belgrade University, provides a survey of Serbian Orthodox church newspapers in the 1980's and 1990's. She notes the internal dissension within the bishops' ranks, citing names and specific examples of episcopal belligerency. She also notes hopeful signs of anti-nationalist leadership in the form of Radovan Bigovic, a younger theologian at the Orthodox seminary in Belgrade. Mato Zovkic, the general vicar of the Sarajevo archdiocese of the Catholic Church, courageously details the process by which he came to understand that Croats had participated in the ethnic cleansing of Muslims in central Bosnia, underscoring the tremendous difficulty of coming to grips with the failings of one's own side in the midst of flight and death among one's own people.

Such courageous writing points to the third important element of the essays collected in this volume, namely opening up an avenue of reconciliation and rebuilding. Mojzes mentioned positive elements that the religious groups can bring to the task of rebuilding Bosnian society such as pastoral care and humanitarian relief. Shenk noted the importance of gathering positive stories of religiously-motivated rejection of hatred as an encouragement to the many Bosnians who continue to reject ethnic hatred as a possible foundation for their society. David Steele's report on conflict resolution seminars held with religious leaders provides a few such stories, as well as a theoretical framework for systematic work by religious leaders at the hard issue of reconciliation. A report by the Franciscan, Marko Orsolich, on the work of Zajedno, the multicultural and interreligious center in Sarajevo that he heads, gives a concrete example of the work of rebuilding Bosnian society. Gerard Powers, foreign policy advisor for US Catholic Bishops Conference, in an article originally published in the *Journal of International Affairs* in 1996, pointed out that divisions exist within all three religious traditions between militancy and tolerance. He contributed the key insight that "the best way to counter religious extremism or manipulation of religion is with strengthened, more authentic religion, not weakened religion." (245)

Thus overall this book has fulfilled its main goal. The numerous translated articles are a positive addition; the challenge of rendering the academic Southern Slav articles into readable English was skillfully managed with one exception - the last sentence on page 209 is incoherent. The other articles not

mentioned here for lack of space all contribute at one level or another to deeper understanding of the role of religion in Bosnia. Given the variety of perspectives presented, it is unfortunate that no index was provided to enable quick cross-reference to different takes on key persons and topics. A unified bibliography or suggested reading list would have been helpful for the reader who comes to this book with little background on the topic, although several of the essays conclude with their own bibliographies. Background knowledge of the topic is simply assumed and in a few essays, key terms are left untranslated and without explanatory footnotes.

While this volume is a solid and important contribution to the topic, several potentially fruitful avenues to examining the role of religion in the war in Bosnia remain unexplored. Only one article mentions the role of religion outside of the big three groups - Catholicism, Orthodoxy and Islam -, an article by Miroslav Kis, a professor at Andrews University in Michigan. Kis' article tantalizingly deals with how Seventh-Day Adventists in the area searched for a non-ethnic God, but does not systematically address the learning that might come from looking at the experience of non-ethnic Protestant or Jewish groups. Although these groups are numerically very small, particularly so in Bosnia, the uniqueness of their perspective merits giving it a look.

Given the importance attached to self-criticism in this volume, the positive results of following that approach, and the presumed audience of this book, published as it is by the American Academy of Religion, a critical examination of the response of Western churches to the war in Bosnia would have been an welcomed addition, particularly in light of Powers' observation that all three major religions have less militant sides that could have been supported, presumably also by Westerners. What styles of ecumenical engagement were tried and found to work best? Angry faxes? Short-term delegations? Longer-term fraternal workers dedicated to learning the language and understanding the various levels of self-(mis)perceptions? Was the American government's stance, due in part to sanctions on Serbia and Montenegro, of only funding humanitarian relief to non-Serbian-controlled areas the correct model for churches to follow or was the European Union's policy of basing humanitarian aid on numbers of refugees the better example? And which pattern did church-based humanitarian organizations actually follow? Given the difficulties refugees had in finding safe havens outside the area during the war, did Western churches do enough to influence their own countries to grant asylum? Or should churches have pushed for more and earlier NATO military intervention as the most helpful response to refugees? The difficulty Western churches had in coming to a consensus on what were for them relatively academic problems, compared to the acute problems faced by religious communities in a war-zone, merely underlines the high respect due those contributors from the region who rejected simplistic representations and examined their own traditions self-critically.

Finally, the importance of seeking out and telling the powerful stories of Bosnians who at great risk to themselves rejected the categorization of their neighbors into "good" and "evil" based on dubious religious and ethnic traits can hardly be overemphasized. The very few such stories included in this book

left me wishing to hear many more, a difficult undertaking, granted, that could hardly have been organized exclusively from outside the region, yet an enterprise that would have added to the foundation of "light, not heat" provided in this book.

- Mark Jantzen, University of Notre Dame, South Bend IN.