

## The War in Former Yugoslavia and Religion

SRDJAN VRCAN

### I

It is a legitimate, intriguing and urgent challenge to contemporary sociological research to enquire into the role of religion in the Yugoslav crisis. The question involves more than simply the relationship between religion and war: it involves the earlier and wider question of the role of religion in deepening social divisions and cleavages until they reach the point of fracture and in exacerbating social conflicts until they reach maximum incandescence. It also involves the question of the relationship of religious confessions to each other, and to the otherness of the others, in an area with mixed population, multiconfessional, multinational and multicultural.

Two fundamental *a priori* objections may of course be made to asking the question at all.

Firstly, some will point out that the war has been characterised as a religious one by the propaganda apparatus of one or other of the conflicting parties with the purely propagandistic aim of concealing the real nature of the war and creating (at least) confusion in international public opinion. It is more or less obvious, however, that this war has not been a religious war. It is evidently a political war, caused by political strategies which since the beginning of the Yugoslav crisis have been on a collision course. It is a war which fully confirms the well-known formula of Clausewitz that war is but a continuation of politics by other means. However, this does not mean that religion has nothing to do with the war. It is also more or less obvious that the three major confessions of the region, Catholicism, Orthodoxy and Islam, have all been implicated and involved in the conflict in some way and to some degree. Here we see an analogy with the civil war in Lebanon and the chronic conflict in Northern Ireland. In both these cases the wars have not been 'religious' in terms of the classical definition of a 'holy war';<sup>1</sup> but at the same time it has been obvious that religion has not been a purely passive onlooker but has been actively engaged in the conflict. Consequently at an impressionistic level the assertions of F. Vreg sound a convincing note:

Amongst the demons of destruction of the processes of cultural rapprochement in the European area have been not only growing ethnicism, which frequently turns into the malignant tumour of nationalism, but also religious mysticism. We have seen a brutal eruption not only of national feelings with their political symbols, but of religious feelings and symbols too, and this has been wrongly understood as a religious rebirth. Croatian soldiers wear not only HDZ badges, but Catholic crosses too; Serbian soldiers do not carry photographs of Milošević but Orthodox crosses. Muslim fundamentalists and mujaheddins kill under the slogan of Allah.

In the former Yugoslav area, then, 'new' frontiers are being established between Catholics, Orthodox and Muslims.<sup>2</sup>

There is no doubt that religious symbolism has for some obviously relevant reasons been widely and deliberately used in the armed conflicts in the former Yugoslav area.

Secondly, it is possible to dismiss the whole question with the argument that the war in former Yugoslavia is purely accidental in origin, or that it is an essentially anomalous phenomenon with no symptomatic value and therefore not deserving of any kind of sociological investigation at all. This argument hardly stands up to scrutiny, however. It is more plausible to maintain that the war is the inevitable result of a dominant political logic which has been in operation for some time. We ought also to remember that current developments in former Yugoslavia can hardly be interpreted as constituting a radical novelty in the modern history of the area, but rather as a contemporary repetition of events which have happened before. It is not surprising that Ernest Gellner's descriptions of the situation in some parts of Eastern Europe formulated in the early 1980s are valid for the developments in former Yugoslavia in the early 1990s. It has turned out to be true that obedience to the nationalist imperative must 'involve population exchanges or expulsions, more or less forcible assimilation, and sometimes liquidation, in order to attain that close relation between the state and culture which is the essence of nationalism.'<sup>3</sup> We also need to bear in mind that the war in former Yugoslavia is not the only war of its kind. In 1992 most of the 30 or more wars being waged around the world were of a tribal, racial, ethnic and/or religious character.<sup>4</sup> Some religious thinkers have been taking up the general challenge of the problem of religion and war. Thus Torrelli asks: 'As it emerges from patriotic wars and wars generated by the clash of two ideological messianisms, is the world going to be engulfed by new religious wars?'<sup>5</sup> It is very difficult, then, to argue that the war in former Yugoslavia is a totally anomalous phenomenon. Just the contrary: it may reasonably be claimed that this is a war with highly symptomatic value if, for instance, C. Offe is right in his diagnosis of the situation in Central and Eastern Europe to the effect that 'there the scene is dominated by territorial disputes, migrations, minority or nationality conflicts, and corresponding secessionist longings'.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, it is permissible to connect the events in former Yugoslavia, which have led to a war in which religion plays a visible role, with some developments and changes of a wider extent. 'As the world becomes increasingly interdependent,' writes Kokosalakis,

and as the utopianism of modernity becomes explicit, ethnic struggles and the assertion of identities become a prominent feature of the contemporary world. Religion at large is inextricably involved in this process almost everywhere and exemplifies the very tensions which are inherent in the matrix of universalism and localism.<sup>7</sup>

