

10-1994

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### Recommended Citation

Steele, David A. (1994) "Former Yugoslavia: Religion as a Fount of Ethnic Hostility or an Agent of Reconciliation?," *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*: Vol. 14 : Iss. 5 , Article 1.  
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree/vol14/iss5/1>

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**FORMER YUGOSLAVIA: RELIGION AS A FOUNT OF ETHNIC HOSTILITY  
OR AN AGENT OF RECONCILIATION?**

by

David A. Steele

Dr. David A. Steele (United Church of Christ) received his doctorate from University of Edinburgh, Scotland. In the last few years he visited the former Yugoslavia several times and has taught courses on conflict resolution. An earlier draft of this article first appeared under the title "Religion: Fount of Ethnic Hostility? Agent of Reconciliation?" in God With Us? The Roles of Religion in the Conflicts in the Former Yugoslavia, edited by Gerald Shenk, Uppsala, Sweden: Life and Peace Institute, 1993, pp. 28-48.

Have religious groups in former Yugoslavia contributed to efforts of peace making or have they contributed toward the atmosphere which led to war? There have been rigorous denunciations, accusing all the main religious traditions of complicity, as well as denials of this by both indigenous and outside observers. The issue is certainly a complex one which necessitates looking beyond merely a recitation of the appropriate official statements on the part of the various religious hierarchies. One must also acknowledge when the unofficial statements of religious leaders seem, at least in the eyes of their counterparts, to contradict official statements.

Furthermore, apart from any specific comment about war or peace, one must examine the role played by religious identity in the resurgence of ethnic identity. To what extent has the process of religious identity formation, on the part of the predominant religious traditions, contributed toward the sacralization of ones own nationality and the development of an atmosphere in which intolerance has been legitimized? Yet, even if it can be demonstrated that the quest for religious identity has had these consequences, it is important to evaluate who is responsible. Is it the religious leadership which has sought to draw a connection between religious and ethnic identity? Or is it political leadership which has promulgated the misuse of religious traditions for this purpose?

Finally, what implications can be drawn for the future? Are confession and repentance appropriate? If so, distinguishing between positive and negative formulations of identity will make this a difficult discerning process. In addition, there are certain to be some groups, or individuals within groups, who are more guilty than others. Or if religious groups really are not guilty, then how can they more effectively counter the misuse of religion? In either case,

what are the possibilities for developing further the potential for reconciliation and peace making among the various religious traditions?

To evaluate these issues, it is important, first, to look at both official and unofficial statements, on the part of religious leaders, regarding the war and violations of human rights. Second, the complex question of linkage between religious and ethnic identity must be examined with respect to its impact on the escalation of the conflict. Third, implications must be noted which may affect any future peacemaking efforts on the part of the various religious communities.

### I. Statements by religious leaders

#### A. Positive statements

On November 26, 1992, representatives of the hierarchies of the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Catholic Church among Croats, and the Muslim community signed an "Appeal for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina." Among other demands, these religious leaders called for an end to the war, the distribution of humanitarian assistance without respect to faith or persuasion, the closing of all prison camps and releasing of all prisoners, an end to ethnic cleansing, the return of all refugees and displaced persons, and the cessation of all uses of religious symbols in any attempt to foster hatred or war.<sup>1</sup> This statement marked the first time that major leaders of the three primary religious traditions in former Yugoslavia had spoken with one voice to oppose the war. Previous attempts to bring them together for this purpose had failed due to numerous reasons.

Contact did prove to be more feasible, however, between the Orthodox and Catholic leadership. Patriarch Pavle and Cardinal Kuharić met in May and in August 1991. During the second meeting, in the midst of the Serb-Croat war, they called upon all people who believe in God to pray for peace and reconciliation.<sup>2</sup> A third meeting, which took place in September 1992, after a cease-fire agreement had been negotiated between Serbs and Croats, yielded a joint statement which itemized many of the same points which would be agreed upon two months later by the leadership of all three of the principal religious groups.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"Appeal for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina," Appeal of Conscience Foundation, Wolfsberg/Zurich, Switzerland, 26 November 1992.

<sup>2</sup>"Joint Statement of Franjo Cardinal Kuharić, Archbishop of Zagreb, Croatia and the Serbian Orthodox Patriarch, Pavle," at Slavonski Brod, Croatia, 24 August 1991, trans. by Rev. Anthony A. Petrusić and Melchior Masina (on file at the Office of International Justice and Peace, United States Catholic Conference, Washington, DC).

<sup>3</sup>"Message of Patriarch Pavle and Cardinal Kuharić Following Their Meeting in Geneva on 23 September 1992," in CEC (Conference of European Churches) Documentation Service, Volume 17, No. 34 (1992), pp. 22-24.

Various separate statements by the Croatian Catholic and Serbian Orthodox hierarchies contribute to this impression of support for human rights and opposition to war. For example, the Croatian Catholic Bishops, at their fall meeting in 1991, condemned "the evil of war" and supported "the rights of all minorities within established borders."<sup>4</sup> More recently, the Catholic bishop and clergy of Banja Luka, despite living under Serb occupation, issued a similar statement with respect to the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. They made their protest against the war and called for respect of fundamental human rights "in the name of all menaced . . . religious and national communities." They also stated that, since the beginning of the war, they had tried their best to see that "believers endowed to our pastoral care should not be tempted to use arms against their neighbors."<sup>5</sup>

The Serbian Orthodox hierarchy has not only condemned the war and called for the recognition of human rights but has dissociated itself from the policies of the Serbian government. In an unprecedented statement the Holy Assembly of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church stated that the current regime did not "make possible equal rights for a democratic dialogue in society," and failed "to sincerely accept national reconciliation, to heal the consequences of the civil and fratricidal war and create preconditions for the spiritual regeneration and healing of the people." They charged the regime with the staging of elections and distanced the church from both the government and its constitution. They even called for "the creation of a government of people's confidence, national unity and salvation of all the people."<sup>6</sup>

Islamic religious leaders have also expressed their opposition to the war, though often with an understandable emphasis on the consequent suffering of their own people. Hamdija Jusufspahić, the Mufti of Beograd, decried the violence of all war and called for dialogue between Muslims and Christians. He has even told foreign Muslims not to send arms, but to help them find *salam* (peace). He claimed that, "If half of the money spent on arms was spent on peace, we would have more believers, more happiness, and more peace."<sup>7</sup> Other

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<sup>4</sup>"Statement of Bishop's Fall Meeting - Zagreb, Croatia," 16 October 1991, trans. by Rev. Anthony A. Petrusić and Melchior Masina (on file at the Office of International Justice and Peace, United States Catholic Conference, Washington, DC).

