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THE ROLE OF THE RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES IN THE WAR IN FORMER YUGOSLAVIA

by Paul Mojzes¹

The starting point of this paper are two premises. The first is that war is the worst form human interaction. The second is that cooperation among people of diverse characteristics (such as race, religion, nationality, gender, etc.) is more important than national sovereignty, national *Lebensraum*, traditions, customs, historical boundaries, and so forth. If these premises are acceptable, then one may claim that the contribution of the religious communities² to the outbreak of the present war in the former Yugoslavia is major while the contribution of the religious communities toward cessation of hostilities and reconciliation is minor.

The focus of this paper will be exclusively on the contemporary situation because of my conviction that the historical overview has been offered *ad nauseum* with no new light shed since each religious community has its own distinct version of history and because presently history is being mythologized in ever more bizarre and divergent directions, the distinct purpose of which is not to determine what happened in the past and interpret it for the present but to provide ammunition for one's claims in the present situation and recall grievances against other groups in the past so that one may avenge them in the present.³

¹This paper was originally written for a conference "Religion and Crisis in Eastern Europe After Communism" in Houston, TX, April 23-25, 1993.

²The term 'religious communities' will be used here instead of the more customary term 'churches' because the word church is unsuitable for Islam (as well as Judaism but the latter plays a negligible role in the present conflict). The term 'religious community' is used here in the sense of an organized institutional formation of adherents of a religious orientation, such as Serbian Orthodox, Macedonian Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Islamic.

³Among the more hilarious products of recent nationalistic 'historical' investigations is that the Croats originate in ancient Iran, that the Serbs originate in the Caucasus, and yet earlier in ancient Mesopotamia, that Islam came to the Balkans independently centuries prior to the Ottoman Turkish conquest or that the present Macedonians are somehow directly linked with Alexander the Great of Macedonia.

Likewise my own analysis of how this war broke out and what fuels it will be left out as I have addressed this elsewhere.⁴ I do not claim that the present war in ex-Yugoslavia began as a religious war, or is currently a primarily a religious war but it is my contention that the war has distinct ethno-religious characteristics as these two realities have become so enmeshed that they cannot be separated.

The interaction of nationality⁵ and religion to the point of overlapping and identicalness is a well known phenomenon in much of Eastern Europe, especially in the Balkans. The Communist regimes in Yugoslavia and elsewhere tried to rupture this close identification for both good and bad reasons. A generation or two grew up under Tito, most of them believing that ethnic and religious distinctions were not unbridgeable and that virulent nationalism was laid to rest at the end of World War II. We now know that this was not so; ethno-religious identification returned with a vengeance. Most of the readers may have discovered this after the Great Transformation in 1989, but it was discernible much earlier. Political scientists noticed that the phenomenon of 'national Communism' was a powerfully disruptive factor in the international Communist movement, and it was nurtured by many in the East and the West with the hope that it will erode Soviet hegemonism. This it did. But one wonders whether the results are not somewhat akin to nurturing Islamic fundamentalism as an antidote to Arab socialism or supporting Saddam Hussain as an antidote to Ayatollah Khomeini's Islamic revolution. In any case Communists were able to dispose neither of nationalism nor of religion despite having attempted both. As the Communist *pterodaktyl* perished and left the nest empty, the eggs hatched an entire flock of birds of prey who are now viciously pecking at each other in the fight to dominate the entire nest or at least a segment of the nest.

The large religious communities played a divisive role during the pre-Communist, the Communist, and the post-Communist period.⁶ Yugoslavia was divided not merely into three

⁴See "Nationalism, Religion, and Peace in Eastern Europe with Special Reference to Yugoslavia" in Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe (hereafter OPREE) Vol. XI, No. 6 (December 1991), pp. 12-31, and "War Between Religions," OPREE, Vol. XII, No. 2 (March 1992), pp.i-vi, "The Reign of Ethnos: Who is to Blame in Yugoslavia?" in Christian Century (November 4, 1993), pp. 996-999, and "Intervening in Bosnia" in Christian Century (April 14, 1993), pp. 388-390.

⁵I prefer the use of the word ethnicity over nationality because some ethnic groups do not have a state of their own yet possess a yearning for self-governing and sovereignty and because I believe that the nation-states of the former Yugoslavia are not nations in the modern sense but are somewhat akin to tribalism, i.e. that the claim of being a Serb or Croat is closer to the claim of being a Yoruba or an Ibo than being a Swede or a Norwegian.

⁶Professor Vjekoslav Bajsić, a Roman Catholic theologian who is teaching at the Roman Catholic Theological School in Zagreb, explained already in the late 1970s in an interview with this author that the only institution that was holding Yugoslavia together was the Yugoslav Communist Party (and the army which was under its control) while the religious communities played centripetal roles. Thus when the Communist Party of Yugoslavia fell apart along the six national component parts,

communities: Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Muslim but into smaller ethno-religious units. The Roman Catholic Church of Slovenia reinforced Slovenian nationalism, Roman Catholic Church *u Hrvata*⁷ supported Croatian nationalism,⁸ the Serbian Orthodox Church supported the idea of Serbdom among Serbs and Montenegrins and tried even to incorporate the Macedonians, the 'schismatic' autonomous Macedonian Orthodox Church contributed to the strengthening of Macedonian national awareness, and Islam contributed to the affirmations of Slavic Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina and adjacent areas (e.g. Sandzhak) and Albanians in Kosovo, Macedonia, and Montenegro. Orthodox ecclesiology provides for the formation of national churches but Catholic and Islamic ecclesiology eschews such approaches. So for theological, political, and national reasons Roman Catholic leaders would frequently use the vague term "our" Church but a closer examination would reveal that "our" was quite limited to their own national unit. Likewise Bosnian and Albanian Muslims had little interaction with one another.⁹ The Roman Catholics of Slovenia perceive themselves having a quite separate religious dynamic of interaction with their nation than the Catholic Church among Croats and vice versa. If Roman Catholic ecclesiology allowed it these churches would in no time call themselves Slovenian Catholic Church and Croatian Catholic Church.¹⁰

To put it bluntly the leaders of each religious community enthusiastically and uncritically supported the continuous inflation of nationalism of their respective membership and frequently attacked the others for allegedly being even more uncritically nationalistic than they were. This is analogous to a blind person calling a deaf-mute handicapped!

there was no longer a force that could hold the country together.

