

SOME PROBLEMS OF THE RELIGIOUS HISTORY OF BULGARIA AND FORMER YUGOSLAVIA

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The relatively small area of the Balkan peninsula is populated by a great number of nations and ethnic groups. The annals of this region show the great role of religion in history and prove that religion can not be regarded just as pure implementation of the Divine principles, for it is strongly influenced by multiple factors. Politics, culture, and religion are interwoven in a syncretic unity. The history of the Balkans has brought many hard and brutal moments to all the people residing in the area, thus resulting in much hostility and alienation. At the same time, religions, traditions, and culture are very close since the centuries of coexistence shaped the human and social psychology in a similar manner. Now that some of these lands are again in the flames of war and insecurity, it is important to find other alternatives for peaceful solution of the problems.

It is hard to discuss all the ethnic groups and religious denominations and movements of this part of the world in a short paper. Therefore, I decided to focus my attention on the peoples of the former Yugoslavia and Bulgaria. In both cases, the majority of the population is of Slavic origin. Their major Christian denomination is Orthodox, and their history during the times of the Ottoman empire was relatively analogous. All these factors, as well as the similarities in their national psychology determine their common ethnic and religious characteristics and problems.

The Balkans - The Powder Keg

The floating metaphor about the Balkans which became popular before World War I describes very well the troubled nature of the Balkans. It applies not only to the political, but also to the cultural and religious life of the people in this region. The whimsical and distinctive nature of the Christian religion practiced in the Central Balkans took its shape in the times of the first Balkan state--Bulgaria.

The relationship between the development of the theology and the development of the nation is very clear and strong in the Balkans. The pagan Prince Boris I (or Bogoris, d. 907) of Bulgaria accepted Christianity in 864 and made it the official religion of his state. He adopted Christianity from Constantinople. Serbia, which covers today Southern Dalmatia, Herzegovina, Serbia proper, and other neighboring areas, also accepted Christianity through Byzantine and Bulgarian missionaries in the 10th century. The process of baptizing the peoples of Bulgaria and later Serbia was a painful and bloody one. In many cases, people were brought to the new religion by force and continued to

worship secretly their pagan gods. Gradually, this tendency to keep the pagan beliefs influenced the Orthodox Christianity practiced in these lands.

Some historians see one of the reasons for the conflict between Constantinople and Rome in their rivalry to attract the powerful at that time Bulgaria. After the split of the Eastern and Western churches in the 11th century, the region was under the powerful influence of the Eastern church.

However, the real clash between religions came with the invasion of the Islamic Ottoman empire in the 14th century. During the period of Ottoman rule in the Balkans, as many as four different types of religious interference could be observed: forced conversion to Islam, voluntary conversion provoked and facilitated by ideological, economic, and cultural reasons, influence of Islam upon Christian theology and culture, and Christian influence upon Islam practiced in the area. The cultural interaction was not necessarily violent. People had to live together, observing some unspoken agreements which existed between them, seeking a certain religious, cultural and daily common ground which would satisfy their mutual interests.

Specifics of Islam in the Balkans

Islam could not evade religious interference. The influence of Christianity on Islam was not as strong because of various theological as well as political reasons. Nevertheless, it existed. At the end of the 14th century and the beginning of the 15th, there were two Islamic religious leaders whose efforts were directed toward the creation of a syncretic Muslim-Christian religious movement--Nasimi and Badr al Din. Both were Sufis and were connected in some way with the Balkans: Nasimi spent a long time in Rumelia (South Bulgaria and Greek Macedonia), Badr al Din's movement (1400-1416) was spread in both Asia Minor and the Eastern Balkans. However, it is difficult to declare those two movements a mere result of Eastern Orthodox influence.

During the 15th through the 18th centuries, other Islamic dervish orders gained popularity in the Balkans. These orders were active in various regions of the Ottoman empire. The dervish sects were syncretic Muslim orders that came to Bulgaria following the Turkish conquerors. Being officially Sunni (Orthodox), they also shared the Sufi (mystical) ideas of Islam. They combined elements of Christian popular beliefs such as veneration of saints and holy shrines, confession, the sacrament of holy communion, etc. with traditional Islam.

Two syncretic Muslim sects were established in Eastern Bulgaria through the 15th and the 16th centuries. One was the Bedreddin order which followed a policy of religious tolerance and propagated the merging of Islam, Christianity, and Judaism into a single faith. The other dervish order was that of Bektashi. It was formed as early as the 13th century by the semimythical figure of Haji Bektash Veli. By the early 16th century, the Ottoman authorities officially recognized the Bektashi order as Sunni and attached it to the Janissary corps as its spiritual representative.

