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ORTHODOXY AND ISLAM IN THE FORMER YUGOSLAV LANDS

Summary

Following a very brief overview of Orthodox-Muslim relations the author describes the recent worsening of their mutual perceptions. The author presents the views of two Serb authors who predict a confrontational and expansionist stance by Islam and Turkey that can be halted only by an Pan-Orthodox alliance. The mutual ethnic cleansing in Kosovo that ended with only a very tiny Serb minority remaining there under intense pressure suggests that coexistence is impossible. The author follows this by examples of interreligious dialogue in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Macedonia by means of international and regional conferences and the organization of interreligious councils. The pro-dialogical ideas of the Orthodox Marko Djuric and Muslim Ismail Bardhi are provided as indicators of a desirable future reconciliation between Orthodox and Muslims. Hope is expressed that the dialogical rather than the confrontational approach will be followed making coexistence productive.

Key Words: Orthodox-Muslim Confrontation, Perception of an Islamic Threat, The Kosovo Knot, Interreligious Dialogue, Hope for Reconciliation

Introduction

The astonishingly intriguing and prescient Macedonian film "Before the Rains" made in 1996, four or five years before the outbreak of armed conflict between the predominantly Muslim ethnic Albanian guerrillas and the army, police, and vigilantes of the majority Orthodox depicted the dramatic deterioration between the Orthodox and Muslim populations of the Republic of Macedonia. During the Titoist period and

in the first years of Macedonian independence, the two groups lived either alongside close to each other- in the countryside without a lot of interaction, or, in some cities in mixed neighborhoods and integrated schools with few incidence of violence. The film depicts the fairly rapid alienation and increasing hatred between the two peoples. The Macedonians in the film manifest a close relationship with the Orthodox Church expressed through church weddings, festivals, and funerals, as well as an outward respect for the clergy, which, however, does not extend to minding the clergy's appeal for forgiveness to enemies. The local men hastily accuse a 16-year old Albanian girl of murdering a man from the village (who was actually killed by his jealous wife). Their intention to kill her is justified by the bad blood between Orthodox and Muslims on account of the atrocities committed by the Ottoman Turks during the five centuries of colonial occupation. This 'memory' whether right or wrong, is projected into the present as well as the future by the Orthodox collectively on all Muslims regardless of their ethnicities not only in Macedonia but also in other Balkan countries. It is a difficult view to eradicate. Needless to say, the Muslims have a very different 'memory' of the Ottoman period, when they were a privileged people who thought of themselves as tolerant and affluent. The film ends in the death not only of the girl, but also of a renowned Macedonian photographer, who had lived in England and returned after many years, having been traumatized by indirectly causing the death of a Bosnian captive. Ironically, the girl was killed by her own brother and the photographer by his cousin, but both were victims of interethnic/interreligious hatred.

One certainly does not need to resort to fiction¹ or film to find examples of confrontational encounters between Orthodox and Muslims in the Balkans. We should discern two major aspects of the encounter between Orthodoxy and Islam. One is geopolitical and the other is religious. For many people these two aspects are interrelated, which greatly aggravates the possibility of finding a peaceful resolution to both problems.

Conflict

The Geopolitical Confrontation.

Up to the 14th Century, the eastern part of the Balkan peninsula was predominantly Eastern Orthodox both in regard to the ruling elite

¹ One of the best known *Bridge over Drina*, for which Ivo Andric received the Nobel Prize in Literature. Bishop Petar Petrovic Njegos wrote in the *Mountain Wreath* approvingly of the massacres of converts to Islam (derisively called *poturice* – Turkicized converts) in retaliation for the Turkish *zulum* (Turkish word for evil/oppression) that is narrated in nearly epic folk poetry of the Balkans.

(emperors, tsars, kings, princes, aristocracy) and the populace. With the gradual penetration and subsequent occupation of the lands² by the Ottoman Turkish Empire, the new ruling elite consisted of the Turkish Sultan and various levels of the ethnic Turkish aristocratic administration as well as the upper social strata of the converts from among the captive nations. This situation lasted into the 19th and early 20th Centuries when one by one, first Serbia, then Greece and Montenegro, then Bulgaria, and finally Bosnia, Albania, and Macedonia were liberated from the Turkish overlords. With the exception of the remnants of the ethnic Turks and those Muslims who had acquired very strong Turkish sympathies, the retreat of Turkey to its present borders was jubilantly welcomed. Balkan political liberation by nascent ethnoreligious nationalistic political forces clearly wished for as weak a Muslim political presence as possible. Throughout much of the 20th century it seemed that the Muslim threat had vanished. With the exception of Greece all of these areas had become Communist after 1945 and there seemed little need to be concerned that Communism would be displaced by Islam. However, at the end of the 1980s the still Communist national Serbian, Montenegrin, and Macedonian elites became concerned about the asymmetric, burgeoning population growth of the Muslim minorities in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Macedonia. Nevertheless the concern was not overly great because one could assume that the Communist dictatorship would keep *everyone* in check. But with Tito's death in 1980 and the increasing decentralization and democratization of society followed by the collapse of the Communist system throughout Eastern Europe, suddenly the non-Muslim population were confronted with the fact that in a democracy numbers matter in elections. With it came the worrisome reality that the voters tended to coalesce around ethnic political parties which rapidly led to very divergent visions about the political make-up not only of the Balkans but of "the new world order". Before too long fear arose of renascent Turkish/Muslim imperial ambitions and Muslim fundamentalist aspirations for world-wide Islamic rule. Paranoid or not, the Balkans seemed like a bridgehead for Muslim penetration into Europe.

