

RELIGION AS HALLMARK OF
NATIONHOOD

Popovi pa topovi.

“First came priests, then guns.”

Headline in the Montenegrin weekly *Monitor*, alluding to the genesis of the Yugoslav conflict of the 1990s

From 1991 to 1995, for a second time in six decades, the Yugoslav peoples were drawn into a bloody fratricidal war fought in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Wars would continue in 1998 between Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo and between Albanians and Macedonians in 2001 in Macedonia. While other eastern and central European nations, liberated from Soviet hegemony, were starting a new happier era, the golden age for the Yugoslav peoples came to an end. The 1991–95 war came as a result of ethnic nationalistic revolutions aimed at destroying the multiethnic federation founded by the communists and establishing ethnically homogenous states in its stead. In 1995 at an international conference in Paris, the Croatian sociologist Stipe Šuvar presented the following data about casualties and war damage: at least 150,000 people had died, and the relatively largest number of the killed were Bosnian Muslims, followed by ethnic Serbs and Croats; 250,000 were injured; two and a half million people were expelled from their homes; at least half a million mostly highly educated people moved out of the territory of the former Yugoslavia to western countries; the number of Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina had been brought down from the prewar 1.3 million to 700,000, and Croats from 750,000 to 400,000; the number of employed in the whole territory of former Yugoslavia has been reduced from 6.7 million in the late 1980s to 3 million in the mid-1990s, of which 900,000 belonged to armies and police forces engaged in some forms of combat.¹ According to the following data about the war

in Bosnia-Herzegovina presented in December 2001 by the Belgrade-based journal *Republika* (no. 274–275), in this war alone, from 1992 to 1995, 236,500 persons lost their lives: 164,000 Bosnian Muslims (126,000 civilians and 38,000 members of the Bosnian Armed forces), 31,000 Croats (17,000 civilians and 14,000 members of various Croatian military forces engaged in the Bosnian war), some 27,500 Serbs (6,500 civilians and 21,000 soldiers), and 14,000 members of other nationalities (9,000 civilians and 5,000 in uniform). Also during this war, the number of wounded and injured was estimated at 225,000. As noted earlier, the war damage included thousands of intentionally destroyed places of worship. Thus, 1,024 mosques and other Muslim religious sites—almost all Muslim historic and cultural landmarks located in the areas occupied by Serbs and Croats—were destroyed. In addition, 182 Catholic churches were destroyed, mostly by Serbs, while Muslims and Croats are responsible for the destruction of 28 Serb Orthodox churches and monasteries.

International observers singled out massive war crimes, such as confining people to concentration camps, massive executions without trial, mass expulsion of civilian population and creation of ethnically homogenous territories, mass rapes of women, and 1,600 children under the age of 15 killed by snipers and artillery shells during the siege of Sarajevo alone. The United Nations established a new international institution, the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), in the Hague. The tribunal indicted hundreds of individuals who took part in genocidal massacres and war crimes. Drawing on the Balkan case, comparative genocide studies inaugurated the concept of “ethnic cleansing” as a form of genocide.²

The Balkan wars of the 1990s were fought among several united ethnic nationalistic fronts each seeking statehood and nationhood and each contesting borders, myths, and identities of rival groups. This time there was no “pan-Yugoslav front” and no communists with their antinationalistic program and multiethnic armies. Almost all of the members of the League of Communists of Serbia turned into radical Serb ethnic nationalists, most of whom become members of Milošević’s “Socialist Party of Serbia” (a national-socialist or neofascist party that, in contrast to the similar Croatian HDZ, has not directly allied with the national church). A large number of members of the League of Communists of Croatia also transferred loyalty to ethnic nationalist parties, mostly to Tudjman’s HDZ.³

The three largest religious organizations, as impartial foreign and domestic analysts have agreed, were among the principal engineers of the crisis and conflict.⁴ Western analysts noticed religious insignia on the battlefield, prayers before the combat and during battles, religious salutes, clergy in uniforms and under arms; elite combat units labeled “the Muslim Army” or “Orthodox Army” accompanied by clergy; massive destruction of places of worship; forms of torture such as carving religious insignia into human flesh; and so on. Foreign “holy warriors” came to engage in a global “civilization clash” on the Bosnian battlefield.⁵ The Serbian Orthodox Church is

held the most directly responsible for the advocacy of ethnic cleansing, but radical faction tendencies were found in Croatian Catholicism and in the Islamic Community as well.

The Serbs did not deny that they struck first in Kosovo, in Croatia, and in Bosnia-Herzegovina, but, as a Serb nationalist leader explained in an interview, "in contrast to 1941, this time we were prepared to defend ourselves from genocide . . . had Serbs not armed themselves and attacked first, they would have been eradicated."⁶ A group of Serbian Orthodox Church leaders and Serb intellectuals defined the war as a spontaneous civil war in which the Serbs, by striking first, were only trying to avoid the genocide that happened to them in 1941.⁷ A "Museum of Victims of Genocide" was opened in Belgrade in 1992. The museum sought contacts with Jewish organizations and Holocaust museums in Israel and other countries, presenting the Serbs as the principal victims of both ethnic wars that had befallen Yugoslavia within six decades.⁸ The museum and the Milošević regime organized international conferences on the genocide against the Serb people.⁹ Milošević managed to obtain support from the Federation of Jewish Communities of Yugoslavia.¹⁰ Only a few Serbs of Jewish descent (notably the author Filip David) spoke out against the Milošević regime and Serbian nationalism. A political scientist from Belgrade, Dragan Simić, echoing the "Serbo-Jewish analogy," said:

I think that we Serbs must unite in the desire to preserve Kosovo forever. We must be like the Jews. The Jews and Israel should be our role models and we must emulate their perseverance and their long-term plan. For two thousand years, the Jews have greeted one another with "I'll see you next year in Jerusalem!" And they eventually returned to Jerusalem and made it the capital of the Jewish state. Why can't we Serbs introduce in our everyday communication the slogan "I'll see you next year in Peć, Prizren, Priština, and Knin"?¹¹

However, the Belgrade psychiatrist and prominent Orthodox Church layman, Vladeta Jerotić emphasized the impact of the memory of World War II and the Serb lust for revenge. He wrote:

We were unprepared to present the facts about what happened in 1941 before Europe (and Europe was not very enthusiastic to listen about the dark and bloody Balkan past). In consequence, we set out to publish intensely about the crimes against the Serbian people, to reveal the facts about those crimes. This search for truth was accompanied with angry, bitter, resentful comments. Thus we incited bitterness, anger, and hatred among the Serbs against Croats and Muslims. The current war had been manufactured over several years through these specific efforts.¹²

