

# The Potential of Inter-Religious Dialogue

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## 1. Introduction

The Dayton Agreement ended the war, but – despite its many positive achievements – has failed so far to provide a basis for a viable future. The activities of the international community have mainly focused on the material dimension of reconstruction such as rebuilding houses and infrastructure, strengthening economic potential and establishing links within the region. This approach is a sound one and is doing much to promote recovery from violent conflict, but it is insufficient in terms of conflict transformation and the elimination of the sources of war.

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The majority of analyses of the situation in Bosnia missed the point as they underestimated or neglected the anthropological and non-rational dimensions that influence human behaviour and contributed to the frictions and decline of the former Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia was a compromise in the global political architecture of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and therefore survived as a state for a certain period. This state was based on the official ideology and programme of a multiethnic community. But its inhabitants did not get deeply attached to this concept. The official programme defining a multiethnic society was very convincing from a global humanistic standpoint, but reviewing it from a historical perspective, one has to conclude that it came too early and did not match the social dynamics.

To understand the nature of the conflict in the Balkans and to formulate a coherent strategy to cope with the challenge of conflict transformation, a careful analysis of the historical and socio-cultural inheritance of the region is needed. This includes understanding the background of the identities of the different communities that represent the Balkans. Clearly, there has been a religious

dimension to the Balkan conflicts. National divisions correspond closely to differences in religious identities. Religion has played, if not a crucial, then at least one of the most important roles in the conflict in Bosnia.

A multidimensional approach is needed in order to address the fundamental challenge in Bosnia, namely the search for an adequate model for coexistence of the different communities. Inter-religious dialogue has to be part of this. Of course it is unlikely that building a viable state can be achieved by inter-religious dialogue, and it is absolutely essential that other vital tasks, such as reconstruction, the return of refugees, and the formation of civil and political institutions, are met simultaneously. But since religion has been and still is a key divider of identity in Bosnia (and the Balkans), inter-religious dialogue could at least contribute to creating common ground to connect people and achieve the multiethnic and multinational tolerance needed for social cohesion.

Inter-religious dialogue can be a useful tool to establish *tolerance*. But it is extremely important to define the essence and the scope of dialogue in a specific context and to determine whether inter-religious dialogue or other forms of social interaction are appropriate. Particular consideration must be given to ensuring that the tool (inter-religious dialogue) and the objective (tolerance) are adapted to the needs and reality of society in Bosnia.

This article investigates the potential of dialogue between religious communities in the region of the former Yugoslavia. It starts with a clarification of what inter-religious dialogue is about and which preconditions are needed for this to be successfully linked to elimination of the sources and alleviation of the consequences of war (section 2). The third section analyses the significance of religion and nation for the identities in the Balkans and how the relations between the different communities developed. The fourth section describes the type of inter-religious encounters and initiatives for rapprochement which have taken place in Bosnia-Herzegovina in the ten years since Dayton. Section 5 points out the need for a broader dialogue on the theological level. The final section concludes with lessons that can be learned from post-war Bosnia, open questions and challenges for the future, reflecting the long-term goal of reconciliation.

## 2. What is Inter-religious Dialogue?

### 2.1. Dialogue and Syncretism

Simply stated, inter-religious dialogue involves people meeting and getting to know their different religious traditions. Paul F. Knitter describes it as “the interaction of mutual presence ... speaking and listening ... and witnessing the commitments, the values, and the rituals of others” (Knitter 1996:14). The

guidelines for inter-religious dialogue from the Presbyterian Church follow this line and define dialogue as “witnessing to our deepest convictions and listening to those of our neighbours”.<sup>1</sup>

The most common form of inter-religious discussion is when two individuals, be they friends, neighbours, or acquaintances, discuss their religious beliefs in a casual setting. Calvin Shenk (1997:210) calls this “living dialogue”. This can be very valuable in promoting better understanding of the different religions that make up a pluralistic society. However, such discussions do not constitute formal inter-religious dialogue, as Jason Barker (1998) rightly states. John Taylor gives a very convincing definition of inter-religious dialogue when he writes: “Inter-religious dialogue is a sustained conversation between parties who are not saying the same thing and who recognize and respect contradictions and mutual exclusions between their various ways of thinking” (Taylor 1981). John Stott (1975:81) defines it in a similar way as a “conversation in which each party is serious in his approach both to the subject and the other person, and desires to listen and learn as well as to speak and instruct”. According to this understanding, inter-religious dialogue is a *formal process* in which authoritative members of at least two religious communities come together for an *extended and serious discussion of the beliefs and practices that separate the communities*.

The roots of the concept and practice of inter-religious dialogue can be found in the ecumenical (or interfaith) movement, composed primarily of participants from the Protestant and Roman Catholic Church. The goal of this movement has been to establish commonality within Christianity by identifying areas of agreement in doctrine and practice. This rapprochement in the ecumenical movement has been carried over into inter-religious dialogue. The desire for commonality among Christian groups has been extended into a desire to establish common ground between religions. The pursuit of common statements between different religions has frequently resulted in negotiations over doctrines and practice. Dialogue has thus become simply *another word for negotiation*. Religious distinctions have been compromised to attain unity. The name for this compromise is *syncretism*.

In ancient philosophy, syncretism refers to the blending of different philosophical or religious perspectives. Today it is pejoratively used to refer to a collection of views without coherence or unity. The study book for the International Missionary Council defines syncretism as “illegitimate mingling of different religious elements” (Thomas 1991:964). Maintaining this definition, the Manila

<sup>1</sup> Presbyterian Church (USA), Office of Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations. Guidelines for Interfaith Dialogue. [www.pcusa.org/pcusa/wmd/eir/dialog.htm](http://www.pcusa.org/pcusa/wmd/eir/dialog.htm).

Manifesto rejects “the syncretism which tries to mix faith in Christ with other faiths.”<sup>2</sup> However, there are opposite opinions. Many participants in inter-religious dialogue argue that syncretism is an essential component of successful dialogue. Such individuals believe that “to hold an exclusivist position [i.e. to believe that one religion is superior to another] is necessarily unreflective and dogmatic” and “to try to persuade others to change their views from one position to another because we think that they are mistaken is always wrong” (Clendenin 1995:113). John Cobb (1985:379) argues: “It is the mission of Christianity to become a universal faith in the sense of taking into itself the alien truths that others have realized. This is no mere matter of addition. It is instead a matter of creative transformation.” Nicholas Rescher (1993:91) underlines: “Confronted with contradictory beliefs or doctrines, we need not – on syncretism’s telling – see ourselves as constrained to make a choice among them; we can and should conjoin them.”

Does it mean that it is impossible to engage in inter-religious dialogue without being syncretistic? David Lochhead (1988:64) answers: “It is difficult to see syncretism as a danger to dialogue unless the goal of dialogue is construed as achieving agreement.” In other words, syncretism is a danger only if the motives are syncretistic. However, I do not claim that syncretism should be a method of the theological dimension of inter-religious dialogue. But from the standpoint of the reality in Bosnia, syncretism can be seen as a possible step from post-conflict inter-religious encounter toward genuine inter-religious dialogue. Syncretism has become reality in the Balkans already as pagan rituals and habits are accepted in local religious practice, and some forms of syncretism could be useful, even necessary, to provide common ground for an introduction to genuine dialogue which contributes to creating a tolerant society and peacebuilding.