The developments in former Yugoslavia may be interpreted as constituting an extreme case of tensions which exist elsewhere. In a stimulating analysis Patrick Michel insists that 'all these contemporary societies are postcommunist societies in the sense that all have to manage the end of a polarity of ultimate references, which have been structuring not only people's behaviour but also their mentality', and that the problems of relationship between particular and universal are today of a crucial urgency.<sup>8</sup>

Some would argue that this war ought to be projected onto the background of the

problem of the affirmation of identities and differences and also of their relation to others and to otherness. In this respect, the war in former Yugoslavia may be taken as an extreme case in which the affirmation of identities has turned into a practical denial of the possibility of living together peacefully and on a basis of equality with others and their otherness, as well as an extreme case in which, as Kalscheuer has recently underlined, religious memories and identities have become motives for their bloody self-affirmation.<sup>9</sup>

## II

There are at least three major lines of argument which emphasise the specific features of the war in former Yugoslavia and legitimise our enquiry into the role of religion in the crisis.

The first line of argument proceeds from a series of undeniable facts. It is a fact that it is largely religious believers and members of various confessions who have been killing each other, who have been destroying each other's homes and churches, who have been driving each other from their towns and villages. Without their engagement on a mass scale, there would be no war, or at least the war would have been shorter and more confined. It is also true that when religion is important to people it is religion which defines the actual battle-lines.<sup>10</sup> To some degree this has been confirmed by events in former Yugoslavia. Another undeniable fact is that the combatants on all sides have made extensive use of religious symbols as the most appropriate to indicate their identities and to demonstrate the aims they have been fighting for; and religious symbols have also been the best means of identifying legitimate targets for destruction. There can hardly be any doubt that the war has so far been waged in a context of religious symbolism, and that the use of religious symbolism has had the effect of increasing rather than decreasing the conflict potential of the basic confrontation. Conflicts between religious and national groups frequently attain extraordinary vehemence and are the most difficult to abate.<sup>11</sup>

It is, furthermore, an evident fact that the war has so far had some very important consequences for the religious confessions in former Yugoslavia. First of all, there is no doubt that the war has made important changes to the map of the whole area and will continue to do so. It would be naive to believe that these changes will affect only the political map of the area, and will be confined to a redrawing of the borders of the new states. In fact, as the conflicts have become totalised and radicalised, they have been changing all kinds of maps: social, political, demographic, economic, cultural and confessional; even the maps of people's everyday lives. One may therefore predict with certainty that the confessional map of the area which will ultimately emerge will certainly be very different from the previous one.

Secondly, there have been very important changes in the social position of the various confessions within the various institutional frameworks in the area. The churches and religions have moved from an essentially extrasystemic or even countersystemic position to occupy a systemic or suprasystemic position; religion is now the overarching systemic cultural and symbolic aggregate.

Thirdly, there have been important changes in the very content of the operative religious confessions. It is obvious that ecumenical dialogue initiatives have been declining everywhere and in some places have completely ceased; that the balance between universalism and particularism within the different confessional cultures has been radically changing; and that some features of the various religions which were previously of marginal or secondary relevance have become more prominent: the

theme of sacrifice, for instance, becoming so important in the current confessional interpretations of history, as martyrology in Serbian Orthodoxy, as a kind of Calvary in Croatian Catholicism and as a historical holocaust among the Bosnian Muslims.

Fourthly, there have been profound changes in the relations between the various confessions: almost everywhere they have deteriorated.

Fifthly, there have been important changes in the external political, cultural and ideological conditions under which the various confessions operate in the everyday life of society in the various regions of former Yugoslavia. The collapse of all previously existing systemic restrictions led to the affirmation of religious freedom on an abstract level; but this has now been followed by new restrictions and oppressive practices against particular confessions in different parts of the country. As so often in history, the proclamation of religious freedom has not been universal but very selective, increasing the freedom of some but restricting the freedom of others.<sup>12</sup>

Finally, it is a fact that since the mid-1980s the predominant political strategies in Central and Eastern Europe have been orientated towards the aim articulated by Mazzini in the nineteenth century of 'one nation one state'. In former Yugoslavia these strategies have obtained religious legitimacy, withheld for a time only by Bosnian Islam and more recently by part of Croatian Catholicism in Bosnia. The Mazzinian political formula is very close to the Old Testament formula of 'one God, one nation and one land'.<sup>13</sup>

The second line of argument is historico-situationally specific.

