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ON BEING AGENTS OF GOD'S PEACE

Relationship and Roles of

the Roman Catholic Church in Croatia
and

the Serbian Orthodox Church

in Ethnic Conflicts in Former
Yugoslavia

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INTRODUCTION

Former Yugoslavia was a small country on the Balkan peninsula in south-east Europe - one of the most ethnically, linguistically, and religiously complicated areas of the world. Its peoples have gained dark fame for the first time in their history during the second decade of the twentieth century, causing the first world-wide war ever. The other event that brought the area into the spotlight was the civil war in Croatia and Bosnia, two of the six former Yugoslav republics - the others are Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Slovenia. The civil strife, lasting from 1991 to the end of 1995, was in many ways specific: it took place very close to the heart of multicultural and multiconfessional Europe, between people who were members of well-established world religions: Catholicism, Orthodoxy, and Islam. Also, this war was waged by people who, until yesterday, lived peacefully together for decades, and suddenly began facing each other with weapons - a very sharp contrast, and a reason for alarm, to the young uniting Europe making its first steps. All of

these sorrowful events make this country an interesting and rich field of study.

This paper will try to cover the history of Christianity and ethnicity of peoples in this territory, and their mutual relationship, from the sixth century onward. The extensive chronological parts cannot offer a full explanation nor a solution for the recent fratricide, but they might be helpful in pointing out the reasons for division, in order to make them useful in future prevention of conflicts. A special attention has been paid to the peace initiatives of the churches during the civil war, for a very simple reason that the negative attitudes and statements have always been made known and often even abused by the press and the conflicting sides. The final sections have been devoted to the peace accord of the former Yugoslav war and the prospects of the reconciliation process between the Yugoslav peoples and their respective churches.

PART ONE: FORMATION OF NATIONS

THE FIRST SETTLERS

The story of South Slav peoples goes back as far as the sixth century, when a group of Slavic tribes came to this region. The Slavs belong to the Indo-European group of peoples whose origin is from East and Central Europe. They began to cross the Danube river to settle into the Balkans permanently. These tribes are the ancestors of Bosnian people today, and this is an explanation why three ethnic groups that played the most important roles in the Yugoslav conflict, Bosnian Muslims, Croats, and Serbs speak the same language. One of the answers why, then, the tribes have not developed into one single group lies in the Bosnian geography. Namely, Bosnia is a mountainous country, and the physical impassability of the mountain ranges enabled communication between the groups of peoples, and therefore the tribes were at first divided into two groups. On the other hand, it was a region surrounded by two powerful forces, the Eastern and Western parts of the Roman Empire. It did not take much for the invaders to fall under their neighbours' cultural and religious influence. At that time the division of the declining Roman Empire already existed and manifested itself very strongly. The borderline ran through the middle of Bosnia, from Lake Skutori in the south to river Sava in the north, and it is interesting to note that it almost follows the contemporary division line between the ethnic groups in Bosnia. The first records of

separate groups of Serbs and Croats date from the eighth century.

CATHOLICISM, ORTHODOXY AND ISLAM

After the great schism in 1054 the two branches of the Roman Empire became two branches of Christianity. Following the geographical division, Slovenia and Croatia in the west were Roman Catholic, and Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia in the east became Orthodox. Again due to the geography, Bosnia remained out of the domination of any of these spheres of influence. In the further course of history, in the 12th century, Croatia and Bosnia fell under the harsh rule of Catholic Hungary. At almost the same time, in the 13th century, the first Serbian independent kingdom was established with hegemony over much of the Balkans. The first bishop of the autonomous Serbian Church was Saint Sava, who is considered to be the father of both Serbian Orthodoxy and Serbian statehood. Nevertheless, the reign did not last long - at the end of the 14th century the Ottoman Turks, an Asiatic people from Asia Minor, invaded the whole Byzantium, conquering chronologically Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro and Bosnia. This Islamic empire ruled the Balkans for the next five hundred years. At the same time, Hungarian Empire merged with the Catholic Hapsburg regime from Austria, and these two big empires confronted each other for centuries in the Bosnian area. T. R. Gurr makes an interesting comparison of Serbs and Croats as brothers separated at birth:

"Many of the ethnic distinctions among the Southern Slavs of modern Yugoslavia can be traced to the arbitrary nature of imperial boundaries: Croats and Serbs of Yugoslavia ... are much like twins separated at birth...The Croats were subjected to harsher Hungarian suzerainty and the Serbs most often found themselves at the mercy of the Ottomans" ⁽¹⁾

THE OTTOMAN HERITAGE

The reign of Ottomans brought an important change in the religious milieu, because the new rulers also brought their religion, Islam. By the means of the *millet* system, where the population of the vast empire was divided not along linguistic but religious lines, the Ottoman rulers managed to run a multinational and non-assimilative state. When talking about the Ottoman rule, it must be stressed that it was rather tolerant toward other religions. All Christians were obliged to pay a tax called *haradj*, but that was their only obligation. Christians were considered to be a national and a religious minority, and the patriarch was at the same time considered to be the ethnarch, the leader of his people. Islamization was not done by force, and it was for that reason that both Orthodoxy and Catholicism survived,

but the privileged positions, nobility and riches were still kept for Muslims only. It led to many cases of voluntary conversion to Islam, and these were the origins of Bosnian Muslims today. In the meanwhile, the Catholic people living in Bosnia identified themselves with ethnic Croats, and the Orthodox with ethnic Serbs. The three neighbouring groups lived peacefully, yet, in the words of a contemporary Bosnian historian,

