

University of Dublin  
Trinity College  
Irish School of Ecumenics

The Role and Responsibility of Religion and Religious  
Communities in the 1991-1995 Wars in Former Yugoslavia

by  
Ela Magda

This dissertation has been submitted for the degree of Master of Philosophy

## DECLARATION

I certify that this dissertation, submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of M.Phil. (Intercultural Theology & Interreligious Studies), has not been submitted for a degree at any other University, and that it is entirely my own work. I agree that the Library may lend or copy the dissertation upon request.

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## **Abstract**

The 20<sup>th</sup> century was marked by bloodshed, both in the World Wars and in the wars that occurred in former Yugoslavia from 1991 to 1995. The world was watching in disbelief as the once united states were claiming independence, and turning against each other. People that had until recently lived next door to each other were now living in fear of each other. Horrifying events were starting to take place; killings of civilians, rapes, genocides and ethnical cleansing. There was no logical explanation as to why that was happening.

This thesis deals with the issue of the role of religion in those events. Religion was present in the south Slavic states ever since their formation. It has always had the role of the keeper of tradition and culture of the ethnic groups. The historical events that took place in Europe never left the south Slavic states unaffected. However, the religion always found a way to keep the ethnic groups together. After the disintegration of Communist Yugoslavia, religion became the barer of nationality. 'Croat' was a synonym for Catholic, 'Serb' for 'Orthodox' and Bosnian for 'Muslim'.

The goals of the research were to examine the historical development of the role of religion in the south Slavic states, the social and political role in the creation of nation-states and the response of the Churches to the wars from 1991 to 1995.

## Contents

Introduction.....	1
The History of the Three South Slavic Nations:.....	4
Croatia, Serbia and Bosnia.....	4
<i>Croatia</i> .....	6
<i>Serbia</i> .....	9
<i>Bosnia</i> .....	11
<i>The Millet System</i> .....	16
<i>Catholicism and Orthodoxy</i> .....	17
<i>Mythical memories</i> .....	20
<i>Summary</i> .....	24
The 20 <sup>th</sup> Century and the Development of the Role of Religion .....	26
<i>The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes</i> .....	29
<i>The Second Yugoslavia</i> .....	32
The Disintegration of Yugoslavia and the Creation of Nation-States: the Socio-Political Role of Religion.....	39
<i>Religious Wars?</i> .....	43
<i>Summary</i> .....	46
The Christian Response to the Wars in the 1990's .....	47
<i>“Positive Statements by Religious Leaders”</i> .....	48
<i>Cleansing of Memory and the Ecumenical Potential</i> .....	50
Conclusion .....	55
Bibliography .....	57

## Introduction

The topic of this thesis is *The Role and Responsibility of Religion and Religious Communities in the 1991-1995 wars in Former Yugoslavia*. Firstly, I would like to point out that in this research I will be focusing on Christian religious groups, i.e. Roman Catholics and Serbian Orthodox, not so much on the Islamic groups. The reason for doing so is foremostly because my primary interest is in inter-Christian relations. Also, I find that the phenomenon of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Bosnian Muslims, because of its complexity, is a topic that is to be dealt with on its own. Secondly, because of the exhaustive and lengthy character of the topic, I will be focusing only on specific points that I find are of importance for my thesis.

In this thesis I will be dealing with the issue of the role and responsibility of religion in general and of religious groups in particular, namely of the Roman Catholic and the Orthodox Church, in the wars in ex-Yugoslavia. My research will be focused on tracing historical roots of the relationship of religion and state in the Slavic states, exploring and defining the social and political character of religion in the Slavic states in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and finally examining the Christian character displayed by the Churches during the 1990's wars.

The thesis will be divided into four main chapters.

The first chapter will examine the historical development of Croatia, Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina (from now Bosnia) from the 6<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Presenting the political, social and religious history of three nations through thirteen centuries would be impossible to do in this moment. That is why my focus will be on main political events that occurred in the history of Croatia, Serbia and Bosnia, and also on the development of and

the main events regarding their respective religious groups. The main reference for this chapter is a book called *Južnoslavensko Pitanje* (The South-Slavic Question), written by Ivo Pilar, a Croatian historian, politician and jurist. Even though it was written in 1918, it is regarded as the leading book on the south-Slav issue. Since he signed this book with a pseudonym L.v. Südland, I will be referring to him as Südland. The chapter will present the issue of the genesis of the Slavic states, their historical relationships, and the significance of respective religious communities within the states. It will also shortly present the issue of the complex relationship of Orthodoxy and Catholicism. The main focus of the chapter will be the historical relationship of religion and state.

The second chapter will also have a historical focus. It will present the development of the idea of *Yugoslavism* through various phases during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. The chapter will then further discuss the creation of the Communist Yugoslavia and the position of religion and the relationship of religious communities within the state. The goal of the chapter will be to present how the events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century shaped the mentality of the south Slavic nations, and enhanced intolerance among the neighbouring countries of Croatia, Serbia and Bosnia.

The third chapter will deal with the disintegration of the Communist Yugoslavia and the implications of that event. Another important issue which will be discussed in the chapter is the issue of the role of religion in the preparations for war. That will also encompass the development of religious nationalism under the Communist regime. In this chapter I will focus on the sociological perspective of the role of religion, as presented by various authors, namely Vjekoslav Perica, Mitja Velikonja, Paul Mojzes, Francine Friedman etc. The chapter will conclude that religious communities played an important

social and political role before and during the wars, and they did so by using ethno-religious mythology and mythical memories.

The main focus of the fourth and final chapter will be to present the faith dimension of Christian communities within the Slavic states. The focus here will mostly be on the case of the Roman Catholic Church in Croatia. In this chapter I will present the idea of the distinction between the notions of *religion* and *faith*, claiming that the element of *faith* is usually excluded from the sociological presentation of the role of religion in the wars in Yugoslavia. Through the presentation of the idea of *cleansing of memory*, I will attempt to find a way towards future reconciliation among the nations. The chapter will conclude that the renewal of the mind and of memory is crucial if there is to be peace and reconciliation in the south Slavic states.

The goals of the thesis are the following: to provide an overview of the historical development of the relationship between religion and state in the south Slavic countries; on the basis of that overview, to present the role that religion, in general, played in the creation of nation-states, i.e. in the wars between Croatia, Serbia and Bosnia from 1991 to 1995, and the responsibilities that the Churches, in particular, carry as Christian entities.



## **The History of the Three South Slavic Nations: Croatia, Serbia and Bosnia**

The settlement of the Slavs in the Balkan territory occurred in the 6<sup>th</sup> and the 7<sup>th</sup> century CE.<sup>1</sup> It happened as “the last wave of the great migrations”<sup>2</sup>. As the Empire was falling apart the number of inhabitants was also declining. During the decline the Roman Empire somewhat unwillingly opened the door of the Balkan area to the Slavic people. The local authorities allowed the Slavs to settle in the abandoned territories. As Südland puts it: “The Slavs came to the territory in two ways: as warriors and conquerors, ..., or as peaceful farmers.”<sup>3</sup> Even though the Slavs were a race of people who were ethnically and linguistically unique, when they came to the Balkan territory they mixed with other tribes and groups of people inhabiting the area. That is one of the first things one needs to keep in mind in order to better understand the South Slavic issue. There is a tendency in the current nations of Croatia, Serbia and Bosnia to present history in a biased and convenient way; an issue that will be discussed later in this research. That is why having in mind that all the nations in ex-Yugoslavia have a shared origin, helps one to have a more objective view of the issues surrounding the 1990’s wars in ex-Yugoslavia.

Südland points out that the current territories of Croatia and Serbia are not the same territories that were inhabited by the Croatian and Serbian ancestors. As Velikonja puts it:

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<sup>1</sup> There is debate about the origins of the Slavic people; however, I find that the debate in question is not of great importance for my research and therefore I will not discuss it further.

<sup>2</sup> L.v. Südland, *Južnoslavensko Pitanje*, Zagreb: Matica Hrvatska, 1943, 5.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid; own translation from Croatian. „Slaveni se pojavise na dva načina: kao ratnički osvajači, .... ili kao mirni ratari, ...“.

The nuclei of medieval South Slav states do not correspond to those of their contemporary “successors”: the first Serbian state was in Kosovo, the Croatian state was formed along the Adriatic Sea and in the upper Una region, ...<sup>4</sup>

Südland goes on to say that “[t]oday's Croats and Serbs, as the rest of the nations of Europe, originated as the product of mixing of the local inhabitants with the immigrants, who then gave the newly created people their own name ...”<sup>5</sup> That suggests that there was no pure race of Croats or Serbs; there was only mixing of various Slavic tribes. As a result, the Balkans were at the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> century an ethnically mixed territory, and geographically not suitable for the creation of a unified nation.<sup>6</sup> Apart from the geographical unsuitability, as Südland states, there is also the political factor. He finds that the Slavs, because of the fact that they were mostly farmers, were (and still are) politically passive. He also attributes that political passivity to the Slavic race itself.

However, I have to highlight that I find the lack of political ability of the Slavs also to be a racial trait, which finds its roots in the Slavic tendency to follow emotions rather than reason, and the strong tendency to react based on immediate impressions.<sup>7</sup>

Although, the statement could be perceived as a personal impression of a biased person, I find that history gives valid arguments which prove this statement to be, at least in part, true. This statement reveals a great truth about all Slavic nations, and I find it to be one of the more important roots of the issues that arose in the Balkan area during history.

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<sup>4</sup> M. Velikonja, *Religious Separation and Political Intolerance in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, Texas: A&M University Press, 2003, 21.

<sup>5</sup> Südland, *Pitanje*, 6; own translation from Croatian. “Današnji Hrvati i Srbi, kao i svi ostali narodi Europe, nastali su kao proizvod stapanja prastanovnika i doseljenika, koji su dali novonastalom narodu svoje ime, ...”

<sup>6</sup> Ibid; also, at the beginning of the book Südland explains why he believes that the Balkan peninsula is not geographically suitable for the creation of a unified nation. His argument is that the natural borders are not as distinct as the natural borders of the Apennine and Pyrenean peninsulas and that the mountain chains in the Balkans divide it to four parts.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 7; own translation from Croatian. “Moram ipak iztaknuti, da tu slabiju političku darovitost Slavena smatram također rasnom osobinom, kojoj povod leži u Slavenima svojstvenom prevladavanju osjećajnog nad misaonim životom i u sklonosti jakom podavanju časovitom utisku.”

Croats and Serbs came to the Balkan area in the last wave of the Slavic migration. They were more dominant tribes of warriors who conquered the land and united the ethnically mixed Slavic tribes<sup>8</sup> into states.<sup>9</sup> Südland claims that the original Slavic tribes would not be able to sustain themselves if they had not been united by the later, more dominant Slavic tribes. He gives examples of Slavs in Greece and the Peloponnese peninsula who were assimilated by the local population because of the lack of their own culture. With the unifying of Slavic tribes into states, they developed their own culture and society which kept them together and made them stronger.<sup>10</sup>

In the following three subheadings I will give overviews of the development of Croatia, Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina from their beginnings to the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

### ***Croatia***

As has previously been stated, Croats settled in the Balkan region at the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> century. They first came to west Dalmatia, where they defeated the Avars and the Romans and took the land. From there they spread further north-east and south. There were three constitutive Croat states: White Croatia (the territory north of the river Cetina), Red Croatia (southern territory which extended to the Albanian border), and Pannonian Croatia (spreading from the beginning of the Alp-Balkan highlands to the Lake Balaton and the Danube in the north-east).<sup>11</sup> There seems to be debate about the issue of the territory of Bosnia and whether it was also conquered by Croats or not. In his short overview of the genesis of the Croatian nation, Paul Mojzes

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<sup>8</sup> It is important to clarify that the territory which they came to was already inhabited by Slavs, who previously came and mixed with the local inhabitants who adopted the Slavic “culture”. Therefore, the inhabitants that the Croats and Serbs found in the territory were ethnically mixed Slavic tribes.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 8; the word that Südland uses is literally translated as “a state-like creation“. I will refer to it as “state“.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 12; also Velikonja, *Religious Separation* , 39.

states that the territory of the Croats was boomerang-shaped<sup>12</sup>, which is a picture that is in accord with the above outlined Croatian territories; however, Südland will argue that for various reasons it makes no sense that the Croats would not settle in the territory of Bosnia, but just the territory around it. I will come back to this issue later.