<sup>5</sup>"Dramatic Appeal for Help of the Bishop and the Clergy of the Diocese of Banja Luka," 24 February 1993 (on file at the Office of International Justice and Peace, United States Catholic Conference, Washington, DC).

<sup>6</sup>"Memorandum of the Holy Assembly of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Issued at Its Regular Session Held from the 14th to the 27th of May, 1992," (on file at Kršćanska Informativna Služba, Zagreb) pp. 3-4. This statement was reiterated again one year later at the 1993 Holy Assembly (see "Communique to the Public From the Regular Assembly of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church," trans. by N. Gerald Shenk, 29 May 1993).

<sup>7</sup>Interview with Hamdija Jusufspahić, at the mosque in Beograd, 4 March 1993.

Muslim leaders have called for peace with Croats, with whom they claimed long-standing good relations, but not with Serbs, whom they saw as the enemy aggressor.<sup>8</sup> Finally, after nearly a year of warfare, the Minister of Religious Affairs for the Bosnian Government affirmed the right of people of all faiths to live together in peace.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to the above statements of general concern for peace and human rights, there have been instances of confession and regret regarding specific atrocities by ones own ethnic group, as well as personal restraint regarding accusations of blame on the part of others. The bishop of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Banja Luka, Jefrem, signed an appeal condemning *chetnik* forces (Serb Nationalist paramilitary troops) for slaughtering Muslim believers at worship in a mosque and for attempting to create a "Greater Serbia."<sup>10</sup> In another example of confession, Cardinal Kuharić expressed sorrow and protest over the attack on the museum and residence of the metropolitan of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Zagreb, claiming that this act was a crime against God's command and against Croatian democracy.<sup>11</sup> An illustration of restraint comes, perhaps most appropriately, from the Mufti of Beograd after a bomb had exploded in the courtyard of his mosque. When asked who was to blame, he stated, "I do not know who placed the bomb, but I know that Serbs put out the fire."<sup>12</sup>

#### B. Negative statements

Alongside the expressions of opposition to the war and affirmations of concern for other ethnic groups, there has been a darker side. Some people and groups within each religious tradition have, out of concern for the well-being of its own people, spoken and acted in ways which were perceived as a threat to others. Some such allegations may be dismissed as examples of heightened paranoia. It would be inappropriate and dangerous, however, to

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<sup>8</sup> Sefko Omerbašić, imam in the mosque in Zagreb and president of Meshikat of the Islamic religious community for Croatia, in message delivered at Church of the Holy Cross in Zagreb, 25 October 1992 (reported in Kršćanska Informativna Služba, KIS AJ.26.02, 26 October 1992); and "Open Letter from the President of the Islamic Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina to Cardinal Franjo Kuharić of the Croatian Catholic Church (reported in Kršćanska Informativna Služba, KIS AJ.22.02, 22 October 1993).

<sup>9</sup>"Mr. Darko Lukić, Minister for Religious Affairs in the Bosnian Government: 'Building a State'," in a quote taken from a *recent* article in the Zagreb newspaper, Vecernji List (reported in Kršćanska Informativna Služba, 2 February 1993).

<sup>10</sup>"The War in Bosnia and Herzegovina: The Latest Appeal of the Religious Leaders in Banja Luka," 4 April 1992 (reported in Kršćanska Informativna Služba, KIS A.07.04.02, 7 April 1992).

<sup>11</sup>"Cardinal Kuharic Protests Against the Attack on the Museum and Metropolis of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Zagreb" (reported in Kršćanska Informativna Služba, KIS AD.21.01, 21 April 1992).

<sup>12</sup>Hamdija Jusufspahić in comment to Elizabeth Salter, member of the international affairs team of the World Council of Church's Unit on Justice, Peace and Creation (reported to this author in conversation with Elizabeth Salter, Geneva, 16 March 1993).

dismiss all such charges, for in them one can perceive not only legitimate fears of victimization but also the dark side of unacknowledged biases. Each religious tradition can provide examples whereby concern for its own self-preservation has been turned into negative perceptions of, and actions toward, others.

One example of this darker side within Serbian Orthodoxy came after the meeting between Patriarch Pavle and Cardinal Kuharic in Geneva in September 1992. The Muslim religious leader, Reis-ul-ulema Jakub Selimoski, charged the Patriarch with saying one thing while doing another. According to him Pavle, despite having signed an agreement condemning war crimes, justified the massacre of Muslims by claiming that Serbs and Orthodoxy are endangered in Bosnia and Herzegovina.<sup>13</sup> In another incident, Croatian church people accused Pavle of blessing the foundations of a new Serbian Orthodox Church which was being built on ground on which previously there had stood a Catholic church. In this town of Lovas, in Serb-occupied eastern Slavonia, there had been no Orthodox inhabitants prior to World War II.<sup>14</sup> A third example illustrates the common tendency to deny the sins of one's own people, thus feeding the hurt and anger of those who have been victims. The hierarchy of the Serbian Orthodox Church issued in December 1992 a "Communique Concerning the False Accusations Against the Serbian Nation in Bosnia and Herzegovina." Despite careful documentation by internationally renowned organizations, such as Amnesty International and Helsinki Watch, the bishops denied that Serbian militias had held and raped 40,000 Muslim women. They claimed that such camps did not exist, while at the same time charging that Serbian women had suffered this abuse. What has been seen by the whole world as a horrendous atrocity, was depicted by the bishops as propaganda designed to satanize the Serbian people.<sup>15</sup> Accusations of bias on the part of the Serbian Orthodox Church have also been made by some Orthodox people. Six Orthodox writers and theologians published a letter in Le Monde in November 1991 in which they charged the Serbian Orthodox Church with "contributing, undoubtedly, unconsciously, to incitements to hate." By focusing so much attention on the past sufferings of Serbs, and ignoring the fact

