

DUST

BOOK ONE

THE FOUNTAIN IN THE WALL

BY

PETER PELZ

All mankind belongs to the same family.

In the beginning we had the same origins.

When fate brings suffering to a human being,

Other members of the family cannot remain unconcerned.

You who are not concerned for the suffering of another

You do not deserve to be called a human being

after Sa'adi

DUST

BOOK ONE

THE FOUNTAIN IN THE WALL

A SERB IN ENGLAND

Driving through the mountains of Snowdonia reminded Lazar of his homeland, the wild hills of Montenegro. Wales has that effect on visitors from all over the world, they recognize a familiar landscape. A Korean friend of my parents had the same reaction. Perhaps the soft rounded slopes gave a sense of being welcomed into the lap and bosom of Mother Earth. Welsh hills are consoling, curving and rolling across the horizon. For the first time Lazar began to relax and to unburden himself of his fears and doubts. We were on our way to Harlech Castle. What he told me in the back of the car led me to an abyss. I looked into it and realized the enormity, even the impossibility of our task in Bosnia.

‘You must be careful of the Muslims in Bosnia,’ he warned me. ‘The Albanians are terrible people. They are the worst. They don’t just kill you. They torture you, they rape you first; they cut you to pieces. They are not human. Serbs are civilized. They will kill you cleanly. We have a culture, we are not unnecessarily cruel. We do what we have to do, professionally, efficiently. All this talk of concentration camps! It is not true: He paused, remembering a recent meeting with Paddy Ashdown, the former leader of the Liberal Party, and now slated to be the new High Representative in Bosnia, who told him: ‘The Serbs are a noble race’. Lazar looked out of the window at the bleak hills dotted with sheep, then added in a strangled tone, almost as though

he couldn't really believe what he was telling me, but needing to hold on to a vestige of national dignity: 'If it were true, if I were to believe we could do such things, then I couldn't bear it. To be a Serb... I could not live with that...'

If an intelligent and educated young Serb were still in thrall to such prejudice and could not face the facts, what hope did we have of achieving reconciliation and peace-building in Bosnia? What use to remind him of the evidence, the survivors of Omarska, the emaciated victims staring through barbed wire reminding Western Europe of Buchenwald and Dachau, horrors from half a century earlier? Even if the stories turned out to be exaggerated, as they tend to be in any war, depending on which side loses, the appearance of these survivors, the corpses and graves of scores of young men, women and children, the villages laid waste across the Bosnian countryside provided evidence enough that atrocities had indeed occurred.

It is always hard to contemplate such extremes of human behavior, even from a safe distance. Driving through the Welsh countryside we observed the signs, written in both Welsh and English. Lazar enjoyed the comparisons with Bosnia. Different tribes populated Great Britain, each holding on to their unique traditions, including language and dialects. Mostly the tribes lived at peace. Lazar observed how the Northern Welsh kept a distance from us, speaking their own language and making it clear they tolerated us as guests, but that we should remember this was their land and we were foreigners. In his view, this island off the North Sea managed to contain its internal differences and conflicts without resorting to concentration camps and mass slaughters. Someone needed to remind him that even the United Kingdom has had its moments over the centuries. For now, each entity reminds the other of its existence and demands respect. Yet even here peace can not be guaranteed. Throughout our journeys in Bosnia people, mostly Serbs, reminded us reproachfully of a long history of violence in Northern Ireland, based also on

ethnic differences and the bitter outcome of historical colonialism.

Driving through the rolling hills and valleys of mid-Wales, Lazar thought of Bosnia and remarked, ‘Why do you need to come to us? You have everything here.’

THE FIFTH DOOR OPENS

Our visit to Serbia as described in my first book, *A Tender Bridge*, altered the course of the Soul of Europe. The initial objectives to create a network of city centre churches for the exchange of interesting and worthy ideas demanded practical projects. Kogi Hammar, the archbishop of Sweden, expressed doubts and perplexity shared by many. He wrote to us that he had not been able to respond to our first leaflet. The vague text prevented him getting a handle on what we wanted to achieve. As soon as he received the first report about our visit to Serbia with its proposals for peace-building and working towards reconciliation in Bosnia and Serbia, specifically through the collaboration of the different communities there to rebuild each others churches and mosques, Archbishop Hammar became enthusiastic and offered to become a patron of the project. The first leaflet roused little interest in Europe. A German contact found it too ‘harmonistic’, sentimental. Nobody knew how to respond. But once we returned with proposals and projects in Serbia and Bosnia, people in Europe took the trouble to meet with us, and discussed possibilities of collaboration, even promising to help us financially once we had worked on the proposals, made them precise, so that they knew precisely what they were supporting and funding.

Our first visit to Bosnia again altered the course of the Soul of Europe project. The grim reality of the political situation there swiftly showed the inappropriateness of building churches and mosques.

Bosnia needed to be brought into the family of Europe, a relationship which would help establish new forms of partnerships to improve its economy, and persuade young people not to leave their country. Employment and returning home would assist the different communities to learn to live together in peace and begin to heal the wounds of the past decade. So our projects needed to be grounded in the everyday reality of people's lives. This was not just a matter of helping a poor, remote and insignificant corner of Europe which most people elsewhere in the continent considered to be alien. The issues that tore this part of Europe, caused massacres, atrocities and widespread destruction of homes and churches, and were of concern to the whole of Europe.

Awareness of these problems inspires the largest of our projects: the reconstruction of the Ferhadija Mosque in Banja Luka. Europe turned a blind eye to the successful ethnic cleansing that took place in several important towns in Bosnia; therefore, to our thinking, the Ferhadija Mosque had to be rebuilt as a symbolic gesture of reparation by the Christian community and as a message to Muslims that they could consider themselves welcome in Europe. Doing nothing meant that Europe continued to not care what happened to Muslims. The Bosnia conflict could happen again. Only this time, as we were constantly warned, the Islamic community would be ready to defend itself. Already 2000 the future did not look secure or peaceful in Europe: and that was before 9:11 and the invasion of Iraq. For this reason the Soul of Europe devoted its energies to projects which would resonate beyond the borders of Bosnia, this still relatively unknown part of south east Europe. We needed to learn from the people there, not only about the dangerous consequences of inflaming ethnic hatreds, but, more practically, how people from different ethnic and religious groups were able to live in relative peace together for centuries.

In the summer of 2000 we postponed our travels throughout Europe in order to raise funds for

the projects, establish a network of friends and supporters, involve church and other communities in the United Kingdom and tell people what we were trying to do. Two events determined the next steps of the Soul of Europe.

A bruising encounter with a Bosnian Serb at a reception in July for the Soul of Europe highlighted the problem for Serbs working in Bosnia, and Lazar decided that he could no longer be involved in our projects there. We then engaged Adnan Jabucar, a Muslim from Sarajevo, to be our translator and driver. This appointment proved to be the key to whatever success we achieved in our projects. At the same we established a partnership with Ros Tennyson in her capacity as Senior Advisor for the Prince of Wales International Business Leaders Forum. She helped us ground our projects in Bosnia.

Stephen and Isabel Wenman hosted a reception for the Soul of Europe in their Thames embankment apartment, with its spectacular view up and down the river, the pedestrian bridge to the Tate Modern standing opposite on the other side of the Millennium Bridge. The main purpose was to raise funds for our work, but despite the Wenmans' butler and two waitresses serving expensive champagne with caviar and pate de foie gras canapes, not one guest gave any money to the Soul of Europe. However the Bosnian ambassador, Osman Topcagic, who attended the reception, giving a speech appealing for Bosnia to become part of Europe, later persuaded Stephen Wenman to support his business ventures in Bosnia, something to do with trading furniture. The ambassador's Bosnian Serb deputy, Radovan Kotic, who represented the interests of the Republika Srpska, came to the reception uninvited. Radovan Kotic, lean and with steel-grey hair, fixed us with a suspicious stare, polite but severe. He attached himself limpet-like to Lazar and they spent most of the evening in deep conversation. Before leaving the party, with the last guests, Radovan Kotic buttonholed Donald and made it clear that he did not favour our

project in Bihac, even though the ambassador supported it. He told us to avoid Bihac and concentrate our efforts in Brcko, a town near the border with Serbia. Lazar had already researched the area. He concluded that Brcko did not provide the favourable traditional ethnic coexistence that could be found in the Bihac area, where, until the war, all three Bosnian communities had lived together amicably for generations. Furthermore, Bihac had a more attractive setting; in Lazar's words: 'Nature, waterfalls and stuff.' But after his conversation with Radovan Kasic, Lazar changed his mind and tried to persuade us to work in Brcko. We felt that he had not told us everything. It turned out that Radovan Kasic had threatened him, warning of the dangers for a Serb to work in the Bihac area. At first we assumed Muslims, who were the majority in Bihac, might kill Lazar. Later we discovered that the chief danger came from nationalist Bosnian Serbs who discouraged any cooperation with Muslims in Bosnia.

We released Lazar from his contract to work for us in Bihac, much to his relief. Meanwhile we needed an interpreter and at a Cross of Nails conference in Coventry, by chance met Igor Solunac, a Serb student training to be an Anglican Priest. Just twenty-one years old, he spoke fluent English without trace of an accent; astonishing for someone who had only visited England once before. Igor gladly offered to help us, particularly as he had already heard favourable reports about the Soul of Europe's projects in Belgrade. Ascetically slim, with soulful eyes like an icon of an Orthodox saint, he was popular with everyone, and became our friend and chief interpreter.

Canon Andrew White, who directed the Centre for Reconciliation at Coventry Cathedral and supported the Soul of Europe from the beginning, invited us to attend a Cross of Nails conference, made up of groups from all over the world who helped raise funds for the centre, whose symbol had been inspired by the two nails found lying in the shape of a cross by the dean

in the rubble of the destroyed cathedral the morning after a German air raid in the Second World War. We hoped to persuade the German and the United States representatives to back the Soul of Europe's projects. Though listening with muted interest, they preferred to socialize and gave presentations about their own charitable projects: the United States to neighbouring Third World countries, smuggling toothpaste and wheelchairs into Central America, the Germans raising money for a hospital in Bosnia.

Igor attached himself to us with enthusiasm, but immediately after returning to Belgrade he sent us a short email apologizing for being unable to help us in Bihac, he too had been threatened. 'It is all very silly,' he wrote to us, evidently understanding the situation as we did, that the peril did not come from the Muslims. 'I will tell you all about it later when we meet in England.'

We found ourselves without an interpreter shortly before we were due to make our second visit to Bosnia. The International Red Cross suggested several names and the best qualified turned out to be Adnan Jabucar, a 24 year old Muslim from Sarajevo, a journalist and Red Cross driver. He sent us an impressive CV. Seeming almost too good to be true, he offered to drive us everywhere we wanted, interpret for us and make all the arrangements. In fact he did all of these, and though he lacked Igor's fluency in English, he made up for this with a questing intelligence and acute understanding of the political situation in Bosnia. He also possessed a journalist's curiosity and was above all enthusiastic. His English rapidly improved as he gave a running commentary on all our meetings and discussions, providing useful background information from his experience as a journalist and contributing suggestions for new projects. Most significantly he opened a door for us into the Muslim world. It turned out Lazar had damaged our credibility in Bosnia, being seen by Muslims as a hostile Serb. Adnan found his work in the first months hampered by having to persuade the muftis of Banja Luka and Bihac that the Soul of Europe had honestly peaceful

intentions. Without Adnan we might still be knocking in vain. The muftis as well as Muslim politicians appreciated our employing Adnan. Because we were prepared to work with and employ a Muslim they began to trust us.

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Looking back over fifteen years, the experience of our subsequent work in Bosnia, thanks to Adnan, opened a door on to a thrilling world I knew little about. In Bartok's opera, *Duke Bluebeard's Castle*, seven doors open to reveal different aspects of the duke's life. The first five rooms display his vast wealth. Each revelation is a musical climax. The final two rooms are forbidden. One of them opens onto the lake of his tears, the dense viscous orchestration, expressing a sorrow solidifying and suffocating. The final door reveals the former three wives, wearing diamond crowns, who each represent the hopeful morning, the blazing noon and the sombre evening of his variously married life. Before these tragic vistas are shown to his insistent fourth wife, the fifth permitted door opens on to an overwhelmingly magnificent panorama. The majestic music suggests a world that stretches over many horizons. The music Bartok writes for this door's opening comes close to describing the sensation for me of a significant, but little known, history of Islam's presence in Bosnia and Europe being revealed in all its glory.

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Financial security being uppermost in his mind, Adnan also sensibly negotiated a reasonable salary in order that we keep him on as an indispensable member of the team.

THE PLACE BETWEEN TWO LAKES

At the reception for the Soul of Europe, our host, Stephen Wenman, had kept taking me aside urging us to produce a visible and practical example of our aims. We live in a time when only

concrete success matters. Only then would pockets be opened to us. He understood the minds of his guests who were unimpressed by talk of peace and reconciliation and wanted tangible results. The friction between material expectations and the ground preparation, involving changing people's attitudes, became a central issue for the Soul of Europe in the following years.

We needed help in establishing the first of our Bosnian projects. Donald had worked for several years as an advisor to Rio Tinto, a global mining company, counselling staff on community affairs at their offices in London and making visits to South Africa and the United States. John Senior of Rio Tinto recommended we approach Ros Tennyson, Senior Advisor to the Prince of Wales International Business Leaders Forum. Knowing it to be primarily a think tank, we had few expectations of it providing us with practical help in Bosnia. But at their first meeting Donald and Ros immediately recognized a common bond; both of them being single minded and committed idealists. Their shared outlook cemented the partnership.

Ros Tennyson's great-grandfather was the poet Tennyson. Her father, Hallam, wrote a highly regarded book about post-Second World War Yugoslavia, where he had been sent to report on the way Tito was transforming and modernizing the country. Hallam discovered a relatively unknown part of Europe and wrote vividly about the social life, politics and the people he encountered, representing a wide diversity of communities and cultures. This connection made Ros particularly interested in our work. As a child she had accompanied her father on his exploration of the former Yugoslavia, and she seized this opportunity to return there.

First we were invited to spend a few days with her in North Wales. Ros Tennyson, together with her husband Richard Grover and a friend Judy Harris, established Trigonos as a conference centre, a place for rest and renewal, where people came to attend courses varying from arts and crafts to social care programmes or simply to enjoy the countryside and take retreats.

We drove through the idyllic valleys of mid-Wales apprehensive about how we could possibly cope with such a high level of activity, good works and high ideals. Ros, Richard and Judy organized conferences from a large house with extensive grounds and outbuildings in Nantlle, a village below Snowdon. The name of the house, Plas Baladeulyn, Welsh for: 'place between the two lakes' described its position. The lake on whose shore the house stood lapped the lower slopes of Snowdon on the other side. Behind the house and the village, up the hill, lay another lake filling the now defunct slate mines which once gave work to the people of the village. The water stretched glassily calm and the slate tinted it a deep turquoise. We stood on the edge and looked into the cold depths, overshadowed by looming walls of dark jagged stone. In the middle floated a large white plastic container. The eerie scene reminded me of the Swan of Tuonela in Sibelius's tone poem, forever circling the entrance to the Underworld.

Ros Tennyson introduced us to a poet and an environmentalist.

The poet shut his eyes and spoke rhapsodically about the Field of Blackbirds, the scene of the Battle of Kosovo, a defeat for the Orthodox Serbs, the single most important and nationally defining event in Serbian history. Though it took place about seven hundred years ago, this catastrophe remains as close to Serb consciousness as though it happened yesterday. The battle represented a story of betrayal and self-sacrifice with the promise of eternal resurrection for Serbs as a nation. A Serb saying goes: 'Heaven must be a very large place. So many Serbs are there.' This refers to the generations of Serbs who died protecting Europe from Islam. Ever since the Battle of Kosovo, the Serbian Orthodox Church has nurtured the myth of Christian sacrifice: a militaristic version of Christ's crucifixion. The myth provides inspiration up until the recent conflicts. General Mladic and Radovan Karadjic used it to justify their war of ethnic cleansing. The Serbian Orthodox Church declared them saints, to be idolized by all nationalist Serbs.

The environmentalist spoke about the possibilities of eco-tourism in Bosnia. Ros Tennyson discussed the possibilities of a small business cooperative and partnership forum in Bihac, so creating models for other parts of the country. We also spoke about the imagination, the need to understand and work beyond the narrow definitions of what constituted progress, politics and economics, to help bring usually disparate elements of society together in a spirit of cooperation.

Outside the house, clouds blanketed the slopes of Snowdon and a dank chill darkness fell as we talked into the night.

We discussed programs bringing people from all over Europe to this remote part of North Wales and also to the equally unknown but more bruised regions of South Eastern Europe.

THE FORTUNES OF WAR

RETURN TO BOSNIA: OCTOBER 2000

KRNJEUCA

Between the towns of Bosanski Petrovac and Bihac in Western Bosnia the road crossed a high wide plateau, the Bjelajskj Polje and the Medino Polje. The soil clung thinly on this plateau, little grew on it and in winter the snow lay deep. Along this flat, isolated stretch of road, our driver Adnan, could pick up speed and we went like the wind.

At a cross roads, a minor unmade road descended southward towards the River Una, leading to Martin Brod and the Rmanj Monastery which we had visited in June, an idyllic valley with waterfalls, flower-filled meadows and thick woods. To the north an asphalt road full of deep cracks and holes led to the village of Krnjeuca.

Before the Bosnia War, Krnjeuca, a Serb village in a predominantly Muslim region used to be a

prosperous small town with three thousand inhabitants, including those scattered in farms and homesteads over the plateau, in the middle of which a now-disused factory had provided employment manufacturing furniture. Eight hundred people once worked there. Three hundred children attended the local school. Krnjeuca, the largest local community in the municipality, once administered a farm association and twenty private enterprises.

The recent history of Krnjeuca was a template for what happened all over Bosnia. At the beginning of the war the Serbs were encouraged by Milosevic and Karadjic in the belief that they could appropriate the region for themselves. Many of the young men joined the Serb army and besieged Bihac. In the outskirts of the town they drove the Muslim occupiers out and settled in their property.

Towards the end of the war fortunes changed and the predominantly Muslim Bosnian Fifth Army broke the siege and began to drive the Serbs out. The Serbs retreated eastward, plundering and burning Muslim properties on the way. These buildings still lined the roads into Bihac, row after row of destroyed homes, crumbling walls, gaping holes for windows, roofs fallen in and the surrounding land in general neglect, strewn with wrecked furniture and kitchen appliances now overgrown with weeds. Having committed atrocities against the Muslims throughout the region, the Serbs feared that a similar fate awaited them if they delayed departure. The Fifth Army drove them back to the village of Krnjeuca, where the Serbs wasted no time in gathering their families and fled eastwards towards the safety of the Republika Srpska. When the Fifth Army entered Krnjeuca the town was intact, the homes well stocked as though the occupants planned to return at any minute. Beans cooked on the stoves. Had the Serbs delayed by even a few hours they faced certain death. So the Fifth Army arrived at a ghost town where the houses stood empty surrounded by cultivated fields, orchards, grazing cattle and scratching hens. But by the time the

Fifth Army left the town, every house had been trashed: looted then set on fire.

The Serbs fled to Drventa, which their army had recently captured from the Croats. The Serbs moved into the empty houses once occupied by Croats. But at the end of the war the Dayton Accord, in a declared attempt to separate the warring factions, divided Bosnia into ethnic groupings. What used to be an integrated society was now artificially segregated. The Accord allocated land that had once been shared or belonged predominantly to one or other of the communities, specifically to the Bosnian Serbs in the Republika Srpska, which made up roughly half of Bosnia, hence the claim by Muslims that aggression had been rewarded. Having established these political divisions along ethnic lines the occupying forces then ordered refugees to return to their original homes, regardless of where they might be within the new ordering of the country: Muslims and Croats to return to the now predominantly Serb Republika Srpska, Serbs to the Muslim/Croat Federation that constituted the other half of the country. Apart from the fact that most refugees had no desire to return to places where they had been persecuted and their families massacred, the few who did, mostly elderly people who had nowhere else to go, found ruins and were met with a hostility that inevitably led to painful confrontations. Croats did return to Drventa and re-occupied their former homes. The Serbs were faced with a choice, either to become refugees in Serbia where they would receive a cool welcome from a country impoverished by the war and NATO bombing campaigns in 1999, or return to Krnjeuca, to a town that lay in total ruin. A few decided to take the risk and were now slowly rebuilding their lives with the temporary help of limited Christian Aid funds. Still, five years after the war ended most of the houses stood empty, roofless, windowless and waiting to be repaired before winter.

These were the scenes we observed on our visit to Krnjeuca in October 2000:

Three elderly people hovered outside their mined houses on the otherwise empty street, hot and

dry under the September sun. Two men lived in the cellar of one ruin because it provided the only shelter. One slightly crazed old woman wandered around with a shopping bag, looking distractedly for non-existent provisions.

Milka ran the Christian Aid store. She had been among the first to return to Krnjeuca and Christian Aid elected her the village representative. A grey haired woman, with cheerful round features, she welcomed us warmly, pouring us lavish portions of home made rakija that ripped into our throats, followed soothingly by copious draughts of Turkish coffee. She watched us intently, looking for signs of help and progress. Her husband was out working and could possibly have been one of the Serbs who burnt the homes of Muslims in Bihac. Milka took us down the street, pointing out one ruin after the other: this one used to be a pub which she had run with her husband and was now a pile of rubble. The owner of the next house still lived in Drventa. The one opposite used to be the forester's home. She pointed out the deserted fields and told us that this year's harvest had been destroyed by one of the worst droughts of recent years. There would be no stores for winter. The few people returning settled as best they could in stables and cellars, wondering what would happen in the winter without roofs, without electricity, heating or water (the Fifth Army had destroyed the connections of all the public services and the villagers had to walk to springs and wells to fetch water). Since the returnees were mostly elderly people, how would they cope? We could only pity their wretchedness. Money from aid agencies was running out for Bosnia. Urgent needs elsewhere in the world claimed attention.

The returnees could not find paid work. The Muslims in Bihac were unlikely to give priority to the employment of returning Serbs, particularly those who had recently been massacring their families and burning their homes. So here the villagers waited, stuck in the middle of an infertile plateau, a remote corner of Western Bosnia, a place hardly anyone knew of or would ever hear

of, let alone care about.

Some chickens emerged from the rubble. Donald pointed them out as a sign of hope. Milka grimaced and said: 'The fox came and ate two of them this morning.'

The church stood in ruined isolation, the roof a row of scorched timbers. The bright October sun cast stark ribbed shadows on the crumbling walls inside, as if the building were a skeleton. However, rebuilding the church could not be seen as a priority. Even before the war people had not been that interested in religion. Yet they were asking for a priest. One of the monks from Martin Brod visited occasionally. But the bishop had not given them their own priest. Where would he live?

Two of the homes seemed to be in good condition, replete with new roofs and windows. Milka lived in one of them, taking charge of the produce delivered by Christian Aid. Early returnees in the other house had managed to get aid for repairs and were busy clearing the garden for winter, harvesting apples and vegetables to make pickles. Their speed and determination had been rewarded. Late returnees would not be so lucky.

Milka and her husband planned to establish a saw mill in an old stable. Meanwhile their old home needed repairing, a house they had first built as newlyweds back in the nineteen seventies. Bihac had been her home town then. She smiled thinking about this and said wistfully: 'The town of my youth.' Yes, indeed, then Serbs, Muslims and Croats lived together in relative peace. Old photographs from the beginning of the last century show a prosperous town with an elegant mosque and two handsome large churches, one Catholic, one Orthodox.

Serb Milka walked us down the empty street and put her arm round Muslim Adnan's waist. Earlier her sharp eyes had noticed the frisson of interest in the young man when her attractive daughter passed through the house. His dark eyes sparkled and he became animated when the

blonde girl cast a lingering glance in his direction. Desire knows no ethnic boundaries. We had been talking about the project and plans for bringing Ros Tennyson to Bosnia on our next visit to work on partnerships and cooperation between the different groups in the region to help the economy flourish again. Milka readily agreed to attend the meetings. These people had nothing to lose, of course. But the meetings would provide a poignant opportunity for people to sit in the same room, people who only a few years ago had been destroying each others lives.

Denis Arifovic, the representative for Christian Aid in the Bihac area, walked on ahead. He took responsibility for delivering supplies to this village and also to other destroyed places in the region, Croat as well as Serbian. Denis lived in Bihac. When Christian Aid closed its office there he would be unemployed again. He planned to leave Bosnia – to go as far away as possible. ‘I want to breed kangaroos in Australia,’ he declared, smiling ruefully. The distance was important. It needed to be so far that he could never return to Bosnia again. This was his home, a place he loved, and he knew he could not survive here. His friend, an attractive, intelligent and strikingly slim girl, Julia, already had a visa for Canada and intended to settle there with her boyfriend whom she planned to marry. Once all these gifted and capable young people had left Bosnia, who would be left to run the country?

Suddenly Denis crouched down by the side of the road and buried his face in his hands, starting to cry. Why had all this happened? What madness took place here? What horrors!

Then he revealed that he had been a soldier in the Bosnian Fifth Army that broke the Serbian siege of Bihac. Still an adolescent, he had been one of the first soldiers to enter the village of Krnjeuca. He remembered the place being undamaged but deserted: every Serb had fled. He noticed the beans cooking on the abandoned stoves. After he left the village the destruction took place. He lived in a block of flats where he personally knew and every day saw the people who

took part in the burning and looting. Now he found himself in charge of administering aid to their victims.

Two elderly men and a lean dog silently watched him weep. They then looked at us in mute appeal. The place became oppressive with despair, made even more unbearable by the bright sun in a clear blue sky, with complete silence all round.

Milka called herself a Serb with pride. Croats and Serbs did not hesitate to declare their ethnic origin. When we asked Denis, he refused to tell us. 'I am an atheist,' he said emphatically.

Donald related an anecdote about Archbishop Tutu from South Africa walking with him down Piccadilly after the funeral service for Trevor Huddleston, the English bishop famous for alerting the world to the evils of apartheid and who spent his whole life fighting it. They were stopped by a drunk who, vaguely recognizing the celebrated South African archbishop, swayed in front of him, and then shamefacedly admitted that he was an atheist. Tutu looked at the drunk with utmost seriousness and wagging his finger said: 'And I hope you are a good one!' Denis and Adnan laughed out loud. Adnan, although proud of his heritage, also refused to be categorized. 'I am a citizen of Europe - of the world,' he announced. Both Denis and Adnan were correctly admonishing us for perpetuating the need to categorize and therefore to segregate the ethnic groupings, the destructive consequence of the Dayton Accord. However there was more to it than that. The other groups did not hesitate to boast their nationality, and therefore their particular sovereignty in the area, excluding the others. It reminded me chillingly of my own memories as a child of Jewish refugees, growing up in England after the Second World War. I had also been ashamed of my background and always tried to conceal it, though my name gave the game away and children in the schoolyard enjoyed calling me 'a filthy Jew'. Distaste and shame, sharpened by the knowledge of Auschwitz, were endemic even in a country which had

fought Hitler. Intellectuals and people of consequence shared this distaste. ‘Oh, you’re from Central Europe, are you?’ they would say disparagingly on hearing my surname, as though a bad smell had come into the room. So I also developed the notion of being a world citizen. That gave me some dignity and helped me rise above the xenophobia.

Bigotry against Jews had now turned against the Muslims. This reflected attitudes across Europe and beyond. Serbs and Croats had fought for territory and influence in their region: ancient battles of honour. Heroic fighting encouraged respect. The recent war was ultimately concerned with the removal of the alien Muslim presence. Muslims did not belong and were to be eliminated from Europe, a continent defined by its Christianity and separation from Islam.

BEARSKIN

For centuries European conflicts on the whole spared religious buildings; people shared cultural traditions. In Bosnia religion and culture symbolized a community’s ethnicity. So when all sixteen mosques of Banja Luka were razed to the ground and the stones removed, the destroyers hoped to eliminate every trace of Islamic culture. As for atrocities, each side claimed them to be exaggerated, but today sophisticated means of communication regularly records them. For instance media cameras recently focused the world’s horrified attention on an act of murderous rage when young Palestinians cornered two Israeli spies in a Gaza police station. In a hurricane of fury, male bodies catapulted across the room, as the Palestinians locked onto the defenceless victims and, in a frenzy, battered and stabbed them to death. Then the young killers threw the bodies out of the window and held up their bloodied hands triumphantly to show the world, which watched aghast and helpless.

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Thinking of Denis's tears and the situation in Krnjeuca, I sat in my hotel room trying to gather myself to write a report, and unpacked the volume of Grimm's *Fairytales* that I always carry with me on journeys. The page opened on a story which could not have been more relevant: *Bearskin*. The composer Stravinsky used it in *A Soldiers Tale*. The specifics of the original story have a special resonance for the Bosnia War.

Myths and fairytales deal with extremes of human behaviour and its baffling mysteries. In the case of Grimm's *Fairytales*, these stories were handed down generation to generation, perfecting, honing and distilling their essence so that every word resonated across centuries because the experience and creative skills of many generations went into the refinement of their narrative. The title itself, *Bearskin*, acknowledges human bestiality and the first sentences describe a young soldier who is happiest in the thick of war, where the bullets rain hardest. So long as war rages he is happy. But when peace comes he has nowhere to go; his parent's village long since destroyed, he is rejected by two brothers. Ashamed of him, and with no use for a soldier in the house, they throw him out. We are curious about his fate: can there be redemption even for such a person? He sits in a field wondering what to do with his life. The Devil appears and after testing the young man's courage by conjuring out of the woods an attacking bear, which the soldier dispatches without blinking an eyelid, strikes a bargain with the no-hoper. The Devil promises a constant supply of funds from the bottomless pockets of his jacket, so long as the young man lives like a beast for the next seven years. This is the bargain. He must not shave or cut his nails, nor sleep in a bed and must wear the skin of the slaughtered bear for the whole of that time. And on no condition must he pray, otherwise he will die and when he does so the Devil will claim his soul. But if he lasts the seven years, then he will be released from his bargain. The soldier readily agrees, but soon regrets his pact with the Devil. Though wealthy, he

wanders the world looking ever more ferocious, unrecognizable as a human being, scaring off all likely friends, feeling lonely and rejected. The story unravels this terrible predicament and provides a resolution which reveals a universal human truth, applicable even to the most despicable criminals. This stage of the narrative is handled with consummate delicacy in the original Grimm fairytale, because it is essential that we now begin to feel pity for the monster. After several years of living rough and having to sleep in sheds at the back of people's houses, he happens one night to overhear a man wailing in desperation. It turns out to be a widowed father who is deep in debt and incapable of feeding his family of three daughters. The monster takes pity on him and gives him a load of coins from his bottomless pockets. The man is so overjoyed that in the delirium of the moment promises the creature one of his daughters in marriage. Two of the daughters recoil in horror and reject the beast. But the youngest is considerate. She muses aloud: if the hideous creature had been kind enough to give her father money and help him out of his predicament there must be some good in him. She agrees to marry. At the words 'there must be good in him', there comes a glimpse of light in the darkness. The story pauses and says: were it possible to see through the mass of matted hair we would have noticed the glistening of a tear as for the first time, the monster experiences a tender human response. He also hears his heart beating. The story continues a familiar course, though with a witty twist in the tail. The monster splits a ring in two and gives one half to the girl. She is not bound to him, but if after the seven years are up he is alive and she is still prepared to marry him, he will come back for her. Disappointed, the Devil has to restore the soldier to his former look, only even more handsome; the experience of the last seven years having humanized him. He returns to the girl's family; the sisters fight for his attention, but the halves of the ring match and there is a happy ending, even for the Devil. He appears to the soldier and thanks him because, in

exchange for the one soul which escaped his clutches, he gained two: the sisters.

The story reflects a local truth in Bosnia. The image of the man turned beast resonated in this part of Europe where so many young men entered the fighting in high spirits and with a sense of nationalistic pride only for them to lose their humanity and commit atrocities on a scale which even the fairy tale could not imagine. One particular group of Serb soldiers known as ‘chetniks’, notorious for their ruthless savagery, were proud of their traditional unshaved and unwashed appearance: bearskins.

The war ended five years ago. No one had begun to accept responsibility for what happened. Bosnia had yet to come to terms with the crimes and their consequences. No tear yet glistened in the matted hair. The heart seemed still to be absent from the land.

Beyond Bihac, the next town to Krnjeuscia, on the way to the Croatian border, up a stretch of the Una valley, overlooked by ruined castles on crags cloaked with thick forest, stands the ruined town of Bosanska Krupa. Whereas Bihac had the feel of a town on the mend, optimistic and full of young people, Bosanska Krupa looked desolate. Being mainly Muslim territory, the mosque had been rebuilt, but the Orthodox church stood derelict with smashed windows and the Catholic church lay in ruins. The town seemed deserted, most of the houses still waiting to be repaired, the shops boarded up, the main hotel bombed out. The normally clean waters of the Una were here polluted with rubbish and wrecks. The bridges across it still waited to be repaired. Only pedestrians dared step gingerly along the creaking rotten timbers. At a gaudily decorated café, smart waiters served soft drinks and coffee to a few customers who could pay. A conspicuous group of intimidatingly muscular gangsters, smartly clothed and wearing heavy gold earrings, sat outside. A beautiful girl, long dyed blonde hair, tall, slim, and leggy, was draped over the boss. In the centre of the ruined town a villa rose up unexpectedly like a mirage in the desert. Its walls

of polished marble, cupolas, columns, fountains, gardens and palatial luxury echoed the ostentatious splendour of the Hyatt Regency in Belgrade, the hotel also surrounded by a wasteland. Adnan informed us that an elderly business couple lived here. He could not explain how they made their money, but they kept themselves private and wanted nothing to do with the rest of the town. Judging from the deserted streets, most of the population had already left. The presence of the gangsters, only too pleased to show off, and the jarring affluence of the villa accentuated the bleak despair of the rest of Bosanska Krupa. Corruption dominated. The Devil still triumphed here.

A BAPTISM

Mist lay on the River Una. Rain poured over forests and hills on our way to Martin Brod. The farmsteads looked more prosperous, fields cultivated with neat rows of fruit trees in the orchards. The landscape gave a feeling of intimacy, of shelter and peace, as though it existed in a safe world of its own, eternal, dream-like. Yet during the war, along this road from Bihac a column of Muslim soldiers had been ambushed and slaughtered by Serbs, using the woods as cover. A thick cluster of fresh white tombstones marked the spot. The cemetery cut a deep scar in the idyllic countryside. The beauty of the landscape however failed to move Adnan, trying to negotiate the final twelve miles of dust track along the River Una. ‘This is a road to hell!’ he exclaimed, adding in disbelief: ‘And I’m going there voluntarily!’

Bishop Chrysostom was so far our only high level Orthodox contact and for this reason we seized every opportunity to meet him and hope to build support for our reconciliation work in Bosnia. He had given us an exceptionally warm welcome on our first visit, one I describe in *A Tender Bridge*. Only later did we discover that Lazar, our first guide and translator, had told him

we were there to help rebuild Orthodox churches. This explained his generous hospitality to us then. Now we were coming to ask for his support for the rebuilding of a mosque.

When we arrived at Martin Brod, passing the bridge still submerged in the river, Bishop Chrysostom and the three monks were celebrating morning service in the little church. It turned out to be a baptism in a large Serbian family. Two brothers and their friends, smartly dressed, sleekly groomed, stood confidently to attention like soldiers. Adnan skulked in the porch, indicating with a shrug that he had little interest in such services, but would stay to protect us, while I worried for his own safety.

The family came from the bishop's hometown of Sipovo. The father, a successful builder and businessman, financially supported the bishop and the monks. The baptism involved a complicated ceremony of anointing the boy's legs with rakija and leading them in a dance around the altar, which had been brought forward from behind the iconostasis for the occasion. Afterwards everybody ran through a downpour of rain to the new monastery. With help from the businessman the monks had managed to procure what used to be an old guesthouse in the village of Martin Brod, a spacious building, and the bishop now prepared to bless it. We stood with the family and village people in front of an altar set up in the vestibule on which lay a small container of salt, some water and brandy. The bishop and the monks proceeded to use the brandy to paint large crosses on every wall of the house. Adnan muttered to us that the Orthodox priests had blessed the concentration camps in the same way. Brother Serghei splashed holy water over everyone with a large brush and after a number of prayers and chants the whole family, friends and guests sat down to a feast of cold pork, meat soup, sauerkraut and tomatoes washed down with fizzy red wine and rakija. Finally they served coffee and walnut cream cakes.

Bishop Chrysostom welcomed us as before, charming and beaming though recovering from a

cold. When an old man with gleaming white teeth, accompanying himself on an accordion, began to bellow folk songs, the bishop joined in, singing softly and conducting with calming gestures in an attempt to reduce the other's abrasive tones. Adnan bent over and whispered to me that the songs were Muslim. The bishop led the party in several more poignant love songs, tears in his eyes. During the speeches the family clustered together, boys with arms wrapped round each other, the proud father looking proprietorial while the mother kept timidly in the background.

The weather deteriorated, thunder and lightning accompanied the meal and Brother Sophronje, also suffering from a cold, kept sneezing into a large napkin. We were given presents. The bishop handed a little icon to Adnan who accepted it politely. Donald offered a housewarming present, and after some excited discussion among the monks, they chose my digital camera, which had been rousing interest throughout the meal. I choked on some rakija, grateful they hadn't asked for a Mercedes.

SARAJEVO

THE CITY IN A VALLEY

Throughout the war, Sarajevo, the capital city of Bosnia, lay at the mercy of Serbian troops firing ammunition from the surrounding hills on the city below. Random massacres in the market place and on the streets, daily terror, abandoned by the rest of the world, knowing that the enemy wanted to annihilate them: how could these memories ever be erased? Even now, beyond the city limits in a park around the source of the River Bosna, bursting in full flood from the base of a mountain, a cool shady area of springs, where city people could stroll and be refreshed, white warning tape stretched along the edge of the forest because undetected mines laid by the Serb

militia continued to kill and cripple straying children. The Republika Srpska lay just beyond the city centre, occupying the eastern suburbs and the same hills from which the city had been bombarded. The Serbs who once wanted to possess the city, to kill and to drive out all the Muslims, still lived within easy access. Such terrible massacres of Muslims took place along the road north and eastward from Sarajevo into Serb territory that even Adnan, afraid of nothing and no one, refused to drive us there.

Banja Luka concealed its dark history beneath an appearance of normality. Ethnic cleansing had been carried out there with ruthless efficiency and all traces of the once substantial Muslim presence had been systematically erased. Not a memory of its hated Turkish past should be allowed to remain. The injustice and threats left no mark, the violence invisible. Sarajevo, though flourishing under international aid and re-building itself, still bore the numerous scars of the recent war. Ruins of massive buildings battered by months of shelling into charred and twisted shapes remained as awesome reminders. No memorial by an artist could be as evocative as these massive ghostly monuments lining the road from the airport into Sarajevo.

The city centre with its fountains, squares, shopping precincts, narrow streets, markets, numerous cafes, famous library, administrative buildings, mosques, synagogue, Orthodox and Catholic cathedrals, huddled at the narrow end of the valley down which flowed the shallow river Miljecka, cutting through the city and crossed by a number of wooden bridges, to join the River Bosna on the other side. The hills rising steeply on three sides made the city vulnerable to siege and attack.

No sign marked the spot; but almost a century beforehand, at one of the street corners facing the river, close by one of these wooden bridges, Gavrilo Principe, a Serb nationalist, shot the Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife, an incident that sparked the First World War.

In itself the assassination had been a local event, a protest against Hapsburg colonialism in the Balkans. This part of South Eastern Europe had endured centuries of friction along the borders of two mighty empires, mainly Catholic Christian in the north-west and Muslim in the south-east, a history complicated by the Orthodox presence which felt oppressed and marginalized by both. This act of terrorism, a violent Orthodox protest against Catholic hegemony, should have been dealt with at a local level but ambitious rulers elsewhere in Europe, with their individual agendas of imperial ambition, eagerly flexed their military muscles.

The blame for the subsequent woes of the twentieth century should not be laid at the door of a dissident grenade-throwing Serb student in a predominantly Muslim city. None the less, being in Sarajevo and learning at first hand about this region made one aware of political, cultural and social issues that dominated not only local history but that of Europe.