The writings of a prominent Serb Orientalist, Darko Tanaskovic, who subsequently became Serbia's ambassador to Turkey, are symptomatic of this process of changing perceptions.³ His early essays that were written during the socialist period are still relatively amiable as he seems to follow the 'official line' of *bratsvo-jedinstvo* [brotherhood and unity –

² These would be the contemporary Albania, parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Greece, Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, and Serbia

³ Darko Tanaskovic, *U dijalogu s Islamom* [In Dialogue with Islam]. (Gornji Milanovac, Yugoslavia: Decje Novine, 1992) and *Islam i mi* [Islam and We], Belgrade, Serbia: Partenon, 2006).

Tito's slogan]. But as the tensions increased, finally leading to armed confrontation during the disintegration of Yugoslavia, Tanaskovic become increasingly hostile to Muslims and became a leading proponent of the thesis of *zelena transferzala* [the green bridgehead]⁴ envisioning an aggressive and united Islamic penetration from Turkey via the Muslim populations residing in Bulgaria, Macedonia, Kosovo, Albania, Sandzhak, to Bosnia and beyond. Against this Muslim zone, he envisions a far less united and more passive Orthodox zone consisting of Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia, and Greece, with Russia as its protector. The Muslim population of the Balkans is viewed as a fifth column, a treacherous population that will be or already is receptive to Islamic fundamentalist plans for the conquest of Europe via the Balkans. According to Tanaskovic, Serbs are unwilling "to return at the end of the twentieth century to the blessings of indisputable but severely restrictive and selective medieval Muslim tolerance."⁵ Tanaskovic does not anticipate that the transformation of a moderate Islam in the Balkans would happen suddenly but in the long run he anticipates that Islamism will take root among the Muslim population. According to him, Islamic "renewal" in the Balkans is a great step backward from a humanistic, civil, "*svetosavski*"⁶ renewal among the Serbs at the end of the 20th century and that Kosovo in particular presents a mirror where the Serbs can see how their situation *vis-à-vis* Turkey has deteriorated.⁷

Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations* clearly resonates in Tanaskovic's views, though Tanaskovic considers the United States as an ally of the Muslims, in particular designating Turkey as the US proxy for regional policing. He does believe that former empires do not lose their taste for expansionism. In the political positions of people like Professor Tanaskovic, there is no chance for reconciliation between these two worlds; only a well armed Orthodox alliance supported by Orthodox Russia and perhaps by an awakened West will save Europe from being overrun by fundamentalist Islam. One should not be deceived by his book titles that appear to be receptive and dialogic; to the contrary, his approach is that of a typical Orientalist writing about Islam in an effort to discern areas of possible weakness so that Serbs could effectively defend themselves, once again from their mortal enemies. He does not explicitly claim to be Orthodox, though he praises the Orthodox *svetosavska* spirituality, which gives the Serbs their cultural and religious identity.

⁴ Tanaskovic, "*Zelena Transferzala' iz mita u stvarnost*" ["Green Bridgehead": from Myth to Reality] in *Islam i mi*, p. 275.

⁵ Tanaskovic, *Islam i mi*, p. 58. Translation from Serbian by the author.

⁶ *Svetosavski* is the adjectival form of St. Sava, the greatest Serbian patron saint, who epitomizes all positive virtues.

⁷ *Ibid*, p. 73.

A persistent and virulent attacker of Islam, under the guise of alerting the naïve West of the true Islamist essence of Islam and its world wide ambitions of total conquest is Miroslav Jevtic, a former ROTC/Communist teacher, who is now professor of political science and religion at University of Belgrade. Jevtic is now being described as an Orthodox Christian presumably by virtue of his Serb nationality. In his article "The role of the Islamic religious community in the war in former Yugoslavia,"⁸ Jevtic attempts by selective interpretation-- always giving the worst possible slant to ambiguous texts of articles published in pre-war Bosnian periodicals by both non-Bosnian and Bosnian Muslims-- to ascribe to Muslims a totally antagonistic position against all non-Muslim and secular regimes, alleging that all Muslims have the sacred duty to fight an uncompromising *jihad* until the entire world is converted to Islam. Full support to such views are based not merely on Alija Isetbegovic's "Islamic Declaration" but also on the fairly innocuous supportive statements by Jakub Selimoski, the last joint *Reis-ul-Ulema* of all Muslims of the former Yugoslavia. To people like Jevtic, it is Muslims who are actually responsible for the dismemberment of Yugoslavia, manipulating cleverly the Croats and Albanians against the Serbs. "Its aim was not to defend Bosnia, but to form an Islamic state, not only in Bosnia but in neighbouring Serbia and Croatia by using military means to annul the secular principle of social organization."⁹ The logic of Jevtic's argument is that as long as there are Muslims in the Balkans such threat will continue since Muslims (not the average, unlearned, peaceable Muslim) must by virtue of the theocratic Muslim principle espouse such intolerance toward all other state formations. According to him the Balkans, esp. Bosnia is slated to become the center of power from which Islam is to spread across Europe.¹⁰ As recently as October 2006, Jevtic was attacking the Muslim custom of wearing the "hiqab/hijab" as a repression of women's human rights and if European countries were to permit it that would mean Europe is "sentencing itself to Islamisation."¹¹

