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RELIGION AND NATIONAL IDENTITY IN YUGOSLAVIA

by Stella Alexander

Stella Alexander is a member of the London Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) and was for a number of years secretary of their East-West Relations Committee. She has been studying church-state relations in Yugoslavia since the middle 1960s and is the author of Church and State in Yugoslavia since 1945 (Cambridge University Press, 1979). She is currently a member of the East-West Relations Advisory Committee of the British Council of Churches and a member of the Keston College Council of Management and the Editorial Board of its publication Religion in Communist Lands. She has written a number of articles and conference papers on her subject. The article originally appeared in Studies in Church History, Vol. 18, pp. 591-607. Reprinted by permission of Basil Blackwell, Oxford, for the Ecclesiastical History Society, with minor editorial changes.

Religion in Yugoslavia is a divisive, not a unifying force. The country is a federation of republics inhabited by six different nationalities which are historically identified with three great religious confessions--Catholicism, Orthodoxy, and Islam. The pattern is complex and dense, the assumptions and reflex actions of the human beings who make up these communities are deeply rooted in centuries of history, and nationalism and religion are proving tougher than ideology.

The Slovenes and Croats in the western part of the country are Catholics, the Serbs, Montenegrins and Macedonians in the eastern half are Orthodox; they live on either side of the historic line which divides the Western from the Eastern Church, Latin Christianity from Eastern Orthodoxy, the Habsburgs from the Ottoman Turks. Lying astride the line, at the core of modern Yugoslavia is Bosnia-Herzegovina, inhabited by a mixture of Orthodox Serbs, Catholic Croats and Slav Moslems, descendants of converts to Islam under the Turkish occupation. Some of these Moslems considered themselves Serbs and some Croats (not infrequently members of the same family) but they form a distinct cultural group and, for reasons which will be examined later, they have

been recognised since 1968 as a separate, sixth nationality.

These are the principal broad divisions, but the situation is further complicated by the numerous minorities within Yugoslavia-- Hungarians, Slovaks and Romanians in the north, Albanians, Turks and Vlachs in the south and Gypsies everywhere (with their own language now officially recognised). Albanians are mostly Moslem by culture, if not today by religion, but they call themselves Albanian, not Moslems, and the same is true of the Turks. Furthermore the majority nationalities appear as minorities within other republics; there is an important group of Serbs living within Croatia, who suffered greatly under the war-time fascist Ustaša state, and who today constitute an irritant factor in Croatia with its simmering nationalism; and there are also small groups of Croats living in various parts of Serbia.

Religion played an important part in the formation of the Serbian and Croatian nations, and became closely identified in each case with the concept of nationhood; its effect on the formation of the recently established Moslem nation has worked rather differently.

I propose firstly to examine, nation by nation, how this happened in history; and secondly its effects on the state of Yugoslavia, and, since the war, on an ideologically secular regime.

I

Serbia

A few years ago a Serbian Orthodox priest living in London told me that he would have to have very compelling reasons indeed before he would baptise a non-Serb into the Serbian Orthodox Church. This total identification of the church with the nation is rooted in its history, its culture and its whole way of life.

The Slavs in the south-eastern part of the Balkan peninsula became Christian under the Eastern Church in the ninth century and adopted the Cyrillic alphabet; this was to prove an important factor in separating them from the western south Slavs, who used the Latin alphabet. From the twelfth to the thirteenth centuries Serbia developed into a powerful state under the Nemanja dynasty, which used the church to consolidate its power. One of them, the youngest son of Stefan Nemanja, secured the autocephaly of the Serbian Orthodox Church and established a national

ecclesiastical administration for Serbia. As St. Sava, he became the principal cult-figure of the Serbian Orthodox Church. The Nemanjids were great builders of churches and monasteries, many of which survive, and are monuments to their faith and their high artistic achievement.

The Ottomans advanced up the Balkan peninsula during the fourteenth century, and in 1389 met and conquered the Serbian army and its allies at Kosovo, the Field of the Blackbirds, an event which became one of the central myths of Serbian history and inspired a great cycle of epic poems.

Under the Ottomans, who divided their conquered subjects according to their religion and granted considerable local autonomy, the Serbian Orthodox Church took over the functions of government, with its own administrations and law courts; priests became the mediators and the go-betweens between rulers and ruled.