The dervishes were babas, a combination of holy man, miracle worker, medicine man, etc. and were often regarded as living saints. The dervishes easily adjusted to the local customs which they adopted in addition to their own Muslim customs. What emerged was a curious variety of European or rather Balkan folk-Islam that included icons, baptism in order to prevent mental illness, and many other basically non-Muslim rites. Those newly converted by the dervishes brought with them their Christian and old pagan traditions which contributed to the original nature of the Balkan Islam.

During the different stages of the history of the Balkan states, there was also a noticeable political control of these "Christian" states over the Muslim population living in their territories. This influence did not have a pure religious character, rather it was connected with the political and national tendencies, but it had a great influence on the Muslim culture of the Balkans. For instance, the number of Slav Muslims in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has fluctuated greatly--according to the census of 1953 there were 1,591, in 1961 - 3,002, in 1971 - 1,248, while a sudden dramatic increase in 1981 brought their number to 39,555. In the 1970s, the Slav Muslims established their political organization, thus gaining more self-confidence. The traditionally hostile attitude of the government toward Slav Muslims induced the majority of them to identify themselves as ethnic Turks, which gave them a slightly better social position. Tito's conjectures about Islam and Muslims created a strong anti-Muslim propaganda at the end of the 1970s and the 1980s. The state-controlled media in former Yugoslavia in those years was supportive of the idea of unification of the peoples of Yugoslavia. Many provocative articles against Muslims appeared in the post-Tito times, and it is clear now that this propaganda totally succeeded. Speculations such as "Egypt was once a Christian country, now it is Muslim; at one time Turkey was a land of Greeks and Armenians. . . there is a collection of commands in the Shari'a which allows for extermination of those who believe in other religions" created anti-Muslim attitudes especially towards 'the traitors'--the Slav Muslims. These attitudes are now among the driving forces of the war in Bosnia.

After the Bulgarian liberation in 1878, a strong wave against the national minorities was incited by the government. Of course, the main victims of these attempts for assimilation were the Turks and the non-Turk Muslim population. Muslim schools were closed, many Turks emigrated to the Ottoman empire. A similar pattern could be observed in Bulgaria and former Yugoslavia after World War II when anti-Turk sentiments were being supported by the communist regimes. The fear of armed revolt and of a potential Muslim state on part of their territories determined the hostile and often aggressive policy of the governments of both countries. Another objective of this policy was the unification and de-religionization of the population.

Influence of the Muslim State and Traditions on Christianity

It is natural that the Christianity of the Balkans is affected strongly by Islam. For instance, a specific feature of Balkan Orthodox Christianity is that it is being used as a powerful tool to determine nationality. The conversion to Islam during the five centuries of Ottoman domination affected strongly the ethnic equilibrium in the region. Christianity here is strongly connected with the idea of national values. In numerous cases, religious

leaders became leaders of armed actions and rebels--it happened also in the 19th and 20th century, and not only against Muslims, but also against the official authorities in post-Ottoman periods. In 1383, when the Turks besieged the capital of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom - Turnovo, the Bulgarian Patriarch Evtimius led the defense of the city. Several centuries later, in 1714, when the idea of national liberation became extremely strong in Serbia the vladika (bishop) of Montenegro Daniel not only made a pilgrimage to St. Petersburg to visit the Russian czar Peter the Great and to ask for help in the anti-Turkish revolt, but was one of the leaders of the Montenegro rebellion. In the second half of the 19th century, the Bulgarian deacon Vasil Levski built a national resistance network in Bulgaria and part of Macedonia. In 1923, when Bulgaria was already independent, one of the main leaders of the antigovernment peasant and worker September revolt was the Red Priest, Andrei. In Serbia of the late 1980s, some religious leaders like Mother Tatyana took a stand for armed defense of Christianity against the Albanian Muslims. However the influence of these contemporary religious leaders could not be compared with that of the past.