The Kosovo Knot

The conflict between Serbs and Albanians as well as Macedonians and Albanians are primarily ethnic and linguistic rather than religious, however, since the Serbs and Macedonians are Slavs and Orthodox while most of the Albanians cohabiting with them the regions of southern Serbia

⁸ Posted on www.Serbianna.com, February 14, 2005.

⁹ Ibid, p. 5.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 3.

¹¹ "Veil debate: Niqab ban a human right violation say Balkan commentators," in file:///C:/Documents%20and%20Settings/pmojzes/Local%Setting... (12/25/2006)

and eastern Macedonia are Muslim the conflict inevitably assumes also a religious character. This is maximally intensified by the fact that Kosovo and Metohija (the Serb name for the province) contains most of the oldest and most sacred Orthodox churches and monasteries and where the erstwhile seat of the Serbian Orthodox Patriarchate was located in Pec.

The civil strife in Kosovo and the subsequent NATO war against Serbia and Montenegro over Kosovo in 1999 are well known, but not the prior history of the conflict and the radically diverse interpretations of it. It will suffice to say that what began in Western awareness as a partial ethnic cleansing of Kosovar Albanians under Slobodan Milosevic ended as a nearly complete ethnic cleansing of Serbs from Kosovo under the auspices of the U.N. administration. Yet, if it were not for UNMIK, Bishop Artemije of Kosovo feels that even the last 100,000 Serbs would have been ethnically cleansed.¹²

As recently as 2002, the so-called "Cyber-monk" Fr. Sava (Janjic), known for his balanced reporting about the situation in Kosovo and his condemnation of Milosevic's persecution of Kosovar Albanians, complained, after "internet terrorists" closed his web site, that the situation three years after the ending of hostilities of the Kosovo war of 1999 there was a planned ethnic cleansing of Orthodox Serbs. Over 110 Orthodox churches and monasteries, had been destroyed or damaged and the destruction of the Orthodox heritage continues, he claimed "Most horrendous are the desecrations of Orthodox cemeteries... graves are opened, caskets broken, and limbs of the corpses scattered..."¹³ While hundreds of mosques had been newly built, not a single Orthodox Church could be rebuilt at that time.

In mid-March 2004 the situation became aggravated as masses of Muslim Albanians attacked and burned down additional historic churches.¹⁴ In this *pogrom* 28 people were killed, several Serbian villages destroyed and 30 churches destroyed, eleven damaged and 400 homes torched. Both the Orthodox political and religious leaders bitterly complained that Serbs are not being protected from those Albanians who do not desire cohabitation of the two peoples.

There are, indeed, in both camps people who believe that coexistence is impossible. Anne Herbst reported that after September 11, 2001,

¹² State in "Days Made of Fear: Films About Kosovo and Metohija," DVD Vide, produced by St. Luke's Serbian Orthodox Mission, Etobicoke, Ont., Canada, I regret that I do not have a similar video made by Albanians. The films leave a clear impression that no reconciliation is taking place between the Albanians and Serbs in Kosovo.

¹³ Ibid. Translated from German by the author.

¹⁴ For a detailed description based on press reports, see Paul Mojzes, "The Destruction of Serbian Orthodox Holy Places in Kosovo" in *East- West Church & Ministry Report*, Vol. 12, No. 3, (Summer 2004), pp. 1-3.

specifically during the winter of 2002/03 the Christian minorities in areas where the Muslims are prevalent in Bosnia and Herzegovina (hereafter B&H) experienced violence in the form of attacks on cemeteries, priests, nuns, and the faithful. Christmas decorations were being burnt down, church properties were vandalized, telephone threats, provocations, and personal insults were being reported. Some imams have urged their followers "Destroy crosses and drive the swine [Christians] out."¹⁵ It is not clear whether Albanians and Serbians will be able to cohabit in Kosovo as their visions for the destiny of the province are too diverse. After all the interventions of NATO and the UN Kosovo remains the tinderbox of the Balkans--maximal conflict, minimal cooperation, with enormous potential for bloodshed.

Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation

Overview of Recent Achievements

Orthodox-Muslim interreligious dialogue and cooperation usually took place in the context of wider interreligious activities and occasional personal contacts among high ranking dignitaries.¹⁶ During the wars of the 1990s, there were meetings between the heads of religious communities of the former Yugoslavia to issue appeals for peace.¹⁷ After the Dayton Accord and the Paris Peace Conference with the Assistance of the American ambassador in Vienna, Swanee Hunt¹⁸, the top religious leaders of B & H created an Interreligious Council of B&H, and naturally there were contacts between the Islamic and Orthodox representatives in the council.

In regard to Kosovo, just prior to the bombing of 1999 an interreligious conference was organized by the Appeal of Conscience Foundation from New York that took place in Vienna in March 1999, which was followed after the war by the formation of the Interreligious Council of Kosovo

¹⁵ Anne Herbst, "Versöhnung in Bosnien-Herzegovina?" in *G2W*, Vol. 33, No. 11 (2005), p. 27. Translated by the author.

¹⁶ In the summer of 1993 Hamdija Jusufspahic, the Mufti of Serbia told the author of his personal communications with Patriarch Pavle of the Serbian Orthodox Church in order to resolve problems between the two communities.

¹⁷ Paul Mojzes, *Yugoslavia Inferno: Ethnoreligious Warfare in the Balkans* (New York: Continuum, 1994), pp. 147-148. See also *Occasional Papers on Religion in eastern Europe*, Vol. XII, No. 5 (Oct. 1992), pp. 50-51.

¹⁸ For a testimony that the war in B & H did not destroy all interethnic and interreligious relationships see Swanee Hunt, *This Was Not Our War: Bosnian Women Reclaiming the Peace*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004). And even better witness is found in a book written by Tito's granddaughter, Svetlana Broz and Laurie K. Hart (eds), *Good People in an Evil Time: Portraits of Complicity and Resistance in the Bosnian War* (Other Press, 2005).

in April 2000 with the assistance of the Interreligious Council of Bosnia-Herzegovina and the World Council of Religions for Peace. That dialogue came to a virtual standstill in 2004 with new impulses toward Orthodox and Muslim cooperation at the level of higher clergy in 2005 and 2006.¹⁹

With the help of outside agencies, interreligious meetings are capable of producing lofty statements. Such was the case of a meeting at the medieval Orthodox monastery in Pec, Kosovo, Serbia, the ancient seat of the Patriarchate of the Serbs on May 1-2, 2006, hosted by the Serbian Orthodox Church but financially and organizationally co-sponsored by Norwegian Church Aid and the presence of several outside dialogue experts.²⁰ The representatives of the Serbian Orthodox Church were Metropolitan Amfilohije (Radovic), Bishop Irinej (Bulatovic), Bishop Jovan (Mladenovic), and Vicar bishop Teodosije. The Muslim representatives were Mufti Naim Trnava, head of the Islamic Community of Kosovo and Dean Rexhep Boja of the Islamic Theological School in Prishtina, as well as representatives of the Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish communities.

The representatives declared their goal to "bring joint initiatives for reconciliation, peace, and mutual trust, and acceptance of common life" through institutionalized dialogue. They expressed their convictions that:

Hatred and war are common enemies; hatred is not freedom.

It is unworthy of the faith in God to regard tolerance as a "necessary evil" and to be satisfied to merely live *next* to each other

We are called to live *with* each other and to pray to find strength to live *for* each other

Accept the basic premise of unity in diversity

All of us suffered. We regret the suffering and pray that the suffering not become another stumbling block toward an open future but become the ground for interactive togetherness and a deeper mutual responsibility before God.

We condemn the destruction of all churches, mosques, cemeteries, and other religious object and are rejoicing in their rebuilding but also the rebuilding of our life, heart, and spirit.

We commit ourselves to regular meetings of the highest religious leaders and the conduct of interreligious dialogue, the return of all refugees, exchanges between religious communities.

An even more substantive contribution to the process of reconciliation after the wars of the 1990's were two conferences that took place

¹⁹ History of the Interreligious Dialogue in Kosovo, http://www.kosvakosovo.com/view_file.php?file_id=61

²⁰ Lutheran Bishop Gunnar Stalsett, who moderated the meeting, Rev. Leonid Kishkovsky, ecumenical officer of the Orthodox Church in America, and Jakub Selimoski of Skopje, former Reis-ul-Ulema of the Islamic Community of Yugoslavia. The source of this report is "Erste interreligioese Konferenz im Kosovo" in *Glaube in der 2. Welt* (Zurich), Vol 34, Nos. 7-8, 2006, pp. 12-13.

in 2002, one in Skopje, Macedonia, held May 10-14 and the other in Dubrovnik, Croatia, held September 12-14. The major papers of both conferences were published in English.²¹