⁷An awkward linguistic term even in Croatian which transliterates even more awkwardly into English: "in Croats," but could be more freely translated "of Croats" or "among Croats."

⁸This I know from personal experience as I interviewed prominent Roman Catholic theologians in Slovenia and Croatia who were members of the same Bishops Conference but did not know even rudimentary data about each other's life while being able to provide detailed analysis of the situation of their church among their nationals. Another illustration of the ethno-religious separatisms is the case of a village which in the Zagreb Archdiocese which had a overwhelmingly Slovene population and was served by a Croat priest. This priest caused great distress among the villagers as only one of the about twenty masses celebrated per week was in the Slovene language despite the repeated petitions of his parishioners. They finally requested transfer of their village into the Ljubljana archdiocese. This took place as recently as 1991/92.

⁹I found in 1969 that the Supreme Islamic headquarters in Sarajevo were quite uninformed and uninterested in Islam among Albanians.

¹⁰Illustrative of this nationalistic character of religion is the unhappiness among Croats over the decision of the Vatican to separate the Bishops Conference of Croatia from the Bishops Conference of Bosnia and Herzegovina--both of whom are Croatian, though no regret was shown over the split of the Slovenian Bishops' conference.

Most of the religious communities contribute to the sacralization of their respective nationalities, and religion plays the role of a political ideology. As Ivan Cvitkovic remarked, "the greater the participation in religious activities in a region, the greater the tendency toward national homogenisation and separatism."¹¹ Let us now look at several specific cases.

A. Contribution of Religious Communities toward Hatred and War

1. Roman Catholic Contribution to Nationalism¹²

Recently two Roman Catholic authors, Geert van Dartel¹³ and Jure Krišto,¹⁴ as well as Anne Herbst¹⁵ have claimed that the Roman Catholic Church, unlike the Serbian Orthodox Church, does not claim that Croat equals Catholic and has a more reconciling, ecumenical posture toward Serbians. This is simply erroneous and, indeed, can be disproved by the very data that Jure Kristo provides in support of his own contention.

Josip Beljan in Veritas¹⁶ writes about the role of the Pope and the Holy See. He declares that they in an unprecedented act became the amplifier of Croatian independence and

¹¹Ivan Cvitković, "God is Dead," in Breakdown: War & Reconstruction in Yugoslavia (London: Yugofax, 1992), p. 52.

¹²I will zero in on the Roman Catholic Church among Croats [Katolička crkva u Hrvata or frequently simply Crkva u Hrvata] because I have more data on it and because there is a war in Croatia.

¹³Geert van Dartel, "The Nations and the Churches in Yugoslavia," Religion, State, and Society, Vol. 20, Nos. 3 & 4 (1992), pp. 275-288. Geert van Dartel is a Roman Catholic priest from Holland who studied in Zagreb under the late Josip Turcinovic, one of the most liberal Catholic priests who was rather exceptional in his ecumenical stance, and van Dartel mistakenly ascribes it to the entire Roman Catholic Church in Croatia. See also his article "Nikolaj Velimirovic (1880-1956)," Glaube in der 2. Welt, Vol. 21, No. 4 (April 1993), pp. 20-26 which is fundamentally sound yet does display an anti-Serbian Orthodox bias because he tends to ascribe unique ethno-religious bonding among Serbian theologians, when in fact, this characteristics was far more widely disseminated, especially among emigre theologians.

¹⁴Jure Krišto, "The Catholic Church in Times of Crisis" and "Diverse Functions of Catholicism and Orthodoxy in Social Upheavals (1989-1992)" unpublished manuscripts.

¹⁵Anne Herbst, "Tod und Verklärung: Die Orthodoxe und die Katholische Kirche im südslawischen Konflikt," Glaube in der 2. Welt, Vol. 21, No. 4 (April 1993), pp. 14-18.

¹⁶Josip Beljan, "Priznata vjernost," [Recognition of Faithfulness] Veritas (Zagreb), Nos. 9-10, (September-October, 1992), pp. 24-25. Veritas is a popular Catholic dedicated to St. Anthony of Padua.

sovereignty as a reward to the Croatian people on account of thirteen centuries of their loyalty to Rome.

God has by way of his Church, by way of the Holy Father, looked at his faithful people, spoke out on their behalf, directly intervened in history, in the struggle, warring together with his people for their liberation . . . With this war God also returned to his people, in its heart and home. [God] Returned to the entire mass media, political, social, and state life of Croatia, from where he was driven out 45 years earlier. The cross of Christ stands next to the Croatian flag, Croatian bishop next to Croatian minister of state. Croatian priest and teacher are again together in the school. Present at masses in churches are officers and Croatian soldiers. Guardsmen wear rosaries around their necks. . . . This was truly again a real war for "the honored cross and golden liberty," for the return of Christ and liberty to Croatia.

The Church is glad for the return of its people "from the twofold" slavery--Serbian and Communist. This is a great "kairos" of God's grace for the entire Croatian people.¹⁷

He continues:

Here was not a battle for a piece of Croatian or Serbian land but a war between good and evil, Christianity and Communism, culture and barbarity, civilization and primitivism, democracy and dictatorship, love and hatred. . . . Thank God, it all ended well, due to the Pope and Croatian politics.¹⁸

Another example was an interview carried out by Darko Pavičić, a journalist of the formerly independent Danas with Franjo Cardinal Kuharić over a gun-toting Franciscan chaplain, Fra Duka, who was accompanying Croatian troops into battle and who accepted a political office. To the question of whether he condemns such activity, Cardinal Kuharić wove a lengthy answer saying that ideally chaplains ought not to go into battle but "when pater Duka wears a uniform and carries a revolver he is not doing this as a representative of the Church but it is his private matter."¹⁹ Since the head of the Franciscan order, in whose jurisdiction this friar belongs, did not condemn him neither will the Cardinal, though he would prefer to see him out of uniform. The conclusion that can be drawn from the Cardinal's response is that such action is permissible and at least will go unpunished by the church authorities. And, indeed, many priests and seminarians have fought in battles.²⁰

Jure Krišto characterizes leadership of Cardinal Kuharić as skillfully steering the Croatian people to sovereignty. He states for instance that in the late 1980s:

¹⁷Ibid., p. 24. Translated from Croatian into English by Paul Mojzes.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 25.