## 2.2. Potential for Tolerance and Peacebuilding

The Latin root of the word “tolerance” can be defined as the willingness to grant other people the freedom of opinion and beliefs. The contribution of religious communities to implementing tolerance depends primarily on their theologies, since “life of religious communities is based on theology, not only in cognition of objective theological truths, but also in ethics and politics” (Djuric 1999). Dialogue requires a balanced attitude. It should be neither ingenuous nor too critical, but open and receptive. It can be understood in different ways: at the purely human level, it means *reciprocal communication*, leading to a common goal or, at a deeper level, to interpersonal communion. Dialogue can also be taken

<sup>2</sup> Lausanne Committee for World Evangelisation 1989. The Manila Manifesto. Section 3: “The Uniqueness of Christ”. [www.lausanne.org/lcwe/assets/Manila\\_Manifesto.pdf](http://www.lausanne.org/lcwe/assets/Manila_Manifesto.pdf).

as an attitude of *respect and friendship*, which permeates or should permeate all those activities constituting the evangelising mission of the Church. This can appropriately be called “the spirit of dialogue”. In the context of religious plurality, dialogue means “all positive and constructive inter-religious relations with individuals and communities of other faiths” which are directed at “mutual understanding and enrichment” (*Dialogue and Proclamation* 1991, chapter 9), in obedience to truth and respect for freedom. It includes both witness and the exploration of each other’s religious convictions. The Church’s evangelising mission uses the term dialogue in this sense. Whether such a dialogue can be implemented depends on the social, cultural, religious and political aspects of the situation in a given society. It implies attentiveness and sensitivity to the “signs of the times”.

Indeed, religions have certainly contributed to the progress of culture and the construction of a more humane society. But we cannot ignore the fact that religion has not always served to enhance respect for human life and dignity and that violence has often been performed in the very name of religion itself. Christianity and Islam especially are still heavily burdened by the tendency to incorporate nationalism into their theology.

Hans Küng (1990:102) launched the slogan that “there can be no peace in the world without peace among the religions,” thereby declaring religious peace, that is, inter-religious ecumenism, “to be the bounden duty of all religious communities.”<sup>3</sup> The adequate form of dialogue to implement this has been pointed out by David Lochhead (1988:64), who states: “Rather than defining dialogue as a search for agreement, it would be more helpful to define dialogue as a search for understanding. To understand another tradition, I do not have to agree with its precepts. I do not have to create ‘common ground’ in order to proceed”. The Second Vatican Council, for instance, has envisaged the primary function of inter-religious dialogue as promoting greater understanding between Christians and representatives of other religions. This is based on the conviction that a sustained, scholarly discussion between representatives of religious groups will clarify the *areas of agreement and disagreement* in belief and practice. Dialogue enables participants to correctly identify areas of genuine religious disagreement, as well as identify misconceptions regarding the beliefs and practices of different religions. But dialogue also increases the understanding of the beliefs and practices of other religious communities.

This enhanced understanding can lead to a more peaceable coexistence in

<sup>3</sup> On the problems with the “planetary ethos” that Küng calls for in this context, see Spaemann (1996: 893-904).

the pluralistic culture of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In the world of today, characterised by rapid communication, worldwide mobility and interdependence of people, there is a new awareness of the fact of religious plurality. Religions do not merely exist, or simply survive. In some cases, they show clear evidence of a revival. They continue to inspire and influence the lives of millions of their adherents. Therefore the important role played by religious traditions cannot be overlooked. If people of different religious communities encounter each other in their everyday activities and establish trust by dialogue, this will enable them to know better the *areas in which mutual activity can enhance society*, and also to identify the *areas in which religious differences can make mutual undertakings difficult*. People who participate in dialogue will also better understand their own faith. Focusing on the differences between religions, participants are forced to examine their own beliefs in order to support these positions. This will increase their self-understanding and enable them to differentiate between the pure religious message and the cultural lenses through which they are interpreted.


### 2.3. Diverse Forms of Inter-religious Dialogue

There exist different forms of inter-religious dialogue. The Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue, in its document *Dialogue and Proclamation* (1991), spoke of four forms, without claiming to establish any order of priority:

- *The dialogue of life*, where “people strive to live in an open and neighbourly spirit, sharing their joys and sorrows, their human problems and preoccupations”.
- *The dialogue of action*, in which “Christians and others collaborate for the integral development and liberation of people”.
- *The dialogue of theological exchange*, where “specialists seek to deepen their understanding of their respective religious heritages and to appreciate each other’s spiritual values”.
- *The dialogue of religious experience*, where “persons, rooted in their own religious traditions, share their spiritual riches, for instance with regard to prayer and contemplation, faith and ways of searching for God or the Absolute”.<sup>4</sup>

Although a variety of forms of dialogue exist, there is also a clear interdependence between them. Were it to be reduced to theological exchange, dialogue might easily be taken as a sort of luxury item in the Church’s mission, a domain reserved for specialists. Since formal inter-religious dialogue is held by scholars and other authoritative religious representatives, ordinary people have little

<sup>4</sup> Dialogue and Proclamation 1991, chapter 42.



involvement in the process. Why, then, should an average person care about dialogue? Contacts in daily life and common commitment to action will normally open the door for cooperation in promoting human and spiritual values. These contacts may also eventually lead to exchange of arguments in response to the important questions which the circumstances of life raise in the minds of people. Exchange of religious experience can also inspire theological discussions. These in turn can enlighten experience and encourage closer contacts between religious communities.

In order to explore the potential for dialogue in Bosnia, we need to understand the relationship between the concepts of *confession, nation and identity* in the Balkans.

### 3. Confession, Nation and Identities in the Balkans

Within each particular community, people are held together by the common values they share. These values are connected with “identity”, which gives them a sense of being “at home” in the groups they belong to, such as family, communities, ethnic groups, congregations or nations. Talking about identity means talking about the identity of both individuals and groups. Colloquially, we can speak about different kinds of identity: cultural, social, collective, individual, etc. Identity is essentially determined by two inseparable dimensions: the common (or collective) and particular (or individual) level. Common identity is expressed by the identification of individuals with the group, or feeling of belonging to the group, while the particular dimension is expressed by highlighting differences with other members of the group. Common characteristics (and ideas) may be clear markers of a collective identity, but essentially, identity is determined by difference (e.g. from another individual or group).

Identity may be formed through historical experience, or in the face of newly encountered (social, political, etc.) problems. It may express itself in mystical, metaphysic forms which are characteristics of the pre-Enlightenment period, or in new forms of enlightenment highlighting the particularity of existence and individuality. In the Balkans and in Bosnia, pre-modern concepts of identity that link religion and nation, mainly expressed through specific rituals, traditions and habits, are still very dominant. To map common ground for the development of a genuine dialogue, the nature of Bosnia’s religious and national identities as well as their historical evolution have to be analysed.