The low intensity civil war in Macedonia that began by an insurrection by Albanian rebels in 2001 that, thankfully, was resolved by intense international diplomatic and military intervention, and the wise policies of the late Macedonian President Boris Trajkovski. While the major reason for avoidance of a civil war was the political accommodations that lead to constitutional change and greater autonomy and political participation of Albanians in the governing of Macedonia, interreligious dialogue with the major religious communities also contributed to a change from distrust and belligerence among the Orthodox Church leadership and the Muslim clergy to the building of trust by means of dialogue that was promoted by Boris Trajkovski and accomplished with some assistance of dialogue partners from abroad. With the assistance of unrelated support and grants from the Council of European Churches, the United States Institute of Peace, and Norwegian Church Aid, a series of meetings took place between 2001 and the present with high ranking representatives of the Macedonian Orthodox Church, the Islamic Religious Community, the Catholic Church, the United Methodist Church, and the Jewish Community. This led to the formation of The Council for Interreligious Cooperation in Skopje in 2002 that at first cautiously and then with increasing commitment brought about considerable progress in interreligious relationships.²² Many subsequent meetings were held both with the facilitation of several of us scholars from abroad as well as when members of the Council for Interreligious Cooperation met by themselves. They also organized a series of four workshops throughout Macedonia in 2006 where most of the participants were Orthodox and Muslims.²³ Joint radio and TV interviews were given by the deans of the Orthodox and Muslim Theological faculties of Skopje as well as an exchange of lectures between professors of the two schools. Regretfully,

²¹ Paul Mojzes, Leonard Swidler, and Heinz-Gerhard Justenhoven (eds), *Interreligious Dialogue Toward Reconciliation in Macedonia and Bosnia*. (Philadelphia: Ecumenical Press, 2003). Same text under a separate cover was in the *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, Vol. XXXIX, Nos. 1-2, (Winter-Spring, 2002). The papers of the Skopje Conference were published as a book in 2004 in Macedonian and Albanian languages under one cover.

²² This author together with Leonard Swidler and the Institute for Interreligious Intercultural Dialogue and the *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* of Philadelphia played an important facilitating role in this process.

²³ Paul Mojzes and Leonard Swidler, "Report on Jewish-Christian-Muslim Cooperation and Dialogue in Macedonia," in *CAREE Communicator*, February 2007.

internal difficulties in the Islamic Religious Community are currently impeding effective cooperation.²⁴

An Orthodox Lay Theologian's Leap into the Future

To my knowledge no mainstream Orthodox Church theologian has seriously wrestled with the theological meaning of Islam. But a voice urging a reevaluation by the Orthodox in order to understand, respect, and reconcile with Islam came from a somewhat unexpected source, a very modest, gentle, somewhat odd, unemployed, independent lay theologian from Serbia, Marko Djuric, whose works are perhaps more often published in non-Orthodox than Orthodox publications. His most recent two articles are entitled, "Islam, Our Daily Challenge"²⁵ and "To be Christian or Muslim, But in What Manner, is the Question Now."²⁶ According to Djuric dialogue between Orthodox Christians and Sunni Muslims is imperative in the crisis situation that is both local and worldwide. He himself writes about Islam positively and with respect cites Qur'anic verses as well as classical Muslim theologians. But the thrust of his critical evaluation is on the Orthodox Church, particularly the Serbian, which he is challenging to move from its Byzantine heritage to a more critical contemporary stance to meet the needs and wants of the age. He challenges the Orthodox Church to move from dogmatic abstractions of the Patristic age and liturgical formalism to the practice of Jesus and the message of the gospels and epistles. Instead of focusing on correct dogmatic formulations and declaring all who are not in agreement as heretics (including Islam, which St. Damascene proclaimed as 101 heresies) with whom Orthodox should have no close contact he urges the kind of love and acceptance that Jesus displayed. The Orthodox should focus on similarities they have with Islam and perhaps more on non-theological common challenges in order for the dialogue to be successful. He points out that at times some of Apostle Paul's writings showing dependence on God's grace parallel Muslim emphasis on the mercy of God, while in other respect the author of the Letter of James displays greater affinity with the Islamic emphasis on works of righteousness than Johannine Christology.

Djuric answers the question whether the Muslim is an enemy of the Orthodox in the negative despite the fact that the Serbs experienced

²⁴ An apparent take-over of the top leadership roles of both the Reis-ul-Ulema and dean of the School of Islamic Studies by extremists does not bode well for the dialogue, unless it turns out to be temporary.

²⁵ "Islam, nas svakodnevnini izazov," in *Znakovi Vremena* (Sarajevo), Vol. 8, Nos. 26/27 (winter-spring 2005), pp. 86-102.

²⁶ "Biti hriscanin ili musliman, ali na koji nacin, pitanje je sad," in *Znakovi Vremena* Vol. 9, No. 31 (spring 2006), pp. 104-125. The English translation of the article by Angela Ilic is planned for *Religion in Eastern Europe*, Vol. XXVII, No. 2 (May 2007).

the Turks as enemies, which led to bloody confrontations. But Djuric urges the Orthodox not to equate Muslims with the Ottoman conquerors. The Muslims are our neighbors, not those who are distant. It is impossible to love God without loving one's neighbor, i.e. Muslims. In the Qur'an (5:126) it states that Christians are the closest friends to Muslims.