During the Ottoman yoke, Orthodox Christianity strove to preserve its traditions and theological ideas. The rituals, the canonical divine service, the icon traditions were kept alive and preserved during the centuries. Yet the architecture of the sacred buildings - churches, chapels and monasteries was degraded and even affected by the Muslim traditions during the 14th-15th centuries. According to the Ottoman laws and regulations, the church should be very modest without a bell tower or ornaments and not taller than the Islamic buildings in the town or village. Inside the churches, however, through the icons and the mural paintings, the Christians created their own miraculous and sacred world where the alien religious and cultural power was not valid. Yet even in the Orthodox Christian iconic painting, one could find slight traces of Islamic influence. This influence appears not in the images; it would be impossible since, according to the Muslim theology, icons and any images are prohibited in the mosques, but in the colors and ornaments. In the mural paintings, the ornamental elements--natural and geometric--became more popular. To the basic colors--white, blue, golden and red-- was added the black, a practice which could be assumed to have been brought by the Turks.

A strong dash of fatalism can be observed in the Orthodox Christian traditions. Probably one of the reasons for this is the same tendency in Islam. It is important to say that this fatalism is mainly optimistic because it is connected, as it is in Islam, with God's wish. Another feature of Balkan Orthodox Christianity could be considered a result of the centuries of coexisting with Muslims on the one hand and the powerful nationalism on the other. This is the particularly strong veneration of the saints-martyrs. Many of them are martyrs for the Christian faith and are not connected with the Muslim influence, but others, as the canonized goldsmith Georgi Sofiiski, are symbol of the Christian resistance to the Islam.

The cosmopolitan character of the Balkan cities of the Ottoman empire in the 17th-19th centuries was remarkable. The religious fusion was especially strong there because the different religious communities, although separated, were living close to each other. Some Islam customs were adopted by the Christians from the cities. For instance, people

who made a pilgrimage to the grave of Jesus (Bozhi grob) in Jerusalem were surrounded by respect and added to their surname the title hajia; the parallel with one of the basic Islamic pillars is more than obvious.

All the above mentioned represents rather indirect influences of Islam on Christianity. Of course, there was also a strong direct influence. If we turn to the documents of the Ottoman empire, we will see that many of them were dealing with the Christian church and its organization. Most numerous among these documents are the berats --letters by which the sultan conferred posts, ranks, titles etc. upon the Orthodox church or its clergy. The oldest known berats are from the 17th century. In them, the sultan not only endorsed the high Orthodox Christian clergy, but also determined its rights and privileges. They also contained regulations of fiscal character. It is interesting to mention that the contents of the berats were identical regardless of the particular region in Greece, Bulgaria, or Serbia to which the berat referred.

The berats were not the only documents which regulated the activity of the Orthodox Christian church. Among the documents of this time were also the fermans, which were addressed to the Turkish authorities. The hudzets were other types of documents which regulated court, business, tax, marriage, and other issues concerning the church, and also regulated the building and renovation of churches. These archival documents give a good perspective of the control exercised by the Islamic state over the Christian church.

Voluntary Conversion of the Christian Population to Islam

Until the 15th century, the people of contemporary Bulgaria and Serbia were in their majority Christian Orthodox. It could be assumed that the situation in Bosnia was similar. There were also small Catholic communities in the region. The area was also a stronghold of several heretic movements. Some of them--Hesychast, Paulician, and Bogomil-- may have been powerful in Bosnia Herzegovina and in the Southern part of Bulgaria. Apparently they turned out to be the weak spot of Christianity in the Balkans. While it would be farfetched to view them as instruments of the triumph of Islam, it is true that some of the Paulicians and Bogomils were much more susceptible to Islam than the other Christians in general.

Paulician theology considered Jesus the Messiah a created man, not a creator. The concept of the Holy Trinity was renounced as contradicting the Scriptures. The Bogomil doctrine also reveals some similarities to Islam that are evident not only in the theology, but in the rituals as well. The Bogomils eliminated the ministry in their churches. The rituals were very simple in contrast to the magnificent Orthodox rituals. Icons, holy crosses, and candles were declared idolatrous. In some aspects Bogomils might have felt closer to the culture of the Ottoman empire than to the Christian state which not only rejected their heresy, but also persecuted them. In fact, some scholars find the beginnings of Islamic influence in the area as early as the 10th century. If this is true, the assumption about earlier connection between the heretic movements and Islam could be made.

It would be superficial and incomplete to conclude that Islam spread only among the heretic Christians. The cultural and economic influence remained in effect for five centuries. Many of the Christians abandoned their traditional faith and accepted Islam. Two major factors contributed to the conversion of Balkan peoples to Islam, especially in the mountain areas: the syncretic character of Christianity and the culture and economic influence of the Muslim state. The Christian faith of this region was also strongly affected by the traditional beliefs of the pre-Christian period. Paganism interwove with Christianity, making it more susceptible to the influence of another religion--Islam. This allowed the population to keep the foundation of their beliefs, changing only the superstructure.