Modern Serbian nationalism was stimulated by the decline of the Ottoman empire, and at the same time the wars between Turkey and Austria sharpened the conflict between the Catholic Croats in the north and the Orthodox Serbs in the south, as each of the major combatants used them as pawns in their larger power game. The Catholic Church accompanied the Austrian advances and proselytised vigorously among the Orthodox, laying the foundations for the rooted distrust of the Catholic Church which still underlies Serbian Orthodox attitudes. But the Habsburgs also invited groups of Serbs to settle on and defend the military frontier between Turkey and Austria, promising them religious freedom and their own church structure. It was in this period that a great migration of Serbs from the heartland of Old Serbia took place, led by patriarch Arsenije III; they settled north of the Danube at the invitation of Emperor Leopold I. The territory vacated by the Serbs gradually filled with Albanian Moslems; this alienation of the land which gave birth to the Serbian legend is a continuing source of grief and bitterness to the Serbs.

The eighteenth century saw further religious pressures on the Serbs, from the Austrians who established a Uniate Church (Greek Catholic) in areas under their control, and from the Greek officials of the Ottoman empire, the so-called Phanariots, who combined with the

hierarchy of the Greek Orthodox Church in an attempt to Hellenise the other Orthodox churches. They secured the abolition of the Serbian patriarchate of Peć in 1766, deposed Serbian bishops and clergy and replaced the old Slav liturgies with the Greek rite. Although the Serbs succeeded in expelling the Phanariots less than fifty years later, the experience left a scar.

One effect of these centuries of outside pressures has been to make the Serbian Orthodox Church deeply conservative and backward-looking, feeding on its past; this, combined with its status, after the sixteenth century, as part of the machinery of Ottoman government and thus in some senses a part of the ruling establishment, made it inevitably resistant to change. It opposed with obduracy, for example, the reforms introduced into Serbian national life by two remarkable men, Dositej Obradović in the eighteenth century, who laid the foundation of modern literary Serbian, and Vuk Karadžić in the nineteenth century, who reformed the grammar and orthography of the Serbian language. Together the two men broke the exclusive hold of the Orthodox Church over the Serbian mind and introduced concepts of rationalism and secular nationalism. But at the same time many priests identified themselves with the Serbian national struggle for freedom from the Turks during the latter part of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; they fought with and sometimes even led the bands of half-revolutionaries, half-outlaws who harassed the weakening and retreating Ottoman forces. All this reinforced the church's concept of itself as the guardian and protector of Serbian nationhood, and did in fact help to create a Serbian national identity. It was however Ottoman religious toleration which made this attitude possible, whereas when the last war brought about a confrontation with Croatian Catholics, there was no toleration, only a savage mutual lust to destroy.

Montenegro

Montenegro was part of the medieval kingdom of Serbia until the fourteenth century, when it broke away: they still consider themselves closer to the Serbs than to any other south Slav nation. It is a small, mountainous, inhospitable land which during its long struggle against the Turks became fiercely tribal and vengeful; it was the price the

Montenegrins paid for their successful resistance. In the sixteenth century the bishops of Cetinje, the capital, assumed political power and took over the rule of the country and at the end of the seventeenth century this became hereditary, usually passing from uncle to nephew. Ecclesiastical and temporal authority became completely merged. This curious arrangement lasted until the middle of the nineteenth century and gave continuity and stability to the state.

Macedonia

The geographical area known as Macedonia lies between Greece, Bulgaria and Serbia, all of which have claimed the area; it is economically and strategically important because of the port of Salonika and the fertile surrounding plains, and because the valley of the Vardar is a strategic corridor to central Europe. The inhabitants of the territory are partly Slav, that is Serbs and Bulgarians, and partly a mixture of Albanian and Turkish Moslems, Orthodox Greek and Vlachs; the Slav dialects of the region can be understood by both Serbs and Bulgarians and both have claimed the Slav inhabitants as part of their respective nations. It has, in fact, all the problems of Yugoslavia itself in miniature, and here also religion has been divisive, but in a different way.

