Cvitkovic's "Konfesija u ratu [Religion in War]" - Book Review

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and the Holocaust, Reagan's foreign policy, or the breakup of Yugoslavia. There are numerous misspellings of foreign words, for example, Magadin for Magadan, Geimschaft for Gemeinschaft, Yevsei for Yevsevi, or zamtki for zamekti. Transliterations are inconsistent, so that the same Russian letter is rendered variously as -e, -eo, or -yo. Foreign first names sometimes are given in the original and sometimes in anglicized versions. Accents, umlauts, Russian soft signs, and other diacritical marks appear and disappear haphazardly in Russian, Polish, German, French, Italian, Czech, Croatian, Romanian, and Hungarian words.

Dunn's subject is important, but his grand concept of the Catholic option for Russia over the centuries is dubious. His picture of Russia and its Church is one sided and minimizes the impact on Russian historical memory of real Western aggression from the Teutonic Knights or during the Time of Troubles. An academic survey of the Catholic Church in Russia is long overdue. This book is not it.

Daniel L. Schlafly, Jr., Saint Louis University


Both books deal with one of the most misinterpreted elements of the last wars in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina from 1991 to 1995: with the role of religious organizations, believers and clerics, and the role of religion in general in them. In some opinions, they are undoubtedly responsible because of their radical politicization, even militarization; on the contrary, in some other views, they were presented just as another victim of the new nationalistic policies. Cvitković's and Perica's books go beyond these oversimplistic and reductionist views (which extended from pure ignorance to deliberate malevolence). Using different approaches and methods they both come to similar conclusions. Both show how, when and why religious organizations became part of dominant political and nationalistic platforms on all three sides, and as such have their share of responsibility – and also guilt – in what was happening there. Leading institutions and personalities of Croat Catholicism, Serbian Orthodoxy and Bosniak Islam were not only ‘used’, ‘instrumentalized’ by some political forces, as it is often assumed – they willingly entered in an alliance with them and they also ‘used’ or ‘instrumentalized’ nationalistic politics for their own goals. What is equally frightening, such tendencies persist in both countries even today, ten years after the end of the wars. So in many aspects - to paraphrase Clausewitz – ‘peace is just the continuation of war with other means’.

Ivan Cvitković is a sociologist of religion from the University of Sarajevo who experienced war in his besieged city. On one side his book contains very broad theological, philosophical and
sociological considerations on violence, war, (in)tolerance, and peace. But on the empirical side he compares some basic data of religious and national structure - from censuses and public opinion surveys of the general population or just some groups (like military units or university students) - of pre-war and post-war Bosnia-Herzegovina. Passing to the religious dimensions of the last conflict, he is right in stating that “war again confirmed that in this region, religion is considered as political doctrine.” (p. 140). Beyond any doubt all religious communities strengthened their role in their respective societies and in political life – but the question remains whether this can be understood as genuine religious revival. Namely, people are well aware of the destructive role of religions during the wars: for example, recent survey among the Bosnian freshmen showed that 60.6 percent of them considered their influence as ‘somehow negative’ and ‘completely negative’, while only 7.8 percent as ‘somehow positive’ and ‘completely positive’ (p. 180). For this reason it is difficult to understand the author's astonishment and disappointment with chauvinistic words that were coming from religious dignitaries themselves (as for example quoted in a footnote on p. 174). Examples from those two wars and many others before them clearly show that none of the religions is apriori, as such good or bad, pacifist or militant, that sacred books and their interpretations contain ambivalent teachings regarding violence – at the end there are actions of their faithful (from the religious hierarchy to believers) who make them such.

Vjekoslav Perica, a Croatian-American social scholar and former reporter of one Croatian journal, chose a more chronological approach. After a short summary of religious history and the gradual creation of the ‘leopard-skin’ religious geography of Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks, and their formative national myths, he concentrates on developments in the last three decades. So, both sides - historiographical and mythological - are represented, which proves to be extremely productive for the further analysis. He also indicates the main historical reasons from the religious side that contributed to the tragic events in the first half of the nineties: religious-national integrim and religious monopolization, exclusivity and homogenization within these nations, poor ecumenism on an institutional level (and much broader and stronger among believers themselves, so ‘from below’), conflicts with the left or liberal secular ideologies, and coexistence, even close cooperation with rightist ones, self-glorification, self-victimization and an increasing sense of menace from the neighbors on one side and simultaneous condemnations of other religions and nations, and widespread triumphalism, conservatism, patriarchalism and traditionalism within the three largest religious organizations. For him, they were 'among the principal engineers of the crisis and conflict' (p. 166) and never really learned historical lessons from their previous mistakes, so that they – and as a consequence together with them, willy-nilly, also the whole societies – are condemned to repeat them. It is then no surprise that the author is pessimistically convinced that today's “Bosnian and Herzegovinian clergy are still this country's curse” (p. 236).
Perhaps less elucidated in these two studies is the comparative dimension, that is, confrontation of religious dimensions of the Croatian and Bosnian wars with similar contemporary or recent phenomena in armed conflicts in other parts of the world. Adding this perspective would prevent notorious misjudgements like that was possible only in that part of the world. Quite the contrary, the religious dimensions is today present in most international conflicts, usually as a very convincing ‘mask’ or ‘smoke-screen’ of the real causes for them. I would have also expected that the fate of the secular population in both countries would be more intensively discussed in these two studies. From one side, these wars – that were by some wrongly labeled as religious conflicts, Crusades or Holy Wars - were paradoxically fought in societies which were to a considerable degree secularized. But on the other side, most of this secular part of the population simply disappeared during last fifteen years. What happened to them, how many of them – including most of the political leaders - became suddenly fighters for the faith and how many remained as they were, even if they were forced to leave their country for this reason? How come that the three national communities are now almost completely religiously homogenous? Is the people's new-found religiosity only temporal, or a true, intimate return to the faith, or is it now manifested for opportunistic reasons or for political pressures? – these are only some of the open sociological questions that remained unanswered.