"For centuries the two communities, the Bosnian Muslims and the Christian *rayah*, lived not together but alongside each other. "⁽²⁾

Nevertheless, with the time the Ottoman system, that was very efficient at the beginning, was becoming more and more corrupted, the fact that was very much reflected in the position of the oppressed *rayah* (a common name for Christian serfs). In 1856, Sultan Abdul Medjid issued *Gatti-Gamayun*, which stated that Christians were granted the same rights as Muslims. In practice, this "liberation" meant that,

"Now they were obliged to count solely on their own resources, even lost many of their former rights and privileges." ⁽³⁾

PRECEDING THE FIRST WORLD WAR

The new treatment resulted in the whole second half of the 19th century characterised by Christian uprisings and Turkish retaliation. The very end of the century announced the total collapse of the Ottoman Empire. Serbia became an independent state, while Bosnia was annexed to Austria. At the beginning, Bosnian Serbs saw the new rulers as saviours from Islam, but soon were faced with new ways of oppression and proselytism. The end of the 19th century and the first years of the forthcoming one were also marked by the birth of the Yugoslav idea - union of all Slavic peoples into a common state. Yet, the displeasure of Serbian side with the treatment of Austrian government culminated in the assassination of the Austrian Archduke Ferdinand by young Serb nationalists, during his visit to Sarajevo, the Bosnian capital, in 1914. As reprisal, Austria attacked Serbia, Great Britain and Russia took Serbian side, and that was the beginning of the First World War that lasted until 1918.

THE BIRTH OF THE FIRST YUGOSLAVIA

With Austria and its allies defeated, the South Slav peoples finally found themselves in one state, named at first the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, and renamed after four years into the Kingdom of Yugoslavia ("land of South Slavs"). It was based on the Serbian monarchy system, and

started falling apart with the rise of fascism and nationalism. What were the reasons behind this union of peoples that have never been united before, since their arrival to the area? Here is a possible answer, given by Latinka Perovic:

"The Serbs identified themselves with Yugoslavia, perceiving it as their state, that is, for all intents and purposes, as an extended Serbia. The Croats and the Slovenes embraced Yugoslavia as a political solution based on their own political aspirations and political realism, given the correlation of forces at the end of the First World War. But they did not embrace Yugoslavhood as an idea of national unity."⁽⁴⁾

The kingdom was confronted with two very different adversaries - various national groups, who opposed the idea of unity, and the growing Communist Party that demanded the change of the political system. King Alexander was assassinated in 1934, and his son was only ten years old when he came to the throne.

PART TWO: WORLD WAR II AND ITS AFTERMATH

CAIN, ABEL AND THE PARTISANS

The World War II came to Yugoslavia in April 1941, when Belgrade was severely bombed by German air forces, which was a reaction to the great anti-Nazi demonstrations that had been organised two weeks earlier. The king and his government fled from the country, leaving chaos behind them. Croatia and Bosnia were united in the Independent Republic of Croatia that supported Nazis, Serbia was a puppet state run by the supporters of German occupiers, and all the other parts of Yugoslavia were taken by the surrounding countries. Still, at the very beginning of the war, the Yugoslav Communist Party led by Josip Broz Tito managed to mobilise people from all over the country who were against the occupation, and organised them into a resistance net and armed troops known as partisans. Partisans were guerrilla fighters who cherished the idea of the united country and were helped by Great Britain on that account. The movement grew stronger with time, and the end of the war found them as winners.

Although it ended in 1945, the World War II will remain a very painful memory in the history of Yugoslav peoples, due to the sorrowful fact that hundreds of thousands of people were killed not only by the occupiers, but also by the military forces of each ethnic group against the members of the other ones. There is a very strong disagreement between the two churches on the exact number of victims on Serb side. In the period from 1941-45 a great number of Serb

civilians was killed in the area of the then Independent Republic of Croatia. The Croat side ventured into underestimation, talking about tens of thousands of victims. On the other side, Serbs talked about 1.3 million people, and the solution was found in arithmetics - the official Yugoslav figure was about 700.000 people. On the Serbian side, there is a strong belief that these atrocities, that included massive deaths of Serbs in Croat concentration camps, can and should never be forgotten, and this issue was brought to surface again during the civil war. Here is an excerpt from an article published in 1992, in the official newsletter of the Serbian Orthodox Church in the US and Canada:

"Even Pope John Paul II in a recent letter to His Holiness Patriarch Pavle of the Serbian Orthodox Church said in reference to genocide, 'the difficult heritage of the past is deeply ingrained in the souls of one and the other (Serbs and Croats)'. Such an innocuous reference, and the ease with which he equates state-organised genocide with sporadic resistance and reprisal, ignores the importance of condemning this horrendous crime against humanity! As long as there is no acknowledgement of the truth, there can be no reconciliation."⁽⁵⁾

Another example of the strength of this unhealed wound comes from the letter written in 1991 by Patriarch Pavle to the chairman of the European Union, Hans Van Der Broek:

"After the Second World War, no one forced the Jews to live together with the Germans in a common state. The Serbs, however, were forced to live together with the Croats, admittedly within the boundaries of Yugoslavia."⁽⁶⁾

Yet, one of the facts that are often foreseen is that there have been several official apologies on the side of the Roman Catholic Church of Croatia. The first important statement was made by Bishop Pihler in 1963:

"In this country, during the last war, many of our Orthodox brothers were killed just because they were Orthodox. Those who have committed these murders were baptised and were called Catholics. These Christians have killed other people, also Christians, because they were not Croats and Catholics. With pain we admit this terrible error of these lost people, and we beg our brothers of the Orthodox faith for forgiveness, as Christ on the cross has forgiven all. Also we forgive all who have perhaps hated us and who have done injustices to us."⁽⁷⁾

Also, not long before the beginning of the civil war, in 1990, Cardinal Kuharic of Croatia wrote in a letter to Patriarch German:

"We regret and condemn all crimes that sons of the Croatian people, on whatever side or under whatever flag they were, have committed against the Serbian and other peoples."⁽⁸⁾

Unfortunately, it is mostly the case that statements of goodwill are often not well-known to the public.