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<sup>13</sup>Reis-ul-ulema Jakub Selimoski, interview with Croatian newspaper Večernji List (reported in "The Muslim Imam for Bosnia and Herzegovina, Abdulah Celebić, was Killed during a Serbian Artillery Attack on Sarajevo...", Kršćanska Informativna Služba, 8 October 1992).

<sup>14</sup> "Serbian Orthodox Metropolitan Bishop Accuses Croatian Authorities - While Serbian Patriarch Paul Blesses the Foundation Stone of a New Orthodox Church on the Ruins of the Destroyed Catholic Church in Lovas" (reported in Kršćanska Informativna Služba, KIS AD3001, 30 April 1992).

<sup>15</sup>"Communique Concerning the False Accusations Against the Serbian Nation in Bosnia and Herzegovina," Beograd, December 1992 (on file at the Conference of European Churches, Geneva).

that most of the victims of the current war were Croatian, they claimed that the church was making itself the accomplice of a national communist war machine.<sup>16</sup>

The Catholic Church in Croatia, on the other hand, was quick to itemize the incidents of "Serbian terrorism" during the Serbo-Croat war.<sup>17</sup> They were blind, however, to the accusation of Serbian Orthodox people that the Croatian government and society were employing symbols which were a vivid reminder of the *ustasha* (Croatian fascist extremists) and creating an environment in which Serbian people did not feel safe.<sup>18</sup> Croatian bishops were also firm in their support for the independence of Croatia, but ignored calls for the right of self-determination on the part of Serbs in Krajina, claiming that the existence of free democratic elections throughout the republic provided adequate constitutional justification for their position.<sup>19</sup> As for the Croatian war effort, there are numerous examples of support from the Catholic Church. In September 1991, a Catholic youth magazine carried the message, "We are ready to die for our Fatherland," on the front page. Bishop Ante Jurić of Split stated that "It is the duty of every Catholic to defend his Fatherland actively. In a moment like this a false pacifism is indirectly strengthening the aggressors and the bandits."<sup>20</sup> Some voices within the Catholic Church in Bosnia and Herzegovina have likewise given support both to the cause of the Bosnian Croats and to the militant means being pursued. Franciscan Ivo Marković writes that the Catholic Church supported nationalistic parties as the only alternative to communism, while at the same time advocating close relations with Croatia. Furthermore, in the face of Serbian aggression and

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<sup>16</sup>"Appeal to the Bishops of Serbia," Le Monde, 27 November 1991 (English translation on file at the Office of International Justice and Peace, United States Catholic Conference, Washington, DC).

<sup>17</sup>Franjo Cardinal Kuharić, "Report of Terrorism in the Territory of the Archdiocese of Zagreb, Croatia," 3 August 1991 (on file in the Office of International Justice and Peace, United States Catholic Conference, Washington, DC).

<sup>18</sup>For a catalogue of incidents claimed by the Serbian Orthodox Church to be examples of Croatian oppression against its Serbian minority, see "Appeal of the Serbian Orthodox Church to the London Peace Conference on Yugoslavia," Beograd, 27 August 1992 (English translation on file at the Conference of European Churches, Geneva), pp. 4-5. An example of a Croatian Catholic rejection of all such incidents can be seen in a letter written to Patriarch Pavle by Father Anton Badurina in which he speaks of the "transparent propaganda regarding Serbs being threatened." (Anton Badurina, "An Open Letter to the Patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church, His Holiness Pavle," Zagreb, 8 November 1991 [on file at the Office of International Justice and Peace, United States Catholic Conference, Washington, DC]), p. 5.

<sup>19</sup>"Statement of the Catholic Bishops of Yugoslavia," Zagreb, 27 June 1991 (on file at the Office of International Justice and Peace, United States Catholic Conference, Washington, DC); and "Statement of Bishop's Fall Meeting - Zagreb, Croatia," 16 October 1991.

<sup>20</sup> Wolfgang Palaver, "The Yugoslav Crisis: A European Perspective," in Cry Out for the World to Hear Us: Pax Christi on the Crisis in the Former Yugoslavia, Pax Christi International, Brussels, 1992, p. 25.

weak Muslim resistance, he claims that the Catholic Church supported the establishment of a Croat army.<sup>21</sup>

In the case of Muslims, the controversial elements focus on the attitudes of prominent government officials in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Both Serbs and Croats have charged that the ultimate aim of Muslims is to build an Islamic theocracy in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Serbian Orthodox bishops have charged that the democratic, inclusive, inter-ethnic state spoken of by President Izetbegović and his government is simply a cover for their real goal of an Islamic state governed by Shariat law.<sup>22</sup> Bosnian Franciscan Ivo Marković concurs with this fear, explaining that when Bosnian Muslims speak of democracy, they mean a unitary state with Muslim domination. According to him, this would be achieved initially through an electoral process, after which Islamic law would be imposed upon the rest of the population.<sup>23</sup>

Both Croats and Serbs point to a series of events which they believe are the initial stages of such an effort. First, and most important, is the publication in 1990 of the Islamic Declaration, written in 1970 by Izetbegović. In this work, the President of Bosnia and Herzegovina clearly states that when Muslims constitute the majority of the population, then Islamic order will become the supreme act of democracy. However, his conception of the social order, modeled on Pakistan, does not sound like western democracy. He writes:

There can be neither peace nor coexistence between the Islamic religion and non-Islamic social and political institutions. . . . Islam obviously excludes the right or possibility of action on the part of any foreign ideology on that terrain.<sup>24</sup>

Following the publication of the Islamic Declaration, Serbs and Croats, alike, have charged the Muslims with a growing intolerance and religious exclusiveness. One indication of this trend was the attempt on the part of the Party of Democratic Action (Izetbegović's political party) to increase the number of Muslim voters within the population to over fifty percent. Part of this effort was directed at attracting back Muslims who had registered as "Serbs," "Croats," "undecided," or "Yugoslavs" during the previous census.<sup>25</sup> But a second part of the

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<sup>21</sup>Ivo Marković, "Uloga i Položaj Katoličke Crkve u Ratu u Bosni i Hercegovini," (trans. as "Role and Place of the Catholic Church in the War in Bosnia and Hercegovina," by Fedja Zimić), Zagreb, 26 January 1993 (original on file at Kršćanska Informativna Služba, Zagreb).

<sup>22</sup>"Appeal of the Serbian Orthodox Church to the London Peace Conference on Yugoslavia," (Footnote 18), pp. 5-6.

<sup>23</sup>Ivo Marković, "Bosanski Muslimani," (trans. as "Bosnian Muslims," by Fedja Zimić), Zagreb, 7 February 1993 (original on file at Kršćanska Informativna Služba, Zagreb), p. 2.

<sup>24</sup>Alija Izetbegović, "The Islamic Declaration," Balcanica: Storia, Cultura, Politica, Volume 9, No. 3/4, 1992, pp. 89, 103, 108, and 115-17.

<sup>25</sup>Marković, footnote 23, p. 2.



effort was the passing, by the parliament of Bosnia and Herzegovina, of a declaration entitled "The Program of the Resettlement of the Bosnians from Turkey," an act which it was feared would bring an additional four million Muslims into Bosnia. A second indication of Islamic domination, in the eyes of non-Muslims was the publication, in the spring of 1992, of a leaflet titled "The Declaration of Independence of the Islamic Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina." This new republic was to include non-Muslims, but was to have a constitution based on the Shariah and was to have one of its two houses of parliament composed of "beys," or leaders from the Islamic community. Despite the secularity of most Bosnian Muslims, the existence of documents such as these made many Serbs and Croats determined to carve out territories for themselves.<sup>26</sup>

## II. Linkage between religious and ethnic identity

It is important to examine the ways in which religious expression has permeated the respective cultures and shaped their national identities. One small indication of the importance of religion as a badge of identification, throughout the region, can be observed in the tendency of Gypsies to change their religious affiliation depending on the exact location in which they are currently living.<sup>27</sup> Other indications vary, depending of the nature of the relationship of each of the three dominant religious groups to its own ethnic context. There are also indications, within each context, that the pattern of expression of this linkage has changed over time. Religious authorities may be equally nationalistic in their orientation but less supportive of their current governments than they were at the beginning of the conflict.

The linkage between religious and ethnic identity in this region is hardly new. Pedro Ramet, in his 1989 writing on "Religion and Nationalism in Yugoslavia," stated that the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Croatian Catholic Church, and the Bosnian Muslim community were "a defining factor in ethnic differentiation, perhaps even the single most important factor." Religion became a badge of identity and guardian of traditions for Croats, Serbs, and Muslims, as well as for other peoples in the region. This was particularly important for the preservation of identity and culture as various foreign empires dominated the region.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Dragoljub R. Živojinović, "Islam in the Balkans: Origins and Contemporary Implications," Mediterranean Quarterly, Volume 3, No. 4, 1992, pp. 62-64.

<sup>27</sup>Interview with Franjo Jurak, Catholic priest, Zagreb, 25 February 1993.

<sup>28</sup>Pedro Ramet, "Religion and Nationalism in Yugoslavia," in Religion and Nationalism in Soviet and East European Politics, ed. by Pedro Ramet, Duke University Press, Durham, 1989, pp. 299-311.

In fact, the simultaneous oppression of both religion and nation tended to solidify the connection between them in the minds of the people.<sup>29</sup>

Although, today, religion functions in a different way than at previous points in history, one can erase neither the historical influence nor the current expression of religion, upon the whole of society, including the present conflicts. We have already seen ways in which each tradition has acted to legitimize the aspirations of its people, and often its government, especially when it perceives that its liberty and/or rights are under threat. We shall now turn to ways in which the dominant religions have helped to foster a nationalistic ideology and social/political infrastructure. The specific role of religion in the conflicts will also be illustrated by the use of religious symbols and the targeting of religious persons and objects, by secular groups.

#### A. Serbian Orthodox

The Serbian Orthodox Church has been a self-conscious contributor to the development of a nationalistic ideology.<sup>30</sup> Like the whole of the Orthodox tradition, the ecclesiastical framework of the church is very much centered on the concept of nation. Theological constructs, such as *symphonia* or *svetosavlje*, have specifically linked church and nation as well as religious and ethnic identity.<sup>31</sup> In fact, ethnic belonging easily overshadows the religious. The use of the phrase, "*Srpska Crkva*" (Serbian Church) suggests that there is no other legitimate Serbian church outside of Orthodoxy, an impression strengthened by the adoption of the saying, "One who is not Orthodox is not Serb," by the patriarchate in the 1920s.<sup>32</sup> Serbian people who belong to other religions frequently complain of being treated as though they were traitors.<sup>33</sup>

The linkage between religion and nation does not mean, however, that the Serbian Orthodox Church has given automatic approval to the present government. Although the initial response of the church was to see the Milosevic government as the liberator of the

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<sup>29</sup>Tonči Kuzmanič, "Former Yugoslavia: The Religious War?" (unpublished revised version of an article published in *Religioni e Società*, No. 4, 1992, Firenze), p. 12.