Also, less is said about the ‘positive’ role of religions and hierarchies, about ecumenism and tolerance - but unfortunately this is simply because there was not much of it (with the exception of some outstandingly courageous individuals!). There were some contacts of religious dignitaries before, during and after the wars, but behind big words there were no real efforts or deeds. Calls to end violence and ‘misuse’ of religious symbols, rhetoric and justifications for military purposes were too abstract or misleading (for example, blaming only the other side or Godless Materialism, of course Communism, or even the Devil himself!), without any practical consequences, and totally non-credible because they were soken by the inciters and perpetuators of religious nationalism themselves (including some of the highest religious dignitaries). In addition, when they finally raised their voices against the war and ethnic cleansing, they as a rule (and again with some exceptions) forgot to condemn also the extremist politics and militants of ‘their’ sides.

Nevertheless, both authors showed a rare quality of combining and uniting broader analytical and historical insights with the ‘close-up’ approach (by focusing on symptomatic details) in one place. In both studies we find plenty of dates, first-hand observations and facts, biographic recalls, references to interviews, media reports, literature and different documents - but also abstract considerations and elaborations. Then, they also dealt with formal structures and dominant discourses in these societies as well as with the views and experiences of ‘ordinary people’, that is on an informal level. Knowing the local language, people and environment just added to the value of these studies. But there are also important differences between the two: not only between the sociological synchronicity in Cvitković's and the more diachronical approach in Perić's, but also between evidently bittered and disillusioned.
humanistic discourse (with few emotional escapades) of the former, and much more analytically reserved, ‘colder’ tone of the latter. Anyway, I had the impression that the silent layer of both studies is a typical intellectual dismay and incapacity in the face of the frenzy in their own countries, as can be observed for example in Ernst Cassirer's posthumous *The Myth of the State* (1946) or Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947).

It must be emphasized, however, that this was not at the expense of analytical profundity and validity. The authors' difficult personal experiences did not spoil their ability for critical and reflexive thinking on these complex, controversial, and highly delicate issues. Cvitković's and Perica's books are examples of excellent, analytically sharp studies: intense, precise, critical, convincing, able to point out general factors and similarities, but not forgetting many important differences and specific cases. As such, they can be compared with some of the best on these same issues, written or edited so far by authors like M. Sells, P. Mojzes, S. Vrcan, N. Malcolm, R. Radić or X. Bougarel. If science is to provide answers and to help make people live better, then studies like these should became a ‘must’ not only for scholars, but first of all for decision-makers within and outside religious hierarchies. Precisely because religious organizations were part of the problem, now it would finally be time - instead of avoiding the responsibility, even complicity - to become part of the solution.

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The publication of this work, which has long been completed in manuscript, in many respects is a great delight for researchers dealing with ecclesiastical history in Hungary. Despite the fact that comprehensive monographs have already been published on the topic – the work of Leslie László has its place in the historiography of the ecclesiastical history in Hungary, as it is a good reference book, an aid in research as well as in teaching. Research in the field of ecclesiastical history produced several outstanding results in the course of the 20th century; these findings, however, were not available to researchers in the English language. Therefore this work summarizes in English the historical knowledge of the first half of the 20th century concerning the topic.

The author himself gives reasons at some length as to why he felt it possible to publish his dissertation, which he defended more than three decades ago – in 1973 – at a university in the United States. He rightly concludes that it is worth rereading the manuscript after some years. And we can also add that this work is well worth adding to the research and study of ecclesiastical history in circulation.

Anyone could easily rebuke the author (who emigrated in 1950 as a young man of 25) that in his work he utilized only a limited number of sources, therefore his work is necessarily one-sided. This