¹⁹Darko Pavičić, "Svecenik nije komesar," [A Priest is not a Commissar] Danas, Vol. 10, No. 503 (October 8, 1991), p. 28.

²⁰Marko Oršolić, a professor at the Franciscan Theological Seminary in Sarajevo told me that most of his former students are armed with machine guns defending the city.

Unlike his communist compatriots, [sic] cardinal [Kuharic] was not timid about the defence of national sovereignty. Catholic bishops were convinced that by defending Croatian sovereignty they were doing something good. Hence, they used every opportunity to stand in defence of Croat national interests. One such opportunity was the debate about constitutional amendments concerning the name of [sic] official language in Socialist Republic of Croatia.²¹

They pressed the exclusive use of the Croatian literary language rather than Croato-Serbian or Serbo-Croatian. Apparently the bishops and other Catholic leaders did not take into account that this would be threatening to the Serbian population in Croatia who would naturally interpret it as the denial of their cultural rights and the right to use their language.²² Did the Catholic bishops lack the wisdom to promote the rights of the Croatian people in such a way as not to threaten minority populations? Did they not act anti-constitutionally in their advocacy of a move that would tear apart the federal structure and provoke a war? Surely they must have known many precedents where civil wars broke out over the preservation of a federation. Krišto proceeds to point out other, at that time still unconstitutional, initiatives of the Catholic bishops. Namely as soon as they succeeded in their aim of unseating the Communist Party of Croatia and replacing it with the Croatian Democratic Union or Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica--HDZ (which Krišto calls a national movement rather than a political party--which, indeed, is how the HDZ wishes to be represented in order to obtain near monopoly over Croatia), they switched attention to Bosnia and Herzegovina. There they supported the political activity of the HDZ among Croats in blatant contradiction of the existing law which forbade the creation of political parties on exclusively national or religious basis. Wrote Krišto, "Hence, the Catholic Church made offers to strike that provision from the books. At the same time, the faithful were encouraged not to fear organizing themselves on the national and religious basis."²³ Indeed they and other nationalists prevailed. Exclusively national-religious parties were created by all--Croats, Muslims, and Serbs. These parties soon became the three major parties of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Those who know the national and religious problems of that state know how fragile the balance of the ingredients was and that the only non-violent alternative was for a government that could somehow keep all three national-religious groups working

²¹Jure Kristo, "Diverse Functions of Catholicism and Orthodoxy in Social Upheavals (1989-1992)" pp. 7-8.

²²This would later be aggravated after the victory of the Croatian Democratic Union by the immediate removal of signs that were both in the Latinic and Cyrillic script which in an economically weak country is an expensive move which could only be interpreted by the Serbians as a decision to obliterate evidence of Serbian presence from Croatia (one should note that in Serbia to this day signs and newspapers appear in both alphabets).

²³Kristo, "The Catholic Church in Times of Crisis," p. 12.

together in a secular context. Thus it is clear that the Roman Catholic bishops initiated the process of national-religious confrontation, one would guess not out of religious but out of nationalist motives, because they clearly equate the two. The outcome of that political move is nothing short of catastrophic, and the Roman Catholic leadership bears a considerable responsibility for the ensuing tragedy. It does not take great wisdom to see that their initiatives in this complex area could only lead to war. The Communists, it seems in retrospect, were far more realistic about the national-religious threat than the Roman Catholic and Croatian leadership.

Another manner in which the Roman Catholic leadership contributed to the tension in Yugoslavia was their support of the Albanian cause in the Kosovo. This they did ostensibly in the name of human rights. It is true that the human rights of Albanians in Kosovo were severely curtailed by the bloody politics of repression on part of Milošević's regime and that no decent human being could be silent on this issue, but the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church was not evenhanded and did not speak out on behalf of other repressed minorities (especially not of minority rights on the territory of Croatia). Their speaking out about the Kosovo situation was bound to aggravate the Serbians who do have some legitimate grievances about the fate of Serbs on Kosovo, though they pressed their interests in a very brutal and unacceptable manner. The Serbs would naturally interpret these appeals as an anti-Serb and anti-Orthodox move by the Roman Catholic Church.²⁴

When the first free elections in Croatia yielded the victory of the HDZ and the Roman Catholic Church was finally publicly rehabilitated after years of oppression, the Catholic Church at first seemed to display practically unlimited support of the new regime's super-patriotic Croatianism. The church leadership was present at the opening of the *Sabor* (Parliament) sessions; politicians and clergy did not fail to use picture opportunities in order to be seen together in the media, and much was done to reinforce the notion of the unity of the church, nation, and state.²⁵ Also the church leadership vigorously promoted the cult of Alojzije Cardinal Stepinac, a controversial figure. Insofar as the Catholic leadership rejected the labeling of the entire Croatian people by some Serbian extremists as genocidal and indicated that Stepinac was badly treated by the Communists, they were right, but they showed too little willingness to express regret for the massacres against Serbians in World War

²⁴I use the word 'naturally' because of the Serb memory of Croat/Catholic massacres and persecutions in World War II, which, of course, are not forgotten and which give rise to fears that they could be repeated.

²⁵Cardinal Kuharić felt the need to explain that he is keeping a distance between the Church and the government despite apparent linkages in his interview to Marinko Čulić, "Nismo u naručju vlasti" [We are not in the Arms of the Government], *Danas*, Vol. 9, No. 461 (December 18, 1990), pp. 20-23.