Bosnian society was marked by a multi-faceted, universal identity which is a characteristic of societies which have not been determined by the idea of nation and the nation-state. This distinguishes Bosnia from the history of the Western European countries. Different value systems existed in a permanently unstable political environment which has deeply affected the identities of the people in the Balkans. Identity was thus reduced and fixed in the essence of ethno-religious groupings. Religious identity emerged as a unique form of social conscience with the capacity to address fundamental concerns and existential questions, and to provide protective cohesion for its adherents. It is imperative to understand this characteristic of the Balkans because it has an impact on all other aspects of identity and is therefore important for any future form of dialogue aiming at tolerance.

The religious identities of the Balkans are determined by the following concepts and characteristics:

- *Pre-Enlightenment*: Pre-Enlightenment religion has a transcendent, metaphysical dimension. “It is not a separate form of human interaction which influences other activities, but it is an inseparable part of human consciousness which permeates all other aspects of human identity, including nationality” (Mojzes in Velikonja 2003).
- *Collectivism*: The relationship with God is not based on the individual but on the collective level. Individual ambitions and interests have to be subordinated to the needs of the community. Therefore, the rejection of individualist values that are characteristics of the Western lifestyle is one of the strongest determinants of Balkan communities.
- *Protection*: Since the Balkan region has developed in permanent crisis during the past centuries, the protection of community has been a first priority for its leaders. The *millet system* which was applied by the Ottoman rulers enabled the Christian Church to play a vital role in its community (see section 4.1). Religious leaders became key protectors of their community, being responsible for the welfare of their followers and for their obedience to the sultan. So the needs of the community overlapped with the concept of nation.
- *Tradition*: Tradition had been a source of mystical religious inspiration and, in doctrinal and canonical terms, was mandatory for its followers. Catholic, Orthodox and Muslim communities underwent minimal reformation. All of them generally considered that it was best to follow tradition since new ideas can lead away from the right path. So the practice of the religious communities in the Balkans is marked by traditional beliefs and habits. Religious dogmas have often been linked with local habits in order to guarantee cohesion.



Due to historical development and geographical circumstances, a great part of the population of the Balkans formed their identities mainly through the need to defend themselves against the repression imposed on them by occupiers. This struggle required a collective conscience which the people – stirred up by Western powers – finally found in their sense of national identity. This also happened in Bosnia. But in the history of Bosnia, “national identity” never evolved as the dominant social, cultural and political factor as it did, for instance, in Europe in the period from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The evolution of national identity and national societies in Europe was essentially associated with the evolution of capitalism, civil society, national language, market and state. In the Balkans (and in Bosnia), in contrast, the concept of national identity was artificially imposed through the nationalisation of religious differences amongst its population. The word “imposed” underlines the fact that there were no socio-cultural settings conducive to the introduction of the European concept of national identity.

In other words, *nationalism was imposed on the Balkans and became a synonym for the liberation struggle* of its inhabitants, its basic aim being to speed up the waning of Ottoman power. Steeped in the collective lyricism of the Balkans, after completing its political task, this malignant form of nationalism turned into a genie which refused to return to the bottle. The prevalence of the model of national history resulted in divisions that led not only to endless political confrontation but also to the destruction of traditional value systems which have not been replaced by viable new orientations.

A cornerstone in the history and development of identity in the Balkans is the arrival of Islam in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. Non-Muslims considered Islam as a sort of religious occupation of their land. The question of Islamisation is still a controversial issue. The Balkans experienced the “Turkish version” of Islam, which was more tolerant than representatives of Christian churches historically described it. The non-Muslim community of the Ottoman state was divided into *millets*, administrative units organised on the basis of religious affiliation. The *millets* enjoyed a fair amount of autonomy. As the head of the *millet*, a religious leader was responsible for the welfare of the members of the community and for their obedience to the sultan. Conversion to Islam was possible and a precondition for social promotion, but not generally demanded. Proselytism was not a characteristic of Ottoman rule. As the Orthodox Church was given an official role in the *millet* system, it was enabled to play a vital part in the development of its community, to keep the language alive, to pass on the cultural heritage and to foster a sense of cultural identity. In return the Ottoman authorities expected the Church to maintain order. So the Orthodox Church had to deal with secular aspects of life in its community and, as a consequence,

finally became a very conservative institution which, in order to protect its community, isolated it ideologically. The Orthodox Church remained untouched by the important currents of Western societies, for instance the Reformation and later the Enlightenment.

At the same time, Islam has never limited itself to its religious role and revelation. Rather it has tended to become a way of life in Bosnian communities. Compared to Christianity, it has spoken much more about social justice. This indicates that social justice has been an attractive and important issue for the inhabitants of the Balkans. These settings were reflected in 20<sup>th</sup> century developments when the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes did not accept ethnic distinction but did accept religious differences among Yugoslav people. In the Yugoslav state after 1918, however, there was no significant current which would have propagated spiritual unity. “Besides that, the idea of Yugoslavism was actually geared to uniting Christians, while in regard to Muslims it was always believed that they would gradually return to their ‘real national identity’” (Radic in Velikonja 2003).

The Serbian Orthodox Church, for instance, has been extremely wary of Catholic ecumenical initiatives, which they have seen as continuation of a centuries-long effort to extend its jurisdiction over the Balkans at the expense of Serbian Orthodoxy. Indeed, Catholic enthusiasm in the Balkans, up until the Second Vatican Council, was heavily burdened with a notion of proselytism.<sup>5</sup> Due to a centuries-long juxtaposition between “nation” and Orthodoxy in Eastern and South East Europe, the Orthodox Church has been regarded as guardian of the nation by many of its members, who understand nation as a natural entity, an organic body, and concomitantly the Orthodox Church as a perpetuator of national identity.

The “dialogue of life” (see section 2.3) has marked Bosnian history, while religions have been shaped and influenced also by culture and social structures. But there was no substantial tradition of interfaith collaboration over the centuries (and this phenomenon is typical also for a great part of the entire Balkan region). Despite the geographical and ethnic mix of inhabitants and sometimes good personal relations between neighbours, relations between religious communities have never been very close. Especially in the rural areas, the different communities and identities existed in parallel structures which did

<sup>5</sup> Proselytising has been a phenomenon present for a long time even in Eastern Europe alongside missions and missionaries. However, it is now emerging as an attempt to persuade members of a church, faith or religious community to change their religion and their religious affiliation; the underlying motives are regarded as dishonest and unfair and the methods used as illegitimate and abhorrent (Vrcan 1997).

not touch or overlap with each other substantially. Balkan inhabitants never had the opportunity to become accustomed to sustainable and peaceful coexistence. There was neither peace in inter-group relations nor a balance in sharing power. But it would be incorrect to state that the sources and incentives for conflict and the Balkan wars developed in the rural regions and not in the cities. It is a frequently held prejudicial belief that uneducated people from rural areas, the so-called lower class, are the most fervent nationalists. The lower class has a high potential for conflict, and might tend to more noticeable, exaggerated reactions, but the main adherents to national enthusiasm are educated people from the so-called middle and upper classes. The source of national inspiration is, both in theory and in practice, a mystical thing.