A particularly strong influence on the Balkans was the dervish order. The Bektashi dervishes were the most syncretic of all the Sufi sects. They adopted pseudo-Christian rituals, for instance communion and confession (with its absolution of sin); they even made the sign of the cross a sign of respect. The dervishes were not strict in prohibition of drinking alcohol and eating pork, which was very traditional in the Balkan lands. Women had a great measure of personal freedom which also was helpful for the easier acceptance of Islam. The dervishes were claiming formally Christian churches and even saints as their own. In this way, the sects of newly-converted Muslims were not bereft of their past.

The other way of converting to Islam was through economic influence. It is necessary to say that the cultural and economic influences could not be thought of as two absolutely separate factors in the Islamization of the Christian population in the Balkans. Islamization was a complex process, so that the cultural and religious influence on the one hand, and the economic on the other were acting together. Of course, the economic policy of the Ottoman empire defended the Muslims and tried to take as much as possible from the non-Muslim population (reaya-- from Turkish--protected flock). Most of the time in the Ottoman empire reaya was left to live according to its beliefs and traditions. But there were a number of restrictions for the non-Muslims--they were not allowed to carry weapons, ride a horse or wear clothes of bright colors. These restrictions, however, do not seem to have been very strict. If we analyze the traditions of Bulgarians, Croats, and Serbs, we will see that horse raising and gunsmithery were traditional crafts among them. The colorful and rich national costumes of the Balkan people also would not have survived if these restrictions were enforced rigorously. The oppression was much more severe in the area of taxation. In some regions, people converted to Islam in order to avoid paying the exhausting taxes which the Turkish empire levied on non-Muslims. It is important to mention that most often entire communities, villages or whole regions converted to Islam at the same time. According to Vera Mutafchieva, the personal conversion was rare. Christian communities were hostile to the neophytes, and Muslim communities did not gladly accept them either. There was even a humiliating name for the new Muslims--dionme, which means traitor. The Christian hostility toward the new converts was natural: the conversion excluded the person not only from the community but from the nation as well. There are other very interesting facts about the acceptance of Islam. In some areas, for instance, in Bosnia, whole communities led double religious lives. People declared themselves Muslims while at the same time continuing to practice

the Christian faith in secret. The 18th century English traveler M. Edith Durham who passed through the mountain parts of Bosnia, Bulgaria, Macedonia, and Serbia was surprised to discover that the Albanian mountaineers of Bosnia used actively two names--one Christian, in front of Christians, and one Muslim, in front of Muslims. They observed the fast, would receive communion, and be married following both Christian and Muslim rites. They visited publicly the mosque and secretly the church. They had clandestine Christian priests and unofficial Christian funeral services, but they had their dead buried in the Muslim cemeteries. Sometimes, this double life was led by several villages or even an entire district. Of course, Christianity and Islam practiced this way could not remain unchanged.

To assume that most of the conversions in the Balkans were false, would be unrealistic. There were and there still are a great number of true converts. In fact, the Southeastern part of the Rhodope mountains in Bulgaria, the northeast of Macedonia, and parts of Montenegro and Bosnia are populated with large communities of Slav Muslims. There were a number of factors which determined the specifics of the conversion to Islam. Many of the converts were very young at the time of the conversion. The majority of them were either very poor or there was a famine when they accepted Islam. The concern about the welfare of their families, crops and animals often determined their religious choice. In many cases, when the head of the family accepted Islam, the entire family had to follow. The conversion among Balkan women tended to be more superficial. Women in the Slav society were entirely responsible not only for the home, for raising and educating the children, but also for the preserving of the traditions--beliefs and family memory.

In the cities, there were some specificities as a result of the stronger cultural, political and economic dependence of the non-Muslim population on the Ottoman empire. Non-Muslims in the cities were closer to the structures of the power. This might explain the easier acceptance of Islam by Jewish communities which were situated mainly in the cities. In fact, the Christian population in the cities was not numerous. During the first century of Muslim domination in the Balkan peninsula (the end of the 14th and the early 15th century), Christians were not allowed to live in some of the cities. All this leads us to the conclusion that even if the Ottoman empire did not rely on conversion as a strong political weapon, this process had a significant place in the religious life of the Balkan Slavs.