The historical account of Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus in *De Administrando Imperio* states that the Croats were baptized and converted to Christianity by Roman priests soon after their settlement.<sup>13</sup> Even though the Croatian territory was under Byzantine authority, the Croats, under the rule of duke Branimir (879-892), decided to side with Rome, i.e. the Catholic Church.<sup>14</sup> Even though Croatia worked on strengthening its relations with Rome under the rule of king Tomislav, Rome did not show much favour to the Croats and opposed the use of national language in the Church in Croatia. Velikonja mentions two issues that arose at the beginning of the 9<sup>th</sup> century: “the first was which liturgy to use, Latin or Slavonic, and the second concerned ecclesiastic jurisdiction over the territory settled by the Croats” (the dispute was between bishop Grgur of Nin and bishop John of Split).<sup>15</sup> Two synods were held (925 and 928) and in both cases the synods ruled in favour of Latin clergy; that meant that bishop John of Split was to have ecclesiastical jurisdiction, and that Latin was to be the language used in liturgy, not Slavonic. Nevertheless, Slavonic continued to be used as the liturgical language in churches in Croatia. During the following years the Roman influence over the Croatian

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<sup>12</sup> P. Mojzes, *Yugoslavian Inferno*, New York: Continuum, 1994, 23.

<sup>13</sup> As quoted in Südland, *Pitanje*, 13.

<sup>14</sup> Velikonja, *Religious Separation*, 41.; also Südland, *Pitanje*, 13.

<sup>15</sup> Velikonja, *Religious Separation*, 42.

clergy and rulers grew stronger, creating dissatisfaction among the people. A national party was created; its goal was to defend Croatian political interests, language and customs.<sup>16</sup>

During the period from 1102-1390, Croatia was under the rule of the Arpad (Hungarian) and Anjou (French) dynasties. As the Ottomans were reaching the western borders, Croatia turned to the Habsburgs (Austrian) for help and in 1527, and elected Ferdinand Habsburg as the king of Croatia. With the Turks taking territory from the east and the Venetians taking territory in the south, Croatia was in that period reduced to *reliquiae reliquiarum*, “remains of the remains”.

Some of the consequences of the Ottoman invasion of Croatian territory were that a large number of Croats fled to Hungary and Austria, followed by the forced settlement of farmers and shepherds in the abandoned areas. The new settlers were Orthodox Christians, because there were no farmers and shepherds among the Muslims since they were a higher social class.<sup>17</sup> Wanting to protect the borders from the Turks, the Habsburgs created a military borderline (military frontier) called “Vojna Krajina” which consisted of refugees who fled from the territories conquered by the Turks. Südland states that because Vojna Krajina, the ethnically pure Croatian territory, now became mixed, it later came in the centre of political quarrels.<sup>18</sup> In 1699, parts of Croatia that were under the Ottoman rule were freed and Croatia remained a part of the Habsburg monarchy.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century in Croatia is marked with national aspirations of the Croats. In order to minimize the Hungarian influence, Croats proclaimed Croatian as their national language. That marked the beginning of the Croatian national movement in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>16</sup> Südland, *Pitanje*, 16.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 27.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 33.

## ***Serbia***

The settlement of Serbs occurred at the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> century. According to Südland they conquered the territory which is today known as Sandžak of Novi Pazar, the south-west part of the territory of the Kingdom of Serbia (before 1912), and the northern parts of Old Serbia or Raška, which later became the centre of Serbia.<sup>19</sup> Südland describes the Serbs as “a poor people with no culture, constituting of farmers and shepherds.”<sup>20</sup> They converted to Christianity in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> century, but unlike Croats, Serbs were baptized by Greek clergymen.<sup>21</sup> Südland also points out that there were no bigger cities or cultural centres, which was the reason why Serbs did not have any significant enemies; unlike Croats who were, especially in their first forming years, under constant Roman pressure because of resourceful Dalmatia. That is why, Südland claims, it took longer for Serbia to create a state.<sup>22</sup> However, under the influences of Byzantine Empire and the more developed Croatians, while also using the power of the Bulgarian neighbours, the Serbs advanced toward creating a state of their own.<sup>23</sup> During the rule of Stjepan Nemanjić (1169-1196) Serbia gained independence and became a state. Stjepan brought together the disunited Serbian people and territory, created a dynasty (Nemanjići) which ruled in the following 200 years, lifted the people to a higher cultural and material level, and most importantly he made an alliance with Byzantium instead of Rome.<sup>24</sup> The Serbian allegiance to Byzantium made Orthodoxy the official religion among the Serbs. Saint Sava

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 43.; also Ibid, 83; Südland disagrees with the account of Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, which gives Serbs a much larger piece of land than was historically theirs. Südland found that Constantine, being a Byzantine historian, was politically biased.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 45; own translation from Croatian. “... jedno stanovništvo bez kulture, a stajalo se od seljaka i pastira.”

<sup>21</sup> Ibid; also Mojzes, *Inferno*, 17.

<sup>22</sup> Südland, *Pitanje*, 45.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 46.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 51-53.

(of the Nemanjić dynasty) gained independence for the Orthodox Church in Serbia, which was until then under the authority of the bishop of Ohrid. Having gained independence, the Orthodox Church in Serbia replaced Greek bishops with local Serbian bishops. Serbian Orthodoxy is today often referred to as “*Svetosavlje*”, which is a veneration of St. Sava, the founder of the Serbian national Church.<sup>25</sup> Südland argues that “St. Sava created and organized the Serbian Greek-eastern Church, and he created it so that it always had to be in the service of the Serbian people and state.”<sup>26</sup> During the rule of the Nemanjić Dynasty (especially Stjepan Dušan the Mighty), Serbia gained power and territory.

After the death of Stjepan Dušan, Serbia fell apart. In 1389, Serbs were defeated by the Turks in the battle of Kosovo Field. During the Ottoman rule, all non-Muslim people were considered to be of lower social class (“*raja*”). Südland states that in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century there was no longer differences in social groups among the Serbs, since they were all farmers and shepherds serving the Muslim lords.<sup>27</sup> The Serbs gathered around the Orthodox Church. A large number fled to the monasteries established during the time of St. Sava and the Nemanjić dynasty. The monasteries were centres of Serbian culture; Serbian literature, stories and legends were kept alive in those places.<sup>28</sup> When the Ottomans saw the cultural power of the monasteries, they wanted to use that power for the benefit of the Empire. The grand vizier Mehmed Sokolović established in 1557, the patriarchate in Peć (Kosovo); the patriarch of Peć was called “*Srbian patriarch of all Serbs, Bulgarians and the*

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<sup>25</sup> Mojzes, *Inferno*, 18.

<sup>26</sup> Südland, *Pitanje*, 56; own translation from Croatian. “*Sv. Sava stvorio je i organizirao srbsko-grko-istočnu Crkvu, a stvorio ju je tako, da je uvijek morala stajati u službi srbskog naroda i srbske države.*”

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 65.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 66; also Velikonja, *Religious Separation*, 71.

Coastline”.<sup>29</sup> The Serbs used that newly gained power to establish connections with the western Christian world; for that reason the patriarchate was abolished in 1776, and Serbia was placed under the authority of Constantinople. Nevertheless, Serbs saw in that patriarchate an extension of their former state and, Südland states, it became the root of the future aspirations towards Greater Serbia.<sup>30</sup>

An important fact to note is that the Ottoman rule made less of an impact on Serbs than it did on Croats. Since its beginnings, the Serbian affinity was always towards the East rather than the West; that made them more trustworthy than the Croats, whose allegiance was to Rome and the Pope. The head of the Serbian Orthodox Church was always under Turkish jurisdiction which gave Serbs more credibility.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, Serbs in the Empire were treated better than the Catholic Croats.

At the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Ottoman Empire started declining. After numerous wars, finally in 1830, under the guidance of Duke Miloš Obrenović, Serbia became an autonomous territory.<sup>32</sup>

## ***Bosnia***

Slavs settled in Bosnia in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> century. However, since Bosnia is located between Croatia and Serbia, the question of its genesis is not the easiest to answer. What makes this question even more difficult to answer is the fact that there was no Bosnian nation. The people settling the territory of Bosnia were Croats, Serbs and Muslims. Its borders were constantly changing, as well as its population. Political quarrels over the territory of Bosnia have been present from very early on. Südland finds that the source of

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<sup>29</sup> Südland, *Pitanje*, 66; own translation from Croatian. “Srpski patrijarh sviju Srba, Bugara i Primorja.”

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 68.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 75.



misinterpreting history in the case of Bosnian territory and its owners comes from Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus. Constantine, Südland claims, was politically biased when presenting the territories of Croatia, Serbia and Bosnia. He states that Constantine's history was written in favour of Serbs, who were loyal to the Byzantine Empire, ascribing to them the territory of Bosnia. Südland argues his statement by giving various accounts of historians who claimed that Bosnian territory was part of Croatia.<sup>33</sup> This question will later become an important issue in political quarrels between Croats and Serbs.

During the reign of Ban Kulin (1180-1204, the founder of the independent Bosnia) the emergence of Bogumils took place. Bogumils were a heretical sect whose origins are traced back to Manichaeism. When Manichaeism started spreading through the Byzantine Empire it was not welcomed by the Emperor. The heretics were persecuted, and were forcedly settled on the borders with Bulgaria in order to create a stronger defence against the Bulgarians. However, the heretics started crossing over from the Ottoman to the Bulgarian territory and spreading their teaching there. Südland gives account of a Slavic priest in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, who merged the heretic Manichaean beliefs with Slavic rituals, named himself Bogumil and started spreading his teaching. It quickly became popular in Bulgaria and Macedonia, and started spreading to Serbia. However, the Orthodox Church had already been established in Serbia, and therefore did not welcome the heretics; they fled to Bosnia under persecution (they were also coming to Bosnia straight from Bulgaria). The Catholic Church in Bosnia was trying to Latinize the population; that was not well received among the locals. Therefore, the Slavic character of Bogumil religion helped the teaching to spread. "Over the next three centuries the Bogumil teaching became the

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 84.

strongest element of political, cultural and spiritual growth in Bosnia.”<sup>34</sup> The anti-Orthodox and anti-Catholic attitude that emerged among Bogumils because of the constant persecution helped Bosnia to distance itself from its neighbouring countries and form a stronger state. Bosnia, along with the Bogumil religion, was the strongest during the reign of Tvrtko I Kotromanić (1338-1391).<sup>35</sup> However, Südland states that

[T]he consequence of the creation of the Bosnian state was not the creation of a Bosnian nation ... The motive for the creation of the Bosnian state was not to conquer land and to keep that land, but simply the survival instinct of a religious confession.<sup>36</sup>

Therefore, after Tvrtko's death Bosnia soon fell apart.