<sup>30</sup>Although in general terms this is true and will be documented in the next few paragraphs, some of the leadership are less nationalistic than others. While most have sympathy for the nationalist movement, and a few a close to radical movements, some have a more balanced view.

<sup>31</sup>Interview with Bojan Popov, Serbian Orthodox deacon, Novi Sad, Serbia, 25 June 1991; and Ivo Marković, "Srpsko Pravoslavlje i Srpska Pravoslavna Crkva" (trans. as "Serbian Orthodoxy and Serbian Orthodox Church," by Fedja Zimic), Zagreb, [n.d.], pp. 3-4.

<sup>32</sup>Interview with Alexander Birviš, Baptist Pastor, Beograd, 11 March 1993.

<sup>33</sup>Interview with Aleksandar Mitrović, Pentecostal pastor, Novi Sad, Serbia, 14 March 1993.

Serbian people, this relationship did not last. In fact, the bishops of the church have faulted the present government for not allowing "the Church to assume her rightful place in society which belonged to her for centuries. . ." <sup>34</sup> One of the areas of contention is the fact that the government has not reinstated Orthodox catechism in the public schools. There is no indication of concern for the rights of non-Orthodox children in Serbia despite the fact that the Serbian Orthodox Church objects to Catholic catechism in Croatian schools. <sup>35</sup>

The aim of the "theology of the nation" was to provide a sense of belonging for the Serbian people, especially for those who lived in other parts of Yugoslavia. Leading Serbian Orthodox theologians focused on the sufferings of the Serbian people, especially at the hands of Croats, Bosnians, and Albanians in Kosovo. Serbian Orthodox newspapers have published such accounts of Serbian victimization since the late 1970s, stressing their claims of the uniqueness of Serbian genocide. In 1991, this perspective was authorized by the Holy Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church when they referred to the suffering of the Serbian nation, during World War II at the Croatian concentration camp of Jasenovac, as the sin of all sins and equated it with the suffering of Christ. <sup>36</sup> The cataloguing of victimization in Croatia and Kosovo, fed by theological interpretation, is paralleled by a glaring inability to view the actions of its own people with the same attitude of repentance which is required of others. <sup>37</sup> Instead of reciprocal repentance by the Serbian Orthodox Church, there has been ecclesiastical sanction for quite astounding conspiracy theories regarding presently perceived dangers. For example, the Reis-ul-ulema Jakub Selimoski recounts a statement by Patriarch Pavle in 1992 alleging the existence of a Vatican-Tehran-fundamentalist plot against the Serbian people. <sup>38</sup>

At the same time that these developments occurred within the Serbian Orthodox Church, an extreme form of Serbian nationalism was emerging outside of either church or

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<sup>34</sup>"Memorandum of the Holy Assembly of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church, 14-27 May 1992," footnote 6, p. 4.

<sup>35</sup>Paul Mojzes, "The Role of the Religious Communities in the War in Former Yugoslavia" (unpublished revised version of article written for a conference, "Religion and Crisis in Eastern Europe After Communism," in Houston, Texas, 23-25 April 1993), pp. 23-24.

<sup>36</sup>Serbian Orthodox theologians, writing from this perspective include Atanasije Jevtić, Nikolaj Velimirović, and Justin Popović (See Geert van Dartel, "The Nations and the Churches in Yugoslavia," Religion, State and Society, Volume 20, Nos. 3 & 4, 1992, pp. 281-82; and Markovic, Footnote 31, p. 3.

<sup>37</sup>As an example of the latter, the Serbian Orthodox Church had lamented that no Roman Catholic official attended the dedication of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Jasenovac, commemorating the victims of Croatian fascism (Mojzes, Footnote 35, p. 22).

<sup>38</sup>Selimoski, footnote 13.

government. Secular writers such as Drašković, Čosić, Šešelj, and Miroljub Jevtić began looking for the roots of nationalism within the medieval Orthodox Church and state, especially during periods when Serbs were perceived to be the victims at the hands of Croats, Bosnians, and Albanians. As the writers attempted to explain contemporary events in the light of this nationalistic view of history, there resulted a blatant declaration of Holy War against Muslims and Croats.<sup>39</sup>

When this war finally erupted, the presence of religious symbols, religious targets, and even religious leaders in the war effort served as indication that a form of religious identification had accompanied nationalism into the souls of even those who were avowedly non-religious. Religious symbols appeared in many forms--on military weapons and vehicles, in the use of the three finger *chetnik* sign (symbolizing the Trinity), and in signs of the cross which were carved or burned into the bodies of Muslim people.<sup>40</sup> Religious objects and people were targeted, not only by the Yugoslav Peoples Army, the various semi-private Serbian Armies, and the various Serbian militias, but also by ordinary citizens. In Bosnia and Croatia, mosques and Catholic Churches were destroyed, and Muslim and Catholic religious leaders were imprisoned and killed. But even within Serbia, itself, Catholics and Muslims have complained of rock throwing, bombs, evictions, death threats, and other forms of harassment at the hands of ordinary citizens, not the government.<sup>41</sup> Finally, there have been cases of priests blessing weapons and soldiers on the front lines of battle.<sup>42</sup>

#### B. Croatian Catholic

Catholic ecclesiology does not advocate the formation of national churches. Therefore, the influence of religion in the development of nationalism took a different form in Croatia. Instead of building upon a history of theological linkage between church and nation, there was a long-term sense of Croatian identification with the worldwide Catholic Church and a specific identification, on the part of the worldwide Catholic Church, with the justice of this

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<sup>39</sup>One of the books, written by Atanasije Jevtić, was even titled Jihad (Kuzmanic, footnote 29, p. 12.).

