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**Religion, Conflict and Prospects for Peace  
in Bosnia, Croatia and Yugoslavia**

Gerard F. Powers

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**Introduction**

A history textbook used by high school seniors throughout Serbia blames the outbreak of the current conflict in the former Yugoslavia on the Vatican, which "launched a battle against Orthodoxy and Serbs through the Catholic Church and its allies." The Serbs fought back, it goes on, "to prevent a repeat of the genocide they suffered in World War II."

Josip Beljan, writing in the Catholic journal, *Veritas*, declared:

The cross of Christ stands next to the Croatian flag, the Croatian bishop next to the Croatian minister of state.... This was truly again a real war for the "honoured cross and golden liberty," for the return of Christ and liberty to Croatia. The church is glad for the return of its people from the twofold slavery -- Serbian and communist."

In November 1992, the leaders of the Islamic, Roman Catholic, and Serbian Orthodox communities in Bosnia stated "emphatically" that "[t]his is not a religious war, and that the characterization of this tragic conflict as a religious war and the misuse of all religious symbols used with the aim to further hatred, must be proscribed and is condemned."

These three quotes reflect three differing perspectives on the role of religion in the brutal war in the former Yugoslavia. The *religious war* account, exemplified by the Serbian textbook, contends that specifically religious divisions give the conflict in the former Yugoslavia a dimension not unlike the religious wars Europe has known all too well over the centuries. The *Veritas* article provides evidence to support the *ethnoreligious war* account of the conflict. According to this view, the conflict is about nationalism, not religion *per se*, but religion has contributed to the rise of nationalist conflicts. The statement

of the religious leaders reflects the *manipulation of religion* account of the war. This explanation acknowledges that religious fears and symbols have been manipulated and abused by cynical ultranationalists for their own ends, but downplays the role of religious differences or religious nationalism in fomenting conflict.

Clearly, there is a religious dimension to the conflict in the former Yugoslavia. National and ethnic divisions correspond closely to differences in religious identity. Serbians have traditionally been Orthodox, Croats Catholic, and, in Bosnia, Muslim is both a religious and national identity. The hundreds of churches and mosques that have been intentionally destroyed, the ubiquitous appeals to religion in official propaganda, and the use of religious symbols in torture are just some of the ways the conflict has been defined according to a complex relationship between national and religious identity.

Nevertheless, the religious leaders are essentially correct in downplaying the religious dimension of this war. "It cannot be overemphasized," concludes Reverend Peter Kuzmic, president of the Protestant-Evangelical Council of Croatia and Bosnia, "that the genesis of the war was ideological and territorial, not ethnic and religious." The conflict erupted out of the failure of the Yugoslav idea, a failure in which cultural, political, economic, and other factors were far more prominent than religious ones. Yugoslavia dissolved in 1991 into a war over competing and mostly incompatible claims of self-determination. None of the six nationalities of the federation was satisfied with the seventy years of the Yugoslav experiment. The Serbs felt that a more united Yugoslavia would end years of discriminatory treatment and give them the power and economic well-being commensurate with their numbers; fearing Serb domination, most of the other nationalities wanted a more decentralized Yugoslavia. After Tito's death, his fragile efforts to balance these competing views of Yugoslavia gave way to a process of economic and political decentralization and disintegration. Serious economic decline coincided with a growing political incompatibility after 1989 between the nascent democratic and nationalist movements in Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia, and Macedonia and hard-line communist-turned-nationalist regimes in Serbia and Montenegro.

Unable to maintain a Serb-dominated, centralized Yugoslavia, Serb nationalists, backed by a Yugoslav army intent on maintaining its power, have fought for a more ethnically pure Greater Serbia that would incorporate (and, in their view, protect) most of the 30% of Serbs who live outside of Serbia. Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Macedonia have sought independence, retaining the internal borders of the Yugoslav republics. Like their Serbian counterparts, some Croat nationalists in Croatia and Herzegovina have sought to unite the Croat-majority areas of Bosnia into a Greater Croatia.

These conflicting claims of self-determination would be difficult to resolve in any situation. The genocidal character of the Yugoslav conflict has been due to the rise of aggressive and chauvinistic nationalisms in the late 1980s, first in Serbia and then in Croatia and Bosnia. Ultrationalists, especially Serbian leaders, have used all manner of violence, intimidation, and propaganda to generate fear of other ethnic, national and religious groups and to destroy any prospects for resolving self-determination claims in non-violent ways that respect the multi-ethnic, multi-national, multi-religious realities of the region.

Of the three accounts of the religious dimension to this conflict, the religious war thesis is the least tenable because it exaggerates the role of religion at least as much as it underestimates the role of other factors, particularly extreme nationalism. The role of religion in the spiral of nationalist violence has been less direct than the ethnoreligious account suggests, yet less a victim of external forces than the manipulation of religion account describes. Religious nationalism has been a factor in this war, especially though by no means exclusively on the Serbian Orthodox side. Religious leaders have been mostly well-intentioned and justified in nourishing the historic links between religious and national identity and in defending their community's rights in the face of grave threats. In doing so, they have unwittingly reinforced, or at least undermined their ability to counter, the ultrationalists' project of religious and national chauvinism.

I will develop this argument, first, by examining the claim that this is a cultural-religious conflict. Next, I will consider to what extent religion has legitimized extreme nationalism and violence? Finally, I will look at the prospects for the religious bodies to play a reconciling role after the Dayton Accords.

### **Religion, Culture Wars, and "Ancient Hatreds"**

The religious conflict account of the war in the former Yugoslavia implicates religion in fomenting "ancient hatreds." According to this view, the Yugoslav conflict is merely the most recent in a long history of conflict between three major cultures, which are distinguished primarily by religion. "The conflict is about religion, not ethnicity," Henry Kissinger argues, "since all the groups are of the same ethnic stock [Slavs]." Samuel Huntington also sees religion as a central factor in a clash of cultures in the Balkans. He contends that the Eastern boundary of Western Christianity in 1500 today represents "the Velvet Curtain of culture" that has replaced "the Iron Curtain of ideology" as the most significant dividing line in Europe, a line which has erupted into conflict in Yugoslavia. In Yugoslavia, differences in religion and culture have led to

violent conflicts over policy, territory and populations, conflicts which are exacerbated by what he calls "civilizational rallying." Western Europe, particularly Germany and the Vatican, rallied around their co-religionists, pushing for recognition of Croatia and Slovenia as independent states, muting criticism of Croat efforts to partition Bosnia, and arming Croatia. Russian politicians and the Russian Orthodox Church supported Serbia. And Bosnia became a *cause celebre* for Islamic governments and groups, especially fundamentalists.