THE COMMUNIST RULE

Nevertheless, the war ended in 1945, and the Communist Party was now ruling the country, which was after several changes named the Socialistic Federal Republic of Yugoslavia⁽⁹⁾, with J. B. Tito as the first (and the last) president. The communist ideology was very strict, especially in the post-war years, and this firm rule was justified by the need to keep stability in the country that was now under the political pressure from both the west (the US and Western Europe), and the east (the Soviet Union). In attempts to keep the political balance, Yugoslavia was soon one of the founders and leaders of the Non-Alignment movement. Another powerful binding force of the country was the very strong Yugoslav People's Army, known all around the world for its technological achievement, and which structure was comprised of 70% Serbs.

In order for the crimes and the bad blood from the past to be forgotten, national and religious feelings were suppressed with the idea of "brotherhood and unity", made up to reconcile the constituent nations that fought each other severely in the Second World War. Lacking a majority people, it "opted for cultural diversity in modern parlance the salad bowl rather than the melting pot."⁽¹⁰⁾ In spite of the attempts, this policy was not always successful. During the early seventies, the period also known as the "Croatian spring", the nationalist movement in Croatia initially gained many supporters, but the regime reacted to it, "as if it were nothing more than a separationist movement. Croatia was disciplined and silenced."⁽¹¹⁾

Regarding the position of churches during this period, it is important to stress again that religious feelings of peoples have been suppressed for ideological reasons but also the fear that the churches could serve as potential sources of nationalist feelings. The deep mistrust and even animosity between the churches and the state was not helped by legal liberalisation of religion during the sixties and seventies. Geert Van Dartel sees the churches under communism this way:

"None of the religious communities really felt free and at ease under the communist rule... They were constantly under attack, pressurised and marginalized as enemy-figures. The Roman Catholic Church in Croatia was labelled as 'clero-nationalist' and 'clero-fascist'; the Serbian Orthodox

Church was also labelled as extremely nationalistic... For more than 40 years the complexes and traumas that were very much present within the churches were kept under the surface".⁽¹²⁾

On the other side, the churches have very often used communism as an excuse for their own inability to keep pace with the modernisation and secularisation that was rapidly changing the profile of Yugoslav society. Their own slowness to recognise the challenges was masked with isolation imposed by the government. To some extent, the Roman Catholic Church in Croatia tried to face the problem of secularisation through good organisation of religious education and publishing new catechetical material, but the Serbian Orthodox Church and its theologians completely ignored the issue, "perhaps as a consequence of their image of religious truth as fixed and static."⁽¹³⁾

CATAclysm OF COMMUNISM

The president-for-life J. B. Tito died in 1980, and the following years were characterised with the incapability of the group presidency rule, emerging nationalism, and realisation that the relatively high standard of living, especially in comparison with other East European countries, was actually based on the money received from the International Monetary Fund. This severe debt crisis was accompanied by the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1989 and radical changes in the political systems of the surrounding countries.

With the fall of communism, the churches found themselves in a new situation. Finally free of oppression, the churches hoped to regain the influence they had before the communist rule. In a way, it was their opinion that they have deserved it, being for decades the only bearers of national identity. For instance, on one occasion, Patriarch Pavle of the Serbian Orthodox Church describes it as, "the centuries-long Guardian of Serbian spirituality and national and cultural-historical being"⁽¹⁴⁾

In that sense, the new governments and religious leaders worked hand in hand, because they both tried to erase the memory of the former rule. The churches were challenged to fill in the social gap left behind the long-lasting atheism. Yet, the flock has changed - after both the forty years of communism and the influence of the secularised Western Europe, the country was actually de-Christianised to a great extent. Pluralism brought in the game some new cultural shapers, and, among these, some new denominations or religions. Instead of joining forces and finding the real core of the problem (which always demands a certain effort), with their resources and energies limited, the churches used

an easier method that they knew to be useful from their past experience. They looked for a scapegoat to put the blame on, and subsequently turned against each other.

This phenomenon was reflected in two ways among Christians in the area of former Yugoslavia. One was the enmity between the two major churches, the Serbian Orthodox Church, and the Roman Catholic Church in Croatia, that was gradually fuelled with the rise of the ethnic conflict between Serbs and Croats. Another way is the phobic response to all the other denominations and new religious movements. It is especially a delicate affair in the case of many Protestant denominations, like for example the Baptist or the Methodist Church, that are now too easily mistaken with "sects". It is interesting to note that the members of these churches are also accused of "undermining the national cause", because being a "good Croat", for example, implies being a "good Catholic", and the identification of a religion with an ethnic group does not leave much space for alternatives in any direction.

