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## FROM GENOCIDE TO DIALOGUE

### CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS IN THE FORMER YUGOSLAVIA

By **Paul Mojzes**

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#### ABSTRACT

Extremely complex historical circumstances and modern political manipulations have caused in the Balkans three major waves of genocides during the twentieth century. The conflicts were so varied and widespread that it will not be possible to provide an adequate overview in this paper.<sup>1</sup>

The first one took place during the I and II Balkan Wars in 1912-1913, in which genocides occurred in the effort of four allied countries (Bulgaria, Greece, Montenegro, and Serbia) to liberate themselves from the Ottoman Empire. Then the second war broke out leading to genocidal ethnic cleansing as the embattled nations of the Balkans attempted to delineate ethnic borders.

The second great wave of genocides took place during and right after World War II (1941-1948). The Holocaust practically exterminated the Jewish population but genocide was also carried out against Romas (Gypsies), Serbs in Croatia and Bosnia, and in some localities against Muslims. After the end of the war in 1945, retaliatory genocide took place against the German minority and politicide against the former pro-Nazi allies.

During the wars of the dismemberment of Yugoslavia in the 1990s genocides and massacres occurred again, of which the most publicized was the Srebrenica genocide of around 8,000 Bosnian Muslims. Retaliatory genocidal ethnic cleansing also took place as in previous wars. War crimes and crimes against humanity were also carried out in other regions of Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina as well as in Kosovo and a similar conflict was barely averted in Macedonia.

After the first wave of genocides early in the twentieth century no one was punished for their crimes, which may have given the impression to future perpetrators that they would not be facing justice. After World War II, however, there were trials of war crimes, but no thoroughgoing discussion took place to resolve the chaotic situation of WWII. Interreligious dialogue—in fact any kind of dialogue—did not take place as this approach was not as yet practiced or even known in the region.

During and after the wars of the 1990s that caused the break-up of Yugoslavia into seven small independent countries the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in the Hague and local courts grappled and continue to do so with the genocides and other war crimes attempting to single out individuals responsible for the worst slaughter in order to prevent later

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<sup>1</sup> For a detailed account see Paul Mojzes, *Balkan Genocides: Holocaust and Ethnic Cleansing in the Twentieth Century* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, Inc. 2011), 297pp.

accusations of collective guilt. In addition numerous regional and local interreligious and interethnic dialogues are being promoted and practiced.

The dialogues range from large international conferences on interreligious and intercivilizational issues at which top leaders and heads of states as well as scholars participate; to establishing national and local interreligious councils consisting of religious leaders; to workshops on how to deal with loss and pain caused by the violence, how to do conflict resolution and build trust, how to promote tolerance, respect, and mutual understanding. Publications and websites have been produced.

These dialogues are not yet embraced enthusiastically or widely because the historical traditions favor confrontation and suspicion. But dialogue is certainly a better alternative to hatred and desire for revenge.

## FROM GENOCIDE TO DIALOGUE

### I. Historical Context

From the beginning of the encounter between Christianity and Islam in the Balkans it was an asymmetrical relationship characterized by very different perceptions of the nature of the encounter. While smaller groups of Asiatic tribes migrated to parts of the Balkans as early as the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> century, the major incursion by Ottoman Turks started in the 14th Century. By that time Christendom was already divided into Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism by the Great Schism, the line of which ran through the Balkans. On the Christian side in the Balkans were a variety of smaller kingdoms that were in constantly shifting relationships of wars and alliances and which gradually solidified into a symbiosis of nation and church; belonging to a specific church tended to connote the national affiliation of the followers.<sup>2</sup>

It was different with the Muslims. When they arrived to the Balkan peninsula they were united in a huge Ottoman Empire whose sultan was also the *khalifa* and the empire ruled its peoples by means of the *millet* system based on religious affiliation. The Muslims of the empire, part of the transnational *umma*, regardless of their ethnic origins were under the *shari'a* as carried out by the administration of the sultan (including the *sheikh ul-Islam*). Muslims clearly became the dominant and privileged social stratum in the Ottoman Empire.<sup>3</sup> The non-Muslim subjects, particularly the *dhimmi* (Jews and Christians as “people of the Book”) were placed under the

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<sup>2</sup> For a detailed interpretation of this history see Francis Dvornik, *The Slavs in European History and Civilization* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1962), 132-133, 136-146, 171-178, 235-236, and 350-359.

<sup>3</sup> Ivan Markešić, “Od religijskog do nacionalnog identiteta i natrag (na primjeru Bosne i Hercegovine)” [From Religious to National Identity and Back (The Example of Bosnia and Herzegovina)], *Društvena istraživanja* (Zagreb), Vol. 19, No. 3 (2010), 539.

limited authority of their respective ecclesiastical leaders, who were ultimately responsible to the sultan's administration. From the Muslim perspective this was a tolerant and just system of divided responsibilities; Christians came to experience it a system of subjugation and eventually, as the Ottoman empire started retreating from their maximal expansion, as greater oppression and abuse of power. Muslim scholars, such as the Bosniak Smail Balić, viewed the spread of Islam not so much by the power of the sword but by the propagation of Islamic truths by travelers and merchants long before the Ottoman armies arrived. According to this view the conversions to Islam were voluntary, based on the attractiveness of the "straight path." Christians, on the other hand, tended to attribute conversions to coercion or to being bribed by the economic and social advantages of joining the military victors. While the converts to Islam were genuinely welcomed into the *umma* regardless of their ethnic background and could make phenomenal advances in the Ottoman system even reaching to position of *grand vizier*, the Christians regarded the converts with contempt as traitors to their conquered people. In their view the converts did not merely change religion but became Turks (*poturice*), who were often viewed with greater animosity than ethnic Turks. The Ottoman conquest now brought about a three-fold rupture of the Balkan population: Eastern Orthodox,<sup>4</sup> Roman Catholic, and Muslim.<sup>5</sup> Generally these divisions were how they identified themselves. Often these populations lived separately in their own communities but sometimes they lived intermingled. There were times when they were able to live in harmonious *komšilik*<sup>6</sup> and at other times fierce hatred resulted in violence. It is this unusual ability to be at some times friendly and cordial with each other and at others to break out in horrible viciousness that bewilders outside observers.