Nineteenth century nationalist politics had been foisted on groups that had over centuries of Ottoman rule become an integrated racial mix. These politics manipulated a clash of cultures and ethnic groups, which communism under Tito managed to contain only temporarily. While working towards the regeneration of their economically ruined country, the same groups with different religions, interests and worldviews needed once more to learn to live together as a single community. Sarajevo had long provided an example of the successful coexistence of varying cultures. After the trauma and devastation of war it had to find inspiration from its tolerant past to create a tolerant future.

A MUSLIM FROM SARAJEVO

On our first meeting Adnan Jabucar, who had replaced Lazar as our guide and interpreter, picked us up at Sarajevo airport and drove us in his own dilapidated car to the Dardanija Hotel.

Having endured the three-year siege of Sarajevo as an adolescent he had many stories to relate. His father, a captain in the Bosnian army was now the headmaster at one of the main secondary schools in Sarajevo. Adnan came from a family of high-ranking Muslims, *begs*, the equivalent of aristocrats. This explained his relaxed and refined manners. At ease with peers, his family was used to being in charge and taking control of the country. Whereas Lazar had been fearful leaving Serb territory, suspicious of Muslims, Adnan had no qualms driving to the Republika Srpska, though he drew the line at taking us to Foca, out of respect for those killed in the massacres that had taken place there. Adnan did not fear Serbs, having Serb friends all over the country, and was engaged to Catholic Daria, a student of archaeology. To show us the pettiness of post-war hostilities between Serbs and Muslims, he drove us on occasional forays across the Serb lines outside Sarajevo where officious guards in Bosnian Serb military uniform stopped the car and addressed us in an intimidating manner, to remind us we were entering enemy territory. Adnan enjoyed teasing the pompous officials who, realizing there were two Englishmen in the car, quickly turned their backs and allowed us to proceed. The provocation helped Adnan lay to rest the ghosts of the past. That same stretch of road once separated his home from the city. The only way to reach the centre had been to drive at high speed so evading the bullets: dangerous, even foolhardy. Adnan explained that everyone had become fatalist, that several of his friends had been shot and killed. As he came to trust us he eventually shared two particularly harrowing personal experiences. The first concerned the approach of Serb soldiers along the street where he lived, early in the war. His father had given fourteen year old Adnan an air rifle and instructed him how to shoot between the eyes. Serb soldiers were dragging families from the houses further down the road, killing the men and taking the women and children away. But for some reason they stopped two doors down from Adnan's home, perhaps afraid to continue as people were

shooting at them with hunting rifles. So Adnan had a narrow escape. On a later occasion the father endured a crisis over his army pistol: would it be safer to protect his family with the pistol, or might there be greater danger if the Serbs found him in possession of a weapon and punish his family even more severely. He kept going out into the garden, burying the pistol, then digging it up again. Adnan declared this to be the most traumatic experience of his life: observing his father's crisis. A courageous bluff saved them. The Serb soldiers approached Adnan's apartment block after emptying the others. Adnan's father gathered the men in the building and threatened the invaders, all of them shouting that the Bosnian army was waiting for them. The soldiers left.

Between them, Adnan and Lazar taught us different perspectives in understanding Bosnia. Before he stopped working for the Soul of Europe, Orthodox Lazar had tried to persuade us to move our activities in Bosnia to Brcko, a place where he felt more at home, near to Serbia and with a strong Serb presence. He felt uneasy about Bihac, where Serbs seemed to be only slowly returning to surrounding villages, and those few still living in the town wanting to leave. Adnan also taught us about the damaging effect of international policies in Bosnia. The Dayton Accord had declared Brcko to be ethnically mixed and insisted that the three groups share the administration equally. Madeleine Albright, then American Secretary of State, gave her blessing to this solution and welcomed a new dawn of ethnic tolerance. This imposed peace could not work and already the cracks were showing. Serbian students demonstrated at having to attend the same school buildings used by Muslims. Before the war they had attended lessons together but now international edicts, lenient to nationalist objectives, exacerbated ethnic divisions. Young people elsewhere in Bosnia and Serbia struck us as being mostly tolerant and optimistic about the future, but the political solution to the problems in Brcko indicated that forcing rather than encouraging cooperation could backfire.

Both Brcko and Bihac were towns where, in the past, the three groups had lived peacefully together. Recent wounds were not healing. The leaders of the Muslim majority in Bihac, as no doubt also the leaders of the Serb majority in Brcko, expressed a willingness to be cooperative with former enemies. 'All are welcome here,' they insisted, but they constituted the dominant group and the others did not feel safe. More importantly, there were not enough jobs to go round, so the majority ethnic group took precedence in business and employment opportunities. Coexistence would be a long process. Having visited the town and met some of the influential people there we decided to continue with our project in Bihac. Lazar stayed in Serbia where the arrest of Milosevic promised to change the political situation and help the country escape its isolation and pariah status. Lazar might be able to establish new projects there. However, Serbia changed little. The new president retained Serb nationalist policies, deliberately snubbing Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia, by making his first state visit abroad to Serb Banja Luka. The mafia did not quietly disappear and no one yet was prepared to acknowledge guilt for the atrocities committed throughout the region.

As Adnan drove us through and around Sarajevo he pointed out the mosques, the Orthodox, the Catholic churches and the synagogue all standing close together in the centre, the elegant town houses lining the central boulevards in the Austro-Hungarian empire style, markets and craftshops in the Ottoman quarter, squares and at the end of every street views of the wooded hills surrounding the city. SFOR soldiers walked among the crowds, Adnan assuring us that their presence helped keep the peace. Humanitarian Aid vehicles, large expensive jeeps, rose haughtily above the Bosnians' shabby cars. Young people crowded the streets, strolling in crowds or gathering in the numerous cafés that spilled onto the sidewalks. The shops were full of stylish western goods, clothes, handbags and fashion accessories, but only foreigners working in

Sarajevo, soldiers, aid workers, politicians and diplomats could afford them. The shops gave an air of prosperity to Sarajevo, which siphoned off most international financial aid to Bosnia. After the extensive destruction during the years of siege, every effort had been made to make it look like a prospering European capital city again. Bihac and Banja Luka received less funding and developed at a slower pace. As for towns like Bosanska Krupa, such places had been forgotten and were left to fend for themselves.

SUPPER WITH SABA

We had one contact only in Sarajevo, a woman of influence, Saba Risaluddin. Donald had met her once in St James's Church during his years as Rector and she remembered his welcome for Jews and Muslims. Saba Risaluddin left England to live in Sarajevo as soon as the war broke out. With her husband she helped established the World Conference for Religion and Peace, of which she was president.

In emails, and then again when we met, she insisted on being no more than a humble translator, making a living from interpreting and translating documents. However, she had personal access to the president, as well as the Reis ul Ulema, the single most important person we needed to meet, without whose support we would achieve nothing. For reasons we never understood, she eventually withdrew from us, not wanting to be seen as closely affiliated, but thankfully not before giving a favourable account of our credentials to the Reis ul Ulema. Without Saba we would not have met the leader of the Islamic community in Bosnia.

We invited Saba and Mike Engelking, the new director of the World Conference for Religion and Peace in Bosnia, for supper at a small restaurant on the other side of the river from the celebrated Sarajevo Library. The library used to house a number of valuable ancient books and

manuscripts, including the medieval Jewish *Haggadah*, before the Serbs deliberately targeted the building during the war. A few precious manuscripts were saved, including the *Haggadah*, a celebrated Jewish text, but the rest fell on the city in a blizzard of ashes. Saba, dressed smartly in severe black, looked at us suspiciously. Mike Engelking, a stylishly suited young American, smiled in a friendly manner but kept a diplomatic silence for most of the supper while Saba delivered a lecture on recent Bosnian history. She made us aware of a number of simple facts, which confirmed our suspicions that the Dayton Accord and international policies towards the Balkan region were destructively flawed. The protection of foreign soldiers had undeniably put an end to the killing and kept the peace, but the new boundaries imposed to end the conflict, did not secure stability and created trouble for the future by accentuating ethnic differences that had been more fluid in the past.

Saba pointed out the injustice and the fatal errors of recent international intervention in her country, the problems of ignorance and prejudice being a perpetually unresolved issue. By rewarding the aggressor, the international community sent a clear message to the Muslims, that the claims of what were seen as indigenous peoples took priority over those perceived as aliens; and this despite the fact that Muslims themselves were indigenous to Bosnia, having lived there for centuries. The majority of Muslims are historically as indigenous as all the other groups. These Slavs chose to convert to Islam. Ignorance about this history created a problem that never existed and exacerbated tensions artificially foisted on people who simply wanted to continue their daily lives, raise their families and work together in peace.

Saba, sitting erect, continued to describe the bleak political situation in Bosnia. Mike Engelking sweetened the atmosphere by smiling enthusiastically, occasionally touching my shoulder in a friendly American fashion, but said little. We assumed he was deferring to Saba, and wondered

what qualified him for the job in this part of the world. Having worked in the marines, he did not look like a person who might be involved with any Church or be even remotely interested in religious matters. At later meetings he turned out to be a mine of information, knowing the problems and all the important people intimately. However he remained inscrutable and withdrawn.

THE REIS UL ULEMA

On our first visit to Bihac Mufti Makic had shocked us with his story of surviving the Omarska killing camp, and informed us that he would do nothing with the Soul of Europe without the permission of the Reis ul Ulema, Dr Ceric, the chief mufti. He ended our meeting with a surly shrug of the shoulders: 'Go ask the Reis ul Ulema. I will do what he says.' It became a priority to meet with the leader of the Islamic community in Bosnia. Saba Risaluddin had access to him, and she agreed to make the first contact on our behalf. Just as we had needed the blessing of the Patriarch in Belgrade in order to gain support of the Orthodox Church, so the goodwill of the Reis ul Ulema was vital to our entry into the Muslim community where the muftis and imams followed the orders of the Reis. Even in a predominantly secular society, people deferred to the hierarchy of each community's religious leadership.

The Reis kept us waiting. Saba Risaluddin had spent months trying to arrange this meeting for us and in the end gave up. Much to our surprise Dr Ceric suddenly and unexpectedly rang Donald, waking him up early one morning. As with most Muslims we had met, and even with other groups in the Balkans, arrangements tended to be made at the last minute. No letters were ever replied to, not even acknowledged. Everything depended on a phone call on the day. Dr Ceric had in fact suggested we fix the meeting with him only when we were in Sarajevo, just

giving us the date he would actually be there. In Bosnia meetings and consultations were left to the spur of the moment, taking into account possible changes of plans and circumstances, leaving important decisions to dictate each day as it came.

Dr Ceric eventually entered the room, a trim academic figure. Though friendly and sympathetic he did not smile. Sadness set in concrete on his face which expressed the burden of the suffering of his people, the uneasy outcome of the peace and personal loss.

He spoke rapidly in fluent English about the political situation, recent developments and possibilities for the future. But a dark cloud hung over the whole encounter, as we realized the impossible difficulty of all our tasks: his and ours. He took responsibility for a disparate group of religious leaders, imams and muftis; he travelled incessantly around the world, telling people about the conditions in his country, destroyed by the most ruthlessly waged war in Europe since Hitler, looking for help to rebuild his shattered community. Saudis and Malays helped most, but his efforts to arouse interest in Europe were met with general apathy. He understood this had to do with western attitudes to Islam. This explained why he had kept us waiting. He wanted to test our seriousness and our qualifications for gaining his cooperation. He had researched our background. Saba gave him a good report and possibly other people too had put in a good word. Now he felt he could talk honestly with us, face to face. The meeting became another turning point in the work of the Soul of Europe.

He told us how between 1992 and 2000 many people had come to Sarajevo with good intentions, followed by discussions and questions. The Balkans were dense with ethnic differences. The Ottomans may have been responsible for creating a region of Europe with many different groups, but on the other hand we could learn from them how they managed to coexist. Dr Ceric suggested that the troubles started with the idea of a 'nation state' in the nineteenth

century. The Serbs and Croats became vociferously nationalist. Ethnic cleansing, the end result of such nationalism, should not be tolerated. Europe had to develop new thoughts and attitudes. Christians too needed help. Devout Muslims felt that theologians promoted the spread of atheism, and this in turn encouraged fundamentalism among those who resisted the new liberalism. These extremists were an embarrassment to the majority of believers. For the Islamic world, Europeans had to face a crucial issue: how to deal with the Muslim communities in their midst. On the one hand the predominantly Christian west perceived Muslims as religious fundamentalists threatening local traditions, and on the other they had become an oppressed minority. The truth lay in the middle, according to Dr Ceric. He announced that the time had now come to invite the Soul of Europe to Sarajevo as guests at a conference in 2001. There must now be open discussions between leading Christians and Muslims about the position of Muslims in Europe. Dr Ceric told us that having taken his time before seeing us, to test our motives and intentions, he now judged that we could be friends and discuss matters frankly. The fundamental issue should be stated: how did we as Europeans feel about the Muslims? Europe was strong enough not to be delegating these issues elsewhere. They must be solved within the context of the whole continent. Dr Ceric quoted the historian Spengler who said: 'There is no such term as Europe.' Europe had to be redefined as a good place for Muslims to live.

Donald observed how in England people from different ethnic groups, living in communities separate from the society and culture around them, had an issue with language, that many first-generation Muslims, especially the elderly, could not speak English. Dr Ceric commented: 'To think about the world, to understand is to become mature.' Not only did those Muslims living in Europe face problems of integration, but they also had to deal with the issue of Muslims migrating to Europe for economic reasons. We must not be naive. There were of course

conflicting interests with integration of Muslims into European society. He then said:

‘Reasonable men adapt to the world. Unreasonable men adapt the world to themselves.’ To be unreasonable is to appropriate the world only to what we want for ourselves.

Donald agreed with the benefits of academic discussions, referring to Dr Ceric’s interest in organizing and attending conferences, but ‘we must stop the horrors.’ He then referred to the destruction of the Ferhadija Mosque. Dr Ceric agreed and his rigid academic demeanor began to soften. We must show Europe, in the example of rebuilding the Ferhadija Mosque, that the ‘horrors’ should not be tolerated and that: ‘We have to stop here. It is a moral issue, a moral commitment.’ Donald added that we needed to establish an international committee, consisting of architects, politicians, etc. He suggested bringing the authorities of Banja Luka over to the Centre for Reconciliation in Coventry to meet the organization of the Cross of Nails. Dr Ceric seemed moved and said how much he admired our persistence. He asked us kindly to persevere with the Ferhadija Project, because of its historical and symbolic significance for the Muslims in Europe. Serbs always had a problem with Turks. Centuries of hatred and a ‘killing history’, a bloody tradition, continued to damage Serbs as much as their victims.

Although the Ferhadija would not be exactly as it used to be, it must be a replica of the original. The future must be better than the past. There would be two futures: internal and external. The Ferhadija as a new mosque should deliver a new message. It must be more than stone. An idea needs to be built into it. That idea would reflect the new relationship between Muslims and Christians in Europe.

Practically we needed to gather people from England and bring the authorities of Banja Luka on board the project. The time was right. Upcoming elections in Serbia and Bosnia might help facilitate changes. We must raise the issue of compensation and make the project symbolic of the

new cooperation between Muslims and Christians in Europe, giving Bosnian Muslims a chance to feel that ‘after all, they can feel secure. Their future is here.’

Mufti Camdzic of Banja Luka would be head of a special committee dealing directly with the authorities. Then there should be a committee gathering national and international experts, architects, etc., and another to be an ‘umbrella’, an international committee of the most eminent people we could find to put pressure on the authorities and see that the project fulfilled the ‘new vision’. Donald offered to suggest names. Dr Ceric would then invite them onto a joint committee and also to a conference in Sarajevo in 2001.

Dr Ceric had clearly been thinking about this project, and how the Soul of Europe could be useful to it. We had not however expected to be given so much responsibility. We assumed that Muslims alone would take charge of rebuilding a mosque, particularly such a significant one as the Ferhadija. Dr Ceric had a wider vision, close to our own, that such a project must embrace a new world of peace and reconciliation between the faiths. He also knew that Muslims were still perceived as alien in Europe, and therefore it became a responsibility for Europeans to open doors and be welcoming. This project would have a greater chance of success within a wider European perspective. But this new concept filled us with trepidation.

Donald then spoke about our project in Bihac, and Mufti Makic who had been suspicious of us. Dr Ceric observed that Makic, the most conservative of his muftis (he had studied in Saudi Arabia) tended to be reserved, not open to new thinking. He had been imam in Prijedor where the Serbs had captured him and put him in the Omarska killing camp. On his release in 1994, Dr Ceric had appointed him to Bihac, and Makic had flown there by helicopter despite the risks, and spent a year working on his own while his wife remained over a hundred miles away in Zenica. We should involve Makic in any projects we might establish in Prijedor, but take our time.

Makic wasn't ready yet. We should not force trust. He could certainly come to London with Dr Ceric when the time came to publicize the Ferhadija project. Dr Ceric would phone and reassure Mufti Makic about our good will. Then when we met the mufti we should just listen and encourage him: a question of confidence and trust. 'He is a good man,' Dr Ceric added with a melancholic meaningful gaze, indicating that he himself found him not the easiest of colleagues, but that he admired him all the same. 'He can work with the Orthodox Church and he is aware of the Soul of Europe and what we all aim to achieve.'

Dr Ceric told us about the Inter-Religious Council in Bosnia, but since most of the Orthodox bishops were Serb Nationalists, the dialogue proceeded with difficulty. We would certainly need help in persuading the Orthodox bishop of Banja Luka to attend our meetings. He then suggested we establish good relations with Muslims in England, the British Muslim Council. Dr Ceric recommended we be in touch with Iqbal Sakramie, the ex-president, who would introduce us to the new president and they should be co-sponsors of the project.

Before we left, Dr Ceric returned to the formidable project for rebuilding the Ferhadija Mosque. We summed up what the next steps should be. First we must establish an international committee and involve the international community. We should then approach the American ambassador who had already asserted that the Ferhadija Mosque must be rebuilt and would help us. The project should take place within the perspective of a united Europe, a United Nations. We would find names for the board and mobilize Muslim groups in England to help rebuild a great mosque in Bosnia for the whole of Europe.

Dr Ceric then rose quickly to bid us farewell. He had spent almost two hours with us, talking intensely and with purpose, having waited several months and prepared himself for our meeting. We had expected someone conscious of his position and dignity, but he behaved more like an

academic than a religious leader. His fluent English and thoughtful manner put us at our ease and gave us confidence. Without his solid moral support and intellectual backing we could not even think about embarking on this project. Now he had placed the ball firmly in our court and somehow we had to deal with it.

At the same time he had given the Soul of Europe a precious gift: a chance to be involved with an inspirational symbolic act that would usher in a new phase in the relations between two faiths.

The Ferhadija Mosque had been built at a time when Islam was one of the leading civilizations in the world, famed for its humane leaders, a culture of learning, beauty and tolerance as witnessed in the great architecture of its time. Above the entrance to the mosque words had been inscribed to the effect that ‘All people faithful to God are welcome here’.

We should recreate this building in the same spirit of welcome and reconciliation.

THE METROPOLITAN AND THE CARDINAL

Following the Reis ul Ulema we had arranged to meet first the Orthodox and then the Catholic Church leaders in Sarajevo.

Metropolitan Nikolaj waited for us at the top of several flights of steps. A number of assistants and priests attended the meeting which concentrated on the subject of rebuilding churches, specifically in the town of Foca. The usual sentiments were shared about the tragedy of war, the good relations between Anglicans and the Orthodox, that we should be spokesmen for peace and witnesses to the human spirit, etc. We were given a festive welcome, seated round a table decked with rakija, orangeade, Coke, coffee, biscuits and pistachio nuts. The phone rang perpetually throughout the meeting, causing a considerable distraction as the conversation had to stop each time, an assistant answering and the Metropolitan giving orders with a raised finger. An

appetizing smell of a stewing beef wafted up from a kitchen downstairs and filled the room.

Our visit caused excitement among the assistants, who all looked at us expectantly as though we had come laden with money and would rebuild all the destroyed churches in the diocese. Lazar had given this false impression to all his Orthodox contacts, no doubt thinking that without such a promise none of them would want to see us. Donald had to repeat the point that we were not an aid agency.

The Metropolitan urged us to visit a seminary in Foca, but Adnan looked uneasy. 'I will take you if you want,' he said, implying that he would do that only as a favour to us, reminding us later that the road to Foca had witnessed some of the worst massacres of Muslims in the war.

While we considered this addition to our itinerary we were given a potted history of the sufferings of the Orthodox Church in the Bihac region. This went back to the Second World War when many Serbs were massacred by Croat fascist Ustashi who had collaborated enthusiastically with the Nazis. There were many Serb refugees then, and some refugees from this last war. Foreign aid did not give money for churches, only houses, schools and hospitals. Ancient monasteries from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries needed rebuilding, which required quality craftsmen, but the meagre funds only covered inadequate materials. Roofs could be cheaply repaired but when the winter came, the weight of snow would damage the flimsy structures. Local government authorities gave permission for rebuilding, but no money.

The Metropolitan repeatedly urged us to visit his seminary in Foca. He invited us to a service there. We would then see how important such a rebuilding might be, a worthy project for the Soul of Europe. He did not appear to hear our demands that such projects must be carried out in a spirit of reconciliation. He considered that we were there just to help him. Other groups were of no importance. It would be a hard task to persuade each group to help the other rebuild destroyed

mosques, churches and communal places, and to understand the purpose of the Soul of Europe's projects in Bosnia.

The Metropolitan made no mention of the ethnic cleansing that took place around Foca, as though these massacres had been of no consequence, all that mattered were his seminary and churches. The Metropolitan was not ignorant of the region's recent history; he had blessed the actions of the Serb army. Sarajevo, adjacent to the Republika Srpska, remained vulnerable, as were all the Muslims in Bosnia. The Orthodox perpetually expressed righteous indignation about their losses, and to them the deaths and disappearances of Muslims did not register. Their presence and the divisions of Bosnia continued to be a regretful reminder of the atrocities that failed to eliminate them.

The Metropolitan welcomed us warmly and entertained us lavishly, presenting us with gifts of books on Orthodox art. Reconciliation between the religious groups seemed impossible.

Cardinal Pulic could not see us personally, and we had to be satisfied with his assistant, the vicar-general, Mato Zovkic. We sat on crimson sofas in the corner of a large reception room, with a vase of plastic salmon pink and vivid scarlet flowers on the coffee table. Mato Zovkic, a lean, harassed administrator and academic seemed reluctant to meet us, having more pressing concerns on his mind. In bored tones he repeated the familiar litany of grievances, the need for houses, the need for coexistence within a tolerant civil society.

He encouraged us to work in Bihac where Catholics and Orthodox were close neighbours with Muslims. We should be careful selecting collaborators. Religious leaders would help us find the right people - those 'honest' enough, he added laughing cynically. Only older people were returning to their former homes. The young were either leaving Bosnia or staying elsewhere. The future was being decided by the lack of employment opportunities.

Only a few priests now worked in the region where Catholics remained a small minority. But Sarajevo was still the capital and eight Catholic parishes existed there. He told us that the roof of the Sacred Heart Cathedral, built in 1899, had been damaged in the war. He expressed no interest in our work.

DIPLOMATIC THUGS

The British Embassy in Sarajevo was a smart but undistinguished suburban house on a side street with no place to park, so Adnan stayed with the car while we met the ambassador. Once past the security doors, placed so close together that one needed to be fit and slim to squeeze into the space between them while waiting for the second door to unlock, a solitary secretary gave us a friendly welcome before refocusing on the mass of papers before her.

Graham Hand, tall and lean, a man of authority, gracious, with an ironic smile, occasionally flitting over his features, was encouraging. He warned us of the extent of corruption throughout Bosnia, to be on our guard and not to trust people. Life in Bosnia, though relatively ordered under the protection of international troops, remained in thrall to the extreme corruption and organized crime that infected the nexus of politics and public life.

He also advised us of the people we could trust. We should meet the Governor of Bihac and concentrate on secular leaders, including the Speaker of the Assembly in Bihac. We had already discovered how partisan the religious leaders in Bosnia tended to be, in varying degrees. We should also see the American ambassador, and might find the new Mayor of Banja Luka sympathetic concerning any projects we had there.

He saw the role of the Soul of Europe as being educational, teaching Bosnia to be self-sufficient.

As to inter-faith problems he assured us that on the whole Muslim extremists wanting a theocratic state had minimal influence. Adnan told us later how Mujaheddin were sent from Saudi Arabia to support their beleaguered brothers in the war and immediately started to abuse Bosnian Muslim women for wearing western fashions and refusing to be veiled and submissive, even beating them on the streets. The most extreme Mujaheddin were condemned and ousted but a number remained, married and settled in Bosnia.

Graham Hand offered to host a reception for the Soul of Europe on our next visit with Ros Tennyson. He would invite influential people to help establish our credentials in Bosnia. Throughout our meeting he proved himself charmingly urbane and witty, making wry observations about the difficulties of life in Bosnia. He seemed to be a wise choice of ambassador in this country knotted with tricky situations, someone aware of the lies and corruption, and adept at crossing the minefield of local politics with a natural geniality that masked an acute awareness of all the dangers. When advising us to meet the US ambassador, a close friend and colleague, he winked at us saying: 'He's a thug!' This was no undiplomatic blunder but a witty caricature of a man who spoke his mind bluntly. The US ambassador would have approved the epithet.

BRIDGE OF SOULS

A Catholic priest, Fra Ivo Markovic, campaigner for practical inter-faith cooperation in Bosnia, returned to Sarajevo after exile during the war and established a choir, Pontanima (Bridge of Souls), made up of singers from all ethnic groups, including Jewish, who together perform each other's sacred and folk music. They produce CDs and give concerts all over Bosnia and Europe.

We found Fra Ivo's office in a side street near the city centre, the house surrounded by a small

garden, cultivated with herbs and vegetables. An American Mennonite couple, who had come to administer Pontanima on a voluntary basis for two years, took charge of the conversation and prevented direct communication with Fra Ivo. Another assistant, who had been training to be a monk and then decided to work with Fra Ivo, sat with us but did not speak throughout the meeting, disappearing into the sofa, keeping his eyes lowered.

A decisive forceful personality, the woman in the couple did most of the talking. They had charitably given time to this worthy project in Sarajevo, 'but we have other options,' she let on, with the self-confidence of people from a secure background who considered it a Christian duty to help people less fortunate than themselves, so long as they did not have to commit themselves for more than a certain period of time. The couple wanted to start a family and preferred to do this in America, not Bosnia.

They handed us piles of cards and leaflets. Fra Ivo meanwhile looked on, like a stranger in this company of foreigners. The Mennonite couple talked about the difficulties of fund raising and asked if we could help with names and contacts. Fra Ivo wanted to talk about the relations between the different religious groups. He managed to squeeze in a few words about Bosnia having positive experiences of peaceful coexistence and tolerance over the centuries. 'God works in all faiths,' he said. 'There have always been good mechanisms of cooperation between the religions, even worshipping together. The negative side was that religions tend to be nationalist, working with national interests, so when political catastrophes emphasize ethnic differences, then the different religions separate. Therefore it is important for us to put pressure on religious leaders to make religion a major factor of reconciliation.' This had inspired him to work at a grass root level, establishing the choir. 'People should visit each other. The nationalists should be removed from power. We need more initiatives like the Soul of Europe. Small church

communities that are not nationalist are indeed starting up. There is still a house of prayer for all religions in Sarajevo. The trouble is that there is still enmity against minorities. Fanatics still hold sway.'

We sat together for a while, several conversations in progress. Book shelves lined the room and everything seemed to be well organized, the Mennonite couple being thorough and efficient. A picture of three horses hung on one wall opposite a portrait with a large half eaten sycamore leaf stuck mysteriously to a man's forehead. There were also photographs of the choir and an abstract stained glass window.

The couple wanted to talk about Slobodan Mike Pavlovic, a rich man from Chicago who was funding rebuilding a bridge over the Drina. He apparently also planned to build a four million dollar inter-religious centre in the town of Brcko. Did we know anything of this? How could we contact this rich man? Fra Ivo seemed disinterested in these material matters, looking at us intently, wanting to discuss grass roots ways and means of establishing peace and reconciliation between the different ethnic groups in Bosnia.

INTERNATIONAL INTERLOPERS

Bosnia, a country still trying to recover from inter-ethnic violence and atrocities, had been taken over by the international community who now forced the Bosnians into the role of dependency. Adnan happened to be the only Bosnian at our next meeting with the Church World Services, an aid agency also funded from America. We met Mike Engelking from America, Vitali Vorona, the Church World Services director in the Balkans, who hailed from the Ukraine, and Theo Jakic, his assistant, a shaven-headed Croat built like a bouncer. Adnan reddened with shame and irritation while we discussed the fate of his country; outsiders deciding what projects should or

shouldn't happen in his country, complacently unaware of our arrogance. We do-gooders dispensed assistance and aid as we thought fit; the natives had better be grateful for anything we did for them. The Mennonite couple would return to America with exciting tales to tell of their experiences in Bosnia; I wrote a book; Mike Engelking moved to another country. Shortly after this meeting Church World Services left Sarajevo to start operations in Belgrade. The Bosnians meanwhile couldn't go anywhere and had to deal with half finished projects the agencies left behind.

We determined from the start that the Soul of Europe had to operate on a deeper level, remaining faithful to our projects as far and long as our funds permitted, establishing foundations secure enough to continue and flourish when we had left.

Vitali Vorona had moved to Sarajevo from Cambodia. He listened sceptically to our project and expressed concern that money for rebuilding ruined churches and mosques in Bosnia came from mysterious sources, implying that national politics used religious buildings as a continuation of the war along the lines of: 'We are strongest here, this is our territory, the rest of you keep out!'. In Cambodia the Khmer Rouge had destroyed towns and the people there were rebuilding by themselves without outside funding. The involvement and participation of locals should be central to the project. In Pale and Mostar the Church World Services had set up programs whereby different groups shared the same amenities, tractors and heavy equipment, rebuilt houses and worked together. By helping to establish a credit union, focusing on grass root activities and working through solidarity groups, this encouraged trust and reconciliation happened in practical ways. He recommended these strategies.

For fifteen years Vitali had worked with refugee returns and noted the 'dependency' syndrome that we had observed in Bihac on our last visit. Because we in the Soul of Europe attended to the

issues of reconciliation and participation in our project, as a core to the process of economic regeneration and spiritual renewal, Vitali expressed a willingness to become a partner and the whole meeting proceeded fruitfully.

He agreed to come to Bihac and attend the discussions with Ros Tennyson, but shortly after our meeting the Church World Services moved to Belgrade to start aid programs in the wake of Kostunica's triumph over Milosevic, and stopped aid in Bosnia.

We sat in a spacious flat in the middle of Sarajevo, pictures of horses and riders on the walls. Several sofas and armchairs surrounded a low round table. A secretary prepared coffee for us in between conducting loud conversations over the phone which rang perpetually.

Vitali, a vigorous man in his forties, thoughtful and attentive, looked world-weary. He had seen too much suffering. What made him choose this line of business, in the aftermath of atrocities and destruction? Could it be a need to help others and suffer the scarring experience; to empathize with the deprivations of others; or for a secret reason? If Mike Engelking had a religious need to be involved in such problematic work he gave no hint of it. Vitali looked driven, haunted and caught on a fast train which would not stop to let him off.

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We returned to Bihac in North West Bosnia to make friends, to encourage interest in our plans to rebuild the Ferhadija Mosque and establish partnerships there.

SMALL IS BEAUTIFUL

RETURN TO BIHAC

Mention of the Prince of Wales Business Leaders Forum, just the first three words, seemed to open doors rapidly in Bihac. People jumped to the conclusion that the Prince of Wales would be

arriving in Bihac at any moment. The various people we then met, including the mayor and his assistant, also the Rector of the University and his demure and modest assistant, then the chain-smoking members of the small businesses council of Bihac, the education minister and other minor ministers with unidentified portfolios were characters from Gogol's *The Government Inspector*. These provincial people had manoeuvred themselves into positions of local power. Coasting along in the backwaters they were suddenly faced with the alarming prospect of meeting a major world figure. Their backs stiffened, they stared at us with unblinking wide eyes and spoke in flowery terms as though we were emissaries from the Prince himself. It also helped when we explained that Ros Tennyson, who would come to Bihac to discuss the partnership project with them. Because she was assumed to be the Prince of Wales' second-in-command, and the Prince would follow shortly after, they paid us alert attention. We swiftly gained their confidence and were able to prepare the ground for Ros when she came, so they would give her a warm welcome and accept her proposals more readily.

Before mention of the Prince of Wales, people had been more difficult to reach. They were 'out of the office', 'taking a class', 'would be back in ten minutes - please ring then.' But when those three magic words were uttered even the mayor, supposedly in another town, appeared within seconds, smoothing down his jacket, as though having been caught in flagrante, and holding out his hands in welcome. All of them gave speeches describing Bihac as a place of peace and reconciliation where everybody, Serbs, Muslims and Croats, lived happily together.

'I am not such a good believer,' the mayor, a secular Muslim, told us unapologetically. 'I'm not one that is obligated by religious rules but by world ethics. This is required from a mayor of this region. I am interested in the development and prosperity of all the nations living here. We are helping with possibilities between all three religions.' Our visit to Krnjeuca had told us another

story: that the different groups were finding it hard to coexist at all, not so much because of religious enmities, but because of the lack of paid work.

The mayor informed us that Bihac was the first region of Bosnia to return property to original owners. Again the facts contradicted him. We mentioned Bishop Chrysostom unable to live in his own residence in Bihac. The mayor told us that refugees were occupying the bishop's house temporarily, but would be leaving shortly. He could return when he wanted to. At our next meeting with the bishop, Bishop Chrysostom said he had not been told of this possibility. Even a year later the bishop had no access to his home, and still lived in a monastery several miles south of Bihac.

Discussing the importance of Ros Tennyson's visit to Bihac, the mayor informed us of the historical reasons behind the present difficulties of generating economic growth in the region. Since the collapse of communism the issue of industrial privatization snagged on the question of who actually owned the formerly worker-administered industries. Previously the state had been involved in everything, especially business. Now the state stepped aside and a new process of finding good business managers had to be developed. An unsatisfactory banking system discouraged investment, which could otherwise boost business. The mayor described a small local refrigeration company run by a Slovenian businessman, a brewery and a bricks and roofing construction outfit, all experiencing difficulties.

VOICELESS PEOPLE

On this visit to Bihac we discovered that the Catholic priest Fra Anto, at the end of his tether trying to cope with the destruction of his parish, had moved back to Banja Luka and been replaced by a more emollient priest. 'I am glad you came with good wishes for us,' the new

priest told us. ‘I hope we achieve happiness in the world. It is good that our words are being heard. The voice of hope needs to be heard. The words of little people are hard to be heard. But we are not discouraged.’

He smiled encouragingly at our proposals for Bihac and his friendly attitude came as a relief after the abrasive Fra Anto who made us feel guilty for wasting his time when he had so many urgent tasks to attend to: finding homes for his parishioners and feeding them. We should at least have come with money. When we gave him our card he looked at us contemptuously: ‘What use are cards? My people need roofs!’ We represented the international community: visitors from abroad who came either to admonish in a colonial manner, or express sympathy like spiritual tourists.

The new priest recounted the history of the Catholic presence in Western Bosnia over the centuries. Three thousand Catholics used to live in the community, a small proportion of Bihac’s population of forty thousand. Two priests and four nuns lived in a house in the neighbourhood. The State had confiscated Catholic property after the Second World War, fifty five years ago, and this led to present-day confusion about who owned what. The priest told us of a Catholic village near Bihac in a similar situation to that of Krnjeuca, the village where Orthodox Serbs returned to destroyed property and no jobs. The priest believed in ecumenical dialogue. ‘We have understanding for others.’ He then added, ‘But the Catholics have been ethnically cleansed from the region. I also am a refugee. The voices of the minorities are not being heard,’ he said. ‘My wish is good will and help from the government side. We keep asking to see the mayor and still have no reply. We need communication with the authorities to start to solve the problems.’

This situation happened all over Bosnia. In the Republika Srpska, in towns like Prijedor the Serb municipal authorities blanked the minorities, reserving funds and amenities for the majority

with the hoped for result that the rest would leave or fade away. As we left, the priest said sadly: 'We are here. So long as there are Catholics there will always be a priest. We will always be helpful to you.'

TRUTHS AND LIES

Students crowded the steps outside the university building, waiting for lectures because they had nowhere else to go. Inside all the doors were padded, no use trying to knock on any of them. A young woman translator, Denise Seho, who turned out to be a Muslim refugee from Banja Luka, accompanied the rector and met us in a large imposing reception room next to the rector's office. We sat round a conference table, split in the middle, with giant rubber plants filling the gap. The chairs rolled about on castors and cups of cold cappuccino and glasses of orange squash waited for us on the table.

It turned out to be the rector's first day at his job. This may have accounted for his solemn demeanour, half expecting the Prince of Wales to come through the door behind us. He gave a speech about the need for democratization in Bosnia, integrating the country into Europe, turning the university into a centre for human rights, etc. The university prided itself on being the oldest in south eastern Europe, with five faculties, two higher schools and five thousand students, including over a hundred and fifty science researchers, doctors, etc. The harsh fact that sixty-two per cent of young people were leaving Bosnia made finding employment and investment in education and training a matter of utmost urgency. The Soul of Europe needed to address this issue. Donald described how the equal partnership of the business, academic and voluntary sectors of society would build a solid base for creating opportunities, employment and flourishing businesses. The rector pointed out the different agendas and conflicting interests in

the area still weighed down by problems concerning religious and ethnic differences, the aggression particularly between Serbs and Croats, making no mention of the Muslim Fifth Army based in Bihac driving Serbs and Croats from their villages. In this part of Bosnia, bristling with glistening white new Saudi-funded mosques, Muslims were conspicuously in charge. 'We must have a multicultural society with colleagues from every side.' No Christian religious objects had been destroyed, he reassured us, yet we had only the day before seen the charred skeleton of Krnjeuca's Orthodox church and noted the Islamic slogans daubed on the ruins of the Orthodox church in Bihac. Like the mayor, the Rector wanted to brush uncomfortable truths under the carpet. Then he informed us that one thousand and fifty-eight Islamic objects had been destroyed in this area during the war. 'But why keep delving into the past, searching for guilty perpetrators?' he said. 'We can do nothing about it now. Young people can build the future anew. We can only train the young. The future is with the young. Young people have to be involved with the partnership.' He invited Donald to speak with student leaders on our next visit.

Discussing the Ferhadija project, the Rector agreed that Bosnian Muslims must be recognized as part of the family of Europe. 'Look at me!' he exclaimed: 'If I am one, then so are we all.' He added in conclusion: 'When people work on common programs we are making partners, not relationships that are subordinate. I will support the partnership as a human being and an academic. Every man is a product of God. It's clear that we must all cooperate.'

All the cantons of Bosnia traditionally enjoy a high degree of autonomy. Each region is governed by its own ministries, and only defers to the capital Sarajevo on matters of national concern, such as the army and foreign policy. Even on these issues, the Republika Srpska

resisted in favour of its own Bosnian Serb non-Muslim militia. A teacher told me in Banja Luka that he objected to his sons serving under 'some Osman'. The political aim of this region remains total independence. To the south of Bihac, the Croat dominated Herzegovina also aims to secede from the Federation, either claiming independence, or joining Croatia, just as the Republika Srpska hopes to become part of Serbia. Though Muslim, and therefore a committed part of the Federation, Bihac, most distant of all the regions from Sarajevo, and bounded like an enclave to the north and west by Croatia, to the east by the Republika Srpska and to the south by predominantly Catholic Herzegovina, the region gave the impression of also being a different country. The ministries we visited were not county councils but governing bodies with powers to administrate as and how they pleased.

Two women presided with solemn dignity over our meeting at the Education Ministry, one the minister of science and culture and the other, a kindly grey haired woman, an advisor on primary schools.

They keenly reassured us that they were happy we had come, even if only to talk and share ideas. 'Sometimes good words and good advice can help even more than money.' The minister added: 'we only regret not having people who share your ideas. Now that you have come we can prevent a repetition of the crisis in 1992-1995. We need to go forward. We must not think about the past. We need to build the country and make a new start where every man can live at peace. We are doing this for our children and the future is in the youth. If we don't make a good situation for them, we can expect nothing.' The minister spoke of her dreams to have common programs whereby everyone had the same opportunities, making Bosnia more western European.