Another issue that arises around the question of Bogumils is whether the population which accepted the Bogumil teaching was of Croatian or Serbian origin. On the one hand, Südland states that at the time of the spreading of the Bogumil heresy in Bosnia, Croatian nationalists were fleeing Croatia because of the growing Roman Catholic power and influence. The Croatian nationalists were already anti-clerically oriented, which made it easier for them to convert to the Bogumil religion.<sup>37</sup> On the other hand, Franjo Šanjek gives accounts of various historians who claimed that the Bogumils were originally Orthodox Christians.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 88; own translation from Croatian. “Tako postade bogumilstvo kroz tri stoljeća najjačim činbenikom političkog, kulturnog i duhovnog razvoja Bosne.”

<sup>35</sup> M. Velikonja, “Liberation Mythology: The Role of Mythology in Fanning War in the Balkans”, in *Religion and War in Bosnia*, P. Mojses, ed., Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1998, 22.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 94; own translation from Croatian. “Posljedica stvaranja bosanske države ne bijaše stvaranje bosanskog naroda, ... Povod za stvaranje bosanske države ne bijaše osvajanje i nastojanje, da se osvojeno zadrži, nego samo vjeroizpovjedni nagon za samoodržanjem i obranom.”

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 91-92.

<sup>38</sup> F. Šanjek, *Bosansko-Humski (Hercegovački) Krstjani i Katarsko-Dualistički Pokret u Srednjem Vijeku*, Zagreb: Kršćanska Sadašnjost, 1975, 27.

The Bogumil heresy started to disappear around the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Südland claims that it was the politically dangerous character of the Bogumil teaching that was one of the main reasons for its disappearance.<sup>39</sup> When the Ottoman Empire conquered the Bosnian territory in 1463, what was left of the Bogumils converted to Islam. Scholars agree on various reasons for the conversions to Islam; from land ownership, tax relief, better business opportunities, to spiritual security of an established religion.<sup>40</sup> What is important to highlight here is that the Muslims in Bosnia are of Slavic origin, not Turkish. As Zhelyazkova informs us in her essay on the Islamization in the Balkans, “the Muslim colonizers of non-Slavic origin did not exceed 2 to 5 percent of the total Bosnian Muslim community.”<sup>41</sup> Muslim settlers who came to Bosnia during the Ottoman rule were from neighbouring Slavic countries (Serbia, Macedonia, Albania and Bulgaria).<sup>42</sup> However, the Bogumil conversions to Islam did not just mean religious conversion but also political conversion; they inevitably became Ottomans (Turks).

The Muslim elite (including ethnic Slavs), more than any other group in Bosnia-Herzegovina, identified themselves with the Ottomans because of the economic and political privileges they received.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Südland, *Pitanje*, 96; he claims that the Bogumil belief was too focused on spirituality and hostile towards that which was *worldly* and therefore was politically weak. Because of that the people started converting to Catholicism in order to sustain themselves.

<sup>40</sup> F. Friedman, “The Muslim Slavs of Bosnia and Herzegovina (With Reference to the Sandžak of Novi Pazar): Islam as national Identity“, *Nationalities Paper* 28 (2009), 166; also A. Zhelyazkova, “Islamization in the Balkans as an Historiographical Problem: the Southeast-European Perspective“, in *The Ottomans and the Balkans: A Discussion of Historiography*, F. Adanir and S. Faroqhi, eds., Brill Academic Publishers, 2002, 226-227; also Velikonja, *Religious Separation*, 65.

<sup>41</sup> Zhelyazkova, “Islamization in the Balkans”, 246.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Velikonja, *Religious Separation*, 64.

That lent itself perfectly in the later 1990's wars, when Serbs and Croats referred to Bosnian Muslims as Turks in a derogatory way, justifying the aggression towards them as vengeance for the Turkish crimes committed during the Ottoman rule.

However, Bosnian Muslims accepted their new religion and political affiliation. When the Ottoman Empire started to decline, Bosnian Muslims held on to Islam more tightly. In reaction to the Tanzimat reforms (the attempts of modernizing and westernizing the Ottoman Empire), Bosnian Muslims turned against the Sultan in defence of "pure Islam".<sup>44</sup>

Bosnia was freed from the Ottoman rule in 1878, and placed under the authority of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. However, the new Christian rulers did not attempt to Christianize the Muslim population. On the contrary, the Habsburgs wanted peace in the Bosnian territory. Taking the land from the Muslims and giving it to Christians would just cause riots, therefore the Bosnian Muslims got to keep their land. The Habsburgs were also aware of the territorial desires of the neighbouring Croatia and Serbia; therefore they tried to promote a "civil ideology, termed *bošnjaštvo*"<sup>45</sup>, which was supposed to unite the Bosnian community despite the religious differences among the people, and strengthen Bosnian resistance to Croatia and Serbia. As Velikonja argues,

... the fateful differences between the peoples of Bosnia-Herzegovina emerged mainly as a consequence of external nationalist influences and existing internal religious distinctions. In contrast to this, the Austro-Hungarian authorities attempted to halt or at least minimize these processes.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Südland, *Pitanje*, 104-105.

<sup>45</sup> Friedman, "The Muslim Slavs", 169.

<sup>46</sup> Velikonja, *Religious Separation*, 134.

That attempt failed; Friedman suggests the reason for that was that the Bosnian Muslims rejected the attempt of being identified in a way with Christians, and so developed “a greater feeling of distinctiveness and differentiation from the surrounding non-Muslim inhabitants.”<sup>47</sup> Both Croatia and Serbia wanted the Bosnian territory and were waiting for the opportunity to claim it.

### ***The Millet System***

One of the most important moments in the history of Croatia, Serbia and Bosnia was the creation of the millet system during the rule of the Ottoman Empire. The Ottomans allowed religious freedom to a certain extent. The millet system was, as Velikonja states, “[t]he most important institution, which not only guaranteed the survival of and provided protection for all religious groups under Ottoman rule but also ensured their augmentation ...”<sup>48</sup> It was also a system which was to prevent mass conversions to Islam. It was not in the interest of the Empire that the whole population converts to Islam because a large amount of money funding the Empire was coming from the taxes of the non-Muslim population. The conquered population paid taxes to keep their religious autonomy. Nationalism was not encouraged and the millet system was supposed to gather communities around religion instead of nationality or ethnicity; however, it was the millet system that influenced the development of religious nationalism among the south Slavs.<sup>49</sup>

The Orthodox millet was the second largest after the Islamic millet. It was governed by the patriarch of Constantinople, who was approved by the sultan. As stated before, the Ottomans favoured the Orthodox over the Catholics, which is not difficult to

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<sup>47</sup> Friedman, “The Muslim Slavs”, 170.

<sup>48</sup> Velikonja, *Religious Separation*, 59.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid; also Südland, *Pitanje*, 28.

understand if we take history into account. The Orthodox Church had its centre in the East, its patriarchs were under the sultan's authority, and they had nothing to do with the Pope, who was leading crusades against the Turks. Catholics belonged to the millet which was regarded as the "infidel millet" and were much less tolerated than the Orthodox. That led to the strengthening of tension between Christians in the Ottoman Empire.<sup>50</sup> Velikonja also quotes an English traveller passing through the Balkans, who said that the Orthodox and Catholics were "so desperate malicious towards one another, as each loves the Turks better than they do either of the other."<sup>51</sup> Catholics in Bosnia, namely Franciscans, were loyal to the Ottoman regime, as Velikonja claims, and were thus given privileges similar to what the Orthodox had. "[T]he sultan allowed the Franciscans and Catholics under his rule to retain their originality and guaranteed them freedom of movement, protection of property, and freedom of worship."<sup>52</sup> The Franciscans were, therefore, protecting people from the authorities, and also took on the roles of physicians and teachers.

Both Croats and the Serbs found religion to be the keeper of their culture and identity. Therefore, by creating the millet system the Ottoman Empire established a foundation that led to the development of Slavic nations based on religion.

### ***Catholicism and Orthodoxy***

I would like to shortly deal with the issue of Catholicism and Orthodoxy. Südland finds that the schism of the Eastern and the Western Church made a great impact on the

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<sup>50</sup> Velikonja, *Religious Separation*, 62.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 61.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 79.

south Slavic countries. Paul Mojzes agrees by stating that “[n]owhere has this schism had more fateful and tragic effect than in the Balkans, even to the present day.”<sup>53</sup>

Probably the most important thing to point out is that the schism between the Eastern and the Western Church was mostly of political and not dogmatic nature. Südland traces the difference between the east and the west back to the Roman conquest of ancient Greece and the animosity that emerged as a consequence. Upon the breaking apart of the Roman Empire, the Greeks broke into the eastern part, claiming the territory for themselves; after the fall of the Western Roman Empire, Byzantium was regarded as the “new Rome”. Wanting to restore the former glory and power of Rome, the pope made an alliance with the Germans. The empire was restored, and Pope Leo III crowned Charles the Great as the emperor of Rome. The act of the coronation of Charles the Great was, as Südland puts it, a “dethronement of the Greeks” and was regarded by the Greeks as a great insult.<sup>54</sup> After that there were some doctrinal issues, but it was never the doctrinal issues that kept the two sides apart. The relations between Catholic and the Orthodox developed on those foundations.

When Constantine I established Christianity as the official religion of the state, he merged the two. The Eastern Church never freed itself from that merger. The Church had a significant role in the state:

The emperor and the patriarch, the secular authority and the clergy relate to each other like body and soul, and the former is equally necessary to the state as the latter is to a human being.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Mojzes, *Inferno*, 18.

<sup>54</sup> Südland, *Pitanje*, 129-130.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 133.; own translation from Croatian. “Car i patriarh, svjetovna vlast i svećenstvo odnose se međusobno kao tielo i duša, te su i u državi kao i u čovjeku jednako neophodno potrebni.”

Stephen R. Goodwin reports that

[t]he two authorities [the priesthood and the imperial authority], exercised power equally in a harmonious diarchy. The 'two hands of God' working in symphonia married church and state powers in the Byzantine Empire and its successor nation-states.<sup>56</sup>

The situation in the west was different. The pope gave the crown to the secular ruler, but in return the secular ruler was obligated to serve Rome and the Catholic Church. However, the pope wanted both the secular and the spiritual authority. Since the secular rulers were not in accord with that, it led to constant battles for the throne. The result was that there was no merger of state and Church. In the long run, the two remained separate, and only used each other for political purposes when necessary.<sup>57</sup> Another interesting and important thing that Südland states is that Orthodoxy, unlike Catholicism, was never a proselytizing religion. However, the Church wanted to spread. Since the state and the Church were connected the way they were, it was the task of the state to conquer land and spread the state religion among the conquered population.<sup>58</sup>

As was previously mentioned, after the breaking apart of the Byzantine Empire in 1204, the Orthodox Church in Serbia gained autonomy as a result of the efforts of St. Sava. In the Ottoman Empire Orthodoxy played the role of the keeper of Serbian identity and culture and was powerful to that extent that the Ottomans wanted to use it for the benefit of the Empire. By creating the Patriarchate of Peć the Serbs got authority over a greater territory, which was, as Südland claims, the foundation for their territorial aspirations in later centuries.

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<sup>56</sup> S.R. Goodwin, *Fractured Land, Healing Nations*, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2006, 22.