The development of nineteenth-century nationalism in the Balkans resulted in pressures on the inhabitants of Macedonia to declare for one or other of the contending nations, Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria. The Bulgarians obtained an initial advantage. Determined to throw off the corrupt and over-weening influence of the Greek patriarchate in Constantinople, and with Russian backing, they persuaded the Ottomans to establish an independent Bulgarian exarchate, with an exarch resident in Constantinople. The patriarch immediately excommunicated the new exarch and his followers, and a long and frequently bloody struggle followed between the adherents of the exarch and those of the patriarch. Bulgarian bishops were appointed and Bulgarian schools established. The Serbs were at a disadvantage, since they had no ecclesiastical organization covering Macedonia. They, however, enlisted the support of Austria-Hungary and at the end of the century they had opened a number of schools and secured the bishopric of Skopje for a Serb. The Greeks

also continued to maintain schools in the area, and great educational rivalry sprang up. One curious result, noted by a contemporary writer¹ was that boys from the same family might be placed in schools run by different nationalities, and since it was a point of honour for a boy to adopt the language and nationality of the school which had educated him, a Greek family might have a 'Bulgarian' and a 'Serbian' son. Since Bulgarian schools greatly outnumbered the others, census counts showed a large but basically fictitious Bulgarian majority in the territory.

Serbia finally acquired the greater part of the territory of Macedonia as a result of the Balkan wars of 1912-13 and set about a regime of assimilation which included the Serbianisation of the Macedonian dialects and the placing of Serbian bishops in Macedonian dioceses. Some of them were strong Serbian nationalists who in the end provoked resentment both among those of the clergy who felt themselves Bulgarian and those who shared the growing sense of Macedonian nationalism.

Croatia

The Croats first emerged as a national unit when Tomislav, one of the tribal chieftains assumed the title of king in about 924. The Croats claim an even longer unbroken link with the papacy going back to 879 when one of the local princes, Branimir, received a letter from the pope acknowledging his rule. The boundaries of Croatia fluctuated considerably over the next two centuries of independence; at its greatest extent it appears to have stretched from the Drava to the Adriatic, at one time including most of the Dalmatian coast. It is this kingdom to which modern Croatian nationalism harks back.

At the beginning of the twelfth century Croatia passed by marriage to the ruling Hungarian dynasty, thus beginning the long association between Croatia and Hungary; at the same time Venice was disputing Croatia's attempts to extend its rule over Dalmatia. The sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries saw the incursions of the Ottoman Turks from the east and a period of fragmentation and unrest. In the eighteenth century the centralising policy of the Habsburgs succeeded in uniting Croatia firmly to the empire, with a special relationship to Hungary. Meanwhile the Ottomans had conquered Bosnia-Herzegovina and were a

constant threat to Croatia and the Dalmatian coast.

There was at this time no unified Croat language and several different dialects were spoken; the language of the upper classes was German or Italian and priests were almost the only literate people who used the Slav language. The counter-reformation gave an impetus to education and spurred the religious orders to set up many schools, seminaries and colleges where the true faith could be preserved and taught. It was during the seventeenth century that the Jesuit Kašić (Cassio) wrote a grammar of the Croatian language and chose for its basis the Štokavski dialect of Bosnia, widely spoken in the hinterland of the Adriatic coast by both Catholics and Orthodox. This dialect thus became the basis of the Croatian literary language, and when in the nineteenth century Vuk Karadžić chose the similar dialect of neighbouring Hercegovina for his Serbian grammar, the basis of a common Serb-Croat language was established. The Catholic Church and the Vatican, as opposed to the local clergy, remained rather cautious; the unique Slav liturgy of the Croats, known as the glagolitic and written in a variant of the Cyrillic script, had been banned ever since the tenth century and its use was only sanctioned in a few places. It is worth noting that under the present regime, which during the first two decades of its existence was deeply suspicious of the Italianising influence of the Vatican, encouraged interest in glagolitic as part of the Slav inheritance of the Croatian nation.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries two remarkable prelates made outstanding contributions to Croat national identity. Bishop Vrhovac of Zagreb (1751-1827) was a romantic nationalist of a kind familiar in the nineteenth century, and believed that the church should be the guardian and sponsor of Croatia's national culture; he gave moral and financial support to the few young writers who were beginning to use the vernacular language. But his appeal to the clergy of the diocese to collect folk sayings and proverbs, folk songs and old books and manuscripts seems to have met with little response and one must conclude that in this aspect of Croatian nationalism he was before his time.