Beginning in early 19<sup>th</sup> century the subjugated ethnic groups began to be affected by the spirit of nationalism emanating from Western Europe. One by one they sought first autonomy, then independence by rebelling against the Ottomans. Croatia (then part of the Hapsburg Monarchy) was freed of Turks by the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In 1804 the Serbs revolted, then the Greeks in 1832. Independence was obtained by Bulgaria and Montenegro in 1878, the same year when Bosnia & Herzegovina switched from Ottoman to Hapsburg control. Finally Albania was

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<sup>4</sup> Sometimes also called Byzantine or Greek Orthodox.

<sup>5</sup> With a Jewish minority unevenly distributed throughout the Balkans, as well as a rather small Protestant presence.

<sup>6</sup> From the Turkish word for neighborhood.

established as a country in 1913 at the end of I and II Balkan Wars. The second war also determined the border of the European part of Turkey just north of Edirne, where it is still today. During these conflicts it should not be surprising that the Christian population had some very negative stereotypical views of Turks and Muslim converts, which only gradually shifted to somewhat more moderate views seeing also positive qualities among the Muslims.<sup>7</sup>

These revolts and wars brought about a radical change for the Muslims in the Balkans, from being the ruling class with distinct privileges over the Christian populations to a repressed minority (with the exception of Albania which retained a Muslim majority). In these re-established Christian nations, either the Eastern Orthodox or the Catholics became dominant, depending on the specific national religion. From the perspective of these nations in which Christians were an overwhelming majority, the Turks and their Muslim converts were getting what they deserved: revenge for nearly 500 years of Muslim oppression. The majority of ethnic Turks and many Muslims who did not have a clear sense of ethnic identity were expelled or deported to Turkey or were exchanged for Christians who had lived in Istanbul and Anatolia. For the several million Muslims who remained to live in the Balkans difficult adjustments were in store. “The status of the Muslim communities was fundamentally reversed. From followers of the dominant faith in the Ottoman Empire who enjoyed a privileged legal and social position, Muslims turned into religious minorities who had to struggle continually to define their place in non-Muslim polities.”<sup>8</sup> According to the Bosnian intellectual Rusmir Mahmutćehajić, Muslims became the demonized “Other,” “the external and internal enemy” in the narrative of Balkan national liberations that resulted in them becoming a perpetually persecuted people.<sup>9</sup>

At first many in the newly liberated countries expected that the Muslim converts would quickly return to the faith of their ancestors. Some did but most did not. Some of the anti-Ottoman rebels and armed forces resorted to intimidation and violence.<sup>10</sup> Those that did convert were easily

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<sup>7</sup> Katarina Ivon, “Turci u vrtlogu preporodnih gibanja u Dalmaciji” [Turks in the Maelstrom of Revival Movements in Dalmatia], *Crkva u svijetu* (Split), Vol. 47, No. 1 (2012), 143.

<sup>8</sup> Ina Merdjanova, *Rediscovering the Umma*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 7.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Rusmir Mahmutćehajić in Sarajevo in May 27, 2011, and email to the author of June 6, 2013. (In my opinion Jews and Romas/Gypsies were far more despised and persecuted.)

<sup>10</sup> International Commission to Inquire into the Causes and Conduct of the Balkan War, *The Other Balkan Wars: A 1913 Carnegie Endowment Inquiry in Retrospect*. (Washington, DC: A Carnegie Endowment Book, 1993), 155-156.

assimilated into the majority, but the ones who retained their Muslim tradition, even those who no longer practiced its religious aspects, were regarded by many with suspicion as an alien and undesired presence.

## **II. The Genocides of the Twentieth Century**

In the writing of my book *Balkan Genocides: Holocaust and Ethnic Cleansing in the Twentieth Century*, among the many definitions of genocide, I followed the formally adopted definition of the 1948 United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.<sup>11</sup> This definition was my primary guide in determining which of the many conflicts in the Balkans during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century (14<sup>th</sup> century A.H.) were genocidal. The result of my research revealed that there were three major waves of genocides.<sup>12</sup> The first occurred during I and II Balkan Wars, the second during World War II, and the third during the wars of the dismemberment of Yugoslavia in the 1990s. This means that the earliest and the latest European genocide during that century took place in the Balkans.

### A. Balkan Wars 1912-1913: An Unrecognized Genocide

So far I am the only scholar who identified the I and II Balkan Wars not only as having been genocidal, but being in the unusual category of multiple mutual genocides.<sup>13</sup> This means that nearly all adversaries in these wars were both perpetrators and victims. The major participants were the Ottoman Empire and the four small, recently liberated countries of Bulgaria, Greece, Montenegro, and Serbia that had entered into an alliance to drive the Ottoman Empire out of the Balkans. In the I Balkan War the allies unexpectedly routed the Ottoman armies and nearly took Istanbul. Historians concentrated on the military aspect of the war; only a few paid attention to the horrendous violence against the civilian population. The major thrust of the violence was against the Ottoman armies and the Muslim population consisting of Turks, Albanians, and Slavic and Greek Muslims. The purpose was to remove them from the territories which the victors intended

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<sup>11</sup> Its text is widely disseminated. I quoted the key definition of it in *Balkan Genocides*, 8.