<sup>57</sup> Südland, *Pitanje*, 134-135.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 141.



Catholicism, as we have seen, was the official religion in Croatia. However, Croats were not always fond of the Catholic Church because it failed to support the Croatian national aspirations. The relationship between Croats and Rome was not always a harmonious one. Südland explains that with the theory that Catholicism was not a state religion but rather wanted to be the only authority; Croatia, on the other hand, wanted its own autonomy. However, there are accounts of the local Catholic Churches in Croatia supporting the national aspirations, e.g. using the Slavic language in the liturgy when Rome prohibited it. Also, during the Ottoman break-in into the Balkan territory, the Croats were regarded by the pope as “*antemurale Christianis*” meaning the “shield of Christendom”, an expression which Croats welcomed with open arms. Under the rule of the Ottomans, Croats found themselves gathering around Catholicism, which at that point, somewhat paradoxically, became the keeper of the identity of the Croats. The Franciscans in Bosnia were working to develop a stronger national self-awareness of the Catholics in the territory. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century they began opening schools, started publishing Croatian literature, established cultural societies etc.<sup>59</sup> Both Catholicism and Orthodoxy played a role in keeping the people together and strengthening their identity.

### ***Mythical memories***

What makes the history of the Balkan territory as complicated as it is, is the fact that each of the countries has its own version of history. As Südland noted, there is a tendency in the Slavic people to give authority to emotion rather than reason;<sup>60</sup> that is why the fact of differing historical views and interpretations is not surprising. We have seen that the history of the Slavic countries is a history of constant change of borders, people, rulers

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<sup>59</sup> Velikonja, *Religious Separation*, 140.

<sup>60</sup> Südland, *Pitanje*, 7.

etc. Small states invented and modified stories that kept them together throughout foreign rule and losses of territory. That gave a good foundation for the creation of local national mythologies that were created all through the history of the Slavic people, and have been of great importance in the 1990's wars in ex-Yugoslavia.

Paul Mojzes divides the mythical history of the Balkan countries in four groups, or four main myths. The first one is the "*myth of land and blood*". Based on that myth the land of a state is perceived as sacred land, and its local rulers as *good*, while the foreign rulers are regarded as *evil*.<sup>61</sup>

The second myth is called "*the crucifixion and resurrection syndrome*" in which defeats are presented as victories.<sup>62</sup> One of the most famous myths in that group is the Serbian myth about the battle of Kosovo Field. That battle was fought against the Turks. Even though leaders of both armies died, and the Turks withdrew from the field due to suffered losses, Serbia still lost the battle and came under the Ottoman rule. However, that day, *Vidovdan* (St. Vitus' Day), 28<sup>th</sup> June 1389, became the most important date in Serbian history. The myth tells the story of prince Lazar, who was a hero betrayed by a fellow Serb, Vuk Branković, and the story of Miloš Obilić (a somewhat mythical figure), who courageously killed the Sultan. The myth presents Lazar as a Christ-like figure, who sacrifices himself for a greater cause; and it presents Vuk Branković as the greatest enemy and traitor of the Serbian blood. The story began to be used as "the driving force in the wars of liberation."<sup>63</sup> And to quote Goodwin, "[t]he myth extracts moral victory from military defeat, preserves a glorious Serbian past, and provides a utopian vision of the

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<sup>61</sup> Mojzes, *Inferno*, 39.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> As quoted in Velikonja, *Religious Separation*, 94.

future.”<sup>64</sup> The Serbian Orthodox Church made sure that the story was preserved through generations. This is, however, just one of many Slavic myths.

The third myth is *understanding time mythologically rather than chronologically*, i.e. bringing the past into the present. As Mojzes puts it, “[c]oncepts of the past and the present are so intermixed that a grievance of long ago is perceived as a present affliction.”<sup>65</sup> That can also quite vividly be seen in the Slavic countries; presenting historical situations as universal happenings out of time and context.

The last myth is “*the glorification of war and violence as the best way to keep or reclaim one’s freedom*.”<sup>66</sup> There have never been national tendencies towards peace-making or forgiveness; however, there have always been national tendencies towards regaining land, fighting for “what is ours”, defending “the holy”. “The great heroes are always those who inflict the greatest damage to the enemy.”<sup>67</sup>

Vjekoslav Perica links the creation of national mythology to the creation of nation-states. He claims that besides having “territories with borders, peoples, armies, and bureaucracies”, a nation-state has to have “an adequate system of public patriotic worship, symbol, myth and ritual.”<sup>68</sup> He defines myth as “a narrative about the origin, that is, birth of the community.”<sup>69</sup> A more important characteristic of a national myth is that it is historically inaccurate. A myth is used by the political powers to create a convenient collective memory in the people, which will help the political goals of the rulers. In the Slavic countries, religion *was* the political power. Thus, looking at the countries of ex-

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<sup>64</sup> Goodwin, *Fractured Land*, 24.

<sup>65</sup> Mojzes, *Inferno*, 40.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> V. Perica, *Balkan Idols: Religion and Nationalism in Yugoslav States*, Oxford: University Press, 2002, 5.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

Yugoslavia it makes sense when Željko Mardešić, Croatian sociologist of religion, says that since religion is in its essence worship, or admiration of an event that occurred in the past, therefore, the evil memories of religion last the longest.<sup>70</sup>

Religion was a major factor in the creation of the Slavic nations. In Croatia, the “ethnicization” of Catholicism (as Perica calls it) began around the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, all through the history of the Croatian people there have been priests and clergymen conducting liturgy and writing poetry in vernacular.<sup>71</sup> In the 19<sup>th</sup> century Croatia started feeling stronger nationalist feelings, and wanted an independent Roman Catholic Croatia. The party that was encouraging this movement towards independence was *Hrvatska Stranka Prava* (Croatian Party of Rights), led by Ante Starčević, latter referred to as “the father of the state.”<sup>72</sup> Velikonja states that the “*pravaši* [members of the Party of Rights] closely linked the exclusivist Croatian national idea to Roman Catholicism, which they saw as the bastion of Croatian national identity.”<sup>73</sup> Their political goals were to unite all Croatian lands, i.e. to restore the medieval Croatia which included Bosnia. They also claimed that Slavic Muslims were originally Catholics. Therefore, even though the feelings of ethnic or national attachment of Croatians to the Roman Catholic Church began to be promoted more intensely only in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there is a Roman Catholic legacy among the Croatian people which was the foundation for the latter ethno-nationalism in Croatia.

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<sup>70</sup> Ž. Mardešić, “Povijesno Čišćenje Pamćenja“, in *Crkva u Svijetu*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (2000), 65.

<sup>71</sup> Perica, *Balkan Idols*, 10.

<sup>72</sup> Velikonja, *Religious Separation*, 112.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 114.

The Orthodox Church in Serbia was present and highly influential from very early on. “In the Orthodox world, the Church, ethnic community, and state grow together.”<sup>74</sup> As we have seen, the Serbian Orthodox Church preserved the ethnic identity of the Serbs throughout the historical struggles of Serbia; therefore, religion had grown politically strong by the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Alen Kristić, a Bosnian theologian and sociologist of religion, states that “[r]eligious memories were, and still are the main cause of the creation and the preservation of the collective memory of ethno-nationalist groups.”<sup>75</sup> Being the keepers of ethnic traditions, both of the Christian traditions had the power to present history in a way that was convenient for their political and historical situation. By creating and promoting national mythology, the Churches were strengthening nationalist feelings and tendencies among the people. One can certainly understand the need to gather one’s own people in the midst of territorial wars with strong neighbours, and the need to create a sense of belonging among the confused population; however, there are different ways in which that could be conducted. And one cannot help but ask could the bloodshed have been avoided, if history had been presented in a different, less biased way?

## ***Summary***

The history of the three south-Slavic countries is a history of losing and gaining land, constant rivalry and flux of population. However, as history shows, the countries also often changed sides, depending on the political situation. Serbs sided with the Byzantine Empire instead of Rome, however, when the situation required it, they sought help from

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<sup>74</sup> Perica, *Balkan Idols*, 7.

<sup>75</sup> A. Kristić, “Ozdravljenjem Pamćenja do Pomirenja“, in *Nova Prisutnost*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (2008), 34; own translation from Croatian. “Religijska sjećanja bila su i ostala ključni uzrok nastanka i očuvanja kolektivnog pamćenja pojedinih etničko-nacionalnih skupina.”

the Christian west. Croats acknowledged the authority of Rome; however, they fought against the Roman influence when their identity was threatened, and again sided with Rome when it was convenient. Croats and Serbs were constant rivals, but Croat troops were fighting alongside Serbs in the battle of Kosovo against the Turks.<sup>76</sup> The Ottomans were a common enemy to the Christian population; however, when it was politically convenient, Serbs showed loyalty to the Turks. Politics was always the central issue in the relationships among the people in the Balkan territory. The Catholic and the Orthodox Church respectively played a great role in keeping the people together and providing them with a distinct culture and a sense of belonging. It is not surprising that religion stayed one of the most important elements for the Croatian and Serbian nation.

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Croatia and Serbia were both developing nationalist feelings, and the tendency towards the creation of a nation-state was growing ever stronger. Bosnia, which population was at that point mostly Muslim, was in the middle of those nationalist feelings and territorial aspirations of its neighbours Croatia and Serbia. The mythological memories of each country respectively found fertile soil in those nationalist movements.

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<sup>76</sup> Südland, *Pitanje*, 62.

## **The 20<sup>th</sup> Century and the Development of the Role of Religion**

The end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the whole 20<sup>th</sup> century were marked by the rising of nationalistic feelings in the Slavic states, which resulted in the creation of nation-states at the beginning of the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, that process was not a peaceful one. The history of that process has been nothing but complicated. The global events which marked the 20<sup>th</sup> century did not leave the Slavic states unaffected.

To go through the entire spectre of events happening in the 20<sup>th</sup> century would require a lot more than a few pages, so I will narrow my presentation down to events I find were of great importance for the development of the nation-states of Croatia, Serbia and Bosnia, and which were strongly tied to the religion of each country respectively.

The second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was marked by constant tensions between the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, Croatia and Serbia. As has been presented in the previous chapter, Serbia had a strong sense of a distinct identity from very early on. The Serbian Orthodox Church which was established by the Nemanjić dynasty played the role of the keeper and protector of that identity and Serbian culture. Südländ, in his book *Južnoslavensko Pitanje*, constantly advocates the idea that Serbia grew and got more powerful only on account of the fact that Orthodoxy was the official state religion. Since the eastern way was to merge state and Church, the interests of the Church became the interests of the state and vice versa, and the Church had its heavenly mission to spread. What Südländ also pointed out was that ever since the establishment of the patriarchate in Peć, Serbia had pretensions over a large piece of territory in the Balkans; that was the foundation on which the idea of Greater Serbia was created. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, after freeing itself from the Ottoman rule, the nationalist feelings in Serbia started to emerge.