Bishop Josip Juraj Strossmayer of Djakovo (1815-1905) who was an early exponent of the idea of the unity of the south Slavs, believed

that the deepening of true nationalism, both Croatian and Serbian, and true Christianity, both Orthodox and Catholic, would best be achieved through education and culture. At the same time he was a champion of Croatian national rights, hoping to establish within the framework of the Habsburg empire an autonomous Croatia which would become the nucleus of a south Slav state. He made important contributions to the literary and cultural life of the Croats, and founded the Yugoslav Academy of Arts and Sciences (note the early and deliberate use of the word Yugoslav: Yug=south). In the atmosphere of nineteenth-century Catholicism he was virtually alone in the gestures of friendship which he made to the Serbian Orthodox Church, and he opposed to the last moment the doctrine of papal infallibility at the first Vatican council, knowing the deep offence it would give to the Orthodox. Strossmayer's vision carried him far beyond the parochialism of the average Croat prelate, and remains unfulfilled to this day.

Bosnia-Hercegovina

Religion in Bosnia-Hercegovina, as in Macedonia, has been a divisive factor. In medieval times the population, tyrannised over by an undisciplined nobility, and divided between Catholics in the north and west and Orthodox in the south and east, turned in great numbers to the Bogomil heresy. This was a dualistic system of belief, similar to that of the Cathars, and was so fiercely persecuted by both the Catholics and the Orthodox that its adherents welcomed the Turks, who promised them full religious toleration. (The evidence is not entirely conclusive, but this is currently accepted as the most likely theory.) A majority of the population converted to Islam; the feudal lords thus retained their privileges and the serfs became free peasants. Those who remained Christian became serfs to the Slav Moslem overlords, who adopted the way of life and mode of dress of the Turks, and became more Moslem than the Ottomans, in many cases rising to the highest positions in the state. They later resisted fiercely all the Islamic movements of reform. As the Ottoman empire weakened and was no longer able to control the feudal lords, peasants were ground down and dispossessed, and by the eighteenth century large numbers had returned to Christianity; the Orthodox Church became the largest religious body in this area.

In the thirteenth century the Franciscans had been invited by the ruling Hungarian duke to settle in the northern part of Bosnia; in the fifteenth century they received a charter from sultan Mohammed II allowing them the free exercise of their religion. They also obtained papal permission to act as parish priests; this privilege which they have never relinquished has been and still is today the cause of lasting friction with the secular clergy and the bishop.

The Turks for whom religion was inseparable from nationality divided their subjects administratively by religion; all the Christians in the territory were put under the jurisdiction of the Greek patriarch in Constantinople. When Austria-Hungary occupied the territory in 1878 there was an influx of Catholic officials from all over the empire; in addition a belt of land in the north along the banks of the river Sava was colonised by Catholics from other parts of the empire, including Germans, Poles and Czechs, thus adding to the confrontation between eastern and western Christianity. The Serbian inhabitants looked increasingly to Serbia for support, revolutionary and terrorist activities sprang up and culminated in the murder in Sarajevo of the archduke Francis Ferdinand in 1914.

Even this brief and much over-simplified outline makes it clear that the seeds of religious and national tensions were present from the beginning in this mosaic of Orthodox and Catholic Christians, Bogomil heretics and Moslem converts, with power and status divided among them in complex and unexpected ways.

2

The nineteenth-century dream of south Slav unity was finally fulfilled at the end of the first world war and the break-up of the Habsburg empire when Yugoslavia (known at first as the kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes) was established under a Serbian dynasty. The Catholic higher clergy of Croatia, led by archbishop Bauer of Zagreb, were enthusiastic supporters of the union, but it was overshadowed from the start by a fundamental misunderstanding: the Croats looked forward to a union of equal peoples and nations, while the Serbs looked on the new state simply as a further extension of the kingdom of Serbia. Although all religions enjoyed equal legal status, the dynasty was

Orthodox and advancement in many walks of life favoured the Orthodox.