Orthodox integrism is the most serious obstacle to dialogue and improved relations, according to Djuric, necessitating a critical stance toward the hierarchy and a more prophetic rather than apostolic stance.²⁷ He calls for a Pan-Orthodox Council, which, like Vatican II, could help the Church to find fresh voices, rather than the ghettoized space between the Western-most reaches of Islam and the eastern-most reaches of Catholicism. Djuric bravely criticizes St. Sava, the founder of the Serbian Orthodox autocephaly, and recent theologians like Bishop Nikolaj Velimirovic and Justin Popovic, who frequently equated the Serb national interest with the Orthodox and were intolerant to everything non-Orthodox. Djuric calls it the Serbian original sin. The way to overcome it is to advance a theology of coexistence (*suzivot* = life together). One must use divine revelation in an ecumenically useful way so that mutual tensions could be relieved. Where there is fear and mistrust there is need for dialogue about peace and equality, abandoning exclusion and defense from heresies. Emphasis should not be on truth but on righteousness and love, which alone can bring peace in the Balkans.²⁸ Serbs must repent for Srebrenica and ask forgiveness from the victims, for this alone will make reconciliation possible. But at present there is a mutual lack of confidence that could be bridged only by relying upon the insights of the two faiths. Currently not enough attention is being paid to the concepts of unity and togetherness. Because no official contacts exist the only advances are made in private conversations in which agreements are possible.²⁹ There is an Abrahamic ecumenism nurtured by some non-Orthodox circles from which Orthodoxy should learn because the traditional Orthodox position vis-à-vis Islam is not promising for improved relationships; there is a need to relativize and modernize theology and inspire it with the spirit of contemporary times. Examples of Pax Christi's work of reconciliation between the French and Germans and the work of Quakers, Catholic rapprochement with Jews and Muslims should be emulated to overcome the traditional Balkan un-forgiveness and brutality that led to bloody, horrendous settlement of disputes.³⁰ Sincere reconciliation is impossible without prior repentance and request for forgiveness. Nothing can change until the Orthodox lift the anathema over "Mohamedanism".

²⁷ "Islam, nas svakodnevni izazov", p. 94.

²⁸ Ibid, p. 102.

²⁹ "Biti hriscanin ili musliman", p. 105.

³⁰ Ibid, p. 106.

For the time being the *Serbian* Orthodox Church remains "*svetosavska*"³¹ and Byzantine. The Orthodox Church needs a good visionary like John XXIII in order to self-critically come to grips with its theological heritage.³² In a manner reminiscent of Christians asking what does it mean to be a Christian after the Holocaust, Djuric raises the question what does it mean to be Orthodox after Srebrenica. His answer is to pray for forgiveness and peace as the sole measure of belonging to Christ, a church that considers itself a "fortress of peace which will not permit the state and its own militant hierarchy to be instrumentalized for state and nationalist goals that usually disturb international peace".³³ If the Orthodox Church persist to interpret its dependence upon God as a formalism and remain Christian in words but not in deeds, and if Muslims persist to see themselves as primarily not being a "Christian error" and both do not avoid the synthesis of state with religion then the conflicts will also persist. Only following the Abrahamic reliance on faith in God can the two religions become nearer each other.

The View of A Muslim Theologian from Macedonia

To my knowledge no Muslim theologian has ventured so boldly into interreligious reconciliation ala Marko Djuric, nor has a Muslim theologian gone beyond the clichés about the "religions of the Book" and the recognition by Islam of previous divine revelations, including the prophetic one of Jesus as a precursor to Muhammad. Nevertheless there is one who has had the courage to break out of the conventional molds.

Ismail Bardhi, an ethnic Albanian citizen of Macedonia, who received his theological education first in Sarajevo, Bosnia, and then in Ankara, Turkey, is not only an active participant in interreligious dialogue in Macedonia³⁴ but is an astute analyst of the Balkan way of life. Like others, he points to the great diversity of peoples and religions in the Balkans and the constant churning of tragedies and difficulties throughout history as people arbitrarily claim what is "mine" or "yours," fighting in the name of

³¹ *Svetosavska* is the adjectival form of St. Sava which the Serbian Orthodox Church regards as a sign of its nature and regards it as a sign of superiority even over other Orthodox Churches, but here Djuric uses it in a mildly critical sense.

³² "Biti hriscanin ili musliman", p. 108.

³³ *Ibid*, 109.