Srdjan Vrcan, a Croatian sociologist of religion, blames the dominant religions in the former Yugoslavia for presenting political, social and national conflicts "as centuries-long conflicts between essentially opposed human types, types of cultures and civilizations" which are virtually beyond mediation and compromise. Moreover, he argues, they have presented "the one side as quasi-immaculate and as the side of the Good as such, and [have] depict[ed] the other in demonical or satanic terms as the incarnation of Evil as such." The result is an identification of the state not only with a particular nation but also with a particular culture, a politicization of culture that breeds conflict and war.

The contention of Huntington and Vrcan and others that cultural-religious factors define and exacerbate the conflict mixes partial truths with questionable analysis. It is true that Yugoslavia's rise and fall is the story of an attempt, ultimately unsuccessful, to bridge the religious-cultural fault lines which run through the Balkans: between Eastern and Western Christianity; between Latin and Byzantine cultures; between the remnants of the Hapsburg and Ottoman empires; and between Christian Europe and Islamic Asia.

The religious leaders in the region are keenly aware of this cultural-religious chasm. Each, in their own way, feels they are at the frontier, protecting their respective religious and cultural traditions from threats from their two cultural neighbors. The Catholic Bishops, for example, argued in early 1991 that the democratic changes in Croatia and Slovenia were threatened by an alliance between communists and Great Serbia nationalists (including "several of the leading personalities of the Serbian Orthodox Church"), both of whom "are strongly opposed to western cultural tradition [and] democratic aspirations." In 1996 in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Catholic leaders have become increasingly concerned about the Islamicization of the Bosnian government during the course of the war. While church leaders have rejected propaganda about the need to defend Christian Europe from Islam and have supported a united, multi-ethnic Bosnia, Reverend Ante Maric, a Catholic priest in a village near Mostar, is not alone among Croatian Catholics in saying: "The Muslims have a holy war with us. We cannot accept the Dayton agreement."

Bosnian Muslims, though highly-secularized, have also

focused on the cultural divide, claiming that the failure of the international community to intervene on their behalf or lift the arms embargo against them is due to Christian Europe's ancient antipathy toward Islam and fear of a politically-significant Muslim community in the heart of Europe. This fear of Islam has been exploited by Croat and Serb nationalists to justify aggressive campaigns of "ethnic cleansing."

The link between religious-cultural differences and conflict is most evident among Serbian Orthodox leaders, who are acutely aware of the historic division between Eastern and Western Christianity. Vatican support for Croatian independence and for international sanctions against Serbia, alleged forced conversions of Serbian Orthodox during the war, and alleged support by the Catholic Church for the *Ustashe* during World War II are perceived as recent manifestations of a centuries-long effort by the Vatican to reconvert the Orthodox. The ancient confrontation with Islam also looms large in Serbian Orthodoxy. The Serbian Orthodox Church gave strong support for Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic's harsh policies toward mostly Muslim Kosovo in order to reclaim this region, long-considered Serbian Orthodoxy's Jerusalem. Orthodox leaders have also joined Serb political leaders in arguing that war was necessary to prevent the establishment of an Islamic state in Bosnia.

Religious and cultural factors clearly are present in the war. But the explanatory value of these factors is limited. First, the religious dimension of these cultural conflicts is often exaggerated. Despite deep differences, religious leaders themselves do not define the conflict in religious terms. Not only are most of the main political and military leaders not motivated by religion, but the general population exhibits a relatively low level of religious affiliation, especially in the case of Bosnian Muslims and Serbs. Religious practice has increased in recent years with the end of communism and the use of religion as part of the ethnomobilization strategy of Slobodan Milosevic, Franjo Tudjman, Ilija Izetbegovic and other politicians. But many people identify themselves as Muslim, Orthodox, and Catholic even though they do not profess or practice any religion. Yet, given the insane logic of ethnic cleansing, their life might depend on whether they are Muslim atheists, Orthodox atheists, or Catholic atheists. At this point, religious identity has lost its religious meaning; religion has been reduced to little more than an artifact, another way of describing cultural, ethnic or national differences. As Mojzes rightly concludes, "insofar as this is a 'religious' war, it is being fought largely by irreligious people who wear religion as a distinguishing badge but do not know what the badge stands for."

A second problem with the religious-cultural roots of war thesis is that religious leaders have not uniformly or unequivocally supported notions of the unity of culture, nation and state, as Vrcan suggests. Bosnia is the prime example of this. Many Muslim and Catholic (and some Serbian Orthodox)

leaders have rejected the ultranationalist's vision of culturally-homogenous societies, insisting instead that the future of their distinct cultural, religious and ethnic identities depends upon the success of a multi-cultural, multi-religious, multi-ethnic state in Bosnia. The increasing threat of a partition of Bosnia into ethnically-homogenous areas is evidence mostly of the success of extreme nationalists in using violence to kill any hopes of realizing a pluralist vision. Bosnia is not the paradigmatic case of a clash of civilizations, but of a clash between different kinds of nationalism. Religious and cultural differences have vastly complicated their efforts to counter the extremists in their midst, but religion and culture are less the cause of the conflict than its victim.

Finally, an excessive focus on religious and cultural differences tends to obscure other factors -- political, economic, and military. The roots of the war are better understood if one looks at the role of the Yugoslav military in seeking to maintain its power, the inherent difficulties involved in sorting out incompatible claims of self-determination after the collapse of the Yugoslav state, and especially the rise of extreme nationalisms, incited by former communists who sought a new ground of legitimacy. The war's barbarity and intractability have been due less to ancient civilizational hatreds than to the fears intentionally induced by warlords and criminals, the logic of extreme nationalisms, which thrive by inciting religious and cultural conflict, and the hatred and vengeance that feed on and intensify cycles of violence.

### **Religion, Nationalism and Human Rights**

If there is a religious dimension to the conflict, it is found more in the integral link between religion and national identity than in religious-cultural differences. Paul Mojzes acknowledges that the war in the former Yugoslavia is primarily "ethno-national," not religious. But there is an "ethno-religious" dimension because leaders of each religious community have provided "enthusiastic and uncritical support of rising nationalism among their peoples." Religious leaders have contributed to ethnic separatism and national chauvinism by encouraging ethnically-based politics, by sanctioning and sanctifying wars of national self-determination, and by showing little concern for the human rights and fears of other ethnic and religious groups.