The political history of inter-war Yugoslavia is complex and has no place in this paper but during the 1930s an episode took place which sharpened the tension between the Catholic and the Orthodox Churches and inflamed national feelings particularly among the Orthodox. A concordat was negotiated between Yugoslavia and the Vatican to replace the concordats which had regulated relations with the various component parts of the new state. As soon as the terms became known patriarch Gavrilko protested vigorously at what the Serbian Orthodox Church considered were the special privileges given to the Catholic Church; he spoke in the name of the Serbian Orthodox Church as a national institution and accused the government of betraying the last bulwark of Serbianism. Although the government at once promised that the Orthodox and all other religious denominations would be accorded the same privileges as the Catholic Church the pretext was immediately seized on by right-wing opposition Serbian political parties to make common cause with the Church in an attempt to overthrow the government. The Church excommunicated the Orthodox members of the government and all the deputies who had voted in favour of the concordat; feelings ran high, a religious procession of protest was attacked by the police and bishops were manhandled. The uproar was so great that the government backed down and did not proceed to the ratification of the concordat. The Catholic bishops in their turn protested that the government had preached the principle of the equality of all faiths but was treating the Serbian Orthodox Church as though it was in fact the state church. This episode inflamed the antagonism between the Serbs and the Croats which bedevilled the political life of Yugoslavia between the two world wars and left a residue of hatred among Croat extremists which culminated, under the Croatian war-time fascist regime, in the brutal murder of two Orthodox bishops, the death of a third in a concentration camp and the severe ill-treatment of a fourth.

Yugoslavia was drawn into the second world war in April 1941. Under great pressure the government had in March signed the tripartite pact with the Axis; it was immediately overthrown by a popular coup d'etat led by Serbian officers in the army and enthusiastically supported by

the patriarch Gavriilo and his clergy. Hitler was enraged and early in April launched an all-out attack by land and air in which Hungarian and Bulgarian forces joined. The campaign lasted for only eleven days after which resistance disintegrated. Yugoslavia was parcelled out among the Axis powers and their allies Hungary and Bulgaria, and ceased overnight to be a state. The Ustaša independent state of Croatia (which included Bosnia-Herzegovina, but not the Dalmatian coast which was annexed by Italy, to the bitter disillusionment of the Croats) was set up under German and Italian protection and was welcomed enthusiastically by the Catholic hierarchy in Croatia for national rather than ideological reasons; the higher clergy in Slovenia accepted with good grace the Italian occupation of the southern part of Slovenia and were then driven by circumstances into ever closer collaboration with the German forces after the fall of Italy. Serbia was reduced to a small rump state under a puppet government, and the patriarch was arrested by the Germans and spent the war in detention and eventually in German concentration camps.

Macedonia was annexed by the Bulgarians, who in many cases were welcomed with open arms by those who still secretly considered themselves Bulgarians and resented Serbian domination. The Serbian bishops and many of the clergy were expelled and fled to Belgrade, the Bulgarian bishops and priests were introduced into their place. But, as an acute and scholarly observer has written: "the conduct of the Bulgarian occupiers was sufficiently unpleasant to disillusion most of the population about the advantages of belonging to Bulgaria, while leaving a large enough sediment of pro-Bulgarian and anti-Yugoslav feelings to make difficulties for Marshal Tito in post-war federal Yugoslavia."²

The distrust and suspicion between the Catholic and the Serbian Orthodox Churches of which echoes still persist cannot be understood without a knowledge of the past history, which I have sketched, but above all without realising the extraordinary savagery of the conflict between the Catholic Croats and the Orthodox Serbs during the war, a savagery which takes one back to the wars of religion in the sixteenth century.

The Ustaše, who governed the independent state of Croatia,

proclaimed their allegiance to the Catholic Church and were determined to eliminate the Serbs and their church from their territory, although they were prepared to accept the Moslems of Bosnia-Hercegovina, since they claimed that the Moslems had originally been Croats. In an episode which shocked even the German general in command great numbers of Orthodox Serbs were either massacred, forcibly converted to Catholicism or were deported or fled eastward to what remained of Serbia; the structure of the Serbian Orthodox Church in the new state was destroyed and bishops and priests murdered. At least one Catholic bishop in his enthusiasm for Croat independence turned a blind eye, others were appalled but felt themselves helpless, and archbishop Stepinac of Zagreb, leader of the Catholic hierarchy, who had welcomed the Ustaše with open arms, protested to the government with growing anger, but in private; later he attacked the crimes in a number of sermons. Serbian Četnik bands retaliated savagely wherever they could against both the Catholic Croats and the Moslems of Bosnia-Hercegovina.