II in which a number of clergy were directly involved and for which Stepinac had a certain culpability. Geert van Dartel and Anne Herbst mention that Bishop Pihler in 1963 did issue an apology asking Serbians for forgiveness²⁶--one apology by a single Croat bishop in 1963 for the massacre of anywhere from 50,000-700,000 Serbs!²⁷ During the tense times prior to the outbreak of the war Serbian bishops often pleaded with the Roman Catholic colleagues to issue a more emphatic statement of regret and condemnation of the war crimes by Croats over Serbs in WWII, but more often than not Catholic bishops reacted by minimizing the casualties and responding with counter complaints that many Croats were killed after the War by the Partisans.²⁸ This too, of course, would have been interpreted by the Serbians as a threat as they wondered whether the Croatians are planning ethnic cleansing as they did in World War II.

Did the Roman Catholic Church of Croatia contribute to the outbreak of the war in a nationalist manner? I would answer that with an emphatic yes. The Church leadership (some more than others) together with Franjo Tudjman made provocative and foolish moves. They pushed their agenda much too speedily with no regard to the consequences of their behavior and certainly have to be seen as being among the culprits for the war.

2. Serbian Orthodox Role in the Disintegration of Yugoslavia

Since the Serbs had far more vested interest in keeping Yugoslavia together than the other nationalities, it may seem odd that the Serbian Orthodox Church contributed to the outbreak of hostilities, but they did. They did so by their role in the Kosovo conflict, in whipping up the claims of the uniqueness of Serbian victimization by others, and later in their uncritical support of Serbian nationalist aspirations.

²⁶Van Dartel, *op. cit.*, p. 286 and Herbst, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

²⁷This is not the place to discuss the numbers of massacred which the Croats tend to diminish and the Serbs to exaggerate. Even if it were only a thousand of massacred Serbs would it not be appropriate for the entire Bishop's Conference to issue a statement of regret? After all there were numerous attempts of forcible conversion of Orthodox to Catholicism and such an act is ecclesiastical.

²⁸The Austrian Catholic theologian, Dr. Philipp Harnoncourt, provided information in January 1993 to this author that he personally heard at a meeting in Vienna convened by Cardinal Köning to work on reconciling the two churches, a plea by the Orthodox Bishop Irinej of Novi Sad and Backa that the Roman Catholic Bishops could do much to allay Serbian fears by condemning the destruction of 500,000 Serbs during World War II. However the Catholic Bishop Djuro Kokša immediately countered that the charge is exaggerated--there were only 50,000 killed, he claimed--and then did not proceed to apologize even for that number. This author likewise never heard a Croatian Roman Catholic priest make any statement that could be considered as a condemnation of the atrocities of the past war.

Already in the late 1970s the Serbian Orthodox Church started warning about the Albanian 'menace' in Kosovo.²⁹ The population explosion of the Albanians and the exodus of the Serbs was labeled in a hyperbole as genocide of Serbs. Before too long this claim was generalized into the claim that the Serbs in general are threatened on all sides by conspiracies.³⁰ As the Yugoslav government cracked down on Albanian demonstrations and repeatedly repressed dissent concerns were evoked by non-Serbs about violations of the rights of the Albanians, the Serbian Orthodox Church went on a propaganda counter attack by issuing appeals regarding alleged rapes, murders, expulsions, and destructions of Serbian cultural monuments and sacred sites--in other words "ethnic cleansing"--by Albanians.³¹ This strengthened the Serb resolve not to give up Kosovo and produced powerful anti-Albanian dislike among Serbs.

Another nationalist conflict by the SOC was the Serbian Orthodox Church's strenuous opposition to the autonomy of the Macedonian Orthodox Church. The Patriarch of Belgrade claimed jurisdiction over nearly all Orthodox Churches in Yugoslavia, namely Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia. Already at that point it became obvious that Serbian Orthodox Church leaders and Serbian Communist leaders saw eye to eye on the Macedonian questions,³² just as the Macedonian Orthodox Church hierarchy saw eye top eye with the Macedonian Communists. Tension also arose in the Orthodox Church in Montenegro where a pro-Serbian branch negated the separateness of the Montenegrins, and a pro-Montenegrin branch asserted that the Montenegrins ought to insist on the autonomy of their church, as it was in the past. These two groups occasionally came to literal blows. Neither of these two conflicts are yet resolved.

As it became evident that Yugoslavia was heading toward disintegration after Tito's death Serbs perceived a threat to their national interests. The leading role in this crisis was played not by the Church but by the scholars of the Serbian Academy of Sciences (SANU for Srpska Akademija Nauka i Umetnosti) who issued a *Memorandum* in 1986. In that document that

²⁹The province is a Serbian national shrine on account of having been the center of the medieval Serbian kingdom and the site of the fateful Kosovo Field battle in 1389 as well as the location of the first Serbian Patriarchate in Pec.

³⁰To the contrary the Serbs were the largest of the national groups in Yugoslavia and were dominant in the federal army and bureaucracy.

³¹E.g "Declaration of the Bishops of the Serbian orthodox Church Against the Genocide Inflicted by the Albanians on the Indigenous Serbian Population, Together with the Sacrilege of their Cultural Monuments in their own Country," (Photostated typescript signed by five Serbian Orthodox bishops of Western countries, September 14, 1988.)

³²Marinko Čulić, "Zaruke zvijezde i krsta," [The Engagement of the Star and the Cross], *Danas*, Vol. 9, No.436, (May 26, 1990), pp. 28-29.

Serbian academics countered the charge that Serbians dominated all other nationalities in Yugoslavia and pictured reality in reverse, namely that the Serbs suffered most for the sake of Yugoslavia but were the greatest losers and most heavily victimized by the Communist system and Tito's government. It was charged that the inter-republican borders were established unilaterally by Tito, a Croat, with no reference to demographic factors in order to weaken and damage Serbia. The Yugoslav constitution of 1974 was blamed for weakening the Serbs, and a great constitutional conflict took place with the Serbs wanting to change that constitution while the other nationalities wanted to uphold the constitutional provisions of the 1974.