Considering the mushrooming of brand new mosques throughout the region, we expected the

Islamic charity, Merhamed, the equivalent of Christian Aid, to be an equally prestigious organization, if not more so in this predominantly Muslim region. The offices consisted of a warehouse downstairs room, with a collapsing ceiling held together by strips of tape. We sat surrounded by boxes of materials and equipment piled high; broken down typewriters stacked on shelves. Electric wires, from which light sockets had been ripped, straggled across the ceiling and rows of moulding sofas covered in ragged rugs stood against the flaking walls. The place looked in a state of demolition rather than reconstruction.

We had expected the wealthy Muslim world, such as the Saudis, to be supporting Merhamed but in fact this NGO received most funds from Vitali Vorona's Church World Services. An exhausted man sat at a desk and described a project in a village near to the Rmanj Monastery. Funds from the Church World Services had helped employ four people producing herb medicine products. However they now needed a small machine for packaging the medicines, otherwise the project would have to close down.

CATCHING FISH

A bleak wind whistled through the empty and largely unfurnished corridors of the Park Hotel in Bihac. Dusty unwashed net curtains draped across large windows. The place had not been redecorated since communist times. A friendly man in an open-necked shirt and jeans welcomed us to the Union of Small Businesses and ushered us into a small room where half a dozen men, also in open-necked shirts, gathered round a low coffee table. They smoked intensively for the next hour, choking the air out of our lungs. Among them sat the president of the union and his elderly assistant, wearing an anorak and corduroy trousers. The traffic-light green carpet in the room clashed with the salmon pink walls and canary yellow curtains. Dust and cigarette smoke

hung like a pall over everything. The men looked like street traders. The president, who had been a former Mayor of Bihac, turned out to be an experienced businessman and understood immediately the nature of a business forum. The rest listened in astonishment to Donald's presentation and his description of what a partnership scheme implied - they had heard nothing like this before. When he talked about the Prince of Wales, they even ceased to puff on their cigarettes, holding them in their fingers with the ash burning to the skin. When he described the need for 'transparency' they stiffened, and at further clarification about 'equality' between the partners they froze.

The president welcomed the scheme wholeheartedly and gradually the others got used to the idea of sharing and collaborating. He told us of his own enterprise, employing just a few people. The Union of Small Businesses had been established a year earlier thanks to help from Koblenz in Germany. 'We have registered five thousand small businesses. There is big potential for development in this area. Bihac has opportunity for development. We are not political. Members come from all three religious groups and nations; which means that all members consider themselves equal, just businessmen. We even have contact with the Republika Srpska. Businesses connect people. Business people go forward more than politicians. Also, these organizations should be linked with everybody, nationally and internationally.'

The president encouraged us to establish a base in Bihac and make a project that would be self-sustainable in the future 'because we think we have enough skills, knowledge and equipment for small businesses that are important for the region. We are a union that keeps these businesses together. Our members have interesting ideas for development along these lines. We have good potential, lots of small enterprises and good ideas; we just need to put them into practice. We have enough educated people manufacturing and producing; also it can be good to cooperate

with the Soul of Europe. We are ready and open to any new ideas. We are interested in sharing projects here and elsewhere.'

The stench of stale and fresh cigarette smoke became overpowering in the small room. Alarmingly loud bangs and explosions outside interrupted the conversation. But a waiter appeared regularly to empty the ashtrays, so we assumed war had not broken out again.

The president continued to speak in a quiet voice, asking questions about primary objectives, the kind of businesses that could be involved directly with our project - such as agriculture, health foods, tourism, local arts and crafts: sustainable, environmentally friendly businesses.

Donald talked about the village of Krnjeuca and the president, smiling, agreed that this wretched community must be brought into the Bihac area of concern. 'We all have a common God,' he said.

We should avoid huge projects and start with small ones, he advised. 'Small is beautiful. All projects should be agreed jointly. Money is needed, enough to employ people - to enable them to work and then trade outside Bosnia.' The president quoted the proverb: 'Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day: show him how to catch a fish and you feed him for a lifetime.' If the idea was right, the means and finance would follow. The organization of partners must ensure that happened. 'Though we are a young organization, we have success in gaining support and the understanding of the authorities. We are trying to convince them to let us develop small businesses. They don't help us a lot but they don't make trouble for us either.'

As for the religious communities, the president felt that: 'they can build buildings, whatever they need. But our task is to build factories and provide work for people.'

After this meeting, we visited Mufti Makic. On our previous visit, we heard the harrowing

account of the mufti's time in the Omarska concentration camp. That encounter determined the path of our work, especially the project to rebuild the Ferhadija Mosque.

Now we sat nervously in his spacious smart private office, expecting him to be surly and grudging of support, in spite of Dr Cerić's promise to phone ahead to smooth our way. By the time he eventually entered, sleeves rolled up from some physical task, a bright hot sun had emerged from behind dark clouds. His manner towards us had changed completely. Appalling memories still cast a shadow across the mufti's face, but the thundercloud had passed, and, eyes softening, he welcomed us warmly, perhaps relieved to be friends. He shook us by the hand, smiled enthusiastically, offered to help us with any projects we might have for his area and sat us round a large low table where he served us mineral water, juice and traditional Bosnian coffee.

He spoke about his hometown of Prijedor in the Republika Srpska. The notorious concentration camps where Serbs had killed and tortured hundreds of Muslims were situated along the road from Prijedor to Banja Luka. Thirty two mosques had been destroyed in the area around Prijedor and Mufti Makic wanted to start rebuilding some of them. Over four thousand Muslims had disappeared, bodies still not found but known to be buried in mass graves. The population of Prijedor which before the war had been fifty per cent Muslim, forty-five per cent Serb and five per cent Catholics, was now hundred per cent Serb and dominated by the Orthodox Church. Muslim refugees were returning, settling in the surrounding villages. Concerned for them, Mufti Makic told us that though he recognized the prime importance of rebuilding the Ferhadija Mosque in Banja Luka, Prijedor must come second.

‘THE WORST TOWN IN EUROPE’ *Lonely Planet Guide to Eastern Europe*

RETURN TO BANJA LUKA NOVEMBER 2000

Appearances deceived in Banja Luka. On our first visit we had been charmed by the setting, the surrounding mountains covered with forests and scattered with villages and farms, the River Vrbas flowing through the centre of the town, flanked by parks and the old castle. Students from the university crowded the streets, squares and cafés. On this second visit the town seemed stagnant. Then we had seen Banja Luka through Lazar’s eyes. Now we were seeing it through Adnan’s eyes.

Elections in Serbia had recently ousted Milosevic. The world interpreted this event as a sign that the majority of Serbs, acknowledging their complicity in war crimes, now wanted to put the past behind them. Serbia ceased being the pariah of Europe. Many aid agencies and international NGOs left Bosnia with its awkward Muslims, unpleasant recent history, unresolved issues of inter-ethnic rivalries and betrayals by the international community, and set up shop in relatively uncomplicated Serb Belgrade. Throughout the period of sanctions against Serbia, the Republika Srpska had benefited by offering Serbs welcome respite from the oppressive restrictions of European sanctions. Banja Luka thrived as a vacation destination for Serbs from Belgrade. Economic considerations and not any sense of war-guilt led to the ousting of a despotic president, though his mafia cronies continued to control the country. Now that Serbs did not need to visit the Republika Srpska - a region of which they always been ashamed, considering it to be backward, the people uncultured - stagnation hung like a grey mist over Banja Luka. The dark events of recent years could not be so easily ignored as when the town, in holiday mood, first charmed us; then a welcome contrast to the bleak and unnerving atmosphere of rampant crime and corruption in Belgrade under Milosevic. The Republika Srpska, still protecting war

criminals like Karadjic and Mladic, had now become the pariah of Europe.

On our last visit we had sat on the terrace of the Castle Restaurant eating schnitzels and drinking wine on a sultry summer evening, enjoying the fresh air rising from the cool waters of the River Vrbas below. We laughed at the description of Banja Luka in Lonely Planet's *Eastern Europe* as being 'the worst attraction of the region'. It didn't look so bad. We could not see any ruins or signs of atrocities. We were deceived by appearances and now felt ashamed at our ignorance.

Banja Luka offers a textbook example of efficient ethnic cleansing: how it should be done without attracting criticism from the world outside. In the space of three years the Muslims, about half of the town's population, had been terrorized, browbeaten and forced to leave their homes and, adding insult to injury, were even made to pay for their transportation to the border with Croatia where they were dumped and left to fend for themselves. The Serbs declared to the world that the Muslims were leaving of their own free will, happy to emigrate. All sixteen mosques were blown up and the rubble removed. The International Red Cross provided cover for this activity because the wife of Radovan Karadzic managed the Banja Luka offices. The operation ran smoothly and unchecked so the town became almost completely Serb. A town, which had once boasted one of the most beautiful mosques of the Ottoman period, and where Muslims, Catholics and Orthodox had lived together, their places of worship across the road from each other, now began to rewrite its history.

A few Catholics and even a handful of Muslim families were returning because they had nowhere else to go. Fearful and not wanting to draw attention to themselves, they tried to be invisible. Muscular men in black leatherjackets and jeans roamed the streets looking suspiciously at strangers. Three of these men sat at the next table in the restaurant we chose for supper in

Banja Luka, and according to Adnan, they were discussing guns, dogs and business. Like the mafia we had seen operating on the streets of Belgrade the previous February, one of them fixed me momentarily with the dark pools of his eyes, sizing me up.

We stayed at the Firenze Hotel where the friendly staff remembered us from our last visit. Dragana, the attractive woman serving breakfast, cried out in pleasure, threw her arms open, hugged and kissed us both. She seemed to be expressing a relief that we had bothered to return. Her pleasure indicated she knew about the heart of darkness in her town, a place no one would ever want to visit, let alone come back to. The lipstick imprint of her kiss stuck to Donald's cheek most of the day.

GRANDCHILDREN AND PROCEDURES

We expected to be briefed about the mayor of Banja Luka, but Roy Wilson, the smart Head of Office at the British Embassy branch in Banja Luka, had arranged to join us outside the mayor's office and could only tell us briefly about the man who might well be one of the most influential people we would meet. Dragoljub Davidovic, in the forthright words of the American ambassador, was merely a cipher, a front man for the more powerful authorities in the Republika Srpska, who, because they were wanted for war crimes, could not govern openly themselves.

Davidovic sat opposite us at a large polished table with a woman journalist at his side. She took notes for a paragraph in tomorrow's paper where it would be reported that more people from Western Europe were visiting the Republika Srpska offering the hand of friendship and support, implying that the crimes and atrocities of the last ten years could be forgotten. But the mayor also knew we had come to discuss the project for rebuilding the Ferhadija Mosque. Donald started by giving a speech intended to touch his heart, about creating a future for our children and

grandchildren. This perplexed the mayor. He had expected an attack on his refusal to grant permission for the rebuilding of the mosque. ‘All Europe will want to come to Banja Luka,’ Donald explained to the astonished Mayor, and emphasized the European dimension of the project. ‘All religions have matters in common so why not build a centre in your city for the different religions to meet as equals and learn from one another?’

The mayor, so taken aback by this visionary speech that he could not respond, began instead to deliver carefully rehearsed statements in answer to questions Donald had unexpectedly not even asked. Not wanting to be seen as refusing permission for the mosque to be built, the mayor instead made excuses, speaking about procedures: the need for blueprints and specific preparations for such a building. This could be sorted quickly, a matter of procedure, no longer a case of ‘possibility’, an issue for the authorities. The Islamic Faith Community had to present the required documents. Documents were the issue. While he spoke we had to keep reminding ourselves that we were not applying for a new structure, a building which had never existed and whose plans had therefore to be examined and discussed. This building had been deliberately destroyed and the foundations removed. The space where it stood remained untouched. Building permits were not the issue. There should be an apology, reparation and support for its eventual rebuilding. But the mayor continued to speak about the mosque as though we were discussing plans for the erection of a multi-storey car park on a piece of public land where nothing had stood before. He embarked on a sophisticated argument about public opinion in Banja Luka being against our project: why build a mosque since no Muslims lived in the town? However, as representative of the town authorities he would create no problems. His words ignored the reason for the absence of Muslims: driven from their homes, they had a right to return.

The mayor then produced carefully composed arguments concerning funding of religious

objects. The Orthodox Church financed their own building projects, so the Muslims should finance their own. He then complained about the lack of balance in these rebuilding projects within the Federation, speaking about the other half of Bosnia as though it were another country, and accused the Muslim Federation army of using Orthodox churches as barracks. At least these buildings were still standing, we thought.. Now the mayor hit his stride and gave expression to righteous indignation. ‘Everybody talks only about the Ferhadija Mosque! What about the destroyed Orthodox churches in other parts of Bosnia?’ We immediately thought of the elaborate and expensive Orthodox churches now being built on prime sites in the centre of Banja Luka while all the mosques in the town had been reduced to patches of waste ground. The mayor repeated his statements about ‘procedures’ and relished telling us about plans to rebuild a mosque in the Federation town of Tuzla, financed by Saudi Arabia. The builders had not followed correct procedures and the building could not be allowed and this happened in a Muslim town, nothing to do with Serbs!

Donald refused to enter into arguments about procedures and permission. Instead he continued to speak about the need for the different faiths to work together, to collaborate and learn from one another. The rebuilding of the Ferhadija represented a project of the imagination. The conversation became tense. The mayor, ill prepared for the Soul of Europe, assumed we had come simply to demand the rebuilding of a mosque. He had to depart from his carefully prepared answers and attempted to shift the blame for the horrors of the last decade on to the world community. Banja Luka had always been an open city, he explained. ‘Why were religious people involved in politics?’ he asked. ‘It wasn’t right and should not have been allowed. They influenced the war. The world community should have stopped the war. Why did they not prevent it? We would not have these problems if they had. The war was a European

responsibility.’ He looked at us sternly so we ourselves suddenly felt guilty for the atrocities and the destruction of Bosnia; the mayor and his people being innocent of any involvement.

Donald responded by asking the mayor point blank: ‘Why were the mosques destroyed?’ While I considered hiding under the table, the mayor looked straight back at Donald and calmly answered: ‘I also ask that question.’

The mayor then accepted Donald’s invitation to come to Coventry and attend a conference on reconciliation where the issue of rebuilding the Ferhadija Mosque as a European project would be discussed on neutral territory and in the presence of leading world figures. We presented him with a bottle of whiskey as a gift. He accepted this in embarrassment. Adnan, shocked at our generosity to this hostile man, later commented that he hoped we ‘had put something in it’.

The meeting turned out to be a delaying tactic by the mayor, who, though welcoming any kindnesses from the international community had no authority to affect decisions concerning the rebuilding of the Ferhadija. He made vague attempts at seeming to be friendly and cooperative, but his task was to ensure nothing would happen. The constant repetition of the word ‘procedure’ became tiresome. However it turned out that on a personal level the consequences of this encounter would have important repercussions for the mayor and the future of the project.

THE DESPAIR OF MUFTI CAMDZIC

On our first visit to Banja Luka in 2000, a year earlier, the meeting with Mufti Camdzic altered the course of the Soul of Europe’s work. Rebuilding the Ferhadija Mosque became a necessity for the world, not just Bosnia, a gesture of welcome to the Muslim community in Europe, a symbol of reconciliation between the three faiths which have existed side-by-side for many centuries in this south eastern part of the continent. Mufti Camdzic had welcomed us with a

dignity that turned out to be heroic in view of the constant threats to his life. He remained in Sarajevo, and he made the arduous journey to Banja Luka several times every week.

Before entering the Islamic centre, a building isolated and vulnerable at the far end of the flat patch of ground where the mosque once stood, I took snapshots, furtively, because we had been warned that the Serbs in Banja Luka, sensitive about having photos taken of their crimes, were known to assault photographers, snatch the cameras and destroy them.

On our first visit we had been ignorant of the fate of the Ferhadija Mosque. But an old postcard which the mufti had held to his chest for a group photo informed us that the beautiful building once stood on this piece of grassy waste ground where not a single remnant remained to indicate that a monument of importance once provided a focal point for the whole town. So thorough had been the clean up after the bombing that even with our knowledge we could see nothing more than space for a car park or a children's playground.

The mufti had told us on our first visit that he wanted us to tell the world what had happened in Banja Luka, declaring: 'I am a mufti without a mosque.' He even considered erecting a tent on the waste ground for the few Muslims left in the town to worship in. Last time he had spoken sadly about the political nature of the issues surrounding the rebuilding of the mosque, aware of the hopelessness of his situation. He knew that bosses living in hiding had ordered the authorities not to issue any procedures that would lead to permission being granted. But on this our second visit Mufti Camdzic lost patience. After a polite but brief welcome, cutting the normal pleasantries, he spoke with furious indignation and as the meeting progressed his voice boomed louder, more desperate and strident. At the end of his tether, the man seemed on the verge of a nervous breakdown.

First came an unexpected shock. Straight away the mufti launched into an attack on our

previous interpreter, Lazar, who had asserted that Serbs destroyed only a few mosques and accused Muslims of exaggerating the numbers. Lazar must have included these offensive remarks in between translating for us. How would Lazar have felt if Albanians from Kosovo declared reports of the destruction of Orthodox churches and monasteries to be exaggerated? We assured the mufti that Lazar no longer worked for us in Bosnia. We later discovered that only after persistent efforts did Adnan persuade the mufti even to see us again. The mufti needed convincing we weren't working for Serb nationalists and for a long time believed the Orthodox Church had sent us to Banja Luka to prevent the Ferhadija from being rebuilt. Lazar had almost succeeded in wrecking our work before it began. The mufti told us of the poor relations between Muslims and Serbia; how during the Hajj when pilgrims crossed Europe to visit Mecca and passed through Serbia, their buses were stopped, pilgrims robbed and beaten by people wearing stocking masks. Elderly people suffered most from these attacks. The evil that happened in Banja Luka stemmed from Serbia. The mufti admitted he therefore had problems relating to Lazar, but trusted us more now that Adnan was our interpreter.

After this unpleasantness, which reminded us to tread carefully, and of how frail our project was, the mufti spoke about the urgent need for permission to be granted for the rebuilding of the Ferhadija Mosque. Already five new Orthodox churches and a cathedral were being built in the Banja Luka diocese, but not one mosque.

Donald invited the mufti to Coventry. The mufti smiled slightly, appreciating our kind support, but also with irony at our inability to grasp the size of the obstacles in the way of the project. He became impatient, angry at the difficulties being put in his way, at the apathy of the international community, and condemned the weakness of the Office of the High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, who needed only to command the authorities to give permission and the problem

would be solved immediately. He was prepared to meet with us only because his boss, the Reis ul Ulema, had told him we were trying to help, but generally he refused to give interviews to international visitors because he felt he had nothing to say, his words being a waste of effort. All eighty-six mosques in his muftiluk had been destroyed during the war, and still he had not been granted permission to rebuild any of them.

Donald asked him why the mosques had been destroyed.

‘I don’t know,’ he answered. ‘I wouldn’t destroy a hen house or a dog kennel. I know the people who destroyed them by first and last name. Everybody knows but everybody keeps quiet. I can tell you that before the war I used to collect money for building eleven Catholic churches and fifteen Orthodox churches. With a Jewish colleague I raised money for synagogues; I offered to be on committees for fund raising. I tell my community that if they know of churches needing to be rebuilt they must give donations. Never be put off by problems with church bells, whatever, but search for money because that is what I do. And we must always ask: why do we offend people? Our minarets should upset no one.’

The mufti paused and looked at us sadly.

‘I am glad to have found you, coming from the other end of Europe. What you are doing is right and necessary. It is what I expect. It should not be considered unusual.’

Though he had no money he would be glad to come to England. Anglicans and Catholics should invite him together with Mufti Makic from Bihac, Dr Ceric and Bishop Komarica. We should call all of them. A German MEP, Doris Pack, invited them to Strasbourg. He had already been to Trent with Bishops Bishop Komarica and Bishop Chrysostom. Clearly Europe should learn about the Ferhadija Mosque. According to the plans, the mosque would be rebuilt as it used to be.

The mufti appreciated being on the committee for this project, but urged us to see Mayor Davidovic and Dodik, the new governor, and tell them the Islamic community had prepared all the documentation, that only permission was needed. The mufti became agitated at the thought of fresh obstacles. 'We cannot wait!' he shouted. 'We will start building now. They can destroy, but we will start again. Mayor Davidovic promised us permission. We will start with just a few builders. We can not wait.'

He then invited Donald to be present at the laying of the foundation stone. Donald spoke about the European dimension of the project, the situation in Banja Luka being a 'black hole' in democratic Europe, Muslims having no rights in their town. The mufti became even more agitated, wagged his finger at Donald and cried: 'You are able to walk the streets in your collar. But when I go out with my hat they spit at me and stone me. Your John Major supported the division of Bosnia, your David Owen too. My family died; over two thousand died because of that mistake. Eighty imams were killed. Both Makic and myself were in concentration camps.'

Shocked, Donald said how important it would be if out of such darkness, this project could succeed in Banja Luka. But the mufti reminded him again of the obstacles, that Governor Dodik had made it clear that if permission were given for the rebuilding, he would blow it up again. So Mayor Davidovic refused to give permission and Dodik kept saying: 'If they build, we will destroy.' The mufti again shook his finger at Donald: 'You can make them give permission. The American ambassador begged the authorities to accelerate the process. But your English ambassador has not yet been to see me. He visited Mayor Davidovic and Dodik, but never came to see me. Most western politicians are cynical; they don't care. Go to Petritsch, go to your ambassadors. Tell them, beg them, order them to put pressure on the authorities. Petritsch shames Europe if he doesn't.'

Donald spoke about his dream for the future: young people from all religious faiths coming from all over Europe to rebuild the mosque and the Islamic community so Banja Luka would be proud of the mosque.

The mufti responded warmly. Of the thousand Muslim families before the war only thirty remained. People wanted to return and soon it would be Ramadan. There were no mosques so how could space be provided for worship? Everybody feared that anything they built would be destroyed.

Then he told us of a German New Age representative who visited him recently, looked at the bare space where the mosque used to stand and asked whether the mufti would agree to plant a 'tree of peace'. The mufti, outraged at this thoughtless sentimental suggestion, told the callow German tersely: 'I need a mosque'.

Donald asked about responses from the Orthodox Church. Bishop Chrysostom had expressed sympathy to the mufti, since his diocese in Bihac had also suffered, but the Bishop of Banja Luka had not even apologized for the destruction of mosques. However, there were many good Serbs who supported the project for rebuilding the Ferhadija.

We finished the meeting repeating Donald's dream, which inspired the mufti, but he nevertheless reminded us once again to put pressure on the High Representative. Petritsch should connect with Muslims in Bosnia and act like a true representative of European democracy.

THE VRBAS GORGE

Adnan liked to tell us that he felt at home everywhere in Bosnia, it being his country, regardless of the divisions. Besides which, he had friends everywhere, mostly through working for the International Red Cross. He used to deliver aid to distant towns and villages and knew each

bend in every road. But despite his upbeat attitude to his country, Banja Luka oppressed him. He reckoned Foca to be the darkest place in Bosnia. Muslims had indeed been murdered in Banja Luka, but most were driven out in a more sophisticated program of ethnic cleansing. In Foca the policy of ethnic cleansing had been bloody, brutal and barbaric: Serbs massacred Muslims there.

Adnan gave us a different perspective on Banja Luka. Our previous guide, Lazar, felt at home with fellow Serbs and had no sorrow for absent Muslims. After all there were no visible signs of destruction and abuse of civil rights; the past could easily be forgotten in the streets of Banja Luka today. Adnan considered the Republika Srpska to be his country and resented the recent history, which tried to turn him into an alien, 'a Muslim from Sarajevo'. Though he had friends in Banja Luka, all of them Serbs, he did not like going there. Meeting us at Zagreb Airport Adnan suggested: 'wouldn't it be better to go straight to Sarajevo?' trying to steer us away from Banja Luka. We noted how the town was turning shabbier. People looked at us with suspicion, hostile and self-absorbed.

Only at the Firenze Hotel was the young staff friendly, as on our first visit. Their good natured smiles and attitudes, even knowing our work and why we were there, suggested that perhaps the youth of the town would help turn its fortunes. Beyond the hotel, Banja Luka was a grim town. When it came to leaving, our spirits rose and Adnan could not wait to drive off.

The road rapidly climbed the Vrbas valley and immediately the beauty of the landscape obliterated memories of our stressful time in Banja Luka. Magnificent views opened up onto forested mountains, looking over the river far below. On a cliff top stood an ancient ruined castle surrounded by trees shedding autumn colours.

In spite of sending notice of our arrival and persistently phoning and faxing him, Bishop

Komarica could not see us. Perhaps he did not think the project for rebuilding a mosque a high priority. We turned up at his offices in the hope he might see us, but were told that a delegation from Croatia had arrived. If a sympathetic ally like Bishop Komarica turned out so difficult to reach, how much more problematic would it be to deal with enemies? After the non-committed response of the frightened Mayor Davidovic and the hysterical impatience of Mufti Camdzic, the project seemed frail, even hopeless, the task before us as steep as the road up the Vrbas valley.

The road climbed along the upper reaches of the River Vrbas where farmsteads and villages scattered over meadows and woodlands. Hayricks stood sentinel, poultry scratched in the orchards and farmers turned the soil for winter, as they had done for centuries. Ruined houses still scarred the rural idyll, but on this journey it felt as though life was returning to normal and that even these scars would heal. We had not yet visited eastern Bosnia, where the massive scale of war-destruction saw whole villages in ruins and displaced people in desperate poverty. Once again we would be shocked into horrified silence.

AMERICANS

We arrived in Sarajevo and went straight to the American embassy, where several layers of security protected the ambassador. First we had to pass the barriers on the street, then the front entrance and beyond that various other groups of soldiers, police and security doors. Daniel Rhea, the ambassador's second-in-command, greeted us warmly, ushering us through a warren of corridors into the ambassador's office. They were prepared for our visit and took our project seriously, having been briefed about the Soul of Europe by Graham Hand. The American ambassador replied affirmatively within minutes of receiving our email request for a meeting. Eventually we arrived at his office where secretaries busied themselves on computers and phones

while faxes grunted and churned out paper. We stood in a well-fortified bunker, the offices pushed back into the secure depths of a large building.

Tom Miller, an athletic ambassador, then gestured us into his comfortably furnished private room. Photographs of a handsome all-American family, sporty son and daughter, glamorous wife, himself with various leading world politicians, prominently Madeleine Albright, covered the walls and shelves, along with baseball trophies and various certificates including one for ‘Ambassador of the Year’. Above his desk hung a poster offering a reward of five million dollars for the arrest of Milosevic, General Mladic and Radovan Karadzic.

The ambassador fixed us with a penetrating gaze, assessing our qualifications for the impossible task of rebuilding the Ferhadija Mosque.

Donald opened the conversation with a statement about Banja Luka being a perfect example of ethnic cleansing and that this constituted an international disgrace. The ambassador immediately warmed to us. Apologizing for his uncouth manners, speaking frankly and not mincing his words, he announced that he had no religious affiliations and therefore wouldn’t be able to speak politely about the situation in Bosnia. Pushing a thigh against his revolving chair, then pacing about the room like a caged animal, explaining that he had been sitting all day and needed exercise, he embarked on a stream of invective at the present situation in Bosnia. Banja Luka was a ‘fucking shithole’, Mayor Davidovic was a ‘cipher’ and a ‘fucking jerk’, scared to make a decision and playing paper games. Dodik and the authorities governing most of the Republika Srpska were a bunch of ‘fucking assholes’. No need to make excuses for them. They were ‘bad guys’ pure and simple; they were against Muslims returning to places that had been ethnically cleansed. True, the Muslim side played games too, but for good reasons. How else could they make progress given the intractability of the Bosnian Serbs? Even Dr Cerić needed all his

cunning to deal constantly with ‘liars’ and ‘jerks’. So the Reis used the Ferhadija Mosque as a stick to beat the Serbs who would never say ‘OK’. As for the High Representative: Petritsch was a ‘feckless, scared jerk’, a ‘little diplomat, a second rate politician from a third rate country (Austria) or should that be the other way round?’ Answering my question as to how such a feeble diplomat had been given a position of such responsibility, he looked scornfully at me as much as to say, ‘you ignorant Europeans are also a bunch of jerks’, shrugged his shoulders and assumed that because Petritsch had been Austrian ambassador in Belgrade before the war, that apparently qualified him for the job of peacemaker in Bosnia, even though his sympathies were bound to be questionable. ‘Mad or not?’

He quickly passed onto another subject, not wanting to waste time analyzing the criminal culpability of such an appointment in one of the most politically delicate positions in Europe. But at least that explained why Petritsch had such difficulty with the Muslims, always fearing to upset his Serb friends. ‘He’s afraid of his own shadow!’ sneered the ambassador. However Petritsch should be forced to make a decision. He had good lawyers and made good speeches but there was never any action. We should take him at his word and insist: ‘Just do it! You said it could and should be done.’ The High Representative had powers, as Mufti Camdzic told us already, and he should be made to exercise them.

Donald, myself and Adnan listened to this no-nonsense interpretation of events, generously spiced with undiplomatic invective, but knowing that for too long people from outside Bosnia had been trying to interpret the horrors of the last ten years as a grey area of shared guilt among all parties when in fact it was only too evidently as black and white as the holocaust.

Donald asked how we should proceed.

‘Have you money?’ the ambassador asked, the bottom line always being money. ‘You are

serious religious guys,' the ambassador continued, and observing Donald's questioning look, explained that Anglicans were considered to be uncorrupted, particularly in comparison with the Orthodox and Catholic Churches in eastern Europe who had badly soiled their reputation through their nationalist affiliations and support of the fighting. 'You are the good guys! Here's the deal: tell the Serbs, I got the money. Then if they don't cooperate we withdraw the offer.'

The ambassador advised us not to trip over other similar projects in Bosnia. We should contact Jack Klein who had a project similar to the Ferhadija: rebuilding a destroyed mosque in Foca, which given Adnan's story about the massacres there, would constitute an even greater miracle.

Despite the problems and the need for cynicism in the political arena of Bosnia, the ambassador assured us that rebuilding the Ferhadija was a good idea.

'It has to happen,' he said shortly. It would become an anchor. Good Serbs who were now intimidated would rally round. We must meanwhile attend to building up 'European horse power', as he pithily described our fund and consciousness-raising objectives.

He threw out a few more names for us to contact: Michael Scanlon, Roy Wilson, whom we had already met in Banja Luka, and Chris Harland in particular who dealt with human rights issues for the Office of the High Representative.

Having energetically given us almost an hour of his valuable time, he shook our hands and sinking back in his chair looked at us suddenly with a grave expression, saying: 'Of course the mosque must be built. It has to be. There is no question about it.'

Outside the embassy, Stephen Rhea talked at length with us about our plans. He agreed to help us negotiate the difficult political waters and advise us.

We set off for Tuzla in Northern Bosnia to make friends and find allies..

GOOD AND EVIL

THE BOSNIA-SERBIA BORDERLANDS

The view from Tuzla's main hotel spanned across a large area of parkland converted into allotments, a patchwork of oblongs, each carefully cultivated. Beyond rose the hills from which the Serbs had bombarded the town. Solidly built concrete tower blocks lined the road leading out of Tuzla. Like Sarajevo, the town seemed to be in a state of shock after the recent war. Along with the incessant bombardment, a single missile attack massacred seventy one young people in the main square. Immediately after the war the town restored its centre where pedestrians could stroll along traffic-free alleys between rows of houses built in the Austro-Hungarian style. A memorial to two friends, a famous artist and writer who lived in Tuzla after the Second World War, portrayed them both conversing at the hub of the pedestrian precinct, exactly as they might have done in life. The sculptor positioned the figures so the viewer could occupy the vacant third point of a triangle, joining in the eternal conversation. Public sculptures indicate national characteristics, the imperial bombast of Great Britain, say, or the sensuality in a cold clime of Sweden and Finland. In Tuzla human intercourse counted, the enjoyment of relaxing with friends in a sociable culture where every other building was a cafe with space to sit, talk and observe. This characteristic made the memorial to the seventy-one young people massacred nearby so poignant. The Serb missile intended for Muslims also happened to kill several young Serbs mingling with their Muslim friends.

Paul Johns, director of a charity called the Sana Project in Eastern Bosnia had invited us to Tuzla. There might be a chance of collaborating and linking his project to the Soul of Europe. We visited to learn and find ways of helping each other. Paul Johns, a Methodist minister, first came to Bosnia working for the Islamic Relief Agency who had asked him to deliver aid,

specifically medical equipment, to Muslim war victims in 1994. The Methodists provided funds and also for a centre for the protection of women war victims. While staying in the Hotel Tuzla he narrowly escaped death when a Serb missile, aimed at the nearby police headquarters, crashed into the next room.

Paul's assistant Amin, a Sudanese Muslim, lived in Tuzla with his Bosnian Muslim wife. Paul had met Amin by chance in Zagreb airport and on a shared flight to Sarajevo they agreed to work together. After the war, when aid began to dry up, a woman working at the Centre for the Protection of Women War Victims and who had been supervisor in a Brcko garment factory offered to train other women in the art of dressmaking. Money from the relief agency bought sewing machines and so the Sana Project was established in Tuzla. Croat and Serb women joined with Muslim women in the project. Working together necessitated communication, and as a result reconciliation began to happen. The project also gave training in English and computer skills. Amin ran the centre from 1995 to 1998. By then the project needed to move where the need was greatest, to villages along the divide of the Bosnian Federation and the Republika Srpska, the war ravaged borderlands of Bosnia and Serbia.

Paul now quickly ran into problems in this politically unstable region of Bosnia. Politics had destroyed people's lives and trust. The movement of populations caused confusion as to where people chose to settle. The Serbs fleeing the Federation did not want to return to their former homes in Muslim territory. Meanwhile they lived in houses belonging to Muslims who were beginning to return. The fiercest fighting of the war happened throughout this area of Bosnia and it would take longer than a few years to begin to heal the wounds. Paul rapidly found enough people in desperate need for him to start a Sana Project in several of these villages. But now, having run out of funds, he faced his biggest task, persuading trusts and donors in the rest of

Europe to continue to support his projects in this the most unstable part of Bosnia. Paul saw it in human terms: people were crying out for help, he felt a duty to help them, regardless of politics and ethical considerations, aware that the people he helped were living in other people's houses, and had probably committed serious crimes. Despite the difficulty in raising funds, Paul refused to throw in the towel and planned to establish a farmer's cooperative and a community centre where reconciliation between the three groups in the area could proceed. Having identified these needs he hoped the Soul of Europe would help him find money.

Paul, an energetic man approaching retirement, a former Chair of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, now worked as a researcher for the Football Association, a job which paid for his journeys to Bosnia and the Sana Project. Amin looked after the people involved in the project, visiting them and managing the shop, building relations with the local authorities. Already this represented an achievement for the Sana Project, considering that Amin came from the Sudan, a black Muslim working among Bosnian Serbs: a stranger here in the predominantly peasant community of a remote region of the Balkans.

Paul accompanied Donald and Adnan into the hinterland beyond Tuzla, while I followed with Amin. In contrast to Paul's intensity, totally consumed by his work for Sana, Amin had a more relaxed attitude towards the problems of survival, cheerful and laid back. However, both were clearly under stress: the future of the project was in doubt.

First we visited the town of Lopare in the Republika Srpska. The road from Tuzla ascended into hills covered in trees shedding deep russet and golden leaves, then followed the undulating folds of a hilly countryside through meadows and orchards. Lopare, a Karadjic town with the flag of the Republika Srpska prominently on display, looked shabby and neglected despite a lively market selling mostly sacks of cabbages, some clothes, linen and large bottles of orangeade.

Unemployed young men looking frustrated and listless wandered up and down the streets.

As soon as we arrived at Lopare two community leaders greeted Paul and Amin, inviting them on a hunt the following Monday, to shoot boar and bears in the surrounding woods. We hesitated to accept, having more to fear from these men than the wild beasts. At the local government offices a man bearing a striking resemblance to Radovan Karadjie, with the same heavy jaw and thick mass of grey hair, welcomed us. Slobodan Bogdanovic had long been a supporter of Karadjic, but nevertheless welcomed the Sana Project and did not mind working with Muslim Amin. Bogdanovic used to be a professor at the University of Tuzla and spoke about the need for tolerance. 'I am a Serb,' he told us. 'I would allow my daughter to marry a Muslim. This is not abstract tolerance.' Either he lied to impress us, or was proof that not all Bosnian Serbs were racist ethnic cleansers. He spoke warmly of Tito and the tolerance that existed under the communists. Professor Bogdanovic took a special interest in the Soul of Europe project in Bihac and hoped we would establish a similar partnership scheme here in eastern Bosnia. All towns in Bosnia shared the same dilemmas, with once state-owned industries looking for new management, small businesses providing some employment, but only for ten per cent of the working population. A few small-scale industries thrived in a mostly agricultural area: saw mills and timber factories, including furniture making. Schemes like ours could work in such regions of transition. The problem remained how to market the region's products. As in Bihac this presented a stumbling block to the eventual success of the partnership. Who would buy the goods? They would have to persuade the European markets. The advantages of Bosnia in this respect were the healthy environment, the favourable ecological balance of traditional farming methods and lack of pollution. Honey, dairy products and fruit were of the highest quality, which we could vouch for from all our visits to Bosnia. So we needed to find brokers and set up micro-

credit schemes to get agriculture moving.

While we discussed these possibilities, a woman poured coffee, elegantly putting teaspoons of foam into each small cup first. Paul expressed impatience about the need to support the Sana Project. Donald suggested that there should be a network of Sana Projects all over the region. Bogdanovic talked about getting people to start working the land again, to produce fruit and products for export. We left unclear as to what we had achieved, except that we were seen to be supporting Paul and that these Bosnia Serbs seemed happy to cooperate with our work. They spoke of tolerance but not of reconciliation. How would they respond if large numbers of Muslims returned to their homes in the surrounding countryside? Finding work for the mostly Serb majority in the area remained the priority.

THE NATURE OF EVIL

We returned to Tuzla on the other side of the national and ethnic divide. The mufti there could not see us, having business in Saudi Arabia. He was probably raising money for new mosques, which would be built in the severe Wahabi rather than the Ottoman style traditional to Bosnia, the main reason why we were not approaching this source of funding. Instead of the mufti we met his deputy Bezim, a young imam, fair-haired and wearing a freshly laundered high collared white shirt. He taught at the local school. Bezim looked Anglo-Saxon and his appearance reminded us that not all Muslims in Bosnia were descended from Ottoman stock. Many of them were Serbs who converted to Islam early in the conquest, centuries ago, to enjoy the benefits of lighter taxation and preferential treatment.

Bezim took us into an elegantly furnished office with thick carpets, upholstered sofas and elaborately carved wooden octagonal tables. At one end of the room stood a large desk and a

high leather-backed chair next to a computer, phone and fax machine. Bezim expressed surprise and interest in the Soul of Europe, and seemed particularly impressed by our description of Banja Luka as an example of successful ethnic cleansing. Agreeing about the sinister official silence from Europe Bezim hinted darkly at negative consequences for Bosnia. ‘Thank you for coming,’ he said, ‘even if you can’t do anything, at least we know that Bosnia has friends who understand what happened. This kind of discussion is rare here. Usually it is a “dialogue of death”. Do not weep for our destiny. Different groups come with different projects and visions, irrelevant to Bosnia, but they are powerful and come with prejudices. They cannot see things objectively.’ He related how an American chaplain from SFOR demanded a reception with the mufti and turned up armed to the teeth accompanied by a military escort in armoured cars. The meeting had been set up to organize a dialogue between the three religious groups. Indignant at this insult the mufti refused to talk to the armed chaplain, declaring ‘This is humiliating! We always meet: all three groups. There is no reason to sit down specially.’

After saying that his support could unfortunately only be of the moral kind, in other words no Muslim funds were available for our kind of work, Bezim gave us a brief lesson on Islam. Despite the western perception of Islam as being a group of extreme fundamentalists prepared to wage a bloody war on the rest of the world, Islam was not in fact a nationalist creed. Islam promoted a civil, as opposed to a specifically religious society. Nationalism encouraged prejudices, which threatened world peace. Even the dreaded word Jihad had been misinterpreted. It signified ‘conflict’ but in the sense of every person’s struggle for purity, to be better, nearer to his or her human best.