In evaluating the extent to which the actions of the three major religious communities reflect this ethno-religious account of the war, several distinctions should be kept in mind. First, religious cultivation of cultural and national identity and religious support for national self-determination are not, in themselves, evidence of religious nationalism. They become so only when religion justifies chauvinistic forms of nationalism or

illegitimate claims of self-determination. Jean Bethke Elshtain distinguishes between ethno-cultural nationalism, which tends to be insular, aggressive and intolerant, and civic nationalism, which is more open, democratic, and pluralistic. The former Yugoslavia, she believes, is a prime example of the former kind of nationalism: "a ruthless granulation of political entities in the name of a principle of the unimpeachable singularity of national, linguistic, cultural, even racial identities coupled with the dangers of 'mixing' any group with the other."

The link between religion and national identity in the Balkans places religion on the side of some form of ethnocultural nationalism, but this kind of nationalism is not as uniformly chauvinistic and aggressive as Elshtain and Mojzes suggest. In the Balkans as elsewhere, there are strong and weak forms of ethnocultural nationalism, as well as hybrids of ethnocultural and civic nationalism. Few nations fit easily into one of Elshtain's two types. Weak forms of ethnocultural or ethnoreligious nationalism are not necessarily problematic; it is the strong, chauvinistic forms which rightly give one pause.

Similarly, some claims of self-determination in the former Yugoslavia are more legitimate than others. Whether religious support for independence or secession has contributed to the conflict in the former Yugoslavia depends upon the validity of the underlying claim. Maintaining Yugoslavia was not necessarily a preferred or a viable option by 1991. Support for an independent Croatia within its current borders is not necessarily as legitimate as support for a Greater Croatia.

Just as there is a difference between positive and negative forms of nationalism and legitimate and illegitimate claims of self-determination, so also there is a difference between legitimate and illegitimate approaches to defending the rights of one's own community. Religious leaders should not be faulted for boldly speaking out against "ethnic cleansing" of their people, for giving pastoral priority to serving the needs of their own community, and for reiterating traditional principles about the right and duty of self-defense. It is when this legitimate concern for the defense of the rights of one's own community is manipulated by ultranationalists or becomes exclusivist that religious leaders exacerbate conflicts.

The major religious bodies in the former Yugoslavia have been neither monolithic nor undifferentiated in their approaches to nationalism, self-determination, human rights, and the use of force. Positive and negative, legitimate and illegitimate actions have been evident in each religious community, though not to the same extent.

#### The Catholic Church



Croatian cultural and national identity is closely identified with Catholicism. In terms of effectiveness as a national symbol, the Catholic Church in Croatia ranks next to Poland. In modern times, two strands of Croatian nationalism developed within Catholicism. Archbishop Josip Strossmayer (1815-1905) personified the Illyrian movement, the integrative strand, because of his support for union between Croatia and Serbia and between Serbian Orthodoxy and Croatian Catholicism.

The clearly dominant tradition in recent decades, however, has emphasized church support for the restoration of an independent Croatia that is religiously and culturally Catholic and Western. This tradition was summarized in an account by the Catholic Press Agency in Zagreb of an interview with Cardinal Kuharic: "The Church among the Croats has always represented the rights of the Croatian nation, like those of every other ethnic nation, to freedom and 'the guarantee of freedom for every ethnic nation is the state,' said Cardinal Kuharic."

This linkage between religion, ethnicity, and national identity has led some to conclude that the Catholic Church bears considerable responsibility for the conflict. Paul Mojzes points to several ways that the church has contributed to the rise of nationalism. It supported, especially in 1990-91, the nationalism of Tudjman's Croatian Democratic Union. In Bosnia, the church supported the establishment of ethnic political parties, specifically the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ), which contributed to the political divisions that led to war there. Moreover, the church embraced Slovenian, Croatian and Bosnian independence, without adequately taking into account the fears of Serb minorities in Croatia and Bosnia.

From the church's perspective, ethnic parties were the best hope to end communist rule in Croatia and Bosnia. After fifty years of an antagonistic relationship with a Yugoslav government that regularly (and falsely) accused the church of clerical-fascism and clerical-nationalism, it was not surprising that the church would welcome an independent Croatian government that respected religious liberty and sought close relations with the church. Since then, the need to maintain national unity in a time of crisis, and the task of rebuilding society after communism and forging a newly-independent nation have led to a certain amount of practical cooperation between church and state. Nevertheless, the church has made a conscious effort to free herself from the image of being too closely tied to the state, and has been increasingly critical of efforts of the Tudjman government and various other political parties to claim church sanction. Reiterating the Pope's warnings, during his visit to Zagreb in September 1994, about idolizing the nation or the state, Cardinal Kuharic said recently, "If all those in authority had listened to him [the Pope], each in his place, ... we would have a far better reputation in the world, a clear conscience,

and clean hands. As it is we have only demeaned ourselves."

The church's position on self-determination derived from similar concerns. Its support for Croatian independence in 1991 had much to do with the church's experience under a Serbian-dominated Kingdom of Yugoslavia between the wars, followed by Tito's communist-dominated Yugoslavia in the post-war period. In its concrete manifestation, the Yugoslav idea connotes for the Church neither respect for Croatian cultural and national identity nor respect for democracy and basic human rights. Catholic leaders point especially to the persecution and intolerance of religion, symbolized by Cardinal Stepinac's imprisonment in 1946 after a show trial, as proof of the fundamental inadequacy of the Yugoslav experiment. By 1990, the militant nationalism and hard-line communism of the Serbian government under President Slobodan Milosevic, the continued power of Yugoslav communists in the military, and the revival of anti-Catholic propaganda in Serbia convinced the church that in Croatia and Slovenia the restoration of religious freedom, national identity, and integration with Western Europe promised by the transition to democracy in their republics were at risk. Given these concerns, a church historically identified with Croatian national identity "accepted and recognized," as a legitimate "expression of the will of the people," the May 1991 referendum and parliamentary vote in favor of exercising Croatia's constitutional right to secede from Yugoslavia.