The attitude of the Catholic bishops is a reflection of the close identification of religion and nationality among the Croats and Serbs. In principle they of course welcomed the prospect of bringing thousands of schismatics freely back to their true mother, the Catholic Church. But over the centuries this theological concept had been coloured by national and cultural differences. The Croats felt themselves to be entirely European, heirs in part of a great Catholic empire, while the Serbs belonged to the Byzantine east with its ecclesiastical quarrels and schisms. Under the influence of a romantic Slav nationalism they had become united into one state, which Serbs, as we have seen, tended to look upon as simply an extension of Serbia while the Croats chafed furiously at what they regarded as outrageous Serbian hegemonism. Suddenly the power of Belgrade was removed and the bishops saw within their grasp the intoxicating prospect of a huge influx of converts to be led gently back into the fold, a precious gift for the Holy See (this phrase was actually used).

The reports which bishop Mišić of Mostar (in Hercegovina, where some of the worst atrocities took place) was sending to archbishop Stepinac illustrate this further; after describing in detail the reign

of terror,

men are captured like animals, they are slaughtered . . . living men are thrown off cliffs . . . in a single day 700 schismatics were thrown into their graves . . . six carloads of mothers, together with their children were thrown alive off the precipices . . . (what echoes of Milton and the slaughtered saints!)

he added:

If the Lord had given the authorities more understanding to handle the conversions with skill and intelligence . . . the number of Catholics would have grown by at least 500,000/600,000 . . . This can serve neither the Holy Catholic cause nor the Croatian cause . . . we might have emerged into a majority in Bosnia-Hercegovina and instead of coveting favours from others be able to dispense them ourselves.

The proselytizing activities of the Franciscans seem to have given a particular zeal to their attacks on the Orthodox population. Certainly there was justification for the accusation after the war that many Ustaša leaders and high officials were trained in the Franciscan seminaries of Bosnia-Hercegovina.

Although archbishop Stepinac protested and made many interventions in individual cases, and some of the bishops attempted to discipline the parish priests who collaborated openly with the Ustaše and in some cases even took part in the slaughter, the attitude of the church and his own attitude were sufficiently ambiguous to provide a handle after the war to the Communist authorities which they used to good effect not only within the country but internationally. This was only the last event in the long history of Catholic-Orthodox conflict in this region which made any common Christian solidarity against the Communists after the war inconceivable; all Serbs, and the Serbian Orthodox Church, thought that archbishop Stepinac had got his just deserts at his trial and were angered at what they described as his 'posthumous amnesty' when he was buried in 1960 with full honours in the Zagreb cathedral.

When the Communist Partisans took over the government of Yugoslavia at the end of the war, the country, always a poor one, was devastated, the population decimated and torn by the passions of the civil war.

Aside from the economic plight of the country one of the most pressing problems facing the new government was to create a sense of unity in the country. The partisans had made their revolution under the banner of 'brotherhood and unity'--bratsvo i jedinstvo--and the unity was no empty slogan; it was essential if the country was to survive. It was Communist Party policy, adopted during the war, to give full equality to all the constituent nationalities and to their languages (there is simultaneous translation today in the federal parliament) and it was made an extremely serious offence to incite national, racial and religious hatred and intolerance. The new constitution guaranteed freedom of religious belief and practice. This provision was largely ignored in the early years and the churches, especially the Catholic and Orthodox Churches, experienced harsh persecution and repression during the decade after the war. The following decade, from the mid-fifties to the mid-sixties was a much quieter time for the Catholic Church in particular, and after the mid-sixties there was a sharp turn towards liberalisation.