If every faith could be represented by the best sample of writing or work of art then how much deeper would we understand each other? Christian and Jewish art has many fine examples, For

me Islam will always be represented in its most distilled form in the writings of the 12th century storyteller and poet Nizami. His final work *The Seven Stories of the Seven Princesses* is a distillation of a life's experience and wisdom, suffering and happiness, expressed to honed perfection in seven tales that deal with the fundamental issues of love and death, good and evil. When people speak of Muslim extremism, bearing more kinship with the bigoted fundamentalism of backward Christian sects, it is important to be reminded of Nizami. The essence of Islam, its sublime tolerance and civilized human values are perfectly expressed in the final act of imagination of an elderly man who shunned the vanity of courtly fame, and lived modestly in a remote village. He contemplated the nature of human existence in the perspective of eternity, expressing the balance between the transitory nature of human experience and the universal mysteries of eternity and infinity by framing each story against a cosmic background of planetary influences. Despite acknowledging good and evil as facts of human nature his narratives provide solutions to their eternal conflict. The penultimate story deals specifically with the consequences of an inexplicable evil act, as brutal as any recorded in the recent war in Bosnia. Healing becomes the means to break the cycle of violence and attrition. Nizami looks unflinchingly at evil, recognizing it is a permanent human trait. The dilemma is that good, by its nature, cannot deal with evil. Nor is it a matter of choice. We can only survive the consequences of evil, and the manner of that survival becomes our salvation. This insight resonated with particular clarity on our Bosnia travels.

Significantly, hardly anyone knows about Nizami's work in Europe. Germany places him among the classics, but England has not heard of him. So little do we rate the culture of Islam, or wish to understand it, that we can not be bothered to read its most sublime achievements.

Bezim admitted that though there were eight mosques in Tuzla, few young people attended

worship. ‘Most of them are in coffee bars,’ he smiled. He worried they might be led into drink and drugs.

Bezim suggested that the matter of rebuilding mosques should depend on the wishes of returnees. People naturally wanted the clock turned back, and busily invested in mosques and churches rather than houses. Religious buildings had become a priority for people.

Bezim reminded us of the darkness at the heart of Bosnia. He spoke of the Orthodox bishop of Tuzla and the difficulties being placed in the way of the future rebuilding of mosques. Serbs were now erecting Orthodox churches on the site of former mosques. ‘We must understand the implication,’ warned Bezim. The mufti of Tuzla had met with the bishop and asked for a promise not to build religious edifices on top of others. Unfortunately the bishop refused to sign the declaration.

Paul Johns had fixed for us to see the bishop the following day.

The meeting ended with a sombre discussion about the difficulty of reconciliation with the enemy and they shared stories of the horrors witnessed or heard about. Paul spoke of taking care of an eight year old Muslim girl raped by Serb soldiers. The local doctor got her to draw pictures. She painted a house, her home, and next to it a giant man with a beard and a gun. It was the chetnik who had raped her. Bezim explained to us why the chetniks had such a bad reputation: they were sent drunk into battle and promised that the more men they killed the more alcohol and women they would receive as reward. Killing all Muslim men remained their most important objective. Adnan related a tragic story of a young couple shot in the streets of Sarajevo not far from his home. The boyfriend saw his girlfriend fall bleeding, picked her up in his arms and ran some distance to the nearest doctor. He reached the surgery where they tried to save her. At that moment the boy fell down dead. They found a bullet in his heart. His courage became a legend in

Sarajevo. The girlfriend died shortly after.

Donald invited Bezim to the Coventry Conference. Bezim was touched. His tolerant attitude would be an example to people in England of the human face of Islam. He declined but asked us to take back a message that Muslims want to live at peace with everyone.

Back at the Hotel Tuzla, we were entertained by an Israeli team of basketball players and their trainers, who were causing uproar. They had narrowly lost to the favourite Bosnian basketball team. The corridors and rooms resounded with shouts of tall testosterone-fuelled males running in and out of each other's rooms.

Next day we drove to Bjelajina, a town on the border with Serbia, to visit Bishop Basil, the Orthodox bishop who refused to sign the declaration forbidding the building of churches on the sites of former mosques. This became one of the most disturbing encounters we experienced in our travels through Bosnia.

IN LEAGUE WITH THE DEVIL

The road from Tuzla to Bjelajina passed through the worst devastation of war we had yet encountered in a country where we were already used to a landscape scarred with ruins. Unlike the rest of the country, no attempt had yet been made to clear the destruction. For mile on mile stretched dismal lines of burnt-out villages and rubble, the rivers clogged with detritus, rags, sacks, plastic bottles, containers and effluent. Occasionally the heaps of rubbish looked like forgotten bodies, and I remembered that the rivers here had indeed run red with the blood of massacred victims. This had been one of the most fiercely contested regions of Bosnia. Bjelajina stood on the border with Serbia, where Serb armies gathered to launch attacks on Bosnia. The bishop had blessed the missiles, which were shortly to kill Muslims and destroy their homes and

towns.

People lived in these wretched conditions and on the day of our drive to Bjelajina most of them were walking along the road to a market, which sold the bare necessities, mainly milk and cabbages. Amin explained that these markets offered a lifeline for the desperately poor people of the region. They could barter goods and thereby eke out an existence barely above starvation. Young unemployed men walked along the roadside protecting their children, women followed carrying the shopping and a few elderly people struggled behind.

This part of Bosnia was recovering least well from the ravages of war. There seemed to be an inability or unwillingness to find a solution to the political problems. International aid balked at servicing this hard line Serb territory, so it remained a troubled and neglected part of the country. For that reason Paul Johns established his project here. As the day progressed we learned how politics and unresolved ethnic tensions complicated the situation so that all attempts to help the people in need were doomed. Even a person as resilient and grittily determined as Paul knew the tenuousness of his position here.

The trail of destruction and poverty continued all the way to Bjelajina which looked as grey and dispiriting as Banja Luka, with little sign of business or new development. The roads were pitted and the walls of buildings covered in political slogans supporting the local nationalists. On arrival, Adnan's car promptly burst a tyre. At first we assumed it had been slashed, because of its Muslim Sarajevo number plate. The more likely cause was the poor road conditions.

We entered the courtyard leading to the bishop's residence. A dozen workers were hacking away at graffiti on the freshly painted house walls. Inside the spacious courtyard a crowd of builders were erecting a large and magnificent church. Smart new buildings resembling an ancient Roman palace, replete with colonnades, surrounded the courtyard where gardeners had

already planted exotic trees and bushes, in between stacks of timber, tiles and rows of plant pots.

An unsmiling monk took us into the main office where we waited for the bishop. Behind a large TV set, the Republika Srpska flag hung prominently on the wall between two pictures: a photograph of an old musician holding a *guzli*, a traditional lute-like instrument, and a large recent painting of St Sava, patron saint of Orthodox Serbs. The expression on the saint's face was severe and military. My heart missed a beat when the bishop entered. I had just been looking at his portrait. He wore a black cassock and a heavy, gold pectoral cross, which he fingered constantly. His black hair had been greased back emphasizing the belligerent expression on his sharp features: the blazing eyes and strong jaw making him look more like a warlord than a bishop. Without his robes and dressed in a black leather jacket and jeans he would have fitted in the company of the menacing black market operators prowling the streets of Banja Luka. He reminded me of the hoodlum I had locked eyes with in Belgrade when Lazar had ordered me to hide the camera. 'otherwise we will be shot!'

The bishop gave us a grudging welcome, and remained unsmiling throughout the meeting, though he reluctantly ordered coffee for us, which arrived some time later served by a sullen monk. Adnan greeted the bishop pointedly with a Muslim 'salaam aleichum', which caused a momentary frisson. The conversation proceeded in a stilted fashion, constantly interrupted by the hammering and drilling of construction work outside.

At first the bishop talked about poor Serbs being shunted from village to village, unable to find homes because they feared returning to their towns in the Bosnian Federation. They preferred to be with their own kind. Donald emphasized the Orthodox part of the project, helping Serbs in Krnjeucia, hoping to build an Orthodox church there, talked about our friendly meetings with Patriarch Pavle in Belgrade, and outlined the monasteries project in Serbia: bringing young

people from all over Europe to help reconstruct destroyed buildings. The bishop was impatient. Nothing less than a promise to get rid of all the Muslims in Bosnia and hand the whole country over to the Serbs would have made him smile.

When Donald had finished the bishop responded with an assurance of his support for Paul Johns' Sana Project. 'May God help you!' he said, and praised this 'noble' work, which helped all people. He then insisted on the importance of national bonds, meaning that Orthodox Serbs should preserve their ethnic purity. Only then would the good work prosper. Reconciliation and peace-building did not concern him. He spoke angrily about the influence of the Mujaheddin in the region. This came as news to us; we had not yet come across any Muslims in the region, let alone fanatical extremists. He talked with especial spite about Moglaj, a Muslim village in the Federation, just a few miles from Bjelajina across the border with the Republika Srpska, where aid had been made available for the rebuilding of a Catholic church and a mosque, but not for an Orthodox church. In this part of Bosnia the borders weaved in every direction between territories occupied by the different ethnic groups, all living close to one another. Confused visitors had difficulty knowing from mile to mile which part belonged to whom.

The bishop, still unsmiling, appreciated our links with the Orthodox Church but spoke threateningly about those areas of Bosnia with 'big problems'. 'When we solve them you will know that people do not hate each other. It is not a people's war. Extremists and international politics are behind them. The three faiths did not always follow God's command. It is not enough to say that people must live without hate when they are not living in their own homes. There is a problem about where they can go. The nation has roots; you have to know our history.' The flag grew larger behind the bishop's head and Saint Sava glared even more severely at us. The bishop concluded his mysterious observations with the baffling remark: 'We need no deep thinking:

decisions are sometimes contrary to good intentions.’ He described the Serbs as being loyal monarchists with links to our royal traditions in Great Britain, a country ruled by both King and Parliament. The Mother Church was in Serbia.

His rambling speech continued with a denunciation of the bombing by NATO of Serbia, which killed innocent Serbs. Eyes blazing with hatred, he then spoke about all people in his part of Bosnia living in a ‘symphony of love,’ a phrase which baffled us even further.

A theological argument about women priests followed. Donald reported his discussion with Patriarch Pavle on this issue. The bishop explained to Donald that the only woman of importance in the Orthodox Church was the Mother of God. Donald then boldly remarked that the Mother of God (Theotikon) could be considered the first priest. The bishop snorted in contempt and ended the conversation with a dismissive wave of the hand, implying that he wanted nothing more to do with such an outrageous and offensive suggestion.

Paul Johns then broke impatiently into the discussion: ‘Can we talk a little about Koraj?’ referring to the Sana Project in one of the villages in the bishop’s diocese.

The bishop told us he intended building an Orthodox church in an area where there never had been one, presumably because there had been no Serbs there before. When Donald mentioned rebuilding the destroyed mosque in Koraj, the bishop again brushed the discussion aside with a dismissive: ‘That’s up to the Islamic community and the authorities.’ He did not even consider any responsibility for its destruction. The bishop declared the urgent need for bread and homes in an area of stifling poverty. As he spoke, the construction work outside became especially noisy and we turned to admire the walls of the expensive new church rising outside the window. The bishop then spoke about the need for modernizing roads which would link the new Serb communities. Up to now the roads had connected villages of different faith communities, but the

Serbs now preferred to communicate only with each other.

He commented on our problems in Northern Ireland, hinting that we should sort them out first before coming to do 'good' in Bosnia. We listened to a history of the Balkans dating back to Barbarossa in the Dark Ages and the great Serbian ruler, Nemenja. The Balkans used to be the most cultured and civilized area in Europe during the Dark Ages, time of the Orthodox Byzantine Empire. Europe had learned from the Balkans. The bishop stroked his pectoral cross and glared at us again while we thought of the last ten years in Bosnia and specifically what we had ourselves witnessed on our journey to see him. We could expect no fruitful dialogue here. He omitted to mention the civilization brought to the Balkans by the Ottoman Empire, when the region lived in comparative peace and prosperity, the various communities coexisting for centuries as an example to the rest of Europe.

The bishop asserted that the Serbs were trying on their side to follow the Dayton Accord, encouraging Serbs to return to their original homes and only then rebuilding their churches. Before leaving we took a group photo. He looked grim-faced, Donald sceptical and Paul Johns smiling proudly. The bishop supported the Sana Project, on condition that the balance be kept, that the Muslims should not be favoured in Serb-dominated areas.

The bishop then took us outside to inspect the building progress and to look at his official apartments. On the way out he muttered a few words with Adnan. 'Where are you from?' 'Sarajevo,' answered Adnan. 'Ah! My home town,' sighed the bishop. After a short pause he continued: 'I can't go back there now; well, not unless I am in disguise!' 'Tell me when you come,' said Adnan, 'I'll look after you. No harm will come to you there.' Evidently the bishop feared visiting the capital city because he was known to have blessed weapons and supported the Serbian army. Now a young Muslim offered him protection in the place of his birth.

A number of priests hovered defensively in the office on the other side of the corridor as we went out. They did not respond to my friendly greeting, 'Dobr dan', but stared back at me in hostile silence. Had they produced guns from under their cassocks and shot us it would not have surprised me.

The bishop mellowed slightly as he proudly showed us round the new church building, then took us into his apartments which glittered with golden chandeliers, crimson carpets, thick drapes, expensively upholstered sofas and armchairs arranged around highly polished wooden coffee tables and large oil paintings of saints and bishops hanging on the walls. He led us through this ostentatious display of luxury into his dressing room where we could admire a selection of richly embroidered vestments through the glass doors of a fitted cupboard and gape at the piles of gigantic hat boxes for his collection of mitres. At first amazed at the bishop's apparent lack of awareness, unashamedly showing off his extravagant wealth, in an area of startling privation, we then observed him watching us intently and realized this was a choreographed power display. 'Go home!' he was saying, 'tell everyone we Serbs are still in charge. You may think you have beaten us, but we, the Orthodox Church, will never submit!' This attitude also explained the sullen hostility of his monks. Earlier he had informed us he intended to return to the predominantly Muslim town of Tuzla, the official seat of his diocese. Perhaps he hoped this might be achieved in the future. But for the time being he would keep his headquarters in the smaller border town of Bjelajina. At the right time in the future he and his priests would push forward into Bosnia and reclaim their territory and authority there. Displaying his power base also prepared the way for his planned visit to England in the New Year. We should inform the church community there that an eminent Orthodox bishop came to do business. He hoped to meet with Anglican bishops and be received with a warm welcome

commensurate with his position. Later we learned that Bishop Basil had ambitions to succeed Patriarch Pavle in Belgrade. This explained his posse of priests and the stately manner of our welcome.

Outside, the builders continued to hack at the graffiti on the freshly painted residence walls while Adnan replaced the car tyres. Driving away from Bjelajina, Amin looked at me pointedly and asked what I had made of the bishop. I recalled the words of the American ambassador and said without hesitating, ‘an asshole!’ Amin laughed. He then told me about the bishop blessing the Serb army as it gathered in the town before attacking Bosnia: ‘in order to protect sovereign Serb territory from the Muslims who had no rights to be there.’ Amin then asked me about my thoughts on the bishop’s relationship with the Sana Project. Amin agreed that the bishop’s interest focused solely on the Serb population. So long as the Sana Project employed Serbs then he would give his support. Meanwhile the bishop had no intention of apologizing or making reparation for the crimes and massacres that had led the Muslims to flee their hometowns and villages.

We approached the chief destination of our visit to Eastern Bosnia, the village of Koraj where Paul had established the Sana Project for which he wanted the support and financial assistance of the Soul of Europe.

A PIECE OF HEAVEN

Early in the fifteenth century Ottoman invasion of the Balkans, Turkish soldiers crossed eastern Bosnia and suddenly found themselves in a landscape of rolling hills, fertile meadows and orchards. They halted their march and exclaimed: ‘Koraj!’, ‘a piece of heaven’, and settled there.

The view over the village of Koraj momentarily dispersed the melancholy impression of

desolation and destruction cluttering the region. Despite the bare fields of late autumn, the naked trees cropped of their fruit and the final sprinkling of golden leaves falling in the woodlands, we could appreciate the sense of this being a haven, a place to enjoy abundant harvests. The village itself lay along the fold of a low hill, the focal point of hamlets and farmsteads scattered for miles in every direction. Amin explained that some belonged to Muslims, others to Serbs. People were returning to their homes, having nowhere else to live. Now that Koraj was part of the Republika Srpska, those Serbs who had fled the Federation were unwilling to vacate the properties they presently occupied but which belonged to the Muslim families returning to reclaim them.

Outside a hamlet on the way to Koraj we noted a pile of neatly stacked wooden planks and other building materials on a prepared foundation, site for a new Orthodox church. The hamlet itself consisted of ruined houses. Serbs were prioritizing their ethnicity and religion in a place that had once been Muslim. The ruins of the mosque in Koraj met us as we drove into the village. It was shocking to see the elaborately carved minaret still lying in a heap of rubble. No attempt had been made, as in Banja Luka, to remove all trace of the building. Next to the ruins young people lounged outside a café, listening to Serb nationalist songs blaring from loudspeakers. The message could not be clearer: Muslims not welcome!

Paul had established the Sana Centre in the centre of the village. He paid rent to the assertively Serb nationalist family living above the small shop, which displayed the dresses and children's clothes made by the collective of mostly Serb and a few Muslim women from a neighbouring village. The manager of the project, Stojadin, a depressed looking Serb, talked softly and slowly about the need to expand the opportunities for marketing and selling their goods. The project provided labour for fifty-one trained women working in shifts to complete as many orders as

were needed. We met none of the women involved in the work and not a single Muslim. People peered through the door on their way to fetch water from the standpipes. A white cat with a black tail sniffed between the rose bushes growing by the shop door and men chopped firewood outside the houses opposite. Were these the Serbs unwilling to move out of properties belonging to displaced Muslims? The answer came on the side of the lorry parked off the road with the name of a building firm from Sipovo on the western side of the Republika Srpska. The name and logo were familiar to Adnan and me: it belonged to the family of the sons whose baptism celebrated by Bishop Chrysostom and the monks of the Rmanj Monastery we had attended in Martin Brod. The father had taken Adnan aside during the celebrations and, in the Balkan way of doing business, offered him ten per cent if he could arrange for the Soul of Europe to put work contracts his way.

The collective had to find a market for their clothes. The cost would be too high for local people, who bought much cheaper clothes at street markets and would be more likely to prefer imitation western designer clothes anyway. Buyers in the wealthier parts of Europe might be equally difficult to interest, unless they specifically chose to support the project as a charity. Amin spent the meeting folding, unfolding, piling, sorting and re-sorting the latest batch of children pinafores, checking for defects, aware of the high standards required for the goods to sell successfully abroad.

Mira, the assistant manager, looking like a young Radovan Karadjic, sat dolefully in the corner. This Bosnian Serb occupied a house belonging to a Muslim family now camped outside the village waiting to return home. Paul sympathized with his plight, having come to know Mira personally over the months of establishing the business. Paul told us of a promise from the authorities in the Republika Srpska to build a new village especially for these displaced Serbs, so

they could move away and allow the Muslims to return. But, unlike Mira and Stoyadin, he realized that the authorities had made an empty promise. There were no plans to build a new village and the problem would remain unsolved. This lack of resolution made the situation in Koraj unstable. Here were people expecting to move on, not knowing yet that they could not do so. Meanwhile returning Muslim families were camping out in ruined buildings on the outskirts of the village, waiting to go home.

Stoyadin spoke about minor troubles between the communities which Paul later interpreted as drunken arguments late at night. The occasional protest at Muslims returning, stones thrown, offensive graffiti on the mined walls, needed to be taken seriously. These attacks might not compare with massacres and the destruction of property, but they provided disturbing evidence that the Serbs were a long way from wanting to be reconciled with their new neighbours. So long as the mosque remained a prominently visible heap of rubble next to the village café, the threat of ethnic cleansing continued.

Paul and Amin could sense our enthusiasm for the project wane. We sweated through long discussions in the foyer of the Tuzla hotel, arguing about social stability in the region. They wanted the Soul of Europe to fundraise for the Sana Project and also to take delivery of goods. We did not dare point out that the clothes would not sell. Instead we talked about matters of justice, dislocated communities, war guilt and the politics of ethnic divisions forced on Bosnia by the Dayton Accord. We could not see the project thrive without resolution of these issues. Paul Johns kept pointing out the desperate need of these people, neglected by everyone because of their involvement in ethnic cleansing. We shared his humanitarian sentiments, but felt the ground needed to be better prepared to ensure the future success of any projects in the region.

Our discussion eventually focused on the arbitrary division of Bosnia leading to an artificial and

destructive separation of ethnic communities. Paul Johns, who had first-hand experience of the war, suddenly shouted at us in exasperation: ‘But don’t you understand? They had to stop the killing!’

Amin sat silent and impassive. Paul Johns spoke animatedly. Adnan looked disapproving, smoking one cigarette after the other. He obstinately resisted the idea of the Soul of Europe helping a project that could damage our reputation. Too many international projects had failed in Bosnia for lack of sufficient thought and planning. Adnan was determined to make the Soul of Europe a rare success in his country and we did not want to get landed with carrying large sacks of unsalable clothes to England.

We finally agreed to work together so long as the Sana Project established a framework of support from the authorities and a network of partnerships, in the manner we were proposing for the Bihac project with Ros Tennyson from the Prince of Wales Business Leaders Forum: a cross-sector partnership with representatives from the different communities, public and private. We suggested involving the mufti of Tuzla and, crucially, Bishop Basil (though we could not imagine him sitting in the same room as the mufti), the mayors and governors of the different townships, Muslim, Catholic and Orthodox, schools, the heads of small businesses, etc.

Before returning to Tuzla I took a photo of the ruined mosque, but had to be quick because the young people sitting outside the café were watching me suspiciously. One of them stood up and made as if to approach me, but in fact he was walking towards a friend he had spotted in the street behind me.

Unlike the village of Krnjeucia near Bihac where Serb returnees were settling and attempting to make peace with their more numerous Muslim neighbours, the village of Koraj remained a place of unresolved conflict, an ongoing inversion of its name: ‘a piece of heaven’.

THE FURY OF DESTRUCTION

WINTER IN BOSNIA, FEBRUARY 2001

BY THE BANKS OF THE BREGAVA

The thickly forested landscape of Bosnia parched in summer and froze in snowy winter. Rivers cut through the hills and mountains. Some flowed deep and fast like the Vrbas that descended a gorge before passing through Banja Luka, muddy from thawed snow or deep emerald in the summer. Some rivers flowed gently. Rubbish lay scattered along the banks spoiling the idyllic beauty of these streams as they meandered sluggishly through meadows and along plains. Branches and roots, rocks and shallow pools in the rivers trapped corpse-like sacks and billowing rags. Plastic bottles, tins and scraps of paper littered the undergrowth on the banks.

Ten years ago, far to the South of Bosnia, near the town of Stolac, beyond Mostar and on the way to Dubrovnik, the residence of a wealthy Muslim family stood by the banks of the gently flowing Bregava. One of the wealthiest in Bosnia, the Rizanbegovic family could afford to design a home that would satisfy all their personal needs, with rooms for guests as well. They chose intimacy and comfort over palatial ostentation, and bearing in mind the heat of long summers, spread the community of buildings along the banks of the river, walls rising out of the water, with a central courtyard shaded by a large tree. Every tile and brick had been hand-crafted, windows carved and placed under eaves to protect from the bright sunlight. Each room, decorated in its own particular style, had a bathroom, a hammam, the ovens tiled with paintings of vines and flowers, and wood panels carved with Islamic decorations. Delicate latticework below the ceiling provided natural air conditioning, fresh air constantly permeating the house. Each building in the complex had its own mihrab, a sacred sign pointing in the direction of

Mecca. The Bregava flowed below bedroom windows; the fields on all sides were cultivated with orchards and vegetable gardens. Beehives overlooked them on the slopes of the hill beyond.

The family completed the restored residence in 1990.

Then the war began. Croats burnt and destroyed all the buildings, leaving roofless walls and gaps where the windows had been. The soldiers were meticulous in their destruction, making sure no one would ever live there again. Had they possessed enough ammunition they would have razed the complex to the ground, as the Serbs did with the Ferhadija Mosque, so not even a trace could remind people of what used to stand in that spot. Skeleton walls and eye socket windows were all that remained of the Rizanbegovic residence. Trees and bushes now sprouted through the rubble. The emerald waters of the Bregava broke into snowy foam as they cascaded over rocks and stones from the ruins. Younger members of the family pitched tents in the courtyard, refusing to move away from their home. In a photograph one of the sons, Harun, can be seen: his slender figure crouching by the waters of the Bregava, hands clasping his head in grief.

Ruined houses and churches became part of the postwar landscape all over Bosnia. The determination to destroy all those whose different ethnic or religious allegiance turned friends into enemies, extended beyond killing and burning property, to eliminating everything they had brought to the history and life of the country. The Muslims of Bosnia brought a unique refinement of culture, going back centuries before the Ottoman conquest. They built on a human scale. Mosques, including the Ferhadija, were intimate places, sufficient for small communities: round, breast-like domes nestled against delicate minaret spears. In towns they were built at the correct distance apart, each just beyond ear-shot of the other's muezzin call.

The Rizvanbegovic residence expressed this balance between man and nature. Its destruction represented more than the burning of a home. The calculated insult to a unique culture went beyond vandalized remains. A home could be rebuilt; but how to deal with the hatred that destroyed it?

The prospect of resolving this all-consuming loathing daunted and depressed us, especially as we contemplated ruins or the flat waste patches of ground where mosques and churches once stood. Not everyone felt this need to destroy. Our hopes for encouraging reconciliation lay with the great majority of people who just wanted to live together in peace again. It was a Serb, not a Muslim, who described the Ferhadija Mosque in Banja Luka as having been ‘part of the landscape of the town’, and therefore needing to be restored. The old castle walls reared above the swirling waters of the River Vrbas. Surprisingly the Serbs had not attacked the castle with its prison, the Kazemat, now functioning as a restaurant. Muslim architects of the Ottoman Empire constructed the castle. Perhaps the men who destroyed the mosque had forgotten this, or more likely the castle had become a secular monument for the whole city, and the mosque alone represented the particular ethnic group, which needed to be cleansed from the town.

On our third visit to Banja Luka, the green flag of Islam fluttered from an upstairs window in the Islamic Centre, a solitary building on the edge of rough ground where the mosque once stood. The flag signaled that the ethnic cleansing of Muslims had not been totally successful. The mufti was saying he intended to return to the city, bring with him the ousted Muslim community, and rebuild the mosque.

Even those politicians who a decade earlier had been certain of a Muslim-free city now admitted to the need for all communities to live together again. Words were easy. How to build

the trust again while resentments continued to smoulder? The Bosnian Serb nationalists in power felt secure that the poor economics of Banja Luka would deter the Muslims from returning, and those that dared would be stationed permanently at the back of the queue for jobs and other considerations. The mufti spoke of erecting a tent on the waste ground for the remnants of his community to meet for worship, just as the Rizvanbegovic family lived in tents on the ruins of their home. The resilience of spirit in human beings is stronger than destitution and physical suffering. Europe's apathetic response to their plight had made Muslims mistrustful. Even in the UK the Muslim community doubted the friendship of its neighbours. The Bosnian Serb nationalists and the Catholic Croat communities were surer of support from Europe than the Muslims, an alien group. The destruction of the Ferhadija and the Rizvanbegovic residence wounded the whole of Europe, not just Bosnia. But the rest of Europe had not yet realized this.

ADNAN'S DECISION

Looking at pictures of the ruins of the Rizvanbegovic residence, Adnan muttered warningly about 'next time.' 'We will be ready next time.'

He translated our letters to political leaders, who only recently were sanctioning the murder of his family, and even engaged in conversation with these people. He felt no fear or hatred, reserving his fiercest criticism for those Muslim politicians, leaders and colleagues who were either corrupt or inadequate. He wished to be an example of how a Bosnian should be: tolerant, hard working, civilized, and European - a citizen of the world.

On our first journey together, driving to Bihac, Adnan had taken us on a detour beyond Mrkonj Grad and we had stopped at a café overlooking a lake in the mountains. By chance he

met two women friends there. While we sat outside on the patio, clear blue skies and the autumn leaves shimmering in the lake waters, they muttered together in Bosnian, evidently discussing us. Throughout their conversation he watched us steadily with piercing eyes. This was a decisive moment for him and us. The look expressed fatigue at dealing with ignorant internationals constantly interfering with his country. What did these two middle-aged men from England want here? Had we any idea of the problems? We did not belong to any major organization like the United Nations or Christian Aid. For the rest of the drive we discussed our objectives, taking his opinions and criticisms seriously. He challenged our naivety, teaching us about Bosnia and the games played by both political and religious leaders. We may have interviewed and chosen him for the job, but he needed to interview us also, and make a judgement.

The next morning he sat opposite us over breakfast at the Cedra Hotel by the River Sana. While drinking his regular morning shot of espresso, so potent that it removed the appetite, he announced that overnight he had come to a decision. We were nervous and then he declared: 'I am prepared to work with you twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Use me in any way you want.' Aware that we operated on limited funds, he then negotiated a monthly salary of three hundred pounds, which lay within our budget. For that he agreed to translate, drive, fix meetings and do everything necessary to help our project.

Meeting us at Zagreb Airport, quicker and more convenient to access Banja Luka than Sarajevo, this time he had dressed sharply like a business partner and wore impressive dark shades. We had found ourselves a Muslim colleague and partner, loyal but free to express opinions honestly, criticise and advise us. The success of the project mattered to him as much as to us. Listening to our plans he would often observe drily: 'That's not smart,' and proceed to

explain why we were wrong and how we could do things better. This partnership had significant influence on the work of the Soul of Europe. Without Adnan our project would have failed. With his help we were able to negotiate the tricky undercurrents and lethal minefields of Bosnian politics. He also helped us understand the role of the international community in his country; how instead of lecturing the natives and making decisions for them, we might listen, learn and suggest possible solutions. His help became invaluable on this crucial visit, because we had invited the political and religious leaders in Banja Luka to a consultation in Coventry: the start of a peace process. Our task was to persuade these former enemies to attend this consultation.

FATHERS DEVOURING SONS

The Bosnian war began with the seven nations that were once part of a federation, known formerly as Yugoslavia, fighting for independence and hegemony in the region. Bosnia at its heart ended up torn between Croatia and Serbia, each militarily more powerful. The war muddied the political, ethnic, religious, social and cultural waters of the Balkans. The attempted genocide of the Muslims by the Bosnian Serbs and Croats, complicated by the loud airing of grievances from all ethnic groups, laying the blame on each other, led to the misconception of the conflict being a civil war, a flare up of age-old ethnic hatreds in a volatile region of Europe. Orthodox Serbs claimed a history of oppression; Catholic Croats claimed territory; Bosnian Muslims found themselves caught in between and moreover without the military muscle of the two other groups rendering them vulnerable to genocide. The Dayton Accord brought this war to an end but perpetuated suspicion between the groups by dividing the country along ethnic lines which had never before existed. There followed the bitter and unresolved entrenchment of rival nationalisms in Kosovo, leading to a refugee crisis. The rest of Europe tried to contain the issue within the region: anything to prevent a flood of refugees. This mean-spiritedness and lack of

foresight now led to conflict between Muslim Albania and Slav Macedonia where most of these Muslim refugees landed, all other exit points being closed to them.

There was and is, both in Bosnia and Kosovo, the persistent unresolved relationship between Islam and Europe. Despite their presence in Europe for over five centuries, Muslims were still perceived as interlopers, invaders and an alien culture. The Balkan races represented a mix of groups long-settled in the region which converted to different religions over the centuries.

The middle of the twentieth century witnessed the holocaust of the Jews, who had settled in Europe since the Middle Ages but had always been considered alien, however much they integrated into their host societies. Where they had integrated most in the social, political, cultural and economic fabric of society the holocaust raged fiercest. Similarly in the Balkans, the Muslims having been part of the landscape for the last five centuries, became the victims of genocide. Family hatreds are the most violent. But families have to live together. How to heal the wounds that have cut so deep?

A young lawyer from Banja Luka spoke to me in an internet chatroom. He refused to give his name and began the conversation by expressing his cynicism for our project. 'You are just taking money and playing around here,' he told me before he knew what our work involved. He dismissed humanitarian aid contemptuously as 'truck and chuck'. He despised foreigners who visited Bosnia and arrogantly dispensed advice and opinions without respect for the culture they came to. He refused to meet me. Most of all he hated the older generation. As a twenty-six-year old he had spent his adolescence witnessing his parents' generation destroying and killing. He expressed the deep anger of all the young people in Bosnia. What upset him most was that so far not one person had said: 'I am sorry.' 'That is all we ask,' he said, 'that someone says: I am sorry.' He then left the chatroom abruptly.

The four religious leaders in Belgrade, led by Patriarch Pavle, had sent us to Bosnia with their blessing to start the process of healing which needed to start with just such an apology.

On our first visit to Bosnia in June 2000 we had sat by the sapphire waters of the River Una in Bihac and listened to Lazar from Belgrade insisting on laying the blame equally on all sides. Sharing this burden of guilt for all the destruction, murder and atrocity salved everyone's conscience, but children who had no responsibility for these crimes were made to witness the horrors, uncomprehending and helpless. Where was the wisdom of the older generation? 'Older people are supposed to set an example, teach us, so we can look up to them,' the young lawyer from Banja Luka told me in our next chat. Now these children had grown into men and women who lived in the ruins caused by war and hatred. They tried to make something of their lives in a collapsed economy. They had to be grateful for foreign aid, so made every effort to emigrate. The struggle for self-respect fed a resentment and anger at the generation which waged the war and now governed them. Fear tempered this anger. The young lawyer described a sinister state of affairs in which older people who now had the power, abused their position and oppressed the young, threatening and even killing them.

Goya, the Spanish painter, who lived and worked in the first decades of the nineteenth century, witnessed Napoleon's invasion of Spain, and depicted the brute reality of war with its arbitrary acts of violence, of humanity disfigured, in a series of etchings and paintings. One of his most shocking paintings deals with the particular brutality of fathers killing their sons in a stark image of the God Cronos eating his children. The original Greek myth tells of the fear of Cronos, the first God, that his sons, once grown, would depose him, so he devours them. Goya depicts the naked old man in a delirium of bestiality staring wildly as he chomps the head off the vulnerable, small doll-like figure of one of his sons. What makes the image so striking and disturbing is its

crude execution, the act of violence devoid of any consoling painterly detail, the background a black chaos, the figures distorted and engrossed in a bloody act, in which the strong consumes the weak. Reason and humanity are absent. Goya depicts the deadly intimacy of such violence, which takes place beyond all boundaries and outside any context. It represents naked fear and hatred. Art generally depicts war as political and social upheavals, glamorous adventures. Goya focuses on the bloody confrontation of victor and victim, the atrocity of killing, which is the purpose of war. Those who advocate wars prefer to focus on defence and patriotism: ‘our brave boys’ doing ‘work they love’, enjoying ‘doing what has to be done’. This distracts attention from consequences of violence. The essence of war has always been about the deadly intimacy of killer and victim. One of the most frightening aspects of modern warfare is the loss of this intimacy through the abstracted killing by remote control and drones. Keeping the necessity for war separate from its bloody reality prevents humane solutions to the world’s problems and peace is just a pause for recovery and re-arming between conflicts.

The lawyer from Banja Luka, harrowed by his experiences, eventually conceded the value of what we were trying to do: ‘We need help to understand, to recover and to make sure it does not happen again.’ But he saw no hope. Until people were able to confront what happened and take responsibility, then how could they say: ‘I am sorry?’

A COLD MORNING

Adnan warned us on the drive from Zagreb through the bleak winter landscape across the flat plain to Banja Luka that there had been little response to our proposals inviting political and religious leaders to Coventry. We had not expected our proposals to rebuild the Ferhadija

Mosque to receive a warm welcome in Banja Luka, where the people responsible for the ethnic cleansing were still governing the town, though we had hoped for more interest from the Catholic and Muslim representatives. We hardened to the fact that no one in Bosnia responded to any of our letters.

We sat in the smartly furnished and neatly organized office of the British Embassy's representative in Banja Luka, Roy Wilson, and waited for a phone call from someone.

From anyone.

Two lively secretaries gossiped in the next room and made us coffee. Roy Wilson smiled ironically, looked at us and said dryly: 'Nothing doing.' The vice-president had indicated no interest in meeting us. He made the excuse of visiting Foca, though maybe he was still in Banja Luka, but unavailable. The Speaker of the Assembly had already left for Foca. It seemed as though all the Bosnian Serb leaders were at the place of the worst massacres in the war, perhaps plotting the next war. Mayor Davidovic had narrowly escaped a car bomb attack the day before. A device underneath the car, which belonged to the director of security services, seemed likely not to have been meant for the mayor. So we could not expect to see him. Mufti Camdzic was out of reach because he spent most of his time in Sarajevo or travelling and rarely switched his fax machine on. He could only be contacted by messaging the office of the Reis ul Ulema in Sarajevo, and no one bothered to confirm receipt of our letters. Even our closest ally in Banja Luka, Bishop Komarica, who had welcomed us so warmly on our first visit to Banja Luka last year and who supported and understood our aims, did not respond. Last time he refused to see us because he had to entertain a delegation from Croatia; this time he had business in Mostar at the other end of the country.

Dispirited, we sat round the desk in Roy Wilson's office. Roy Wilson explained that the

political and religious leaders were suffering from visitor fatigue. The opposition parties complained of inaction; the president and Prime Minister were rarely in town, always travelling. Mlado Ivanic, the Prime Minister of the Republika Srpska, spent his time either in Washington or Greece, making the right noises. Visitors came and expressed sympathy or just looked around, promising assistance but nothing ever happened. Why should we be any different?

The phone rang.

Boris Todorovic, the General Secretary of the Party of Democratic Progress, not the nationalist party, but middle of the road Bosnian Serb, would be prepared to see us straight away. The Prime Minister belonged to this party, so if we wanted his cooperation we needed to talk to Boris Todorovic. His office being round the corner, we walked there.

As we left, a tall, lugubrious porter unlocked the metal door of the large protective cage. Donald looked at the bars and asked Roy Wilson: 'Have you had any problems here?' 'Not since they burnt the embassy offices down,' replied Roy Wilson, matter of factly, as though this happened regularly. While the British were bombing Belgrade, Roy Wilson had left Banja Luka for a meeting in Sarajevo. The porter rang to say the office was under attack but they were not to worry, he had a gun. Smiling ironically at the memory, Roy told us how he ordered the porter to remove himself 'and his gun' as far away as possible.

Boris Todorovic, a friendly man in his forties, met us in a dark office and offered us a choice of coffee or hibiscus tea, which looked like diluted blood.

We explained the difference between a conference and a consultation. Conferences are about lectures, people listening and then leaving. Consultations are about work-in-progress and involve all the participants. The main questions a consultation would attend to might be: 'Is Banja Luka working well?' and 'What building blocks are needed to start this process?' So it is important to

invite the top people, the key players in the town. Why Banja Luka? It seemed right, bearing in mind the recent history of the town. We as 'animateurs' might help something happen.

Boris Todorovic replied warmly. 'On behalf of the PDP as General Secretary, I will give an official stand about questions and issues. The PDP as a party stands for equal rights for everybody, all religious communities and for respect for every person and individual opinion.' He continued: 'Because of that we were criticized even during the war in Banja Luka and throughout Bosnia. We are for the Dayton Accord because we are forming an agreement implementing Annex 7 about returnees, which means that all people should be in their own homes and therefore all communities must have their own religious objects. So our aims are to rebuild all religious objects in the whole of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This is one of the basic human rights and we cannot be against it. So we support your initiative.'

These promising words lifted our spirits and we extended an invitation to all the significant leaders in Banja Luka. The consultation would be a private event, but high profile. If it went well, the participants could deal with issues of regeneration, the economic, social and spiritual well-being of Banja Luka, including religious buildings. We spoke about opening an office in Banja Luka to put into effect the resolutions agreed on at the consultation in Coventry.