Velikonja informs that while in the millet system the identifying factor was religion, during the rule of the Austro-Hungarian Empire that religious and cultural identity was starting to form a national identity.<sup>77</sup> And it was not happening only in Serbia. Even though Croats were not so unanimously attached to the Roman Catholic Church it was still a unifying factor during the Ottoman rule, and was a preserver of the Croatian culture. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century there is a rise in national awareness of Croats, especially promoted by clergymen and priests. There was also the significant figure of Josip Juraj Strossmayer, a very politically engaged bishop, who advocated the idea of the unity of all south Slavs, or *Jugoslavenstvo* (Yugoslavism). It was supposed to prevent battles between neighbours and unite them around their common origin. He was, however, opposed by the aforementioned Ante Starčević, whose idea was to have an autonomous Croatia, built on the Croatian Roman Catholic tradition. He was also in strong opposition to any kind of unity with the Serbs. However, unity of Croats and Serbs was difficult to avoid in that situation. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Serbs were largely present in the Dalmatian territory. At the same time Croatia's desire to connect the autonomous province of Dalmatia to the Croatian territory was growing ever stronger, but was opposed by the Austrian authorities. In that situation, Croatia needed the large Serbian population in Dalmatia as an ally. A convenient idea emerged claiming that Croats and Serbs are in essence the same people with different names. In 1905, an agreement called *Riječka Rezolucija* (the resolution of Rijeka) was signed, followed by *Zadarska Rezolucija* (the resolution of Zadar) which confirmed the former. It was a treaty which, based on Serbian and Croatian agreement, pleaded for help from Hungary in the efforts to unite Dalmatia to the triune kingdom of Croatia, Slavonia

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<sup>77</sup> Velikonja, *Separation*, 122.



and Dalmatia; it also stated a desire for a more independent and autonomous political, cultural and economical development of the kingdom.<sup>78</sup> In return for Serbian support in Dalmatia, Serbia demanded that Croatia renounces the territories in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the interest of Serbian expansion; Croatia, of course, agreed.

Another issue that brought Croatia and Serbia together was a common dislike of *hungarization* that was being strongly enforced by the Hungarians both in Croatia and Serbia in the turn of the centuries. Therefore, the two countries supported each other against Hungary. However, not all Croats and Serbs were in favour of those kinds of alliances.<sup>79</sup> In 1908, Austria, in an attempt to solve the “south-Slavic issue”, annexed Bosnia. The annexation was not welcomed either by the population living in Bosnia, nor by Serbia who wanted the Bosnian territory for itself. In that situation, Serbia turned to Hungary for help in regaining Bosnian territory.<sup>80</sup> Serbia was encouraging nationalist feelings among the Orthodox population. Serbs even enforced a “no-foreigner policy”<sup>81</sup>, which was preventing Austro-Hungarian immigrants from coming into Bosnia. That policy later also extended towards Croatia. That explains why the Orthodox Serbs were the largest population in Bosnia in 1910.<sup>82</sup>

It was presented in the previous chapter that the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy was trying to improve the situation in Bosnia by encouraging *bošnjaštvo*, an idea which would bring all people living in Bosnia together despite their religious differences. Austria wanted to ensure that Bosnia would not fall under the arising nationalistic influences of Croats and Serbs. Serbian hatred towards Austria was rising, and resulted in the

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<sup>78</sup> Südland, *Pitanje*, 346.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 341-342.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 350.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 355; Südland calls it “protukuferna politika”, which literally means “policy against suitcases”.

<sup>82</sup> Velikonja, *Religious Separation*, 126; table 5-3.

assassination of the Archduke of Austria Franz Ferdinand on June 28<sup>th</sup>, 1914. That event is regarded as the event which triggered the First World War.

The situation was not stable. We see that everyone was forming alliances with everyone in order to gain political power in one way or the other. Serbia was following its idea of the Greater Serbia. Südland claims throughout his book that all the Serbian political alliances with neighbouring countries were always in service of the desire for the Greater Serbia. Croatia foremostly wanted independence. During the political activities of Ante Starčević there was also striving towards a Greater Croatia, however, its main goal was autonomy. It only made alliances in order to preserve itself, as Südland claims.<sup>83</sup> Bosnia, being a country of mixed ethnicities and religions, with a complicated history, found itself in the midst of those desires.

### ***The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes***

After the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the war began. Despite the alliances between Croatia and Serbia, the two countries found themselves on opposite sides. Croatia gave its allegiance to the Monarchy, while Serbia sided with the Entente Powers.<sup>84</sup>

The War flared hatred among the Slavic population, which was especially visible in Bosnia, where constant battles were going on between Serb and Muslim military units.<sup>85</sup>

When the War began Serbs declared that their objective was to liberate their “oppressed Serb, Croat and Slovene brothers”.<sup>86</sup> Since Serbs were also on the winning side

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<sup>83</sup> Südland, *Pitanje*, 362.

<sup>84</sup> Velikonja, *Religious Separation*, 141.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, 144.

when the War ended, they considered themselves to be saviours of their neighbouring nations. Serbs used the situation after the War and the falling apart of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy and formed a union with Croats and Slovenes. The process of unification was finalized in 1918, and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (kraljevina Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca, SHS) was created. Velikonja informs us that the situation in the kingdom was never stable due to the fact that all included countries had a different idea in mind. Both Croats and Slovenes wanted a federalist state, in which they would have autonomy; Mojzes writes that they “thought the union was a voluntarily association, a free affiliation of a number of south Slavic nations...”<sup>87</sup> Serbs, however, wanted a centralist government, which was proven in 1929, when king Alexander Karađorđević declared personal dictatorship over the kingdom.<sup>88</sup>

During the kingdom of SHS ideas of Yugoslavism, the unity of all Slavs, started to be promoted again. “The universities of Belgrade and Zagreb in particular attempted to ‘scientifically prove the ethnic sameness of the South Slavs’.”<sup>89</sup> It appears, however, that unity was never really possible between these countries. Although Croatia willingly entered the kingdom, it did so because it was the best option at the moment; however, it never forgot its desire for independence. Therefore, Serbia never had complete control over the constitutive states. It wanted to control all religious groups; that resulted in conflict. Nevertheless, the Serbian Orthodox Church was finally realizing its desires to restore its medieval glory. With the creation of SHS,

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<sup>87</sup> Mojzes, *Inferno*, 72.

<sup>88</sup> Velikonja, *Religious Separation*, 143-144.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, 144.

the Serbian Orthodox Church merged the Metropolitan Sees of Serbia, Sremski Karlovci, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro, Macedonia, and two Dalmatian dioceses (Zadar and Kotor) into a uniform structure.<sup>90</sup>

An important moment that took place in 1937, was the so-called “Bloody liturgy”, i.e. a march led by Orthodox priests in Belgrade against the concordat made between the government of the kingdom and the Holy See. The concordat wanted to establish a better position for the Catholic Church in the kingdom. Perica informs that the Serbian Orthodox Church threatened to excommunicate those “Serb delegates who voted for the ratification of the concordat.”<sup>91</sup> The Serbian Orthodox Church claimed that the reason for protesting against the treaty was because it was putting the Roman Catholic Church in a favourable position in the kingdom, and that it will “eventually make [the] country and state subordinated to the Roman Curia.”<sup>92</sup> However, according to Südland’s theory about Orthodoxy, the situation could be understood as the tendency of the Orthodoxy to be the state religion, and therefore the ruling religion with no partners or rivals. The tensions between the Orthodox and the Catholics grew over the years. On June 28<sup>th</sup> 1939, the Serbs gathered to commemorate the 550<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Kosovo battle. The Croats responded by announcing the beginning of a nine-year celebration, “Great Novena – Thirteen Centuries of Christianity in the Croat People”.<sup>93</sup> The goal of the celebration was to commemorate Croatian Christianity and to emphasize “the role of the Church in the preservation of Croatian ethnic identity and desire for statehood-nationhood”.<sup>94</sup> Velikonja

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid, 151.

<sup>91</sup> Perica, *Balkan Idols*, 17.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid, 18.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid, 21.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

quotes a slogan from the Eucharistic congress organized during the Great Novena, “O Christ, O King of the Eucharist, protect the Croatian nation!”<sup>95</sup>

### ***The Second Yugoslavia***

We have seen that the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was marked by rising nationalist tensions. We have also seen a rise of religious feeling among the Serbian Orthodox and Croatian Roman Catholic population, and the creation of “ethno-national” and religious myths that were fanning intolerance and hatred. All in all, the situation could best be described by quoting Velikonja:

Time worn myth and ideological vulgarization of history are all too frequently encountered in the Balkans: a partisan historical memory, political amnesia, concealed defeats, the glorification of past tragedies, are all topped-off by an unreasonable pride in times gone by.<sup>96</sup>

World War II left a great mark on the Slavic states. The kingdom fell apart in 1941, when it came under the authority of the Axis powers and was divided into satellite states. Three groups emerged: the partisans (communists), the *Ustaše* (Croatian nationalists who were already active in World War I) and the *Četniks* (Serbian nationalist military unit). That period was marked by a civil war and massive massacres of the population. The numbers of the victims of the massacres are enormous; however, what Perica points as important in those events is not so much the number of the victims, but rather the brutality of the *Ustaše* and the *Četniks*, which was present neither in the Partizan nor in the Nazi

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<sup>95</sup> Velikonja, *Religious Separation*, 158.

<sup>96</sup> M. Velikonja, “Liberation Mythology: The Role of Mythology in Fanning the War in the Balkans”, in *Religion and the War in Bosnia*, P. Mojzes, ed, Atlanta, Georgia: Scholar Press, 1998, 20.

groups.<sup>97</sup> The brutality, he finds, was a result of “hatred generated by the local history, religion, ethnicity and myths.” Precisely in that brutality and hatred he finds the reason why the Communist regime was so successful in Yugoslavia.<sup>98</sup>

It is not easy to believe that the Church would support those kinds of nationalist groups; however, the clergy was not condemning their behaviour, and was directly or indirectly supporting them, as Perica states.<sup>99</sup> That was especially clear when the *Independent State of Croatia* (Nezavisna Država Hrvatska, NDH) was created and managed by the Axis powers. Perica argues that the Roman Catholic Church in Croatia saw in NDH the “return of the ancient Western nation of Croats”, an idea which was later supported by the Great Novena project.<sup>100</sup> On the other hand, as Perica states, the Catholic Church in Croatia did not represent all Croats. A large number of Croats, Serbs and Muslims joined the Partisan forces against the chauvinistic rule, and were supported by the Allies.

Second Yugoslavia was created by the Communist party, which was led by Josip Broz Tito, right after the War ended. The creation of Yugoslavia was not met with unanimous enthusiasm. The Communist regime started persecuting all wartime collaborators, which included a large number of priests and clergy. Among them was also the archbishop of Zagreb, Alojzije Stepinac, who was a politically active priest during the kingdom SHS and NDH. His arrest and trial became another myth in Croatian history; the myth of martyrdom of Cardinal Alojzije Stepinac. That period of creation of Yugoslavia was also marked by the emergence of myths about wartime genocides; all groups had their

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<sup>97</sup> Perica, *Balkan Idols*, 22-23.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, 23.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, 25.

own myths. Nonetheless, the Communist party managed to create a somewhat unified state. Perica claims that if it had not been for the Communists and the creation of Yugoslavia around the principle of *brotherhood and unity*, the civil war in the area would have escalated.<sup>101</sup> The principle of brotherhood and unity was supposed to unite all ethnicities and religions under one name and nation of Yugoslavia. There are differences in opinion (especially in nationalist circles)<sup>102</sup> whether that project actually succeeded or not, but the fact remains that when Tito died, the nation was in grief.