The Vatican's justification for its much-criticized decision, in January 1992, to recognize Croatia and Slovenia reflects how the war changed the moral and political calculus of secession. Even after the declaration of independence in June 1991, the Catholic bishops of Yugoslavia and the Vatican presumed that integrating the new independent republics with what remained of the Yugoslav constitutional system should be done through dialogue and negotiation. The Vatican considered it both politically possible and morally appropriate to maintain some form of confederation. But the intensity and brutality of what was considered an aggressive and unjust war against Croatia convinced the Vatican that negotiation of a new relationships between the Yugoslav republics was impossible short of full independence. Consequently, by October 1991, the Vatican sought an international consensus in favor of conditional recognition of Croatia and Slovenia (and later Bosnia-Herzegovina and Macedonia). Among other things, conditional recognition was intended to respect the right of self-determination and the territorial integrity of the republics, to ensure respect for minorities, and to encourage the parties to abide by a cease-fire and permit a more lasting settlement to the conflict.

The Vatican was one of the first states to recognize Bosnia-Herzegovina. Throughout the war, both the Vatican and the Catholic bishops in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia have supported a united, multi-ethnic Bosnia and have opposed proposals to partition Bosnia along ethnic and religious lines. Cardinal

Kuharic and Cardinal Puljic strongly condemned the extremism and violence of the Bosnian Croats during the Croat-Muslim fighting in 1993 and efforts to create a Greater Croatia. The church's position has placed it at odds with the Tadjman government and the Bosnian Croat leadership in Herzegovina, both of which have publicly denounced the church's position as unpatriotic and against the interests of Croatians.

The church supported the establishment of the Croat-Muslim Federation in 1994 as a way to resolve the Croat-Muslim fighting. It has also supported the Dayton Agreement, as a potential step toward a lasting peace. Reflecting their commitment to a united Bosnia, Cardinal Puljic of Sarajevo and other church leaders have criticized aspects of the Dayton agreement, however, because they fear it will lead to the partition of Bosnia, given its ratification of "ethnic cleansing," its lack of adequate federal structures, and the unlikelihood that its provisions regarding the right of return, democratic elections, and other civilian matters will be implemented.

Given the church's support for an independent Bosnia, Croatia, and Slovenia, it reiterated traditional Catholic teaching about the right and duty of these new states to defend themselves, respecting the laws of war, against aggression. While some Catholic leaders have spoken of a sacred duty to defend the nation, Church support for the use of force in self-defense has been relatively restrained. Even during the worst of the ethnic cleansing in Bosnia, the bishops did not embrace lifting the arms embargo against Bosnia and Croatia for fear of widening and escalating the conflict. Rather, with Pope John Paul II, they appealed for "humanitarian intervention" by the international community "to disarm the aggressor" and begin a process of demilitarizing the region.

The church's reaction to Croatia's resort to force in August 1995 to retake the Serb-held Krajina area of Croatia typifies the ambiguity many religious leaders face in responding to violence and human rights abuses. Church leaders expressed joy and relief at what they saw as the liberation of a large part of Croatia, an area from which all Croats had been "cleansed" in 1991. In responding to reports of human rights abuses they did not want to give credence to Serbian allegations that they were being "ethnically cleansed" from the area, when Serb leaders themselves had orchestrated the exodus. They also gave the benefit-of-the-doubt to their government's claimed commitment to protect Serb rights. At the time of the military operation, the Church leaders urged Serbs to stay in Croatia and urged Croats to protect their rights. Once the extent of Croat abuses became clear, the church condemned them as "immoral" and a "stain" on the wider community.

Overall, while the Catholic Church in the former Yugoslavia

has shown some characteristics of Mojzes' ethno-religious nationalism, this description of its role in the current conflict is too undifferentiated. The church in Croatia embraces a weak form of ethno-nationalism which sees the "church among the Croats" as nurturing and protecting the spiritual values, historical memory, and culture of the Croatian people, but the church does not advocate a form of religious nationalism that equates national identity with adherence to the Catholic faith, and it has been outspoken in opposing efforts to create ethnically-homogenous societies. The church's support for independence was motivated partly by ethnic nationalism, but moreso by legitimate concerns for democracy and human rights, especially religious liberty. The Vatican's recognition of Croatia and Slovenia was defensive in nature, a reaction to an already failed Yugoslavia and a destructive war in Croatia, not a cause of Yugoslavia's dissolution or the resulting conflict in Bosnia, which was inevitable given the failure of Yugoslavia. Catholic leaders justified the use of force in defending against Serb aggression and in appealing in particular to the international community to stop the slaughter of civilians in Bosnia. While these appeals represented a legitimate application of traditional just war principles, they were seen by the Serbian Orthodox as further proof of a Catholic campaign against them. The churches record on human rights was mixed. On the one hand, a consistent concern for human rights was reflected in Cardinal Kuharic's frequent admonition: "If the opponent burns my house, I will guard his. If he demolishes my church, I will protect his. And if he kills my father, I will safeguard the life of his father." On the other hand, church leaders were often preoccupied with their own community's suffering, and sometimes slow to condemn abuses by Croatian forces.

#### Bosnian Muslims

Bosnian Muslims are the only Muslims in the world officially designated as a national as well as religious group, yet, of the three main religious bodies in the Balkans, Bosnian Muslims have the least sense of national identity. Muslim was largely exclusively a religious or cultural identity until the 1960s, when the communist party began encouraging the idea of a Muslim ethnic group and, later, nationality. Designation of Muslims as a separate national group was designed to cut off the Muslims from Croatian Catholics and Serbian Orthodox, both of whom claimed that Bosnian Muslims were descendants of Catholics or Orthodox who converted during centuries of Turkish rule. The designation of Muslims as a nationality had the strong support of Muslim clerics, who claimed a role as communal leaders of their people, based on this link between religion and ethnicity.

Nevertheless, most Bosnian Muslims remained highly secularized and largely supportive of the Yugoslav state. In a 1990 survey of adults in Yugoslavia, Bosnia had the highest

percentage (29%) of any republic not declaring confessional orientation. A 1989 survey of children found that only 34% of Bosnian Muslims were religious believers. A 1991 survey found that more Bosnian Muslims (88%) valued their affinity with Yugoslavia than either Bosnia's Serbs (85%) or Bosnia's Croats (63%).