Yet not only the Serbs, but also the Croats and Bosnian Muslims espoused the martyr-nation concept. A scholarly symposium held under the aegis of

the Catholic Church in Croatia designated Serbs and Serbian clergy as instigators of the war and termed it a genocide against the Croat people.¹³ The Croatian daily *Slobodna Dalmacija*, citing an article from the Austrian press that, drawing from Daniel Goldhagen's study about ordinary Germans as Hitler's accomplices in the execution of the Holocaust, referred to the Serbs as "Slobodan Milošević's willing executioners."¹⁴ The new Croatian historiography portrayed Serbia as warlike nation whose leaders forged a secret plan to commit genocide against the neighboring peoples as early as the 1840s.¹⁵ In 1990 the Tudjman regime founded the "Croatian Holocaust Information Center." New historical studies appeared in Croatia arguing that the Serbs started the genocide against the Croat people in May 1945 (the "Bleiburg Massacre") under Communism continued it through the secret police (UDBA), and tried to conclude with the 1991–95 war incited from Belgrade.¹⁶

Religion and Nationalism in the Successor States

In all successor states of the former Yugoslavia except perhaps in Slovenia, religion became the hallmark of nationhood. To be sure, new languages were introduced in lieu of Serbo-Croatian and sanctioned by constitutions (the Croatian, Bosnian, and Serbian languages were inaugurated between 1990–92 and a new Montenegrin language emerged in linguistic and political debates in the second half of the 1990s). Yet a primacy of religious identities could be observed. In addition, religious organizations became co-rulers with the new regimes in all the successor states except Milošević's Yugoslavia.

Islam and Muslim Nationalism in Bosnia-Herzegovina

Slavic Muslims and their Islamic Community were primary targets of genocide carried out against them by the Serbs while also being endangered by, post-1990, the increasingly unfriendly Croats. The prewar turmoil, war, and genocide, however, facilitated a historically unprecedented politicization and "nationalization" of Islam. The Muslim nationalist party SDA utilized Islam as the principal instrument for the making of the Muslim nation. Alija Izetbegović became convinced that nothing else but the creation of an Islamic state (his secret agenda in the Islamic Declaration of 1970) could secure survival for Europe's only native Muslim community. Muslim countries rushed to help their coreligionists in Europe. During the 1992–95 war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the heartland of the ex-communist federation became another Mecca. As Samuel P. Huntington observed in his *Clash of Civiliza-*

tions (1993), the plight of the “blue-eyed Muslims” of the Balkans mobilized the whole Muslim world in an effort to provide military, economic, and political assistance to their coreligionists. According to a Croatian newspaper, in 1995 more than 190 various Islamic organizations (including branches of the militant Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and Taliban) operated in Bosnia and Herzegovina.¹⁷ In spite of an extremely difficult situation on the battlefields, Alija Izetbegović and his Party of Democratic Action exploited such favorable international circumstances to launch an Islamic revolution aimed at creating an Islamic republic in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The one-time pro-Yugoslav Islamic Community became one of the principal mobilizational resources and the equivalent of the “national churches” in Serbia, Croatia, the Serb Republic, Montenegro, and Macedonia. On 28 April 1993 in besieged Sarajevo, Bosnian Muslim clergy, urged by Alija Izetbegović, held a “congress of renewal.” Mustafa Cerić, the former imam of the Zagreb mosque, was elected the head of the new organization adopting, the title *naibu-reis*. Cerić later became *reis-ul-ulema* of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The ousted pro-Yugoslav *reis*, Jakub Selimoski, blamed Izetbegović, the SDA, and the aspiring *Reis* Cerić for turning the Serbian aggression on Bosnia into a civil war and also accused Izetbegović of being partly responsible for the outbreak of the 1993 war between Bosniaks and Croats.¹⁸

In contrast to accounts according to which religious fundamentalism, was a driving force of Muslim militancy, a French analyst noticed that Izetbegović and his group were in fact ethnic nationalists (similar to Serbs and Croats).¹⁹ Religion boomed, but so did a “new” history, without which a nation cannot exist. School textbooks glorified the Ottoman era. The Bosniaks have become a martyr-nation, victim of a genocide perpetrated against Muslims by the two neighboring Christian nations. Emulating the Serbian Church’s prewar activities, the Islamic Community carried out massive commemorations and reburials of victims of the 1992–95 war. The new regime encouraged homogenization of Muslims and separation from the neighboring groups. In counties with a Muslim majority, as well as in the offices of the Muslim-dominated Federation, everyone was required to use the traditional Muslim salute, “Selaam aleikum.” The *reis-ul-ulema*, Mustafa Cerić, argued that interfaith marriages were blasphemous acts.²⁰ During the Christmas holidays of 1998, *Reis* Cerić complained about what he saw as excessively Christian content on state television.²¹ The Bosniak nationalist poet Djemaludin Latić, speaking in the capacity of official ideologue of Izetbegović’s Party of Democratic Action, was widely quoted in the press as saying that “a Muslim from Malaysia is closer to him than a Catholic or Orthodox Slav from Sarajevo.”²² The imam-preacher Nežim Halilović, who was the commander of a Muslim combat brigade during the 1992–95 war, earned postwar fame with his zealous sermons in the Sarajevo “King Fahd” Mosque. Halilović urged faithful Muslims to reject the “alien and hostile influence of the West” and demonstrate solidarity with the holy struggle of Muslim brethren in Chechnya and elsewhere.²³

New mosques mushroomed in areas under Muslim control. The massive rebuilding was funded by Islamic countries. According to a Sarajevo journal, Saudi Arabia financed the rebuilding of 72 mosques and other religious facilities; Kuwait donated money for a hundred new mosques and religious facilities; Indonesia paid for the construction of the currently largest mosque in Bosnia; Malaysia helped the renovation of 40 mosques; and so forth.²⁴ According to the same source, in the Sarajevo county of Novi Grad alone, three new mosques were under construction in 1997, with 27 other religious facilities to be built soon; in the town of Bugojno, a new Islamic center will cost 15 million US dollars; one of the newly built mosques, as local believers had proposed, was to have a 250-foot-high minaret, thus aspiring to become one of the largest mosques in the world and, as a Muslim leader pointed out, higher than the Saint Sava Serb-Orthodox Cathedral at Belgrade.²⁵ In September 2000, a Croatian daily announced that a new Islamic center with the second largest mosque in Europe was opened in Sarajevo by an official from Saudi Arabia and that that country alone had financed, since 1995, 157 new Islamic centers, mosques, and other buildings of the Islamic Community in Bosnia-Herzegovina.²⁶ The archbishop of Sarajevo, Vinko Cardinal Puljić, calling Europe's attention to what he called the "Islamization" of Bosnia-Herzegovina, presented similar data (49 new mosques in Sarajevo and 156 elsewhere in Bosnia-Herzegovina) in his October 2000 interview with the Italian Catholic weekly *Famiglia Christiana*, but the Bosnian Muslim press replied that the cardinal was exaggerating about the new mosques while himself launching construction of a new cathedral in Sarajevo.²⁷

New mosques sponsored by Arab states were designed as "Islamic centers" with schools, cultural centers, and restaurants. A number of segregated schools for men and women (boys/girls) were opened, and various Muslim cultural and political organizations affiliated with Islamic centers were founded in Sarajevo, Zenica, Tuzla, and other Muslim-dominated cities and towns. The so-called Active Islamic Youth (*Aktivna islamska omladina*), inspired by militant Arab revolutionary Islam, became the most conspicuous among these organizations. This organization's leaders carried out bitter polemics with liberal Sarajevo press and secular youth press such as *Dani*, but a large number of young Muslims joined this organization and adopted its ideology and program.