Boris Todorovic, still smiling amicably, spoke of the many problems concerning human rights abuses, economic ruin and the need for reconstruction. Money! They had to find the right strategy politically and economically. We sat in the gloomy office and sensed the stagnation of Banja Luka, how everything had stopped, no one and no thing moving forward. He agreed with the principle of contacting organizations in the rest of Europe and involving young people in the reconstruction, but the government needed domestic and international support. However the Social Democrats, the extreme nationalist party of Radovan Karadjic, were in a majority. This

threatened the stability of Bosnia.

Boris Todorovic told us not to invite the extreme nationalists to Coventry. These people responsible for the massacres and destruction still held positions of power. But he seemed hopeful that the extremists were no longer pulling the strings. The present government recognized the need to follow new visions and create new political organizations which would bring the region and its people into Europe. The Prime Minister's party, the Party of Democratic Progress, wanted a fast entrance into Europe. The first moves of the present government were promising and we could soon expect an alliance on the level of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This marked a change of attitude from last year when the new President of Serbia, Kostunica, made a deliberately high profile visit to Banja Luka. The snub to Sarajevo indicated that he considered the Republika Srpska to be part of greater Serbia and not Bosnia.

Being Vice-Dean of the economics faculty, Boris Todorovic suggested a number of people from the university who should attend the consultation in Coventry. We explained the unique nature of the consultation. The participants should commit themselves to an agreed agenda, however small, and we would see that it happened. The participants would include religious leaders and politicians, all with their own agendas, but the mixture should hopefully produce new ideas.

Donald brought up the thorny issue of the Ferhadija Mosque.

Boris Todorovic surprised us by saying there would be no problem about the reconstruction. 'If they get permission, there will be no destruction,' he told us. 'I am from here. Most people in this town were unhappy about the destruction. We grew up with these symbols and never wanted them destroyed. People and politicians are two opposite things. It was a war situation. Someone should be responsible for justice. We should learn to live together and quickly go

forward. We have many problems to solve.’

Donald explained the title of the consultation: *Beyond Conflict .Towards Peace, Prosperity and Reconciliation*. It meant dealing with the whole situation in Banja Luka, not just rebuilding a mosque. A European dimension could help this process of regeneration.

‘You’ll be surprised at what I’m going say,’ Donald suddenly announced. ‘There are people in Turkey who are interested in the integration of Islam into Europe. They would help make Banja Luka an open city again.’

Boris Todorovic smiled wanly at this provocative notion, then said emphatically: ‘Banja Luka is an open city. In the war the killing was not as bad as in other places. There was no war in Banja Luka and no ethnic cleansing. Even Bishop Komarica will confirm this. What happened was the destruction of Catholic churches and mosques. People just followed orders in Banja Luka, like all over the Republika Srpska.’

After a stunned pause in which I felt Adnan stiffen next to me and I tried to reconcile this selective interpretation of recent history with the concentration camps up the road and the noticeable absence of Muslims in the streets, the desperation of Mufti Camdzic and everything we knew about the town, Donald managed to say: ‘It is nice to hear about Banja Luka being an open city.’

‘Basically I support the idea,’ said Boris Todorovic, ‘and I would like to implement it as soon as possible. Whatever I and my party can do to help, we will be there to help you.’

‘Help the project, not me,’ Donald quickly responded and then gave a brief autobiography to explain why he, an Anglican priest, had landed in Banja Luka. ‘I want to make the world a better place,’ he said. He described the Soul of Europe as being a catalyst and animator organization, not an aid agency. This always needed explaining to people who expected visitors from the rest

of Europe to come loaded with money. He then mentioned the project in Bihac and the involvement of the Prince of Wales International Business Leaders Forum. The suggestion this model might be useful for Banja Luka excited Boris Todorovic: 'I am now *very* interested!' Donald explained the need for a broker to liaise between the different groups, getting them to work together. This could be an important part of the discussion at the consultation in Coventry.

Roy Wilson sat silently and watchfully throughout our conversation, as he would at all our meetings. It gradually emerged that he had organized all of them with difficulty and effort. Back at the embassy office, his secretary passed several phone messages to us. Now that we were in town everybody did indeed want to meet us. We should make our way quickly to the Minister of the Interior's Head of Cabinet at the Police Station.

Leaving the embassy office we looked at the ruins of a house next door. Once an attractive home with carved wooden beams, now burnt and smashed, the windows without panes and the roof falling in, it belonged to a Muslim family. This did not chime well with Boris Todorovic's remarks about there not having been any ethnic cleansing in Banja Luka. Where was this family now?

CARING FOR SOULS

We drove to the outskirts of Banja Luka where a high rise office block loomed alone on a large patch of ground overlooking the town.

Boris Jovanovic, the Head of Cabinet to the Minister of the Interior, greeted us in a polite but severe manner, observant, curious, fixing Donald with an intent gaze as we sat round the polished table on plush leather chairs, in an elegantly furnished room on the top floor of the building. We were relieved not to be meeting in one of the interrogation rooms below. The Head

of Cabinet was a young man in his twenties, tall and handsome with a mane of immaculately groomed black hair. His assistant from the Department of International Police Cooperation did not have Boris Jovanovic's filmstar looks, but he also stared at us with a mixture of severity and respect when not writing notes.

Donald outlined the project's plan for the consultation in Coventry and offered the incentive of meeting opposite numbers in the UK. He cracked a joke about them maybe being interested in visiting Scotland Yard, causing a frisson all round but also raising a quarter smile.

Donald explained our need for an office in Banja Luka to take the decisions reached at the Coventry Consultation further and for establishing European partners to help with the economic, social and spiritual regeneration of the town. They began to look disinterested and bored, so Donald shifted gear and outlined the future perspective of life in Europe. 'I'm doing this for our grandchildren,' he declared finally. Suddenly the men's expressions changed and softened for a moment as though they were remembering their own children. 'We are inviting the Prime Minister and the High Representative to this consultation,' Donald added, 'in order to help make Banja Luka a stable and peaceful city.'

We were then served coffee while Boris Jovanovic and his assistant drank red hibiscus tea and a glass of water. Expecting to meet gun-toting macho men we were surprised by Boris Jovanovic's mollifying speech about the 'souls' of people in Banja Luka. 'For sure the cause of all the bad things that happened is due to the souls of the people being sick. We first need to heal souls. Why is it like this? Police have no answer. Nor is it our job to heal souls. We are here to implement law and to develop partnerships with the community to try to resolve people's problems. Of course, even police cannot guarantee one hundred per cent security. Nor could Jesus guarantee one hundred per cent that there will be no suffering! So we serve citizens and

together try to solve their problems.’ The observation about Jesus baffled us. The rest of the political broadcast sounded almost persuasive from the mouth of this handsome police chief.

He promised to tell the minister about our meeting, but then wondered why we were interested in meeting the police. What did we expect from them? Donald charmed them by saying that usually people neglected this important segment of the community. It might be useful for them to be involved in the discussion and decision making, which rarely happens. ‘You are an important organization in Banja Luka,’ Donald explained. ‘Without police there would be anarchy. Therefore there are pressures on the police.’ He described how the decisions made at Coventry would require the understanding and the skills of the police. ‘The people will decide,’ he said and explained that in the UK police are often left out of the discussion process. ‘The British Ambassador was wise to suggest your presence,’ he concluded.

The Head of Cabinet agreed on the need for reconciliation, but advised caution. ‘Our wounds are still fresh. There are still so many wrong steps being made in that direction and we do not have the reconciliation we would like.’

He then asked us why we had picked on their town and weren’t working elsewhere. We would be asked this question time and again, indicating that the people who governed Banja Luka still had difficulty facing the guilt of the past. They all assured us that other places had been engaged in worse crimes, as though in the scale of criminal activity Banja Luka came low in comparison to other more evil places. Why did we not go to Mostar, for instance? ‘It would be smart. There are lots of good reasons to go there,’ the Head of Cabinet told us. He defended the Bosnian Serbs who were forced to flee the town and attacked the Catholic Croats there who killed many Serbs and destroyed Orthodox buildings. They assumed we were criticizing and judging them. It would be a long process towards peace building in Banja Luka when the people in power had yet

to face their complicity, if not direct involvement in what happened in their town.

Donald answered diplomatically. ‘You are right,’ he said, ‘But at this stage we are here in Banja Luka.’

The two men listened politely and promised to consider our invitation to come to Coventry. ‘But we police here have procedures,’ they concluded, ‘so can not be committed.’

We descended onto the wide patch of ground, parts of it a carefully trimmed lawn with edging plants. Plainclothes detectives in raincoats and shabby jackets scurried in and out of the building. I thought of the frightened Muslims and Catholics from the town below herded here for questioning, just a few years ago, being bullied and threatened.

Boris Jovanovic, too young to have been present at the height of the ethnic cleansing, still represented the old guard of Bosnian Serb nationalists who resented being dictated to by the international community. A few months later, on May 9, at the ceremony to lay the foundation stone for the Ferhadija Mosque, the police did not stop demonstrators throwing stones. The police marshalled the crowds so the Muslims and assorted guests, international and local, had no choice but to walk the gauntlet of stone-throwers. Afterwards, when the international community insisted that those responsible for the violence be arrested, the police grudgingly rounded up a dozen men, held them in custody for a few hours before releasing them due to a lack of evidence. Later when the High Representative insisted on the ceremony going ahead, the police gathered a third of the total force of the Republika Srpska and with the added protection of SFOR tanks on standby the demonstrators were held at bay. Then adding insult to injury, the police presented the bill for this enlarged force to the Islamic community.

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Dragoljub Davidovic had been defensive though cordial on our last visit, but this time he

looked greyer and shaken by the bomb found under his car, a warning from his nationalist peers not to go soft. So our conversation became stilted and unproductive. When we had come on behalf of Mufti Camdzic, to urge the rebuilding of the Ferhadija Mosque, he assumed this to be the sole objective of the consultation in Coventry. It needed to be explained that the prosperity and future of the whole town were at stake: rebuilding the mosque would become a symbol of Banja Luka as a place of reconciliation. The mayor could not look that far ahead.

This time he sat opposite us at a long polished table stretching yards on both sides. Next to him his press advisor, the same woman we met last time, smiled cordially to soften the difficult conversation that ensued. The mayor studied some documents in front of him with a severe expression on his haggard face and hardly looked at us.

‘Thank you for your interest in Banja Luka,’ he said with a sarcastic tone in response to our proposal for the consultation in Coventry and request for names of people to invite. What he meant to say was: ‘Why can’t you leave us alone and go elsewhere to do your good works?’ Bearing in mind his nationalist masters who would not tolerate outside and possibly Muslim and Catholic interference in their new town’s affairs, he suggested we restrict our invitations to Banja Luka, concentrating on the region within the Republika Srpska, and definitely avoid inviting people from the Federation.

‘Who is coming?’ he then asked, not disguising his anxiety on this matter. Mentioning the High Representative and the Prime Minister did not reassure the mayor so we asked which political leaders we should invite. The mayor suggested leaders from the local National Assembly, as well as the Assembly for Religious Affairs and local politicians. Specialists on recent Bosnian history back in England and the United States had urged us not to invite these people, all tainted with war crimes. Professor Adrian Hastings in Leeds had gone so far as to say

they should all be arrested, put on trial and punished. But Donald and Andrew White from Coventry agreed everybody should be allowed to come. The key players in Banja Luka had all to be involved in the consultation and peace process, even those complicit in crimes.

Fearing the problems he would have with his superiors, the mayor insisted that all three religious leaders must come to the consultation, not just Mufti Camdzic and Bishop Komarica with their personal agendas, but also the Orthodox Bishop Jefrem. Only later did we discover that persuading the Orthodox bishop to come to Coventry would require some sort of miracle. The mayor had knowingly set an obstacle in our way. Donald suggested the Prime Minister should send a representative to attend the whole consultation, then added emphatically: 'But the mayor is the most important person to be there!' Resisting flattery, the mayor continued to look grey, thinking about the difficulty of his position in the town, having to please his nationalist superiors and to attend to the demands of improving the political and economic situation in Banja Luka. He responded by pressing the theme of representation: 'For different reasons it is crucial that all the religious leaders are from Banja Luka. We are for reconciliation, but the reality is that there is no reconciliation.' He concluded by saying categorically that if all the religious leaders of the town were not at Coventry altogether, he would not be there either. 'People are always speaking of peace and reconciliation; sometimes they even say that people should come forward from all the different groups. But local situations are difficult. These are the reasons why we must guarantee the presence of all the religious leaders.'

The mayor winced at our declared commitment to Banja Luka but he agreed that the town had been neglected, compared to Sarajevo and Mostar, and he assured us that he wanted it to be an open city. 'Mostar, Tuzla and Sarajevo all get more help,' he grumbled, naming three mainly Muslim cities. 'Banja Luka is neglected without reason, just because of the consequences of war.'

It should be equal for everyone.’ He perpetuated the misconception that Muslims and Croats shared responsibility for the war with the Serbs. Even when confronted with the facts, Serbs invoked history to show how much they had suffered at the hands of their enemies in the past, implying that this oppression justified war and massacres.

The mayor mentioned the Second World War and the persecution of Serbs, thousands killed in concentration camps. However, cooperation followed that war, which was how it should be in the whole of Bosnia now. ‘All opinions have to be heard,’ the mayor announced with emphasis and then looked straight at us with cold severity and added: ‘Ask Mufti Camdzic what he is doing for the Serbs in Zenica?’ pronouncing the name Mufti Camdzic with contempt. ‘We had a reception for all three religious groups in Banja Luka but the mufti didn’t come. This is a clear signal that the Muslims are not interested.’

‘Perhaps the mufti was frightened,’ Donald suggested. ‘If he spent time with us he might feel more secure.’

The mayor looked defensive and angry, pursing his lips and feeling indignant about the Muslims. His opaque blue eyes narrowed and he went on: ‘What about the persecuted Orthodox people in Zenica? What is the mufti doing for them?’

Trying to mollify the mayor we suggested he might meet the mayor of Birmingham, something our chairman, the Bishop of Aston, could arrange. But Mayor Davidovic was so wound up with resentment he could not respond to the invitation, and snarled: ‘Here people want to improve the atmosphere. How strange that foreigners want it even more! If the international community had power to stop the war, then why didn’t they? There is a European obligation. Europe is responsible: it has an obligation to help. We are not tribes in Banja Luka. And as for mosques in Sarajevo, there are a whole lot of new mosques but few churches!’ Reckoning it useless to

argue further, remembering that Banja Luka didn't have a single mosque but a number of splendid new Orthodox churches, we got up to leave.

The mayor thanked us for the travel arrangements and accepted our invitation only on condition that all three religious leaders attended. He sent us on our way with a depressing piece of revisionist history: according to him there had only ever been a tiny minority of Muslims in Banja Luka, at the most seventeen per cent. There had been many mosques and only two churches for the seventy per cent of Serbian Orthodox who made up the rest of the town (he did not mention the Catholics at all). Churches and the culture of Banja Luka should reflect the majority and not the minority. The Soul of Europe should therefore concern itself with other places in Bosnia where real injustices took place and where the Serbs had been cruelly persecuted.

BANJA LUKA, YEAR ZERO

Adnan somehow endured this meeting without making any comment. He had the resigned and patient look of someone who had heard it all before. But he needed now to find support and sustenance from a friend. Fortunately he spied the car of his former boss at the Red Cross offices of the Republika Srpska in Banja Luka parked nearby, so he fixed a meeting over the mobile. 'It will be good for you to meet an objective, good person,' he told us. We should, however, not mention the name of Mrs Karadjic, who had used the Red Cross for her own corrupt purposes in the war and remained its official director in the Republika Srpska. 'She is like cancer, you must not mention her!'

Miroslav Dekic welcomed us warmly, though we arrived unexpectedly. He knew nothing about the Soul of Europe and after listening to Donald's exposition he supported our efforts. 'We all

have to start somewhere,' he said. 'We must open our minds and go forward. Like the majority here I believe that everybody must communicate and live together. We need European knowledge and experience.'

He then expounded on the sad situation in the city, particularly with young people leaving the country and encouraging returnees to stay. Apparently Croats and Muslims were returning to Banja Luka, but only to sell their property and then move either to Zagreb or to Sarajevo. The Dayton Accord was doing a better job of keeping the various parts of the Central Balkans ethnically clean than the nationalists ever managed. Miroslav Dekic then reminded us of how before the war no one had taken notice of ethnic groups. Friendships were made regardless of race or religion.

In his office, cabinets full of files, Red Cross posters on the walls, a computer flickering screen-saver images, there seemed to be little work, a sense of waiting for something to happen. The air thickened with disappointment and apathy, as though the task for the future had become too massive for one man and his secretary to influence in any worthwhile way. Frozen in apathy of shock, the enormity of the barbaric war, with its mass murders and concentration camps, the destruction of cultures as well as homes, seemed too much for anyone to contemplate, let alone deal with.

When we first visited Banja Luka with Lazar in June 2000 we had the deceptive impression of attractive young people running the place, a new generation making a difference. The destruction of the mosques and the cleansing of the community from Muslim and alien presences had been carried out with such completeness that we strangers were not aware of anything missing. Now however our eyes fell on emptiness, not just the patch of flat ground where the Ferhadija Mosque once stood, but also in the city itself, as though the soul had been ripped out of it and the people

remaining wandered around aimlessly, unsure of themselves. The city had died. Politicians were working to resurrect it as a new place in which only Bosnian Serbs were welcome. Postcards could only show non-descript municipal buildings because the main architectural treasures of the city had been destroyed and now were said never to have existed. Banja Luka, Year Zero.

The mayor might be contemptuous of Mufti Camdzic shouting for justice and banging on his door, but the people of Banja Luka still suffered a state of shock at what happened in their name. Because Europe shunned the city and refused to help, the future looked bleak. Young people resorted to a destructive cynicism which embraced suffering and they turned the table on visitors: ‘Why are you coming here? Why should anyone want to come here? You must be mad. Go away. Banja Luka has no future,’ they said. ‘We don’t even want one! We will leave the city as soon as we can. What else can we do?’ And since their parents were responsible for, or passive witnesses of the destruction of their city and community, the children felt no need to make reparations.

On our following visits to Banja Luka, the truth of its history and the place as it had become could not be forgotten or disguised. Each visit became progressively more depressing and desperate: like Ovid’s description of Hades, where people repeat impossible tasks for eternity:

The dungeon of the damned

That place is called... Tantalus

Can never catch the water, never grasp

The overhanging branches; Sisyphus

Chases and heaves the boulder doomed to roll

For ever back; Ixion’s wheel revolves,

Always behind himself, always ahead...

We used to enjoy dining in the castle restaurant by the River Vrbas, but now even that became a dispiriting experience, staring out of the window at the swirling waters and watching the few people either fishing or walking disconsolately along the opposite bank.

Roy Wilson suggested another restaurant by the river. At the next table a grotesquely overweight mafia-type in a smart black suit entertained two slim beauties in skimpy dresses. They giggled appreciatively but also apprehensively at his uncouth grunts and lipsmacking as he guzzled. At one point, over-excited and with his mouth still full, he seized the face of the slenderer of the two almost anorexic girls and planted a sloppy kiss on her lips. She took it in good humour, laughing, but then looked forlornly in our direction, wishing to be rescued but having to tolerate a situation from which she could not afford to escape.

THE LITTLE GREEN FLAG

Beyond the now familiar patch of ground surrounded by concrete blocks to prevent cars parking on the sacred space stood the mufti's house, solitary and vulnerable. The small green flag still fluttered from the upstairs window, not so big as to be an easy target for hooligans, but sending the message: 'We are here. You can not get rid of us altogether.'

Mufti Camdzic welcomed us warmly which made a change from the last time when he shouted impatiently at us for having not yet done anything. But his eyes, blazing intensely, hinted at some long speeches to follow. His kindly assistant, a meek man in cardigan and threadbare trousers, ushered us upstairs. A shy young man in a goatee and sweater was waiting for us, but sat silent throughout the whole meeting.

Mufti Camdzic's voice boomed. He spoke like this to everybody, his clarion tones declaring: 'Listen to me! I'm not invisible! I am here!'

He immediately attacked Roy Wilson. ‘You may be busy,’ the mufti shouted, ‘but we feel nothing! Everybody is opening offices here, but nothing is happening!’ Roy Wilson sat rigid and responded: ‘We work hard behind the scenes.’ This did not impress the mufti.

Donald explained about the consultation in Coventry and mentioned the European Ecumenical Council. The mufti listened patiently, looking older than before, more pugnacious. Then he launched into a speech, focusing attention on the Ferhadija Mosque project. Sarcasm spat venomously from his opening words addressed to Donald: ‘Respectfully honoured priest, we are glad you are here again after so long a time. The Reis is president of our project and you and I are vice-presidents. I think we will write your name in gold letters on the mosque, but we don’t have money to pay. You should receive an honorary passport. I think we will be well satisfied with each other. We are glad you are here today with us. Yesterday I was with the Reis in his Cabinet meeting and he sends you his greetings. Also we will have a meeting with the board on Monday. There are twenty million Muslims in Europe, yet not one Muslim from Europe is represented in Bosnia. We want to be part of Europe. So we invite you and your visits to our country to represent the Muslim community in Europe. There are a hundred mosques in England; Muslims should be represented.’ The flowery language concerning Donald’s name in gold letters alarmed us; we had achieved nothing yet for the mufti, but far from garlanding us, his bitter tone urged us to achieve something.

He then asked pointedly: ‘Are there troubles for Muslims in England?’ Donald explained that the Muslim Pakistanis tended to be closed communities due to language difficulties, but there were meetings with the Islamic Council and that the Prime Minister liked to be seen to be maintaining good relations between Islam and Christianity. The mufti should meet brother muftis in England when he came to Coventry, also refugees from Banja Luka in London.

They then discussed names of participants at the consultation: Mufti Makic from Bihac should be invited, and Omer Visic, the vice-mayor of Banja Luka, also a Muslim. The Dayton Accord had insisted on his appointment, even though it bestowed on him only token powers. Omer Visic used to be Mayor of Banja Luka before the war, when the Muslims were still a majority. We had not heard of this vice-mayor before; Mayor Davidovic hadn't mentioned his existence. We then heard the familiar depressing story about official obstacles put in the way of rebuilding the Ferhadija Mosque. 'People are constantly visiting me,' the mufti said, 'all refugees from Banja Luka are coming to see me, all are surprised that the Ferhadija is not being built - also no Catholic churches. Remember all those destroyed churches and mosques? The official authorities don't want to give permission. But Prime Minister Ivanic is a good man; he speaks out and suffers the consequences.' Momentarily the mufti became distracted, overwhelmed at the obstacles and upset at having to speak kindly about the Prime Minister whom he knew he could not trust.

Suddenly he raised his loud voice a pitch further: 'Mr Vice-President! I beg you! Whatever Dodik does Ivanic will do the same.' The former Prime Minister of the Srpska Republic had publicly stated he would destroy the mosque again if it were rebuilt. Mufti Camdzic went on: 'The only way out of this vicious circle is to speak publicly on television in Sarajevo and Banja Luka and officially ask that the High Representative Petritsch demand that all churches and mosques and synagogues be rebuilt. On the 16th July in 1999, when we had problems with the various municipalities where the authorities refused to give permission to rebuild houses, the High Representative issued orders to the authorities in Banja Luka that everything destroyed in the war should not require permission to be rebuilt .it was enough just to have the building plans.'

The mufti's voice now boomed around the house as though wanting to be heard across the town: 'In public people fear to say it, but they don't want Catholics and Muslims in Banja Luka. So permission is not given. This New Year, Mayor Davidovic expressed cynicism about the mosque being rebuilt. I had a long correspondence with him. You, our Vice-President, should be aware that we are doing our best, but you must also experience what it is like to be broken on the wheel!'

Donald spoke about the need for a mediator at the consultation and the mufti boomed back, banging his fist on the table but smiling amiably at the same time to show that he was not angry at us, only impatient: 'Mr Vice-President! We need to build a perimeter fence and get the stone from the quarries to build the mosque! Mufti is in a hurry! We are sorry to hear nothing new. Coventry is so far away in the future!' Donald muttered something about the problems of getting the stones from the quarries, that permission would have to be granted and of officials standing in the way. The mufti interrupted and shouted: 'Please!! For eight and a half years we wait. Eighty-seven mosques were destroyed. Many people killed. The former mufti here died of a heart attack. Last year Wolfgang Petritsch and Jacques Klein promised we will get our mosque!'

Donald started to speak about working on a strategy when the mufti interrupted again and told us to stop writing letters. We should have meetings. 'Is Petritsch against the mosque?' he asked plaintively, then told us that the Orthodox bishop, whom we were meeting immediately afterwards, ignored the mufti. Ralph Johnson the High Representative's deputy had invited all three religious leaders to a meeting. Bishop Komarica came but not Bishop Jefrem. Yet before the war they all met during the blessing of a new Orthodox church. Mayor Davidovic recently sent a Christmas card to the mufti. We considered this a sign of hope, the mayor being conciliatory, but the mufti

disabused us of any such naïvety: ‘It was an insult to a mufti!’ He had visited the mayor but the mayor never came to visit the mufti. ‘Words and reality!’ the mufti exclaimed fixing us with his blazing eyes. Donald tried to calm him: ‘We are all human beings,’ he said. ‘We are made in the image of God. So we must all meet together.’ But the mufti could not be mollified. He had put in a request for a mufti house but received no answer. Glaring at Roy Wilson, he accused the British Embassy of never responding to the mufti’s problems in Banja Luka. The imams had nowhere to live. The mufti himself commuted everyday from Sarajevo: a long journey over several mountain ranges. No one helped.

We left with our ears ringing. It came almost as a relief to stand outside the office on the flat piece of ground, letting the silent space speak for itself. We looked at the concrete blocks bordering the ground and noted the nationalist emblem stamped on each block. They turned out to have no sinister purpose. Supporters of the local football team who shared the same emblem had put them there everywhere else across town.

BISHOP JEFREM’S FORTRESS

In contrast to the vulnerable position of the mufti’s offices, the Orthodox bishop’s palatial home was protected by walls, gates and a neat garden with tall trees and bushes. A politely welcoming chaplain waited for us at the gate and led us round the other side of the building. This meeting had been arranged entirely due to the efforts of Roy Wilson. We had written to Bishop Jefrem several times over the last nine months hoping to gain an audience. He never replied to any of our messages, not even to acknowledge them.

We had been led to believe Bishop Jefrem supported hard line nationalism, wanted nothing to do with peace missions, and that he resisted interfaith ecumenical meetings. He had spoken

publicly with hostility about ecumenism. Any mention of rebuilding the Ferhadija Mosque would have him shutting the door in our faces. So we expected a fierce and bullish bishop, like Bishop Basil in Bjelajina, sharing the latter's contempt for Donald's progressive theology and with an army of chaplains and priests hovering in the anteroom.

Bishop Jefrem turned out to be the exact opposite. We were welcomed kindly by a timid, bookish man, his tall thin figure wrapped in black silk robes and pectoral crosses. He sat down, nervously rearranging these crosses, patting his cassock. We had the impression he was silently hoping the meeting would proceed without argument or recriminations. This frightened man found himself in a political situation, which he neither understood nor wanted to be part of. Before the war he used to meet with other religious leaders. During the war the new political bosses of Banja Luka made it clear he should keep out of their affairs. His job as priest and man of prayer had not prepared him for the brutal reality of what happened in Banja Luka during the war: the injustices and the ethnic cleansing. He now seemed to be a man in shock. He barely engaged in conversation with us and when we discussed the Coventry Consultation he made a feeble excuse that he would need to obtain the permission from Metropolitan Nikolaj in Sarajevo. The Metropolitan later told us that Bishop Jefrem had no need for permission and could do what he wanted. We thought of Bishop Basil of Bjelajina who never asked permission of anyone. The conversation took a farcical turn when Bishop Jefrem suddenly asked: 'There won't be any fighting, will there?' For a moment we entertained the vision of the mufti flooring the bishop with a left hook. This telling question, the only one he asked, indicated his feelings of anxiety and guilt. Even though he benefited from being on the winning side and lived in comfort and security, he dreaded confrontation. This sign of conscience surprised and touched us. Then we looked round the plush furnishings of his residence, and thought of Mufti Camdzic hanging a

little green flag out of an upstairs window.

Aspidistras, lamps and chandeliers decorated the reception room; portraits of former bishops hung on the walls, and heavy crimson curtains draped over the large windows, kept the room dark. A mixture of incense and garlic hung in the air; worship and cooking in close proximity. The bishop smiled as we arrived, but his fingers twitched nervously. We explained our proposals with emphasis on Orthodox projects and made special mention of Krnjeucia, near Bihac, with its destitute Orthodox community learning to cooperate with their Muslim neighbours after the destructive war. We spoke about the invitation to Bishop Chrysostom from Cambridge University. Bishop Jefrem sat like a prince in a throne-like armchair, smoothed his carefully groomed hair and swung one of his medallions, large as a biscuit-tin lid. Donald offered the carrot of a meeting with the Bishop of London, Richard Chartres, a particular friend of the Orthodox in the Anglican Church. Donald also described our meeting with Patriarch Pavle in Belgrade, hoping to impress Bishop Jefrem, who only looked even more alarmed.

‘Something must come of all this effort and good intentions,’ Bishop Jefrem said after Donald had finished his presentation. ‘Thank you for all your care and effort. It is an interesting and unique project. I think it is very possible, but there is something to add to make its success even better. First the people you invite must not be in conflict!’ We reassured him that Coventry was a place of peace and reconciliation. ‘In that case,’ the bishop went on, ‘there is no need to worry. We cooperated before and we cooperate now. We do not fight.’ ‘You don’t even talk to each other,’ I thought to myself. ‘Reconciliation should be made here among the politicians,’ the bishop went on, with sudden feeling. Mayor Davidovic had told us earlier that reconciliation must happen among the religious leaders first. We reassured the bishop that all the politicians coming recognized this. Visiting Coventry, coming to a foreign place would help them to look at

problems in a new way.

Donald repeated his 'I am an old man' speech, about preparing the way for our grandchildren, creating a better world. He also spoke about the necessity of him being a mediator, doing something small but achievable. The bishop agreed wholeheartedly with this last observation and smiled nervously. He looked distressed.

A discussion followed about permission from the Metropolitan: 'He is the president of the Bishops Council of Bosnia and Herzegovina,' Bishop Jefrem informed us grandly. 'We cannot go without consulting him. We need meetings and agreements about such an important visit. Our Council will elect someone to go. Bishops have obligations and it may not be possible for me to come.' Donald refused to countenance such a possibility and reassured the bishop that we would insist that the Metropolitan allow him to come.

Then Bishop Jefrem handed us gifts of a book written by a Bosnian Serb about the atrocities committed by Croats in the Second World War.

The bishop told us that he had been twenty years in Banja Luka, and throughout the war. 'Unfortunately it was very hard,' he said. 'Something I could never imagine happening; everything happened, but it was imported!' He told us he had liked the former mufti of Banja Luka, the one who died of a broken heart over the destruction of the Ferhadija Mosque. 'We had good cooperation.' But Mufti Camdzic had not introduced himself yet. In fact Mufti Camdzic had often asked to speak with the bishop, but the bishop never replied, just as he never replied to us. Donald then suggested introducing Bishop Jefrem and Camdzic, at which the bishop burst into embarrassed laughter. 'It is not so important a matter for you to concern yourselves with!' he exclaimed. 'Such small things!' Donald said it was far from unimportant and that such a complicated issue needed an outsider to help.

The conversation petered out with comments about young people wanting to be ordained in the Orthodox Church and that refugees should be allowed to live where they want. The bishop did not support the policy of returnees being encouraged to settle where they had been ousted from their homes. 'There is a physical law that two bodies cannot be in the same place at the same time,' he told us. Serb refugees from other places in Bosnia should not be moved from Banja Luka. Therefore Muslim refugees could not return to their homes. He referred to economic rather than political reasons. 'The process is going too slowly,' he said, but did not make clear what this process was.

Before the war the mufti had been the leading religious figure in Banja Luka; now the Orthodox were in the majority. The bishop relished his increased authority, and did not welcome back Muslims and Catholics.

We drank coffee and rakija, enjoying the kindly welcome of the timid but autocratic man, who hoped the meeting would end peacefully and with no hard feelings. Also a man of prayer and tradition, wanting to be nice to everyone, he found himself unprepared for being a religious leader in times of crisis and war. The residence felt like a haven from the outside world, which remained invisible beyond the thick crimson drapes. Protected from worldly issues, he preferred to pray rather than face the problems of a homeless, mosque-less mufti and the awkward arguments with Bishop Komarica over the return of Catholic families to homes occupied by Orthodox Serb refugees.

We heard no gates clanging shut behind us as the silent chaplain showed us out with a polite smile, but it felt as though we were leaving a kernel of Orthodoxy existing in a vacuum, an ancient tradition untouched by the squalor of life on the streets of Banja Luka.

INTO THE LIONS DEN

We now approached the offices of the vice-president of the Republika Srpska to meet the people who had administered the nationalist policies of the Bosnian Serbs over the last decade, and who took ultimate responsibility for the ethnic cleansing and the destruction of mosques. We did not expect to meet a chetnik, eyes blazing above an unkempt forest of beard and whiskers, but possibly a clone of Radovan Karadjic, with jaw jutting and fists banging on the table. We also expected to be kept waiting.

To our surprise we were immediately ushered into an elegant reception room where the vice-president and two colleagues were already sitting in a row at a long table in front of large writing pads, pens poised to take notes. Smartly dressed, they greeted us politely and asked us to sit facing them at the glass-covered polished table.

Vice-President Cavic wore a grey suit and his crew-cut topped a smooth shaven face. On his right sat a thoughtful looking bald man, also smooth shaven and formally dressed, holding a cane, who hardly spoke throughout the meeting. On Cavic's left sat his economics advisor, Svetlana Cenic, a formidable-looking businesswoman in a scarlet two-piece, with masses of jet-black hair surrounding a pale, powdered face. Of all the people we met in Serbia and Bosnia, Svetlana Cenic turned out to be the only one who kept in regular touch. In spite of being the busiest, she answered every piece of correspondence, however small, immediately and punctiliously. Through her alone we could gauge the reactions and thoughts of the people who agreed to attend the Coventry Consultation. The political leaders saw an opportunity of making allies and becoming part of Europe; the religious leaders remained suspicious and cautious. The politicians were forward looking, and naturally wanted to sweep the past under the carpet; the religious leaders lived with the consequences of the last decade and remained fearful of a more

secular future which threatened to diminish their authority.

Later, when we returned to Sarajevo on our way home, the British Ambassador described Cavic and his colleagues as *laptop chetniks*. Adnan laughed: the phrase so accurately portrayed this new generation of Bosnian Serb politicians who wanted to dispense with their traditional wild beast image and fit in with the rest of the political world; just as New Labour in the UK, before the 1997 election, smartened their appearance with red roses, power dressing and gleaming-toothed smiles in order to bury the rough cloth-cap and power-to-the-workers image of the past and so woo conservative voters.

Behind and above Cavic hung an elaborate version of the nationalist flag, asserting the Repbulika Srpska to be a country in its own right and not part of Bosnia and Herzegovina. So long as this symbol dominated, along with the Cyrillic script on all street signs, the Republika Srpska would never be integrated into Bosnia. On the main wall opposite the windows hung a large genre oil painting of an historical event. It depicted a group of Bosnian Serb men in traditional costume taking a picnic, conversing and resting, surrounded by mountains with clouds on the horizon. The scene remained a mystery: were they soldiers resting between battles? A few women in the crowd serve the men drinks.

While Donald delivered his 'old man' speech and encouraged them with an 'all expenses paid' invitation, Cavic stared unblinkingly at him, slightly ironically, as though trying to make up his mind whether Donald were a fool or in fact someone to be taken seriously. Fascinated by this apparently fearless older man with grey hair and wearing a cassock, the vice-president's eyes expressed amazement and sneaking respect.

Then Cavic read out a letter from the British ambassador recommending us and proceeded to deliver a speech: 'I need to tell you: everybody who comes with reconciliation and long-term

peace is welcome. Thank you for your initiative concerning the future of our town. You know that this has been an area of conflict throughout the twentieth century. All these conflicts left consequences and wounds. They led to further suffering and unexpected consequences. Many of these were never repaired. Because of all we have experienced in Bosnia and Herzegovina, peace comes from initiatives from the biggest world powers. We are aware of this, not least because the last war left traumas that are still fresh in our memories. All conflicts in Bosnia and Herzegovina, world wars, civil or regional, were always blamed on the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina, no matter where they came from. Basically the fight was between the different people here. I tell you this to give you a historical perspective.’

He then pointed to the half-finished Orthodox cathedral outside the window, The cathedral stood between his government offices and the mayor’s offices on the other side of the square. Destroyed in 1941 by German bombs, only two years after it had been built and blessed, the Croat Ustashi police and the Nazis forced local Serbs to remove the rubble. In 1945 the communists built a monument on the empty space. ‘Unfortunately we have similar but terrible tragedies everywhere. It is the strategy of war. Only your initiative can stop this. Such a realistic view of opportunities for rebuilding will provide a good base for reconciliation.’ He then made an unexpected admission: ‘Basically we have to acknowledge our mistakes.’ Svetlana Cenic, the raven-haired woman in scarlet, surprised us by announcing in an alarmingly guttural voice: ‘People sin!’ To which Cavic added: ‘But there is forgiveness.’ For the first time in all our meetings and visits to Serbia and Bosnia we heard words that came close to an apology and from the least expected quarter - those in power. Initially we considered this admission to be a cynical ploy to gain our good will, but these people meant what they were saying.

We spoke about reconciliation involving economic, social and spiritual regeneration.

‘But we need new concrete steps,’ Donald pressed forward. ‘Unless there is forgiveness there is no future. Coventry has possibilities for us, but we need to be realistic.’ Then, with a nod to the woman in scarlet, added: ‘Because we all sin!’ He went on to describe the consultation, its content, the meeting between people, then holding them to their resolutions afterwards, to make sure decisions were carried out. ‘Otherwise it will be a waste of all our time!’

The vice-president then spoke about truth and reconciliation. ‘In a recent assembly of the parliament we formed a committee for reconciliation: a truth commission. We support this initiative. One day there will be a consensus throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina in the different areas of life, cultural, religious, etc., that will take steps toward truth and reconciliation.’ Mufti Camdzic’s despair at not being listened to was a reminder of the cheapness of words, people in power pontificating about truth and reconciliation. They did not suffer the degree of anger and resentment that crippled those groups who had suffered most in the war, and who still felt that no one attended to their immediate concerns for justice, homes and destroyed buildings. Cavic read our minds and reminded us of a historical context. He spoke of his own family tragedies caused by conflict throughout the twentieth century. ‘My grandfather was killed in a concentration camp. He had fought as a soldier in the Hapsburg Empire and was killed in the Second World War. There has been lots of death, suffering and refugees in my family. Every family in Bosnia and Herzegovina has one or more such traumas. So we need to go the way of neutrality. We must have similar internal politics to Switzerland. History has shown how geography determines the position of ethnic groups.’

We talked about our project in Bihac.

‘What about other places in Bosnia?’ asked Cavic, interested in the possibilities of such a project in Banja Luka. ‘As Vice-President of our party I understand and give support. Every step

forward however small is welcome.’ He then promised to give names of people for us to see on our next visit.

The trio who had looked like terrifying interrogators waiting for us when we arrived, now expressed only good will and support for our proposals. The silent bald man with the cane smiled, Svetlana Cenic spoke to us animatedly in fluent English, often translating for Adnan, and the smooth faced Vice-President shook our hands. Professor Adrian Hastings back in England had warned us not to associate with these people because they should all be on trial and punished for their war crimes. Ten years ago their hands had been bloody. Now they spoke about admitting their mistakes and sins and tidied themselves up to give a good impression. Should we doubt their sincerity? Meanwhile Mufti Camdzic clamoured in vain for their attention and Bishop Komarica struggled to look after his dispersed community. A chasm remained between words and reality, intentions and active justice.

Journalists and photographers had been allowed in briefly at the start of our meeting to take pictures. They waited outside to televise a report. They asked no questions. Cavic and Donald spoke to camera about the positive outcomes of our meeting, but the journalists showed little interest, uneasy at voicing critical questions and simply carrying out a tedious duty.

CHASING BISHOP KOMARICA

Continuing suspicion about our motives, exhaustion with foreigners interfering and criticizing, visitor fatigue and above all the priority of looking after their own communities and interests explained the lack of response to our requests for meetings. These would only be fixed at the last minute and we were then welcomed warmly and ceremoniously as though the engagement had been planned months in advance and eagerly anticipated.