Forced Conversion to Islam

The issue of the forced conversion to Islam raises many questions. Some historians (K. Karpat) claim that such a conversion never happened; others (D. Hupchik) take the view that such a process definitely took place. It is important to state in the very beginning that the forced conversion to Islam was not the typical way of adoption of Islam, nor was it a standard policy of the Ottoman empire. However, that is not to say that for almost half a millennium the policy of a state and religion toward a specific region remained unchanged. There are many evidences of forced conversion which in my opinion cover four main periods.

The first period is the period of the initial settlement of the Turks in the Balkans during the end of 14th and the beginning of the 15th century. The Ottoman state was built on the principle of the Holy War. The main goal was the extension and defense of Islam. The world was divided into darulislam (the domain of the faithful) and darulhard (the domain of war). If a city or a region submitted without resistance, the people were allowed to practice their religion. If they resisted, they could be enslaved or massacred. The conversion in a situation like this was the only salvation. The conversion to Islam was welcomed, and since the choice was to be killed or to convert, it should be considered that the adoption of Islam was forced.

Not many documents of this period are available now, but there are some demographic data which indicate strong and aggressive Muslim presence and influence immediately after the conquest of the region began. They show that during the 15th century from about 800,000 Christian Bulgarians only about 300,000 had survived; the others were either destroyed or converted. For instance, at the very end of the 15th century, the population of Sofia, one of the biggest cultural and administrative centers of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom, was 80% Muslim and only 20% Christian without a significant growth of the city.

The second period covers the rule of Selim I (1512-1520). His somber character earned him the sobriquet "the Grim." During this time individual cases of anti-Christian actions are known, for instance the martyrdom of Georgi Novi Sofiiski in Sofia (1515). Selim's reign is notorious for the total elimination of the native Bulgarian noble class (bolyars). During this period, thousands of Bulgarians and Macedonians accepted Islam in order to avoid being killed.

The third period. The exact number of Orthodox Christians that converted to Islam during the 17th century is unknown. According to the Bulgarian historian, M. Genchev the population of the Bulgarian lands declined by over 240,000 persons during that time. In the 17th century, during the rule of Mehmed IV, there was an act of forced conversion. As a pretext for it, Mehmed IV used the rebellion of the Bulgarians of Chepino against the state. Upon entering the town of Chepino, Mehmed wanted to execute the notables and the Christian priest of the town, but one of the imams, Hassan Hoja, suggested that the Christians could pay for their lives by converting to Islam. By August 1666, over 200 churches and as many as 33 monasteries were destroyed in the region of Pazardzhik (central Bulgaria). The case of Chepino and Pazardzhik would seem indisputable if there were not the mysterious circumstances of the discovery of the three historical documents describing those events - the Pazardzik note, the Belovo Chronicle, and the tale of Draginov. They were discovered and published at the end of the 19th century, eight years prior to the liberation of Bulgaria when the anti-Greek and anti-Turkish national sentiments were very strong. Most probably, some of the facts were exaggerated. According to Dennis Hupchick, the conversion not only took place, but had also deep roots, both social and legal. On the other hand, Kemal Karpat claims that the area of Chepino, which he for some reason calls Chapni, was Muslim a long time before, as a proof he states that Chapni, the name of the town, derives from the Chapni, a branch of Kizilbash who resided in the Sivas area in Eastern Anatolia.

There are sources referring to violent actions against Christians who accompanied the Ottoman military operations against the Habsburgs in the last two decades of the 17th century. During the same period, the town of Chiprovci was burned to the ground, and the majority of the population which did not accept Islam was either killed or enslaved. The action took place in early October 1688 and was led by Eygen Pasha.

During the same period, another form of forced conversion was particularly popular - that of devshirme (blood tax). Periodically boys of age ten or younger were taken from their families. They were raised as Muslims and later served in the military forces of the Empire as Janissaries. The female population was also subjected to this type of conversion. There are much less data about the taking of young Christian girls for the harems of the Ottoman noble class. Yet this is one of the main themes of the Bulgarian and Serbian folklore in this period which indicates that it was a relatively common practice. There is not enough data about the conversion of women, and the information about the numbers of boys recruited through the devshirme system differs greatly. The numbers in different sources vary sharply - from 200,000 to many times this number for the whole period when the devshirme was practiced (mainly during the 17th and the 18th century). The attitude of the native population to the 'blood tax' was very different--if the Bosnian Muslims requested to be included in it, for the Christians, taking away children by force was a painful violation of their national and religious dignity.