The question of how much existing religious differences contributed to the decline of the former Yugoslavia has led to controversy. As Radmila Radic<sup>6</sup> states: “The disintegration of Yugoslavia may be considered a result of the unsuccessful creation of a multicultural community that had a chance to integrate constitutive nations of different historical and cultural heritage” (Radic in Velikonja 2003). Zoe Petre, a Romanian historian,<sup>7</sup> is convinced “that the bloody Balkan conflicts [of the 1990s] are ultimately the effect of national communism, not of confessional or religious differences”.<sup>8</sup> Paul Mojzes<sup>9</sup> acknowledges that the war in former Yugoslavia was primarily “ethno-national”, and not religious. Marko Orsolovic says: “Religions in former Yugoslavia – Catholic and Orthodox – were misused, because religions are corresponding to nationalities. It means Catholics are mostly Croats, and all Serbs belong to the Serbian Orthodox Church.”<sup>10</sup> Indeed, immature national identity – almost completely based on religious affiliation – was a perpetuator of the war.

However, it can be concluded that mutual relations between religious communities, or what we may call “dialogue of life”, which means that religious communities have lived in Bosnia in physical proximity for centuries, were marked by passive tolerance. But regardless of this and in spite of far-reaching ethnic and

6 Dr Radmila Radic is a Serbian historian and researcher at the Institute for Modern Serbian History in Belgrade.

7 Professor Zoe Petre has taught at the Ancient History and Archaeology Department of Bucharest University and at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales in Paris. From 1996 to 2000, she served as a Senior Political Advisor to the President of Romania and Head of the Public Policies Department at the President's Office.

8 Radio Free Europe, 19 February 2004: Eastern Europe – Orthodox Church Still Wields Political Clout.

9 Professor Paul Mojzes is professor of religious studies and former Academic Dean and Provost of Rosemont College, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He is a Yugoslavian-born American expert on religious changes in Eastern and Central Europe.

10 Radio Free Europe, 19 February 2004: Eastern Europe – Orthodox Church Still Wields Political Clout.

linguistic similarity they have never developed deeper relations or a “dialogue of action” (active tolerance). The cultural diversity of Bosnia and the Balkans has never been transformed into a multicultural identity, but only into a more or less tolerant culturally intertwined society. Relations between the religious communities were not extensively developed before the Bosnian war.

Looking back, it must be stated that the confrontation was already being prepared in the period from 1988 to 1991. It would be completely idealistic to define this phase as a time of flourishing democracy and religious freedom in Bosnia, and to say that April 1992 marked the sudden beginning of a war. There were already a number of hidden defects present during that period before the war, many of which were not recognised in the euphoria of transition.<sup>11</sup>

During the war, the religious communities in many places were divided along the conflict lines, with tensions cutting across ethnic and religious identities. Where links between the Serbian Orthodox, Catholic and Muslim communities existed, they have been heavily damaged by the war. Nevertheless, some of these links have survived. Due to the realities of life it was not possible to completely divide the ethnic, religious and national groups. At least some initiatives exist that strive to overcome the divide between religious groups and the causes of conflict, even if this is proving to be very difficult. These efforts for religious rapprochement will be illustrated in the following section.

## 4. Initiatives for Inter-religious Dialogue during and after the War in Bosnia

Many peace initiatives were launched by the international community and also by Bosnian individuals during the war. Even before the war, there were warnings from Bosnia that the concept of “national parties” would propel the country into war. Several initiatives were created in the hope of preventing the “creeping” confrontation.

<sup>11</sup> Srdjan Vrcan states: “There is no doubt that the time of the late 1980s, characterised generally by an over-optimistic approach to transitional processes, has elapsed, and that a process of sobering has been underway. An initial and highly euphoric dream about transition has been now dreamed off and a discourse about emerging democracy has been substituted by a recent discourse about so-called ‘sustainable’ democracy. Transitional strategies appear to be contradictory, tension producing, and conflict generating.” Vrcan continues: “And more particularly the origins of such tensions and contradictions are located within fundamental transitional requirements: a) for building a new nation state; b) for radical economic reforms and introduction of a market economy; c) radical democratisation of the society conceived of as its coherent political pluralisation and polyarchisation; d) securing at least a minimal standard of life alongside with a lowering of expectations on a mass scale; and e) guaranteeing at least a degree of social stability and social peace, internal as well as external” (Vrcan 1997).

Numerous valuable peace initiatives were proposed during the war, not only by Bishop Komarica<sup>12</sup> and Franciscan Father Ivo Markovic<sup>13</sup>, but also by other religious leaders in Bosnia, drawing strong feedback on an international level. But these initiatives failed to reach and persuade the intended recipients: the sides in conflict. Nevertheless, the conflict in Bosnia did not end because of peace initiatives, but rather, after many casualties and atrocities, because of the use of force. Therefore, instead of speaking about a peacebuilding process, we prefer to speak more precisely about alleviating the consequences of war and working to eliminate the sources of war.

During and after the war, NGOs with religious affiliations and civil society groups contributed to easing the consequences of the war, providing humanitarian assistance to the needy; they included local initiatives like *Caritas*, *Merhamet*, *Dobrotvor* and *La Benevolencia*<sup>14</sup> and Christian NGOs from Western countries, international Muslim and Orthodox NGOs. The churches and Islamic communities in Bosnia (the words “church” and “clergy” do not apply to Islam) failed to provide these NGOs and groups with any direction. Instead, many of these organisations delivered humanitarian aid exclusively within the religious communities they felt affiliated with, which definitely cannot be regarded as a constructive contribution to inter-religious dialogue. Indeed, delivering aid to those affected by the war according to their religious affiliation can be seen

<sup>12</sup> His initiatives met with strong feedback especially at international level and have also been supported by some religious communities in the Balkans. Rather than describing the numerous activities of Bishop Komarica (for further information see [www.freewebs.com/hrvatska-hrvati/biskupkomarica.htm](http://www.freewebs.com/hrvatska-hrvati/biskupkomarica.htm) and [www.biskupija-banjaluka.org](http://www.biskupija-banjaluka.org)), it should be underlined that he was proposed for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004. However, Bishop Komarica modestly stated that he had only done his duty.

<sup>13</sup> Ivo Markovic's activities include setting up the Pontanima Choir and Chamber Orchestra as a project of Oci u Oci (Face-to-Face) Inter-religious Service in Sarajevo. Founded in 1996, Pontanima's mission is to unite people who love music and want to use its spiritual power to bring the different Bosnian constituencies together. The choir members come from all ethnic groups in Bosnia, as well as from other countries around the world. Their repertoire includes music from the Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Protestant, Muslim and Jewish traditions, as well as songs from places far beyond the Balkans. The Bosnian Franciscans sponsor regular performances at the Church of St. Anthony in Sarajevo. Pontanima has also toured Bosnia and performed internationally in Austria, Italy and the United States. Ivo Markovic and Oci u Oci have been also active in other fields (for example publishing: *Cvitkovic 2004* was published by Oci u Oci and reviewed by Ivo Markovic).