But the question of nationalism which the Communists thought would be solved by their enlightened policies refused to go away; as soon as the rigidities and intolerance of the early years lightened, nationalist sentiments reappeared and Croatian nationalism, in particular, went so much further than the authorities considered safe for the unity of the country that in 1972 there was a sudden reversal of the trend to liberalisation and pluralism and a tightening of party discipline through the whole system of 'self-management socialism'. The unity of the country took on a paramount importance, given urgency by the realisation that Tito was growing old and his charismatic leadership must soon disappear. The authorities realised the importance of enlisting the loyalty and support of believers, but were determined to keep the churches as institutions in their place. Simultaneously the churches were gaining confidence; the position of the Catholic Church in particular had been transformed by the papacy of John XXIII and the Second Vatican Council, diplomatic relations had been restored between the Yugoslav government and the Vatican, and president Tito and his wife were received by pope Paul VI during an official visit to Rome.

The danger which the government foresaw was that the churches would set themselves up as the embodiment of the nation and its soul, the guardians of its 'Serbianism' or 'Croatianism'. Attacks on this subject in the secular press began as early as 1969 and during the latter '70s became very frequent; they continue unabated today.

The case of Macedonia is different; here, the concept of a separate Macedonian nationalism--for the moment at any rate--draws the Macedonians closer to the Yugoslav federation. At the end of the war a Macedonian republic was established as a constituent member of the Yugoslav republic, accompanied by an upsurge of joyful nationalist sentiment. A national language was formed by adopting one of the main regional dialects (which already had a literary tradition) and it became evident that the nationalist ground-swell was accompanied by a longing for a national church, one of the validating marks of a true nation. (It is difficult to establish how far this was a widespread grass-roots feeling, or whether it was largely confined to the clergy. Among them, it was certainly genuine.) The Serbian bishops had all been expelled in 1941 and the new government had refused them permission to return. A long struggle now began between the Serbian patriarchate in Belgrade, fighting desperately to preserve what it regarded as Serbian unity as much as the unity of the Serbian Orthodox Church, and the Macedonian clergy, enthusiastically backed by the Macedonian republican authorities who understood that a national church would strengthen internal solidarity and would give Macedonia a useful weapon to resist Bulgarian claims that the inhabitants of the territory were Bulgarian. The Macedonian clergy finally won the battle and after nine years of uneasy 'autonomy' to which the Serbian patriarchate had reluctantly agreed, proclaimed their own autocephaly in 1967. The Serbian Orthodox Church considers that the schism has weakened it and undermined its claim to represent the whole Serbian nation (since they continue to regard the Macedonians as Serbs) and it is convinced--overtly outside Yugoslavia and in Yugoslavia always implicitly--that the Macedonian Orthodox Church is simply a creature of the regime. I do not believe that this conviction is justified; it seems to me a genuine and historically predictable expression of Macedonian nationalism. Its support by the

federal government strengthens Macedonia's loyalty to the federation and in this sense only can one say that the church is hand in glove with the authorities.

Today the Macedonian Orthodox Church is a state church in all but name and its archbishop is a public personality; it receives substantial grants of money from the government. It has still not been recognised by the ecumenical patriarch or any other Orthodox Church, but it is content to wait, remembering that other local Orthodox Churches, the Bulgarian and the Greek, for example, had to wait many decades before their independence was recognised. Its greatest danger, a spiritual one, lies in the rather suffocating embrace of the republican authorities.

We come finally to the Slav Moslems of Bosnia-Hercegovina, who as we have seen, form a distinct cultural group. In the inter-war years they played an important political role in Yugoslavia and during the war their allegiance was divided. Some Moslems joined the Partisans, rejecting the claim of the Croatian Ustaša state to be a country of two religions, Catholic and Moslem, but many others, feeling themselves Croat rather than Serb gave their allegiance to the Ustaše. After the war their ambiguous position continued to cause them uneasiness; many began to describe themselves as Yugoslav by nationality. But the Yugoslav authorities very early gave up the attempt to impose an over-all Yugoslav national sentiment, recognising that it was an artificial, intellectual concept without ethnic or religious basis, and for some years most Slav Moslems described themselves as either Serbs or Croats. Finally the solution was adopted of officially acknowledging the existence of a sixth, Moslem, nationality to add to the already existing five nations in the federation; the category Moslem had already appeared in the 1961 census and in 1968 their separate nationhood was confirmed by the government. This solution was eagerly grasped by a large number of the inhabitants of Bosnia-Hercegovina and was reflected in the 1971 census, when the number of those describing themselves as 'Yugoslav' dropped almost to vanishing point, the numbers of Serbs and Croats also diminished and the number of Moslems rose dramatically.