<sup>12</sup> Actually three and half waves when one includes the genocide of the Yugoslav Germans right after World War II.

<sup>13</sup> This is not the place to justify this departure from the prevailing opinion that in a genocide a greater power is the perpetrator and a weaker population is the victim.

to incorporate into their states and the explosion of violence included killings, torture, raping, arson, looting, deportation and all imaginable outrages with the purpose of ethnically cleansing these territories of Turks and their allies. The latter naturally retaliated. The International Commission to Inquire into the Causes and Conduct of the Balkan War that traveled in 1913 throughout the area described in distressful detail the horrors of that war.<sup>14</sup> The first war ended by the intervention of the great powers with the Treaty of London.

Bulgaria, having been dissatisfied with the treaty's division of territories, attacked in 1913 Greece and Serbia with the purpose of taking some territories they considered rightfully theirs. The Bulgarians found themselves fighting not only their former two allies but the Ottoman Empire re-entered the war to recapture lost ground and so did Romania in order to take some disputed territories from Bulgaria. The second war was even more gruesome than the first. In order to claim that certain cities, villages, or territory really belonged to any of the warring sides they considered it imperative to expel all but their own national group and the more gruesome the violence was, the faster they thought they would get rid of the others. Territories were taken, lost, regained and in the meantime genocidal ethnic cleansing descended into barbarism in which not only uniformed soldiers and armed bands (*bashi-bazouks*, *komitadji*, and *andarte*) but the general population engaged in atrocities, and conversely suffered "excesses of horrors." In the words of the head of the Commission, "the worst atrocities were not due to regular soldiers. . . .The populations themselves killed each other."<sup>15</sup> The populations executed, slaughtered, raped, tortured, imprisoned, burned, looted, destroyed, and banished, the purpose being the complete extermination of "aliens" from one's "own" territory. Holy places and holy objects were not exempt from the destruction, not merely as "collateral damage" but with purposive sacrilege by Christians of mosques as well as churches of the other nations (although all of them were of the Eastern Orthodox faith) and by Muslims desecrating churches and sometimes killing people in churches.<sup>16</sup>

Eyewitnesses claimed that these were the most atrocious wars in history; little did they know that soon after the end of this short II Balkan War, a much larger World War was to be

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<sup>14</sup> See *The Other Balkan Wars*, 1-156 and Mojzes, *Balkan Genocides*, 25-34.

<sup>15</sup> *The Other Balkan Wars*, 13. The ellipses are in the original.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 124 and 132.

ignited by an assassination of the Austrian Archduke Ferdinand in Sarajevo by a young Serbian radical. And that war would later be greatly overshadowed in destruction and suffering by World War II.

Not only were these two Balkan wars genocidal but no one apologized for the excesses, no one was accused or punished for any war crimes or crimes against humanity.<sup>17</sup> In other words, the people of the Balkans realized implicitly that one can carry out the worst possible crimes with impunity provided one “justifies” it with patriotic or religious slogans.

#### B. Multiple Genocides of World War II: 1941-1945 and After

It is impossible to concisely present the multitude of wars in the Balkans within the larger Second World War. Bulgaria and Hungary had joined Nazi Germany and fascist Italy and their combined forces attacked, conquered, and partitioned Yugoslavia and Greece without a declaration of war. Italy had previously occupied Albania. Yugoslavia was broken up into about ten sections, some of which were directly annexed or colonized while a few others became puppet regimes to the Nazis. Armed resistance on ethnic and ideological grounds flared up so that the international war became also a civil war. It was within this complex framework that the Holocaust and multiple genocides occurred.

Jews of the area became the first target of extermination<sup>18</sup> so that about 95% of the Jews perished (with the exception of those in “old” Bulgaria). Romas became another target of extermination; the exact numbers are unknown but more than half of them were killed. Serbs living in Croatia and parts of Bosnia that were under Croatian control were subjected to merciless genocide not merely by expulsion but by mass murder in numerous concentration camps, the most infamous being Jasenovac. The Croatian *ustaše*<sup>19</sup> tortured, killed, raped, burned, destroyed Orthodox churches, forcibly converted many Orthodox Serbs to Catholicism, and did this with such an unusual degree of sadism that shocked even their German allies. Jasenovac became a symbol of suffering analogous to Auschwitz.<sup>20</sup> Muslims were not unanimous in their adherence

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<sup>17</sup> The word or concept of genocide, of course, was not yet formulated.

<sup>18</sup> The Bulgarian government semi-protected those Jews who lived within the original rather than expanded borders while Italian administrations inconsistently protected some Jews but deported others to extermination camps.

<sup>19</sup> Roughly analogous to the Nazi SS troops.

<sup>20</sup> Mojzes, *Balkan Genocides*, 52-65, based on a large amount of documentation and analysis. Estimates of the number of murdered in Jasenovac range from an obscenely minimized figure of 20,000 to an vastly

but often joined groups that fought each other. Some of them were members of the *ustaše*; others ended in their concentration camps. Three SS divisions were formed by Muslim soldiers, *Handžar*, *Kama*, and *Skenderbeg*, the first two of Bosnian-Herzegovinian Muslims, the third of Albanian. In the Italian-occupied Albanian territories which included Kosovo, Albanian Muslims avenged themselves against the real and imagined persecution by the Orthodox Serbs by killing and expelling them, thereby continuing the vicious cycle of alternate dominance or subjection of whoever is in power, which continues to this time.

