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Book Review: Za bolji i pravedniji svijet: Etika politika religija [For a Better and More Just World: Ethics, Politics, Religion]

Paul B. Mojzes
Rosemont College

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Peter Kuzmič, *Za bolji i pravedniji svijet: Etika politika religija*. [For a better and more just world: ethics, politics, religion], Zagreb-Sarajevo: Synopsis, 2019. Hard cover, 326 pp. ISBN: 978-953-7968-85-4.

Reviewed by Paul Mojzes, editor OPREE

Normally we at OPREE review books in English and sometimes in German, but I am making an exception in reviewing a book written in the Croatian language, not because we expect our readers to rush out and buy it, but because Peter Kuzmič, the rector of the Evangelical Theological School in Osijek, Croatia, provides relevant and thought provoking inspirational messages to his readers. While many leaders of the tiny minority Protestant churches tend to focus on messages of piety for their often beleaguered congregations on the territory of former Yugoslavia, Kuzmič has ventured forth on a path of public involvement, in this case through a series of weekly columns in the local paper, *Glas Slavonije* (Voice of Slavonia), from Osijek, the second largest city of Croatia. He provides an enlightened, moderate, prophetic voice on local, national, and international events.

The book contains 98 columns written in the period from 2006 to 2009 in chronological order, but undated and organized only in four subsections. The topics are of great variety and there would be little value to try to summarize the book except to say that the Slovenian born Pentecostal Evangelical author was educated in a German Bible College, and holds a B.A. from Southern California College in Costa Mesa, CA; an M.A. from Wheaton Graduate School, and an M.Th. and D.Th. from the University of Zagreb. He has a wide ecumenical and international teaching experience and is able to bring insights from his many contacts with prominent religious and political figures. He has become one of the best known and influential Protestant religious voices from Eastern Europe. Every other semester he teaches at Gordon Cowell Theological School in suburban Boston and thus helps students in the USA to have a better understanding of developments in Eastern Europe and the international student body at the theological school in Osijek benefits from his exposure to Western insights and experiences.

These journalistic columns are not intended primarily for religious readers. Croatia is a predominantly Catholic country with many readers with a distinct secularist worldview and it may be among the latter that Kuzmič is more avidly read because he provides an insight into how a deeply religious person analyzes the world situation with a levelheaded analytical and committed

ethical perspective. A pro-Western attitude is clearly discernible in his essays, yet he can and is sharply critical of the many warped economic and cultural realities of the USA. He is likewise critical of the many social problems of the Croatian and wider Balkan and Eastern European environment. There is a danger in offering a collection of columns on current events because many years later many seem obsolete or misjudged (e.g. his initial enthusiasm for the election of George W. Bush of which the Iraq war disabused him). Clearly the value of this book is not whether his analysis of this or that current event is on target some years later but for the intelligent reader to see how a thoughtful, well-educated, and dedicated Christian is able to apply his faith commitment to help people face the realities and challenges of the time. And, to do so by neither being gullible nor hypercritical of the developments in church and society.

Being a capable organizer and entrepreneur he developed the Evangelical Theological School in Osijek into an ecumenical place of learning with a prominent international regular and visiting faculty and access to the most modern library and internet technology. Of some interfaith interest is that the chapel of ETS is a former synagogue destroyed by the fascists during World War II, purchased from the remnant of the Jewish community. It has retained many of the original symbols, thus showing respect and honor to the Judeo-Christian tradition. In it many ecumenical events have taken place, thereby manifesting the ecumenical and interreligious cooperation so badly needed in this war-torn area.