Firstly, it is obvious, but needs stressing, that the war in former Yugoslavia is a very peculiar contemporary war. It is being waged not in some distant part of Asia, Africa or Latin America but on European soil, close to the very heart of Europe, an hour by air from major European cities.

Secondly, it is obvious, but needs stressing, that the confessions implicated and engaged in the war are not strange pagan religions or extremist fanatical sects, but well-established and respectable world religions: Christianity in its Catholic and Orthodox versions has shaped European history and Islam has existed on European soil for centuries. Those involved are believers in God in general and in God and Christ in particular.

Thirdly, we should note that this war has another peculiarity. It is a war not between opposing states with more or less delineated frontiers and more or less regular armies, but a war being waged and presented as one between nations as collective entities, involving in a total manner all individuals belonging to those nations and disregarding any other identities they may possess. It is a war which has been depicted and publicly legitimised as a confrontation between presumably irreconcilable types of human culture and civilisation; and in the final analysis, as a legitimate confrontation of totally incompatible worlds. It is a war, therefore, into which the principle of collective responsibility as opposed to that of personal responsibility has been introduced; and this principle has legitimised the elimination of all distinctions between military and civilians, between armed and unarmed, between men and women, between adults and children. It has moreover become legitimate to resort to retaliation on a mass scale as a normal way of waging the war, and to treat all persons and objects identified by a specific national sign as hostile and as legitimate targets. With this aspect of the war being daily underlined by the mass media and the politicians it is not surprising that thousands of people have been murdered, that thousands of houses have been demolished or plundered in regions where no shot has ever been fired, that numerous churches and devotional objects have been destroyed in places otherwise untouched by war operations, that hundreds of thousands of

people have been driven from their homes, that thousands of unarmed civilians have been arrested as potential enemies and sent to concentration camps.

Fourthly, another particular feature of the war is that it is not being waged between total strangers against unknown intruders from far away, but between people who yesterday were acquaintances, neighbours, colleagues, friends. Furthermore, the weapons being used are not examples of contemporary high technology that kill and destroy at a distance: these combatants come face to face with their victims and are personal witnesses of the effects of their actions; consequently, the war is waged in an atmosphere of overheated personal emotional commitment. At the same time, this war is not being fought as a strictly professional task requiring only technical knowledge and efficiency: it is more similar to traditional wars which require an emotional commitment on the part of the combatants and their supporters. It is a war, therefore, which feeds on overheated hatred, and it needs the permanent production and reproduction of hatred on a mass scale as its main spiritual fuel. In this sense it is a war in the manner of a *jihad*. A recent commentator has described some current wars as not simply instruments of politics but as signs of identity, expressions of community, ends in themselves.<sup>14</sup> As Torrelli notes, describing modern wars:

The enemy is the central notion; the war is being waged against him; but in modern wars, in ideological wars, in civil wars the enemy becomes a human type to destroy: he is to be 'converted', or he must disappear; this is a new war between 'believers' and 'heretics'. True religious wars have always been manichaeic wars in which the enemy has been satanised.<sup>15</sup>

There is thus no way of avoiding the difficult subject of the role of religion in the production and reproduction of hatred on a mass scale.

Finally, we must take account of the fact that the war is being waged in Europe, in an area that may reasonably be considered, for historical and cultural reasons, as almost the ideal field for practising interconfessional dialogue and ecumenism and working towards multiculturalism, multiconfessionality and multinationality as a viable way of life for present and future. The fact is, however, that publicly proclaimed willingness for interconfessional dialogue and ecumenism has not been able to resist increasing social division and conflict. The religious problem is not a failure to agree on the theological interpretation of the *filioque*, or on celibacy, or on the question of women priests or on papal primacy; the problem is a failure to live together in conditions of normality and equality. Interconfessional dialogue and ecumenism seem to belong to history. Never before, except during the Second World War in some regions, has the idea that 'it is impossible to live together with these others' obtained more support or higher legitimacy. Never before has a multinational, multicultural and multiconfessional community been not only declared unviable but stigmatised also as something unnatural, against nature.

The third line of argument to demonstrate the legitimacy of an exploration of the role of religion in the war in former Yugoslavia is predominantly theoretical.