PART THREE: THE CIVIL WAR

SEPARATIONIST MOVEMENTS

In 1991, the two richest republics, Slovenia and Croatia, both declared independence. About 82% of population in Slovenia were Slovenes, without any significant minority group, which made the separation rather "easy". Yet, in the case of Croatia it was much more difficult, due to the fact that 13% of its population were ethnic Serbs. Helped by the very strong Yugoslav People's Army, which was governed from Belgrade, ethnic Serbs who lived in Croatia took arms and fought the new government. Like a wave, the flames of war caught Bosnia and Herzegovina in April 1992, when Muslims (44% of the Bosnian population) and ethnic Croats (15%) declared independence from the Belgrade regime and elected their own government, while the Bosnian Serbs (33%) boycotted these elections. The leading political parties of all three sides organised their own (para)military forces, and the civil war that began lasted for more than four years. It was characterised by genocide, ethnic cleansing, concentration camps, mass murders and rape, siege and systematic destruction of towns and villages, more than 300.000 victims, and almost two million uprooted people.

FACING ETHNICITY

The civil war in Bosnia and Herzegovina was, at first sight, a classical example of a modern conflict - it is a conflict between three indigenous ethnic groups within a particular state. Nevertheless, there are voices stating that such a definition cannot be applied in the Bosnian case.

Primarily, there is a question of ethnicity. Namely, two of the groups, Serbs and Croats, are indisputably ethnic groups related to a particular religion, Orthodoxy and Catholicism, respectively, but the issue of the Bosnian Muslims as an ethnic group was many times defied by both the Serb and Croat side. Muslims from Bosnia have always been considered as a religious and cultural group, nevertheless, their definition as an ethnic group dates as late as 1974, when the right of a constituent nation was granted to this group by the late J. B. Tito. Even after this legalisation of their ethnic status, many Muslims still declared themselves officially as Yugoslavs, all the way up to the late eighties, when the rise of ethnic tensions in Bosnia brought about the awakening of the Muslim national identity, too.

Another question, related also to the primary concern, is the issue of being an indigenous group. There were attempts at, again both Serbs and Croats, to see Muslims in this area as intruders, connecting the beginning of Islam in Bosnia with the conquest of Bosnia by the Ottoman Empire in the fifteenth century. One view of this period is that Bosnian Muslims of today are descendants of Turkish invaders, therefore giving them the status of unwanted newcomers. The other view is that they are the descendants of islamized Slavs, which allegedly "legitimised" the claims of, for example, Croat side that the Bosnian Muslims are actually Croats. This idea has roots in the ideology of Ante Starcevic, "the father of Croatian nationalism" ⁽¹⁵⁾ from the second half of the nineteenth century. One slogan used during the civil war said that Muslims are actually "Croat flowers".

Yet, in any case, five hundred years is a period that is long enough for creating a sense of national identity within a group, especially bearing in mind the historical situation that for centuries constantly stressed if not national at least the religious difference. In his view of a similar situation, negating Palestinian identity by the Israelis, Nicholas Wolterstorff said that,

"One of the surest ways to intensify a group's feeling of national identity, where those are weak, is to wound the group. If Palestinians were not a nation, as so many Jewish leaders have insisted, they have certainly become one" ⁽¹⁶⁾

Another argument in this discussion could be that ethnic groups are self-defining. On the contrary to the case of religion, there are no rules declaring who can be a member of a certain ethnic group, or what the group itself is, and therefore creating national identity is a long-lasting but spontaneous process. Nevertheless, sometimes it happens that a certain criteria formation appears within a group. In the

framework of Bosnian war, members of the same ethnic group were described as, for example, "good Serbs" or "bad Serbs":

"A person of Serbian 'descent' who rejects the national identity crafted by the leaders of the Serbian community and wishes to participate in politics as an individual or through a civic party or broad coalition, does not present an alternative Serbian or civic identity. She is merely a traitor to the nation, characterised in the media as a self-hater or collaborator with the enemy. Members of the peace movement in Serbia are a good example".⁽¹⁷⁾

NATIONALISM - THE SOCIAL PLAGUE OF THE CENTURY

This quotation is also a good example of nationalism in full bloom, when it has reached such an extent that all that is of concern is The Nation. N. Woltenstorff has given his definition of nationalism as:

"A nation's preoccupation with its own nationhood. Instead of the members simply living their life together as a nation, they become preoccupied with their national existence - rather like the man who constantly checks his pulse rather than simply going about his tasks and letting his heart do its work".⁽¹⁸⁾

The national being gains the supreme importance, and the interest of the group supersedes the interests of an individual within the group itself. And, if such is a case of compatriots, what could be the destiny of dominant ethnic minorities? They are unfortunately in most of the cases left with:

"Only two choices: either to emigrate, under varying degrees of duress, or to accept the status of second-hand citizens, with varying degrees of deprivation of rights and repression. There is never any other choice"⁽¹⁹⁾

Here Wolterstorff was talking about the peaceful choices, but regretfully there is a violent one, too. The minorities feel so much excluded from the benefits of the state that the general feeling becomes the one that trying to change the situation as such by force cannot make things worse than they are. In the case of the war in former Yugoslavia, it happened that primarily in 1991 the Croatian government did not show any desire to accommodate political and cultural interests of the Serb minority. The response was the latter fighting the government they found oppressive. In the case of Bosnia, the Muslim-Croat government was trying to assure again the Serb minority that their rights will be dutifully respected. Nevertheless, after the Croatian experience,

there was not much confidence left with Serb politicians and their followers.