Bishop Komarica turned out to be especially elusive. The last time we arrived he declined to see us because of a meeting with Croatian representatives. Adnan had constant problems with this issue as he tried to fix appointments for us over the phone, reading negative motives behind the hesitations and refusals. He feared for his reputation working for us, particularly if we failed to deliver. Bishop Komarica still prevaricated, not sure whether he would be in Banja Luka when we wanted to see him.

Davor Bozinovic, the Banja Luka representative of the Catholic charity, Caritas, and a quiet assistant stood in for the absent bishop, looking alarmed and defensive. The atmosphere during this meeting became strained and awkward. We sat in the small reception room where we had met a US army chaplain on our first visit.

Donald began by appeasing the two men and emphasized the importance of the invitation to the bishop to come to the consultation in Coventry. He explained the UK Catholic community's ignorance of the situation in Banja Luka, of Bishop Komarica's history, particularly his period of house arrest in the war and the danger to his life.

Davor Bozinovic apologized for the Bishop's absence, visiting Mostar. 'Allow us to make some comments', he said and proceeded to claim how much they cared for the communal life in Banja Luka, particularly with the Orthodox and the Muslims. 'We have a long tradition of living peacefully together. I think that hate in war comes from politicians, not people. On purpose.'

This contrasted with Mayor Davidovic's assertion that religious leaders encouraged the conflict between the different communities. So far we had found nothing to contradict the mayor. The book which the Orthodox Bishop had presented to us described in grisly detail the massacres of 'good, law-abiding and god-fearing Orthodox Serbs' perpetrated in the Second World War by brutish and monstrous Catholic Croat soldiers crazed with drink and blood lust: just the kind of

propaganda to keep ethnic hatred burning fiercely. The book purported to be a balanced assessment of historical truths and a plea for peaceful co-existence, but the manipulative style of purple passages describing in detail violent rapes and the murder of ‘innocent and honest Serb folk’ had the opposite effect. The oratory of the book took its cue from Mark Anthony’s speech in Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* in which the pleas to the crowd for restraint followed by a gory description of Caesar’s murder, particularly his ‘piteously’ gaping wounds, have the desired opposite effect of whipping the crowd into a frenzy of retribution, instigating civil war. Reading the book given us by Bishop Jefrem and listening between the lines to what Davor Bozinovic told us, it became clear that the hatred between the Muslim and Orthodox communities paled before the implacable antagonism between Catholics and Orthodox. The Bosnia war found the Muslims caught between two rival Christian Churches. This accounted in part for the high proportion of Muslim loss of life, property and suffering.

‘I think it is possible to have trust again,’ continued Davor Bozinovic. ‘But this is a long process. I think it is very important to work with the majority because they make the rules.’ He explained that the Catholic diocese had forty parishes in the region of Banja Luka. Some had been destroyed, the community decimated. Seventy thousand Catholics from before the war were reduced to seven thousand. ‘It is not the problem of just rebuilding churches and houses, but also people. They have no work or income to live. That means if you rebuild a house or church there is no guarantee of its future.’ He liked the Bihac project initiative. ‘I will be happy to see the Ferhadija Mosque rebuilt, just as I would any Catholic church. I wept when it was destroyed. I was a priest in that parish. I will be glad when love rebuilds what hate destroyed.’

Davor Bozinovic expressed surprise about the ignorance in Europe concerning the Catholic situation in the Republika Srpska. ‘It is a trend in Europe, not just in the Catholic Church. Are

we too late to learn? We are the new hot spot in the world. We are being forgotten. This is why we are here,' he concluded, with reference to his work for Caritas.

Hearing that the bishop planned to return to Banja Luka later that evening we postponed our journey to Sarajevo in order to talk to him again.

Outside the Catholic offices we met Denis Arifovic, who had driven over from Bihac to pick up his expenses. He looked leaner, paler and more haggard than at our first meeting in Bihac when he had sat on the roadside in the ruined village of Krneucia, buried his face in his hands, and wept at the enormity of the destruction and suffering that had taken place in his country.

Christian Aid had decided to move their operations elsewhere. They had ditched him, with a poor work reference, but he seemed happy for the chance to work with us on our Bihac project.

Adnan was suspicious of Denis, doubting his sincerity and ability. Adnan possessed a tough skin and pugnacious pride. No one 'messed' with him. The older Denis had fought in the Bosnian army and been broken by the experience of war. Adnan's stubborn determination and impatient ambition contrasted with Denis's fatalism. But impressed by this Bihac Muslim's ease at relating to the Orthodox returnees at Krnjeuca, we depended on his skills at collaborating with different groups, though his laid back manner and unwillingness to keep in regular contact when we returned home exasperated us. Both Denis and Adnan were of incalculable value to the early stages of to the Soul of Europe work in Bosnia. We listened carefully to their reactions, criticisms, and thoughts. These became crucial to developing our projects of Bosnia.

'A DREARY BUGGER'

The Minister of Faith's task was to ensure equal rights for all the religions in Banja Luka. However, the prominent display of icons on his desk and on the walls of his office indicated a

clear preference for the Orthodox. We sat in a dingy office on the seventh floor of the building and felt the atmosphere thicken throughout the meeting.

Donald worked hard at his presentation but the bearded minister and his surly assistant looked unhappy and uninterested, even hostile. ‘Thank you for the invitation,’ he said afterwards, ‘but I am not sure I can come. We are unhappy about the sessions being private and not public.’

Donald had explained the importance of holding the consultation ‘in camera’ but failed to impress the minister. ‘If all is as you say, then why should the meetings be private? Politicians can speak frankly, and also the religious leaders. They should reach their conclusions publicly. We don’t want to reject your initiative but we question your methods.’ We explained that the Coventry Consultation provided a safe space for people to talk freely and listen to each other. ‘It is a different dynamic to a public meeting. We have skilled facilitators for this process.’ Donald went on to describe our expectations for new initiatives in Banja Luka, modest ones. The Soul of Europe together with European partners would ensure the initiatives took place. ‘This is an invitation. It creates opportunity for a city which has seen great suffering. A new government can take fresh steps for the future.’

The minister spoke of a recent conference on war he had attended in Strasbourg at which he had a conversation with military chaplains. ‘I hope the conference will have more understanding of the problems we are having here. Often we meet people who are ignorant of local problems. So it’s important to know the participants, who they are.’ We reassured him that there would be a list and an agenda.

‘Who is coming from the Federation of Bosnia?’ the minister asked, narrowing his eyes. He then described the difficulties with issues of religious communities, explaining that each must take responsibility for protecting their own community. He clearly had little time for our

proposals and triumphantly accused us of not inviting a Jewish representative. ‘There are Jews here, why haven’t you invited them? If you want to be fair and representative you must consider all faiths, however small. They are all important.’ Our omission had given him the excuse not to take us seriously, so we immediately expressed gratitude for the name of the Rabbi of Dobož whom we would certainly visit.

‘Basically we accept your invitation,’ the minister said grudgingly, the atmosphere thick with mistrust. ‘We need to discuss this with the Prime Minister. The Ministry of Faith is interested in participating, for now our agenda is empty. We know roughly what needs to be discussed. But we need time to consider.’ His words made our invitation seem like an unwelcome demand. Donald commented on how religion is largely irrelevant to young people everywhere. ‘There is an issue about young people and religions,’ he explained. ‘We should be more relaxed - it is a human thing we are doing.’ The minister ignored him and concluded the meeting by saying: ‘As time passes, relations will improve between the religions.’

‘Dreary bugger!’ Donald exploded on leaving the minister’s office, just as the door closed behind us. Roy Wilson burst into a nervous laugh. ‘Thank goodness they didn’t hear that!’ he said.

GOD WAS A REFUGEE

Before meetings with Sulejman Tihic, the Deputy Speaker of the Assembly, and Bishop Komarica scheduled for evening, we took Roy Wilson out for tea at a busy café. He advised us to chase up the Prime Minister to nominate a representative for the Coventry Consultation, and gave tips on how to handle the ambassadors we were booked to meet in Sarajevo. Hans Jürgen Kretschmer from the EU was a German anglophile; we should be blunt with the High

Representative and not expect funds from Jacques Klein from the UN.

We then met Alexander, a Serb friend of Adnan's for coffee in the Hotel Bosna. A leader of the University Student Union, Alexander was halfway through an architecture degree. This brief meeting taught us how alienated the youth of Banja Luka felt in their own town: no jobs and no places for them to meet.

The Coventry Consultation would no doubt attend to this issue, one that could unite all the participants. 'We must have peace first,' Alexander suggested, 'then jobs after.' This priority pointed at the injustice of providing jobs for Bosnian Serbs first and keeping expelled Muslims and Catholics out of Banja Luka. He also suggested that houses should be rebuilt, and young people kept in Banja Luka by creating a youth centre, as well as rebuilding cultural landmarks, including the Ferhadija Mosque. All these were hot issues in Banja Luka and we realized yet again how difficult our task would be. As Adnan commented: 'If you stand on a street corner here with a sign *Rebuild Ferhadija* you will be dead in ten seconds.' Looking at the grim faces of the burly Bosnian Serbs taking coffee beside us in the hotel this seemed an accurate prognosis.

Later, over supper, we asked Adnan what he felt about religion. A secular Muslim, he claimed that he did have religious feelings. He described the experience of a quiet spring morning shortly after the end of the siege of Sarajevo. The muezzins were calling and bells rang from the Catholic and Orthodox churches. 'There is a God up there,' Adnan remembered thinking. 'But he has been away for a few years. God was a refugee.'

THE JOKER

Just as it had been a revelation to meet a mufti in Belgrade, so we were surprised to know that the deputy speaker of the National Assembly of Banja Luka was a Muslim. Like Mufti Camdzic,

Sulejman Tihic commuted from Sarajevo, and looked isolated in the company of so many Serb nationalists. Adnan ordered us to keep quiet in the government building. 'All walls have ears here,' he explained and then shuddered perceptibly. 'I hate to come here,' he added. It wasn't hard to imagine blood trickling down the walls.

Tihic, friendly and cultivated, welcomed us into his private office and listened attentively, his lean compact body bending forward, eyes fixed kindly on us, touched by our efforts. 'Thank you for coming. I heard about your work from the Reis ul Ulema. I think you really can help us in Bosnia. For us Bosniaks we consider ourselves to be European, not immigrants. Our Muslims are European; they dress and live like Europeans. Unfortunately in all conflicts and wars we were exposed to genocide. Personally I was in five concentration camps and have testified at the Hague Tribunal. But after all that, we must continue to live together. However we expect to have help more from European than Saudi organizations. We are far from near to having the Ferhadija Mosque rebuilt. Local authorities continue to block any decisions. We have experienced them. International communities remain happy and deceived. But we don't want to create difficulties; it is not the time. The consultation should be more than words. We must establish an office afterwards to control the decisions made at Coventry. We have bad experiences: people sign documents and break promises. Churches remain unbuilt. I will devote myself to granting permissions and will accept any invitation to come to England.'

Donald talked about international recognition embarrassing the opponents of the Ferhadija Mosque project. 'Young people from all over Europe should take part in the project, keeping it ecumenical,' he said. 'Banja Luka could become an example for the rest of Europe and the world. Young people will be proud of Banja Luka. Perhaps a small organization like the Soul of Europe can help make this a reality. If the process is right and well publicized, involving all

levels of European and international interest, then the project should work. All citizens of Banja Luka will be proud to have their mosque back.’

‘I want to be frank,’ responded Tihic. ‘Muslims are convinced that international and European organizations don’t do enough for them, not enough pressure has been put on the authorities of Banja Luka. We cannot understand how Dodik’s government avoided criticism during all his years in power. Not a single Deutschmark was given for refugees, despite him receiving thousands in aid. No notice is taken of the High Representative or the American ambassador who ordered the rebuilding. No one took any notice. The mosque will bring security in every way, not just a religious one. For security reasons you cannot have night prayers. It isn’t safe. Police cannot guarantee safety. Yet ordinary people are not hostile to Muslims; and extreme nationalism is now at an end. It is no longer a problem to walk the streets. Present politicians make the problems even bigger than they actually are to avoid the real program. For example, I asked for permission to build but they answered: Let’s wait for the elections; let’s wait till November. There are crazy people around. But the truth is they simply don’t want the mosque.’

‘The mosque is for Europe, not just for Banja Luka,’ said Donald, repeating his assertion that we could embarrass the people into not opposing the building. ‘We are committed to the Reis’s wish to see that Islam is integrated into Europe.’

‘You mean well,’ Tihic responded, ‘but Europe doesn’t want to see Muslims like the ones in Bosnia because they don’t fit the image of extremist Muslims. Find a place in Bosnia where there is a destroyed church and I will build it.’ He then described a Muslim community in Bosnia culturally closer to Europe than to the Middle East.

On western ignorance about the Muslim genocide, Tihic said: ‘It is important to make the consultation succeed.’

He then apologized for cutting the meeting short, having to attend the Assembly. He expressed thanks that a European organization was taking Muslims seriously, and added gloomily that he couldn't stop people building offices on the ruins of mosques. No one took notice of the High Representative who refuses permission to build on ruins. 'They go ahead anyway!'

As we left the government building a motorcade screeched up to the entrance, motorbike outriders roaring, headlights blazing. Several buffed and heavily armed bodyguards leapt out of the car and stood to attention on the steps of the building. 'The Speaker,' whispered Roy Wilson. Dragan Kalinic, the most powerful man in the Republika Srpska, approached us with a glistening smile, all teeth bared, shaking our hands warmly. 'I can see you tomorrow,' he told us. 'Oh! you have to leave? So sorry!!' The bodyguards looked on approvingly, much to our relief, but we were surprised he knew who we were. Evidently word had gone round Banja Luka. 'Next time we must talk!' He then apologized for being in a hurry and swept into the building followed by his guards.

Roy Wilson described the close alliance between Mr Kalinic and Radovan Karadjic, which explained Mr Kalinic's determination to remain in the Speaker's position, the most powerful position in the Assembly, and therefore the most influential in the Republika Srpska.

Adnan later commented on his smile: 'Like the Joker in *Batman*.'

RAKIJA AND REAL VALUES

All our apprehensions about the bishop vanished the moment he appeared, rushing along the corridor having just arrived from distant Mostar. In the process of taking off his coat and ushering us into his main reception room where we had first met him, he apologized profusely, explaining that on our last visit he had been ill. 'You are too young to be ill,' said Donald with

immense relief at meeting our best friend in Banja Luka again.

After the chill of the National Assembly and our sinister encounter with the Joker, the bishop's abundant servings of coffee and rakija lifted our spirits. Again he made us feel at home in his warm reception room, decorated lavishly with landscape paintings, icons, religious sculptures and flourishing houseplants. On our first visit we had left the residence drunk, so this time took note of his kindly manner of surreptitiously refilling our glasses while we were deep in discussion and not paying attention. The home-distilled rakija first ripped into our throats with a ferocity that took the breath away, then passed through the chest with an intense glow like swallowing the sun.

'I understand what you are saying,' Bishop Komarica responded to our presentation about the Coventry Consultation and the invitation. 'Thank you for not giving up on helping the people in Banja Luka who are unfortunately without basic human rights - innocent. I am happy that your project will bring about something; though we don't quite know yet what. But God will determine this. That also depends on our efforts. From my experience we leaders of religious communities, we have power, but it's not key power. Politicians have the power to decide, local and international representatives. In Banja Luka there will be a conference on returnees. I hope something will happen after this conference. It is one thing to give people human rights on paper - but something else to forgive and live in peace. How I see this issue is to resolve it with all the relevant people and institutions, international governments and financial supports so people can rebuild their homes and find work. That means aid must be given to build a proper country. Religious leaders can give input in their own communities. That means we have obligations as representatives of our religious communities.'

He supported the Bihac project and the work we would do for all the poor people there:

Muslims, Croats and also Serbs. He commented that people must first return to their homes. Muslims were returning in small numbers, but Croats not at all. This reminded us again of the ferocity of the hatred and mistrust between the Orthodox and Catholic communities and how particularly difficult it must be for Bishop Komarica in Banja Luka.

The bishop then politely thanked Roy Wilson for coming. ‘Politicians must make the decisions,’ he continued. ‘Local authorities never say: “come back” to returnees, or apologize.’ He had asked Dodik why not one penny had been used from all the money given by the international community for returnees, but had received no answer. The bishop then thanked Donald again on the point of embarrassing the local authorities into changing their policies about returnees and rebuilding. ‘I want to repeat: real values should come, not just words. Constructive people must come together on the same task. Once again, thanks for your efforts to remove this egoism and destruction and to build a more human future for this part of Europe, based on values and principles all people know.’

We talked about the Ferhadija Mosque and finding a Catholic church needing to be rebuilt. It could be a small project, a symbolic act.

‘Thanks for mentioning this,’ responded Bishop Komarica. ‘Last time I told you that we want to provide people with roofs over their heads, so they have somewhere to live. Churches should be rebuilt. But we can use temporary spaces. Young people are always welcome to help. You are right: churches should be built by people, like schools.’ He then fetched a video about the work of Caritas in his diocese and promised to attend the consultation in Coventry. ‘For that I will postpone other meetings.’

He then hurried off to fetch several bottles of rakija for us to take home and thanked us once more. ‘Destructive people leave behind destruction, but where are the constructive people? In

Banja Luka of course!’ He smiled and gestured towards us. ‘For your spirit and cooperation in God, thanks! Thanks be to God for sending you to Banja Luka!’

On the way out he spoke about the two hundred aid agencies who had come to Banja Luka since the war. During the traumatic post-war period in the country, they had come like ‘tourists’ for six months making beautiful speeches, but doing nothing for ordinary people.

We left relieved to still have the friendship of this important ally in Banja Luka and drove through the night to Sarajevo. Adnan broke all speed records. A super-charged jeep, belonging to the Swedish Embassy, dared to overtake us, but eventually a determined Adnan re-passed it and proudly swept us up the drive to the Hotel Grand before midnight.

RETURN TO SARAJEVO

CULTURE, SOULS AND BISCUITS

It takes time to appreciate the distinct cultures which flourish in Bosnia, each indigenous and yet reflecting different traditions. In the rest of Europe such various traditions exist in vacuums, with a pecking order in which the host nation dominates and the others find their niches and ghettos. In Bosnia these cultures meshed over the centuries, fed from each other and yet remained distinct. In Sarajevo the formal elegance of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, its monumental buildings and wide boulevards, stood cheek by jowl with the elegant but more modest scale of the Ottoman Empire, with its cluster of mosques, slender minarets, rounded domes, narrow streets, shops attached to craft studios, coffeehouses, squares and fountains.

The Turks came close to conquering Vienna several times in the centuries before Mozart composed *The Abduction from the Seraglio* for the court opera there. The Christian aristocratic

lovers and their spirited servants express a European Enlightenment ideal of the freedom of romantic love and equality of the sexes in contrast to the rules of sexual slavery followed by their Muslim captors. But it emerges that earlier in the war the young nobleman's father had driven the pasha from his homeland and taken everything away from him. Concepts of liberty, fraternity and equality were developing in the same society which oppressed other cultures being colonized across the world. However it is the pasha, the supposed enemy of freedom and justice, who becomes the civilizing influence on the opera's outcome. He teaches forgiveness. The pasha's overseer, disappointed at having his desire for punishment thwarted, interrupts the reconciliation with a frenzied outburst of hatred. At which point the rest of the cast comments quietly: *Nothing is as hateful as revenge: instead, to be humane, kind and to forgive selflessly, that is achieved only by great souls!* That the 'great soul' happens to be the enemy must have come as a revelation to the first Viennese audiences. Mozart gave moving expression to the noblest aims of the Enlightenment, but he did not compose any music for the pasha to voice his emotions in the way all the other characters are allowed. A recent Salzburg production expanded his role. After the lovers have sailed away to mutual happiness, Turkish instrumentalists enter the stage and while they play traditional Ottoman music the pasha begins to dance like a slowly whirling dervish, bringing the focus of the story to his own life and fate.

Cultures borrowed from each other. The Viennese took to Turkish-style music with its vivid colours and percussive rhythms, adopted the Turkish custom of drinking coffee and adapted a Turkish recipe for one of their most popular confections: a crescent-shaped biscuit consisting of butter, ground almonds and vanilla icing sugar.

Throughout what is known in European history as 'the dark ages', Islam in the Middle East preserved the wisdom and discoveries of the Roman, Greek and Egyptian civilizations after the decline of the Roman Empire. Christian crusaders were perceived as barbarian invaders.

Bosnian culture is a mesh of traditions in equal balance. This could still be witnessed in the ruins of the war: the rubble of Orthodox and Catholic churches lay next to mosques in town centres all over Bosnia, indicating that no one community took precedence over the others.

Europe considered the Muslims to be an alien presence in Bosnia, rather than indigenous. Therefore Christian Serbs and Croats could traditionally claim European loyalty. Their notions of national sovereignty mirrored those of western European countries. Europe supported Serb and Croat nationalist extremists in their pursuit of ethnic cleansing, though was horrified when confronted with evidence of concentration camps and mass graves. The peace-brokering encouraged the policy of ethnic divisions, so ensuring conflict for future generations.

Europe continues to deny a fundamental truth about Bosnia: that all the communities there are European - culturally and historically. This denial embitters the Muslim community, perceived as automatically linked to the more extreme forms of fundamentalist Islam to be found in the Middle East. Sulejman Tihic reminded us of Bosnian Islam's European influences.

THE FOUNTAIN IN THE WALL

SABIRA RECORDS THE DESTRUCTION OF THE FERHADIJA

It snowed on our last day in Sarajevo. The muezzin's morning call to prayer from the mosque close to the Hotel Grand drifted over the roofs of houses and silent streets, the echo sinking mysteriously into the whiteness. Previously the sun had shone brightly and it felt as though spring had come early to Bosnia. In this city, Orthodox and Catholic Church bells rang out together with the calls to prayer. The sounds rose from the valley up the slopes of the surrounding hills. Serb guns failed to destroy the city and turn it into another Banja Luka, with unwanted traditions razed to the ground to prepare for year zero and a rewriting of history. The

unbroken chain of villages and suburbs spread along the slopes overlooking Sarajevo, punctuated by massive graveyards. Thousands of new white gravestones gleamed in the winter sun.

In the middle of Sarajevo stood the shell of the historic library which had been specifically targeted by Serb guns on the hills. During that bombardment a different snow fell on the city. Ashes of priceless books scattered in a blizzard over the streets and people. Libraries of classic ancient texts including those of all religions, Jewish, Christian as well as Muslim, were among the main heritages of Islam. The destruction of this great library was a deliberate act of vandalism attempting to erase Islamic culture from the Balkans.

To forgive selflessly, that is achieved only by great souls.

Decorative graffiti daubed the walls of the government building in Sarajevo. The plain office block overlooked the River Miljacka, opposite the spot where the assassin of Archduke Franz Ferdinand tried to escape after the shooting, jumping into the river, wading across before being caught mid-stream.

Sabira Husedjinovic, the advisor to the Minister of Culture, waited for us on the staircase, a tiny figure. She leant over the banister and smiled at us warmly, as though greeting long awaited acquaintances, then took us up several flights of stairs to an office with a view over the hills around Sarajevo. The Minister of Culture, Dr Fahrudin Rizvanbegovic, smartly dressed and quietly spoken, greeted us politely. Dr Ceric had already informed them about our position regarding the rebuilding of the Ferhadija Mosque, but they knew nothing else about us. We sat at a round table and introduced ourselves.

The minister then showed us books and brochures with photographs and articles about destroyed Muslim buildings throughout Bosnia; among them pictures of his ruined home, a beautiful

residence by the river Bregava, burnt by Croats. Eighty per cent of all schools in Bosnia had been destroyed. All of them needed to be rebuilt. 'Now we are in a phase of rebuilding our heritage,' the minister told us. 'In this way we start initiatives including the rebuilding of the Ferhadija Mosque. Heritage is symbolic but also practical. These are sacred places. People recognize them as a reason for returning to their homes. In that sense, cultural heritage should have priority. The Ferhadija is one of these sacred objects. The mosque should be built as a facsimile - to bring confidence to returnees to Banja Luka. Fortunately we did not have total destruction in Banja Luka. However dynamiting heritage was a planned project - a kind of Nazi attempt to destroy a community.' The minister's face showed little emotion, as though he had long since exhausted his feelings of grief. Only a cold rage remained. Adnan later told us that the minister was suspected of having contacts with extremist Muslim groups. An aristocratic Muslim from a wealthy and famous family, he naturally would be allied to conservative forces. Contacts awarded him a high position in the government, but his depressed attitude indicated he would prefer to spend his time rebuilding his residence on the river Bregava. Politics were a necessary responsibility, but not his first choice.

'No doubt many non-Muslims wept', the minister continued with a trace of dry irony. 'We need to give back confidence to these as well.' Then his cold anger expressed itself: 'All destroyers should be tried and judged - each one individually. This is a big task. Another task is the rebuilding. We are glad you are interested in the Ferhadija Mosque. We need to give back to this mosque a symbolic meaning to gather people around the project. Let me give you a practical idea, one that is tangible. We make a small brick. I suggest that every one should buy one brick. On one side will be a picture of the mosque, on the other a thank you. Each person will give what he can for each brick. The return is gratitude from the citizens of Banja Luka. We hope to

have a thousand bricks, maybe even thousands. Every donor will be given one brick. This is also the message: we all build the Ferhadija. I am sure that the citizens of Banja Luka will also buy bricks because they are ashamed of what happened.’

We had heard that there might be a chance of funding from Saudi sources, which meant that a new mosque might be erected like so many across the Federation, Wahabi-style, though, not Ottoman. Such a convenient construction would provide Mufti Camdzic with a place to worship, but would have no connection to the symbolism, history and architectural quality of the old Ferhadija. Donald asked about the possibility of this happening and heard a surprising story of courage, subterfuge and heroism on the part of Sabira Husedjinovic, who looked like a timid librarian but turned out to be a woman of uncommon bravery.

First the minister assured us that the Ferhadija Mosque would be built exactly as it was: it came under the protection of the Ministry of Culture’s Institute for Cultural Heritage. This institute had existed for twelve years now in Banja Luka and only the institute would give permission for the rebuilding and would ensure that it complied with stringent demands for authenticity. These included architectural and building skills long forgotten, but part of the heritage of the Ottoman Empire. The minister then paid tribute to Dr Sabira Husedjinovic. She had worked for the institute for twenty-five years and wrote her doctorate on mosques in Banja Luka. She secretly took pictures of the destruction of all the mosques, hiding a camera in her coat. Despite the danger, she managed to remain undetected. The people dynamiting the mosques paid no attention to this frail looking little woman, not believing she could be so brave as to record their crimes. She concealed the film, distributing it among Serb friends and sympathizers, even persuading them to rescue bits of stone, rubble and decoration and hide them at home. These people were waiting for a time when it would be safe to bring these images and fragments

forward. Meanwhile she was arrested and brought in for questioning at the police station, every day for seven weeks. She gave statements but they could not find any evidence that she had taken photographs of the destruction. The Bosnian Serb nationalists had intended not only to remove all traces of the mosques, but also all evidence that they had even existed. When they had finished questioning her, only sparing her life in the hope of finding the films, she fled to Sarajevo and after the war became adviser on culture and heritage to the Ministry.

Sabira knew more about the Ferhadija than anyone else. She told us how the mosque had been damaged in an earthquake in 1975, and how UNESCO helped with repairs and provided new furnishings for the interior. She opened a book of photographs which showed trucks being loaded with the rubble, emptying it at the city junk heap. She followed the trucks on her bike. A series of colour photographs at the end of the book showed the interior of the mosque as it used to be, its exquisite design and colourful decorations. For the first time we could see what kind of architectural and artistic treasure the Ferhadija Mosque had once been. She had begged the man in charge of the destruction to leave the minaret. Several attempts were needed to bring it down. The purpose of the destruction then became clear to her: to eliminate even the memory of Muslim existence in the city. She watched the police, militia and their helpers stand around the destroyed mosque in a circle after they had brought the whole building down, including the minaret. They sang Bosnian Serb nationalist songs. We remembered our visit to Koraj and the similar nationalist songs blaring from the loudspeakers of a café within yards of a destroyed mosque, its minaret still lying across the graveyard.

Dr Sabira Husedjinovic spoke warmly of her Serb friends and supporters in Banja Luka. Without them she would probably not be alive and they had helped her gather stones from the ruins, hiding them in their homes. Many of these stones preserved the original decorations in the

mosque, which would help the architects and builders in the reconstruction. Her book concluded with a long chapter about traditional building methods. Many of these skills had been forgotten in the Balkans. The book described the interior, decorated in vivid colours, the cupola being a particularly fine feature, light flooding in from the surrounding windows and garlanded with arabesques, the mihrab facing Mecca painted in an intense deep ultramarine blue against a satin black flecked with gold.

How could anyone destroy such a beautiful artifact? A short time before our latest visit to Bosnia, Afghan Taliban extremists had triumphantly destroyed two ancient monumental Buddhas carved into a cliff face in the Baniya province. The religious bigotry of the Taliban matched the nationalist zeal of the Bosnian Serbs who dynamited the Ferhadija Mosque. The Taliban were also making a political gesture aimed at the hypocrisy of the West, who ignored the poverty of their country while expressing horror at their cultural vandalism. The Ferhadija Mosque, the heart and soul of the Muslim community in Banja Luka, represented the cultural influence of Islam in Bosnia. Destroying it, the nationalists intended to wither the soul of the community so it would leave and disappear. In so doing they turned Banja Luka into a featureless and nondescript town, spiritless and depressing.

Vandalism as a political statement has recurred over the centuries, from the sacking of Rome and other cities of ancient civilizations by invaders proving their superiority, through the destruction of monasteries and church art in England during the Reformation as a visible sign of independence from foreign Catholic interference, to annihilation by extremists today. Religious bigotry endorsed this vandalism. Imagination fell hostage to bigotry and the assertion of power.

I turned the pages of Dr Husedjinovic's book, stroking them as though wanting to make the images become stone again. She asked whether the board of the Soul of Europe might

pay for printing and distribution of her dissertation. We should put a good word in at the meeting the next day. The book would certainly provide an attractive selling point for raising funds towards the reconstruction, besides being a record of an important piece of architectural heritage, its beauty and its demolition. More than a dissertation, this document examined the people's capacity for both giving sublime expression to the imagination and also sanctioning its denial and destruction.

This went to the heart of our projects in Bosnia. Incorporating a centre for peace building as part of the reconstruction of the mosque would be a tangible sign of hope in the process of reconciliation; a symbolic gesture that would bring the traumatized communities together, not only those who were the victims, but perhaps even more significantly the group of people who now had to acknowledge their crimes.

The minister felt that a centre for reconciliation might not be a powerful enough symbol of healing. He described how the Ferhadija Mosque used to have a fountain in the wall surrounding the building, a traditional feature of old mosques. The Begova Mosque in Sarajevo had a large fountain in its forecourt, but water for drinking also flowed from a place on the outside of the wall surrounding the mosque so all people, not just worshippers, could refresh themselves. We should restore the fountain in the wall when rebuilding the Ferhadija. Ancient springs and wells became sacred places throughout the world, from small churches in the country to cathedrals like Chartres, the waters credited with healing properties. A fountain in the wall outside St James's Church, on Piccadilly, provided drinking water for passersby, whoever they were and wherever they came from. Fountains, the most communal of amenities, and central to city life, refreshed the body and spirit. Throughout the Islamic world architects appreciated the essential qualities of water in a dry hot climate. Water became a central feature of their urban planning, a gift to both

Muslim and non-Muslim. The notion of restoring the fountain in the wall surrounding the Ferhadija Mosque took on special significance because when the nationalists destroyed the mosque and left the space empty, they also blocked the water supply. Once the fountain flowed again the spirit would be seen to have returned to the town.

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In the twelfth century Persian poet Nizami's *Story of Good and Evil*, the penultimate chapter of *The Seven Stories of the Seven Princesses*, water is the catalyst of a disturbing tale about good and evil, eternal and irreconcilable parts of human nature. Two merchants cross a desert. Their water supply runs out. Observed by the good merchant, the evil one hides a private supply which he refuses to share. When the good merchant is about to die of thirst and begs for help in return for all his goods and wealth, the evil merchant demands only his eyes. In desperation the good merchant agrees. The evil merchant blinds and then robs him of all his goods, leaving his cheated and assaulted victim to die of thirst in the middle of the desert. The good merchant is rescued by Kurdish nomads in a variation on the Good Samaritan parable told by Jesus as a lesson in humanity which makes the telling and usually missed observation about our saviour being not of our community. The Kurds heal the merchant; he regains his sight and becomes a healer of other people. There is no resolution to the story, which ends ambiguously with one final confrontation between good and evil. By his nature the good merchant cannot harm the other; but since evil by its nature can only destroy, someone has to stop the perpetrator. The seed of this conflict came from the refusal to share water.

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By blocking the fountain, the destroyers of the Ferhadija Mosque intensified the process of cultural desecration, a religious and ethnic conflict which remained unresolved in Bosnia. The

thrust of Nizami's story is about healing, the only way to deal with irreconcilable issues.

Healing was now the main objective of our work. The fountain in the wall would become a significant part of this process: letting the water flow freely again, for all people, good and bad.

We then went to meet the Serbian Civic Society, representing Serbs living in Sarajevo, a city where they felt themselves to be an oppressed minority.

THE GENERALS AND THE JOKE ABOUT MUSLIMS MASSACRING THEMSELVES

A tired elderly man with worn teeth greeted us in a dowdy office. The entrance to the building had been bombed and still waited for repair.

The Serbian Civic Society had been formed by Serb nationals in Sarajevo and represented a movement for equality in Bosnia, remaining loyal to the Federation. Five tasks were agreed on at the first assembly in 1994 and formed the basis of the Constitution: stop war and establish peace; save Bosnian borders as internationally recognized; recognize the equality of all nationalities in all parts of the country; encourage the unconditional return of all returnees to homes they had lived in before 1991, and protect human civic rights. They also supported the need to put on trial war criminals from all sides of the conflict. Furthermore they worked for a re-integration of the whole of Bosnia, recognizing hostility to this request from the Bosnian Serbs in the Republika Srpska. In the Federation the Serbs were constitutionally recognized along with Bosniaks, as the Muslims were now called, and Croats, but in the Republika Srpska Bosniaks and Croats still waited for their constitutional rights. Legally the conflict ended four years ago, but a request needed to be made before the Constitutional Court in July 2000. The court made two decisions: that both entities work separately and therefore not unitedly on these constitutional changes, so

ensuring further segregation of communities.

The Serbian Civic Society aimed to ensure the return of all refugees from the Republika Srpska to their former homes, including Muslims and Croats; also for Serbs from the Federation. President Izetbegovic accepted their initiative, the sympathy of the mainly Muslim Presidium being important to the success of their aims. It had been a hard struggle because of 'the black hole' of Srebrenica where one of the worst massacres of Muslim men and boys took place in the war, and still no one took responsibility for that crime. Serbs made up the council of the Serbian Civic Society in Banja Luka but encouraged Muslims, who were their former neighbours to return, the problem being that Serb refugees now living in Banja Luka did not want to move back to Sarajevo and other places in the Federation where they used to live.

We discussed the Ferhadija Mosque and this 83-year-old Second World War veteran from Belgrade said he wept at its destruction. All Banja Luka Serbs felt the mosque to be part of their lives. The SDS Serb nationalist party had ordered it - as part of a policy of destroying all objects not Orthodox. 'It is an issue for the Hague,' he said. The Orthodox cathedral in Sarajevo had been hit in error by a Serb shell, but the mainly Muslim government paid for its repair.

Dust settled in drifts over the dingy office with its damaged chairs and a plastic table. The fatigue of the elderly man and the sense of an impossible task depressed us all. We thought of the politics of lies that had confronted us in Banja Luka and elsewhere in the Republika Srpska, such as the regularly repeated statements of supposed fact that: 'the Muslims destroyed their own mosques', that there had only ever been a tiny minority of Muslims living there - and this according to the mayor himself - and that the Muslims had massacred themselves in Sarajevo and wanted to leave Bosnia anyway.

A photograph taken during the war shows General Mladic meeting with General Rose, who led

the British contingent of the United Nations peacekeeping forces in Bosnia. General Rose cannot be judged to be complicit with Mladic from this photo, just as our own meetings with war criminals should not be construed in a similar manner. The image is nonetheless disturbing. The generals sit together and share a joke. Rose looks away smiling while Mladic and another Serb general laugh outright. They stare at General Rose in amused astonishment that this Englishman should tolerate their behaviour. General Rose's sideways and downward glance as he joins in the laughter illustrates Europe's then perception of the conflict as a local affair, irrelevant to everyone outside the Balkans. The glance seems to say: 'These Serbs are decent men; we can trust and do business with them.' The joke could have been the one about Muslims massacring themselves and burning their own mosques. The disturbing implication of this photo, although it does not implicate the general's support of Mladic, haunted every moment of my time in Bosnia.

Attitudes to Bosnia did not change. When Robin Cook, Britain's Foreign Secretary at the time, greeted the Croatian and Serb leaders of their respective countries, photos show him to be pleased. He rushes forward to shake their hands, beaming with delight. When Muslim leaders are shown greeting him, however, he looks unfriendly. Stiffly he endures the moment, regarding these people with suspicion. 'They are not one of us.'

GUESTS IN THEIR OWN COUNTRY

Melancholy resignation marked the faces and attitudes of all the Muslims we met in Bosnia, enduring the seemingly hopeless struggle to win the respect and acceptance in Europe. No wonder they reacted to us with suspicion, accustomed as they were to rejection. We had to win their trust, by degrees. Even liberal-minded friends in Europe treated them as guests not as family, with ineffable superiority keeping the alien communities at a distance, tolerated but not

loved. Talk to any young Asian or black person in the UK and you learn about the constant racism, bigotry and discrimination they endure, even from those who offer friendship while making it clear they alone own Europe and the rest are guests. Yet those ‘guests’ born in Europe also rightfully consider it their home. The Muslims in Bosnia have been there for centuries and can not comprehend the difficulty Europe has in accepting them.

Adnan led us up five long flights of stairs to the Red Cross offices and introduced us to his boss, Marinko Simunovic, the General Secretary, a handsome young man with a shock of hair already turned white. He treated Adnan as a respected colleague and chided us smilingly for taking him away from his journalistic studies and work with the Red Cross. Twenty thousand people still needed to be traced, probably all of them dead. The Red Cross helped everybody in need. Marinko Simunovic laughed and ducked the issue of our Banja Luka project. He didn’t see any way of helping us in a part of the country he avoided, so dark was its recent history. He took more interest in our project in Bihac and promised to help with contacts. We discussed the possibility of organizing a summer camp on the River Sana near Bihac for young people from all over Europe so they could meet young Muslims, Serbs and Croats and see how they were coming to terms with each other. Bosnia needed to ‘Europeanize’. A thousand young people attended a summer camp near Dubrovnik last year, aged between seventeen and twenty five, but there had been only two hundred beds. What happened? Five to a bed! We discussed a partnership between the Soul of Europe and the Red Cross, and made plans for a ten day summer camp.

Marinko Simunovic invited us to visit his hometown of Mostar.

Adnan told us how he knew every bend and stretch of the roads in Bosnia, having taken aid all over the country from the day the war ended, while still a teenager. Sometimes he would drive

from morning till midnight, delivering aid to a remote region and then return home to Sarajevo on the same day, however late the hour. The experience forged a self-reliant manner that could be abrasive, one totally unintimidated by arrogant officials. On our first visit to the American Ambassador in Sarajevo we had to pass through several security checks while Adnan parked the car. We expected him to be kept waiting outside, but he stormed his way through the checks angrily rejecting his assumed status as merely our driver, and arrived at the meeting indignant at having been treated with so little respect. The ambassador eyed Adnan with admiration and pointedly included him in the conversation. We were getting to know more about Adnan; and he about us, forging the kind of friendship that lasts a lifetime. On the long journeys across Bosnia his mobile phone rang regularly and after a brief interrogation from the other end he often smiled at us: 'My mother always worries about me!' Muslims working in Banja Luka or anywhere in the Republika Srpska were still in danger, but Adnan shrugged: 'I have friends all over Bosnia. This is my country. I am at home everywhere.' He considered us to be in greater danger and it was his duty to protect us. At Martin Brod, while we attended the baptism service where a Serb family stood like a small army inside the Orthodox church, Adnan waited outside and when I asked solicitously whether he felt uneasy, he snorted and said, 'Don't worry! Nothing will happen.' Then he added touchingly: 'If they threaten I will protect you!'