After World War II and the establishment of the Communist Yugoslavia, there were still some attempts of nationalistic movements. However, Perica points out that the religious groups (especially the Roman Catholic Church) showed allegiance to the state rather than to those movements.<sup>103</sup> After the attempts of the secular nationalists failed, the Roman Catholic Church in Croatia took on the role of encouraging nationalist feelings. It seems to be a rather paradoxical situation. However, putting that situation into its context, we see that the efforts of the Roman Catholic Church in Croatia to strengthen the national feelings of Croats were not directly focused on nationalization of the population, but rather on countering the accusations of the Serbian Orthodox Church. With that I do not mean to defend the Catholic hateful attitude towards the Orthodox, because that attitude was present long before the 20<sup>th</sup> century. What I am pointing to is the fact that the Churches were negatively encouraging each other to strengthen a sense of identity amongst their respective believers. Velikonja describes the relationship of the groups in Yugoslavia as follows:

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid, 31.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, 106.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, 58-59.

The principal community needs an enemy against which it can establish itself as the radical opposition and, by way of this, defines its complementary imaginative mythical order.<sup>104</sup>

There were, however, ecumenical endeavours of the Churches which the Communist regime was cautiously supporting; the reason for supporting it was probably because peace among religions meant peace and less tension among the population in general.<sup>105</sup> Nevertheless, despite the peaceful ecumenical attempts, mythical history appears to have been stronger. Orthodox and Catholics were accusing each other for wartime genocides of their respective believers while at the same time not recognizing or acknowledging crimes of their own people. What is interesting and important to note is that in the accusations there was always talk about the “Orthodox brothers” who were killed by the Catholics, or vice versa; they were not regarded as Serbs and Croats.<sup>106</sup> In the Croatian Catholic weekly newspaper *Glas Koncila* in 1992, in a report about the happenings in eastern Croatia at the beginning of the Croatian Homeland war, the author reports about the great problems that the “Catholic believers” or “Croat parishioners” were facing.<sup>107</sup> There was no talk of Croats in general, but just Catholic believers. The same thing was happening during the accusations of genocide, the focus was on religious affiliation. Memories of ethnic killings were kept in religious traditions.

Perica gives a positive view of the relationship between the Yugoslav state and religious Communities.<sup>108</sup> Velikonja informs us that the Communist party wanted to strengthen the Muslim distinct identity by encouraging development in the Islamic

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<sup>104</sup> Velikonja, “Liberation Mythology”, 38.

<sup>105</sup> Perica, *Balkan Idols*, 34.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid, 33.

<sup>107</sup> “Etničko Čišćenje u Rukavicama”, in *Glas Crkve*, November 15, 1992, 9.

<sup>108</sup> Perica, *Balkan Idols*, 35-36.



community.<sup>109</sup> However, one has to be aware that the primary attitude of the Communist regime towards religion was not positive. All good will shown towards religious progress during the Communist regime seems to have been politically based, as we have seen in the example of promoting ecumenism in order to keep the tensions among ethnic groups to a minimum. Radmila Radić, in her book *Vera Protiv Vere* (Faith Against Faith), informs that according to the Commission for religious matters, founded in Slovenia in 1944, the attitude of Communists towards religion was the following: the Church needed to stop identifying itself with political parties, and religion should not be affiliated with nationality. Communist belief was that religious affiliation is a matter of personal choice, and they did not want to discriminate based on religion. Also, belief that religion would disappear once the economical and social problems of the population were solved was an important part of the Marxist ideology.<sup>110</sup> Therefore, religion was not regarded as important in the Communist regime. Radić states that even though the Communist always kept those principles, it was the implementation of the principles that changed as the situations in the state changed.<sup>111</sup> The Communist idea was to create a unified state whose population will not be divided along ethnic, national or religious lines. Since religion had such an immense role in the lives of the Yugoslav people, and since, as Lenard Cohen informs, ethnic and religious identity were in that period synonymous<sup>112</sup>, the Communist regime had to make sure nothing will come in the way of creating such unified state. Church was separated from the state, religious education was banned from schools, many clergymen were persecuted, executed or imprisoned, and the religious communities lost

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<sup>109</sup> Velikonja, *Religious Separation*, 222.

<sup>110</sup> R. Radić, *Verom Protiv Vere*, Beograd: INIS, 1995, 103-104.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid, 110.

<sup>112</sup> L. J. Cohen, "Bosnia's 'Tribal Gods': The Role of Religion in Nationalist Politics", in *Religion and the War in Bosnia*, P. Mojzes, ed, Atlanta, Georgia: Scholar Press, 1998, 45.

not just a large portion of their land.<sup>113</sup> According to Radić, 85% of the land that belonged to religious communities was expropriated.<sup>114</sup> The Communists, as Velikonja notes,

were well aware of the destructive power of religious nationalism and attempted to find a new basis for national identity that would be beyond traditionally long reach of religion and the church.<sup>115</sup>

There has not been much word about Bosnia until now, so I would like to briefly present the special case of Bosnia and its development during the Communist regime.

Bosnia was, unlike Croatia and Serbia, an ethnically mixed state. It was presented in the previous chapter, in the history of Bosnia that the majority of the Bosnian population converted to Islam when the Ottomans conquered the territory. There has also been word about the aspirations of Serbs and Croats towards Bosnia. There are historical claims on Bosnia from both Croats and Serbs. When the Austro-Hungarian Empire defeated the Ottomans it wanted to establish a more independent state in Bosnia so that it would be able to resist Serb and Croat attempts of claiming it for themselves. However, Bosnia never managed to create a unified nation, because it was historically always ethnically mixed. During the Communist Yugoslavia, Bosnia became the sixth constitutive state and Bosnian Muslims were recognized as a nation in 1968. Friedman writes,

The significance of the new designation was that no longer would the Bosnian Muslims be considered only a powerless pawn in the Croat and Serb battle for dominance in Bosnia.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Velikonja, *Religious Separation*, 185-186.

<sup>114</sup> Radić, *Verom*, 149.

<sup>115</sup> Velikonja, *Religious Separation*, 187.

<sup>116</sup> F. Friedman, "The Muslim Slavs of Bosnia and Herzegovina (With Reference to the Sandžak of Novi Pazar): Islam as national Identity", *Nationalities Paper* 28 (2009), 173.

However, they were declared Muslims in the national sense, not in the religious sense; Islam as an identification factor was not encouraged. Steven Burg and Paul Shoup, in their book *The War in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, claim that the Muslim population in Bosnia was secular and supportive of the Communist regime and its ideas of interethnic equality.<sup>117</sup> The Communist regime brought a cultural and intellectual reform to Bosnia, which was manifested in the breaking down of social and ethnic barriers. The number of mixed marriages was growing and any kind of national intolerance was immediately suppressed by the state.<sup>118</sup> Velikonja also claims that the Bosnian Muslim population was mostly secularized and oriented to the west rather than the east.<sup>119</sup> However, he reports that while the secular national identity was growing stronger among the Bosnian Muslims, there was also an ascent of the Islamic religious identity. It seems to have been a result of the cultural development of Bosnia, and the ties to the greater Islamic world that the Islamic Religious Community (Islamska vjerska zajednica, IVZ) nurtured. It is important to note, however, that the sense of religious identity among Muslims was not overall present.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> S.L. Burg and P.L. Shoup, *The War in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2000, 41.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid, 42.

<sup>119</sup> Velikonja, *Religious Separation*, 222.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid, 223.

## **The Disintegration of Yugoslavia and the Creation of Nation-States: the Socio-Political Role of Religion**

First of all, I would like to point out that when talking about the creation of nation-states in the territory of ex-Yugoslavia, one is unavoidably talking about the wars that took place from 1991 to 1995. Therefore, in this chapter I will examine the role that religion in general (Christianity and Islam), and the Serbian Orthodox and the Roman Catholic Church respectively, played in the events leading to the wars in 1990's.

After Tito's death Yugoslavia started to decline. Mojzes states that the disintegration of Yugoslavia was caused by "the political elites of the republics", and was not a result of national conflict. What ended Yugoslavia was the disagreement about the sharing of power among the states.<sup>121</sup> The Communist party finally fell apart in 1989; that event was followed by the creation of national parties, each of which "addressed themselves only to their own ethnic/national group."<sup>122</sup> Each state wanted to defend the economic and political interests of its ethnic group; therefore, ethnic nationalism became the main principle behind all political action. According to Mojzes, ethnic nationalism has been "the main historical force determining Balkan events in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries".<sup>123</sup> During the last years of Tito's regime and after his death, the economical situation in Yugoslavia was bad and deteriorating.<sup>124</sup> Yugoslavia was in debt. The attempts to redistribute wealth among the constitutive countries were not met with enthusiasm by the wealthier Yugoslav nations. At that point the only thing that was justifying the

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<sup>121</sup> P. Mojzes, *Inferno*, 77.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid*, 82.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid*, 83.

<sup>124</sup> C. Bennett, *Yugoslavia's Bloody Collapse*, London: Hurst and Company, 1995, 67.

communist monopoly of power was the reference to the revolution which led to the creation of Yugoslavia.<sup>125</sup> Christopher Bennett states that

[i]n Tito's absence, Yugoslavia's federal centre lacked sufficient authority to assert control over the economy of the whole country for the purpose of reforming it. The system could not reform itself, yet it was so bankrupt both materially and spiritually that it would not permit even the media to discuss the debt question.<sup>126</sup>

The state which seemed to protest most against Tito's regime was Serbia. Bennett explains that Serbia harboured negative feelings toward the Communist regime ever since Tito decided to emancipate Kosovo's Albanians. As history shows, Kosovo was for Serbs sacred land. Serbs also propagated anti-Communist feelings based on the oppression they were experiencing from the hands of Communists. Bennett, however, claims that according to Yugoslavia's "comparative figures for the proportion of political prisoners from a particular nationality, ... Albanians and Croats were easily the most persecuted peoples in Yugoslavia."<sup>127</sup> A rise of nationalist feelings again brought about the idea of Greater Serbia. Serbs tended towards a centralized state, unlike most other nations who desired a federalist government. Bennett presents the 1985 *Memorandum*, which was drafted by the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences. It argued that Croatia and Slovenia were working together against the Serbs in order to exploit their economy.<sup>128</sup> That Memorandum remained one of the most nationalist and propagandist polemics, and was used by Serbian politicians in stirring up fear among the population.

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid, 70.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid, 78.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid, 81.

The most important figure to mention in Serbian politics is of course Slobodan Milošević. According to Bennett's research, Milošević was regarded not as a nationalist, but as

ruthlessly ambitious and prepared to use and abuse anybody and any ideology to fuel that ambition. His driving power was an over whelming lust for power, not visions of a Greater Serbia ...<sup>129</sup>

Milošević used ethno-religious mythology, especially the Kosovo battle, in order to gain popularity among the bitter Serb population. After taking over the Communist party in 1987, he became president of Serbia. Milošević gained power over the political realm, as well as over the media realm. That opened the door for strong nationalistic propaganda. According to Bennett, Milošević's goal was to "exert maximum pressure on his opponents and extend his political control throughout the country."<sup>130</sup>

As a result of the strengthening of Serbia, Croatia felt the need to reassert itself. Franjo Tuđman, a former communist general, came to power by announcing the threats Croatia was facing from its neighbour Serbia. Once a Communist, he now became a radical nationalist. He created his reputation on stories of personal suffering and persecution under the Communist regime, even though he was dedicated Yugoslav patriot in his young years.<sup>131</sup> He became president of Croatia in 1990, when his party *Hrvatska Demokratska Stranka* (Croatian Democratic Party) won the election.

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid, 83.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid, 110.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid, 128.