<sup>14</sup> Caritas International is a confederation of 162 Catholic relief, development and social services from more than 200 countries and territories. It is one of the world's largest humanitarian networks involving different groups and individuals regardless of creed, race, gender, or ethnicity. However, Caritas was active locally during the war in Bosnia. Merhamet is an Islamic organisation insisting on its purely humanitarian nature. It has provided various types of assistance to the needy, particularly the homeless. Dobrotvor is a Serbian humanitarian organisation working with the small Orthodox community that remained in Sarajevo. It provides care for the old and sick and has a few small income-generating projects. La Benevolencia, an organisation set up by the small Jewish community in Sarajevo, has provided emergency medical and educational activities for citizens regardless of religious affiliation. For further information and an overview of the activities of faith-based NGOs in Bosnia-Herzegovina see Leban 2003.

as an expression of misunderstanding or misinterpretation of the principles of the donors' own religion. This shows that activities of communities, groups or individuals may be inspired by specific religious values but their work may not necessarily be grounded in religious inspiration and identity. Religious values are an entirety and must be taken as an entirety. It is not viable to take some values and ignore others, i.e. to be "partly religious".

There is no definitive database of international groups active in interfaith cooperation in Bosnia-Herzegovina during and after the war.<sup>15</sup> Many of them focused on humanitarian aid, feeding people, rebuilding houses or educating students. Some of them were also important players in the process of developing civil society and contributed to building relationships that are critical to post-conflict regeneration. These activities are very useful from the standpoint of alleviating the consequences of the war. Nevertheless, they did not substantially contribute to inter-religious dialogue, nor are theology and inter-religious dialogues needed for the distribution of humanitarian aid. The potential of inter-religious dialogue lies in the ability to explain the identity of local inhabitants and communities, to address the causes of the war and provide advice on how to eliminate them.

In the period after the war, some cooperative activities have been developed that strive for trust-building, coexistence and tolerance in Bosnian society. Some efforts have been launched by religious communities, as well as individuals who are inspired by their religious vocation. Some outstanding initiatives which could be understood as a paradigm will be mentioned in the following, with no intention to establish priorities or give a complete picture: 1) The *Inter-religious Council of Bosnia and Herzegovina*, 2) the *International Multi-religious and Intercultural Centre* and 3) the Association *Abraham*.

#### 4.1. Inter-religious Council of Bosnia-Herzegovina

On 9 June 1997 four religious leaders in Bosnia signed a joint Statement of Shared Moral Commitment in Sarajevo. It was the first document of its kind in the Balkans, and it has been regarded as having high moral and political value for the future. It was signed by *Mustafa Cerić*, Reis-ul-Ulema of the Islamic

<sup>15</sup> In the early 1990s, several large Christian NGOs from Western countries – like Caritas, World Vision, Catholic Relief Services, and the United Methodist Committee on Relief – provided emergency humanitarian aid in Bosnia. They contributed to meeting basic needs and to reconstructing infrastructure throughout Bosnia-Herzegovina but were also criticised for lack of flexibility in their response to the specific local context, as Leban (2003) points out. Only a few of them went beyond delivering short-term humanitarian aid and focused on long-term involvement with local communities in order to strengthen local capacities as agents of social change. Islamic Relief Worldwide and International Orthodox Christian Charities are among the international NGOs active in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Community of BiH; Metropolitan Nikolaj Dabrobosanski in the name, and with the authorisation of His Holiness *Serbian Patriarch Pavle; Vinko Cardinal Puljic*, Archbishop of Sarajevo and President of the Bishops' Conference of Bosnia-Herzegovina, and *Jakob Finci*, President of the Jewish Community of Bosnia-Herzegovina. These religious leaders pointed out that the reason for the joint Statement was a concern over the slow and inefficient implementation of the Dayton Agreement, and the ongoing separation between the two entities in Bosnia-Herzegovina. At the signing ceremony the formation of an Inter-religious Council of Bosnia and Herzegovina was announced.

Bearing in mind the hierarchical structures of religious communities, the joint Statement is the most important inter-religious event not only after Dayton but probably in the recent history of Bosnia and the Balkans. It is therefore quoted below (see box 1).

**Box 1:** "Statement of Shared Moral Commitment" signed by the Leaders of the Muslim, Jewish, Orthodox and Catholic Community in Bosnia in June 1997<sup>16</sup>

"The peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina have undergone enormous suffering. But, thanks [to] God, the war has ended. Our task now is to establish a durable peace based on truth, justice and common living.

We, the Reis-ul-Ulema of the Islamic Community of Bosnia-Herzegovina, the responsible representatives of two Christian churches (Serbian Orthodox and Roman Catholic) and the President of the Jewish Community of Bosnia-Herzegovina, recognize that our Churches and Religious Communities differ from each other, and that each of them feels called to live true to its own faith. At the same time we recognize that our religious and spiritual tradition holds many values in common and that these shared values can provide an authentic basis for mutual esteem, cooperation and free common living in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Each of our traditional Churches and Religious Communities recognizes that the dignity of man [*sic*] and human value is a gift of God. Our faiths and religions, each in its own way, call us to recognize the fundamental human rights of each person. Violence against persons or the violations of their basic rights are for us not only against man-made laws, but also breaking God's law.

We jointly, in mutual recognition of our religious differences, condemn all violence against innocent persons and any form of abuse or violation of fundamental human rights.

Specifically, we condemn acts of hatred based on ethnicity or religious differences. We express our special concern at:

- The burning of houses;
- The desecration of religious buildings and the destruction of graveyards;

- The obstruction of the free right of return;
- The acts of revenge;
- The abuse of the media with the aim of spreading hatred.

Further, we call for respect for the fundamental human rights of all persons, regardless of religious or ethnic affiliation, which must include:

- The freedom of all responsible representatives or religious leaders of Churches or Religious Communities in the territory of Bosnia-Herzegovina to fulfil their mission in every part of the country;
- Opportunities for the free performance of religious services and all forms of pastoral care by all Imams of the Islamic Community, all Christian priests (Serbian Orthodox and Roman Catholic) and all representatives of the Jewish Community;
- The right of every child to religious instruction in his or her own faith;
- Guarantees that no one shall be compelled to attend instruction in the institution of another church or religious community.

Finally, we call on all people of good will to take responsibility for their own acts. Let us treat others as we would wish them to treat us.

With this Statement we appeal to believers of our Churches and Religious Communities, and all citizens of Bosnia-Herzegovina and the President and members of the Presidency of Bosnia-Herzegovina.”

The foundation of the Inter-religious Council of Bosnia-Herzegovina (IRC-BiH) was supported mainly by the US Institute of Peace<sup>17</sup> and the World Conference on Religion for Peace (WCRP), an international multifaith organisation with members in 100 countries.

In June 1997, the overall political situation in Bosnia was still very fragile, with many incidents, the destruction of homes and attacks on returnees. At that time, it was almost impossible to use the term “reconciliation”. The joint statement therefore called for “durable peace based on truth, justice and common living”, which, according to the authors, was meant as a way forward towards reconciliation.