The Bosniak-Muslim liberal politician Muhamed Filipović admitted in an interview that the incumbent chairman of the Bosnian presidency, Alija Izetbegović, backed by the SDA party and the ulema, was driving Bosnia-Herzegovina toward partition and the foundation of a small, homogenous Islamic state.²⁸ To be sure, many moderate and nonnationalist Muslims in Sarajevo, Tuzla, and other large cities did not support the movement for an Islamic state in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Not even the alliance between the SDA and the Islamic Community held for very long. Tension between the clerical and secular Muslim elites arose as religious leaders demanded restitution of IZ property confiscated by the state under communism. According

to these demands, the Islamic Community should be given the property it owned under Ottoman rule and prior to the 1878 Austrian occupation of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Roughly, this would include over one-fourth of all arable land plus buildings, estates, and other forms of property.

In 1999 and 2000 when the ailing Izetbegović retired from politics, the attempted Islamic revolution in Bosnia and Herzegovina lost momentum. The influential Muslim leader Haris Silajdžić opted for a European-oriented secular and moderate “Party for Bosnia and Herzegovina.” The party viewed future government in Bosnia-Herzegovina as a coalition of moderate secular Muslims, former communists, and other supporters of Bosnia’s independence and secular democracy. A large number of urban Muslims espoused the Silajdžić’s Europeanism and even saw Bosnia-Herzegovina as a “region” of Europe rather than the strong nation-state that SDA wanted to establish. The elections of November 2000 mirrored the following situation: Silajdžić’s coalition did not dominate but still changed the erstwhile stalemate, in which three mutually hateful ethnic parties maneuvered waiting for the opportunity to dismember the country. Silajdžić also saved the face of Islam and distinguished his faith from that of the discredited nationalistic Christian neighbors. Although Islamic radicalism and Muslim nationalism have not been completely defeated, a large portion of the Bosnian Muslim population have chosen democracy, secularism, and new Europe, in spite of the lack of help they experienced during the war.

*The Madonna of Medjugorje and
Croatian Nationalism in
Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia*

In the second decade of its life, the longest sequence of Marian apparitions in religious history, the Medjugorje “miracle,” had followed the same pattern of “fall,” erosion, and disenchantment that manifested in other concurrent religious and quasi-religious phenomena such as nationalism, ethnoclericalism, and communism. While local and international pilgrims continued their blind worship of what they viewed as the “Queen of Peace” of Medjugorje during the Bosnian War, Croatian nationalists in Herzegovina, assisted by the Tudjman regime in Zagreb, founded a secessionist-minded Croatian state-regime under the name “The Croatian Community of Herceg-Bosna.” The Republic of Croatia provided regular financing of the administration of the Croatian enclave in western Herzegovina.²⁹ The capital city, Mostar, became known as “the city of the bridges”—with remnants of its ancient Ottoman bridge over the Neretva river destroyed by artillery shells of the Croat Army in 1993—cleansed of Muslims and Serbs, as were many other towns and villages in the area. Medjugorje became a “sacred capital” of this new Balkan state. The local Franciscans strengthened ties with the separatist authorities of the Herceg-Bosna and with the Tudjman regime,

thereby insulating themselves even further from the authority of the local bishop. According to a Croatian opposition weekly, the Franciscans from Medjugorje and the nearby Široki Brijeg monastery amassed wealth through the ownership of the Bank of Herzegovina and other forms of Mafia-style businesses that boomed in the broader region during the 1990s.³⁰ In the midst of the bloody war, the Herzegovina Franciscans, assisted by Croatia's defense minister, Gojko Šušak, built in Croatia's capital, Zagreb, a new mammoth church and pastoral center worth 12 million German marks.³¹ A Sarajevo antinationalist newspaper described Medjugorje simply as a center of massive fraud and crime.³² Reporters for the Split daily *Slobodna Dalmacija* investigated organized prostitution in Croatia, in which, according to the newspaper's findings, almost all pimps and prostitutes came from western Herzegovina.³³ At the same time, according to a "who rules in Croatia" analysis in the opposition weekly *Feral Tribune*, thousands of natives of western Herzegovina moved to neighboring Croatia and became members of the new ruling elite: cabinet members, leaders in military and security apparatus, business and media tycoons.³⁴ The four probably most infamous figures in postcommunist Croatian politics, the defense minister Gojko Šušak, the business tycoon Miroslav Kutle, President Tudjman's senior adviser and HDZ vice-president Ivić Pašalić, and the film director Jakov Sedlar, who directed the movie on the Medjugorje miracle, *Gospa* (1995), and the neo-Nazi film *Četverored* (1999), were all natives of west Herzegovina linked with the Franciscans. An Italian political analyst of Balkan affairs designated Medjugorje a fulcrum of the new Croat nationalism and wrote that the Medjugorje cult was under the control of the neo-Ustašas.³⁵

The official Church struggled to tame the Balkan friars while trying not to harm Medjugorje's religious, political, and financial benefits. As early as 1994, Cardinal Kuharić attacked the politics of the west Herzegovinian HDZ party concerning the Bosnian War. Vatican inspectors were constantly busy dealing with the issue of the administration of parishes and mediating between the bishop and the friars. In February 1999, the bishop of Mostar, Ratko Perić, backed by the Vatican and with the personal involvement of the superior general of the Order of the Friars Minor, made one among numerous attempts to implement the papal decree *Romanis pontificibus*, which commands the monks to withdraw to monasteries and leave the disputed parishes to secular clergy.

The political, military, and "Mafia" background of local affairs, however, did not harm the Madonna's cult. According to a *Newsweek* article published in January 2000, the seer of 1981, Ivan Dragičević, who lives in Boston with his wife, Laureen Murphy (a former Miss Massachusetts), attracted thousands of American Catholics to his daily encounters with Mary.³⁶ On the occasion of the nineteenth anniversary of the Medjugorje miracle, Dragičević said to the press that the Madonna of Medjugorje appeared in 1981 in Bosnia-Herzegovina to warn the people of the imminent war and that the contemporary world is experiencing a "spiritual revolution."³⁷ The Med-

jugorje cult burgeoned in many countries, being the most popular in the United States, in spite of several well-documented critical books published there.³⁸ Pilgrims were coming to the land of genocide from Italy, Poland, Korea, France, the United States, Canada, the Baltic states, Ireland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Albania, and elsewhere.