Both Milošević and Tuđman worked towards creating a sense of fear of the power-seeking neighbours. Even though the majority of the population was well integrated with the neighbours, the war propaganda did its part and created fear, anxiety and hatred.<sup>132</sup>

In 1991, the first armed conflicts occurred in Croatia when the Croatian and Serbian police clashed over the control of Plitvice national park. On June 25<sup>th</sup>, 1991 both Croatia and Slovenia declared independence. Serbia wanted to claim the “Serbian parts of Croatia”, and declared that it had no problem with Croatian independence if they renounce the Serbian parts.<sup>133</sup> The war went on from 1991 to 1995. The war in Bosnia started in 1992, and ended in 1995. I will not attempt to politically evaluate and define the situation the three states found themselves in; that is not my field of expertise and it would require much more research in the field of politics. Since my focus is on the religious influence in those conflicts I will now turn to discuss that topic.

After the fall of Communism nationalist leaders took over the government of the republics and led the countries into war. The whole process of the nationalization of ethnic groups was welcomed and encouraged by the main religious groups, Mojzes claims.<sup>134</sup> There is agreement that, even though the war in Yugoslavia was not explicitly a religious war, religion was one of the most important factors.

Srđan Vrcan claims that the “policization of religion” and “religionization of politics” were the logical step after the desecularization of social life and politics in ex-Yugoslavia.<sup>135</sup> What Vrcan argues is that the religious factor in the war is visible in the fact of the merging of state and religion. Political parties were identified with religious

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid, 125.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid, 163.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid, 82.

<sup>135</sup> S. Vrcan, “Religious Factor in the War in Bosnia and Herzegovina”, in *Religion and War in Bosnia*, P. Mojzes, ed, Atlanta, Georgia: Scholar Press, 1998, 114-115.

affiliation, religion was being lifted to a status of state religion, political goals were regarded as religious goals and political issues with religious issues. The national mythology collected over the centuries fit perfectly into that situation. The role and the use of mythology in the Balkan countries was presented in the first chapter; creation of national mythology was a result of political aspirations. We have seen that myths were used through history according to the political situation the states found themselves in. In the situation at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, demonization of the other based on “historical evidence” was the necessary mythology. To refer to Mardešić again, religion has the largest capacity for memory. It was a guardian of ethnic memory all through history, and was therefore the greatest source of mythology when it was needed.

### ***Religious Wars?***

As I have previously stated, there is agreement that the role of religion in the wars was certainly significant, but that the war itself was not a religious war. Mojzes presents Catherine Albanese’s division of religion into ordinary and extraordinary; where ordinary religion is “traditionalist, unself-conscious, and conformist” and extraordinary religion is marked by personal experience, religious commitment and anti-traditionalism.<sup>136</sup> Mojzes looks at Yugoslavia from that point of view and states that even though the perception about religion in Yugoslavia is extraordinary, it is not how religion is actually experienced by the population. One has to be cautious about stating general conclusions in this case; however it appears that religion in the south Slavic states was never so much a question of belief, as it was the question of political orientation. That does not mean that the south Slavic people are not committed to their respective religions; the case is quite the contrary.

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<sup>136</sup> P. Mojzes, “The Camouflaged Role of Religion in the War in Bosnia and Herzegovina”, in *Religion and the War in Bosnia*, P. Mojzes, ed, Atlanta, Georgia: Scholar Press, 1998, 76.



However, it is questionable whether the core values of the respective religions are recognized and lived out by the believers. Therefore, I would agree with Cohen who argues that theological differences were not the primary factor in the war.<sup>137</sup> That is also in accord with Südland's theory that the differences between the east and the west were never primarily theological differences, but rather political.

Religious groups acted as political parties. As, Mojzes also argues, it is difficult to define religion, therefore it is difficult to precisely present its role in the conflicts in Yugoslavia. Nevertheless, looking at the historical experience one can, with a great amount of certainty, conclude that the role of religion was firstly of social and political nature.

In a research report on the topic of the roles of religion in the war in Yugoslavia, there are short overviews of the role of each religion respectively in the wars. It states that the Serbian Orthodox Church, being extremely nationally oriented, was working towards creating a sense of belonging among the Serbs, and it did so by focusing on Serbian suffering at the hands of Croats, Muslims and Albanians. In the war, the use of religious symbols was vastly present; the most disturbing use of religious symbols was carving cross marks into the bodies of Muslims.<sup>138</sup> The situation in Croatia and the Roman Catholic Church was not very different. The Church was referring to the war as "the Golgotha of the Croatian nation". The Roman Catholic clergy showed "virtually unconditional support" to the new nationalist-oriented government. The Church even supported national political activity in Bosnia, which was forbidden by the state law. The use of religious symbols and

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<sup>137</sup> Cohen, "Tribal God's", 44.

<sup>138</sup> G. Shenk, *God With Us?: The Roles of Religion in Conflicts in the Former Yugoslavia*, Uppsala: Life and Peace Institute, 1993, 39-40.

blessing of the soldiers and weapons was also present.<sup>139</sup> Islam in Bosnia, although it was not practiced by the majority of the Bosnian Muslims, was an important mark of identity. Shenk states that if the Muslim population is a majority in a state, there is a sense of obligation to organize the state according to Islamic law. Fear among non-Muslims was enhanced by Alija Izetbegović's (president of Bosnia 1990-1996) *Islamic Declaration*, which was suggesting the creation of a greater Islamic federation.<sup>140</sup> Shenk concludes that even though the initial aspirations of Bosnian Muslims were not fuelled by religion, the war in Bosnia gradually took on the character of a jihad.<sup>141</sup> During the Communist regime, Bosnian Muslims were not so keen on creating a separate national identity. They thought of themselves as Muslims in the ethnic and/or religious sense. However, when Yugoslavia was starting to fall apart, Muslims recognized the need to distinguish themselves from Croats and Serbs. It was possible to do so by gathering around religion. Willingly or unwillingly, Muslims found themselves being identified along religious lines. A conclusion can be drawn, that in the case of Bosnia, religion primarily was not a strong factor in the national identity of Muslims, but it "artificially" became the defining factor of Bosnian Muslims.

Therefore, when talking about the role of religion in the wars in ex-Yugoslavia one must not jump to conclusions. It is not correct to simply define those wars as religious. Nevertheless, that does not mean that religion is excluded as a factor in the wars. As Mojzes says, religion was used as a camouflage for political aspirations.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid, 42-43.

<sup>140</sup> It is important to note that Alija Izetbegović was not a strongly nationalist leader. History shows that he was in favour of Yugoslavia, and only decided to declare independence when the pressures of neighbouring countries became unbearable. See Bennett, *Bloody Collapse*, 182-184.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid, 43-46.

<sup>142</sup> Mojzes, "The Camouflaged Role", 75.

## ***Summary***

The war started by the Serbian aggression on Croatia in April, 1991. The countries were at that point led by nationalist leaders; Slobodan Milošević in Serbia, Franjo Tuđman in Croatia and Alija Izetbegović in Bosnia. The Serb aggression began after Croatia declared independence. Milošević, being a radical nationalist, was leaning towards the idea of Greater Serbia. Tuđman and Izetbegović at first formed an alliance against the Serb aggression. Later in the war, when it came to the issue of Bosnian territory, Tuđman sided with Milošević with the intention of dividing Bosnian territory and claiming the parts for each of the two nation-states respectively. Demonization of the other was a common trait of all the nations. Political propaganda fanned hatred among the nations by presenting mythological images and stories using the country's media. The general situation was one of lying, distorting the truth, using history in one's own advantage, all in political purposes. Religious leaders were part of the propaganda. They repeatedly accused each other for supporting national and religious hatred. It was a never-ending circle of evil.

## The Christian Response to the Wars in the 1990's

After exhaustively presenting the historical and social role of religion in preserving and encouraging nationalist identity, and its political role in the 1990's wars in Yugoslavia, I will now attempt to present the role of Christianity, focusing on Christianity in Croatia. With this I am making a distinction between *religion* and *faith*. The reason for doing so is that there appears to be differences in the way sociology presented the religious role and the way it was perceived by religious communities themselves. Based on my research, religious journals, theologians and Catholic laity were in large part depicting a positive image of Catholicism in Croatia during the war. Based on the previous chapters, it would be easy to conclude that the Catholic Church in Croatia was obviously biased. However, despite the nationalist orientation of religious leaders of main religions, there have been moments of promoting Christian values and peace among the divided population. In this chapter I will present some of those moments.

When I refer to *Christianity*, I am referring to the Christian *faith*, not a religious denomination (Catholic, Orthodox, or any other). Going back to Catharine Albanese's theory<sup>143</sup>, although a vast majority of religious activity during the 1990's wars can be regarded as "ordinary religion", it would not be fair to overlook the moments of "extraordinary" religiosity that occurred in the midst of religious and national intolerance in ex-Yugoslavia. That "extraordinary religiosity", the kind that is non-conformist, anti-traditionalist, and based on personal experience of the Divine, is what I understand under the notion of *Christian faith* or *Christianity*.

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<sup>143</sup> As quoted in Mojzes, „The Camouflaged Role“, 76.

### ***“Positive Statements by Religious Leaders”<sup>144</sup>***

Despite all the negative attention the Churches have drawn to themselves during the war there have been cases when religious leaders stood up against evil and fought for the rights of the oppressed population. Cardinal Franjo Kuharić and patriarch Pavle met in 1991, at the beginning of the Serbo-Croat war, and called believers to pray for peace and reconciliation. In 1992, they issued a joint statement, which contained an appeal for peace and a call to all believers to pray for reconciliation. In 1992, representatives of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Croatian Catholic Church and the Muslim community met and issued the “Appeal for peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina”. The appeal was followed by humanitarian aid for all areas struck by war regardless of nationality and religion; and also with a call to close all prison camps, release the prisoners, and end ethnic cleansing.<sup>145</sup> Shenk also informs about anti-war statements and appeals for peace made by Catholics and Orthodox separately. He also states that the Serbian Orthodox bishops condemned the war and distanced themselves from national politics.

[T]he government did not ‘make possible equal rights for a democratic dialogue in society’, and failed ‘to sincerely accept national reconciliation, to heal the consequences of the civil and fratricidal war and create preconditions for the spiritual regeneration and healing of the people’.<sup>146</sup>

When looking at the history of the Serbian Orthodox Church, that statement seems to be rather extraordinary. Even though the Serbian Orthodox Church was part of the Serbian state almost from the very beginning, and even though the logical historical step would

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<sup>144</sup> This title is used by Gerald Shenk in his research on the role of religion in the conflicts in Yugoslavia.

<sup>145</sup> Shenk, *God With Us?*, 29-30.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid, 31.

have been to blindly support the state polity, the Church seems to have recognized its Christian role.

In 1992, the Catholic newspaper *Glas Koncila* published a statement by the Macedonian reis-ul-ulema Jakub Selimski. In the statement he condemns the nationalistic efforts of the chauvinist leaders who brought strife to the once united Bosnian people “in the interest of the nation”. He also refers to the use of religious symbolism by the nationalist armies, which are trying to create a religious war.<sup>147</sup>

*Glas Koncila* published a vast number of similar articles and statements all through the 1990's wars. The first issue of *Teološki Riječki Časopis* (Theological journal of Rijeka) in 1993 was devoted to the questions of war, peace and reconciliation. It is evident that the sociological perspective of the role of religion which was presented in the previous chapter is just part of the image. Without denying the objectivity of the sociological perspective on this issue, I have to mention that it appears that at times the positive role of the Church's endeavours is overlooked. Of course, there is no doubt, especially after studying the history of the Slavic nations, that religion was a decisive factor in shaping nationalistic politics. There is more than enough evidence to sustain that claim. As David Steele writes, “[t]he tendency of religion to deepen social cleavages, rather than unite the different ethnic peoples, in former Yugoslavia has a long history.”<sup>148</sup> However, it appears to me that a necessary question arises out of that history: was religion, namely Christianity, always simply a means to political ends? From a Christian perspective, I cannot help but wonder whether there was never any trace of true Christianity all throughout the history of Croatia and Serbia. Of course, that question is a bit stretched. A broader look at religious history of

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<sup>147</sup> “Govor reis-ul-uleme Jakuba Ef. Selimskog“, in *Glas Koncila*, December 6, 1992, 3-4.