<sup>40</sup>Interview with anonymous Muslim refugee, Gashinci refugee camp, near Džakovo, Croatia, 11 March 1993; the Rijaset (leadership of the Islamic community), in a statement reported in "Muslim Leadership Proclaims," Kršćanska Informativna Služba, KIS AG.23.01 [July 1992]; and Kuzmanič, footnote 29, p. 4.

<sup>41</sup>Interview with Jusufspahić; Kuharić, footnote 17; Kuzmanič, p. 4; Rijaset, footnote 40; and interview with Bishop Franc Perko, in the Croatian newspaper, Globus (as reported in "We Are More and More Times Unable to Carry Out Our Worship Service," Kršćanska Informativna Služba, KIS AH1402, [August 1992], pp. 1-2).

<sup>42</sup>Kuzmanič, footnote 29, p. 4.

particular Croatian cause. At the same time, this relationship has occasionally been expressed in overtly theological terms. In like manner to Serbian Orthodox theology, the war is depicted as the Golgotha of the Croatian nation,<sup>43</sup> and the Croatian people are depicted as "chosen" by God while in the midst of great suffering. Josip Beljan, writing in the Catholic publication, Veritas, amplifies this perspective.

God has by way of his Church, by way of the Holy Father, looked at his faithful people, spoke out on their behalf, directly intervened in history, in the struggle, warring together with his people for their liberation. . . . With this war God also returned to his people, in its heart and home. [God] Returned to the entire mass media, political, social, and state life of Croatia, from where he was driven out 45 years earlier. The cross of Christ stands next to the Croatian flag. . . . The Church is glad for the return of its people "from the twofold" slavery--Serbian and communist. This is a great "kairos" of God's grace for the entire Croatian people. . . . Here was not a battle for a piece of Croatian or Serbian land but a war between good and evil, Christianity and communism, culture and barbarity, civilization and primitivism, democracy and dictatorship, love and hatred. . . . Thank God, it all ended well, due to the Pope and Croatian politics.<sup>44</sup>

The involvement of the Vatican, in gathering international support for the recognition of Croatia and Slovenia, was one of the causes underlying the Serbian claim that the Catholic Church was part of an anti-Serbian, anti-Orthodox, conspiracy. In one way, the identification of the Croats with an international church made it even more frightening to the Serbian Orthodox Church. The Serbs saw a new international alignment developing along religious lines, the parameters of which reminded them of historical humiliations. Furthermore, this new alliance was then acting to interfere in the internal affairs of their country and to callously rebuff the legitimate concerns for self-determination on the part of Serbs living in Croatia. But the Vatican chose to adopt the Croat view that it was a matter of the human rights and legitimate self-determination of the Croat people, though it did press the Croatian government for protection of minority rights within its own borders.<sup>45</sup>

In addition to the Vatican, the leadership of the Croatian Catholic Church played an important role in the quest for Croatian sovereignty. Even in the late 1980s, Cardinal Kuharić and other Catholic bishops were advocates of Croatian national interests. For example, despite a considerable threat level to Croatian Serbs, they pressed for the exclusive use of Croatian language and alphabet within their society and for the creation of a Croatian Orthodox Church, independent from Serbian Orthodoxy. After the Croatian Democratic

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<sup>43</sup>van Dartel, "The Nations and the Churches in Yugoslavia," footnote 36, p. 281.

<sup>44</sup>Josip Beljan, "Priznata Vjernost," Veritas, Nos. 9-10, September-October 1992, Zagreb, pp. 24-25 (trans. by Paul Mojzes, in "The Role of the Religious Communities in the War in Former Yugoslavia," footnote, p. 17.).

<sup>45</sup>Gerard F. Powers, "Testing the Moral Limits of Self-determination: Northern Ireland and Croatia," The Fletcher Forum, Summer 1992, pp. 36-37.

Union (Hrvatska Democratska Zajednica or HDZ) came to power, the Catholic Church, along with the nationalistic movement, could emerge from the role of opposition. Then the Catholic leadership displayed almost unconditional support of the new government and its nationalistic policies. They were present at the opening of parliament and appeared with state officials in the media. After succeeding in their attempt to influence the political process in Croatia, the Catholic leadership turned its attention to Bosnia and Herzegovina where they supported the activity of the HDZ in violation of laws which forbade the existence of political parties formed exclusively on the basis of national or religious identity. The attempt, on the part of the Catholic Church, to change this law was a major factor in the division of Bosnian politics along religio-ethnic lines. As a result, the Catholic Church must bear its share of responsibility for the ensuing ethnic confrontation which has led to such tragedy.<sup>46</sup> This must be said despite recent attempts on the part of the Catholic Church, in both Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, to distance itself from the political authorities.

Until the first part of 1993, the actions of Vatican, cardinal, and bishops clearly served to solidify even more the Croat and Catholic identities. It is no wonder that even a former communist politician, such as Tadjman, began to refer to "all that is Croatian and Catholic," as though the two were inseparable.<sup>47</sup> *Crkva u Hrvata*, "the church among Croats," was as definitive a statement of linkage as was *Srpska crkva*.

As with Serbia, this linkage between religion and nationality can be seen in the war effort through the presence of religious symbols, religious targets, and religious leaders. The symbols include soldiers being ornamented with rosaries and crosses as well as weapons and vehicles being decorated.<sup>48</sup> Targets include places of worship and sacred objects, as well as threats to other clergy. The Serbian Orthodox Metropolitan Bishop of Zagreb-Ljubljana received menacing letters from the Veterans Society of Croatia saying that the first to be attacked will be all Serbian bishops.<sup>49</sup> Finally, Catholic priests, many of whom are refugees from occupied territories of Croatia, have been sent as army chaplains who bless soldiers and weapons on the front lines. A few priests, including a Croatian Franciscan who later

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<sup>46</sup>Mojzes, "The Role of the Religious Communities in the War in Former Yugoslavia," footnote 35, pp. 17-19.

<sup>47</sup>Franjo Tadjman, letter to Serbian Orthodox Patriarch Pavle (reported in "Letter of Croatian President to Head of Serbian Orthodox Church," Kršćanska Informativna Služba, Zagreb, 20 March 1992).