The fourth period. The end of the 19th century is notorious for the Ottoman massacres of the Christian population in different regions of Bulgaria. They were documented by Januarius A. MacGahan in The Turkish Atrocities in Bulgaria. Letters from Bulgaria. In this book, he describes the massacres of the Christian population in various regions of Bulgaria and Macedonia in 1876. The reason for the atrocities was the April rebellion, which broke out in Koprivshitsa (Central Bulgaria). The rebellion spread only in a few Bulgarian cities, but many others, even though they did not participate, were destroyed and the inhabitants were murdered. The atrocities of the 19th century did not have conversion as an aim, yet, nevertheless, they were evidences of the aggressive periods in the Ottoman policy toward the non-Muslims in the Empire.

The process of forced conversion to Islam did not have a regular character. The conversion, when it took place, was motivated more politically than purely religiously. I would call it an example of exercising the right of the stronger which was typical of any medieval society. The forced Islamization was much stronger in Bulgaria, Macedonia, and Southeast Serbia than in the other Serbian lands which were situated in the periphery of the Ottoman Empire. Once again, this fact is proving the political, not ideological character of the forced conversion to Islam.

However, the result of such aggression during certain historical periods the policy was the polarization of Islam and Christianity, even more--the hostility and alienation of Christians towards Muslims. The fear of falling under Islamic influence once again, of being annexed by Turkey and becoming part of the Muslim world, determines to a great extent the contemporary shape of Christian-Muslim and even of secular-Muslim relations.

Bulgarian Orthodox Theology Since 1453

The Christian Orthodox theology of the Balkans is connected intimately with the formation of the nation. This is the result of the double submission of the Balkan Christian churches to the Turkish authorities on one hand and on the other to the Greek Orthodox Church of Constantinople which was a political puppet of the Ottoman empire. One of the strongest movements in the history of the Balkan nations was the movement for an autocephalous national church. All the peoples of the Balkans were striving hard for religious independence as well as for national liberation. During the Ottoman domination, Serbian and Bulgarian churches were subjects to the Greek Patriarchate of Constantinople. The Serbian episcopate was nominally under the jurisdiction of the Bulgarian archdiocese of Ohrid, but in fact it, too, was subordinate to Constantinople. In 1557, Sultan Suleiman II agreed to reestablish the Serbian Patriarchate of Pec in order to incite pro-Turkish sentiments in the border regions of the empire, but two centuries later, in 1766, the Patriarchate of Pec was abolished again.

Here, however, I will lay emphasis on the history of the Bulgarian church and theology. Under Greek dependence from 1393 until the 19th century, this church was quite characteristic of Orthodox Christianity in the region. The period of the direct control by the Phanariots was complicated not only because the Greek patriarch represented the churches before the Turks. The Greek domination abolished the Slavonic liturgy and impeded the development of the literature written in the Old Church Slavonic language; the schools where this language was taught were closed and replaced with Greek. This rejection of the Old Church Slavonic language and the Cyrillic alphabet, which have been the language and the alphabet of the Bulgarian and Serbian Orthodox liturgy since the 9th respectively the 10th century and its replacement with the incomprehensible Greek liturgy, had a strong negative effect on these two churches.

During the first three centuries of the Ottoman rule, the Bulgarian theology did not surpass its achievements from the 14th century; quite the contrary, it endured a deep crisis. Most of the Bulgarian theological books had been shipped abroad (mainly to Russia and Romania) by Patriarch Evtimius in the times of the Ottoman invasion in the 14th century. Only in the monasteries of some remote mountain regions was the Bulgarian liturgical tradition preserved and perpetuated. The first active Christian movement in Bulgaria independent from Constantinople was not Orthodox, but Catholic. The Roman Catholics kept some contact with the Ottoman part of Europe. There was a short period of successful Roman-Catholic independence in Chiprovci (in the Northwest part of Bulgaria). The school existed until 1624, when the Turks destroyed the mission. The true outbreak of religious life in Bulgaria began with the writings of Paisii of Hilendar. He investigated the Bulgarian manuscripts at the Hilendar monastery and in 1762 wrote *Istoria Slavianobulgarska* (History of the Slav Bulgarians). This book vindicated the Bulgarians against the chauvinism of Greeks, Serbs, and Russians, who were declaring them a primitive tribe without their own language, religion or culture. The book contained some historical errors, but it served a significant function, fostering national spirit of pride and dignity. Thus, the first step towards recognition of the

Bulgarians as a nation was made not by the Bulgarian bourgeoisie (chorbadzii) but by a member of the clergy.