Firstly, the war provides an opportunity for a reexamination of some of Max Weber's ideas and more particularly of their contemporary relevance. I am referring mainly to Weber's idea that an unavoidable polytheism, an irreducible pluralism of gods, or ultimate values, leads inevitably to irreconcilable antagonism as the distinctive feature of the human condition as such. According to A. Giddens, commenting on Weber's ideas, the war in former Yugoslavia seems to suggest that behind ultimate values stands nothing but force, that irreconcilable cultures are defended by conflicting states operating from the home of their power.<sup>16</sup> Have Weber's ideas been

superseded by modern history? Are they outdated, or have they preserved their theoretical relevance for the contemporary sociology of religion? We should remember particularly Weber's warning that in the modern age the old gods might well rise again from their tombs and engage once again in their old eternal struggles, leaving to men only the possibility of aligning themselves with one or the other.

Secondly, as Weber did, we should examine the relationship between the religious ethics of human universal brotherliness and politics. Weber concluded that there is an acute tension between the two, which is always connected with power and violence, either manifest or latent.<sup>17</sup> It seems now, in light of recent experience, that this relationship is more complex and more ambivalent. One ought to remember Hobsbawm's thesis that Christianity has been the most fertile greenhouse for universal but competing ideas.<sup>18</sup> Frequently, the acute tension noted by Weber either does not exist, or is easily circumvented, particularly when integral nationalism enters on the scene.<sup>19</sup> At least it seems that the otherness of the 'others' may be easily absolutised in such a way as to put those 'others', with their specific traits, for all practical purposes outside the field otherwise covered by universal human brotherliness. That this is so could, of course, best be demonstrated by an analysis of public reaction to war crimes and misdeeds committed against others by their own side.

Thirdly, we should take note of an interesting set of problems regarding the process of transition to which Patrick Michel draws our attention. Discourse on transition presupposes that the point of departure of the transition as well as the point of arrival have been clearly identified, which is not the case. Michel discusses the role of communism in the development of modern society. On the one hand, there is the view common in the Catholic Church that the Soviet system was the last incarnation of modernity, the last caricature by those who would construct a world without God and the ultimate bastard offspring of the Enlightenment, and that consequently the fall of communism represents the victory of the church over modernity. On the other hand, there is an interpretation of the fall of communism which sees communism as a failed attempt to retard a continuous and global process of disenchantment by substituting a political modality of believing for a religious modality: the fall of communism is thus a further stage in the process of global disenchantment – this time, disenchantment with sacralised politics. According to the latter interpretation, the primary function of religion in the transition from communism has been to compel politics to limit and desacralise itself. Consequently, there are two distinct processes in operation. The first has been inducing the political reinstrumentalisation of religion, which thus becomes one of the reference points for politics and regularly questions the categories of pluralism and therefore of democracy. The second process is longterm, it involves a threefold phenomenon of individualisation, differentiation and rationalisation, and it induces the loss of social relevance of religion. In the final analysis, those who appeal to ultimate and absolute references are facing the champions of democratic politics which, because it operates in conditions of pluralism, has by definition to be located in the relative. After the failure of communism with its ultimate references, sacralised and absolutised, the choice seems to be between politics with ultimate religious references, excluding pluralism (at least at the highest level), and politics with no ultimate references at all, no sacred absolutes, and hence coherently pluralist. Put in the simplest terms, the choice is between politics in a reenchanting and disenchanting world, and politics in a disenchanting and disenchanting world. The consequences of this disjunction are certainly very interesting to examine.<sup>20</sup> The role of religion in the Yugoslav crisis should shed light on the relationship between war and these two alternative types of postcommunist politics.

### III

There is no need to develop a lengthy argument in order to show that the major confessions have played an important role in sharpening social divisions and in intensifying social conflict or to demonstrate their involvement in various ways in the war that has broken out. It is, however, important to explore the reasons for this role and involvement. To quote N. Kokosalakis:

In what was Yugoslavia, of course, the claims for autonomy of the new Republics of Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia, etc., and the resultant violent conflicts, are all underpinned by different ethno-religious boundaries between Catholics, Orthodox and Moslems. Now it hardly needs emphasizing that these ethnoreligious identities are immediately connected with the social and political struggles of these people to acquire statehood and a place in a world of scarcity and hard economic realities. Religious conservatism in these circumstances tends to promote political radicalism and violent conflict.<sup>21</sup>

The involvement of the major religious confessions in the war has developed on the basis of the confessional legitimacy previously given to the dominant political strategies. The religious confessions have been variously involved with political strategies in three contexts: firstly, in bringing about the demolition of the atheistic state with the elimination of all previously existing restrictions and institutional pressures on religion and ecclesial organisations and securing complete religious freedom; secondly, in securing independent national states in a complex region where the application of the right to self-determination must disclose the 'chameleonic' nature of this right;<sup>22</sup> and thirdly, in accomplishing radical and rapid transition involving a set of political, economic, ideological and cultural shock therapies.