During a joint visit of religious leaders from Bosnia-Herzegovina to the United Nations and USA organised by the Appeal of Conscience Foundation in May 1998, another Joint Declaration was signed. It stated:

”During this initial period of peace in our ravaged country, we recognize that there is still much to be accomplished to heal the wounds of a

<sup>17</sup> The United States Institute of Peace is an independent, nonpartisan federal institution created by Congress to promote the prevention, management, and peaceful resolution of international conflicts. Further information on [www.usip.org](http://www.usip.org).



brutal war and to bring universal freedom and democracy to Bosnia and Herzegovina. Although we cannot forget the pain and suffering of the past, we have the obligation to coming generations to plan and build a better future. Therefore, we reiterate our call for fundamental human and religious rights for all persons in Bosnia and Herzegovina.”<sup>18</sup>

The Steering Board of the Peace Implementation Council of the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia-Herzegovina, during its meeting in Luxembourg in June 1998, declared that: “The Steering Board calls on the Inter-religious Council in Sarajevo, as well as all religious leaders, to engage directly in efforts that would defuse conflicts and promote freedom of worship and freedom of movement for members of all religions” (Finci 2005).

Activities of the Council are outlined in the Report of the WCRP: “In the fall of 2002, the draft law was submitted to the Presidency’s office for further review. In early 2003, the Law on Freedom of Religion was presented to the BiH Ministry of Human Rights. Several meetings were held between the Ministry and the IRC-BiH Legal Experts Group in order to finalize a few remaining issues, and in March 2004, the Law was approved by the BiH Ministry of Human Rights and passed the parliamentary procedure ... The Bosnian Presidency has requested meetings with the IRC-BiH on a number of occasions.”<sup>19</sup>

However, the main mission of religion and therefore also the Inter-religious Council is of a spiritual nature, and cannot be evaluated by its short-term results. Although fairly low-key in terms of its media and public profile (it has no website, for example), the Council has an important moral weight and strong symbolic value. It concentrates its activities on spirituality, which, while essential, tends not to produce publicly visible results. Since 1998, IRC-BiH has overcome several challenges arising from the withdrawal of some of its participants from the Council. Nevertheless, these withdrawals were meant more as a protest against specific political issues than as an action against the spirit of the Inter-religious Council. Also, one of the most important issues is the fact that, in contrast to the majority of NGOs, IRC-BiH has preserved its full autonomy toward international and national institutions and politics. “Although the Council initially relied on WCRP for organisational skills and logistical support, it has expressed the determination to continue on its own.”<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Private documentation of the first President of IRC-BiH (Finci 2005). Private correspondence A. Finci and Z. Brajovic with permission of A. Finci.

<sup>19</sup> [www.wcrp.org](http://www.wcrp.org).

<sup>20</sup> The Religion and Peacemaking Initiative of the US Institute of Peace; Report: Can Faith-Based NGOs Advance Interfaith Reconciliation? [www.usip.org/library/topics/rp.html](http://www.usip.org/library/topics/rp.html).

## 4.2. The International Multi-religious and Intercultural Centre

One of the pioneers in interfaith dialogue in the Balkan region was the Franciscan priest Marko Orsolc from Sarajevo who became active before the war had begun. On 10 December 1991, i.e. Human Rights Day, he founded the International Centre for the Promotion of Inter-Religious Dialogue in Sarajevo. This centre involved priests, an imam, the President of the Jewish community, and numerous atheists. It did not function strictly as a church organisation. It was, rather, a peace movement which asserted human rights and extended material assistance to the citizens of Bosnia-Herzegovina during the war, with a special focus on those who were in the worst situations, like people in mixed marriages, who were often by-passed by the aid delivered by agencies such as *Dobrotvor*, *Caritas* and *Merhamet*.

After hostilities had ceased, an initiative led to the formation of the International Multi-religious and Intercultural Centre (IMIC) in 1997. Orsolc is a representative of the Franciscan order, which has traditionally exerted important influence in Bosnia. The order has been working in the region since at least the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The Franciscans in northern Bosnia have a long tradition of promoting interfaith tolerance and continue to play a public role in this effort. Other parts of the Croatian Catholic hierarchy and Franciscans in the south do not share this tradition or perspective.<sup>21</sup> The activities of IMIC incorporate Orsolc's values and the legacy of the Franciscan tradition and acknowledge Bosnia's historical and cultural inheritance along with the current social climate. This includes the ability to maintain a critical distance from political and even church hierarchies and to guarantee independence from nationalist policy while still keeping the profile of being "on the side of ordinary people". IMIC's activities (as well as initiatives by other organisations such as *Oci u Oci* and *Pontanima*, which are influenced by a Franciscan background) can be regarded as immersed in the substance of the Balkans, with deep knowledge and feeling for Bosnia. The Franciscan background provides the substantial spiritual dimension to the activities of IMIC, and the Centre was involved in several inter-religious conferences.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> For generations the Franciscans lived "in, around and under more numerous and powerful Muslims. Never part of a ruling caste, they look on the Church's difficulties with a degree of equanimity" (Orsolc in an interview with Marcus Tanner, in *The Tablet*, 12 March 2005, [www.thetablet.co.uk](http://www.thetablet.co.uk)). The Franciscans have always had a tradition of highlighting unpleasant issues concerning the Catholic Church and also had a difficult relationship with the Church's hierarchy. However, they were deeply committed to Bosnia and its history and culture.

<sup>22</sup> IMIC was involved in a Seminar on Rehabilitation of the Archive Service in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1999, co-organised an arts exhibition in November 2002 at the Tito barracks in cooperation with the City of Sarajevo Museum and participated in the interfaith conference of religious leaders in Trebinje in the same year. Moreover, IMIC was involved in the International Symposium: Religious Studies in the Public University Curriculum of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century in 2005. IMIC has also started an educational partnership in religious studies with Arizona State University, USA and published various books and articles.

### 4.3. Association “Abraham”

Abraham is an association of citizens founded in Sarajevo on 4 March 1998. The Association brings together Jews, Christians (Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestants), Muslims and “all people of good will, with the intent to promote the process of reconciliation in Bosnia and Herzegovina through interdenominational peacemaking efforts”.<sup>23</sup> Abraham is the result of a local initiative. It was set up primarily by students of theology and other individuals interested in religion, strongly supported by the Protestant pastor Christoph Ziemer from the former German Democratic Republic. Abraham operates as an independent, non-profit, and non-governmental organisation, with a primary focus on encounter and action.

The main source of inspiration for this Association is the personality and the work of Abraham (or Ibrahim). It is a platform based on the five Abrahamic traditions: Judaism, Serbian Orthodox Christianity, Roman Catholicism, Protestantism and Islam. Members all share a common faith into the peacebuilding power of the Abrahamic religions. The Association relies upon encounter and overlapping of shared spiritual values, and strives to develop social initiatives aiming to build mutual trust and promote the culture of reciprocity, coexistence and nonviolence. Members are committed to the following principles: belief in one God, struggle against the old and the new idols, hospitality, building peace, and working against indifference.

#### Box 2: Programme goals of Abraham<sup>24</sup>

- Transfer of knowledge (information) and dialogue on different religions, or different confessions;
- Assistance in overcoming the consequences of both personal and collective past (curing bad memories);
- Finding and highlighting positive examples of religious coexistence in Bosnia and Herzegovina from the past and the present;
- Promotion of fair debate on disputed issues relating to complex matters and the interaction between religious, ethnic-national, social and political aspects of life;
- Identification and revival of religious sources and religious inspiration for unity and building of peace, justice and freedom within society;

<sup>23</sup> [www.abraham.ba](http://www.abraham.ba).