The Serbian Orthodox Church soon vigorously joined SANU in voicing Serbian grievances, in particular incensed by what they regarded as the lack of Croatian Catholic willingness to atone for their war-time crimes against the Serbian Orthodox population in Croatia and Bosnia. Prominent Serbian Orthodox bishops and theologians started vigorously speaking up on behalf of what they considered threatened Serbdom in areas where in World War II massacres of Serbs took place, in particular the concentration camp of Jasenovac in Croatia. It was lamented that no Roman Catholic official came to the commemorations to the victims of Croatian fascist 'ethnic cleansing' during the dedication of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Jasenovac.³³ Cries of "never again" could be heard from both nationalist and church circles. The Serbian Orthodox Church kept reiterating its age-old claim that the Church always was, is, and will be, even when all others fail, the defender of Serbian national interests. The gravest threats to Serbdom and Orthodoxy, the hierarchs pointed out, were Muslims and Catholics. The crimes of the *Nezavisna Država Hrvatska* (abbreviated to NDH and standing for Independent State of Croatia) and the *ustashe* (Nazi Croatian crack units similar to the SS) were frequently linked to the Roman Catholic Church and its leadership.³⁴ The Serbian Orthodox fully sided with other Serb nationalists who saw in the Croatian independence movement many "ustashoid" elements.³⁵

³³This author does believe that it was the real aim of Pavelić's regime to have a pure Croatian "Great Croatia." I am stressing that in order to point out that the Serb attempts at "ethnic cleaning," which I under no circumstances support, are in fact retribution for what happened in World War II (namely we are witnessing the ending of that war on the Balkans as well as the beginning of the next round of warfare). The Serbs are carrying out what is popularly known as *milo za drago* or tit for tat.

³⁴Among the Serbian publications emphasizing the tie between Croatian nationalism and Roman Catholicism were Dragoljub Živojinović and Dejan Lučić, *Varvarstvo u ime Hristovo* [Barbarianism in Christ's Name] (1988), Vladimir Dedijer, *Vatikan i Jasenovac* [The Vatican and Jasenovac] and Milan Bulajić, *Ustaški zločini genocida* [Ustaša Crimes of Genocide], 1988.

³⁵It seems, indeed, that too little care was given by the nascent Croatian independence movement to clearly reject the symbols of the fascist NDH.

By the late 1980s the anti-Albanian, anti-Slovene, and anti-Croat feelings were conflated, and the Serbian Orthodox Church saw initially in Slobodan Milošević's "antibureaucratic revolution" the salvation and liberation of the Serbian people. Only in 1992 did some Orthodox leaders, especially Patriarch Paul I, see Milošević's populism as a threat to the well-being of the Serbian people. Patriarch Paul I and several other prelates openly criticized the government of Milosevic at anti-government demonstrations in Belgrade and elsewhere and charged that the government is harming the interests of the Serbian people.

Jure Krišto and Anne Herbst demonize the role of the Serbian Orthodox Church for allegedly always supporting the state in contrast to what they perceives as the much more independent role of the Catholic Church among Croatians. Both of them are too harsh on the Orthodox Church prelates and theologians and too lenient with the Catholic ones. No significant difference in the relationship of these two churches toward their respective nation is in evidence. It is true that the Serbian Orthodox hierarchy was more servile to the former Yugoslav government than the Roman Catholic hierarchy was, but there are a host of other plausible explanations for that. In respect to the rise of national chauvinism both churches contributed heavily. It is symptomatic that parallel to the notion *Crkva u Hrvata* is its match *Srpska crkva* as a synonym for the Orthodox Church. The term *Serbian* seems to carry more weight than the term *Orthodox*. An interesting editorial in *Teološki Pogledi* [Theological Views], the official theological journal of the SOC indicates that there are those who mistakenly favored only the Serbian national identity as a measure of their adherence to the Christian church and that in the period of the decline of Communism some people started identifying the church with the state, blaming the SOC for the errors of government policies and claiming that this brought about God's wrath upon both the Serbian church and state. But Dr. Ignjatije Mitić, the author of the editorial, rejects this equation.³⁶ Yet in typical Orthodox fashion he rejects a sharp division of the worldly (political) and spiritual (ecclesiastic) domains.³⁷

The SOC Metropolitan of Sarajevo, Nikolaj Mrdja, was the first Serb leader to point out that organized rapes were being carried out by Serbian extremists. However for Christmas 1992 the SOC hierarchy issued a sharp statement categorically denying that Serbs have organized rapes and challenging anyone to name a single concentration camp where such rapes occurred, while simultaneously charging that many Serbian women had been raped by

³⁶Ignjatije Mitić, "Umesto uvodnika," [Instead of an Introduction], *Teološki Pogledi* [Belgrade], Vol. XXIII, Nos. 1-4, 1991, p. 12.

³⁷Ibid., p. 15.

Muslims and Croats.³⁸ This case indicates the delicate position of the SOC, namely to truthfully point out events that it cannot conceivably condone and the need to become the protector of the national reputation when the entire Serbian nation is demonized by the outside world.

Like the Roman Catholic Church in Croatia the Serbian Orthodox Church favors obligatory religious education in schools.³⁹ Unlike the Croatian Sabor the Assembly [*Skupština*] of the rump Yugoslavia defeated the motion with a large majority. The SOC worries about the situation of Serbian children being catechized by Roman Catholic teachers in Croatian schools but seems unconcerned about the fate of non-Orthodox children in the event of mandatory Orthodox catechism in schools of Serbia. Serb theologians also undertook the defence of Serbs and attack of Croats (and others) when Croatian views critical of Serbs appear in foreign journals.⁴⁰

Neither Orthodox ecclesiology nor Serb nationalism is at ease with a theology and patriotism of repentance and sharp criticism of one's own group. To that degree the criticisms of Herbst, Krišto, and van Dartel are accurate. They fail to see the same failings in Catholic ecclesiology and Croat nationalism which likewise has difficulty admitting wrongdoing by their own people. Failings are usually pointed out by the rivals and outsiders; the power of internal criticism is left unused.