The world-wide Islamic revival, added to the resurgence of nationalism has given a strong impetus to Slav Moslem feelings of

nationality. Religious and secular elements are closely entwined in these feelings and this poses a dilemma for the authorities. It is ideologically difficult for them to accept the inescapable religious element in Moslem nationhood and they have only partly succeeded in avoiding the problem by stressing the concept of a Moslem culture in which religion is only one element.⁴ The upsurge of national feeling has been accompanied by a religious revival which has touched even Moslem intellectuals. Efforts are being made to raise the educational level of the hodžas and a higher theological school has been opened to give the equivalent of a university degree; a medresa for girls--a revolutionary step for these religiously conservative men--was also established; Saudi Arabia and other Islamic states sent generous financial contributions. The Iranian revolution appears also to have caught the imagination of some of the more extreme elements and Khomeini's name has appeared in slogans scribbled on walls. Moslem religious and cultural institutions are accused of setting themselves up as the only legitimate representatives of the national identity of Moslems, precisely the same accusation which has been made against the Catholic and Orthodox churches in Croatia and Serbia.

It is too soon to do more than note this latest example of the interaction of religion and national identity in Yugoslavia; but it is already clear that the authorities intend to keep it under strict control.

And so, looking back over the complicated intertwining of nationalism and religion which I have tried to trace, one might come to a rather paradoxical conclusion. Religion which in the beginning nurtured a sense of national identity as one way of resisting assimilation by alien powers has been overtaken by the growth of nationalism and has itself been weakened by the secularisation of present-day society; today there can be no doubt which is the stronger force. It is nationalism which feeds religious feeling, while the churches cling desperately to their role as guardians of the soul of the nation. This has recently been vividly illustrated in Croatia where the Catholic Church has been celebrating thirteen-hundred years of Catholicism (dating from the establishment of the first bishopric at Nin in the

seventh century) and the eleven-hundredth anniversary of Croatia's unbroken link with Rome (dating from the pope's letter to Branimir in 879), with processions and pilgrimages. It is difficult to see how these two historical events are linked in any except a romantic sense to the more recent history of the Croats, but the Church has attempted to transform them into a symbol of the identity of Catholicism with the Croatian people.

Professor Bohdan Bociurkiew of Carlton University, Ontario, who is working on a comparative study of church-state relations in East European Communist countries, has recently suggested that scholars working in this field tend to give too much emphasis to Marxist-Leninist ideology when dealing with the persecution of churches under Communist regimes and not enough to political, cultural and social factors, in particular nationalism and nationality. He suggests that nationalism is in fact more important than ideology and that everywhere communist regimes fear the identification of national feelings with religion and the churches. I am convinced that this is particularly true of Yugoslavia. This is not to deny the strong anti-religious feelings of many Yugoslav Communists, particularly among the older generation, some of them with little education, who came into the party through the war-time Partisans. But this is a dying phenomenon. The present generation is secularised, like their contemporaries in the west, and those among them who are religious have often been caught up in the swell of charismatic renewal. The Catholic Church in particular seems to have perceived this and is beginning to shift its ground from nationalism to 'human rights'.

The Yugoslav Communists have reason to fear the disintegrative force of unfettered nationalism, and as long as the churches are associated with this, the regime will continue to attack them. The churches' real challenge to Marxist ideology lies elsewhere.

FOOTNOTES

¹H. N. Brailsford, Macedonia: Its Races and Their Future (London, 1906), p. 102.

²E. Barker, Macedonia and its Place in Balkan Power Politics (London, 1950).

³R. Patee, The Case of Cardinal Stepinac (Milwaukee, 1953), pp. 390-391, quoted in S. Alexander, Church and State in Yugoslavia Since 1945 (Cambridge, 1979), p. 32.

⁴G. Schöpflin, "Nationalism as a disintegrative factor in Yugoslavia," paper delivered at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University of London, 11 June 1980.