³⁴ The interreligious dialogue in Macedonia has formally five participants--Macedonian Orthodox, Islamic, Catholic, Methodist, and Jewish—but the largest groups are the Orthodox to which nominally about 60% of the population belongs, whereas the Muslims make about 30% hence the interaction of these two groups is crucial, whereas the other three play a buffer role.

religion, though not respecting religion at all.³⁵ Places of worship are being destroyed in order to rebuild them again. During the Ottoman rule Balkan people were differentiated by religion whereas currently they are composed of various ethnic and religious identities, which causes some national groups to be homogeneous while others are heterogeneous. In recent decades the changes were mostly due to political, economic, demographic, ethnic, social, and cultural factors but the most significant were the natural population growth (high birth rate) and migration. These factors cause great regional disproportions and disruptions based on social, economic, demographic, ethnic and other factors. After World War II some ethnic groups increased significantly their proportion in the total number of inhabitants, while others decreased. The question is how will these local trends be affected by global trends, by universal or perennial religious and transnational civilizational developments overagainst local or provincial religiosity and culture.³⁶

Bardhi maintains that the transitory local identities must be inspired by the authentic original values stemming from the Abrahamic roots and by the limitless divine gift of human freedom. Conflicting values cause a confusion that was caused by the destructive virus called "marital relationship between Church and State, religion and nation, nation and nationality, idea and ideology,"³⁷ which resulted in offsprings that are unsuccessful human societies and civilizational spirits. This virus caused a particular mutation in the Balkans, which is the inversion of the role of politicians and religious leaders. In the Balkans politicians speak like religious dignitaries should and vice versa. Heavenly truths are transposed into political interests in the statements of religious dignitaries whereas politicians translate their daily political interest into eternal verities. Religious truth is what the politician thinks it is and is often presented as divine purposes when in fact it is the result of political self-interest frequently implemented by undemocratic means. Politicians have the main word and tell the population what is righteousness and truth, while religious dignitaries chime in by only saying "amen."

Bardhi believes that during the Ottoman period the relationships between Islam and Orthodoxy was more metaphysically grounded whereas today, when such grounding would again be needed, it is pale in comparison as we don't seem to perceive the need for the necessary relationship between these two religious approaches, neither in the form of interreligious dialogue, nor in the deeper theological dimension. This lack of spiritual communication cannot be supported by the basic teachings of

³⁵ Ismail Bardhi, "Religiozna kultura i balkanski identitet" [Religious Culture and Balkan Identity], unpublished essay written by Bardhi at the request of P. Mojzes for the purpose of using in this paper.

³⁶ Ibid, p. 2.

³⁷ Ibid, p. 3.

Islam or Christianity but is grounded in the primitivism of the local environment. In the past the lack of communication between these two religions contained a dose of deep respect between the common followers of the two religions whereas today it has led to an indirect genocide.³⁸ Bardhi concludes his remarks by regretting that whereas the Balkans used to be the place where East met the West and both profited from the interaction, now the Balkans are being invaded by some very dubious emissaries both from East and West who are spreading equally dubious hybrids of quasi-culture and quasi-religiosity where one can hear less and less the chords of traditional spirituality and of original domestic culture.

In another essay of his, Bardhi proposes Islamic humanism as a foundation for interreligious dialogue.³⁹ Islamic humanism understands humans in an existential relationship with God and determined the positive attitude of Islam toward other peoples of the Book. Islamic humanism accepts the same basic values as do other forms of humanism, namely "freedom, justice, peace, peaceful-coexistence in the society, solidarity, tolerance, etc."⁴⁰ Bardhi pointed out that interreligious dialogue used to be regarded with great suspicion in Macedonia, even as a 'lie,' however, if carried out in a spirit of equality and full participation, it is capable, for the first time in the history of Macedonia to lead to greater human rights and liberties. By being God's servants we can avoid being each other's slaves, concludes Bardhi.

While Bardhi's assessment may strike one as wistful, harking to some better times in the past, nevertheless it affirms both Islamic and Orthodox spirituality as compatible and genuinely valid.

Concluding Remarks

The desire for revenge and continued ethnic cleansing is sometimes so strong in the Balkans that neither cohabitation nor cooperation seems likely in the long run. Despite glimmers of light from the creation of interreligious councils in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, and Macedonia, from interreligious conferences abroad (Budapest, Pec, Vienna, Geneva, Tirana, New York), and from within the former Yugoslavia (Sandzak, Belgrade, Dubrovnik, Pristina, Skopje, Ohrid, Tetovo, Strumica, Prilep and others) there is not much reason for great hope that the cohabitation of the Orthodox and Muslims in the Balkans will lead to wider cooperation and dialogue in the foreseeable future. The main reason for it is the lack of visionary leadership and lack of a critical mass of educated religious leaders as well as the inertia that is the result of centu-

³⁸ Ibid, p. 4.

³⁹ Bardhi, "Islamic Humanism: A Foundation for Interreligious Dialogue," in *Interreligious Dialogue Toward Reconciliation in Macedonia and Bosnia*, pp. 66-72.