<sup>48</sup>Kuzmanič, footnote 29, p. 4.

<sup>49</sup>"Serbian Orthodox Metropolitan Bishop Accuses Croatian Authorities...," footnote 14.

accepted a political office and numerous former Catholic seminarians in Sarajevo, have carried guns and accompanied troops into battle.<sup>50</sup>

### C. Bosnian Muslims

The Muslim faith, like the Catholic and unlike the Orthodox, has more of an international scope and is, therefore, less nationalistic in orientation. Islam is a worldwide faith with a highly developed supra-national consciousness. At the same time, the Bosnian Muslims are the only Muslims in the world who are considered Muslim by nationality. In the early 1970s, Tito gave them the status of a nationality within Yugoslavia in order to balance the power of both Serbs and Croats. Within the former Yugoslav context, the only distinguishing characteristic, upon which to base their independent national identity, was their religion and the culture which had formed around it. This was true despite the high degree of secularization among these people. Religion, though not practiced by the majority of people, had become an essential mark of identity.

At the same time, as already indicated, the political leadership, which developed in the Muslim community in preparation for the 1990 elections and which subsequently has become the ruling party in Bosnia and Herzegovina, has been very much influenced by the Islamic faith. Furthermore, to understand the Muslim perspective, as embraced by these religious Muslims, it is important to understand the relationship between religion and politics in much of Islam. When living in countries where they are a minority, Muslims express their faith primarily within the privacy of their religious community. However, when they become the dominant group, there is often a sense of obligation to implement the supposed optimum form of governance, i.e. to organize the state according to Islamic law. It is assumed that this state of affairs will be best for everyone. A Muslim intellectual from Bosnia clearly stated this perspective by saying that, even Christians, in their longing for justice, should be in favor of an Islamic state because it is the most just form of organization for human society. Given this attitude, it is not surprising that a Bosnian Croat would conclude that, for Muslims, tolerance does not imply equal partnership, but only a temporary acceptance of the perspective of the other on the way to establishment of the ideal Islamic society.<sup>51</sup>

Another aspect of Islamic aspiration, which has produced fear among non-Muslim peoples, is the pan-Islamic model of supra-national unity of the worldwide Islamic

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<sup>50</sup>Mojzes, footnote 35, p. 17; and Franz K. Prueler, "Report on Caritas Europe Mission to Croatia and Serbia," 9 September 1991 (on file at Catholic Relief Services, Baltimore, Maryland), p. 2.

<sup>51</sup>Marković, footnote 23, p. 1. At the same time, as is the case in both the Serb and Croat contexts, one can find statements on the part of individual leaders which contradict this impression. For example, Darko Lukić, Minister for Religious Affairs in the Bosnian government has spoken of his vision for a state in which three faiths could live together (Lukić, footnote 9).

community. Izetbegović, in his Islamic Declaration, envisioned the creation of a great Islamic federation "from Morocco to Indonesia, from tropical Africa to Central Asia." He pictured the creation of supra-national Islamic structures in the economic, cultural and political spheres.<sup>52</sup> A secret trip by Izetbegović to Libya, followed by one to Iran, both prior to the disintegration of Yugoslavia, simply increased fears among non-Muslims regarding the president's pan-Islamic intentions. Bosnian Serbs responded to the meeting with Qadhafi by calling it "a secret alliance between the Bosnian leaders and an Islamic despot from the Near East." Furthermore, Izetbegović, himself, admitted that he received support for his political views in Tehran.<sup>53</sup> These events have fueled charges by both Serbs and Croats of a growing Islamic fundamentalistic influence brought in from these two countries.<sup>54</sup> Muslim leaders from Bosnia and Herzegovina have repeatedly denied that Islamic fundamentalism has had much of a following there. They have claimed that any fundamentalism has been the result of Serbian aggression toward Muslim people.<sup>55</sup> However, even sympathetic observers have indicated that leading Bosnian Muslim theologians, imams, and activists, such as Isma'il Balić, Halid Hajimulić, Halid Varatanović, and Fadil Porča, have increasingly identified with

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<sup>52</sup>Izetbegović, footnote 24, pp. 119-20.

<sup>53</sup>Živojinović, footnote 26, pp. 58-60.

<sup>54</sup>The Catholic Archbishop of Sarajevo, Vinko Puljić, said that though Catholic-Muslim relations in Bosnia had been good, that "now [January 1993] unfortunately Islamic fundamentalism is growing, brought in from Libya and Iran" (John Thavis, "Archbishop Says Bosnian Catholics Fear Ethnic Cleansing by Muslims," Catholic News Service, Rome, 19 January 1993, p. 21). Serbian specialist in Islamic studies, Darko Tanasković, has claimed that, on the basis of the PDA's foreign policy, together with its domestic policy, its party program documents, and Izetbegović's Islamic Declaration, it is clear that the governing party of Bosnia and Herzegovina is the kind of political organization which would be labeled as "Islamistic" or "fundamentalist" in any Muslim country. Public denials of its religious character have been ploys to gain support from the West and popularity within a highly secularized indigenous population. But when addressing Bosnian soldiers for the purpose of heightening their fighting spirits, as well as when attempting to gain support from Muslim countries, the religious dimension is emphasized (Darko Tanasković, "Is a Religious War Going on in Bosnia and Hercegovina?" [Report on] Round Table Conference of Independent Scholars From All Republics of Former Yugoslavia, at the Institute of Federalism, University of Fribourg, Switzerland, 27 September to 1 October 1992, pp. 23-24). Tanasković has also asserted that the influence of more radical, non-hanafi and non-Sunni political interpretations of Islam has been rising. He pointed to references to both radical Muslim ideologues from the Middle Ages (ibn Taymiyya and Ibn alGawzi) and contemporary neo-fundamentalist ideologues (Mawdudi, Sayyid Qutb, and al-Qardawi) in recent Bosnian Muslim literature (Darko Tanasković, "Muslims and muslims in Former Yugoslavia, Part 1," East European Reporter, Volume 5, No. 3, May-June 1992, p. 13). Finally, Tanasković has spoken about the growing anti-Serbian rhetoric, between 1987 and 1992, in Muslim periodicals such as The Muslim Voice (Interview with Darko Tanasković, Beograd, 26 August 1992).