The Serbs also engaged in mass killings. Their paramilitaries, the *četniks*, fought, killed, and massacred Muslims and Croatian Catholics, but due to their relative weakness their victims were less numerous. However, *četnik* leaders also verbally expressed the desire to create an ethnically cleansed territory.<sup>21</sup>

There was another major guerilla force, the multiethnic *partizans*, led by the Communist Tito who fought simultaneously not only the foreign occupying forces but also all their collaborators (real or imagined), basically fighting everybody else but not on ethnic or religious basis. They also killed large numbers of people but, unlike the others who killed primarily those who were of another ethnicity or religion (thereby making it genocidal), the *partizans* fought more on an ideological basis for liberating the country of foreign occupation.

The war ended in May 1945 with the Allied victory and Tito's armies securely in control. But the killing, imprisonment, torture, etc. did not stop. Between 1945 and 1948 (and even later) Tito's government viciously retaliated against all enemies, real and imagined, massacring the majority of captured collaborators. Yugoslavia used to have a sizable German minority of about 600,000, only some of which became Hitler's followers. Many of them left the country prior to the end of the war fearing retribution. Those who stayed, who were mostly not guilty of any wrongdoing, were all incarcerated into concentration camps, and again, tortured, killed, starved or worked to death, and finally years later the minority survivors permitted to emigrate—the sum

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exaggerated number of 700,000. While this author refuses to engage in the numbers game because of moral concerns, a number of serious scholars estimate between 65,000 and 150,000.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 96-99.

total of all of that being a retaliatory genocide, about which it was forbidden to write in Yugoslavia until the fall of Communism in 1990.<sup>22</sup>

A large number of trials for war crimes and crimes against humanity took place after the war. Many who were executed or imprisoned deserved the punishment, but many of the trials were show trials with the outcome known in advance. Lingering doubt whether true justice was served still troubles many persons. In addition Tito had decided to move quickly by “suppressing both the manifestations and the memories of interethnic conflict. It [Tito’s government] made only a limited effort to address the accumulated grievances of the ethnic populations in a constructive manner.”<sup>23</sup> Of course, the terrible devastation after World War II almost of necessity prioritized the rebuilding the country. History was tendentiously interpreted only through a Marxist prism, so that after the collapse of communism people rushed to revise history, resulting in much uncertainty as to what really happened during the war. The current nationalist interpreters of a dismembered Yugoslavia are also guilty of perverting the truth. The unresolved legacy of World War II and the persecution of religion and lack of human rights under communism resulted in the wars of the 1990s and another great wave of genocides.

### C. Genocides During the Wars of Yugoslavia’s Disintegration of the 1990s

Many of the historical, ethnic, religious, social, and ideological unresolved problems left over from World War II plus the accumulated problems of 45 years of the communist system couldn’t be resolved by the successors to Tito, who died in 1980. A decade later the entire Soviet and East European communist system collapsed. At first it seemed that Yugoslavia would have the easiest transition into post-communism, but the political leaders that emerged aggravated rather than resolved the problems. The result was the worst of all alternatives, a decade of the bloodiest wars in Europe since WWII.

It was not a single war but rather a series of five related wars:

1. War in Slovenia, June 1991

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 109-121. See also Georg Wildman, ed. *Verbrechen an den Deutschen in Jugoslawien 1944-1948: Die Stationen eines Völkermord*. (Munich, Germany: Donauschwäbische Kulturstiftung, 2000), *passim*.

<sup>23</sup> Steven L. Burg, “Intractability and Third-Party Mediation in the Balkans,” in *Grasping the Nettle: Analyzing Cases of Intractable Conflict*. Ed. By Chester A. Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson, and Pamela Aall. (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2005), 185. I would substitute Burg’s choice of the word ‘ethnic’ with ‘ethnoreligious.’

The war lasted only about two weeks, was low in casualties. No genocides occurred but resulted in Slovenia's secession and independence.<sup>24</sup>

## 2. War in Croatia, 1991-1995/98.

Croatia declared independence while Serbs in Croatia engaged in a civil war with the help of the Yugoslav People's Army. This long-lasting war was characterized by very high casualties and intense ethnic cleansing, first of Croats from Serb-held territories and at the end of the war by the near total expulsion of Serbs from Croatia reaching genocidal dimensions. U.N. peacekeeping forces and international mediation had limited success.<sup>25</sup> Less attention is here given to that war as it was predominantly a war between Catholic Croats and Orthodox Serbs. Muslims became involved mostly when Bosnia and Herzegovina ignited into even more massive violence.

## 3. War in Bosnia-Herzegovina, 1991-1995.

This was a three-way war between Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims), with changing alliances; the bloodiest war and dirtiest war with participation of foreign volunteers and mercenaries on all three sides. UN intervention was only partially effective. The casualties were huge, with about 100,000 killed, many more wounded, almost 2 million (out of 4 million total inhabitants) exiled from their homes, genocidal rapes, large scale destruction of sacred objects, and mass burning of homes. Many of these brutalities were carried out in the name of religion.<sup>26</sup> In the early stages of the war Serbs were dominant, but at the end they did not achieve their objectives. However, Bosnian Muslims sustained the greatest casualties as they were the least prepared for the war. Ethnic cleansing became successful as the ethnoreligious composition of the previously mixed population was forcefully segregated into fairly homogeneous Bosniak Muslim, Serbian Orthodox, and Croat Catholic areas.<sup>27</sup> Places of worship and other symbols of the religious and ethnic identity of adversaries were frequently demolished not merely as a result of the fighting

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<sup>24</sup> Mojzes, *Yugoslavian Inferno: Ethnoreligious Warfare in the Balkans*. (New York: Continuum, 1994), 97-99. The concept of ethnoreligiosity connotes the synthesis of ethnic nationality with belonging to a religion so that by being born of a particular ethnicity automatically confers religious affiliation to nearly all members of the group.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 100-106.