In June 2001, the celebration of the twentieth anniversary of the first apparitions brought together at Medjugorje more than 200,000 pilgrims. This event may be also designated the first straightforward clerical manifesto on the political, ethnonationalistic background of the Medjugorje apparitions. At the mass, held near the apparition site on 24 June 2001, the local Franciscan provincial Tomislav Pervan said that without the miracle at Medjugorje there would not have been the Croatian independent state existing today, and that it was the Madonna of Medjugorje who put Croatia on the map of world nation-states.³⁹

Religion and Nationalism in Other Successor States

Close ties between church and state were established in the so-called Serb Republic (RS), a territory “cleansed” of Muslims and Croats during the war. The constitution of the Serb Republic granted to the Serbian Orthodox Church a “special status.” Orthodox Christianity became the *de facto* state religion (“*de facto*” means a real religious monopoly as in other successor states, but without being put in writing lest the western providers of financial aid object to it due to their liberalism). The RS government and foreign-aid givers funded renovation of more than 100 Serb churches damaged in the 1992–95 war. Serbian churches in Sarajevo and Mostar were rebuilt thanks to financial assistance from Greece and Germany. Meanwhile, Muslims and Croats in the Serb Republic were stopped from rebuilding their shrines by Serb police and angry crowds incited by clergy (in some enclaves, Croats applied similar tactics against Serbs and Muslims). According to an insider in RS ruling circles, “amidst the reign of crime and robbery, everyone celebrates the *slava* [traditional Serbian feast of baptism or family patron-saint] and pays lip service to the Orthodox Church,”⁴⁰ According to a U.S. human rights organization, the RS continued to be governed by internationally wanted war crimes suspects.⁴¹ No Serb cleric or bishop ever condemned any Serb criminal, not even those tried and sentenced at the Hague War Crimes Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. The internationally wanted war crimes suspect and former president of the Bosnian-Serb Republic, Radovan Karadžić, was seen in the company of Church leaders. In 1996 and 1997, the patriarch of Serbia, Pavle, was among several dozen nationalistic intellectuals who signed declarations demanding that Karadžić and another war crimes suspect, General Ratko Mladić, be pardoned by the International War Crimes Tribunal in the Hague.⁴² The Greece-based Hilandar monastery

offered Karadžić monastic life as protection from the prosecution. Serbian Church leaders such as Metropolitan Amfilohije, praised Karadžić's defiance of the Dayton Peace Accord. The Orthodox Churches of Serbia, Greece, and Russia honored Karadžić with high church decorations for the defense of the Orthodox faith. According to a British newspaper; Karadžić was made a candidate for sainthood in the Serbian Orthodox Church.⁴³ Serb prelates, including the patriarch, also frequently met with the paramilitary leader and Belgrade mafia boss Željko Ražnatović Arkan. Arkan made generous donations to the Church, especially for the rebuilding of churches in Kosovo and Metohija. Arkan is also remembered for his wartime statements that the patriarch of Serbia was his supreme commander.

In the province of Kosovo, between 1989 and 1998, the Serbian Church, taking advantage of Milošević's police rule, was rebuilding churches and renovating ancient monasteries. New cathedrals came under construction in Priština and Djakovica, while monasteries and ancient shrines were being renovated. The Church, however, remained in a less favorable situation in Serbia proper. The Church could not recover property confiscated by the communists. Milošević annoyed Church leaders by retaining many symbols and memorials of the communist era and ignoring Church events. Many churchmen, according to a Belgrade analysis of Church affairs, became disappointed with the Serbian nationalist revolution, while zealots increasingly spoke out against Milošević.⁴⁴

In the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the Macedonian Orthodox Church became the main pillar of the tiny, barely viable nation. The national church, with shrines it controlled, and the new cathedral at Skopje helped resolved the difficult question: "Who are the Macedonians" (Greeks, Slavs or Albanians)? by providing a simple answer: the Macedonians (by nationality) are members of the Macedonian Orthodox Church. In the meantime, the Serbian patriarchate continued its struggle against the Macedonian clergy and Macedonian state. Several Serb bishops and prelates were evicted from the border zone by the Macedonian police upon violation of the Macedonian law that prohibited Serb clergy from wearing clerical attire in the republic's territory. The Belgrade patriarchate continued to complain that the Skopje government had denied the Serb clergy access to the shrines and tombs of Serbian kings and military cemeteries from the Balkan War of 1912 and the Salonica Front of 1918.⁴⁵ In October 1998, the Orthodox Church of Greece unsuccessfully attempted to mediate between Skopje and Belgrade. In 1998 the Macedonian Orthodox Church contributed to the electoral victory of the radical Slavic Macedonian nationalistic party VMRO-DPMNE. The new premier, ethnic nationalist Ljupčo Georgijevski, promised to the national Church of Macedonia status of a state religion and promptly allocated to the Church lands in the Ohrid region. Finally, in 2001, as Albanians took up arms and, emulating their cousins in Kosovo, rebelled against the Skopje government, the Macedonian Orthodox Church got a chance to demonstrate militant patriotism similar to that of the Serbian

Church. As the fighting went on, the head of the Macedonian Orthodox Church, Metropolitan Stefan, called for a holy war against the Albanian “terrorists who are stealing our territory.”⁴⁶

In Montenegro, two parallel rival ecclesiastical structures coexisted. The Serb metropolitan, Amfilohije, controlled the metropolitanate of Montenegro-Primorje, with 160 clerics, nuns, and monks who served more than 90 percent of all parishes and monasteries in the country. The schismatic self-declared Montenegrin Autocephalous Church (MAC), under the unrecognized Metropolitan bishop Miras Dedać, established a headquarters at the old national capital of Cetinje. There adherents of the Serbian Church and the Church of Montenegro challenged each other on occasions of church festivals and holidays in a ritual and symbolic fashion. Occasionally the rivals used traditional means such as fist-fighting and pistol-shooting—thus far, only in the air. In the late 1990s, several plebiscites were held in parishes, and the schismatic church thus acquired 26 temples. Step by step, reminding one of the case of Macedonia, the schismatic Church of Montenegro was institutionalized. According to an advocate of Montenegrin ecclesiastical independence and statehood, “the autocephalous Montenegrin Orthodox Church will unify all Montenegrins around our native Montenegrin cults and saints in a single Montenegrin national state, instead of inciting hatred, turning us against our neighbors, and sending us to Heavenly Serbia.”⁴⁷ In an attack on the schismatic church of Montenegro, Metropolitan Amfilohije chided the Montenegrins for adopting what he called “tribal identity.”⁴⁸ Urged by Belgrade, the assembly of Orthodox churches held in Sofia, Bulgaria, from 30 September to 1 October 1998, released a special pronouncement by which the schismatic clergy of Montenegro was denied priesthood. After the 1998 elections, the new president of Montenegro, Milo Djukanović, inaugurated a proindependence course and supported the quest for autocephaly of the Montenegrin Church as a symbol of distinct Montenegrin national identity and statehood. The Holy Assembly of the Serbian Orthodox Church repeatedly condemned “the apostate Miraš Dedać and his schismatic godless group backed by the separatist forces in Montenegro.”⁴⁹ In December 2000 in Cetinje and around other shrines a new round of quarrels exploded between a sizable “army” of followers of the Metropolitan Amfilohije and Montenegrin separatists and culminated on Orthodox Christmas, 7 January 2001. In his sermons and interviews, Metropolitan Amfilohije repeatedly spoke about civil war as he had in 1990–91.