It would be interesting to see how the problem of ethnic groups was viewed generally through the prism of the state's well-being. Immanuel Kant thought that:

"Nature employs two means to keep peoples from being mixed and to differentiate them: the difference of language and of religion. These differences occasion the inclination toward mutual hatred and the excuse for war; yet at the same time they lead, as culture increases and men gradually come closer together, toward a greater agreement on principles of peace and understanding."⁽²⁰⁾

It happened that, not just in the civil war but on many occasions throughout the history in former Yugoslavia, the "inclination toward mutual hatred" often took the role of the winner very easily. Another remark related to the overall situation would be that all of the post-communists governments of former Yugoslav republics claim to be democratic, and at the same time exercise oppression or even tacitly approve of the ethnic cleansing of minorities, which is somewhat in opposition to the opinions of J. Burnham:

"The fundamental characteristic of democracy ... is the concession of the right of political expression to minorities",⁽²¹⁾

and Lord Acton, according to whom,

"The most certain test by which we judge whether a country is really free is the amount of security enjoyed by minorities",⁽²²⁾

Obviously, in that sense, all of these new governments still have an enormous task in front of them if they would really like to prove the democracy and freedom they allegedly grant to all of their citizens.

THE CHURCHES' RESPONSE TO NATIONALISM

Religion and the issue of ethnicity have always been closely linked, as very important components of group identity, and also as being able to raise the level of human passion in conflicts. For these reasons, and in an area marked by constant warfare, the role of religions in the Balkans politics has never been simple. From the eight century onwards both Catholicism and Orthodoxy have been the keepers of national identity of the related ethnic groups. During the communists' time it was done under suppression, but both the churches and the nations managed to survive. With the

fall of communism and ethnic conflicts erupting, "yesterday's dreams have turned into today's nightmares." ⁽²³⁾ The change was obvious long time before the actual emergence of violent conflicts. Stella Alexander, a Quaker scholar, noted it a whole decade before the beginning of the civil war:

"Religion, which in the beginning nurtured a sense of national identity as one way of resisting assimilation by alien powers, has been overtaken by the growth of nationalism and has itself been weakened by secularisation of present-day society; today (1982) there can no doubt which is the stronger force. It is nationalism which feeds religious feelings, while the churches cling desperately to their role as guardians of the soul of the nation." ⁽²⁴⁾

The civil war in former Yugoslavia was not a religious war, and this a statement that was on numerous occasions repeated by religious leaders and theologians. Still, talking about religion, violence and conflict resolution, Marc Gopin warns that:

"There are two dangers to highlight the importance of religion: (1) that analysts and activists, in their enthusiasm about religion's positive contribution to conflict resolution overlook its violent potential, and (2) that analysts will overemphasise religion's role and not see it as a part of a complex array of factors that generate violence and peacemaking." ⁽²⁵⁾

Therefore, the roles of churches should not be taken as being the primary generators of violence. Yet, accepting a statement like, for instance, that "Islam in no way contributed to the setting of the bloody scene in Bosnia" ⁽²⁶⁾ for granted, without the thorough discussion of the relation between the religions and political strategies that caused the war, would not be realistic.

One of the most precise analyses of the partition of religions in the Yugoslav conflict was written by Srdjan Vrcan, professor of law at the University of Split, Croatia. Here is the way Vrcan examines the most important aspects of the process of religionization of politics:

1. A systematic and permanent inclination to lend essentially religious attributes and connotations to some key political concepts in everyday usage ('sacred Croatia', 'celestial Serbia', 'sacred will of the nation', and so on.)
2. The ontologism of existing social, political and cultural differences, projecting them on to a metaphysical backdrop... presenting the conflict between different and

opposed human types, irreconcilable cultures, antagonistic types of civilisations.

3. A pervading and systematic manichaenism applied to current conflict... one of the opposed parties being portrayed as an angelic personification of Good and the other as a diabolic incarnation of Evil.

4. An interpretation of national history in terms of a sacred martyrology (mostly on the part of the Serbia) or Calvary (the case of Croatia).

5. The nations involved are eternalised in terms of some kind of *Urvolk* and in terms of their fundamental allegedly suprahistorical immutable qualities.

6. Official interpretations of recent political events to a theory of diabolic conspiracy (involving Masons, Jews, the Comintern, the Vatican) against this or that nation."⁽²⁷⁾

Now, what happened to the teachings of the churches? Although "the church has a tradition of millennia, while politicians cannot count more than on life-time"⁽²⁸⁾, they have lost this race under the pressure of every day politics. What the Christians involved in this conflict have forgotten is stated by Wolterstorff as:

"As Christian struggle to diminish the conflict of nation against the nation in the world today they will not forget the life of that other nation to which they belong, that 'holy nation', in Peter's words, the church of Jesus Christ - 'elect from every nation, yet one o'er all the earth'. After Pentecost God's chosen people on earth no longer excludes the members of any natural grouping - neither Greek nor Jew, female nor male, slave nor free. It does not exclude them because it transcends them. Without destroying all those old loyalties, it transforms them: they become enrichments of this one new nation. So at least it was meant to be."⁽²⁹⁾

PART FOUR: PEACE AT LAST

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE COIN

The peace process can never begin with a peace settlement - it should rather be said that the settlement is a crown to the long-lasting efforts. Fortunately, not all the religious leaders in former Yugoslavia have forgotten that the basis of the Christian faith, according to the Archbishop John Foley, is shown in three levels of biblical love:

"Do unto others as you would have them do unto you;"

"Love your neighbour as you love yourself;"

"Love one another as I have loved you". ⁽³⁰⁾

What follows is a chronological presentation of the most significant peacemaking initiatives coming from the Serbian Orthodox Church, and the Roman Catholic Church in Bosnia and Croatia.