Conferring confessional legitimacy on such political strategies in general is, however, different from conferring it on a war. To qualify as 'just', a war must traditionally fulfil a number of crucial requirements, including the following: (a) war should be a last resort when all other means have been exhausted; (b) war should clearly be an act of redress of rights actually violated or defence against unjust demands backed by the threat of force; (c) war must be openly and legally declared by properly constituted governments; (d) there must be a reasonable prospect of victory; (e) the means must be proportionate to the ends; (f) the war must be waged in such a way as to distinguish between combatants and noncombatants; (g) the victorious nation must not require the utter humiliation of the vanquished. All the major confessions involved in the war in former Yugoslavia have effectively invoked this same doctrine to legitimate their support for the different and opposed political strategies that have led to the war and consequently for their support for the opposed sides in the war. It should also be noted that the doctrine of 'just war' is being invoked at a time when at least some Christian thinkers have been seriously questioning and revising that doctrine.<sup>23</sup> It is also clear that there are no indications that serious consideration has ever been given to observations such as Reinhold Niebuhr's warning that the Christian faith 'ought to persuade us that political controversies are always conflicts between sinners and not between righteous men and sinners. It ought to mitigate the self-righteousness which is inevitably concomitant to all human conflict.'<sup>24</sup> Finally, it is also important to take into account the generally disregarded possibility that the irony of history may be at work today in the process of transition in this area, as it has been before, involving the possibility of perverse effects of otherwise commendable social

actions.<sup>25</sup> It is thus a legitimate exercise to look more closely at the reasons which have motivated and facilitated confessional options for opposed political strategies, providing religious legitimacy for such strategies and contributing to a more or less total mobilisation of confessional resources for political purposes.

Lying behind this phenomenon is a complex process involving the parallel politicisation of religion and the religionisation of politics, described by R. Robertson as a trend of world dimensions.<sup>26</sup>

Despite occasional criticism and partial dissent, the politicisation of religion has been proceeding steadily in official political circles. It may be detected primarily in a visible political instrumentalisation of religion and in a religious instrumentalisation of politics. The former involves a visible process of mobilisation of all the resources at disposal, including confessional resources, for political purposes in a situation of increasing social conflict. In fact, none of the dominant political strategies that have led to the war had a realistic chance of success without an extended mobilisation of the various existing confessional resources or without obtaining at least some kind of legitimacy in superior religious terms. The latter involves a direct confessional intervention in politics, without which there is no realistic likelihood of a religious *reconquista* of secularised society. This has required the affirmation of each particular confession as the primary legitimating institution, which is able to create and recreate stable loyalty on a mass scale to emerging social and political systems.

The political mobilisation of confessional resources has been brought about in two different ways, described by R. Robertson.<sup>27</sup> A particular religious confession will be favoured as a result of ideological motives and for political purposes which are in themselves of a nonreligious and extrareligious nature; meanwhile a particular political programme will be chosen on the basis of strictly religious commitments and for purely religious motives.

The parallel process of the religionisation of politics has been going on in different ways. The process consists essentially in a tendency to present crucial political concepts as meriting total adherence and unconditional and overheated veneration, in substance religious or parareligious.

The most important aspects of this process have been the following.

- 1 A systematic and permanent inclination to lend essentially religious attributes and connotations to some key political concepts in everyday usage, even if these are of secular origin, with the evident intention of increasing their non-negotiable attraction and intensifying their emotional charge as well as protecting them by explicit sacralisation from possible political critique and immunising them from public dissent. In this way they are given an ultimate political legitimacy of essentially numinous nature as in political discourse about 'sacred Croatia', 'sacred Serbia', 'celestial Serbia', 'sacred untouchable frontiers', 'sacred will of the nation', 'sacred history of the fatherland' and so on.
- 2 The ontologising of existing social, political and cultural differences, projecting them on to a metaphysical backdrop. By this means political conflicts are transformed into conflicts, as it were, *sub specie aeternitatis*; they are presented as conflicts between different and opposed human types, between irreconcilable cultures, between antagonistic types of civilisation. The possibility of normal and peaceful coexistence is thus reduced and the acceptable price to be paid for conflict and war is raised.
- 3 A pervading and systematic manichaeism is applied to current conflicts, and this leads to one of the opposed parties being portrayed as an angelic personifi-



cation of Good and the other as a diabolic incarnation of Evil. The tendency to depict the two sides as God's and Satan's goes against Weber's expectation that the introduction of God's name into violent political conflicts will be experienced by believers as blasphemy.<sup>28</sup>