<sup>148</sup> D.A. Steele, “Christianity in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo”, in *Faith-Based Diplomacy: Trumping Realpolitik*, D. Johnston, ed, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, 125.

the Slavic territory will give us examples of true Christian endeavours, whether Catholic, Orthodox or Protestant. Nevertheless, when examining all the sociological definitions of religion and its focus only on the social and political role, one has to wonder whether there is also a bias in that kind of presentation. Therefore, I am posing this “stretched” question with the purpose of pointing also to the spiritual element of religion, i.e. faith, which also had its role in the lives of believers during the recent wars.

### ***Cleansing of Memory and the Ecumenical Potential***

There has already been word about memory and its destructive use in the war-time period. Religion, as a preserver of ethno-national culture, was the keeper of memories. As we have seen in the previous chapters, it used historical memory as a foundation on which it created myths; myths that were later used in political purposes of demonizing the enemy and fanning the intolerance of the Slavic states. Memory has been in the essence of strife of the Slavic people throughout centuries. The notion of “cleansing of memory” appears to be the logical step, if one seeks peace and reconciliation. Nevertheless, the fact that it needs to be done does not make it any less difficult.

Mardešić deals with the issue of the cleansing of memory. An important factor in this problem is *religion*. The reason I am stressing the word *religion* is because of what I have already previously stated, and that is the difference between lived faith and ordinary religion. In his article “Hrvatski Katolici u Vremenu Post-Komunizma” (Croatian Catholics in the Time of Post-Communism), Mardešić states that after the Communist regime there was enthusiasm about freedom, and the people were starting to gather around Catholicism because there was a need to fill the void, which was left after the

disintegration of Yugoslavia and the changes that followed. Religion was being perceived as a secular entity; simply a part of the national culture. The people were not experiencing faith (in most part), but were embracing Christianity as a cultural trait. Mardešić finds that in that “indifferent Christianity” was the reason for the abuse of religious values.<sup>149</sup> The cleansing of memory in general, and specifically in the context of Croatia, has to be an act of repentance and recognition of wrongdoing. In another article, Mardešić states that the wars in ex-Yugoslavia were a consequence of open wounds and memories that hurt.<sup>150</sup> It is not helpful that the memories were distorted and therefore do not recognize the pain inflicted to the other. There is need to cleanse those memories in order to be able to dialogue with the other and forgive. What Mardešić sees as a problem is precisely the fact of the “indifferent Christianity”. The act of repentance and seeking of forgiveness is an inner spiritual and moral act of a believer. It requires honesty and bravery. A person who has not had the experience of faith, and does not know the essence of Christian faith cannot forgive and ask for forgiveness. It is the mind of those who are only nominal Catholic Christians that justice needs to be served. Their memories are those memories created by the religion which promoted nationalism and hatred. The only justice they see is justice for themselves. Recently, a Croatian internet portal published a sermon held by the Croatian Cardinal Josip Bozanić, which was dealing with the current issue of the Croatian generals who were convicted for war-crimes in Hague. The conviction of the generals was seen as an insult to the Croatian nation. Croatia regards them as heroes. Cardinal Bozanić compared the suffering of the generals to Christ’s suffering on the cross; following that, he

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<sup>149</sup> Ž. Mardešić, “Hrvatski Katolici u Vremenu Post-Komunizma”, in *Crkva u Svijetu*, Vol. 29, No. 4, 1994, 373-374.

<sup>150</sup> Ž. Mardešić, “Povijesno Čišćenje Pamćenja”, in *Crkva u Svijetu*, Vol. 35, No. 1, 2000, 65.



stated that justice is the only thing that will guarantee peace in Croatia.<sup>151</sup> Justice seems to be a relative term, when the idea of it is based on distorted memories. Mardešić gives account of a statement given by the *Biskupska Konferencija* (Episcopal Conference), which stated that the individuals who were killing civilians because they were ordered to do so by their superiors are still responsible for their crimes.<sup>152</sup> Mardešić also points out that war is not justified in the Gospel, and therefore it is always in every situation contrary to what Christ ordered the believers to do. Asking for justice is the natural thing to do, one could even say biological. Forgiveness goes against nature. It is the result of deep faith. The Church should be faithful to Christ, not to the world, as Mardešić also points out.

The question of memory is a painful question in Croatia, as well as Serbia and Bosnia. The need for a renewal of the mind has been long due, however it seems unlikely it will happen anytime soon. The reason for that is that the ordinary religion is still vastly present in Croatian Catholicism, and it is not working in favour of forgiveness or cleansing of memory. Mardešić concludes by stating that even though it would be much easier for him to simply cling to nationalist mythology and disregard the blame of his own people, it would not be Christ-like.<sup>153</sup>

Cleansing of memory also lies in the roots of ecumenical endeavours. My definition of ecumenism in this case is simply sincere dialogue between religious groups. Since the history of the Slavic nations is filled with religious intolerance and hatred fuelled by religious leaders and organizations, the idea of dialogue between those groups is possible only if history is overcome. There has been much talk about the mythical

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<sup>151</sup> “Kardinal Božanić: Ne mogu nas slomiti ni svjetske sile ni domaći mešetari”, last accessed on August 8, 2011, <http://dalje.com/hr-hrvatska/kardinal-bozanic--ne-mogu-nas-slomiti-svjetske-sile-ni-domaci-mesetari/353106>

<sup>152</sup> As quoted in Mardešić, “Čišćenje Pamćenja”, 68.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid, 70.

memories and religion-based wrongdoing, so there is no need to stress again how difficult it is to leave history in the past, and work towards a better future. The example of Cardinal Bozanić's sermon and the Croatian reaction to the conviction of the generals shows that even today, 16 years after the war, the wounds are still as fresh as they were when the war was raging. How is it, then, possible to think about ecumenism in that context? Jure Zečević, Croatian Catholic ecumenical theologian, states in this article *Pomirenje i Ekumenizam* (Reconciliation and Ecumenism in the Context of the Crisis of Civilisation) an important truth, that ecumenism is not simply a helpless and passive victim of external factors that surround it.<sup>154</sup> He acknowledges the crimes committed by all groups during the war, and the religious hatred and intolerance of everyone towards everyone; however, he claims that if there is to be any ecumenical endeavours in the future, it needs to be recognized that ecumenism does not fall under worldly categories, and is above all worldly identities that seem to be a barrier for honest dialogue and reconciliation. The pope stated that amongst the sins which require penance and forgiveness are also any kinds of sins which cause damage to the unity of the Church of Christ.<sup>155</sup> Zečević begins the article by stating that there is connection between reconciliation, justice, memory, acknowledging guilt and repentance.<sup>156</sup> He states that the only way that a believer will achieve a holy, Christ-like life is reconciliation. As we have seen, Mardešić also finds that statement to be true.

If one understands Christianity as a way of life, rather than as religion, there is hope for change. Nevertheless, the wounds of the wars are still fresh and the memories are

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<sup>154</sup> J. Zečević, "Pomirenje i Ekumenizam u Kontekstu Krize Civilizacije", in *Bogoslovska Smotra*, Vol. 68, No. 2-3, 1997, 368.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid, 367.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid, 359.

depicting a painfully distorted image. Forgiveness and reconciliation seem to be notions very distant from the reality of things. However, the idea that something can transcend the barriers of nationalism and religious intolerance seems to be an idea worth looking into. As idealistic as it may sound, ecumenism could present a way towards reconciliation of nations.

In the past, the Church was part of the problem, and creating more problems. However, if it had such an immense role in the life of the Slavic population all through history, one cannot help but wonder whether it could use that position in society to be the solution of the problem in the future. We are witnesses of the increasing secularization of the world, and there is certainly a feeling of change in the mentality of the Slavic nations as well. I do not want to go into an in-depth presentation about what secularism is and is it happening or not. There is certainly proof of growing tension between traditionalism and “modernity” in Croatia, and I am sure that the rest of the Slavic nations are not left unaffected.

That leaves me with some questions. Does religion play the same role? Can religion be a factor in reconciling the nations if it is pushed to the margins by the increased secularization? Will the main religion use its historical position in society to promote true moral values and help the people in healing of wounds inflicted by the recent wars?

## **Conclusion**

The first chapter presented the historical development of Croatia, Serbia and Bosnia. Starting in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries with the settlement of Slavs, the first chapter points to the common origin of the south Slavic tribes. Through the centuries the states each headed in its own direction; a direction which will prove to be of crucial significance in the future. Serbia formed an alliance with the Byzantine Empire, thus turning its back to Rome and Catholicism. The political influence of Byzantine shaped Serbia into a state closely affiliated with religion. The Orthodox Church took its place in the Serbian state and remained all through history a keeper of Serbian identity and ethnic culture. The Serbian Orthodox Church was the bastion of Serb culture during the rule of the Ottoman Empire. Croatia, on the other hand, was more west-oriented, and therefore formed alliances with Rome and the Catholic Church. The Roman Catholic Church in Croatia was not as strong as the Orthodox Church was in Serbia, but the local Churches and clergy still preserved Croatian culture through the centuries. Bosnia, being an ethnically mixed territory, was never stable. It found its “firm ground” in the Ottoman Empire and Islam. A large majority of Slavs in Bosnia converted to Islam. The history shaped the countries and at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century led them into becoming nation-states. The process was not easy. It was visible through history that the natures of the states would not provide a peaceful outcome.

Religion was strongly present in the states all through history. With its culture- and memory-keeping character, religion was a perfect ally to the small states who were trying to establish themselves. The historically established relationship of religion and state in the south Slavic countries resulted in the affiliation of religion and nation. Through the 20<sup>th</sup> century, each religion respectively was using the memories it had preserved over the

centuries to strengthen nationalistic feelings among the population. The situation between the south Slavic states was never without tension. Therefore, historical memories were distorted into myths. National myths began to be used for the purpose of fanning hatred and building intolerance among religions and nations. During Communism, hatred was building, and ever more national myths were emerging. After the breaking apart of Yugoslavia, religious nationalism was the dominant ideology. The power-seeking political leaders used the religious communities to their advantages, since religion leaders had authority and therefore a powerful effect on the people. It escalated into a bloody war that lasted from 1991 to 1995. Religion was abused both by politicians and by the clergy to support their goals.

Nevertheless, the faith aspect of religion was also present. Although, the religious voices pleading for peace and reconciliation were present, they were in large part shadowed by the negativity which was immensely present in ex-Yugoslavia. The long history of tensions between religions, ethnicities and nations, the mythical memories that were being propagated, and the cruel nationalism were, and still are much stronger, than anything positive. However, there is hope that the situation can be better. By cleansing ones memories, seeing history in a new way and accepting responsibility, there is a possibility for a step forward. The Christian Churches, which are called to be the light and the salt to the World, have a real possibility of making a difference. Even though the world is changing, and the role of religion is not as strong as it was once, it is still the responsibility of the Christian Churches to fulfil their true purpose.

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