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

- Encouragement and promotion of a culture of responsibility, reciprocity and dedication to justice;
- Encouragement and support to people whose engagement is positive and who are ready for dialogue within a specific religious group, as well as for the dialogue among different groups (intra-denominational and inter-denominational dialogue);
- Development and support of positive forms of religious coexistence;
- Starting joint initiatives for the promotion of trust and cooperation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, public advocacy and practical assistance to nonviolent conflict resolution.

Abraham has a modern Western approach, combined with the ability to provide resources and convert vision into action. The organisation has developed a well-defined range of activities which correspond to the universal dimension of inter-religious relations and dialogue. Activities include gatherings and debates (monthly meetings of members of Abraham with emphasis on Abrahamic/Ibrahamic themes, including conversations, lectures, specific theme workshops), peacebuilding training sessions and seminars for members as well as public lectures, conferences and rallies, and collaboration on joint declarations<sup>25</sup> and publications.<sup>26</sup>

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Abraham experienced an internal power struggle for a time, but was recently able to re-establish its activities and programme according to its statute and values. It aims to encourage tolerance and respect for other people, world views and religions and does not have direct or formal connections with any of the religious communities or their officials. Initially, it was supported by friends from Germany, later on by parishes, organisations and individuals from German-speaking countries. Abraham is currently developing curricula for the study of world religions to be used in high schools in Bosnia-Herzegovina.<sup>27</sup>

The challenge for Abraham is to develop a profile which resonates with the very specific and complex nature of Bosnian society. Like the majority of the local NGOs in Bosnia, this organisation is dependent on international funding and support. This makes it difficult to develop its agenda according to local needs.

<sup>25</sup> For instance a Declaration of Hospitality 1998; a poster titled "Their Tragedy Concerns Us Too", dedicated to the suffering of children in the conflict in Kosovo in 2000; a Statement, "Standing Up for the Weak – The Imperative of Co-existence" in 2000.

<sup>26</sup> Since its foundation it has published a monthly magazine promoting a culture of interdenominational dialogue ("Abraham"). A Newsletter in German and English is issued three times a year.

<sup>27</sup> The Religion and Peacemaking Initiative of the US Institute of Peace; Report: Can Faith-Based NGOs Advance Interfaith Reconciliation? [www.usip.org/library/topics/rp.html](http://www.usip.org/library/topics/rp.html).

#### 4.4. Conclusions

Reviewing the past ten years, the Franciscan priest Marko Orsolc points out that the foundation of an Inter-religious Council has been a “turning point in the history of religion in Bosnia, but it didn’t bring the results which were rightfully expected because they isolated themselves from the other NGOs, and even from the theological faculties”.<sup>28</sup> He states that “peace cannot be restored with political decisions but only with true reconciliation with God and with restoration of human lives, not only places of worship.”<sup>29</sup>

Marko Orsolc is convinced that the people of Bosnia-Herzegovina face a choice between dialogue and death, and he believes that many clerics still lack the will to participate in a real exchange of views and ideas. In his opinion the reluctance of religious leaders stands in “sharp contrast to the attitude of the average citizen ... In everyday life here, people of various faiths are capable of getting along well; they have developed this capacity for dialogue over the course of centuries. But when it comes to the religious superstructure – theologians and so on – the situation is really much worse than we would prefer to admit.”<sup>30</sup>

The general impression is that initiatives which have been undertaken to promote inter-religious dialogue in post-war Bosnia have been somewhat distant from the reality of ordinary people. Initiatives for rapprochement have mainly focused on small circles of intellectuals and have not affected wider parts of society. Moreover, it can be concluded that there have been important efforts but these initiatives still cannot be considered as part of genuine inter-religious dialogue. To qualify as inter-religious dialogue, an activity must be primarily “inspired by religious vocation” which, besides its mystical dimension, must have a comprehensive social profile.

Inter-religious dialogue needs a substantial theological background that can only be developed in an atmosphere of tolerance and mutual respect in a society. A post-conflict period certainly does not provide an adequate environment for substantive dialogue. It is therefore not surprising that ten years after Dayton, success stories of inter-religious *dialogue* cannot be presented in Bosnia. The most that could be expected in this particular phase were inter-religious encounters that would ease the overriding tension and prepare the ground for a development which later might lead to a genuine dialogue.

There is still one key task in the process of inter-religious rapprochement throughout Bosnia which must be addressed by Roman Catholics, Serbian

<sup>28</sup> Private correspondence between M. Orsolc and Z. Brajovic – with permission from M. Orsolc.

<sup>29</sup> Statement of Marko Orsolc at the interfaith conference of religious leaders in Trebinje, April 2002.

<sup>30</sup> Marko Orsolc, interview with Klaus Dahmann (Deutsche Welle) 2002. English translation: [www.qantara.de/webcom/show\\_article.php/\\_c-308/\\_nr-9/\\_p-1/i.html](http://www.qantara.de/webcom/show_article.php/_c-308/_nr-9/_p-1/i.html).

Orthodox and Bosnian Muslims (Bosniaks) alike. The members of all these religious communities share a common Slavic origin; at the very least, there are no ethnic or linguistic demarcation lines. Nonetheless, they have been heavily affected and forced into confrontation by the nationalisation of religious differences. This division still exists and could be regarded as perpetuating the conflict from the 1990s. Each of the religious communities has to face the past and its own responsibility and find the minimal common ground for tolerance and dialogue in the present and future. The Jewish community, as a genuine part of Bosnian identity but not a part of the Bosnia problem of the 1990s (although unfortunately this did not save it from suffering), can provide strong support for this process.

Inter-religious encounters can function as an element of post-conflict settlement and thus should continue, but they should place their emphasis on producing tangible results and focusing on well-defined activities that achieve these results, rather than pursuing too many objectives, or objectives which are too broad in scope or are distant from the reality and life of ordinary people in Bosnia and the Balkans.

## 5. The Need for Broader and Genuine Dialogue at the Theological Level

Establishing tolerant relations among religious communities is a prerequisite for all dimensions of inter-religious dialogue. In today's Bosnia a dialogue is needed that is aimed at *theological exchange in general, not only at involving people from the Balkans*. However, in order to develop this broader dialogue, it is necessary to deal with local Balkan burdens. It is important to see the differences and similarities, the dividing and connecting issues. Despite the significant differences, the Christian, Muslim and Jewish religions share quintessential values. Jewish and Christian traditions talk of the human being as "*created in the image of God*" which Islam describes as "*the most sublime of God's Creation*". All three traditions affirm the sanctity of human life and the inalienability of human dignity. These shared values should lead Jews, Christians and Muslims to a special relationship of cooperation and universal solidarity. Despite different perceptions, members of all these religions experience "God" similarly. The notion of "holiness" in Christianity and Islam does not differ in its effects and results. Christians are viewed as the "people of the Book" by the representatives of Islam. Islamic faith does not question their salvation. Hence both are equal in dialogue. The policies of proselytism and unification have been condemned by the highest authorities of the Catholic Church and are now seen as tragic remnants of Christianity. The Orthodox

Church is in a different position and has inherited difficulties in relating to other confessions. But it will also have to develop different views on history and to stop thinking in terms of “us” and “them,” gradually putting aside its negative picture of Islam. Yet the question remains: *How much scope is there for inter-religious dialogue in Bosnia? Inculturation and justice* offer a possible answer.