- 4 An interpretation of national history in terms of a sacred martyrology of Calvary made glorious by the quality and quantity of the suffering of the victims that has to be recompensed or revenged in terms of a privileged quasi-salvational historical mission within the eternal plans of Providence, or in terms of a historical dedication of the nation chosen in advance by Heaven in a non-negotiable manner and committed to the celestial cause and spiritual values.
- 5 The nations involved are eternalised in terms of some kind of *Urvolk* and in terms of their fundamental allegedly suprahistorical immutable qualities.
- 6 A constant resort in official interpretations of recent political events to a theory of diabolic conspiracy (involving Masons, Jews, the Comintern, the Vatican) against this or that nation.

The end result of this kind of religionisation of politics can be described as the absolutisation and sacralisation of some otherwise controversial political goals or, in Michel's terminology, the reintroduction into politics of ultimate references; the reenchantment of politics. The process is of a structural nature and has social functions which can easily be detected. And it is hard to pretend, in the context of a critical sociological analysis, that such a process has nothing to do with religion.

Behind this whole process lies a very specific concept of the nation which is prevalent in contemporary confessional cultures, Orthodox and Catholic and recently Islamic too. As Schnapper has noted, there are at least two different histories of the nation, two different ideas of the nation which have been permanently opposed to each other, and the histories of the construction of the nation and national ideologies have been different in the eastern and western parts of Europe. 'In various terms theorists of the nation have opposed the nation of Western Europe – civic, voluntary, contractual – to the nation of Eastern Europe – populist, organic, natural, ethnic. The Western European nation of citizens is opposed to the Eastern European nation of ancestors.'<sup>29</sup>

The Western European definition dates back to the French Revolution, and 'defines the nation in non-ethnic terms. This concept of "*nation citoyenne*" is opposed to an ethnically-based definition of the nation.' The crucial element in this definition is 'the idea of the nation as an association of citizens, each of whom possesses certain rights which should be guaranteed and safeguarded by the state.' And this means that the nation is defined on the basis of 'the idea of citizenship and a commitment to pluralism': the nation is not to be understood in terms of a community which is ethnically and culturally homogeneous;<sup>30</sup> it is at least in principle open to all who participate in the common political life. The Eastern European concept of the nation is more ethnic than political, and is based on the idea of exclusive adherence to a collective entity, characterised by cultural homogeneity, which tends to be closed. Political structures are deemed to derive from the *Urvolk*, the preexisting historico-biological community, and the state is seen as the supreme, almost sacred, political incarnation of such a community and its *Wesenswille*, and not necessarily a state based on law and the democratically articulated political will of equal citizens, which is by definition negotiable and open to criticism and contestation as well as to rational and competent public discourse. This latter concept necessarily introduces a discriminatory distinction between citizens of the first order and citizens of the

second order, according to their nationality, or between citizens and subjects, the former enjoying all the rights of citizenship and the latter being denied some of these basic rights.<sup>31</sup>

Each of the main religions in former Yugoslavia is host to various traditions and cultural aggregates which can be used, and have been used, to stimulate and legitimate confessional options in support of political strategies in pursuit of the political ideal of 'one nation, one state, and only one state for each nation' – an ideal which can hardly be realised in this area without resort to violence. Some of these confessional traditions and cultural aggregates are as follows.