<sup>26</sup> Mitja Velikonja, *Religious Separation & Political Intolerance in Bosnia-Herzegovina*. Trans. by Rang'ichi Ng'inja. (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2003), 259-262.

<sup>27</sup> Mojzes, *Balkan Genocides*. 172-193

but even in areas not affected by military activities, for instance the demolition of the historic Ferhadija mosque in Banja Luka.<sup>28</sup>

Not all the numerous claims of genocide can be legally ascertained but the International Criminal Tribunal for Yugoslavia in the Hague concluded that the murder of about 8,000 people, mostly men, in Srebrenica in July of 1995 was a genocide, that many of the rapes were genocidal in character, and that the intention existed of expelling populations from their ancestral areas, in which case the ethnic cleansing had a genocidal character. While members of all three ethnoreligious collectives perpetrated crimes against humanity and war crimes, those by Serbs were most numerous and most severe. Several of the major Serb war criminals have been sentenced or are likely to be found guilty of conspiracy to commit genocide. Typically people of each ethno-religiosity blame the other two of having committed genocide but insist that they themselves were only victims who acted in self-defense. To this day there are radically different interpretation of who is responsible and guilty and what actually took place.<sup>29</sup>

#### 4. War in Kosovo, 1999.

Kosovo/Kosova<sup>30</sup> was the region of Serbia where the wars of the dismemberment of Yugoslavia actually began with low level violence and unrest between Kosovo Orthodox Serbs (a minority) and Muslim Albanians (the majority). This occurred already in the 1980s,<sup>31</sup> then subsided as the conflict took the form of civil disobedience on part of the Albanian population<sup>32</sup> only to break out into a full-fledged war in 1999 with the attack by NATO air forces lead by the USA upon Serbia. President Milošević's ultimate surrender lead to Kosovo's secession from Serbia and its final declaration of independence in 2006.

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<sup>28</sup> Michael Sells, "Religion, History, and Genocide in Bosnia-Herzegovina," in *Religion and Justice in the War over Bosnia*. Ed. By G. Scott Davis. (New York and London: Routledge, 1996), 25.

<sup>29</sup> E.g. Sells places the main responsibility on the Serb extremists whereas Darko Tanasković, *U dijalogu s Islamom* [In Dialogue with Islam]. 3rd rev. ed. (Gornji Milanovac, Serbia: Dečje novine, 2006), 275-316, attributes the dangers and reasons for the conflicts to the expansion of radicalized Islam.

<sup>30</sup> Kosovo is the Serbian pronunciation and Kosova the Albanian.

<sup>31</sup> The Assembly of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church had issued a declaration in 1988 of a genocide upon Serbs by Albanians. See Mojzes, *Yugoslavian Inferno*, 136.

<sup>32</sup> Council for the Defence of Human Rights and Freedoms in Prishtina, *Knocking on Europe's Conscience*. (Prishtinë: Infotrade, 1992), *passim*. (Collection of documents promoting the Kosova Albanian cause).

During the major phases of the war from March to June 1999, at first nearly 800,000 of Kosovar Albanians fled or were expelled from Kosovo; that lasted briefly and most of them returned back, causing the flight and expulsion of Serbs by the revenge-seeking Albanians. An uneasy peace was imposed by United Nations forces and led to a sharply segregated Serbian minority complaining of frequent Albanian attacks on their churches, graveyards and other monuments whereas the Kosovar Albanians also claimed prior destructions of mosques. Massacres were carried out by both sides. Again, genocides were claimed by both sides.<sup>33</sup> But when one looks at the resolution of the conflict up to 2013 it would seem that at first nearly half of Kosova Albanians were uprooted from their homes, while in the later stages the vast majority of the Serbs were driven out. Great distrust and even hatred persists between these two ethnoreligious groups, far greater than in Bosnia and Herzegovina because there is no ethnic, linguistic, or religious affinity between Kosovo's Albanians and Serbs.

#### 5. Low Intensity War in Macedonia, 2001-2002.

Albanians from Kosovo and Macedonia attempted an insurrection in the Republic of Macedonia in 2001 that led to small-scale population expulsions and killings. But with the wise leadership of Macedonia's President Boris Trajkovski and the decisive intervention of the international community, negotiations resulted in a change from a military confrontation to a democratic political accommodation. Genocide was averted. It is mentioned here only because interreligious dialogue was a contributing factor to avoiding the war.

### **III. Interreligious Dialogues to Deal with Hostilities**

There is a long heritage of hostilities in the Balkans but only a short period of utilizing interreligious dialogue with its possibilities to deal with adversarial or competitive relationships. The wounds sustained by the victims (and even by perpetrators, whose humanity has been diminished by the very attempt of trying to deny or erase the humanity of the "others") eventually healed but only on the surface. Often the "infection" is pushed deeper under the surface, allowing it to fester until it erupts again in another crisis situation. The wars of the 1990s may be viewed as a sort of continuation of the unresolved conflicts stemming from World War II.

It was different during and in the aftermath of the wars of the 1990s. As already noted above, people from the outside (volunteers and mercenaries) came to assist militarily to all three

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<sup>33</sup> Mojzes, *Balkan Genocides*, 217-219.

belligerent sides. However, there was also a different kind of assistance from abroad and from within. Some such assistance came as various international diplomatic, political, and even military negotiators tried to reduce the hostilities and find a resolution. Such were the interventions by the United Nations, European Union, NATO, the United States, Russia, Arab and other Muslim countries, and so forth. Some of these international mediators lost their lives in the process. In addition to these negotiations, the U.N. authorized the creation of the International Criminal Tribunal for Yugoslavia in 1993, which actively pursued and tried about 180 accused, among them for the first time in history a head of state (Slobodan Milošević) and other top political and military leaders,<sup>34</sup> thereby contributing to the possibilities that instead of imputing collective guilt, individual responsibility and guilt will be established. In addition, local courts in all of the former Yugoslav states continue to try a multitude of lesser perpetrators.