3. Bosnian Muslims: Ethno-Religious Ambiguity

The Bosnian Muslims are in the unique and somewhat awkward position of being the only group of Muslim believers in the world who are also considered Muslim by nationality. Some claim that national consciousness among the Slavic Muslims of Bosnia and Herzegovina came late. Others maintain that the Muslims were the mainstream of Bosnian life, having come peacefully to Bosnia in the 9th Century and having created a Muslim civilization, culture, language, script, and so forth.⁴¹ However most scholars contend that Christians of the former Bosnian Church underwent a mass conversion to Islam in 1436 and later in other

³⁸*Glasnik* [Belgrade], Vol. 73, No. 12 (December 1992), p. 201. Also "Noch einmal: Moslem-Frauen," *Glaube in der 2. Welt*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (February 1993), pp. 10-11. See also "Gewalt gegen Frauen als Mittel der Kriegsführung," *G2W*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (January, 1993), pp. 16-19.

³⁹Lazar Milin, "Omladina i religija (pitanje veronauke u skolama)" [Youth and Religion (the question of catechism in schools)], *Glasnik*, Vol. 73, No. 8 (August 1992), pp. 133-142.

⁴⁰Lazar Milin, "Srbi u očima hrvatskog književnika Vlade Gotovca," [The Serbs in the eyes of the Croatian writer Vlada Gotovac], *Glasnik*, Vol. 73, No. 5 (May 1992), pp. 85-89.

⁴¹Statement by Smail Balić at the international Jewish-Christian-Muslim dialogue in Graz, Austria, January 4, 1993.

adjacent areas.⁴² One thing is certain: the contemporary Slavic Muslims do not remember their pre-Islamic religious or ethnic origin. Since they were the ruling class during the rule of the Ottomans, they were detested by their neighboring Slavic Christians, Orthodox and Catholics alike. When the Turks withdrew from the Balkan peninsula, the so-called *poturice* [Turkicized people] were expected to return to their Christian origins thereby swelling the ranks of the Orthodox and/or Catholics. When the courting of the Muslims turned out to be unsuccessful, their Christian population continued their resentment and the Muslims had to work on their own identity. Some preferred to call themselves Yugoslavs, some Bosnjaks others Muslims. The Croats and the Serbs vigorously continued to claim that all the Muslims were converts from their respective religion and nationality. It is most likely that in fact both Serbian Orthodox and Croatian Catholics converted and in any case repressed their previous identities so effectively that most of them are unable to regard themselves one or the other.⁴³

I am not informed first-hand about the engagement of Muslim religious leaders enhancing Muslim nationalism in Bosnia. My own personal travels through the region and the general opinion of observers is that Islam is more a cultural than religious identity for most Muslims in Yugoslavia and that they may well be one of the most secularized Muslims in the world, gravitating toward Europe rather than the Muslim world. It is said that the current President of the Bosnian government, Alija Izetbegović, at the time when he was a Communist prisoner wrote a book that some describe as Islamic fundamentalist because allegedly he aimed to establish Bosnia as an Islamic state in which the Muslim majority would take over and rule with the help of the *shariyat* law.⁴⁴ It is evident, however, that since he was elected to a responsible government post, he has consistently pledged himself to a secular, multi-national and multi-religious state in which everyone's rights would be respected.

⁴²Vatro Murvar, Nation and Religion in Central Europe and the Western Balkans--The Muslims in Bosnia, Hercegovina and Sandžak: A Sociological Analysis. (Brookfield, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), p. 12. This author regards many of the speculations and hypotheses of Murvar and Balić as far-fetched, just as he is unimpressed by Serbian and Croatian mythological history.

⁴³Professor Esad Ćimić, a former Marxist sociologist of religion of Muslim heritage caused quite a controversy when he rejected the innovation created during the later years of Tito's regime to call muslims Muslims, by joking that he thinks of himself as a Croat and his brother believes himself to be a Serb.

⁴⁴Since I did not read any of his writings, I cannot substantiate this claim, but Serbs frequently refer to the alleged fundamentalisms of Izetbegović. Croats on the other hand criticize him for having been too naive and trusting the Serbs and not arming the Bosnian Muslims in time, thus causing them to suffer disproportionate war casualties.

It is also evident that since the Western world has not given any effective assistance to the Muslims who are the major losers thus far in the war in former Yugoslavia, that eventually these Slavic Muslims may be driven into the arms of Islamic fundamentalists who seem more eager to assist them than others. If this takes place it will be less a conscious and free decision of the Bosnian Muslims and more an act of a desperate people on the verge of extermination. The battles between Muslim and Croat forces that broke out in late 1992 and April and May of 1993 are an evidence that the Muslim-Croat alliance is temporary, driven only by a common hatred of the Serbs.

4. Macedonian Orthodox Separatism

It is general knowledge that the Macedonian Orthodox Church was supported in its schism from the Serbian Orthodox Church by Tito's government in order to make a more determined effort to prove the separateness and identity of a Macedonian nationality.⁴⁵ Since in Eastern Europe one cannot imagine a nationality without its own religion, it was important to establish an autocephalous or at least autonomous Macedonian church. This was done to deter Bulgarian, Greek, and Serbian claims that Macedonians are not separate but are parts of their nationhood. Though one of the last nations in Europe to become free of Turkish overlordship (1913) and one of the last ethnic groups to proclaim its own national consciousness,⁴⁶ the Macedonians in turn have made some outrageous claims about uniting Greek, Bulgarian, and Yugoslav Macedonia into a Great Macedonia, a move which has cost them especially Greek resistance to recognition as an independent, sovereign state upon the fall of Yugoslavia.⁴⁷

Macedonian Orthodox higher clergy have dutifully carried out the task of promoting Macedonian sovereignty and been fairly effective ambassadors abroad. It is interesting that the Macedonian Orthodox hierarchs have nurtured fairly good relationships with the Vatican and the Croatian Catholics--one presumes on the old European principle of being friends with the enemies of your enemy. There seems to be a minor reconciliation with the Serbian Orthodox Church since no Orthodox Church in the world was willing to grant autocephaly to the MOC, and some accommodation will have to be worked out with the SOC which has very reluctantly granted it autonomy under the domain of the Serbian Patriarchate.