The first one to be mentioned is a prayerful gathering at Assisi, Italy, in January 1992, announced by Pope John Paul II "to invoke peace on Europe and particularly on the Balkans." ⁽³¹⁾ Besides Catholic Episcopal Conferences, representatives of 47 delegations came also from the Orthodox, Anglican, Protestant, and Old Catholic churches and communities, as well as persons of the Jewish and Muslim religions, who prayed according to their traditions. The Serbian Patriarch Pavle was unable to attend the meeting, yet in the message he sent to the Holy Father, the Patriarch asked for a delegation of the Serbian Orthodox Church to be received in Rome, with a view of a possible meeting between the Patriarch and the Pope ⁽³²⁾ .

This visit took place in April 1993, when Metropolitan Amfilohije of Montenegro and the Coastland, and Bishop Irinej of BaÅka were received by the Pope and had discussions with the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. The theme of the discussions was the role of Christians in the current situation involving the countries of former Yugoslavia and the Balkans, where a profound process of reconciliation between the various peoples was urgently needed. ⁽³³⁾

Another event of great importance took place at the Sarajevo airport in May 1994, where an Orthodox delegation, led by the Russian patriarch Aleksij II and the Serbian patriarch Pavle, met a Catholic delegation led by Cardinal Kuharić and the Archbishop of Vrhbosna (Sarajevo) Msgr Puljić. However, the Islamic community refused to take part in a meeting with Patriarch Pavle, and were later informed on the agenda by Cardinal Kuharić. The Orthodox delegation also used this opportunity to meet with Radovan Karadžić, the then leader of Bosnian Serbs, at his headquarters at Pale.

In September 1994, one million worshippers gathered in Zagreb, Croatia, for a mass celebrated by Pope John Paul II to mark the ninth centenary of the Church in this country. To the disappointment of Croatian nationalists, the Pope used this opportunity to call for the solidarity of the peoples of former Yugoslavia and declare that peace in the Balkans is not a utopia:

"The present tragic divisions and tensions should not make us forget that there are many elements which unite the peoples who are at war today... Beyond all the differences, origins, nationalities, there is a basic unity linking every human being, and we Christians are called to witness to it with special strength and responsibility. Would it not be intolerable hypocrisy to repeat the *Our Father* while harbouring feelings of resentment and hatred, or even ideas of retaliation and revenge? ... It is time for the Church in Zagreb and in the whole of Croatia to become promoters of mutual forgiveness and reconciliation. 'To ask forgiveness and to forgive': the commitment incumbent on all can be summarised in these words, if there is a desire to take firm preliminary steps to reach a true and lasting peace." ⁽³⁴⁾

Just one of many meetings convened by these ecumenical bodies, and the last one in this presentation, is the meeting with bishops of the Council of European Bishops' Conferences (CCEE) and the Conference of European Churches (CEC), and representatives of religious communities in the countries of former Yugoslavia in PãfÂcs, Hungary, in July 1995. In their joint statement, the church leaders underlined that,

"By protecting and helping each other, and by building up mutual respect and understanding through dialogue, confidence and security can be enhanced... Pessimism and despair can be challenged, if reconciliation is shown and proved to be both necessary and possible." ⁽³⁵⁾

During the same year there were also two major initiatives of the Serbian Orthodox Church in promoting co-operation with the Catholic Church in former Yugoslavia. The first was a visit of an Orthodox bishop on behalf of the Holy Synod to the bishop of the Catholic community in Banjaluka, Msgr Franjo Komarica, as sign of fraternity in his isolation. The other event was participation of Bishop Lavrentije of _abac - Valjevo in the "Pilgrimage of the European Youth" in Loreto, Italy, September 1995. It was reported that, "not only did the Patriarch allow Bishop Lavrentije to accept the invitation, but it was the whole episcopate gathered at the Council of Bishops of the SOC, who decided to send him as their representative." ⁽³⁶⁾

Yet, it would be highly unfair to draw this chapter to a close without paying due respect to many unknown lay persons and clergy in all the war-affected countries, who all throughout the war organized prayers for peace, meetings and workshops for religious people from the opposed sides, helped in the distribution of interchurch humanitarian aid, and other activities that showed really a genuine Christian love towards their sisters and brothers in Jesus Christ.

THE DAYTON AGREEMENT

As an answer to these prayers, after four and a half years of unsuccessful cease-fires, the peace agreement was finally signed by the presidents of Bosnia, Croatia and Serbia in Dayton, Ohio, in December 1995. All the Serb occupied territories in Croatia were given back to this new state. Bosnia and Herzegovina is a united country that now consists of the Muslim-Croat federation and the Republic of Srpska, the entity held by Bosnian Serbs. The recent democratic elections gave no reason for hope - the same parties that started the war were elected again. Repatriation of Bosnian refugees, that is urged by some Western European countries led by Germany, is almost impossible, because the homes of these people are mostly taken by other refugees who were also forced to leave their homes somewhere else, and so on, in a vicious circle. Another dark cloud above the future of Bosnia are landmines, spread across the whole territory, and especially along the inter-ethnic boundary lines.