By the 1990s interreligious dialogue had already received recognition internationally as a way for people of good will to mitigate conflicts and find ways for a respectful, thoughtful, positive, and productive interaction among rivals and even conflicted religious communities. As seen above, the three great religious communities, Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Islamic, certainly perceived each other as rivals and even enemies. Additionally, much blood had been shed in both the distant past and recent or contemporary times to aggravate these relationships to the point of intense distrust, fear, and even hate.

Individuals and institutions from abroad began to urge religious leaders and followers to engage each other in dialogue rather than debate or fighting. Well-meaning individuals who were able to visit locations where war caused intense suffering were able to organize workshops and NGOs to which local activists were drawn. These activists would assist the survivors of genocides and war in dealing with their suffering without seeking revenge and by breaking the cycle of violence. Institutions such as the World Council of Religions for Peace (WCRP), the World Council of Churches, and the Council of European Churches, and smaller religious and humanitarian agencies all urged religious leaders to undertake peace-making measures and interreligious dialogue. Meetings were arranged within the former Yugoslavia or outside the country when war prevented them from meeting at home. Thus for instance, there was a series of

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<sup>34</sup> The trials of some of the major accused, Radovan Karadžić, Ratko Mladić, and Vojislav Šešelj are ongoing.

meetings between Serbian Orthodox Patriarch Pavle I, Roman Catholic Cardinal Franjo Kuharić, and Reis ul-Ulema Jakub Selimoski, later replaced by Mustafa Cerić, at which well-written declarations were issued,<sup>35</sup> which regretfully had a more positive effect abroad than at home, where they were poorly distributed.

Toward the end of the war the American Ambassador and the WCRP helped organize the Interreligious Council of Bosnia & Herzegovina,<sup>36</sup> which functions to this day to deal with difficult issues in the relationship between Orthodox, Catholic, Islamic, and Jewish communities. Similar cooperative efforts can be found in Croatia, Kosovo, Serbia, and Macedonia, with different degrees of success.

The Macedonians have advanced the farthest in promoting dialogue not only at home but also regionally and even internationally.<sup>37</sup> The initiator of these dialogues was the late President of the Republic of Macedonia, Boris Trajkovski. As his country veered to the edge of war between ethnic Macedonians and Albanians, he invited this author and Leonard Swidler to come to Macedonia and help organize interreligious dialogue. Based on our experience of a series of international scholars' Jewish-Christian-Muslim dialogues and with the financial assistance of the U.S. Institute of Peace and the Open Society Foundation,<sup>38</sup> we organized a meeting of about 50 Jewish, Christian, and Muslim scholars to meet in May 2002 in Skopje. The conference was also attended by an additional 150 participants and guests from Macedonia, including the President of the Republic and the heads of the Macedonian Orthodox Church, Islamic Community, Catholic, United Methodist, and Jewish communities.<sup>39</sup> The topic was "Confidence Building Among Churches and Religious Communities in Macedonia." Despite some tense moments that might have ruined the outcome, the conference produced some really genuine interaction and resulted in two unexpected sessions at the Macedonian Orthodox and then Islamic theological schools that created a huge amount of good will. The result was also the creation of a Council for Interreligious

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<sup>35</sup> One such declaration was printed in full in *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*, Vol. XII, No. 5 (October 1992), 50-51.

<sup>36</sup> For more information see [http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/religion\\_education\\_bosnia\\_herzegovina.pdf](http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/religion_education_bosnia_herzegovina.pdf).

<sup>37</sup> The author of this paper, along with Leonard Swidler participated actively in all or nearly all of these efforts and is writing this based on first-hand knowledge.

<sup>38</sup> In addition to smaller grants.

<sup>39</sup> Among the notable guests was also the representative of Prince Hassan of Jordan. One of the major papers was delivered by Mehmet Aydin, later Minister in the government of Turkey.

Cooperation consisting of representatives of the five communities. All of the papers from the conference were published in English, Macedonian, and Albanian languages.<sup>40</sup> Leonard Swidler and I recognized the importance of not merely planting a seed but of continuing to nurture it and have subsequently frequently gone to Macedonia with a small international team always with a Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, Muslim, and Jewish member to continue the training and reinforce the local participants who tended to lack the strong commitment for dialogue, as they were often preoccupied with issues within their own community. They did not merely continue meetings of the Council for Interreligious Cooperation but also organized training sessions in a series of cities throughout Macedonia in which there had been conflicts between Christians and Muslims. Because the view prevailed in the country that the three great religions did not have much in common, we produced a short paper with summaries of the most common beliefs.<sup>41</sup>

President Trajkovski decided to further upgrade these dialogues and in August 2003 organized a “Dialogue of Civilizations” in Ohrid, Macedonia, with the participation of all the presidents of the former Yugoslav states that were only recently at war with each other, as well as the presidents of Albania, Bulgaria, and Hungary. It is amazing that the presidents of formerly adversary countries all stated in their public addresses that if they had used the method of dialogue then perhaps the wars might have been averted.