Cohen argues that, largely in response to the mobilization of Serbian nationalists in Bosnia, Muslims (and Croats) became more nationalistic in the late 1980s. Pan-Islamic oriented clerics began mobilizing support for Muslims in Kosovo, which further hurt Muslim-Serb relations. The fact that distinct political parties, each linked to religious leadership, emerged to represent each of Bosnia's three main national communities further polarized the situation. While most Bosnian Muslims were highly secularized, the founding members of the ruling Party of Democratic Action included most of the major representatives of the pan-Islamic current in the Islamic community in Bosnia. The party was headed by Alija Izetbegovic, "a Muslim conservative," who Cohen argues, "if not accurately described as a religious fundamentalist, was definitely perceived by most members of the republic's other ethnoreligious communities as a religious nationalist and a man whose political mindset included devotion to Islamic principles."

Izetbegovic's *Islamic Declaration*, which offered a blueprint for an Islamic state in Bosnia once Muslims became a majority, has been the subject of considerable controversy. Many downplay the significance of a document written more than twenty years ago, interpreted by many to be a relatively benign attempt to link Islamic principles with a pluralistic modern state, and from which Izetbegovic has since distanced himself. But the Declaration (and other actions of the Islamic leaders of the party) was perceived by many non-Muslims as proof of a latent Islamic fundamentalism. Cohen concludes:

The frequent observation by Western commentators that Bosnian Muslims have had a traditionally secular and European outlook, and have tended to 'wear their faith lightly,' is essentially correct. But those outside Bosnia often failed to recognize that, owing to the attitudes advanced by most nationalist and many religious leaders within the Muslim community during the 1980s and 1990s, and also in view of the modern history of Bosnia, most non-Muslims did not take the political aspirations of the Islamic faithful quite so lightly.

Concerns about the actual intentions of Izetbegovic and other Muslim leaders have increased during the war as Muslim religious leaders have become more radicalized and Bosnian politics have become more Islamicized, both developments largely a reaction to the inadequate international response to the plight of the Muslims. As in Croatia and the Serb Republics of Bosnia and Krajina, religion has been introduced into the schools.

Religious indoctrination also has been introduced into the military. The appearance of several thousand Iranian, Afghan, and other foreign Islamic troops in Bosnia and Muslim units within the Bosnian army, such as the Black Swans and the 7th Muslim Brigade, exemplify this trend. Mustafa Ceric, the rais ul elema of Bosnia, has promoted bans on the sale of pork and mixed marriages. Izetbegovic obtained a temporary amendment to the Bosnian constitution guaranteeing a Muslim successor in the event of his death, and Muslims are increasingly favored in the distribution of jobs both within and outside the government.

These developments have led an aide to Cardinal Puljic to conclude that "Sarajevo is considered a Muslim canton, and the authorities act as such."

The Bosnian Muslims largely share the Catholic view of the war as a legitimate defense against Serbian aggression. Even more than Catholic leaders, they have been committed to a united, multi-ethnic Bosnia, though the commitment to pluralism has waned under the pressures of the war. Also like their Catholic counterparts, Muslim leaders have appealed for international intervention to stop genocide, but they have been much stronger than the Catholics in condemning the arms embargo as immoral. As the situation in Bosnia grew more desperate, some Muslims began to speak in terms of a *jihad*, which combined with the increasing visibility and power of specifically Islamic military units within the Bosnian military has contributed to a sense of holy war.

The Muslim role in the emergence of nationalism is distinguishable from that of Catholic and Serbian Orthodox leaders in two important respects. First, while most Serb and Croat nationalist politicians are former communists who had no special commitment, if any, to religion, the Bosnian president and many leaders of the dominant party in Bosnia are strongly-motivated by a version of political Islam. Second, whereas Catholicism and Serbian Orthodoxy long have been closely identified with their respective nations, the Islamicization of Bosnia has largely been a product of a war in which Muslims were targeted solely because of their identity. If Croatian and Serb fears of an Islamic state in Bosnia become a reality, it will be mostly a self-fulfilling prophecy.

#### Serbian Orthodox Church

Historically, the Serbian Orthodox Church has been the most uncritically nationalistic religious body in Yugoslavia, promoting a strong form of ethno-religious nationalism. It sees itself as a defender of Orthodoxy at the frontier of Islam's assault on Europe and Roman Catholicism's assault on Eastern Orthodoxy. Like other Orthodox churches, it also considers itself to be the principal defender of authentic national identity. While Serbian Orthodox ecclesiology envisions a symphonic relationship of close cooperation between church and state, it is

not a state church, but a national church.

The church's nationalist vision is rooted in two related concerns. First, the church defines the Serbian nation as a natural entity, an organic body that cannot survive and flourish if it is divided or if it is separated from its religious, specifically Orthodox, roots. There is a strong sense that one who is not Orthodox is not Serb, and that all Serbian Orthodox should live in the same state. Second, the church shares with many Serbs a deep sense of insecurity growing out of a history of victimization: victimization by Turks during the Ottoman Empire, by Tito's communism in the post-War period, and especially, by the Ustashe during World War II. This sense of victimization has been an overriding factor in the church's response to the Yugoslav crisis.

Given its traditionally strong ethno-religious nationalism, the Serbian Orthodox Church, especially younger religiously- and politically-conservative clerics, was predisposed to look favorably on the rise of Serbian nationalism in the late 1980s, though it was neither the cause of this rise, nor did it embrace all its forms or proponents. The new Serbian nationalism seemed to offer freedom from a Titoist Yugoslavia that had suppressed and manipulated the church and had discriminated against Serbs. Of special concern were Serbian minorities in Albanian Muslim-dominated Kosovo (10-15%), in Croatia (12%) and in Bosnia (32%). By 1990, the Serbian Orthodox Church was claiming that Serbs in both Kosovo and Croatia were suffering or threatened by genocide. In the case of Kosovo (and later Bosnia), the challenge was defined, in part, as defense against Islam; in Croatia, as defense against Catholicism and the rise of an allegedly neo-fascist state under President Franjo Tudjman.