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 67.

ries of suspicion, hatred, wars, and oppression. The Serbian Orthodox Patriarch is too old and most of the bishops around him are too oriented on protecting the flock. There are very few Orthodox theologians that are willing to break out of the mold (Radovan Bigovic is one of the few but too busy with attempts to modernize Orthodoxy) to be able to play a role in the dialogue with Muslims. Marko Djuric is too marginal a figure to get a hearing in his own country, among his own people, but perhaps, like the prophets of old, may get to be appreciated by a future generation.

The same is the case with Muslims. Mustafa Ceric, the well educated Reis ul Ulema of Bosnia is too bent on defending Islam and too interested in power politics between the three communities to play the role of reconciler. There are some moderate Muslim theologians (Adnan Silajdzic⁴¹ and Nedžad Grabus) in Sarajevo whose role will be to hold out promise that reconciliation is possible, but they seem unlikely to be trail-blazers. In Tirana Archbishop Anastasios is very ecumenically minded but is sickly and too busy rebuilding the Orthodox Church of Albanian from the shambles of the Hoxha regime. The leadership of the Macedonian Orthodox Church is too wrapped up with its attempt to extricate itself from under the Serbian Orthodox canonical bond that has caused a near-total isolation by the Orthodox Churches of the world. Metropolitan Archbishop Stefan, the head of that church, is well-meaning but cautious. The leading Orthodox theologian, Ratomir Grozdanoski, currently Dean of the Orthodox Theological Faculty in Skopje, is warm-hearted and outgoing to the Muslims, but his professional field is New Testament and like so many others, he has been assigned too many tasks to be able to provide robust interreligious leadership.⁴² In any case, the hierarchical structure of the Orthodox Church all but precludes that someone other than the top leader can accomplish much, and even he is subject to the Holy Synod that is capable of stopping actions of which they are suspicious. The Islamic Religious Community in Macedonia is gripped by a desperate power-struggle in which the moderates have been marginalized. Jakub Selimoski, the former *Reis* of all of Yugoslavia and the most skilled diplomat, barely survived as the Muslim representative in the Council but does have the ability of fence-mending. The best educated ethnic Albanian Muslim theologian, Ismail Bardhi, who understands the theological foundation of our common humanity under One God, has at least temporarily been relieved of his position as the Dean of the Faculty of Islamic Sciences and has been rendered unemployed.

⁴¹ Adnan Silajdzic, "But There is No Other Way: Reconciliation Among Muslims, Serbian Orthodox, and Catholics – An Islamic View," in Mojzes, Swidler, and Justenhoven, (eds), *op.cit.*, pp. 186-192.

⁴² As the President of the Council of Interreligious Cooperation for 2006, the year of the most intense activity of the Council, he was behind the organizing of four regional interreligious workshops – a no mean achievement.

For the Muslims, the great issue is how to resolve the tug between a more radical Middle Eastern form of Islam coming from Saudi Arabia (Wahabism), Egypt, Libya, and Iran, or a moderate self-conscious European Muslim orientation that wishes to integrate itself into a contemporary European mentality. For the Orthodox, the dilemma of orientation is similarly schizophrenic, whether it should follow a Byzantine and/or Russian orientation or a more central European one. If the Middle Eastern orientation among the Muslims and Eastern orientation among the Orthodox prevails, the clash of these two civilizations would seem to be inescapable. After three cycles of genocides in the 20th century, further genocides to end cohabitation is a possibility, though not a probability. If the European orientation prevails in both communities, their cohabitation will likely continue to be fraught with tensions but of the creative kind that may lead to cooperation and dialogue.

One may dare to hope that the common desire of all Balkan communities to be "Europe" will prevail and that efforts in that direction both locally and internationally (supported by proponents of conflict management and dialogue from abroad) will make not only cohabitation possible, but perhaps to be followed by reconciliation and cooperation through political negotiations and interreligious dialogue.

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ПРАВОСЛАВЉЕ И ИСЛАМ НА ТЕРИТОРИЈИ БИВШЕ ЈУГОСЛАВИЈЕ

Резиме

Након врло кратког прегледа православно-муслиманских односа, аутор описује погоршање њихових узајамних перцепција. Аутор доноси погледе два српска аутора који претскажују конфонтацију и експанзионизам ислама и Турске које може бити заустављено само сарадњом православних држава. Обострано етничко чишћење на Косову, које се завршило са врло малом српском мањином у покрајини која живи под интензивним притиском, сугерише да је суживот немогућ. Следе примери међурелигијског дијалога у Босни, Косову и Македонији путем интернационалних и регионалних конференција и ораганизовањем међурелигијских савета. Про-дијалогски погледи православаца Марка Ђурића и муслимана Исмаила Бардхиа приказани су као показатељи пожељне будућности помирења међу православним и муслиманима. Изражена је нада да ће се дијалогски пут радије следити него конфронтациони чинећи суживот продуктивним.

Кључне речи: православно-муслимански сукоб, перцепција муслиманске опасности, косовски чвор, међурелигијски дијалог, жеља за помирењем