Yet, let us go back to the Peace Agreement, supported by the powerful presence of the multinational Implementation Forces (IFOR). But is it not *contradictio in adjecto* - peace by force? Can there be reconciliation if the peace did not come from the hearts of the conflicting sides, out of the genuine desire for the end of the war, but just because it was enforced by the foreign powers and ensured by their military? Robert Schreier calls this kind of process "reconciliation as hasty peace", that

"tries to escape an examination of the causes of suffering. If the causes of suffering are not addressed, suffering is likely to continue; the wheel of violence keeps turning, and more and more people get crushed. Reconciliation is a process that cannot be foreshortened; it keeps its own timetables." ⁽³⁷⁾

To prove the accuracy of this thesis in the Bosnian case, here is a fragment of the report on the first phase of implementation of the Peace Agreement by UN High Representative Carl Bildt from March 1996:

"Three months after the Peace Agreement was signed, we must regrettably conclude that the forces of ethnic separation are still far stronger than the forces of ethnic reintegration... No lasting peace can be built without a genuine commitment to reconciliation, but nothing is as difficult after a war as bitter and brutal as the war in Bosnia has been as this. Reconciliation will be possible when there is a common perception that justice for all will be created, and when the energies and efforts of the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina are concentrated less on the

legacies of the bitter past than on the promise of a common future." ⁽³⁸⁾

The Peace Agreement found very diverse response with the leaders of the religious communities in the area. Cardinal Vinko Puljić, head of the Catholic Church in Bosnia, has sharply criticised the US-brokered Dayton accord to end the Balkan war for ignoring the "yearning of nations for freedom" and the requirements of "peace and justice". In his opinion, the accord could not be "trusted or celebrated", since it "legalised ethnic cleansing" in a region where rival ambitions still existed for a "Greater Serbia" and "Greater Croatia". "Perhaps this peace is just an extension of the war, albeit not quite as dramatic," the cardinal said. ⁽³⁹⁾

Still, his remarks were very much in the opposition with the statement on the Dayton Agreement given by the Pope, who said it marked "an important movement in Europe's history" and urged the international community to "show real spiritedness in helping the former Yugoslavia's material, social and spiritual reconstruction." ⁽⁴⁰⁾

Within the Serbian Orthodox Church reactions to the agreement were different as well. During the talks in November 1992, before the accord was signed, Patriarch Pavle approved the role of the Serbian president Milošević as a negotiator on behalf of all Serbs. When the negotiations were successfully ended, some members of the Holy Synod openly castigated the Patriarch, threatening with their own resignations unless the Patriarch withdrew his approval of Milošević's negotiating position. Beleaguered, the Patriarch finally complied. ⁽⁴¹⁾

IS RECONCILIATION A REAL OPTION?

Now that peace has been at least technically achieved, the next "hot issue" on the Bosnian agenda is reconciliation. The primary question is, can there be any reconciliation without justice? And, if so, how can justice be done without being subjective, and without causing further conflicts? The atrocities of the former Yugoslav civil war are a fact, and the charges against war criminals have been pressed at the International Court of Justice in the Hague. For instance, Simon Wiesenthal described the Serb regime's assault against Bosnia as a clearcut case of genocide, adding that, "You don't have to kill everyone to have genocide" ⁽⁴²⁾ Yet, the attitude of Justice Richard Goldstone, the Prosecutor of the International Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia, seems to be somewhat less explicit in that sense. When asked about the rough balance of crimes committed by Serbs, Croats and Muslims throughout the war, he answered that,

"It's not a judgement. It would be unhelpful, improper and inappropriate to say that one side is more guilty than the other." ⁽⁴³⁾

War criminals must be punished, it is acknowledged on all sides, but it is almost always followed by the defensive addition that it was not "our side", but "the other". In his *Notes on Nationalism*, George Orwell said that,

"The nationalist not only does not disapprove on atrocities committed by his own side, but he has a remarkable capacity for not even hearing about them!" ⁽⁴⁴⁾

The next question is the one of the appropriateness of reconciliation itself, formulated as the doubt that it is not the right time for reconciling the Balkan enemies. There was too much bloodshed and atrocities during the war, and some time is required for the healing of wounded memories - this is a very common attitude. Yet, will not the process escape control if it is given too much time on its own? The experiences with a similar situation following the Second World War did not end with a constructive outcome. On the contrary, the suppression of the hurt made it explode almost half a century later. Just like there can never be a suitable moment for waging a war, it is always a suitable time for reconciliation. This process is difficult and extremely demanding, and historical circumstances in ante-bellum periods are never kind to it, so, for that reason, any delay may just cause multiple additional obstacles.

Reconciliation also does not have a "suitable" place, it can equally be initiated on the side of the victimised as on the side of the oppressors. It is the opposite of forgetting - the memory should not be erased, but, at the same time, it must be treated in a very careful manner. Instead of being a threat and fuel for future conflicts, it should be a warning of the road to hell where chauvinism and exclusion can lead. The boundary between exclusion and embrace is called forgiveness, ⁽⁴⁵⁾ plain, and pure, Christian forgiveness, for our Father forgives us as we are forgetting the trespasses of others. Can churches get involved in the reconciliation process if they have taken part in the conflict? Their involvement is an obvious fact, and though the former Yugoslav war was not a religious war in the same sense as, for instance, the crusades, it would be far from truth to say that the churches have been passive. Nevertheless, it could be viewed as a positive challenge to their leaders and congregations to compensate for the misdeeds of the past. For, finally, for Christians reconciliation is a mission of supreme importance. It is a ministry given by the Lord (2 Cor 5:18) and before facing God we must be reconciled with our brothers (Mat 5:23-24). Christian faith has to be proved as *orthopraxis*, because

"Christian theology does not stop at these doctrinal issues. If we are to love God, we are to love our neighbours too; the word of reconciliation applies also to human conflict situations, and there requires the same acceptance of both grace and responsibility " ⁽⁴⁶⁾

In this case, both Catholics and Orthodox in the area of former Yugoslavia have responsibility and a task in the reconciliation process in their war-ravaged countries.