The Politics of Saint-Making

After the bloody 1991–95 wars in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, the rival churches of Serbia and Croatia continued the course in interfaith relations begun in the 1960s. This course could be briefly described as intransigence with a sporadic display of ecclesiastical diplomacy (see more on this later).

While the postcommunist Croatian nationalist regime established Catholicism as the de facto state religion and the Stepinac cult as the key patriotic symbol, the Serbian church and Serb nationalists established cults of the martyrdom of Serbs in the World War II and published books that portrayed Cardinal Stepinac as an instigation of genocide. In 1995, the Zagreb archdiocese issued a collection of allegedly authentic Stepinac wartime sermons (earlier kept in secret Church archives) as evidence of the prelate's humanitarian work and criticism of the Ustaša regime for its excessive cruelty.⁵⁰ In 1997 the renovated Cardinal Stepinac shrine was opened in the Zagreb cathedral. In addition, the Croatian government and the Church had a nine-foot-high bronze statue of what became the nation's new founding father erected in Stepinac's native village of Krašić. Local authorities began building monuments to Stepinac in every village. In the meantime, the Vatican concluded the beatification cause and announced that the head of the Roman Church would come to Croatia in October 1998 for the beatification of Alojzije Stepinac, the servant of God.

As the beatification in Croatia approached, foreign Jewish organizations (and some individual Croats of Jewish descent) vehemently protested the beautification of Alojzije Cardinal Stepinac. Early in 1998, the Simon Wiesenthal Center asked the Zagreb government for a delay of the Stepinac beatification. A Croatian human rights organization close to the regime replied angrily by saying that "the Jews cannot appropriate the exclusive right to pass historical judgments and to bear the aura of the only martyr-nation, because many other nations, such as notably, the Croatian nation, have suffered, too."⁵¹ The Catholic Church announced that Cardinal Stepinac, "according to solidly based data . . . saved several hundred Jews during the Second World War: either by direct intervention, or by secret prescripts to the clergymen, including mixed marriages, conversion to Catholicism, as did some Righteous in other European countries."⁵² On the basis of documents in possession of the Catholic Church, the Zagreb regime and the Church twice requested from Yad Vashem—The Holocaust Martyr's and heroes' Remembrance Authority at Jerusalem—that Cardinal Alojzije Stepinac be honored as one of the "Righteous among the Nations," but Yad Vashem declined. The Vatican did try, however, to pursue something that could be described as a politics of "balancing the saints." While the Stepinac beatification was scheduled for 2 October 1998 during the second papal visit to Croatia, similar event, aimed at appeasing the Jews, would occur in the Vatican on 11 October—the papal canonization of Edith Stein, a Carmelite nun of Jewish descent who perished in Auschwitz.

On 3 October 1998, the most massive congregation since the 1984 National Eucharistic Congress welcomed the pope at the national shrine of Marija Bistrica. On this occasion Pope John Paul II consecrated Alojzije Stepinac a blessed martyr of the Roman Catholic Church. According to the papal message from Marija Bistrica, the Croat church leader Cardinal

Stepinac became a martyr “to the atrocities of the communist system” and “humanist who opposed the three twentieth-century evils of Nazism, fascism, and communism.”⁵³ Thus, construction of the Stepinac myth was completed. It started in the 1950s during the critical moment in the Cold War when anticommunists in the Church and Western countries used the jailed Croatian prelate to energize the global anticommunist struggle. Under the Tudjman regime, the beatified churchman became some kind of a “co-founding father” of the new Croatia. In the words of the Archbishop of Zagreb, Josip Bozanić, “Cardinal Stepinac has become a compass that makes possible proper orientation for the Croatian people.”⁵⁴ As the “nation’s” myth, the new Stepinac myth highlights a link between the past and present of Croatia, sustaining the thesis about the Church as the nation’s original founder and guide through history. On the Balkan interethnic and multi-confessional front, the Stepinac myth operated as a check against Serbian nationalism while also whitewashing the Church’s World War II past. It rebuffs the Serb genocide charges and redeems the Croats from the sense of guilt that Serbian nationalists attempted to impose in order to curb Croatian nationalism. For the Holy See, the Stepinac myth was expected to help the cause of the ongoing beatification procedure of the wartime pope Pius XII, who has been continuously attacked, especially by Jewish circles, for his alleged silence about the Holocaust. Incidentally, in the same year the Vatican issued a kind of a public apology to the Jews, entitled “We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah.”⁵⁵ Finally, the 1998 beatification of Cardinal Stepinac was also part of the Catholic Church’s construction of a new mythical history of the twentieth century during which the Church, as its leaders asked the faithful to believe, purportedly opposed all the three “evils” of fascism, Nazism, and communism.

While the “Shoah” document and the Edith Stein canonization might have somewhat appeased the Jews, the Stepinac beatification certainly did not meet with approval from domestic and foreign Jewish circles, let alone the response of the embittered Serbian Orthodox Church, which coincided with the beatification. In anticipation of the beatification and papal visit, the Serbian Orthodox Church responded: in May 1998 the Holy Assembly of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church canonized eight new Serbian saints. Although many clerics and faithful in the Serbian Church expected that the answer to Stepinac’s beatification would be canonization of the anti-Catholic and anticommunist bishop Nikolaj Velimirović, whose relics were solemnly transferred to Serbia from the United States in 1991, church leaders chose a more telling response. In the regular spring session of the Belgrade patriarchate, the Holy Assembly of Bishops had announced the forthcoming canonization of these eight new saintly martyrs. Seven of the new saints had been executed between 1941 and 1945 by the Ustašas and one by the communists. The following church leaders, priests, and believers were to become “new martyrs” and members of the Assembly of Saints of the