Occasionally, as with the mayor of Banja Luka in surly and hostile mood, Adnan looked understandably irritated and bored, and we had to work overtime to ease the atmosphere. But generally he behaved politely even with people who had only a few years earlier been trying to kill him. He shook them by the hand and introduced himself proudly as Adnan Jabucar, a recognizably Muslim name which translated as 'paradise apple'.

People respected and even confided in him as though welcoming a chance to build bridges.

Adnan's value to the Soul of Europe and our work in Bosnia was at its most potent in such encounters. His youth meant that he was neither a past enemy nor a victim. He represented the new generation and the hope for the country.

'EXTREMISTS ARE NEVER GOOD'

We mounted several flights of stairs to the top storey of Metropolitan Nikolaj's residence, but because they knew we did not come with money they ushered us into an unheated gloomy office instead of the main reception room. An old fashioned tiled stove dominated one corner, wardrobes for vestments lined two of the walls, while mirrored cupboards stood round the rest of the room. We sat in the dark round a table with Metropolitan Nikolaj and his chaplain. The Metropolitan, in a frayed black cassock, granted us a few moments of his time, between more important meetings, curious about our persistence and wondering how to extract funds from us. After desultory talk about the weather Donald embarked on his presentation outlining the purpose of the Coventry Consultation. We hoped to persuade the Metropolitan to come with the Cardinal and the Reis ul Ulema to Coventry: a show of unity between the chief religious leaders for the sake of the media in the UK and also to encourage the participants in their deliberations. Like Reis Ceric and Cardinal Pulic, Metropolitan Nikolaj told us that if the other leaders came then he would attend the consultation for a day or so. We could only secure an acceptance by assuring each of them that the others had agreed. When told that Bishop Jefrem had said he needed permission from the Metropolitan to come, Metropolitan Nikolaj burst into loud laughter and snorted contemptuously. The bishop could do what he liked, but it would be wise to inform Belgrade. We might need to talk with Patriarch Pavle about this, but bishops on the whole had freedom to travel and attend whatever meetings they pleased. This information depressed us as it

confirmed our suspicions that Bishop Jefrem used any excuse not to attend the consultation.

Suddenly Metropolitan Nikolaj suggested that Bishop Chrysostom from the diocese of Bihac, where the Orthodox Church had suffered, should come to Coventry instead of Bishop Jefrem. The Metropolitan wanted Bishop Jefrem's place taken by Bishop Chrysostom who could then air the grievances of the diocese of Bihac; mutual recriminations between beleaguered Muslims in Banja Luka and persecuted Orthodox communities in Bihac would deflect attention away from the main issue of the consultation, reconciliation in Banja Luka and rebuilding the Ferhadija Mosque.

We agreed that Bishop Chrysostom could accompany Bishop Jefrem, but not represent him. Given that Orthodoxy represented the dominant faith in the Republika Srpska now, Bishop Jefrem's presence became crucial. His absence could prompt awkward questions about why the Bishop of Banja Luka had not come himself, and lead to the assumption that he had no interest in cooperation and reconciliation.

Metropolitan Nikolaj now lost interest in the consultation and became defensive, shifting the conversation to problems of the Orthodox Church in the Federation. Having decided not to come to the consultation he made excuses about having to attend the finals of student examinations, ignoring the need for a strong Orthodox presence to help the success of the consultation.

The ensuing discussion became confusing, because the Metropolitan kept contradicting himself and seemed to be rejecting our proposals while at the same time wanting to be part of them.

'Please send the invitation right away,' said Metropolitan Nikolaj. There would be a meeting of the Inter-Religious Council the following Monday, the first in months and therefore important, and they could then discuss the invitation. 'What do you mean by: blessing the consultation?' he asked. 'Simply to wish the consultation well,' Donald replied and suggested that he write a few

words that could be read out at the beginning of the event. Donald hoped to flatter the Metropolitan by telling him we had come to him first before inviting Cardinal Pulic and Dr Ceric. The invitation would come from the Bishop of Coventry. Reassured, the Metropolitan said: 'I need to fly. I hope to find two days free.' Donald promised to take great care of Bishop Jefrem. He could come with a chaplain and there would be interpreters. The Orthodox hierarchy like to be flattered and given particular respect. Bishops are treated like royalty and attract the same adulation wherever they travel among the people as the Queen expects and receives on journeys throughout the United Kingdom. Like royalty, Orthodoxy, in its form of worship, adhered rigidly like royalty to tradition, providing spectacle, mystery, familiarity and stability. Donald asked about attending a liturgy, and the Metropolitan suggested the morning service in the cathedral on Sunday, although he would be in Visegrad, on the Serbian border, where a larger congregation awaited him. Few Orthodox people attended the liturgy in Sarajevo so the Metropolitan was considering moving his centre of administration to the Republika Srpska. This despite government attempts to persuade him to stay in the capital city, repairing the cathedral and his offices.

'Bishop Chrysostom will come instead of Bishop Jefrem,' he suddenly announced again, to our consternation.

He spoke animatedly about the ruined Orthodox churches in the villages around Bihac. It would be good if we could put roofs on these churches. We were back to the argument of equal guilt on all sides and the special suffering of the Serb people. Prepared for this, we spoke about the Serb village of Krnjeucia which now took a prominent part in our Bihac Project. 'We will have informal conversations about it,' said the Metropolitan distractedly, trying to think of some other larger benefit for the Orthodox Church he could secure from the consultation. 'You can teach us

in the UK how Orthodox, Catholicism and Islam can exist peacefully and equally together,' Donald said, trying to flatter him. Donald reminded him of our visit to Patriarch Pavle last year and the joint statement about reconciliation issued at the meeting we set up in Belgrade between the four religious leaders.

The Metropolitan immediately changed the subject: 'I know Archbishop Wood in Melbourne, in Ballarat,' he said apropos of nothing. The Metropolitan's chaplain, an elderly man with sharp watchful eyes, sat at the table with us, cracking nuts in his teeth and fiddling nervously with our paper, a translation of the consultation proposal, turning it round constantly on the table.

'Before the Second World War we had cooperation among all churches, with Anglicans too,' the Metropolitan said distractedly, worrying that he might be forgetting some important question for us that could benefit him. Donald quoted Patriarch Pavle as saying: 'We can still be friends even if we disagree.' For some reason this cheered the Metropolitan and he invited Donald to give a lecture at the Orthodox school in Foca.

'I am very grateful,' said Donald politely.

The Metropolitan seemed to read our minds and ended the meeting with a conciliatory observation: 'It is necessary for people to be close together. Extremists are never good.'

JEWS

Jakob Finci, the president of the Jewish community in Bosnia, sat alone in his office waiting for us. His face expressed a cynical resignation, different from the shock and melancholy we saw in all Muslim eyes. He looked at us coolly and with a trace of fatigue. Were we yet more spiritual tourists claiming his time? But he accepted it as his duty to talk to us and explain the situation as he saw it. He observed the conflict as a witness in a country shared by the other three faiths,

which had engaged in mutual warfare; he therefore possessed a special understanding of the still unresolved rivalries and suspicions. We met in a sparsely decorated room, chairs around a large table. On the walls hung sepia tinted pictures of rabbis and group photos taken before the Second World War, at a time when the Jewish community still thrived in Bosnia.

Jakob Finci spoke fluent English and gave us a brief history of the Jewish community in Bosnia. Of the fifteen thousand Jews still living in the country, twelve thousand were in Sarajevo. Eighty-five per cent of the Jewish community disappeared in the Second World War, probably killed in concentration camps. There were five synagogues in Sarajevo; one for worship, the others converted into museums, galleries and places for accommodating displaced people, mostly from Sarajevo. Small communities lived scattered throughout the rest of the country.

He explained the structure of the different religious communities. The Orthodox Church worked through Belgrade and every decision had to be passed by Patriarch Pavle. The bishops did not have independence, a fact which explained Bishop Jefrem's anxieties about coming to the consultation without permission from his superior. However some bishops were not quite so respectful. Those bishops like Basil in Bjelajina who blessed Serb weaponry before it unleashed death and destruction in Bosnia clearly did so without consulting their Patriarch who would never have sanctioned such sacrilege.

As for the Catholics, Cardinal Pulic represented the Pope not only in Bosnia but throughout the Balkans and as far afield as Latvia.

Unsmilingly going through his paces, Jakob Finci described an apparently harmonious relationship between members of the Inter-Religious Council. This contradicted our previous experience with Metropolitan Nikolaj, who expressed no interest in dialogue with other faiths.

The Inter-Religious Council produced a statement: *Truth and Justice towards Reconciliation after the War*, which represented a significant first step. ‘Imagine the year after the Second World War,’ Jakob Finci explained to us, weary of repeating the same observation day after day to queues of visitors: ‘Germany and England, Japan and America: it is unbelievable to imagine cooperation and partnership.’ This statement accompanied a glossary explaining religious terms, educating people about religion and what bound rather than divided them. The leaders took part in a radio program entitled *Encounter*, which explored the similarities between the Abrahamic faiths. They also celebrated the first Easter of the new millennium together. The group presented the idea of living together and took it to Geneva, Brussels and the USA to explain their objectives and how political leaders so often misappropriated religion. Some priests had even colluded with the politicians. The Statement declared: ‘Any crime in the name of religion must be condemned as a crime against religion.’

Jakob Finci told us about a Truth and Justice Commission in which over a hundred NGOs from all over the Balkans cooperated internationally. We had not heard of this commission; Metropolitan Nikolaj never mentioned it, nor would Cardinal Pulic or Dr Ceric. Evidently only the Jewish community felt guiltless after the war in which, to a greater or lesser extent all the religions had contributed to the destruction and suffering. The war had ended without declared winners or losers; or as Jakob Finci dryly put it: ‘They were all losers’. Now people were being taught that: ‘Neighbours are your enemies’; history re-written by the politicians in power who considered themselves to be the victors. He nevertheless advised us to keep the politicians on board with our consultation.

When we expanded on the European aspect of our work and Dr Ceric’s objectives to bring the Muslim community of Bosnia into Europe, Jakob Finci told us that a conference had been

arranged in Stockholm on Islamophobia. This had been a Jewish proposal to combat ignorance. European Muslims, particularly those in Bosnia who had integrated into European culture over many centuries, had the disadvantage of not being considered 'proper' Muslims by Eastern Islam. Balkan Muslims found themselves caught between hostility from East and West. Ottoman Islam had traditionally been in opposition to the two competing extremes of Islam, from Saudi Arabia and Iran, which saw them fighting for the souls of Muslims. Dr Cerić skillfully negotiated this conflict, knowing how to adapt to the western way of understanding Islam. But it could not be easy for him holding the balance between East and West.

Jakob Finci informed us about western political attitudes in Bosnia. For instance Jacques Klein, the United Nations representative, believed that sharing the blame evenly between the three main ethnic groups of Bosnia provided the only way forward. So for every mosque, a Catholic and an Orthodox church should also be restored; the resources pooled and distributed evenly. He had proposed a Catholic cathedral in Drventa (in the part of the Republika Srpska near Croatia where the hatred between Orthodox and Catholic communities burned fiercest), a mosque in Foca and an Orthodox seminary in Sarajevo. Too tired to express any opinion on this policy, Jakob Finci clearly felt as we did that such a proposal did scant justice to the Muslim community who had suffered far in excess of the other two groups. However he felt that at least the religions were agreed on the implementation of reconciliation policies, more than happens in Northern Ireland and many places of recent conflict in the world. He warned us not to accept excuses from the politicians in Banja Luka. We should emphasise the location of the consultation, Coventry having a good image in Europe.

Paul Oestreicher from the Centre of Reconciliation, respected and well known, had visited Bosnia during the war. Jakob Finci congratulated us and agreed to support our project, then

spoke with exhaustion about the ‘safari’ visitors who come to Bosnia from all over Europe. Painfully aware of being a nuisance we were relieved to hear he did not consider us to be part of this objectionable breed of self-righteous meddlers who notched up meetings with eminent leaders from all the religious communities, asking questions but never giving time for proper discussion, then leaving and, worst of all, not following up on any of the matters raised.

Finally we discussed the danger of the myths that fuel Islamophobia, the collusion between Serbs and the West on the issue of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ Muslims, i.e. those perceived as sympathetic to the West, the rest branded fundamentalist terrorists. These treacherous myths encouraged the belief that the ‘bad’ deserved genocide. Who decided on good or bad?

‘WHO PAYS, SAYS’

It is universally acknowledged that the person who controls the purse strings has the power. Everyone assumed in Bosnia that the High Representative was the ultimate authority: a figurehead who could compel people to follow agreed policies. However people paid little attention to his statements and edicts. Eventually economic imperatives would lead to changes. In the meantime the High Representative remained just that, a representative from the European Commission in Brussels. The commissioners themselves wielded the power. They paid his salary and made decisions on what and who to support.

The European Commissioner in Bosnia, Hans Jorg Kretschmer, a tall, slim, severe-looking German, made it clear that he ruled the roost. ‘Don’t go anywhere else for money, he told us. You will always be referred back to me. Don’t even bother going to Brussels. Chris Patten, Prodi, they have no authority on these matters. I do.’ Sixty years earlier another German would have been a familiar and frightening figure in Central and Eastern Europe, exercising power over

life and death. This German wore a fashionably casual but smart suit, spoke with a cultured charm, but still had the last word. His office at the top of a modern high rise building resembled an eagle's eerie overlooking Sarajevo, with secretaries keeping a respectful distance on lower floors. The aristocrat manner, born to rule, was in keeping with his unelected status. A gigantic detailed map of Bosnia dominated the spacious room, sparsely but stylishly furnished, with no personal pictures or photos to give the room character or to tell us anything about the man himself.

Donald altered the tone of his presentation to seize this powerful man's attention. From being subtly persuasive with the Serb politicians and religious leaders, he now had to draw on more aggressive tactics. 'I am a persistent person,' he warned loudly. Kretschmer's eyes widened. 'You look like it!' he countered, momentarily stunned at this unfamiliar opening gambit. 'I am old,' added Donald. 'You're in a hurry!' responded Kretschmer and smiled.

The ice now broken he proceeded to give us an indigestible amount of information and advice, and explained the funding situation. 'The European Commission in Sarajevo is always considered able to fund projects, which is not the case,' he began. 'There are not many funds. We are the only delegation in the world fully responsible for program implementation. We are autonomous. In other words you are at the right place! There might be a budget from Human Rights, but only for big projects. You should not think that nothing has happened since 1995. President Ivanic talks to Dr Ceric. The Republika Srpska is open to the world. Things have improved. Occasionally there are violent incidents, particularly in Croat areas, from the HDZ party in Bosnia. The main problem comes from illicit mafia-style corruption. The issue has to do with a conflict of conception between independent groups and the need to strengthen the state. There is no hostility but procedures are problematic.' Having tested us with this concentrated

analysis of the political and economic situation in Bosnia, he focused on the Ferhadija Mosque project: ‘There are no budget problems with the rebuilding. Muslims can get money from Saudi Arabia. As for permission to build, the problems are actually from the Muslims. The trouble is with the size. The Ministry of Planning withdrew permission and the process has to start again. Now is the time to get plans. Camdzic is a bitter man, but I am impressed by him. The Serb politicians in Banja Luka are agreed on this matter. At a press conference, lasting half an hour, Kalinic and Ivanic both made the same point that the problem should be solved. In a couple of weeks the issue will be settled. It will happen. As for your consultation in Coventry we have no funds for that. Go to the Human Rights budget, perhaps they will be interested, but generally they only fund big projects. Talk to UNESCO - they are developing funding and loans, now specifically for rebuilding the old bridge in Mostar. But mosques are a more sensitive issue than bridges. Perhaps the World Bank will be interested.’ In fact both UNESCO and the World Bank refused support for religious projects. Kretschmer continued, peppering his speech with baffling acronyms: ‘As for your Bihac project, we are doing all kinds of things with the World Bank focusing on regional economic agencies, such as Tuzla, economic development agencies, GTZ and local businesses. We support small and intermediary enterprises, small-scale funding for training and linking to EU companies etc. It has been successful and the Bihac area can now be considered. There is a possibility of credit facilities - also through the World Bank, loans through local banks such as the CFW Credit Bank. For instance there are twenty five million euros available for putting loan systems in place to help returnees. Credit loans can be got from partner banks.’ Continuing the information overload, punctilious Kretschmer listed the names of all banks giving credit to small companies in Sarajevo and Banja Luka, such as EBRV, establishing micro-enterprise banks giving credit. Also the World Bank supported local initiative

projects for small organizations to establish themselves with tiny loans, at about five hundred Deutschmarks. Quick Impact Facility might be most relevant for our project in Bihac. Care UK ran it. It helped and supported economic initiatives in areas where refugees were returning. This could be of help in villages like Krnjeucia. We should contact the QIF and Kretschmer gave us some literature about them. They were on course for this year, but only in Mostar and Brcko. Small-scale economic projects went to QIF. He mentioned the Prince of Wales Project for rebuilding Muslim architecture and the Dresden Trust in England. We should apply to them as well.

Having given all the advice he could, Kretschmer relaxed slightly and described one of his recent personal successes. He had helped fund a film festival for children. Two and a half thousand children came together, aged between six and fifteen. SFOR cooperated with Serbs and Croats in the Republika Srpska. Looking at the beaming faces of these children watching his films made a deep impression on him.

Kretschmer, self-assured and relishing his authority, exuded self righteous smugness. Germans not unlike him had once governed most of Europe for several years with efficiency and pride in refined cultural tastes that gave them a feeling of superiority. He could also afford himself the occasional luxury of sentimentality, looking at the happy faces of a crowd of children watching a film he had laid on for them. He spoke contemptuously of the High Representative. 'We put him there, we pay his wages; don't bother to ask him for help. He does what we tell him.'

We asked for an update on the International Crisis Group, an NGO which kept the world informed of events in the Balkans via the internet. 'They are out of date and no longer credible,' said Kretschmer, dismissive of this body of seasoned journalists and observers who refused to tow the European line, and reported factually and without political bias. According to him Tom

Miller, the American ambassador, obsessed too much about the Serb nationalist party, the SDS. Kretschmer asserted that Karadjic no longer pulled the strings, which did not chime with our recent experiences in Banja Luka, though we agreed that Cavic no longer fitted the traditional chetnik nationalist image. Kretschmer, knowing everything, told us that Kalinic, the Speaker of the Assembly in Banja Luka, might not be as close to Karadjic as during the war, when they were inseparable, an assurance which we already knew to be optimistic if not false. 'We don't mind the colour,' Kretschmer said, 'but they must perform properly. It is EU policy.' He added reluctantly: 'We hope that everybody will be brought to justice, but we still have to work with people.'

We were surprised that a German, conscious of history, seemed too ready to forgive and forget the second attempted genocide in Europe, but his unassailable authority gave him the right to any opinion, however distasteful. With another dismissive wave of the hand he said in conclusion: 'Go and see Mr Petritsch, he has a special interest in Banja Luka.' At which he stood up, shook our hands and ushered us out. Our hour with him was up.

THE CARDINAL

On our previous visit to the Catholics in Sarajevo we had met the Cardinal's second in command, Mato Zovkic, the Vicar General, and sat in an ante room at a small table with plastic flowers. This time a chaplain ushered us into the main reception room furnished with crimson drapes, thick carpets and magnificent large paintings on the walls. Portraits of former cardinals surrounded a canvas depicting the Sermon on the Mount. In the middle of a crowd of ordinary people in peasant clothes listening to Jesus a bishop stands in cope and mitre. The splendour of his attire jars with the poverty surrounding him. The bishop looks on with the look of one who

tolerates ridiculous notions about peacemakers being blessed but knows how the world really works.

The Cardinal, a man in his forties, welcomed us kindly, smiling the whole time but his eyes keeping a steady watch. Elbow resting on the chair arm, one hand supported his head; the other stroked a frayed robe flecked with stains. He did not seem to care about how he looked, even his cap was slightly askew, but we were not fooled by appearances. This clever and ambitious man survived by being a skilled operator with contacts everywhere. A rumour, probably scurrilous, doing the rounds said he might even be involved in drug trafficking. Nothing surprised us in Bosnia, where each side felt it useful to blacken the others' names, exaggerating or inventing crimes. We were told that Mato Zovkic had to attend a conference in Geneva and could not be present to translate. While Adnan tried to park the car in one of the narrow streets surrounding the Cardinal's residence, the chaplain, speaking only a little English, tried his best, so the meeting proceeded haltingly.

Donald invited the Cardinal to Coventry to bless the consultation along with the other leaders, who had so far agreed to come. The Cardinal smiled cunningly saying he had not heard of anything happening in Coventry, not having received any of the letters and e-mails we sent. 'I hope it will be possible to come,' he said in answer to Donald's observation that in the UK it would be important that the religious communities in Bosnia were seen to be working together. The Cardinal then continued in a soft voice: 'Dialogue between religions: there is no alternative. There must be new success in this new millennium. I'm fighting phobia all the time, but reciprocity is important. Islam must do for Christians what we are doing for them in Europe. We have connections world-wide and must build strategies internationally. Also in Bosnia there must be reciprocity. I am not against religious buildings being rebuilt. So far Arabs are building new

mosques, but the Muslims have not yet rebuilt one church.’ We bit our lips, deciding to be polite and not to provoke the Cardinal by reminding him that the Muslim authorities in Sarajevo had provided money for the repair of both the Orthodox and the Catholic cathedrals. Nor to remind him that the Muslims had been the victims in the last war, and were not equally guilty with the Croats and Serbs. Instead we asked whether the Cardinal knew of a Catholic church which could be rebuilt with the help of young people from all over Europe and from different faiths. The Cardinal deftly moved the argument away from this contentious issue. ‘We want to rebuild houses,’ he said. ‘When people return they can work and will build churches by themselves.’

Suddenly Mato Zovkic entered the room, flustered. So he wasn’t in Geneva after all. Donald now gave a thorough presentation of the Coventry Consultation. The Vicar General translated and the conversation proceeded smoothly. ‘In theory religions are free; in practice words are empty,’ said Zovkic, before suggesting that aid should come before churches and that young people should be involved in the project.

Donald tried to encourage the Cardinal by saying the consultation might be a good occasion for him to make contacts with Catholic bishops in England. At this point the conversation suddenly took a surprising turn. ‘His Eminence wishes to mention the issue of forgiveness,’ said Mato Zovkic. ‘You have mentioned tensions between Coventry and Dresden, but there are also tensions between Croats and the English which need attending to. It would be a worthy matter to discuss.’ Donald, unaware of what would follow, hurriedly offered to organize a meeting with Cardinal O’Connor and other Catholic bishops. ‘Our faith should encourage an atmosphere of understanding between nations, Croats and English,’ Mato Zovkic continued, a grim look on his face. ‘Since 1945 there have been questions between the countries. Let me give you some history. In 1945 partisans took power in Bosnia.’ (Partisans from all communities had helped the

Allies defeat the Germans for whom the fascist-friendly Croat army had been fighting.) ‘Many non-partisans fled to Austria. They waited for the English to rescue them; but the English sent them back to the partisans and most of them were killed – three thousand young men. The partisans did not keep their word to the English. The fact has been ignored ever since and the Croats are sore about this. Throughout the communist period there were no discussions about the issue. Nicholas Tolstoy has written about it.’ The Cardinal continued to smile slyly at us, wondering whether we would swallow this reading of history. We were taken aback by his impertinence, describing the fascist Croat soldiers as ‘non-partisan’, as though they had been innocent of any collaboration with the Nazis. Maybe the Cardinal considered them unwilling accomplices in the persecution of Jews and enemies of Germany. The political and social confusion caused by the aftermath of the Second World War meant that the English and the Allied Occupying Forces had their hands full, but in hindsight they should not have returned the non-partisan soldiers back home to Yugoslavia knowing they faced immediate execution. This fatal error of judgment on the part of the victorious allies still rankled among the people of Croatia and Slovenia, who refused to acknowledge their part in Nazi crimes. The allies seemed not to have cared what happened to these soldiers. Perhaps they considered that these prisoners of war were not entitled to their human rights, because, while they were fighting, they had denied these same rights to their enemies.

Because the Cardinal interpreted our inviting him to the Coventry Consultation, with all expenses paid, as us asking a favour of him, he felt entitled to ask one of us in return. It rankled, but Donald promised to follow it up saying: ‘We are grateful to rebuild bridges of understanding between Croats and the British.’ The Cardinal continued to smile slyly and said: ‘As believers we should have enough spiritual strength to recognize the wound and heal it.’ Shocked by his

hypocrisy and wilful misreading of history, we tried to broaden the argument and spoke about the need for all atrocities to be acknowledged from all sides. The Cardinal paid no attention to this and continued: ‘We would like Muslims here to influence other Muslims elsewhere in the world to be kinder to Christians.’ He seemed to have forgotten that Croats and Serbs had been far from kind to Muslims in a war which had only ended a few years ago. ‘It is a deep wound,’ the Cardinal repeated, adding: ‘The British always preferred Serbs because Croats were part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, traditional enemies.’ We avoided getting bogged down in historical arguments. No point in reminding him that Serbs were also part of the same Empire and that we had not always been traditional enemies, nor to remind him that Croats in the Second World War had sided with Germany and fought the Allies. We focused on the present and future, speaking about partnership and the need to rebuild destroyed parishes, to make healing links between all communities, including between Croats and the English, by creating links with Christian churches in the UK. The Cardinal smiled again, but his eyes glittered coldly. Ignoring Donald’s suggestion he said: ‘I’m glad we touched on this theme,’ at which point we were asked to leave. Mato Zovkic would continue to be our contact. As we left the room, the Cardinal, still obsessing about the death of the Croat soldiers, said to us: ‘The Serbs have always denied the facts of the Second World War injustices.’

Reconciliation seemed impossible. The Catholics burned with bitterness at crimes committed by their Orthodox enemies, while the Orthodox kept alive the memories of Catholic atrocities, neither taking responsibility for their actions but continuing the cycle of recrimination and revenge. Bishop Jefrem had given us the book which described the Croat Catholics as barbaric monsters massacring good Serb folk. The Cardinal needed to impress on us the vengeful cruelty of the Serbs on Croat soldiers who had only been doing their duty. Neither seemed interested in

reconciliation and peace.

MYTHS, FINGERS AND AGATHA CHRISTIE

Adnan, who missed the meeting, unable to park the car, later explained to us the complex history of Croat-Serb relations. For the last five centuries the Croats and Serbs wooed the Muslims to support them in their traditional and perpetual conflict, an endless cycle of vendettas, occurring on average once every fifty years, both sides describing the Muslims as ‘the flower of the Balkans’.

Now politics of choice determined the present situation: hatred and violence or peace and collaboration? Before further conflicts destroyed the region completely all sides needed urgently to examine and demolish the myths and traditions flourishing most virulently in the last two centuries when nationalism became a driving force of European politics. One of the most enduring of these traditions involved first-born Serb boys being taken to Turkey, the administrative and military centre of the Ottoman Empire, where they were educated and trained to be members of the elite fighting force. Ivo Andric, the Croat Nobel Prize-winning author from Travnik in Bosnia, vividly describes this exodus of children in the opening chapters of his book, *The Bridge on the Drina*. The scene of desperately grieving mothers following their sons tugs the heart-strings in the manner of a Stephen Spielberg film, and turned the book into a key text for Serb nationalists during the Bosnia war. Milosevic kept a copy by his bedside throughout his trial at The Hague. Igor, our translator in Belgrade, gave us more detail about this custom. The theft of the eldest boy caused such grief among Serb families that they traditionally resorted to cutting off one of the child’s fingers so he would be considered imperfect material for Muslim purposes. Ottoman Turks took the blame for this mutilation. Nevertheless a choice remained:

was it better to be resentful and hostile as servants or to be educated in a different, but comparatively refined culture, achieve high qualifications, become valued soldiers and return to high positions in society back in their home country? The former choice led to resentment and hatred festering and growing from one generation to the next, then to massacres and mass graves: ‘know your enemy’, whether Serb Muslim, or Croat. During our visit to Bosnia reports came of a Croatian nun schoolteacher deleting all references to Serb in a dictionary and forbidding mention of the word.

So Rizvanbegovic’s proposal to build a fountain in the wall of the reconstructed Ferhadija Mosque, Ferhad’s fountain, suggested a return to the once traditional love of the Bosnian Muslims, ‘the flower of the Balkans’. Again it became a matter of politics of choice. What choice did Banja Luka have? Education and traditions perpetuated myths and kept ethnic hatred alive. Roy Wilson told us of his experience learning Serbo-Croat while lodging with a Serb family. He endured the perpetual expression of racist views, but when he found out that his room had belonged to the grandmother, who now slept on the floor in the corridor, he left.

These traditions led to the anomaly of blaming atrocities on the ‘enemy’, the ‘victims’ being held responsible. It is easy to be deceived by the ruthless determination of the weak. Bosnia TV showed a film of Agatha Christie’s *Murder on the Nile* that night. Despite the comfortingly neat setting of a whodunit, topped and tailed by a smugly omniscient Inspector Poirot, among the exotic locations of pyramids and river, and a cast of clichéd grotesques, including racist stereotypes of stupid but respectful natives, Mia Farrow subtly fleshes out Agatha Christie’s conceit about the connection between murderous intent and physical weakness. Her deceptively frail appearance and stifled speech recall the disquietingly soft tones spoken by the gangsters we overheard in the hotels and restaurants of Banja Luka, their murmuring voices and liquid

consonants disguising the callous brutality they get brawny henchmen to carry out on their behalf.

MOSTAR

The road to Mostar descended from the lush plateau of central Bosnia with its green meadows and forested hills, rivers and valleys. The landscape became more rugged as the road curved round rocky slopes, past precipices and across ravines, like Hergé's illustrations to Tintin's adventures in Borduria, where a boy in plus-fours and his sailor companion are chased by black-whiskered villains in cars and planes, then are rescued by an overbearing opera diva who irritates everyone by perpetually trilling the Jewel Aria from Gounod's *Faust*.

The road penetrated a landscape of adventure and the imagination. High mountains rose out of the morning mist, beekeepers set out their stalls along the road and whole lambs roasted on their water-powered spits over gently glowing charcoal outside cafés and restaurants. We drove along the deep flowing River Neretva cascading towards the Adriatic. Because of a land mine found on the main road we took a detour before reaching Mostar: a cracked jewel of a town. Ruins littered the roadside, but mosques, churches and homes survived amid the debris. Scarcely any building remained undamaged, most dramatic of all being the famous old bridge which once crossed high above the deep gorge that cuts Mostar in half, one side Croat, the other Muslim. Two stumps on either side indicated where it once spanned the void, the sapphire waters of the Neretva foaming far below at the bottom of the ravine and disappearing into the distance between boulders and precipitous rock faces on either side. On one side perched churches, on the other, mosques, surrounded by houses and a multitude of cafés and restaurants. The dramatic beauty of the town takes the breath away, but when we met Marinko Simunovic, the General Secretary of the Red

Cross from Sarajevo, and told him his town would soon be one of the chief tourist attractions in south eastern Europe, he shrugged his shoulders dismissively, offended by the folly of our observation. For him the town was still at war. Memories of the fighting seared his mind, the terror of the siege, perpetual bombardment and the killing of his friends and family. Why should anyone wish to visit Mostar as a resort? A preposterous notion! We sat in a pizzeria where a crowd of women celebrated a birthday and we waited most of the afternoon to be served. The window looked out onto the other side of the town where a massive Catholic cathedral rose out of the ruins, its height a signal of defiance to the mosques standing opposite.

We returned home in the cool of evening, Adnan taking us up an idyllic narrow valley, with a mill stream gushing through meadows, to show us what used to be a restaurant nestled in the slope of the hill and surrounded by orchards.

Next day we attended the service at the Orthodox Cathedral in Sarajevo. Twelve elderly women and three young men stood, each one in isolation, shivering in the cold of the wide gloomy space, while a priest chanted interminably and an enthusiastic woman in a smart dark twin-set, blue silk scarf and brushed-back black hair led the small choir. She sang the responses in a soft, well trained voice, with the secure intonation of a professional. The other three members of the choir muttered along in the background. The old women kissed the icons and added their lit candles to the many flickering in ash trays. When the priest closed the doors of the sanctuary behind the iconostasis for the long process of consecrating the bread and wine, it seemed pointless to freeze any further. We moved round the corner to the Catholic Cathedral which was packed. Despite the numbers, the service proceeded in a lack lustre manner, the singing half-hearted and the readings barely audible. The congregation then listened to a band of young amateurs who were struggling through a sacred pop song, hitting wrong notes and adding

to the dreariness of the atmosphere. Some young members of the congregation smirked knowingly at the fiasco. However most seemed moved by the service, in particular a group of mature soldiers, in flak jackets, standing at the back, hands crossed over their hard rumps and staring thoughtfully up at the holy statues. The grim features of these soldiers indicated that they spent the rest of their time in harsher conditions. When the priest began to chant, we left, and wandered down the pedestrian walkway towards the mosques of the Ottoman quarter. The weather had turned bitterly cold. We sat for a while by the fountain and sipped from the streams of water gushing on all sides, the saying being that if you drink the water you will always return to Sarajevo. We looked at the hills surrounding the city and considered our conversations with the religious leaders, their churches hardly thriving. The leaders spoke as though they were in charge of large congregations, when in fact most people in Bosnia, as all over Europe, were not interested in religion.

SOME THOUGHTS ON GENOCIDE

Metropolitan Nikolaj was reported to have said: 'Following Mladic and Karadjic is following the difficult road of Christ.' Not even Hitler or any of his henchmen were awarded such a blessing. The Metropolitan spoke this at a time when the world knew of the atrocities being committed under orders by the two leaders. However, just as the world turned a blind eye to the well known facts of concentration camps in the Second World War, mainly due to an indifference to the fate of the Jews, so the fate of Bosnian Muslims became a matter of indifference to the rest of the western world, most of which shared the Islamophobia of the Serbs and Croats. The Serbs, like the Germans killing Jews in the Second World War, were openly proud of carrying out the sacred task of ridding Europe of Muslims for all of Europe. This

traditional belief accounted for the words of Metropolitan Nikolaj. Heroic journalists like Ed Vulliamy uncovered the horrors of Omarska and other concentration camps and forced the rest of the world to at least pay lip-service to the reality of atrocities. This is what genocide looked like. Politicians not wanting to interfere in a civil war, so giving tacit support to ethnic cleansers, preferred not to see the evidence. Even the evidence of genocide did not prevent NATO from rewarding the aggressors, bringing the war to an end and dividing the country so the Serbs held on to half of Bosnia. Towards the end of the conflict the Muslims began to gain the upper hand and were in the process of driving the Serbs back towards Belgrade. NATO could not allow this. The Serbs had to be protected from defeat. Suddenly the argument ran that the war had to be brought to an end at whatever cost. Despite lonely voices of protest from within the international community on behalf of Muslims, and reports from United Nations soldiers returning home from Bosnia traumatized by witnessing massacres and rapes, no one considered bringing the war to an end while the Muslims were suffering. In fact the calculated policy of western governments stopping delivery of arms to them prevented the Muslims from protecting themselves. What else should the Serbs have thought but that Western governments condoned the ethnic cleansing?

Since the war, humanitarian aid began to operate, but as soon as other crises occurred elsewhere in the world, it left for other 'more deserving' areas. After the demise of Milosevic the West rushed to Serbia where most of the aid now operated. The new leader, who openly shared the nationalist views of his predecessor, found that he was lavished with loving attention, sympathy and generosity. When we contacted the aid agencies we had met on our first visit to Bosnia half a year ago, they had already left Sarajevo for Belgrade. Now our contacts in Scandinavia mournfully told us that they no longer had money for projects in Bosnia, the assumption being, that Muslims should claim aid from their own kind, even though Bosnian Muslims were

considered heretical and unworthy by the more extreme forms of Islam in the Middle East.

Genocide has never worked. The means have not yet been found to ensure the efficient pursuit of this policy, despite enthusiasm and tacit international support. The Jews survived the Holocaust and prospered. Bosnian Muslims survived the overwhelming might of Serb aggression. This genocide should actually have succeeded, and it came as a shock to the western world that the Muslims in Bosnia survived. A European commissioner told Bishop Komarica bluntly: 'They were not meant to.' Like the political attempts to keep western countries ethnically pure, the streets of capital cities throughout Europe only proved how multi-ethnic, multi-racial and multicultural the western world has become and how the politics of genocide and ethnic sovereignty are doomed to fail.

Unless an efficient method of genocide is discovered, a way of eliminating all unwanted groups to ensure total extinction, there is no alternative but to learn to live with diversity.

Economic considerations are generally believed to be the driving force of politics. In fact bigotry, fear, hatred and suspicion motivate them as much as material needs, and are endemic the world over. And despite hypocritical words deploring atrocities, which after all make for such lively and gruesome reading in our daily press, genocide is now recognized as a policy. Only its failure is considered embarrassing, as well as its visibility, rousing feelings of outrage that punctuate our more pressing material concerns. Outrage is a luxury and naïvety is no longer permissible. There is now no alternative but to learn how to coexist. Apart from arms manufacturers, the world could find peace to be far more profitable - war is an expensive business, particularly its aftermath.

Genocide is a 'man thing'. Observing the men in the Balkans who had recently been involved in ethnic cleansing, we learned that they considered their task to be worthwhile, important, even

‘sacred’: ‘following the path of Christ’, and they carried out the destruction of churches and cultural monuments as well as the killing of people with all the seriousness and skill of mechanics repairing an engine. The blowing up of mosques, the removal of rubble, all required efficient teamwork: man’s work. Men carried out the task not, as generally reported, in a drunken stupor, but with careful preparation. The day before the dynamiting of the mosques in Banja Luka people were warned to keep their windows open so as to prevent glass shattering.

Genocide is ‘sacred’ work, and the ruthless pursuit of such a policy arouses awe and secret admiration. This explains the lack of appetite or interest in bringing the ‘criminals’ to justice. In Germany, after the Second World War, convicted Nazi criminals, responsible for the deaths of scores of people if not hundreds and thousands, received respect, enjoying more privileges in prison than vilified East German communists and Red Brigade urban terrorists, who could not even begin to compete with the scale of crimes committed by the former. Woody Allen once joked that he was not surprised by the Holocaust, only that it doesn’t happen more often.

MORE THAN A COLLECTION OF STONES

Dr Ceric responded solemnly to our presentation about the Coventry Consultation. The Reis then shook his head and expressed doubts. For a moment we feared the main guest would refuse to come. But the Reis wanted to broaden the perspective. ‘We are in Europe,’ he said quietly. ‘In France there is a memorial to Algerian veterans, twenty eight thousand soldiers died. It is modeled on the Vietnam Memorial in Washington. The Vietnam War between 1958 and 1976 - a severe war. The young men who survived are now old. Why is Europe in such a state of making wars - fascism, racism, Islamophobia? We have such a long way to go. Dayton, human rights - we had Dodik, he was received by everybody and yet delivered nothing. Ivanic is also going

around begging for money for the Orthodox Church. Have they no sense of moral duty? All we need is permission for the mosque. Why do we need to go to London to beg? It is so painful. How can we make people understand? We can not all be victims or all evil.’ The Reis was trying to understand the wider issues beyond Bosnia, in Europe and internationally. The Serbian President Kostunica’s unrepentant nationalism depressed him, as did the other Serb leaders being welcomed by the West with open arms when in fact there had been no change in attitudes. President Kostunica had followed Milosevic who had instigated the wars that broke up and laid waste to the region. There was hope among internationals that President Kostunica would be more conciliatory towards other now independent nations in the former Federation of Yugoslavia, but he turned out to be just as nationalistic as Slobodan Milosevic. ‘I had dinner with Ivanic the other day,’ Dr Ceric continued. ‘The Portuguese ambassador invited us. Ivanic repeats the same words: he cannot do anything because of his position. How can evil be solved by evil?’ This final remark perplexed us. The Reis expressed doubts: ‘We are all religious people,’ he said. ‘We have been taught moral values we all cherish and hold. But talking about evil we come to a difficult moral issue. The mosque represents a moral problem. The more you destroy the more power you have for bargaining. There are no counters for us to bargain with. There is no destroyed Orthodox church in Sarajevo to balance with the Ferhadija Mosque.’ In other words if the Muslims had destroyed as many churches as they had lost mosques they might be in a better bargaining position. The Reis reminded us of the unveiling on 27th January of a Holocaust memorial representing the moral stand taken by the UK on the issue of genocide. ‘Muslims are not angels,’ he continued, ‘but we are unprotected by anyone, without the offices of the Pope or Washington to defend us, with too much Ottoman history on our shoulders.’ His final words acknowledged the injustices seen to have been perpetrated under several centuries of

Turkish rule in the Balkans. ‘In this region we are however multi-ethnic. There has been too much fear. Now we must be friendly. The Muslim community will commit to rebuild all churches if Serbs commit to rebuilding mosques.’