⁴⁵This is another area which the author did not research but is part of general knowledge.

⁴⁶Institut za Nacionalna Istorija, Istorija na Makedonskiot Narod (Skopje: NIP "Nova Makedonija," 1969. 3 vols.

⁴⁷See a map distributed by Macedonian Review (Skopje), Vol. 22 (1992).

5. Protestants: Inability to Withstand War Propaganda

The Protestants, being less than 1% of the population are quite marginalized. Generally the larger churches tended to be churches of national minorities (Hungarians, Slovaks, Germans). Among the larger Yugoslav nationalities the number of Protestants was quite insignificant and played only a marginal role.

In the past the free church Protestants, who tended to attract membership from a variety of national groups (e.g. Baptists, Pentecostals, Seventh-Day Adventists, Methodists) tended to nurture exemplary harmonious relationships between the members of various nationalities, and there was hope that these good relationships could survive the war. They were also outspoken in maintaining that God is not a nationalist and that religion ought to reconcile rather than divide people.⁴⁸

But that would have been too good to be true. These formerly unified churches that worked together wherever they had members on the territory of Yugoslavia now found themselves in separate countries and had to break up along the new nation-state borders into separate church organizations.

Then many of the Protestant leaders in Croatia became so morally outraged at what they perceived, along with the rest of the Croatian people, as Serbian aggression that they condemned this aggression and urged foreign military intervention against Serbians, often criticizing foreigners, especially Americans, for inaction.⁴⁹ This incensed their fellow-religionists in other states and formerly close colleagues now regard them no longer as peace-makers but war-mongers.⁵⁰

On the whole the Protestant communities tend to accept the official propaganda of their respective new states and often interpret the events the way such propaganda channels them. This does not mean that they uncritically support all the policies of their governments, but it does show that even they are unable to bridge the enormous abyss that now separates Croats and Serbs, Serbs and Macedonians, etc.

⁴⁸Marijana Radulović interviewing Peter Kuzmič, "Bog je zbunjen," [God is Perplexed] Danas, Vol. 10, No.465 (January 15, 1991), pp. 66-68. Kuzmič, widely regarded as the best known Protestant (Evangelical Pentecostal) theologian in Yugoslavia, is a Slovenian who lived and worked in Croatia and Serbia.

⁴⁹Peter Kuzmič, "U zamci medija i interesa," [In the Snare of Media and Interests] (Photocopy of an article in Izvori (Osijek) taken from Glas Slavonije (Osijek) but no date provided (probably 1992). Pp. 8-10.

⁵⁰See Bill Yoder, "Protestant Adjustments After the Break-up of Yugoslavia," in this issue of Religion in Eastern Europe.

All Protestant churches have immersed themselves, despite their small size, into relief work, assisting both international religious relief agencies as well as out of their own means. Particularly impressive is the work of the Seventh-Day Adventists who at considerable personal risks to themselves deliver mail and packages to war ravaged areas where no postal system functions any longer.⁵¹

B. The Reconciling Role of Religious Communities

We already noted that the reconciling role of the religious communities is undeveloped in comparison to the divisive role. Calls for peace and reconciliation are not lacking but many of them did not go beyond platitudes and claims that this or that religion has always stood for peace. Frequently the call for peace was tempered by strong defensive language rejecting culpability of one's own side and blame directed toward the other groups. Very few positive statements have been uttered about other religions and nationalities during these times, which is not surprising given the cruel treatment meted out to each other.

Of course most people in the churches regret the war (though not all mourn the disintegration of Yugoslavia). Fewer members of the religious communities can give a sound assessment of the situation that is not merely a reflection of what they hear from their mass media.⁵² These assessments rarely receive wide circulation. And even fewer are those who decide to become activists on behalf of peace. Most people see themselves as being victims of forces far too great for their modest abilities. Survival in tumultuous times is the overwhelming desire--active peace-making is neither a tradition nor do people have enough psychic energy left for conflict-resolution. Most are too shell-shocked by the brutality of the war and the troubled times for their communities and their own person to be able to stem the confrontational mood throughout the country.

Several remarkable statements have been made, however, by leaders of religious communities, both by themselves and in meeting with others. The most significant such occasions were the meetings between Patriarch Paul I of SOC with the head of the RCC Bishop's Conference Franjo Cardinal Kuharić. Their first meeting was in Sremski Karlovci (Serbia) in May 1991, the second in Slavonski Brod (Croatia) in August 1991, the third one in the Spring of 1992 in St. Gallen, Switzerland, the fourth in Geneva in September 1992, and the fifth a meeting which the Reis-ul-ulema of the Islamic Community Jakub Selimovski

⁵¹Thomas Shanker, "Adventists getting the mail through," Philadelphia Inquirer, April 30, 1993. Also, "Paketi za Sarajevo," [Parcels for Sarajevo], Evropske Novosti (Frankfurt), May 22, 1993.

⁵²One such sound interpretation is that of Vjekoslav Bajsic. Interview with Bajsic, January 11, 1993, in Zagreb.

also was able to be present at a meeting which was convened by the Conference of European Churches and the European Catholic Bishops' Conference in Switzerland in early 1993.

