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Book Review

Religion and the War in Bosnia edited by Paul Mojzes. Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1998. Paperback, xii + 294 pp., \$19.95.

This book is a collection of 19 essays examining various aspects of religion in the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992–95). They fall into three groups, dealing respectively with contextual issues, the religious factor in the war, and paths towards reconciliation. Among the 19 contributors there are nine from the USA, four from Croatia, three from Serbia, two from Bosnia, and one from Slovenia. They are mostly theologians (7) and sociologists of religion (6), with two church historians, two political scientists, a historian and a foreign policy adviser. The intention was to represent all the religious and national interests involved in the conflict and the contributors therefore include representatives of Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, Islam and Protestantism.

Although it was published in 1998, the book addresses the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina as it was in early 1996. The fact that the war had then only recently ended is evident from the tone and intensity with which the authors coming from the region express their convictions. ‘Milovan Djilas, the renowned Montenegrin ideologue and former Tito’s closest collaborator, pointed out that the Serbs never accepted a real faith, but were rather Christians only superficially while basing their life on ancient myths’, states the only Muslim contributor, Sulejman Mašović, in his short article (pp. 145–49).

While most of the contributors from other parts of the world try to treat the major religious communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Muslim) in a more-or-less even-handed way, the local contributors are either criticising the other confessions or defending their own. In fact, the issue of the involvement of the religious communities in the war comes down in this book to an attack on, and defence of, the role of the Serbian Orthodox Church.

The book envisaged an ecumenical and cooperative approach. Nevertheless the conclusion by Croatian sociologist of religion Srdjan Vrcan in his essay (p. 127) seems to echo the book’s main theme:

... it may be plausibly concluded that the religious factor in contemporary B&H has shown that it inclined more to separate than to unite, more to divide than to link together, more to confront than to cooperate, more to deepen social cleavages than to build bridges ...

Most of the articles contain helpful sources and footnotes, and at the end of the book there are biographical notes about the authors with a listing of their major works. We are left with the hope that the same kind of book by the same authors compiled today would reach qualitatively different conclusions. As Hans Kung

observed in 1993, during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, ‘there can be no peace among the nations without peace among the religions’.

BRANKO BJELAJAC