Orthodox Church: the metropolitan of Zagreb, Dositej Vasić, who was imprisoned and beaten to death by Croat Ustašas (allegedly, as the *Pravoslavlje* writes and as was included in the official saintly biography, Catholic nuns took part in the torture); the metropolitan archbishop of Sarajevo, Petar Zimonjić, killed by the Ustašas at Jasenovac; the bishop of Banja Luka, Platon Jovanović, executed by the Ustašas near Banja Luka and thrown into a river; the bishop of Karlovac, Sava, killed by the Ustašas; the archpriest Branko Dobrosavljević, tortured and executed by the Ustašas; the archpriest Djordje Bogić, tortured and killed by the Ustašas; and the Serb peasant Vukašin, a parishioner from Klepci, Herzegovina, who, according to survivors' testimonies, died under torture while calmly telling his executioners: "Just keep on doing your business, son"; and the metropolitan of Montenegro, Joanikije Lipovac, executed by the communists in 1945 after his failed attempt to escape across the Austrian border to the West.⁵⁶ All except Joanikije Lipovac were victims of the Croat fascist Ustašas, while the metropolitan of Montenegro (Joanikije) was executed by the communists.⁵⁷

The announcement of the canonization of the new Serbian saints in May 1998 was an immediate response to the Stepinac canonization. An official and liturgical canonization ensued two years later. In the meantime the list of the new martyrs was expanded with the new name of Rafail, who during the World War II was the abbot at the Šišatovac monastery near the Serbo-Croatian border. The ninth martyr was also a victim of the Ustašas and died under torture in the prison camp of Slavenska Požega. The solemn canonization of the new Serbian saints took place during the central commemoration of the two thousand years of Christianity, on 21 May 2000, at the memorial Saint Sava's church in Belgrade. The new Serb saints were to consolidate one of the founding myths of the new Serbia—the Jasenovac myth. As the "second Serbian Golgotha," the Jasenovac myth combined the myth of the nation's origin, that is, the Kosovo myth, with the myth of the nation's rebirth in the 1990s. It consecrated the link between past and present and between heavenly and earthly Serbia. Finally, it boosts the Church's historic role as a leading national institution. The two new myths, the Stepinac myth and the Jasenovac myth, according to their clerical architects, were designed to become building blocks in the making of two new European nations: postcommunist Serbia and Croatia. The Serbo-Croat hostility of the 1930s and 1980s was thus reinforced, and the historic strife between Catholicism and Orthodoxy in southeastern Europe was continued in the twenty-first century. Things have settled in their proper place, as the Serbian patriarch had announced in his 1987 interview. The Partisan struggle during World War II and the communist era of Serbo-Croatian brotherhood and unity was meant to be some kind of a temporary disorder. The harmony was engineered by "godless" forces, so that the godly clerical forces had to correct it by manufacturing hatred and securing its endurance—in which they seem to have succeeded.

Religious Organizations and the International Peace Process

During the Balkan wars, leaders of the mainstream Yugoslav religious organizations maintained hostile relations and deepened the hatred but issued a number of appeals for peace. With increasing international involvement in the Balkan conflict, domestic clergy encountered a new challenge: foreign missionaries as peacemakers, also known as “religious statecraft.”⁵⁸ Willy-nilly, the archrivals had themselves to turn to peacemaking diplomacy.

After the outbreak of the Yugoslav war of 1991, numerous relief programs and conflict mitigation activities were initiated and carried out by foreign and domestic religious groups and individuals. Though it would be difficult to give credit to whole institutions for humanitarian and peace-building activities, because religious institutions and religious authorities carried out, to say the least, an ambiguous strategy that involved simultaneous backing of the nationalistic factions while playing the role of peace mediators before the international observers, a number of individual clerics and religious leaders have done an invaluable service for peace. The evangelical scholar from Osijek, Croatia, Peter Kuzmić, convened in spring 1991 at Osijek a “Peace and Justice” conference aimed at raising awareness in the West about the imminent war threat in the Balkans; during the war, Kuzmić conducted relief work through centers based in Boston, Massachusetts, and in Osijek. In 1994, the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Osijek inaugurated a course in “Christian Peace-Making” and held in September 1998 the Second International Conference for Theological Education in the Post-Communist World. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bosnian Franciscans of the province called “Silver Bosnia,” as opposed to their brethren in western Herzegovina, excelled in the peace effort in the 1990s. The Bosnian Franciscan leaders Petar Andjelović and Luka Markešić, with the friars Ivo Marković, Marko Oršolić, and others, fought on the humanitarian front while also agitating for a united Bosnia-Herzegovina. Provincial Andjelović took part in one of the first interreligious peace vigils held in besieged Sarajevo on 4 October 1993 and has continued to partake in peace efforts since. Fra Ivo Marković directed the conciliation project “Face to Face” sponsored by U.S. ecumenical foundations and American Presbyterian mediators. The project involved regular interreligious meetings, conversations among clergy of all Bosnian religious communities, and mutual visitations on the occasion of religious holidays. During the Easter holidays of 1998, Fra Ivo set up the first interfaith Catholic-Orthodox children’s chorus in the church of Saint Anthony in Sarajevo. In Croatia, the bishop of Šibenik, Srećko Badurina, the bishop of Djakovo, Marin Srakić, and a priest from Trnava, Luka Vincetić, labored to maintain dialogue with the Serbian Orthodox Church and ease tensions. In addition, Bishop Badurina was the chief initiator of the

"Epistle on the Occasion of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Ending of the Second World War in Europe," released by the Conference of Croatian bishops on 1 May 1995, in which the Croat bishops for the first time in history mentioned the persecution of the Serbian Orthodox Church by the Croat wartime state and called for reconciliation. Bishop Badurina was also an outspoken critic of crimes against Serb civilians committed by the Croatian military during the Croat victories against the breakaway Serb republic of Krajina in 1995. Furthermore, the chief imam of Croatia and Slovenia, Ševko Omerbašić, promoted Christian-Muslim understanding and organized relief work during the Bosnian war. The bishop of Banja, Luka Franjo Komarica, fought under extremely difficult conditions for survival of the local Catholic community (while also helping Muslims persecuted by Serbs) through a patient dialogue with Serb authorities and cooperation with the international community. In the Serbian Orthodox Church, the bishop of Srijem, Vasilije, took part in several ecumenical meetings and prayers for peace before, during, and after the war. In addition, a few individual Serb churchmen who took part in the peace process were veterans of the Partisan war and leaders of the Titoist clerical association, such as the archpriest Jovan Nikolić from Zagreb and Krstan Bjelajac from Sarajevo.

Foreign relief organizations, conflict resolution specialists, and ecumenical groups and other governmental and nongovernmental organizations involved in the otherwise booming political business of conflict resolution (accompanied with peace research and conflict analysis as advancing branches in international relations studies) provided mediation, financial aid, relief, and humanitarian and peace-building programs and organized numerous interfaith round tables and conferences.⁵⁹ According to one account, the religious peace-building operation in the Balkans expanded into the most massive such operation in the history of humanitarian work and peacemaking.⁶⁰ As I will show later, the impressive quantity but low quality of this "religious statecraft" (i.e., little if any real effect in eliminating the causes of the conflict) is one of its most remarkable characteristics.