- 1 There is a tradition which refers to an allegedly insoluble synthesis between the respective nationality and confession, insisting that a particular confession has been not just one of the important historical and cultural components of the nationality in question, but the constituent and constitutive nucleus of the very being of that nation as such. An element of transcendence and sacredness has thus been implanted into the national being itself.
- 2 There is a traditional belief in the presumed convergence of the national state and its particular confession and church, a convergence which leads to the veneration of the national state as such, regardless of how it was established and the historical context in which it has developed, and above all regardless of the way it is organised and functions. In these circumstances, for a church to stay resolutely with its people means that it must also stay resolutely with its national state and state politics. The notion of the sacredness of the state has been built into the very idea of the national state.
- 3 There is a tradition which interprets national history as a sacred or quasiesacred martyrology (in Serbian Orthodoxy) or Calvary (in Croatian Catholicism) of the respective nation; this is primarily the consequence of a deliberate historical dedication of the nation to religious beliefs and celestial values. In this way national history becomes desecularised.
- 4 There is a tradition which ascribes a specific historical role to a particular nation in the history of a particular confession. The nation is described as finding itself on a religious frontier, as acting historically as the guardian of this (western or eastern) religious frontier and constantly exposed to external threats.
- 5 There is consequently a well-established tradition of a fundamental historical convergence between, on the one hand, the 'national cause' (Serbian or Croatian) and, on the other hand, the 'religious cause' (Orthodox or Catholic) in the wider arena. And this tradition appears to be reinforced by conditions in the modern industrial world. If, as Ernest Gellner argues, the function of the nation state in the modern industrial world is essentially that of a necessary political roof over a common culture, then there is an important twofold consequence for the former Yugoslav area: firstly, a particular religion as a crucial element in a common shared culture requires by necessity a specific political national roof over it in an otherwise pluricultural and pluriconfessional region; and, secondly, a state which claims to function as a political roof over a shared national culture in an otherwise pluricultural and pluriconfessional region must obtain an essentially religious legitimacy and generate the required cultural homogeneity in religious terms too. There is consequently a mutual reinforcement of two parallel absolutisms: national and confessional.
- 6 Finally, there is a tradition which regards those of a different confession as schismatics, heretics or infidels. This easily leads to the negative absolutisation

of confessional and national 'otherness' and lends a kind of superior legitimacy to political ideas which proclaim the impossibility of living together in a peaceful, democratic and durable way with those of different confessions and nationalities.

In my view we must come to the conclusion that the war in the former Yugoslavia is not a classical religious war of the type well known from history, but is nevertheless a war in which religion is deeply involved and consciously engaged. At the same time, the war has some of the characteristics of a war of faiths, if a war of faiths means a conflict of creed against creed ('*croire contre croire*', as Michel has put it<sup>32</sup>); but the faiths involved represent a mixture of confessional and worldly components, including absolutisations, sacralisations and reenchantments. It has to be said that the course of events in the Yugoslav crisis has shown that the confessions operating in the area have been more able to divide than to unite, to oppose than to conciliate, to inflame than to placate.<sup>33</sup>

### Notes and References

- <sup>1</sup> 'The term "holy war" has been, and is, applied to wars which are in some way the contest of God himself. Holy wars appear as wars which have been commanded. Their legitimacy does not allow of any debate: a holy war must lead to the total elimination of the opponent, who is the enemy of God himself ... A holy war is not only a just war; it is more than a necessary evil which ought to be limited; it is a positive good; it contributes to the accomplishment of God's kingdom; it executes God's will.' J. Touscoz, 'La guerre juste: quelques remarques sur les doctrines du judaïsme, du catholicisme et de l'islam', in M. Torrelli (ed.), *Religion et Guerres* (Mami, Nice, 1992), p. 93.
- <sup>2</sup> F. Vreg, 'Iluzije o evropskem multikulturalizmu', *Teorija in praksa*, vol. 30, nos 7–8, 1993, p. 664.
- <sup>3</sup> E. Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1986), p. 101.
- <sup>4</sup> B. Barber, 'Džihad protiv McWorld', *Teorija in praksa*, vol. 29, nos. 9–10, 1992, p. 843.
- <sup>5</sup> M. Torrelli, 'Introduction', *Religion et Guerres*, p. 9.
- <sup>6</sup> C. Offe, 'Capitalism by democratic design? Democratic theory facing the triple transition in East Central Europe', *Social Research*, vol. 58, no. 4, 1991, p. 869.
- <sup>7</sup> N. Kokosalakis, 'The historical continuity and cultural specificity of Eastern Orthodox Christianity', in *Conferenza Internazionale su 'Religions sans frontières?' Tendenze presenti e future di migrazione, cultura e comunicazione* (Università degli Studi di Roma 'La Sapienza', Rome, 1993), p. 94.
- <sup>8</sup> P. Michel, 'Pour une sociologie des itinéraires de sens: une lecture politique du rapport entre croire et institution', *Archives de sciences sociales des religions*, vol. 82, 1993, pp. 223–38.
- <sup>9</sup> O. Kallscheur, *So All European Roads Lead to (West) Rome*, (Institut für Wissenschaften vom Menschen, Vienna, 1993), p. 8.
- <sup>10</sup> J. Coleman, 'Social cleavages and religious conflicts', *The Journal of Social Issues*, no. 12, 1956, p. 46.
- <sup>11</sup> *loc. cit.*
- <sup>12</sup> E. Poulat, *Liberté, laïcité* (du Cerf, Cujas, Paris, 1987). As a credible witness may be taken Ševko Omerpašić, the head of the Islamic community for Croatia and Slovenia. See his interview in *Feral Tribune* (Split), 23 September 1993, p. 3.
- <sup>13</sup> J. L. Piveteau, 'L'Ancien Testament a-t-il contribué à la territorialisation de la Suisse?' *Social Compass*, vol. 40, no. 2, 1993, p. 169.
- <sup>14</sup> Barber, *op. cit.*, p. 843.
- <sup>15</sup> Torrelli, *op. cit.*, p. 23.
- <sup>16</sup> A. Giddens, *The Nation State and Violence* (Polity Press, Cambridge, 1992), p. 185.