Another significant figure of the Bulgarian theology was the bishop of Vratsa Sofronii Vrachansky (1739-1814). He is famous for bringing back the medieval Bulgarian literature through retranslation from Old Church Slavonic to the contemporary Bulgarian language. His best known book is *Nedelnik* (1806)--translation from the Greek and the Old Church Slavonic of instructions on the Sunday Gospels together with the sermons of the great feasts of the liturgical year. In his works Sofronii was strongly influenced by the ideas of the European Renaissance and the age of reason. He also started a reform of the educational system and introduced the literary use of the Eastern Bulgarian dialect so the Bulgarians could have a modern literature written in their own language.

In 1870, the Turks, alarmed by the strong pro-Russian leanings in Bulgaria, attempting to divorce it from the Russian influence, complied with the Bulgarian demands for an independent church. However, the Greek church refused to recognize the autocephaly. Formally, complete ecclesiastical autocephaly was achieved only in 1953 when the synod of the Bishops of Sofia proclaimed the third Bulgarian Patriarchate.

Although the Greek church did not recognize the autocephalous Bulgarian church, the end of the 19th century was a time of fast and prolific theological development. There was a considerable Russian influence, but it was accepted much better than the Greek one. It was a result of the similarity of the languages and the memory of the Bulgarian religious books and traditions that had been preserved in Russia from the conquerors at the end of the 14th century. The Bulgarian seminaries used as basic texts the works of Russian theologians such as Filaret Drozdov, Amfitetrov, Metropolitan Platon of Moscow, and Silvestr Malevanskii. Several original Bulgarian theologians became famous during that period--Stefan Buntovnikov, Anfim Chinvanchev, and Christo Pavlov.

The Turnovo constitution of 1879 granted the Bulgarian Orthodox Church legal status. Until then, the Bulgarian Orthodox church had been strongly nationalistic. This national tradition accounts for the peculiar and rarely seen anywhere else double-headed Christian church. Two communist constitutions--those of 1947 and of 1971--granted the Bulgarian citizens freedom of conscience and the religious beliefs de jure, but de facto these rights were suppressed. The new democratic constitution of 1991 determined the independent status of the church. Almost immediately, the state crisis was mirrored in the church. In 1992 the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and theology were split in two; Patriarch Maxim who was the generally recognized head of the official church, and the opposition that was led by the priest Christofor Subev, who was struggling for leadership in the church, accusing the Patriarch and the Holy Sinod of collaboration with the communist regime. Thus, the Bulgarian Orthodox Church became as disunited as the Balkans as a whole.

Communities Apart

Joseph Brodsky, Russian poet and Nobel Laureate, viewed the Communist empire as the twentieth-century Ottoman empire "with the historical compass line of decrepit, eastern

despotism traveling North from Istanbul to Moscow--from the Sultan's Topkapi palace to the Kremlin. . . ." If we continue Brodsky's analogy, we can say that the Communist empire left behind divided and hostile peoples as the Ottoman did a century ago. Now, these peoples are delirious with chauvinism.

The unrestful and unpredictable nature of the Balkans manifested itself again during the last three years. Among the main causes of the conflicts are disputes over territory and the minorities - ethnic and religious. It would be an exaggeration to state that the war in former Yugoslavia began because of religious grounds, but nationalism obviously has its deep religious roots. Both Christianity and Islam incorporated elements of nationalism into their theology. The attempt to create a new nation, that of Yugoslavs, is a manifestation of a different type of nationalism. Yugoslavenstvo was a term coined to express the idea of one great people among the South Slavs (including Bosnian Muslims). This idea, which emerged in the middle of the 19th century, complicated even more the intricate national situation in the former Yugoslavia.