The new "religious statecraft" and religious humanitarian work carried out by foreigners posed challenges for mainstream domestic denominations and required their response. Patriotic clergy and the church press, as well as secular nationalistic regimes, attacked foreign religious peace advocates (predominantly Protestants), asking for state protection against the "invasion of sects." The first Balkan Evangelical conference, held in September 1996 in Belgrade, complained about police harassment and a propaganda war against Western peace and relief workers in Serbia, Croatia, and Bosnia alike.⁶¹ Prominent prelates in Serbia and Croatia and Bosnian imams released studies on "sects" and guidebooks on how to deal with them. According to the Serbian Church's "anti sectarian" pamphlet, "religious sects of various names and 'doctrines' all lead toward destruction of integrity of the individual, while undermining homogeneity of the nation and stability of the state, making them prone to self-destruction and the abandonment

of the centuries-old spiritual, cultural, and civilizational heritage and identity.”⁶² In 1997, 280 monks and 40 priests of the Serbian Orthodox Church released an “Appeal against Ecumenism.” The appeal was published in all major church and secular newspapers and read on state television. This appeal argued that interfaith ecumenical dialogue was a weapon of Western missionaries’ proselytism and quoted the famous statement of Archimandrite Justin, from his 1974 antiecumenical study.

Gradually, most religious leaders came to collaborate with Western supervisors of the peace process. The archbishop of Sarajevo, Vinko Cardinal Puljić, the reis-ul-ulema Mustafa Cerić, the bishop of Kosovo, Artemije, and Western-educated monks from the Kosovo Visoki Dečani Abbey, and some others, understood the importance of lobbying, public relations, fund raising, and so forth. Even some earlier outspoken militants espoused the rhetoric of peace and human rights. For example, the Serb Orthodox bishop of Slavonia, Lukijan Pantelić, who in 1991 made the “eye for an eye, tooth, for tooth” statement, in June 1996 met with the Catholic bishop of Djakovo, Marin Srakić, at an interfaith peace meeting arranged by the Conference of Catholic Bishops of the United States and said: “We were drawn into a horrible war from which both churches emerged as losers. Someone used us and played games with us. We all need help now.”⁶³ In a similar vein, at an interfaith conference that took place on 16 March 1998 in Tuzla, the participants released a joint statement according to which “we feel remorse and regret the evil committed in this war by some members of our respective communities, although the perpetrators of the crimes did not act on behalf of the churches. . . . We pray for mutual forgiveness.”⁶⁴

The Catholic Church had undertaken relatively more conciliatory activities of all major religious institutions in the successor states. Pope John Paul II, during his 1997 visit to Sarajevo, appealed: “Forgive and beg for forgiveness.” The Catholic Church also attempted, without much success, to restart the interfaith dialogue that began in 1965 and was interrupted in 1990. As noted earlier, in 1995 the Croatian Catholic episcopate released a statement on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of V-E (Victory in Europe, i.e., the Allies’ triumph over the Axis) Day. In this epistle the episcopate said that “the wartime regime in the Independent State of Croatia established an ideology of racial and ethnic discrimination [and] committed crimes which cannot be justified as self-defense,” and that “many suffered during the war, [and] particularly gravely affected was the Serbian Orthodox Church.”⁶⁵ The Catholic Church in Croatia also assisted in the restoration of the religious life of Orthodox Serbs and the return of the Serb clergy in the Krajina region (abandoned by people and clergy in the aftermath of the Croatian “Storm” military offensive in the summer of 1995).

The archbishop of Sarajevo, Vinko Cardinal Puljić, became a media favorite, portrayed as a leading peacemaker. Thus Puljić was one of the founders of the American-funded “Interfaith Council of Bosnia-Herzegovina” established at Sarajevo in June 1997. The prelate toured the world and raised

significant funds for various conflict resolution and peace-building programs while also using this activity to advance the Croat Catholic perspective on the Balkan conflict and discredit enemies of the Church and Croatian nationalism. Cardinal Puljić insisted that religion and religious organizations had nothing to do with the making of the Yugoslav conflict. The archbishop portrayed the religious institutions as victims of communist oppression as well as manipulation by secular politicians (many of whom were ex-communists). In Puljić's words, religious organizations could not aggravate the crisis because before the war "[c]hurches had influence on a relatively small number of people who regularly attended worship services, church press had a small circulation, and churches had no access to radio and television."⁶⁶ Puljić's appointee as coordinator to the U.S.-funded Interfaith Council, Niko Ikić, said in an interview with Voice of America that the Interfaith Council had to focus on foreign relations in order to explain to the Western governments that the war in Bosnia was ignited by "atheists and others who manipulated and deceived the religious institutions and dragged them into conflict."⁶⁷ On one occasion Cardinal Puljić argued that only practicing believers and others who enjoyed Church leaders' confidence could take part in the peace process and receive financial aid.⁶⁸ Cardinal Puljić, his vicar Mato Zovkić, and Church leaders in Bosnia and Croatia found common ground with the reis-ul-ulema Mustafa Cerić and the Serb Orthodox archbishop of Bosnia, Nikolaj Mrdja, in attacking unanimously several notable domestic clerics who were peace advocates as alleged "Marxists, communists, and Titoists" demanding that the international community exclude them from the peace process.⁶⁹ Such discredited clerics were, among others, the Bosnian Franciscan Marko Oršolić and the Serb-Orthodox priest from Croatia, Jovan Nikolić. Yet Oršolić and Nikolić (who had been Partisan resistance fighter in World War II) were by no means Marxists or communists, although both were sympathetic to the united Yugoslav state and the brotherhood-and-unity idea of Tito. Like many other pro-brotherhood and unity clerics, the two contributed to the ecumenical dialogue of the 1960s and 1970s. During the wars of the 1990s, the two clerics excelled in the antiwar campaign, relief work, and peace-building (Father Nikolić was a member of the Helsinki Committee in Croatia). In short, it is obvious that Cardinal Puljić and the top religious leaders of all denominations sought a total control over the religious dimension of the peace effort in order to protect various "higher interests" other than mere assistance to victims of war and genocide.

