

Zagreb, 23 July 1993

Dear Editor:

In Religion in Eastern Europe Vol. XIII, No. 3, pp. 13-32 Paul Mojzes, the journal's editor, published "The Role of the Religious Communities in the War in Former Yugoslavia." Since the author strongly disagrees with my views expressed in unfinished manuscripts I have given him, I feel obliged to reply to his article.

Even though I consider Dr. Mojzes a friend, I must immediately express my surprise that the editorial board approved an article which is full of uncritical statements, innuendos, and unsupported assertions and which is as uninformed as it is tendentious. Substantial flaws are evident in the very first paragraph. He begins with two premises. The first is the self-evident platitude "that war is the worst form of human interaction." The second is that "cooperation among people," is "more important than national sovereignty" and similar values. He somehow connects these two premises with his main thesis, saying that religious communities in the states of former Yugoslavia were more interested in "national sovereignty" than in "cooperation among people," which makes them responsible for war. He not only wants to prove that religious communities have made major contributions to the war in former Yugoslavia, but also distributes that responsibility equally among religious communities in order to diminish the international outrage at the behavior of the Serbian Orthodox Church.

Mojzes disregards the obvious fact that "national sovereignty, traditions, customs, and historical boundaries" regularly do not interfere with "cooperation among people." If that is the case with most states in the world, why would it not be the case with the states which emerged out of the dissolution of former Yugoslavia? For some reason, Mojzes denies the churches of former Yugoslavia the right to support self-determination of nations to which they belong, a right that I am certain he would not deny to churches in America, France, Greece, or any other state.

Mojzes actually writes under premises which he never states. He blames Croats and the Catholic Church there for the dissolution of Yugoslavia. More importantly, however, he makes a great effort to diminish the outcry of impartial international observers concerning the role of the Serbian Orthodox Church, not only for the dissolution of Yugoslavia but also for waging the war. I count myself among those who do not regret the disappearance of the unfortunate artificial state of former Yugoslavia and who point to substantial evidence of the involvement of Orthodox clergy in the incitement of Serbs in Croatia to rebellion and in the territorial enlargement of Serbia.

Mojzes, however, chooses to distribute the responsibility equally to all religious communities. Since his materials for this position are not abundant, he resorts to unfounded accusations and outrageous statements. He distinguished himself by the statement in Christian Century (November 4, 1933, pp. 996-999) (regretfully but significantly, such articles appear in journals supposedly interested in ecumenism): 'If

they were in the position, Croats and Muslims would do the same atrocities over the Serbs.' Reverend Mojzes seems to be undisturbed that by this logic one could easily justify Hitler's elimination of Jews and Turkish genocide of the Kurds. The tragedy is that Mojzes uses this logic precisely to diminish the responsibility of the Serbs for waging war against Croats and Muslims and the crimes thereby committed.

Mojzes' piece is full of outrageous statements. For him Croats and Serbs are not nations of the same degree and quality as, for instance, Swedes and Norwegians; they are, according to him, "somewhat akin to tribalism" (probably "tribes"), more similar to Yoruba or Ibo (p. 14) (why the Yoruba cannot be a nation like Swedes only Mojzes knows). He opposes the name of the Catholic Church "among Croats" for linguistic reasons (p. 15). Mojzes is disturbed that the "Roman Catholics of Slovenia perceive themselves having a quite separate religious dynamic of interaction with their nation than the Catholic Church among Croats and vice versa." Would he be disturbed, I wonder, if American and Canadian Catholics had a "separate religious dynamic," as they certainly do! Mojzes uncritically asserts that religious communities "contribute to the sacralization of their respective nationalities" and states without blinking that "religion plays the role of a political ideology."

Of course, Mojzes does not hesitate to accuse the Catholic Church of Croatia and of Bosnia and Hercegovina of nationalism. In the absence of solid evidence, he resorts to marginal phenomena, obscure authors, generalizations, and outright misinterpretations. But authors who are critical of the Serbian Orthodox Church he accuses of "an anti-Serbian Orthodox bias"(16).

Mojzes is particularly unfair with the materials I gave him. First of all, all the materials were supposed to be for private use only, since they consisted of an unedited version of an article which was to be published in the United States (in Sabrina P. Ramet and Ljubisa S. Adamovic, eds., *Beyond Yugoslavia*, Boulder, CO.:Westview Press, 1993) and a draft version of another article. While he abundantly uses my materials, he rarely acknowledges the source. This is not, however, the gravest matter. Mojzes takes the case I used to illustrate Catholic challenges to communists in Croatia and Bosnia and Hercegovina and uses it as "proof" of the nationalism of the Catholic Church there.

So what are the manifestations of Croatian Catholics' nationalism according to Mojzes? Defending the right of Croats to use their language in their state; defending the right of their people to self-determination; raising their voice against the Serb oppression of Albanians in the Kosovo province (Mojzes himself says that "no decent human being could be silent issue"); being satisfied because of the election victory of the political party, which supposedly "publicly rehabilitated [the Catholic Church] after years of oppression"; and promoting "the cult of Alojzije Cardinal Stepinac," who was sentenced by the Communist court to sixteen years of imprisonment in an infamous showtrial typical throughout "Eastern Europe" during those years of terror. These are some of the reasons why Mojzes answers "with an emphatic yes" to the question of whether the Catholic Church of Croatia contributed to the outbreak of war " in a nationalistic manner" (p. 20).

I would say that Mojzes has lost all sense of fairness and appropriateness. This is manifest in his exclusively negative treatment of the Catholic Church as it is in his straining to justify the Serbs and their Church. Tragically, he seems to have adopted the position of much of the Serb propaganda. Although he is not uncritical toward the Serbian Orthodox Church, he uses every opportunity to diminish its responsibility and actually to blame others for its unchristian behaviour; most often it is the Catholic Church and the Croats who are blamed! The role of the Serbian Orthodox Church in the anti-Croatian hysteria prior to the beginning of aggression on Croatia is justified by what Croats did to Serbs during World War II; he actually says that it is a retribution (p. 23, note 33).

Mojzes counts me among those who are "too harsh on the Orthodox Church prelates and theologians and too lenient with the Catholic ones" (p. 23). Those who know me better will not count me among those who are uncritical of Catholic prelates. It is actually not a question of "harshness" and "leniency" but of looking at the behavior of those prelates with a set of moral principles. If the evidence showed that Catholic hierarchy said or did even vaguely similar things to the Orthodox hierarchy, it would not have received my approval. But I do not consider it fair nor responsible to invent misconduct of individuals just so that my writing may appear to the readers in the West more balanced. The consequences of the supposedly balanced reporting that equates the aggressor and the victim are visible in the shameful position of the world political leadership, but even more poignantly in Croatian hospitals and graveyards. They are also visible in articles that Mojzes and others of the same bent produce. Instead of representing ourselves as "decent human beings," as Mojzes is urging us to be, he shamelessly tries to cover and even justify the despicable conduct of Serbian Orthodox clergy, from priests and bishops to the very top of the hierarchical structure of that Church. What this does to ecumenism, I hardly have to explain.

Jure Kristo