<sup>55</sup>Patrick Moore, "Islamic Aspects of the Yugoslav Crisis," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Report, Volume 1, No. 28, 10 July 1992, p. 38.



radical, although not fundamentalist, movements.<sup>56</sup> Such distinctions do little to quell the fears of Serbs and Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The pan-Islamic movement is not limited to fundamentalists. Even Muslim traditionalists, from places like Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, have responded to the call for Islamization in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The difference is only one of tactics, with fundamentalists using forceful means and traditionalists using quieter means. One cannot ignore, therefore, allegations that, for Muslims of all kinds, the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina is increasingly taking on the character of a *Jihad*, even where that was not initially the case.<sup>57</sup> Another growing indication of this movement toward *Jihad* is the increasing occurrence among Muslims, as with the Serbian Orthodox and the Croatian Catholics, of religious leaders who support the war effort<sup>58</sup> and of militias which target religious objects and persons of other faiths.<sup>59</sup>

### III. Implications for future efforts by religious groups

In these conflicts religion is clearly being used as a mark of identity, by which all the warring sides distinguish themselves from each other and with which they seek to legitimize their actions. The three major faith traditions have all contributed to this reality. The smaller religious traditions have not been evaluated here since their impact on ethnic identity formation is either minimal or non-existent. Because some of these groups lack any linkage with ethnic identity, and in fact actually bridge the ethnic divides, they can potentially play a constructive role well beyond that suggested by their small numbers.

Yet, the potential for constructive involvement in reconciliation efforts does not rest exclusively, nor even primarily, with the small religious communities. There is also considerable evidence of a desire for peace among many people within the three predominant faith communities. This can be seen, not only at the hierarchical level of inter-faith statements, but also at the level of local clergy. We should certainly encourage continued efforts at

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<sup>56</sup>Khalid Duran, "Bosnia, The Other Andalusia: After the Evil Empire, an Evil New World Order," unpublished paper, Gaithersburg, Maryland, [n.d.], pp. 21-24.

<sup>57</sup>Tanasković, "Is a Religious War Going On in Bosnia and Hercegovina?," footnote 54, pp. 24-25. The concept of *Jihad* is beginning to take root among some of the Muslim refugee population, even among the many who, before the war, were proponents of peace. One sad account of this shift from a largely peaceful orientation is the story of a Muslim refugee who once taught pupils to love, but now speaks only of *Jihad* (Branimir Talajić, in an article in the Zagreb newspaper, Novi Vjesnik [trans. by Branimir and Yelka Talajić for Pacific News Service, printed in the National Catholic Reporter, 4 September 1992, p. 73]).

<sup>58</sup>Interview with Mustafa Čerčić, imam of mosque in Zagreb, 20 August 1992.

<sup>59</sup>The Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland, "Communique of British and Irish Churches Delegation to Serbia and Croatia 26.1.93 - 2.2.93" (on file at Conference of European Churches, Geneva).

reconciliation by many of these religious leaders who truly desire to be peacemakers. However, such efforts will be most successful if the peacemakers are fully aware of the negative contributions of their own religious traditions and take appropriate measures to counter these negative effects.

Sorting out all the positive and negative forms of identity formation, and thereby identifying every contribution of each tradition to the origins of the conflict, is a task which goes well beyond the scope of this paper. It is one which needs to be addressed in full by persons within each religious community. While it is still important to affirm the positive roles played in forming the identity of one's people, there must be a self-criticism which at present is rare.<sup>60</sup> Most people respond defensively to allegations against their own group, citing their own list of allegations against their adversary. This confession needs to be spoken in conversations with individuals, as well as written in formal statements by the various religious hierarchies. The confession should include admission of specific acts as well as indication of a general awareness of the negative contribution of one's own faith in the identity formation process.

In addition to confession, there will need to be repentance. Admission of guilt must be accompanied by concrete actions to counter the negative effects which have come from a singular preoccupation with protecting one's own people. For example, each religious community could take the lead within its society for establishing and protecting minority rights of other peoples. This should go beyond the extension of relief efforts to refugees from other ethnic groups, a very important ministry already performed by the humanitarian aid organizations within each faith community. Such efforts, however, could become the springboard for attempts to redress the broader legal and social problems facing minority groups in each society.

The Bosnian Minister for Religious Affairs claims that local clergy are able to play a critical role in amending the problems facing these societies because of the influence they have with their own people.<sup>61</sup> In addition, the various religious traditions have the moral resources with which to begin such a healing process. But they will need to reaffirm a primary allegiance to God, above that given to their own people. The recognition of a higher allegiance can be critical in one's ability to take the necessary risks and restore trust within broken relationships. As the Catholic Bishop of Šibenik rightfully suggests, the power of

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<sup>60</sup>One exception to this is a request for forgiveness, on the part of a delegation of Serbian women, made to their Croatian and Slovenian colleagues, at a conference of the International Interdenominational Women's Movement ("Serbian Christian Women Asked for Forgiveness of Croatian and Slovenian Colleagues," reported in Kršćanska Informativna Služba, KIS AK.12.02, 12 November 1992).

<sup>61</sup>Lukić, footnote 9.

prayer, an expression of relationship with God, can help people both to respect themselves and to respect the differences between people.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>62</sup>Interview with Bishop Srećko Badurina, "We Believe in a New Beginning Based on Prayer and Works" (reported in Kršćanska Informativna Služba, Zagreb, 24 February 1993), p. 2.