In April 1998, Puljić jumped into a public polemic with the UN High Commissioner for Bosnia, Carlos Westendorp. In a statement to the U.S. press, Westendorp drew analogies between the role of the Church in the Spanish Civil War and in the recent Bosnian war. Westendorp argued that the churches took sides and bore a large degree of responsibility for the conflict and its consequences. He concluded that peace would come provided that the churches took the blame and withdrew from political and public

life while ethnic nationalist parties were abolished. Cardinal Puljić attacked Westendorp in a Croatian newspaper accusing him of underrating the legacies of communism and atheism and the influence of secular politicians, especially ex-communists.⁷⁰ The Bosnian-Croat author Ivan Lovrenović pointed out that at a round table held in Sarajevo in September 1999 and televised in prime time by the state television, all the religious leaders and members of the Western-funded Interfaith Council of Bosnia and Herzegovina reiterated the charges against secular forces while denying any clerical liability and saw no connection between religion, ethnic nationalism, and genocide in Yugoslav lands. The most outspoken in advancing such ideas was the representative of the Serbian Orthodox Church.⁷¹

In the meantime, the Serbian Church was also active on the peace-making and humanitarian front. During his first visit to Croatia after the war, in the spring of 1999, the patriarch of Serbia, Pavle, spoke about forgiveness and urged local Serbs to be loyal to the new Croatian regime.⁷² Patriarch Pavle also made several moves to improve relations with the Islamic Community. In June 1999, Patriarch Pavle invited and cordially welcomed a Muslim delegation to the Mileševo, monastery, the most sacred Serbian shrine in Bosnia. According to the Muslim newspaper *Ljiljan*, the Serb political leader Biljana Plavšić “kissed the hand of the mufti of Sandjak,” while the patriarch and the Serbian Church, according to the newspaper, “signaled that some kind of change might be in process in the Serbian Church.”⁷³

While improving its image via this new “interfaith cooperation,” staged for the eyes of Western peace-builders, the Serbian Church also improved its image by attacking Slobodan Milošević, who in the meantime had evolved into an archenemy of the international community. A Church assembly at Belgrade on 9–11 June 1998 denied the right to “any individual or the incumbent regime in Serbia which conducts of an unnational and non-democratic politics, to negotiate and sign treaties and contracts about the fate of Kosovo and Metohija.”⁷⁴ In May 1998, Patriarch Pavle received Harriet Hentges, the vice-president of the United States Institute of Peace. Thereupon Bishop Artemije visited Washington several times and spoke against Milošević.⁷⁵

Numerous projects aimed at promoting reconciliation either collapsed or produced ambiguous results. While religion posed as a general differences-sharpening but not unsurmountable obstacle, history proved “unmanageable.” Religious institutions failed to conduct a tolerant dialogue about their common past and find like views on any important issue. Here is one example. In 1995 foreign mediators tried to convince religious leaders in the successor states to abandon the myths and take a realistic look at the past in order to discover a minimum they could agree about. The principal mediator in this project, entitled “South Slavic Religious History,” was the Austrian bishops’ conference. Religious leaders and scholars from all major religious institutions from ex-Yugoslavia were invited to Vienna to discuss

controversies from church history. The Austrian church institution “Pro Oriente” established and funded a “Commission for South Slavic Church History” whose members were Croat Catholic, Serb-Orthodox, and Bosnian Muslim religious leaders and scholars. Cardinal Franz Koenig, the retired archbishop of Vienna, said at the commission’s first session that a new church history of South Slavs must be written *sine ira et studio* (without anger and prejudice) if the Yugoslav peoples and the new Europe wanted to have a future.⁷⁶ Yet, after the first meeting, the project was ignored by the leaders of the two major churches. As was pointed out by a U.S. conflict resolution agency, “the necessity of establishing the historical truth” will remain one of the principal tasks in the peace process in southeastern Europe.⁷⁷

Although “religious statecraft,” as an instrument of the management of worldwide conflicts, received much encouragement and recognition, and in spite of considerable Western investments in the religious dimension of the Balkan peace process, the religious peace-making in the former Yugoslavia seemed anything but successful. In some cases it only helped religious leaders who were candidates for prosecution by the Hague Tribunal as war crimes suspects to avoid it and become “peace-makers,” speaking as guests of honor in the United States and other countries where religion is part of established conservative politics. Many Western nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) continued their support of the discredited Balkan religious leaders, some of whom have been designated in the liberal press as war crimes suspects and candidates for the Hague Tribunal. For example, in January 2001, the Washington-based International Crisis Group released a report on the role of religion in the Kosovo conflict. The report extends the Western support for the ineffective albeit expensive “religious peacemaking” similar to the Interfaith Council in Bosnia and Herzegovina and says

contrary to common belief, religion has not been a direct cause of conflict in Kosovo and may offer a way to reconciling some of the bitter social and political divisions between Albanians and Serbs. Religious leaders of all faiths in Kosovo—Orthodox, Muslim and Catholic—are prepared to enter an interfaith dialogue, but more support from the United Nations Mission is needed to give these talks appropriate standing. This report argues that UNMIK should establish and fund a permanent Kosovo Interfaith Council, provide adequate financing for the repair and protection of all religious monuments, and ensure that education in Kosovo remains secular.⁷⁸

Those who are well informed about the history of interfaith relations and religious aspects of the Yugoslav conflict remained unimpressed with the new “religious statecraft.” One of the prominent ecumenical advocates in the former Yugoslavia and a Vatican-appointed mediator between Croat Catholic and Serb-Orthodox hierarchies, the Catholic archbishop of Bel-

grade, France Perko, voiced disappointment with the peace process. In his 1999 Christmas message he called for forgiveness and reconciliation among all ethnic communities in the Balkans. Yet he also told a Belgrade weekly in a Christmas interview that at present there is “no sincere wish for reconciliation on any of the sides.”⁷⁹ Perko echoed the same concern, skepticism, and fear he expressed in a 1990 interview with me.⁸⁰ At the Religious Peace Conference that took place on 27–28 November 1999 at Amman, Jordan, under the aegis of the New York-based World Conference on Religion and Peace, representatives of religious organizations from ten Balkan countries released another abstract appeal for peace but, according to a BBC report, “refused to accept direct responsibility for the decade of conflict in the Balkans, saying that religion and religious institutions had been manipulated by nationalist politicians.”⁸¹

Balkan religious leaders used interfaith institutions for pursuing their common interests, such as the restitution of church property and public pressure on all anticlerical forces. On 5 July 2000 in Sarajevo, Serb Orthodox bishops met with Croat Catholic church leaders to set up a joint committee for the celebration of two-thousandth anniversary of the birth of Jesus. After the meeting, which was advertised as ecumenical, the bishops said in a press release that they again demand from the authorities the restitution of church property confiscated by the communists 50 years ago and used the opportunity to strongly reject the charges that religious organizations bore any responsibility for wars and war crimes in former Yugoslavia and its successor states.⁸² In November 2000, “religious statecraft” was again used as a battering ram of clericalism. The Interfaith Council of Bosnia and Herzegovina refused to approve a proposal made by international secular peace-building initiatives that ecumenical courses in religious culture be introduced in all Bosnia’s public schools. Instead they insisted that catechism under control of religious authorities be taught in segregated classes. In a commentary, the Sarajevo author Ivan Lovrenović concluded that “[t]he 1992–1995 Bosnian war may have not been a religious war. But the next one will be for sure.”⁸³