*Inculturation* means that the (religious) message and activities must be incorporated in the culture and spiritual tradition of those addressed, so that the message is not only intelligible to them but is conceived as responding to their deepest aspirations. Christians and Muslims both share the foundations of ethics and humanism. Mutual goals will always “concern achieving Gospel and Koran ideals that are at the same time rational and humane ideals” (Djuric 2000). A common goal can be striving for *justice*.

*Justice* is necessary if mutual reconciliation is to be attained. Justice excludes violent conflict and is needed for power balance and harmony. There are different approaches and perceptions of justice. Immanuel Kant’s concept of justice, for instance, contains no notion of forgiveness. It is antithetical. Following this concept means that, although suffering the consequences of the terrible war, we should in no way speak of retribution and punishment, as such talk leads to disputes, not to dialogue. The concept of God’s justice, however, does contain the notion of forgiveness. Moreover, the Church must be – and in fact can be – *socially and politically involved where issues of justice are concerned*. It must never dictate the policies of the state, but it should provide answers to ethical and social issues (which can themselves be highly political), in order to provide people with orientation and incentives for social engagement.

## 6. Conclusions and Perspectives for Reconciliation

1. The importance of religious and national identities in the Balkans has been underestimated for a long time. Both dimensions of identity have been misused by powerful groups. The result was the dissolution of social cohesion in Bosnian (and Yugoslav) society. Ten years after Dayton there is still a long way to go in Bosnia from the end of the war to the establishment of a viable peace. *Reconciliation* could, at least in theory, bridge that gulf. But reconciliation takes time, and it is going to be a *long-term process of rebuilding relationships* between opposed communities.

Moreover, different levels of reconciliation are needed. Indeed, in essence, reconciliation may be conceived as a general striving for justice, truth, and forgiveness. Nevertheless, the process of reconciliation must also cope

with the far more prosaic realms of ordinary life in the form of local politics, economy, communal activities, etc. These are the relations that constitute our everyday reality. They enable production, trade, and investment to take place, which the economy and the state need in order to resume normal activity. The quality of these relations depends on the identity and adherence of ordinary people. It depends also on the question whether they are willing to learn lessons from the past, in order to prevent identities from being formed in nationalist and exclusive terms, leading to the elimination of “the other”.

From the standpoint of developing identity, a *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* (rather than war crimes tribunals) might contribute to reconciliation. Experience from South Africa has shown that the truth and reconciliation process has contributed to more lasting solutions. In these post-conflict situations, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has certainly not solved all problems, and it would be naive to believe that this alone can achieve reconciliation. Reconciliation involves much more than just bringing to light the truth of the past. By necessity, reconciliation must occur simultaneously with other vital tasks, such as reconstruction, the return of refugees, and the formation of civil and political institutions.

2. But there is also a *dilemma* which has to be taken into consideration regarding post-war Bosnia. We need to be clear about the two parallel processes that follow after the Dayton Agreement. Bosnia faces, on the one hand, the need for post-conflict settlement and, on the other hand, the challenge of transition. While reconciliation is relevant for post-conflict settlement, it is counterproductive for the economic and political transition which Bosnian societies are faced with. This is a dilemma, for Bosnia has to press ahead with economic and political transition as soon as possible and must overcome the “passive obstruction” which results from people’s lack of interest and motivation. Building new social cohesion requires creative energy and adherence. On the other hand, a post-conflict settlement which aims at reconciliation needs to concentrate on reconstruction; it must allow emotions to calm and let time work for peace. But there is simply no time for such a long-term process of reconciliation, as there is a pressing need for economic and political changes.

Post-conflict settlement concepts which are linked with reconciliation may be inappropriate for Bosnia, especially if they strive to restore multiethnic and multireligious tolerance, forgiveness and the healing of memories as a path to the restoration of the former way of life and societal structures and ignore the fact that in Eastern and South East Europe, the former societal structures and their concomitant ways of living no longer exist; on the contrary, their reality is



marked by the challenge of *transition from one political and economic system* to another one. Within this process, all available positive energy and adherence must be mobilised in order to provide a new model of social cohesion and visions for the future. This is why discussions on how to “*re-construct*” societies and social relations risk missing the point, and the concept of *re-conciliation* needs to be carefully adapted.

Obviously, reconciliation corresponds with different building blocks of our identity, in order to avoid the conflict (of identities) and the split between communal duties and personal conviction, which are extremely destructive for both communities and individuals. The concept of reconciliation therefore has to be discussed within the context of *justice*. It is not important for religious communities to follow a common understanding of justice nor is it desirable that they try to impose a concept (like the Christian notion of forgiveness) on others. But it is extremely important for them to be socially and politically involved where issues of justice and ethical questions are concerned, in order to provide their members with values, direction and incentives for engagement for society.

Other tensions, cutting across ethnic and religious identities, may also be barriers to reconciliation. There is a widening rift, for example, in experience, perspectives and resources between those who remained in place throughout the conflict and those who are returning, between those who have not been directly affected by the war and those who lost their loved ones or former existence. Resentment has also developed over disparities in post-conflict assistance. As Leban (2003) points out: “Interestingly, Sarajevans tend to think that all citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina share an underlying set of values, and therefore Sarajevans are relatively optimistic about prospects for interfaith actions and reconciliation.” But prospects for the long-term process of reconciliation depend on a variety of factors which are not fundamentally linked with the material structures of societies. All these factors and regional differences have to be considered in order to avoid unrealistic expectations.

Bosnia needs people of good will, mediators, resources, and efficient services. In the post-war period, many people started to work there with good intentions and a high level of motivation. It is important, however, to teach people how to be tolerant, how to conduct a dialogue, and how to love other people. All too often, the true intention behind external support and mediation has been to exert influence. Our challenging need is for mediators who do not see themselves as influence-peddlers. Unfortunately, we have far more mediators than peace-builders in the region. The essential need for Bosnian society is to be tolerant, to be willing to have a dialogue, and to love people regardless of national or religious affiliation. Our message is: Do not predict or dictate; rather, do it yourself.

3. In conclusion, it is clear that there is no possibility of building a viable society in Bosnia without addressing religious identities. But the question remains: How should they be addressed, in order to contribute to conflict transformation? In a way, Bosnian society now finds itself at a crossroads. There are three different possible answers.

- The first possibility would be decoupling religion and national identity by secularising society, and replacing communal commitments by a more individualistic ethic.
- A second option would be to identify, within the cultural and religious traditions of the Balkans, the moral norms and basic beliefs that are consistent with and reinforce a vision of society – of another society in which religious, ethnic and national differences are less a source of conflict than a reason for coexistence.
- A third option would be to counter religious extremism (or manipulation of religion) with a strengthened and more authentic religion. The challenge for the Balkans would then be to show that “religion can counter extreme nationalism and can be a source of peace because of, not in spite of, its close link with culture and national identity” (Powers 1996:221-252).

Whatever option is chosen in the future, one principle should be clear: In a modern society, religious communities must readjust their relations with political power. The state must guarantee political plurality, while the Christian churches, mosques and synagogues stand for religious diversity and remain key civil society actors.

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