The Serbian Orthodox perspectives on the nature of the Yugoslav conflict and self-determination, therefore, are diametrically opposed to that of Catholic and Muslim leaders. The war is not, as the Catholics and Muslims claim, an aggressive attempt to preserve Yugoslavia or to create a Greater Serbia. It is "an interethnic civil war" started by those intent on destroying Yugoslavia, which, despite its communist failings, had given the Serbian nation its state unity for the first time. Self-determination, according to the Orthodox Bishops, means allowing Serbs who have lived for centuries in Croatia and Bosnia to choose the state in which they will live. While Catholic and Muslim leaders consider the internal borders of the former Yugoslavia as historic and inviolable borders of their new states, the Orthodox dismiss them as merely "administrative," "imposed by a group of Marxist revolutionaries in the Second World War and by the post-war totalitarian communist system." "That is why," the bishops argue, "we cannot but understand why our people are unable to accept the forcefully imposed dissection of their living national organism or the unjust partition of territory." In short, the Serbian Orthodox Bishops would have preferred maintaining a reformed Yugoslavia in which Serbians

were given their rightful status; failing that, they believe the creation of a Greater Serbia is a legitimate expression of the right of self-determination, and is necessary to protect the rights of Serbian minorities in Croatia and Bosnia and to preserve the natural unity of the Serb nation.

This perspective on self-determination would be more credible if it were not tied to a strong, chauvinistic version of ethnic-religious nationalism. The exclusivist character of this religious nationalism is evident in a letter Serbian Orthodox Patriarch Pavle wrote to Lord Carrington during the war in Croatia in 1991:

It is time it was understood that the victims of genocide and their previous and perhaps future executioners cannot live together any longer. After the Second World War nobody forced the Jews to live with the Germans in the same state. The Serbs, however, were forced to live with the Croats.

This conviction that Serbs are threatened with genocide if they remain as minorities in Croatia or Bosnia (or Kosovo) combined with the belief in the organic unity of the Serb nation has led Orthodox leaders to cooperate with ultranationalist politicians in encouraging Serbs to flee areas not under Serb control. Unlike many of their Catholic and Muslim counterparts who stayed in Serb-held areas until they were forced out by "ethnic cleansing," most Orthodox bishops and priests fled areas under Croatian and Bosnian control early in the war. In August 1994, the Orthodox Bishop of Knin joined local military and political leaders in encouraging Serbs to flee Croatia en masse in advance of a Croatian military move to retake the Krajina. Bishop Hrizostom represented a minority view among Orthodox Bishops when he sharply rebuked Bosnian Serb leaders for encouraging Serbs to flee the Sarajevo suburbs before they were turned over to the control of the Muslim-Croat Federation in February 1995.

The Orthodox commitment to a Greater Serbia in which the Orthodox Church would have a central role has led to a close relationship between Orthodox leaders and ultranationalist politicians. Much has been made of the Serbian Orthodox Church's unusual and courageous show of resistance to state authority in moving from tacit support of the nationalist Milosevic regime to open hostility, including leading massive demonstrations in 1992 that called for Milosevic to step down in favor of a new government of national unity. But while the church has opposed the man most responsible for the rise of Serb nationalism, it has supported other, equally or more aggressive nationalist leaders, such as Radovan Karadzic. Church leaders believe that the political leaders of the Bosnian and Croatian Serbs are more committed to the church's central role in the Serbian nation. The Serb Republic in Bosnia permits religious education in state schools, for example, and Karadzic has effectively appealed to



the integral link between Serbian Orthodox and Serbian national destiny:

We have a firm belief that we are on [the] right path of God and that this folk [Serbs and Russians] will pay their debt to Serbdom and Orthodoxy; our deaths, suffering, and endurance we accept as God's grace, that he gave us the gift of destiny to accomplish this and, if God permits, that we save Serbia and Montenegro from devastation.

Karadzic and other ultranationalists also are more committed than Milosevic to maintaining the essential unity of the Serb nation. The Serbian Orthodox Church strongly opposed Milosevic's acquiescence in the international community's demands that Serbia end support for the Bosnian Serbs and give up the idea of a Greater Serbia. Significantly, the Synod declared as invalid Patriarch Pavle's witnessing to the August 29 agreement between Milosevic and the Bosnian Serb leaders which gave Milosevic authority to negotiate at Dayton on behalf of the Bosnian Serbs. Many bishops have called for the Patriarch's resignation because he failed to oppose the Dayton Agreement, which the Orthodox Assembly sees as an unmitigated defeat for Serbs because it forces Serbs to give up the idea of a Greater Serbia.

The Serbian Orthodox have been most severely criticized (Swiss and German Protestants have sought their suspension from the World Council of Churches) for giving moral and religious legitimacy to, or at least remaining silent in the face of, Serb aggression and ethnic cleansing. Like Catholic and Muslim leaders, the mainstream leadership of the Serbian Orthodox Church, while strongly supporting Serb self-determination, insisted that, if Yugoslavia was to dissolve, it should do so by agreement and without violence. Also like other religious leaders, since the outbreak of war they have defended the right and duty of their people to protect themselves and their homeland from what they considered "ethnic cleansing" and genocide against Serbs in Bosnia and Croatia. Some Serbian Orthodox statements have distinguished between legitimate self-defense and "wars of conquest," and there have been many general denunciations and a few specific condemnations of "ethnic cleansing." But Orthodox leaders have supported Karadzic, dismissing his indictment for war crimes as simply another example of the bias of the international community. Also, amidst widespread "ethnic cleansing" and a brutal siege of Sarajevo, they issued strong appeals for Serbs to defend themselves and their nation, while remaining silent about the crimes that were being committed in the name of this "defense." In July 1994, for example, they declared:

With full responsibility before God and before our People and human history, we call the entire Serbian Nation to stand up in defense of their centuries-long rights and liberties, of their vital interests, necessary for physical and spiritual survival and right to remain in the land of

their fathers and grandfathers.

The inability of key Serbian Orthodox leaders to acknowledge the extremism of Karadzic and other Bosnian Serb leaders and the validity of most allegations of "ethnic cleansing" and human rights abuses is due in part to ubiquitous Serb propaganda and intimidation, but moreso to a deep mistrust of the international community and an abiding sense of siege. This mistrust and siege mentality were in evident in an August 1995 statement:

Our crucified Church sees that Her crucified people are threatened from within by the spiritual and moral consequences of fifty years of ideological atheism, and from without by the interests of heartless world political powers, with their inhuman sanctions, pressures, threats, slandering and even direct bombings of innocent Serbian people.

This siege mentality has combined with a vision of a spiritually- and politically-strong and united Serbian nation to produce a strong version of ethnic-religious nationalism, which has played a mostly negative role in the current war. This is not to say that the church bears a significant responsibility for the rise of aggressive Serbian nationalism, for intellectuals, journalists and politicians have been far more influential. Yet secular nationalists sought and received support for their ultranationalism in Serbian Orthodoxy and have manipulated, with great effect, religious symbols and fears. The church has contributed to the war, therefore, not in creating aggressive and chauvinistic Serb nationalism but in validating its claims of national rights and myths of victimization, and giving it theological and religious legitimacy.