In Bulgaria and the former Yugoslavia, a great number of ethnic groups live together: Serbs, Croats, Macedonians, Slovenes, Bulgarians, Greeks, Hungarians, Armenians, Russians, Vlachs, Pomaks, Boshniaks (Slav Muslims from Bosnia), Albanians (some of them are Christians but in general they are Muslims), Roma (Gypsies), Jews, etc. The religious and ethnic map of the region is rather complex. The nations where the majority is Orthodox Christian--Bulgaria, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia have their national Orthodox churches. However, there are Catholic areas in Croatia and Slovenia as well as small Catholic communities in Northwest Bulgaria. Many ethnic Turks also live in some areas of Bulgaria and Macedonia. Most of them are Sunnis, but there are small communities of Shiites as well (for instance in Northeast Bulgaria). Furthermore, Slav Muslims live in Bosnia and Bulgaria, Greece and Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro--practically in all lands which have been under Ottoman domination. Generally, they speak the respective Slavic language (Bulgarian, Macedonian, Serbian) and rarely use or even know Turkish. In Bulgaria they are known as Pomaks, in Macedonia they are also called Torbeshes and Poturs. They are a minority in every Balkan country except Bosnia, where they constitute the largest single group of the population - 39%. Their strong faith, solid community ties and political traditions made possible their separation into a new nation. Another factor for their particularism is the hostility which surrounds them. In the last several decades they came under the attack of the Serbian propaganda that proclaimed them traitors of the race. Serbs claimed that the Slav Muslims "have acted disloyally to their history, embracing the Islamic religion, that by its very nature, Islam allows the extermination of others who are not in agreement with it. Hence, the idea of Muslim domination of Yugoslavia becomes terrifying."

Macedonians are the other group which consider themselves a separate nationality. This issue was and still is the root cause of the controversy between Bulgarians, Greeks, Macedonians, and Serbs. In the former Yugoslavia, Serbia controlled Macedonia both politically and through the church. Yet in 1967 the Macedonians, recognizing themselves as a separate nation, declared the autocephalous status of their church.

Other ethnic groups, such as Vlachs and Gypsies, are of mixed faith. The Gypsies, originally a nomadic people that originated from India, reached Byzantium around the 14th century. In Macedonia and Bulgaria where the Ottoman domination was longest, most of the Gypsies are Muslims, whereas in the other Balkan countries they are mainly Christians. However, their attachment to a particular religion often appears to be a matter of convenience rather than a stable tradition.

The Vlachs live mainly in Serbia, Macedonia, and Bulgaria. They have different names depending on the region--Konslovaks, Aromani, Cinnari. Usually they practice Orthodox Christianity, but there are some Catholics and Muslims among them as well.

Small groups of Jews are scattered over the Balkans, most of them are Sephardic Jews. They settled in the area in the 16th century after being expelled from Spain. Until World War II Salonika (the main city of Macedonia, now in Greece) was predominantly Jewish. Balkan Jews could not remain unaffected by the religious and ethnic problems of the area. There have been some antisemitic incidents, especially in Croatia, in the wake of a Serbian press report in 1992 claiming that the World Jewish Congress supported Serbia against Slovenia. The immigration to Israel in recent decades has greatly diminished the numbers of the Jews in the Balkans.

All these nations and ethnic groups share much of their history, traditions, and culture. Yet nevertheless, they are strongly separated and continue to live rather isolated from each other. It is interesting that this alienation is common even between ethnic groups within a single country practicing one and the same religion. For instance, recent demographic data indicate that mixed marriages between Slav Muslims and Turk Muslims in Macedonia are virtually nonexistent. People of Muslim or Christian background who do not practice their religion still regard themselves as affiliated with either the Muslim or to the Christian world. On the other hand, many Pomaks and Slav Muslims consider themselves Turks who have lost their language. Whole communities claim to be Turk Muslims, even though they are not accepted as such by the ethnic Turks proper. This happens mainly in Bulgaria where the government used to persecute the Pomaks, banning them from using their Muslim names and practicing their religion.

Conclusions

The historical alienation and hostility manifests itself in chauvinist attitudes on each of the sides of the conflict. It is difficult to predict the future of this region. Nobody knows whether there will be a bigger explosion than the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which will set ablaze the powder keg of the Balkans, or whether equal participation of the minorities in the social life of the new post-Communist countries will postpone the detonation.

The religious relations were the main subject of this paper because in my opinion they are in the core of the problems of today's Balkans. Being at the crossroads between Asia and Europe, between the Communist past and the unknown future, the Balkans need to calm down and to find the right way out of the war, of the atrocities, and the instability. The

interreligious dialogue can help achieve peace and security. But are the peoples of the Balkans ready for this dialogue? The dialogue requires knowledge of the causes and the background of the conflict; consequently, an analysis of these causes should be the first step.

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