Regretfully, President Trajkovski died the following year in an airplane crash. Fortunately, the successor governments of Macedonia decided to continue and even expand these dialogues. With the help of UNESCO they organized a series of World Conferences for Interreligious and Intercivilizational Dialogue in 2007, 2010, and 2013, with several hundred participants from many countries and religions. The next conference is planned for 2016. The format of these conferences does not afford enough opportunities for an actual give-and-take of dialogue with people of

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<sup>40</sup> Paul Mojzes, Leonard Swidler and Heinz-Gerhard Justenhoven, eds. *Interreligious Dialogue toward Reconciliation in Macedonia and Bosnia* (Philadelphia: Ecumenical Press, 2003). Also published as a double issue of the *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, Vol. XXXIX, No. 1–2. Mojzes and Swidler, eds. *Gradenje doverba pomegu crkvite i versikite zaednici vo Makedonija preku dijalog/ Ndertimi I besimit perms dialogut ndermjet kishave dhe bashkesive fetare ne Makedoni* [Confidence Building between the Churches and Religious Communities in Macedonia through Dialogue], bi-lingual Macedonian/Albanian (Skopje, Macedonia: Ecumenical Press, 2004).

<sup>41</sup> See Appendix I. Published in *Interreligious Dialogue toward Reconciliation in Macedonia and Bosnia*, p . A discussion of the common elements can be found in R. Marston Speight, *God is One: The Way of Islam*. (New York: Friendship Press, 1989), 113-117.

different experiences and views. Only a few in high positions of leadership in governments, churches, and religious communities get a chance to deliver speeches espousing their viewpoints. Unlike previous conferences, the Macedonian Muslim delegation regrettably decided not to participate in the conference of 2013, apparently for some internal political reasons. That is exactly the wrong decision; it prevents the Macedonian Muslims from sharing their grievances and aspirations with others. The two foremost Muslim contributors to dialogues in Macedonia were the former *Reis ul-Ulema*, Jakub Selimoski, who regrettably died in 2013, who was a very skillful facilitator of dialogues and Dr. Ismail Bardhi, the former Dean of the Islamic Theological School in Skopje, who is a great theoretical contributor to dialogue, who, regrettably has been marginalized by his community..

In September of 2002 another interreligious dialogue, an International Conference on Reconciliation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, took place in Dubrovnik, Croatia. It was much smaller, with about 30 participants, mostly professors and religious activists, a few from Germany and the USA, others were local. A far greater in-depth conversation took place with a lot more interpersonal contacts. Representatives of several grassroots organizations from Sarajevo<sup>42</sup> and other towns shared their interreligious dialogue experiences working for reconciliation. Subsequently a book was published containing the conference papers.<sup>43</sup> Articles in such books are resources for advancing the dialogue and for beginning new ones.

There were many additional dialogues, some known to this author and some unknown. Some were intended for young people, training them for dialogue so that they may set aside suspicions and mistrust and learn to accept each other, such as the Third Summer School for Dialogue and Interconfessional Understanding in Ulcinj, Montenegro, July 1995, while the war had not yet ended. Others were for scholars and religious leaders such as the Round Table on Contributions of Religious Communities of Yugoslavia for Reconciliation, Diversity, Democracy, and Human Rights in Belgrade, Serbia, December 2001. A very large number of workshops, courses at universities and other venues, radio and TV programs, and numerous publications of

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<sup>42</sup> Groups such as *Zajedno* (Together), and *Abraham/Ibrahim*.

<sup>43</sup> P. Mojzes, Heinz-Gerhard Justenhoven and Vjekoslav Saje, eds. *Religijski pristup pomirenju u Bosni i Hercegovini* [Religious Approach to Reconciliation in Bosnia and Herzegovina] (Sarajevo: MAG Plus, 2004).

books, journals, and websites all intended to promote tolerance and explain interreligious dialogue.<sup>44</sup>

Concurrently with *interreligious* dialogue (perhaps even prior to it) it is important to engage in *intrareligious* dialogue—dialogue within the religious community about the possibilities, willingness, scope, and limits of dialogue with *others*. Without the internal dialogue it is fairly likely that some members engaging in dialogue with others may become alienated from members of their community who are against dialogue. Yet it is also important not to merely wait for the full consensus within a religious community on this issue; in that case almost nothing will ever be achieved, as it is likely that some will continually oppose dialogue. But “once when we no longer doubt in the necessity of dialogue with others it will be possible to accept others as equal partners, and not as opponents, it will be possible to allow the others to introduce themselves as they are, and not continue with one’s preconceived notions about them. . . .”<sup>45</sup>

In a simplistic manner one can distinguish two kinds of interreligious dialogues: those whose main purpose is to promote tolerance, understanding and improved relationships among the religious groups and those dialogues of substantive theological issues that unite and divide religions. The latter has not yet been engaged in in the Balkans<sup>46</sup> except in ecumenical meetings among Christian theologians. The former is gaining momentum and acceptance in interreligious meetings. As one can easily conclude from the above, the almost exclusive foci of these conferences were:

how to conduct dialogue,

how to show respect, tolerance, and understanding with one another, in order for people to be able to live along one another and improve the communications with each other,

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<sup>44</sup> An example of books see Christian Moe, ed. *Images of the Religious Other: Discourse and Distance in the Western Balkans*. (Novi Sad, Serbia: CEIR, 2008.), while an example of a magazine is *Religija & Tolerancija*. (Novi Sad, Serbia: Center for the Empirical Research of Religion), now in its 10<sup>th</sup> year of publication.

<sup>45</sup> Dino Abazović. *Religija u tranziciji*. [Religion in Transition]. (Sarajevo, B&H: Rabic, 2010), 24. Translated from Serbo-Croatian-Bosnian by P. Mojzes.