One conclusion we can draw from these brief descriptions of the actions of the three religious communities is that, to the extent they have had a role in the conflict, it has been in supporting and legitimating various kinds of nationalism. With the exception of some key Catholic leaders in Herzegovina, the Catholic Church has supported a weak form of ethnic-nationalism that is qualified by one important element of civic nationalism: support for a multi-ethnic, multi-religious state in Croatia and Bosnia. Many if not most ordinary Muslims and key Bosnian political figures, especially early in the war, have held to a vision of a secularized, multi-ethnic Bosnia, but Muslim religious leaders and Izetbegovic's party have increasingly embraced a weak form of an Islamic state. Many Serbian Orthodox leaders, more than their Catholic and Muslim counterparts, have embraced a strong form of ethnic-religious nationalism in which a multi-ethnic, multi-religious state is seen as a threat to national and religious identity, except where Serbs and Orthodox are dominant.

For most nationalist politicians, nationalism has provided

new scapegoats to fill a void left by the demise of communism. But for religious leaders, nationalism is much more compelling than merely a reaction to the demise of communism; it has been a means to bring that about and to advance legitimate national, cultural and religious rights that were suppressed under communism. One reason religious groups supported ethnic political parties is that there were few viable non-communist alternatives in the immediate aftermath of the demise of the Yugoslav communist party. Even if alternatives had been available, the religious leaders would not have embraced political parties that promoted a highly secularized state and society in which religion was marginalized or privatized.

The religious dimension to the conflict has been exacerbated by the diametrically opposed views of the Orthodox, on the one hand, and the Catholics and Muslims, on the other, of the causes of the conflict and the meaning of self-determination. I believe that the Muslim and Croat understanding of the conflict and their claims of self-determination (excluding the Croat vision of a Greater Croatia) are more valid. Given that, by 1991, Yugoslavia had ceased to exist as a functioning state, in large part due to the rise of Serb nationalism, Catholic and Muslim support for an independent Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia were reactions to, not the cause of, the descent of Yugoslavia into nationalist conflict. The links between religion and national identity was not the cause of the Yugoslav conflict, it was the almost inevitable destabilizing effect of these historic links once the federal government had lost its legitimacy.

Where religious leaders have failed the most during this war is in not condemning, in unambiguous and clear terms, violence and human rights abuses committed by their own people. Religious leaders on all sides have provided excruciating details about the suffering of their own people, while paying relatively little attention to the harms inflicted by their own national group, offering instead general condemnations of human rights violations by all sides and sometimes even categorical denials of well-documented atrocities.

This failure to be a strong and consistent witness for human rights reflects an understandable pastoral priority given one's own flock, especially when confronted with threats to the very survival of one's religious community. It takes extraordinary courage during a genocidal conflict to criticize your defenders for abusing the rights of those from the community you believe threatens your own existence. Religious leaders in the former Yugoslavia also have felt that the world has ignored or been indifferent to the dramatic suffering of their people and that criticism of human rights abuses would further deflect attention from this suffering and play into the hands of the aggressors. The ubiquitous war propaganda spewed out by government-controlled media in each country and sometimes unsubstantiated allegations by international organizations and human rights groups led religious leaders, like many others in these countries, to

disbelieve accusations of atrocities and to give their own governments the benefit of the doubt. The tendency of some church leaders to "rally around the flag" and to become enmeshed in the politics of atrocities, grossly exaggerating claims of genocide and other abuses, has further exacerbated the situation. Fear and intimidation have also been factors. In most parts of the region, speaking out against violence and human rights abuses takes great courage. A Serbian Orthodox Bishop living in Banja Luka or a Catholic priest in Mostar put themselves at risk if they are too outspoken about "ethnic cleansing" by Serb or Croat warlords.

It would be inappropriate to adopt a false evenhandedness that apports blame equally for the relative silence of religious leaders about specific acts of violence and war crimes. All sides in the war have committed gross abuses, but Serb forces have been responsible for the brunt of the "ethnic cleansing." Therefore, the Serbian Orthodox Church bears the heaviest responsibility for its failure to clearly speak out. To the extent that all three religious bodies have not shown a consistent and unequivocal commitment to human rights and a consistent opposition to violence, they have missed an important opportunity to mitigate the hatred and transcend the deep divide among their respective communities.

### **III. Religious Bridge Building and Reconciliation**

Throughout the war, there have been innumerable initiatives designed to help the three religious communities play a peacemaking role in the Balkans. These expectations and initiatives have multiplied after the Dayton Agreement. They arise precisely because of the link between national and religious identity, and the respect and influence that some religious leaders enjoy. They are also based on an assumption that reconciliation after the past five years of bloodletting will require more than restoring tolerance, law and justice -- as important as these are.

In *An Ethic for Enemies*, Donald Shriver argues that what is needed in these situations is a political equivalent of the religious notion of forgiveness. In politics, forgiveness requires a four-step process of (1) moral judgment about past injustices, (2) forbearance from revenge, (3) empathy for the enemy, and (4) a commitment to repair broken social relationships. "Such a combination," he posits,

calls for a collective turning from the past that neither ignores past evil nor excuses it, that neither overlooks justice nor reduces justice to revenge, that insists on the humanity of enemies even in their commission of dehumanizing deeds, and that values the justice that restores political community above the justice that destroys it.

That the Balkans could use such a process to escape its cycle of violence and atrocities seems indisputable. The pain, the hatred, the fear, the mistrust, the vengefulness, the loss of a sense of solidarity with those of other communities are palpable. Religious leaders have not been as prominent as they should have been in moving forward the process Shriver outlines, but all religious leaders, and many courageous individuals have insisted on the urgent need for and a vision of forgiveness and reconciliation between religious, ethnic, and national groups -- against overwhelming ideologies that insisted, at the point of a gun, that such a vision was impossible, unpatriotic, and even unnatural.