SIGNS OF HOPE

Apart from the change of concrete war policy, accompanied, unfortunately, with just few adjustments within the political structures on all sides, there have been obvious changes in the attitudes of the churches as well. These shifts have been described by Srđan Vrcan ⁽⁴⁷⁾ as a change from unconditional and total legitimacy given previously to the dominant political strategies of some kind of conditional and limited legacy, as well as an erosion of the previous religious unanimity in this respect. Nevertheless, regardless of the initial extent, it is still a shift in a positive direction, and it also might represent a germ of future development of churches' response to temporary affairs that would be significantly less dependent on everyday course of political decisions. In the Serbian Orthodox Church this change has been seen in the dissent with the official Serb state politics and president Milošević, improving openness, and strengthening ecumenical cooperation on all levels. The Roman Catholic Church in Croatia began to confront nationalism and stand for human rights, with preparedness to look for the culprits within its own ranks.

In the practical sense, proofs of this new course are evident. There are several inter-religious dialogue initiatives developing at this moment, but here the two most important ones will be mentioned. The first Department for Inter-Religious Dialogue in Europe will be opened in Sarajevo, at the city's partly destroyed university. A co-founder, Paul Mojzes, editor of the US-based *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, said that the department would include professors from all religious traditions, as well as lecturers on ethics and peace-making, and would aim to rebuild interfaith tolerance after four years of war. An ecumenical committee would ensure the "political independence" of department staff-members from their respective religious groups. Mojzes also said he believed the new department's inter-religious character would help minority Serbs and Croats to regain confidence. ⁽⁴⁸⁾

Soon after this idea was launched, there was another international initiative to cement peace in the Balkans. Namely, the leaders of former Yugoslavia's Catholic and Serbian Orthodox Churches have agreed to cooperate on a joint history project, under the auspices of a Vienna-based commission. This project would promote a "new way of thinking" about the region's inter-faith conflicts, and it has been personally approved by Patriarch Pavle of Belgrade and Cardinal Kuharić of Zagreb. The commission is sponsored by Pro Oriente, an independent forum established by Cardinal König of Austria in 1964 for promoting ties between Eastern and Western churches. Its working groups would study the role of propaganda and "hostile images", and recruit young scholars for specific research tasks, with the aim of an objective picture of recent Balkan history which can be accepted by all sides. ⁽⁴⁹⁾

CONCLUSION

The urgent need for reconciliation among the peoples and religions of former Yugoslavia is a screaming fact. If the long-awaited peace does not find a solid ground in the true conversion of the hearts of people, it might easily be broken by new acts of violence, as continuation of the overwhelming conflicts from the past. And what could be the final message for the leaders and congregations of the divided religious communities? Here are some suggestions given at the Ecumenical Dialogue on Reconciliation held in Belgrade, Serbia, February 1996, and organized by the Conference of European Churches and Theological Faculty of the Serbian Orthodox Church, with participants representing Christian denominations from Bosnia, Croatia, Serbia, and Europe and the United States. ⁽⁵⁰⁾

Reconciliation is at the center of all life. It begins first with the self and one's own community, and requires a readiness to repent, forgive and accept forgiveness.

Reconciliation calls for action. Without repentance and compassionate and supportive action reconciliation is an empty word.

Reconciliation involves taking risks and responsibilities. The steps taken by Christians and their neighbours at the local level can be a powerful challenge to national and international leaders.

Finally, there is an eternal reminder and example to be followed - the teaching and life of Jesus Christ, the message of love and peace he endowed us with. In the same manner, with simply remaining faithful to the spirit of their religion, and approving that we are all children of one father, Catholics and Orthodox believers from Bosnia, Croatia and Serbia could give their deepest and most profound contribution to reconciliation in their countries.

END NOTES

(1) T. R. Gurr, *Minorities at Risk*. US Institute of Peace, Washington, DC, 1993, p. 184.

(2) V. Kesic, "Bosnia: History and Religion", in B. Nassif (ed.), *New Perspectives on Historical Theology*. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1996, p. 83.

(3) A. Schmemman, *The Historical Road of Eastern Theology*. St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, p. 273.

(4) L. Perovic, "Yugoslavia Was Defeated from Inside", in S. Biserko (ed.), *Yugoslavia: Collapse, War, Crimes*. Belgrade Circle & Radio B92, Belgrade, 1993, p. 60.

(5) *The Path of Orthodoxy*, USA; January 1992.

(6) The letter of Patriarch Pavle to the chairman of the EC, Netherlands Minister Hans Van Der Broek, on 24 October 1991, as quoted in *Serbian Orthodox Church - Its Past and Present*, Vol. 8, Belgrade, 1992, p.6.

(7) G. Van Dartel, "The Nations and the Churches in Yugoslavia", in *Religion, State and Society*, Vol. 20, Nos 3 & 4, p. 286.

(8) *ibid.*

(9) The republics that made the federation were Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Slovenia.

(10) H. Poulton, *Minorities in the Balkans*. The Minority Rights Group, London, 1989, p. 39.

(11) L. Perovic, "Yugoslavia Was Defeated from Inside", in S. Biserko (ed.), *Yugoslavia: Collapse, War, Crimes*. Belgrade Circle & Radio B92, Belgrade, 1993, p. 62

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