<sup>46</sup> In a different context, an international group of Muslim scholars issued “A Common Word Between Us and You,” which was an unprecedented instance of Muslim outreach to Christians. The response by Russian Orthodox Patriarch Alexy II was a significant contribution to the dialogue by using a theological reflection on Biblical texts applied to the Russian context.

how to build confidence that living together is possible again, and how to creatively deal with the tremendous losses in human lives and horrible experiences after the wars,  
how to help in repairing our individual and collective pain,  
how to correct stereotypes that emerged due to insufficient direct knowledge of each other,  
how to correct misinformation about the founders and the prophets of the religions, and about the actual beliefs and practices of the others,  
how to bring formerly warring sides to a process of reconciliation by learning how to forgive without forgetting the evils that took place.<sup>47</sup>

Dialogue can help participants discover in one another resources for increasing trust in God and God's guidance through life's turbulence, aiming for the kind of fulfillment that God has in store for all of us in the near or distant future. Dialogue can help us jointly grasp God's greatness and goodness toward all of God's creation. As for the historically accurate interpretations of the past replacing the current frequently inaccurate and widely divergent views about what did transpire in the past, it would be highly desirable to create and fund groups of serious scholars from the various religions who could jointly and truthfully try to determine and interpret the past so that a more balanced picture would emerge.

These dialogues are not yet embraced enthusiastically or widely because the historical traditions favor confrontation and suspicion. But dialogue is certainly a better alternative to hatred and desire for revenge. Transitional justice needs to be coupled with efforts at forgiveness and reconciliation that lie deep within the message of each of the religious communities that live in that area. We need to hope and trust that God will give courage and wisdom to those who are promoting cooperation and dialogue so that they can persist even when people who sow disrespect and distrust agitate against dialogue. We can be confident that God's intention for the ultimate harmony and peace among people will ultimately prevail.

## Appendix I

### **COMMON ELEMENTS OF JUDAISM, CHRISTIANITY, AND ISLAM**

In the past when people were comparing religions they tended to focus on the differences between them. That tended to emphasize the distance between religions. More recently we have come to understand that Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – the so-called Abrahamic religions

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<sup>47</sup>Abazović, 24.

heritage – have common roots and many common elements. Thus we are nowadays looking also at the similarities and common elements of these religions. Here are a few major ones:

#### Belief about God.

Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are monotheistic religions; namely they believe that there is only one God. Jews and Muslims greatly stress the oneness and unity of God. The affirmation of the oneness of God by Christians is sometimes misunderstood, because Christians believe that the one God is triune (the Holy Trinity). However, this is not a denial of monotheism but an affirmation of the complexity of the Divine Being.

All three religions believe that this God is the origin and source of all that exists. God cares about the entire creation and desires the well-being of all. God is just and has provided basic rules for our guidance so that we may be good and righteous, according to God's intention. God is also merciful; by means of God's grace we are given strength to be more like what we ought to be.

#### Understanding Human Beings

The three religions believe that human beings are the highest creatures here on earth. God created us full of mystery, which means potential for continuous growth, both as a species and as individuals. We are capable of both good and evil. When we grow in goodness, righteousness, and love we become more like what God intended human goodness to be. When we abuse our freedom and do harm to other people, ourselves, and the environment it means that we are going against God's plans as we become evil-doers. Each person is capable, with God's help, to turn away from evil, repent, and do good. We owe God our devotion, glorification, and obedience.

#### The Future

No matter how difficult the past and present may be, the three religions are hopeful about the future. Evil and suffering cannot ultimately prevail. God has provided a condition (or state of being) for which our three religions have different names, but we agree on the term Paradise. This future will bring about God's unchallenged rule; unconditional bliss for all who live with God.

#### Divine –Human Encounter

The three Abrahamic religions believe that God and human beings can and should communicate with each other. By revelation God communicates to people, among which the most important are revelation through prophets. These revelations are recorded in the Holy Scriptures of each religion. While the Holy Scriptures of the three religions are not the very same, the younger two nevertheless religions acknowledge God's truth as found in the previous religions, and encourage respect to the Holy Books. While each of the three religions does not merely focus on one set of writings, the key Scripture of Judaism is the Torah, the key Scripture of Christianity is the Bible, which consists of the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible) and the New Testament, and the key Scripture of Islam is the Qur'an.

The duty of people is to read or listen to God's Holy Writings and to respond with prayer, praise, and with an appropriate acceptance of God's commandments in our lifestyle.

#### God's Guidance

God did not leave us without guidelines for behavior. God provided us with sound basic rules to live by as well as a rational mind to learn how and when to apply those rules to our everyday life. All three religions, for example, abhor murder, the arbitrary killing of innocent people. Likewise, God wants us to be telling the truth and not to take from others what rightfully belongs to them. We are to respect the dignity of every person and help especially those who are not capable of helping themselves, such as widows, orphans, and the poor. All three religions

believe in Golden Rule: doing to others what we wish others do unto us. All three religions foster modesty, moderation, and honest work. We are to submit ourselves to the will of God.

All three religions closely link religion and morality. Religion is to be manifested by showing concern for the well-being and dignity of others, in a life of service to others, and in personal and social ethical behavior.

#### What Should be Our Response to these Similarities?

In the past many people showed respect and tolerance toward each other's faith. They lived in peace next to each other, and congratulated each other's holy days. However, it was very rare that they wanted to learn much about their neighbor's religion except the superficial outward appearances. Nowadays, Jews, Christians, and Muslims are trying not only to live in peace with each other, but to get to know each other including what they believe and practice as religious people. Interreligious dialogue developed not only among religious leaders and theologians (scholars) but even among common people. We have come to understand that because religion touches upon the innermost being of believers that if we want to really communicate with each other and be tolerant we need to engage in dialogue with one another first about our similarities but then also about our differences. We should do this not defensively, but eagerly, because when we see each other's religious convictions we see and are seen in the best light, in our noblest selves, and we shall be able to build better communities in which we can live in trust and in peace.

We propose these observations as a beginning of a process in which Jews, Christians (Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant), and Muslims can review this and propose additions, deletions, and changes until we come up with a document that can be shared with the general public.

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Submitted by Paul Mojzes and Leonard Swidler

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