Perhaps the most visible symbol of this commitment to reconciliation were the series of high-profile meetings and statements by Serbian Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Muslim religious leaders before and during the war. These wartime initiatives did not bear fruit, in part because of the deep differences between the three religious communities. Despite these differences, religious leaders seem to agree on the need for renewing genuine dialogue and for reconciliation between the religious bodies and between the three communities. In October, 1995, the Pope convened all the bishops of the former Yugoslavia in Rome to discuss the church's pastoral role in post-war reconstruction. Of the ten commitments for pastoral action coming out of the meeting, eight dealt solely or entirely with opposing "excessive nationalism," promoting interfaith and intercommunal reconciliation, and ensuring that church programs served people of all faiths and ethnic groups; the other two dealt with prayer and rebuilding churches. Even in opposing the Dayton Accords, the Serbian Orthodox Assembly reiterated its previous pleas for healing: "[W]e call our people to mutual reconciliation and repentance, and to reconciliation with the peoples with whom we have lived together for centuries and with whom we will live in the future."

The role of religion in catalyzing a process of reconciliation will have to overcome several challenges.

There is not a recent history of deep interfaith collaboration. Despite their geographical proximity, interfaith relations in the former Yugoslavia have never been very close. The Serbian Orthodox Church has historically been extremely wary of Catholic ecumenical initiatives, which they see as a continuation of a centuries-long effort to extend its jurisdiction over the Balkans at the expense of Serbian Orthodoxy. Catholic enthusiasm for ecumenical dialogue has been limited as well, in part due to the opposition of the Orthodox and in part due to an image, strengthened by recent events, of a "Byzantine" church that is a servant of the state and antidemocratic.

What interfaith relations existed have been virtually destroyed by the war, especially those between the Serbian Orthodox, on the one hand, and the Catholics and Muslims, on the

other. The gulf between the religious groups on the causes of and solutions to the conflict will be difficult to overcome. The religious communities each feel that the other bears a heavy burden for its actions or inactions in response to this and past conflicts, and each believes that future cooperation depends on a process of repentance. The senior Muslim leader in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Mustafa Cerić, has refused to meet with Serbian Orthodox leaders until they repent for failing to oppose genocide against Muslims. Catholic Church leaders feel similarly about the Serbian Orthodox support for aggression against Croatia and Bosnia and for their encouraging Croatian Serbs to leave Croatia in August 1995. The Serbian Orthodox concerns were evident in their opposition to a proposed visit of Pope John Paul II to Belgrade in September 1994. They cited the Catholic Church's role in the *Ustashe* genocide, the Vatican's contribution to the demise of Yugoslavia by recognizing Croatia and Slovenia, and the Pope's support for international intervention to "disarm the aggressor" in Bosnia.

The Catholic Archbishop of Belgrade recently suggested that a long period of time is needed before this and similar issues can be publicly discussed and condemned because up until now any condemnation would have been taken as an admission of guilt that justified revenge, thus making matters worse not better.

Other religious leaders have taken a similar position on public acts of repentance, noting the fear that such acts would be misused to impose collective guilt on the whole religion or nation. They insist that a way must be found to undertake an objective analysis of the multiple conflicts and injustices perpetrated over the decades and centuries as part of any move toward reconciliation. Several initiatives that are bringing local religious leaders together to promote interfaith dialogue, reconciliation, and cooperation could contribute to this process.

The reconciliation process outlined by Shriver must begin now, but it will take many years to complete. In the short term, religion will play a constructive role in more immediate and practical ways. Throughout the war, many religious leaders have insisted that the average people, freed from war hysteria, violence, and intimidation, would return to living together in peace in a multi-ethnic, multi-religious society. The appeals by these leaders for people to stay in or return to their homes, even if they will be a minority, is a direct challenge to nationalist politicians (and some religious leaders) who are encouraging voluntary "ethnic cleansing." If there is to be any possibility of healing the wounds of war and rebuilding a multi-ethnic, multi-religious society, refugees must be able to return to their homes and resume a normal existence. Interfaith cooperation will likely be most fruitful in this practical task of rebuilding.

The most important work of healing will come, not just or even mainly through interfaith reconciliation, however necessary

that is, but from within the religious bodies themselves. Religious institutions, from schools to independent media, will play an important part in building a civic society that had only begun to emerge at the time the war broke out. More important, healing traumatized individuals and communities poses a daunting pastoral challenge, which economic and political reconstruction, even if successful, will leave unaddressed, but which religious bodies are uniquely suited to address.

### **Conclusion**

The war in the former Yugoslavia confirms one of Douglas Johnston's conclusions about religious conflicts in *Religion: The Missing Dimension of Statecraft*: namely that, "[t]he political, economic, and security dimensions of most social confrontations usually outweigh the religious, even when the conflict is superficially about religion." The war also confirms a tendency to overestimate what religion and religious leaders can do to prevent or mitigate these conflicts, especially when they involve the kind and scale of political extremism and violence found in this conflict. Religion is too readily dismissed as part of the problem in the former Yugoslavia because religious identity is, at least on the surface, a distinguishing characteristic of the opposing sides, and because the link between religious and national identity is often described in exclusively negative terms and as a source of conflict.

Religion has contributed to the conflict, but mostly indirectly. Weak and marginalized at the time of the collapse of Yugoslav communism, religion has been susceptible to manipulation by communists-turned-nationalists who harbor mostly disdain for things religious, but cynically enlist religion in the cause of their virulent nationalisms. Unfortunately, there have been ready recruits among all three religious groups, most notably among Serbian Orthodox leaders, Croatian Catholics in Herzegovina, and the ruling Muslim-dominated Party of Democratic Action in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The majority of religious leaders, however, have not subscribed to this religious nationalism, yet their legitimate cultivation of national identity and defense of communal rights has sometimes exacerbated divisions, especially among religious groups, played into the hands of the political extremists, and diverted them from finding ways to bridge the ethnic-nationalist chasms in the Balkans. Nevertheless, many religious figures have taken positive, even heroic, steps to minimize the conflict and have remained lonely voices for moderation and tolerance amidst the extremism that surrounds them.

It would be tempting to seek a solution to this and similar conflicts in decoupling religion and national identity, secularizing society, and replacing communal commitments with a more individualistic ethic. The better and more realistic

approach would be to find within the rich cultural and religious traditions of the Balkans the moral norms and basic beliefs that are consistent with and reinforce a vision of society in which religious, ethnic and national differences are less a source of conflict than a reason for coexistence. The best way to counter religious extremism or manipulation of religion is with strengthened, more authentic religion, not weakened religion. The challenge for religious leaders in the Balkans is to show that religion can be a counter to extreme nationalism and a source of peace because of, not in spite of, its close link with culture and national identity.