The most powerful text emerged out of the Geneva meeting partially reproduced here as follows:

Following our prayers and conversations, we appeal with one mind and voice to the faithful of our churches, to the responsible organs of the state, to military commandos and troops, to all peoples and men and women of our common geographical and spiritual area, as well as to all international forums and institutions engaged in the search for a solution or in the provision of aid to our region and in our states; and we do not only appeal but demand, on the basis of our spiritual position and moral responsibility:

1. Immediately and without condition to cease all hostilities, all bloodshed and all destruction, in particular to stop the blasphemous and insane destruction of places of prayer and holy places, Christian and Muslim alike; and that negotiations between the warring parties be initiated without delay.
2. Immediately and without condition to liberate all prisoners of war and hostages, as well as to close all prison camps and to free all those incarcerated in this evil war.
3. Immediately and without condition to cease the inhuman practice of ethnic cleansing, by whomever it is being incited or carried out.
4. To permit all refugees and deportees to return to their homes and to ensure all bishops and priests of our churches as well as Islamic spiritual leaders free access to their flock and undisturbed exercise of their office.
5. That normal communication and unrestricted circulation be re-established, as well as the possibility of free movement and settlement for all people, whatever their religious or national affiliation, and
- 6 that all suffering people be assured undisturbed and equal access to humanitarian aid.

Equally with one mind and voice we condemn all crimes and distance ourselves from all criminals, irrespective of which people or army they belong to or which church or religious affiliation they claim. We especially express our horror at the perpetration of extremely immoral misdeeds, at the mistreatment of older and younger women and girls, which only monsters can perpetrate, no matter what name they give themselves.

Before God, before humanity and before our own conscience we pledge that we will use all evangelical means and the full influence of our office and responsibility in church and society to work, in our own states and peoples, decisively and openly for peace, justice and the salvation of each and every one, for the dignity and inalienable rights of every individual and every people, for humanity and tolerance, for forgiveness and love.

We ourselves call, individually and together, for repentance before the God of love, for conversation and for service to him, that we can live anew as neighbours, friends and brothers,
Peace to all!⁵³

Of great importance was the distancing which the prelates took from those who would wage war in the name of their religion, saying that to do so is the greatest crime against one's own religion.

⁵³See full text in OPREE, Vol. XII, No. 5 (October 1992), pp. 50-51.

The Christmas message 1992 by all the Orthodox bishops presided by Patriarch Paul I is likewise very peace oriented.⁵⁴ In it the Bishops give an answer why such destruction ensued after the proclamation of democracy and multi-party elections. The reason is "that the proclaimed principles were accepted only externally, formally, but in the soul matters stayed unchanged due to espousing the notion that one can help oneself and one's people more by doing evil than by good, and that one can defend oneself and one's people from crimes and criminals by doing the same, namely by means of inhumanity and crimes . . ."⁵⁵ The bishops proceeded to point out that these attitudes brought about the unhappiness of all the nations involved in this war, and then they invoked love toward all as mark of Christian discipleship.

The Roman Catholic Archbishop of Belgrade, the Slovene France Perko, also rejected the linkage between war massacres and religion yet admitted that the coupling is now closer. While urging patriotism instead of nationalism the Archbishop conceded that many believers see themselves more as nationalists than Christians due to the deficiency of evangelization.⁵⁶

Looking at the leadership in religious communities, it is difficult to find prelates with a distinct orientation toward peace. The top leadership of the three communities--Orthodox, Catholic, and Islamic--are more conciliatory than some of their colleagues, but no one emerged with a Christ-like, Ghandian or Martin Luther King, Jr.-type strategy of resisting evil. There are minuscule groups of dissenters who oppose the war or who look for alternate peaceful ways in Belgrade, Zagreb, and Sarajevo.⁵⁷ In Sarajevo, for instance, there was a small group of Catholic, Orthodox, and Muslim clergy led by Marko Oršolić, a Franciscan, who founded the International Center for Interreligious Dialogue, Justice, and Peace who are working toward converting one of the military barracks into a dialogue center after the war, but they are not only isolated but also despised by their own religious community. Some have already been assassinated by members of their own groups; Orsolic, a Croat, is being attacked in the Croatian press as a 'communist.'⁵⁸

⁵⁴Unfortunately Herbst uses this document selectively and regards it as an escalation in episcopal and patriarchal defensiveness of the Serb position that they are waging merely a defensive war. See op.cit., p. 18.

⁵⁵Glasnik, Vol. 73, No. 12 (December 1992), pp. 198-199. Transl. from Serbian into English by Paul Mojzes. It should be noted that the text is not directed at enemies of the Serbs.

⁵⁶"Krieg erst am Anfang," G2W, Vol. 21, No. 2, 1993, p. 11.

⁵⁷In Zagreb Jerry Shenk, an American Mennonite theologian and activist tried to teach pacifism at the gathering of a group of religious people convened by the Fellowship of Reconciliation.

⁵⁸Interviews with Oršolić during the first week in December 1992 in Baltimore and Rosemont, PA.

One of the American peace activists reports that most of the clergy, especially the higher clergy, in former Yugoslavia have been inundated by foreign ecumenical and fact-finding delegations, and they feel overburdened by high expectations that the churches can be agents of reconciliation while they do not see themselves as having that much influence. The activist reports that it is fairly difficult to find key middle level or higher clergy who wish to meet with their opposites from other churches. The most that one can expect at the present moment is relief work by the churches, an effort for which they are neither trained nor particularly well suited. While some of the church centers seem to be able to effectively distribute relief based only on need, there are reports of abuses; certain local churches distribute aid only to regular church-goers of their own denomination or use aid to promote church attendance.

C. Conclusion

It is difficult to have hope regarding a better future for the devastated and brutalized people of ex-Yugoslavia, including the religious segment and its institutions. Most people with whom I spoke or corresponded expect it to become worse before it will become better. In Dante's "Inferno" there is a sign over hell: "Abandon hope all those who enter." The people in former Yugoslavia are, indeed, closer to hell than to heaven--at least regarding life here on earth. The most the religious communities are able to do is to suffer along. Perhaps some of them learn a lesson that stimulating national chauvinism and separatism rather than tolerance, pluralism, and concern for fellow-human beings regardless of nationality and religion is a recipe for hell.