- <sup>17</sup> H. H. Gerth and C. W. Mills, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1958), pp. 333–5.
- <sup>18</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *Nacije i nacionalizam* (Liber, Zagreb, 1992), p. 71.
- <sup>19</sup> The term ‘integral nationalism’ is taken from J. Schwarzmantel, who writes that ‘traditional or “integral nationalism” has invoked an idea of “one nation, one state”, where the nation has been claimed to be totally culturally united, as having supposedly homogeneous character.’ J. Schwarzmantel, ‘Nation versus class: nationalism and socialism in theory and practice’, in J. Oakley (ed.), *The Social Origin of Nationalist Movements* (Sage, London, 1992), p. 57.
- <sup>20</sup> Michel, *op. cit.*
- <sup>21</sup> N. Kokosalakis, ‘Religion and the dynamics of social change in contemporary Europe’, *Archives de sciences sociales des religions*, no. 81, 1993, p. 145.
- <sup>22</sup> The term is taken from B. Neuberger, ‘Samoodločba narodov-konceptualne dileme’, *Novarevija*, vol. 13, nos 141–2, 1994, p. 157.
- <sup>23</sup> See, for instance, G. Labouerie, ‘A propos de guerre juste’, in *Religion et Guerres*, p. 110. He insists that ‘there are no just wars, there are inevitable wars, wars connected with our freedom and its practice’. He refers to the Vatican II assertion that ‘war must never be regarded as a means of establishing justice among peoples’ (*ibid.*, p. 243).
- <sup>24</sup> Quoted in J. B. Elshtan, *Women and War* (Basic Books, Boston, 1987), p. 187.
- <sup>25</sup> R. Boudon, *Il posto del disordine* (Il Mulino, Bologna, 1985), p. 258.
- <sup>26</sup> R. Robertson, ‘Globalization, politics and religion’, in J. Beckford and T. Luckman (eds), *The Changing Face of Religion* (Sage, London, 1989), p. 12.
- <sup>27</sup> *ibid.* p. 19.
- <sup>28</sup> Gerth and Mills, *op. cit.*, p. 334.
- <sup>29</sup> D. Schnapper, ‘Les sens de l’ethnico-religieux’, *Archives des sciences sociales des religions*, no. 81, 1993, p. 155.
- <sup>30</sup> Schwarzmantel, *loc. cit.*
- <sup>31</sup> J. Habermas has pointed to tensions existing between the generalisation of human rights and nationalism, asserting that ‘the abstract generalised idea of democracy and human rights constitutes a solid point of reference upon which traditional national concepts – the language, literature and history of one nation – break down.’ J. Habermas, ‘Per una idea razionale di patria’, *Micromega*, no. 3, 1987, p. 131.
- <sup>32</sup> Michel, *op. cit.*, p. 228.
- <sup>33</sup> In this respect we should take into account critical views such as those expressed by Barber (*op. cit.*, p. 844) to the effect that whereas in the past such monotheistic faiths as Judaism, Christianity and Islam were characterised by an enlightened universalism, in their modern incarnations they tend to be parochial rather than cosmopolitan, fuelled by hatred rather than love, proselytic rather than ecumenical, fanatical rather than rational, sectarian rather than deistic, ethnocentric rather than universalist, with the result that as new forms of hypernationalism they are schismatic and secessionist, and never integrative.