The Reis’s ruminations alerted us to a problem that would dog us throughout our project to rebuild the Ferhadija Mosque. While it remained an empty space, the destroyed mosque was a stout stick with which to beat the Serbs, a potent reminder of a crime committed against all Bosnian Muslims. For all his positive words about the project, we could not ignore the unspoken thought that the mosque not being built gave the Reis a political advantage.

His last statement appeared to be a decision. The Reis then prepared us for the meeting of a committee formed to supervise the reconstruction of the Ferhadija Mosque. He had already appointed Donald to be vice-president along with Mufti Camdzic and presented us with an elegant document recording this appointment, marked with a seal in green and gold and signed with a flourish. However Donald had several questions about the nature of the committee and his responsibilities. The Reis gave unclear answers, as though distracted by deeper and wider issues. ‘In Banja Luka, the urban planning permission has been granted,’ he told us. ‘But can it really be so that if you commit one evil, then by committing another evil all sins are justified? They are complaining about the position of the mosque and insisting that a higher court must make a decision. The Ministry of Culture is not involved. Dayton had a mission to stop the war, but Croats and Serbs complained about having to live in a multicultural Bosnia. National states exist at the expense of other groups, so they divided Bosnia between them. It is a difficult issue. Karadjic inspired Dayton. The Republika Srpska is a Serb state in Bosnia which denounces the Federation and makes a mockery of it. Dayton affirmed ethnic cleansing as a reality and established a diaspora of Bosniak groups everywhere in Europe and the world. It is apparently

real-politik. Muslims are unimportant. The Islamic community has to deal with the mosque, of course, but the issue must be the concern of the whole Bosnian constitution. The Prime Minister of Bosnia has to talk with Prime Minister Ivanic for mutual recognition. Bosnia and Herzegovina is a state. The Ferhadija Mosque issue is only one part of a whole case and must be dealt with nationally.'

'Please accept the offer to be vice-president,' he said. 'The Soul of Europe is of benefit to Sarajevo today.' He then agreed with Donald that there should be a sub-committee to deal with fund raising and which would incorporate legal issues concerning the granting of permission to start building the mosque. 'Don't put Serbs in a bargaining position at Coventry, just announce that the mosque is being built,' the Reis said finally, as the members of the committee began to arrive.

The committee consisted of a group of middle-aged, grey-suited men, with Sabira Hudjenisovic being the only woman. They were architects and legal consultants and all sat in silent awe of the Reis. Mufti Camdzic arrived wearing a suit and a large black beret pulled at an angle over his left eye, in the manner of a French resistance fighter. Acknowledging us with a peremptory nod, he sat next to the Reis in a position of humility and took no part in the conversation. Stubborn political issues complicated legal issues, but the process should carry on as best it can.

Architectural matters were in the hands of experts.

The Reis asked his chief lawyer about the legal position. Timorously the man began to explain about the difficulty of getting permission on technical grounds, emphasizing the issue of human rights now being blocked by the Republika Srpska putting in a so-called 'anti-request', demanding documents and creating further obstacles. The Reis interrupted him impatiently and the man fell silent in fear and awe. 'We need a briefer explanation,' demanded the Reis angrily.

‘How can we cut through this mess? It’s very simple what we need, just do it! It’s a moral issue. The EU should recognize it is a matter of honour.’ His voice rose and he finally shouted: ‘We are always suffering because of the moral issue.’ The lawyer then apologized and left - he had to go to court. The rest of the group remained in a silent state of shock and depression.

The Reis calmed down and read out a list of five decisions that had been made at the last meeting with Mufti Camdzic and other members of the committee. There should be a special fund established for the reconstruction of the mosque. The Soul of Europe’s role would be functional and international, in collaboration with the committee. We had a mandate to go around the world and collect funds. An account had been opened. Ferhad Mulabegovic would be asked to give a plan on the lines of the Mostar bridge and form an architectural sub-committee. An appeal should be lodged against Banja Luka’s ‘anti-request’ and a letter sent to the High Representative to urge him to issue an order to rebuild the mosque, providing a specific date and to remove obstacles. Lastly the Reis recommended Donald as Vice-President of the sub committee.

The meeting continued with a discussion about the reconstruction of the mosque. The Reis had met the UNESCO representative, Colin Kaiser, who suggested gathering an international team responsible for the rebuilding of the mosque, along the lines of the bridge at Mostar. He offered to help find a team of experts. UNESCO would sign a protocol and take it to Paris. Local and international experts should work together. It might prove hard to reconstruct the building exactly as it used to be because traditional technology had been forgotten: an important issue revealed during problematic restoration of the building after an earthquake in 1975. We needed to collect, examine and clean stones from the rubbish dumps, find the original drawings, make tests, etc. We must prepare for this task.

Most important of all, the international community must do the right thing. The mosque had been destroyed and there should be no need to ask for permission to rebuild it. The High Representative must command. UNESCO must be pressured. ‘We expect much from you,’ said the Reis looking at us. ‘But that is the position of the weak. We want to cooperate. Issue the statement to rebuild the mosque. But the authorities never do anything in the proper way. How to make them understand they did wrong? Only Petritsch can do this. Why should extremists have the final say?’ Then the Reis narrowed his eyes and became belligerent. ‘We have extremists too,’ he muttered menacingly. ‘Some bad things can be useful. In Arabic it sounds better: sometimes things that are damaging can be useful. The Ferhadija Mosque project can be seen from two aspects, both evil. We talk about the evil of the destruction and encourage hatred of all Serbs because we know those individuals who were responsible. This is wrong. There are no good or bad nations – only good or bad people. The other evil is the individualization of crime. But the rebuilding of the Ferhadija Mosque can be seen as a good example, not in itself, but in the spirit of the Soul of Europe. If the Ferhadija Mosque can become an example for Europe to be aware of the authentic Muslim culture in Bosnia, and so encourage a rational integration of Islam into European society, then Europe doesn’t need to ask, but Muslims should be free to ask to be integrated into Europe. It is wrong to assume Muslims don’t want this. However there will always be two groups who hate each other: the isolationists and the assimilationists. The future of Muslims is with neither. Nor is it good for Europe. These are pointless groups. Some people believe in assimilation and others believe in isolationism. Both are wrong. The answer is for Europe to find ways of integrating Islam into Europe - equal, responsible and active in the creation of a new Europe.’ Finally the Reis turned to Donald and said, ‘If the Ferhadija Mosque is a project which is more than just a collection of stones, then your visit was worthwhile. We

support your idea about the youth of Europe learning about Islam. For Serbs in the future the building will represent the whole European community.'

Before we stood up to leave, Donald, feeling the burden of expectation weighing heavy on our shoulders, asked for tolerance, looking specifically at the hunched, tense figure of Mufti Camdzic hiding under his beret. 'Please be patient with us.' The Reis reared up at this point and spoke solemnly for the group saying: 'And please be patient with us too!' They all nodded. A smile broke across his grave features and we felt the burden lift.

We understood why Muslims felt so depressed and helpless. They were being made to beg to rebuild a mosque which the authorities, granting the permission with reluctance and without apologies, had themselves destroyed.

THE HIGH REPRESENTATIVE

Everyone we met in Bosnia spoke of Wolfgang Petritsch, the High Representative, in hushed tones, with the exception of two even more powerful people: Hans Jorg Kretschmer from the European Union offices in Sarajevo, considering himself to be the High Representative's paymaster, and the American ambassador who contemptuously dismissed the Austrian Wolfgang Petritsch as a third-rate politician from a second-rate country - someone afraid of his own shadow. For everyone else the High Representative could command anything in Bosnia: just say the word and it would be done. But from what we saw, no one took much notice of him.

We expected a stiff and formal Austrian diplomat and waited for our meeting outside his offices in the company of two young Americans: Kim Gendin, a political advisor, and Christopher Harland, a Human Rights consultant attached to the Office. In contrast to the formality and protocol we experienced with everyone else we met, the atmosphere at the Office of the High

Representative was relaxed and we were treated politely as people deserving respect. Both of them had contacts and knew the area well. Christopher Harland gave us an optimistic account of permission being granted for the Ferhadija Mosque. There would be no problem from the authorities and agreement would be granted within a fortnight. The obstacles concerning the size and exact position of the mosque could be easily overcome, with minimum negotiation. It had nothing to do with the antipathy of the authorities in Banja Luka. They needed to widen the road there, but the size of the mosque would not be affected. He blamed the Muslims for not providing detailed drawings of the new mosque, which legally they had to do within a fixed time from the granting of the urban planning permission. But the OHR would help them steer the drawings past the authorities, and with the help of UNESCO, even the issue of traditional technology and use of materials could be solved. The optimism and relaxed manner of Christopher Harland made a change from the gloom and despair of the committee at the Reis ul Ulema's residence.

Wolfgang Petritsch arrived breathless from another meeting. A trim figure with grey hair neatly groomed, he apologized for keeping us waiting. We sat round a table in his office that overlooked the city and offered panoramic views of the surrounding hills. Above his desk in the far corner hung three paintings by a Serb artist in the style of Mark Rothko but lacking the sumptuous luxury of colour and warm sensuality of the Jewish American painter. Grey and hard edged, the clenched fist of these three paintings provided a menacing counterpoint to the quiet cultured tones of the High Representative.

'Don't shoot the messenger,' Donald began before reporting on the impatience of the Muslims concerning the mosque and outlining the purpose of the consultation. Petritsch did not want to argue. Instead he spoke thoughtfully about the wider issues, much in accord with the Reis ul

Ulema. ‘I visited Banja Luka first one-and-a-half years ago and announced the Ferhadija Mosque project. The local authorities had obligations. But we cannot impose our orders. It is after all a common heritage of all the people in Bosnia, including Serbs and Croats. The mosque has a high symbolic value. We have to inculcate a degree of ownership even on the part of the Serbs. The project may be driven emotionally by the Muslims, but we have to cajole and motivate the rest. The local authorities need to take charge of this.’ He then recalled events building up to the Second World War, specifically mentioning the ‘Kristallnacht’ image of the Ferhadija Mosque being destroyed, like the synagogues in Nazi Germany which were also all burnt on a single night in 1936.

‘We have to move slowly,’ Petritsch continued. ‘We have to raise the awareness of all the people, in particular the Serbs. It is their common heritage. We have to broaden the idea of the Ferhadija Mosque. Abstract ideas are important.’

Unexpectedly this turned out to be the easiest of all our meetings. It proceeded smoothly; we agreed on all the basic principals and also on the wider issues which were the purpose of the Coventry Consultation. Unexpectedly, Petritsch became the first of all the people we met who understood the significance of this event. Of course he agreed to come, and asserted that the process of organizing the reconstruction and getting permits must continue and Europeans should also be involved in raising the money. Impressed by our vision he noted approvingly the mixture of religious and political leaders taking part in the consultation. We needed to know that the deeper roots of nationalism were part of a religious war. Therefore politicians and religious leaders should work together. Petritsch knew his history and reminded us of the fact that the pasha who ordered the original building of the Ferhadija Mosque had an Orthodox cleric brother whom he involved in the project. Historically the ethnic groups were collaborative and

intermixed. That may have explained the peculiar viciousness of the recent conflict: ‘family feuds are the worst.’ The inter-religious council must also accept responsibility for being abused by the politicians. Metropolitan Nikolaj talked of a ‘holy war’ and Cardinal Pulic still smarted from the injustices done to Croat fascists fifty five years ago. Reis Mustafa Cerić was still in a state of shock about recent events. Only the Jewish Jakob Finci expressed a measured non-partisan interpretation of Balkan history. ‘Our common European heritage will provide a better understanding of Islam which has been part of European culture for centuries,’ said the High Representative. This was not an officious politician but a man of culture and humanity.

Petritsch gave me the name of Vito Vuković, a Bosnian Serb now living in Vienna, and suggested organizing an exhibition of his work in Bosnia as part of our project. The artist did not reply to my offer. It could be he was now a successful artist and had no interest. Or perhaps this Bosnian Serb had no wish to be involved in anything to do with Islam. The Serbs I remembered meeting in Vienna were particularly defensive and nationalistic. The High Representative, wanting to support a refugee artist, had probably not seen the clenched fist in the paintings.

We returned to the Reis who hurried into the room like a student waiting for the results of his exam. ‘So have you any good news to tell me?’ he asked. We were astonished that he needed us to find this out for him. Relations between all the leaders were fraught with suspicion and inflated expectations. He seemed genuinely surprised and pleased to hear that all obstacles would be removed to granting urban planning permission for the Ferhadija Mosque within the next two weeks.

The rest of our meeting with him concerned the Soul of Europe’s position in the committee. The Reis announced five points on which we should agree. But first he gave us another history lesson about the reasons behind the problems between Islam and Orthodoxy in the Balkans.

Orthodox Serbs laid too much stress on nationalism, basing their dogma on a hatred of the Turks who had colonized them for so many centuries, despite intermarriage and mutual conversions leading to cooperation with the Ottomans who had no intention of subjugating the Serbs. There being no international community in those early days, the Ottomans found it in their political and security interests to protect the rights of minorities and so keep the peace throughout the empire. In this new millennium, should we still be separated for reasons of race and religion? The Reis quoted Hobbes' theory of 'fear' - fear leads people to cooperate. That offered a rational explanation and we now needed a revolution of the spirit, not of reason. The Reis agreed with the High Representative that the Ferhadija Mosque project should be owned by the Serbs as well as the Muslims, and by all Europeans. That should formulate our vision and task.

Now we came to our part in the project. Firstly, we should make the reconstruction a European project. Secondly we must work with UNESCO as much as possible. Thirdly the mosque should become a place of reconciliation of all religions. Fourthly the Soul of Europe would work for the Ferhadija Mosque with the objective of explaining Islam to Europe. Fifthly the Soul of Europe would organize a conference on the future relationships of different religions, including the Orthodox.

The Ferhadija Mosque project should not be limited to Banja Luka, but broadened to all the Balkans and to Europe. And we should do this as soon as possible.

Before we left, the Reis introduced us to his Chief of Protocol. cool and polite, when we arrived he insisted we sit in certain chairs. Ifet Mustafic would be our regular contact when we could not reach the Reis himself. 'He is not married,' said the Reis laughing, 'So he has the time.' Ifet Mustafic looked even sterner at that point and remained inscrutable.

‘THE POOR SERBS OF SREBRENICA’

We had seen Jacques Klein, the United Nations Representative in Bosnia, on a news broadcast, so prepared ourselves for a bruising encounter with this ebullient and pugnacious American. Jacques Klein’s assistant apologized that he would be late and we sat for half an hour by her desk, watching the three other secretaries, one reading, one phoning and one staring at the screen of her computer which had broken down. She tapped hopefully at the keyboard. Two workmen entered and set about repairing the radiators. Klein’s imminent arrival made the assistant and secretaries suddenly tense with apprehension. The workmen knelt down in front of the radiators. A man entered, officiously barking over a phone: ‘...give him ninety days to vacate the property...’

Eventually, after a commotion in the corridor, the burly figure of Jacques Klein lumbered through the office, cigar clenched in his lips. Followed by a servile assistant, the Representative, without a greeting, made an imperious gesture that we follow him into his office: a large room, cluttered with furniture, armchairs and packed bookshelves.

He sank heavily into a spacious armchair, silently signalling for us to be seated. ‘How much money do you have?’ were his first words, shouted at us in a tone meant to intimidate. Prepared for this aggressive start Donald spoke back in equally robust fashion: ‘Not a penny, that’s why we’re here!’ Impressed, Jacques Klein looked slightly taken aback by this blunt response, and proceeded to deliver a lecture on what we should be doing. He began by criticising the Reis. Dr Cerić used people; we should be cautious with him. ‘He’s sly as a fox. He will use you. He has his own political agenda.’ We had heard this before, and were not so naïve to think all the people we met were not using us for their own ends.

Jacques Klein then launched into his own agenda. ‘We need a theological seminary for the

Orthodox, we need a Jewish cemetery, factories and we don't need churches that divide people.'

He then spoke warmly of the Serb Prime Minister of the Republika Srpska, 'a decent fellow'.

'Extremists are very busy in Banja Luka!' It turned out he was referring to Muslim, not Bosnian Serb, extremists. This surprised us, as we had already met several Serb extremists but among the Muslims only Mufti Camdzic and his timid assistant fitted this description. 'There is Muslim opposition to the building of the Orthodox cathedral,' he declared, then continued to denigrate the Muslims, exclaiming: 'They have no management or organizational skills!' adding contemptuously: 'In Morocco we had to build a school to train artisans.'

Out of the blue he cracked a joke about God, 'When you talk to God it is called prayer. When God talks to you it is called schizophrenia.'

After which he described Cardinal Pulic as a naïv Croat peasant, which contradicted our impression of this politically savvy church leader. Jacques Klein dismissed Bishop Jefrem as 'just an academic', whereas Jakob Finci and Dr Ceric were 'very well educated'.

'Concentrate on the ecumenical aspect of the project,' he continued. 'Help finish the Orthodox Cathedral in Banja Luka, then you will get the support of the Serbs for rebuilding the Ferhadija Mosque.' We knew of his plan to help each ethnic group equally by supporting a joint project in which an Orthodox and a Catholic church would be rebuilt as well as a mosque, a project we also planned before we first came to Bosnia. However, rebuilding churches and mosques did not attend to the issues of guilt and reparation. It surprised us that Jacques Klein, who should know the situation even better than we did, still clung to this mistaken thinking. But no one dared argue or discuss with Jacques Klein.

He threw more information at us in no particular order. Srebrenica remained an ulcer. Not however, according to Jacques Klein, because of the massacre of Muslims. He felt sympathy

only for the Serb refugees neglected by the international community and living in poverty. He seemed to have forgotten that the Serbs had massacred the Muslims, several thousand men and boys, before moving in to the town and taking it over, we could not begin to argue with him, grateful for Adnan's absence, due to a family crisis.

Jacques Klein then proceeded to tell us we needed money, artisans and blueprints for the Ferhadija Mosque. The United Nations had given one-and-half million pounds towards infrastructure in Bosnia, but it was dependent on Muslim and Serb cooperation. They intended to open a bank account for the four religions and Jacques Klein had 'hit on' Libyans and Iranians. He only stayed in Bosnia because of the Turks who could help establish a bridge between the Arab world and Europe.

He then gave us a new slant on our understanding of recent history. Until 1972 in the former Yugoslavia you were either a Croat Muslim or a Serb Muslim. Tito then decreed that Muslims could be a group on their own. This had the effect of depriving them of nationality. Now the divisions in the country between the different languages, all basically the same with subtle variations, were actually legitimizing the separateness of the three main groups.

He then urged us to be fair to the Serbs and to gain their support by rebuilding the Orthodox cathedral in Banja Luka even though the cathedral had not been destroyed by the Muslims. The Ferhadija Mosque, however, had been deliberately razed to the ground by the Serbs. How could the Muslims possibly accept the fairness of footing the bill for the cathedral in return for rebuilding the mosque? Jacques Klein exhibited the usual western arrogance towards the Muslim community - they were not 'one of us'. He ended the meeting abruptly by telling us he had no money for our project and showed us the door.

BURNING THE CANDLE AT BOTH ENDS

Before leaving Sarajevo for the long drive through the night to Zagreb we paid a quick call on the British Ambassador, Graham Hand. Recovering from flu, he startled us by loudly hauling an assistant over the coals in his office while we waited in the ante-room. We expected similar treatment but he greeted us with smiles and encouragement. After the anti-Muslim and pro-Serb sentiments of Jacques Klein we heard yet more surprising judgments about some of the people we had visited. Graham Hand described Sulejman Tihic, the Muslim Deputy Speaker of the Banja Luka Assembly, who had struck us as reasonable and sympathetic, especially given his vulnerable position among the Bosnian Serbs in authority around him, as a ‘snake in the grass’, associating with bad people, willing to deal with gangsters. All representatives of the international community we met, with the striking exception of Tom Miller, the American ambassador, badmouthed the Muslims and gave the benefit of doubt if not approval to Bosnian Serb leaders who were known to be former ethnic cleansers and warmongers, let alone mafia criminals. Graham Hand had only good words for Mayor Davidovic, ‘a key man and someone we could trust’. This despite the mayor’s radical rewriting of history. The ambassador went on to describe Vice-President Cavic, the ‘lap-top chetnik’, as being the brains behind the party and not having a bad past.

Depressed at this blanket condemnation of the Muslim leaders and general appreciation of the Serb leaders, we changed the subject and brought up the issue of the Bitburg Massacre for which Cardinal Pulic had asked an apology from the British Government. Graham Hand suddenly lost his cool, his eyes blazing as they had when berating the assistant. ‘He can get stuffed!’ he spluttered with indignation. ‘He’s a Croat peasant made good. It may be a matter for historical reflection and even a matter for regret, but it can have no reference to the problems of modern

day Bosnia.’

Graham Hand depressed us by suggesting we follow Jacques Klein’s advice about sharing rebuilding projects equally between the Orthodox and the Muslims. However he supported all our objectives and approved the idea of twinning Birmingham with Banja Luka. He encouraged us to apply to the Quick Impact Fund recommended by Hans Jorg Kretschmer, and to be tougher on US Aid which had told us they were not interested in helping the Bihac Project. The new government in Bihac, the Social Democrats, showed interest in getting direct foreign investment. Small projects could work there, that being the basic culture of this region of Europe. He concluded by reflecting on the country we too were coming to know, one in which war had destroyed the infrastructure, and in which a highly cultured society went to waste. He gave us several more names to contact in the Foreign Office, in particular the Eastern Adriatic Department, and the British Association for Central and Eastern Europe, where Sir John Birch would be encouraging of our projects. The ambassador looked forward to giving a reception for Ros Tennyson, and again congratulated us warmly on our work before showing us out, aware of the long night of travelling ahead of us.

We had asked for advice on what present to give Roy Wilson for all his work and care for us in Banja Luka. As we left the Embassy the secretary ran out after us and shouted: ‘Opera! Anything with Maria Callas!’ I could now picture the neatly dressed and immaculately groomed British Representative in the Republika Srpska retiring to his flat after a depressing day’s work in the office, dealing diplomatically with local politicians, a number of them war criminals, crooks and gangsters, then answering emails, filing documents and following the shifts of political emphases in the Assembly. Perhaps he would remove his highly polished shoes before pouring a stiff drink, sitting quietly and listening to the burnished tones and

unstinting interpretations by this celebrated opera singer of whom someone said: ‘she burned the candle at both ends: look how brightly it burns!’ Yes, the room would fill with the stoic fatalism, manipulative wit, lyrical innocence, candour, desperate determination, noble humanity and broken ambition of the wide array of roles she made her own, with bronzed tone and a variety of colours including alarming, curdled high screams and sepulchral howls, the music would register extremes of human emotion. Roy Wilson had been appointed to work in one of the darkest areas of Europe, one which had witnessed a repetition of the worst atrocities of the twentieth century in its final decade. The attempted genocide, the destruction of homes, towns and villages, the inability to acknowledge responsibility and continuing resentment and hatred distilled the worst aspects of the past century. It is sometimes painful to listen to Callas, but that is often the nature of truth. When she sings of tenderness, love and forgiveness, her voice glows like a gentle fire, melting the cynical heart to release emotions.

SPRING IN BOSNIA

THROWING STONES

The monumental government offices that made Downing Street look provincial, and the ubiquity of the Republika Srpska flags fluttering on every street and municipal building in Banja Luka sent a clear message that the Republika Srpska considered itself a country in its own right. The ubiquitous cyrillic script emphasised links to Serbia rather than to the rest of Bosnia. This message deliberately obscured the fact that the Republika Srpska had always been part of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Any attempts to secede and join with Serbia would result in another war. The rest of Bosnia would resist such a union. Kustunica, the present president of Serbia, had already suggested that the Republika Srpska should be part of Serbia, and this constituted the long-term

political objective of the entity's nationalist leaders who spent their time commuting between Belgrade and Banja Luka, turning their back on Sarajevo. Such an outcome sanctioned ethnic cleansing. Catholics now gravitated to Croatia and the Muslims to the Federation of Bosnia. 'We can trade, carry on diplomatic relations in a peaceful way,' said the Bosnian Serbs, adding menacingly: 'But we have to live apart.' The world went along with the Serb myth that there had been strife and hatred between the communities throughout history, and described the conflict as a civil war. It seemed a reasonable solution to separate the communities and give each their own territory.

Two factors militated against the smooth running of this separatist policy, and both were related. The Dayton Accord divided Bosnia on ethnic grounds, then, perversely, simultaneously ordered that refugees should return to their homes. Ethnic cleansing had not been carried out with totality, so there were enough Muslims and Catholics wanting to return home to now predominantly Serb areas, to confuse the issue of separatism. Serbs resisted the policy of encouraging returnees, saying there were not enough houses and jobs. Why should Serbs be forced to return unwillingly to their own homes in parts of Bosnia where Muslims and Croat Catholics dominated? In fact Serbs did return to home villages and towns in the Federation, in Krnjeucia, for instance, and we supported business ventures which encouraged these communities. The other factor concerned the theory of centuries of strife and hatred. This contradicted historical facts. While the rest of Europe was engaged in bitter warfare on and off for the past thousand years, culminating in the carnage and destruction of two world wars in the first half of the last century, the various communities and nationalities in the Balkans under five centuries of Ottoman domination managed to coexist in relative peace, despite spats and a simmering resentment against the Ottoman yoke. The lay-out of Bosnian towns indicated the

mutual respect of the different communities: Orthodox and Catholic churches and a mosque, stood only paces away from each other in the centre of each town. No-where in the rest of Europe, with its history of ghettoization, could one find any similar visual evidence of the mutual respect and tolerance between different communities and religions.

This introduction might help put in perspective the violent protest on May 7 in Banja Luka, two weeks before we paid another visit there to help prepare for the Coventry Consultation scheduled for September 2001. As soon as urban planning permission had been granted for the rebuilding of the Ferhadija Mosque, Mufti Camdzic without consultation with the Banja Luka authorities, organized a ceremony to lay the foundation stone. He bussed in several coach-loads of Muslims, together with representatives of the international community, ambassadors, politicians and religious leaders, for the occasion. Only the Orthodox leaders refused to attend, claiming to have appointments elsewhere. Bosnian Serb nationalists in Banja Luka organized a protest and distributed fliers warning the citizens of the town that thousands of Muslims from all over Europe were going to take the town over. The nationalist politicians represented the protest as a spontaneous reaction of fear to a perceived invasion, but the evidence of piles of stones covering the ground after the event, hurled at the guests, and the slaughter of a pig, the head placed offensively on the foundation stone, indicated that this had been carefully planned. For hours before the ceremony, people gathered in the small bars around the site of the former Ferhadija Mosque, and enjoyed free drinks. The tension exploded into a raucous protest. Children were paid to throw stones, delivered by truck, and one of these killed an elderly Muslim man.

Attitudes hardening on all sides made the Coventry Consultation timely. None of the Serb politicians questioned the justice of rebuilding the destroyed mosque, but they saw the ceremony as a provocation to the extreme nationalist views of the people of Banja Luka which in turn

confirmed feelings of victimization by the Muslim community. On internet chat rooms people calling themselves ‘anti-Musulman’ ranted offensively. The international community also accused the Muslims of unnecessary provocation. This hardened attitudes among nationalist political leaders, who now stood on their dignity, defensive and outraged at any criticism. They repeated traditional myths of Serb victimization at the hands of Muslims and Croats. Dr Ceric narrowly escaped with his life at the ceremony. He would certainly have been stoned to death by the crowd had his driver not seen the danger and taken him straight back to Sarajevo. The Reis announced he had been ‘reborn’ because on that day he realized the mortal danger facing Muslims in the country, and the inability and unwillingness of the international community to help them. We realized that despite all the conferences, meetings between political and religious leaders, papers, articles and statements delivered through megaphones ever since the war, no one actually listened to what the other sides said. The Serbs shouldered the main guilt for the war and in order to cope with the burden of taking responsibility for so much destruction and killing, pointed the finger at the other communities, claiming they too had committed carnage. Catholic Croats in Western Bosnia, and also Muslims, took responsibility for a number of atrocities - we ourselves saw the trail of destroyed Serb villages in the countryside around Bihac. To stop the cycle of violent revenge people urgently needed a truce, and to start listening to each other. Though initially successful, the crude protest in Banja Luka became a futile gesture. The Republika Srpska could not survive without international support, and rebuilding the mosque and allowing the return of refugees were mandatory conditions for this happening. The violence of the protest, with children throwing stones at elderly Muslim women, the humiliation of ambassadors and dignitaries, the desecration of the foundation stone with a pig’s head, had the effect of shaming the community of Banja Luka, and even the nationalist leaders later tried to

distance themselves from an embarrassing event they had encouraged. Surprized by the sternness of the reaction of the international community, which did not take kindly to ambassadors being publicly humiliated, the leaders sacked the police chief, who had stood back and allowed the crowd to carry on the protest undisturbed. In fact British SFOR soldiers were also ordered not to interfere, much to the dismay of the Muslims who interpreted this decision as an endorsement of the extreme nationalists' actions.

A month later, the American ambassador and the United Nations representative planned another ceremony to lay the foundation stone, sending the extremists a clear message that they would not have the last word. There remained the threat of vandalism in the future and persistent harassment of Muslims, making their lives harder than ever. Even now Muslim women feared to leave their homes and call out the names of husbands in the street. Bosnian Serbs carried on the war by means of harassment and threats. People still did not listen or hear each other.

AFTERMATH

Dragoljub Davidovic, the mayor of Banja Luka, could not see us this time, being apparently otherwise engaged. After our last visit, in which he told us we should concern ourselves with other towns in Bosnia, ones where Serbs were being victimized, and informed us that Muslims had only ever been a tiny minority in Banja Luka, and that there was no need of any mosque, it came as no surprise that he did not want to meet. After May 7 his line would probably have hardened. Instead we met his deputy, Omer Visic, a Muslim, as specified by the Dayton Accord. We sat at one end of a polished table set for fifty places. Paintings in muted blacks and greys, depicting machines and robots, hung on the walls.

After the exchange of polite introductions, the vice-mayor announced the necessity of fulfilling

two conditions: one, to get the religious leaders to cooperate, and the other, to get the politicians from all sides to work for peace, unreservedly. 'It will be an honour for me to come to Coventry,' he said. He believed that he and Mayor Davidovic could make a creative contribution. So we had not lost the mayor. Talking to Omer Visic turned out to be a lot easier than Mayor Davidovic who always looked harassed and defensive, understandably, since he was the one having to make decisions with extreme nationalists constantly on his back. Omer Visic, remote from power, had the freedom to speak his mind. We discussed the possibility of organizing a meeting of all the political leaders on our next visit, so that we did not need to see them separately. This might also constitute in itself a start to the process of cooperation. Donald spoke about the heart of ministry being the imagination: 'What sort of city should Banja Luka be? What first steps can we take to make that imagined city come into being? Problems are always so exhausting and depressing, so let's start with the imagination, then become practical.' The vice-mayor's secretary, a Serb woman, who had been sitting with a grim face throughout the meeting, suddenly cheered up. She liked this approach.

We then hurried to Sulejman Tihic, whom we had met on our last visit and had struck us as peace-loving, sympathetic and thoughtful. This time he had lost patience with the nationalists governing Banja Luka and spoke scathingly about their lies and subterfuges. They had personally organized the May 7 protest, the police had been told to encourage and marshal the protesters so that when the guests arrived for the ceremony they would have to walk the gauntlet of stone-throwing children and abusive chants. We told him about the possibility of the Inter-Religious Council coming to Coventry and he became angry. 'They are not functioning at all,' he told us. The Orthodox Church had been particularly unhelpful. 'I hope you will be supported in your efforts,' he commented sadly, looking at us intently, as though judging whether we had the

required stamina for the task. ‘We support you,’ he continued. ‘Even the other sides will support you, publicly, although behind the scenes they will try and destroy your project. But you are doing your best. Efforts will work.’ He added these last words so as not to discourage us, but he evidently felt that we had only the smallest chance of success. Donald spoke about the importance of a mediator. He quoted Dr Zaki Badawi, the leader of the Muslim community in England, who described the situation in Banja Luka as being bad news for the twenty million Muslims in Europe. A process of community development had to happen to change attitudes. The Soul of Europe could assist in this process. Sulejman Tihic responded cynically: ‘Here in the Balkans it is different because, despite rational argument, power and force dominate. If there is no power behind you, no one takes you seriously. But extremists must not be allowed to dictate. It has been shown here that there has not been efficient removal of extremists. Therefore it is essential for the Serb politicians to ensure that human rights be respected and that the mosque be rebuilt. The international community must be more decisive. We face Islamophobia. Politicians should change their rhetoric. The Orthodox must be represented and the media should be more positive.’ He then reminded us of the history of Bosnian Islam, how it differed from mainstream Islam in Asia and Africa; how from the beginning it had been European. Bosniaks did not feel at home in Muslim countries outside of Europe. They belonged in Bosnia, in Europe. ‘It is our country and we have to fight to be here! The Constitutional Court decisions must be properly implemented, in full, not diluted, as is already happening because of the sympathy for extremists.’ This explained his change of attitude from quiet reason and melancholic resignation to a desperate truculence. He felt his very existence was under threat. His terrible fear for the future of Muslims in Bosnia echoed a moment the night before when Adnan suddenly lowered his voice in a restaurant where we had taken Roy Wilson to discuss the strategy for our visit to

Banja Luka. Adnan had been relating an incident about someone calling out his name. ‘Adnan!’ he said loudly and suddenly several men at a nearby table turned to stare suspiciously at us. We had been told how Muslim women feared to call their husbands on the streets. Even confident and fearless Adnan fell silent under the hostile scrutiny of these nearby men. Like Jews in Berlin in the years following the rise of Hitler, Muslims did not feel safe in Banja Luka.

Roy Wilson wondered about the proportion of extremists in the crowds protesting on May 7. Out of two hundred and fifty thousand people living in Banja Luka only five thousand attended the demonstration; and only five hundred of these would be extremists. The situation in the Republika Srpska could best be understood by imagining the British National Party dictating policy in the UK. On the whole the democratic system in the UK managed to contain extremists; but not here. Tihic declared with confidence that the majority of Serbs in Banja Luka disapproved of the protest. ‘Even Serbs are ashamed and insulted,’ he said, reminding me of Sabira Prime Minister’s experience of being supported by Serb friends, protecting her, helping her conceal ruins of the mosque and plans of the building.

‘Will the extremists be marginalized?’ asked Donald. Tihic replied: ‘It depends on how the law reacts. Are they going to be decisive and strict enough? Will the organizers be arrested? If only the stone throwers are arrested, then it will happen again.’

Later we heard that a few stone throwers had been jailed for a few days, then released because the protest had been deemed spontaneous.

‘That means the SDS leadership must be arrested,’ said Roy Wilson. Tihic responded: ‘It is a matter of individual responsibility. It’s up to the government, even though they organized it. The Prime Minister is not SDS and he behaved properly.’

‘Why has no one apologized to Mufti Camdzic?’ asked Donald.

Tihic sighed: 'That is the shame of it!'

Donald persisted: 'Who will repair the building?'

'I will raise these issues at the Assembly,' Tihic responded quietly with another sigh.

Donald went on: 'As a visitor I don't understand why it so hard for those responsible to make the simple human act of saying sorry to Mufti Camdzic.'

Tihic responded thoughtfully: 'There were Serbs with us in the Islamic Centre where the guests fled for cover. They have been lied to by the media. The Republika Srpska is a state; the nationalists see their part of Bosnia as a temporary situation. They are biding their time. They refuse returnees, and even then few returnees want to come back, the atmosphere is so hostile here. The demonstration was to stop returnees even more than stopping the building of the mosque.' The protestors were sending a warning to Muslims in the Federation planning to return: 'We don't want you! This is what will happen if you try to come back!' My investigations of Serb chat rooms corroborated this.

'We need practical measures, not just talk,' Tihic added and noted bitterly the absence of the Orthodox bishop. His presence alone would have dissipated the riot.

Donald commented: 'In the process of a peace process small victories are important. Even shaking hands can shift the perception of our enemies.'

'We have to fight hypocrisy,' Tihic continued, thinking about the Serb politicians distancing from the protest, asserting they knew nothing about it. 'Words and acts - they must feel the consequences.' He meant they should be punished. 'The High Representative has the power to remove them, but is unwilling to do so.' As Wolfgang Petritsch told us later, he couldn't keep on sacking these politicians, soon there would be none left.

Our last meeting with politicians took place in the grand offices of the vice-president. Again we

were warmly greeted by both Vice-President Cavic, looking harassed and less confident than on our last visit, and Svetlana Cenic, his economic adviser and our closest useful link with the nationalists. She had always faithfully replied to all our messages and material sent from England, expressing gratitude for our efforts.

We could not guarantee Bosnian Serb presence at the Coventry Consultation, but at least Svetlana was trying to calm their suspicions that they would be attacked and blamed. She understood the tricky situation and also had the foresight to know that the nationalists had no option but to change. The male politicians stood more on their dignity, refusing to budge. Dragan Cavic looked stressed, caught between the extremists in his party who accused him of letting them down, and the High Representative giving him a dressing down. 'It's been a stormy week,' commented Svetlana.

Deliberately ignoring any reference to the protest, Donald immediately launched into a description of the Coventry Consultation, talking about the presentations, the positive aspects of all sides meeting on neutral ground, listening to each other, and the need to look at the future of Banja Luka, each giving their personal profile of their city and suggesting building blocks towards peace, prosperity and reconciliation. The most important part of the consultation would be all of the participants agreeing on at least one thing they could do as a group.

Dragan Cavic looked relieved. We were not on the attack. He smiled wanly and said how much he admired Donald's energy. 'All initiatives are welcome here.' He spoke pointedly about Bosnia, not the Republika Srpska, and the need for the religions, which were generating problems elsewhere, to inspire peace. 'We have no problems agreeing on the economy - Serbs, Croats and Muslims all want economic regeneration. The real problems in Bosnia are between the religions.' He went on to speak reasonably about the need for peace, goodwill and

understanding. 'We will participate in the Coventry Consultation, talk frankly and openly, even with people of different views. No need for conflict. The events in Trebinje and Banja Luka were tragic. Now we must focus on the events of May 7. The biggest harm is to Serbia as a nation. The general view is now represented by extremists, a small proportion of the population. Ten mosques have already been built with no problems, three on the road to Prijedor. So why no problems with these mosques? Why with the Banja Luka one? We admit to a mistake - we as an authority, also the organizers. Ninety-nine per cent of Banja Luka wants the Ferhadija Mosque, but people are against the aggressive provocation of the ceremony. The mosque has now become a symbol of conflict, not of peace. Yesterday the Education Minister replaced seven headmasters for releasing students to demonstrate.' Later we heard that these headmasters had been sacked for the opposite reason, for preventing children joining the protest and for expressing opposition to extreme nationalist views.

Dragan Cavic spoke about the president of the Republika Srpska forming a committee of reconciliation which would include public and religious figures. 'We will organize the discussion ourselves,' and suggested ways of getting the Orthodox people to the table. 'You people of God have different characters,' he said. 'It is always hard to get hold of bishops.'

He then stood up from the table and beckoned us to the window. Outside, in the square between the government building and the mayor's office, an Orthodox cathedral rose half way to completion, the bright orange stone swathed in scaffolding. The history of this building reflected the outer and inner conflicts of the country. The original cathedral had been destroyed by the Germans in the Second World War. The communists then erected a socialist monument in its place. Now, post the collapse of communism and after the war with its successful eviction of most non-Serbs, the new Orthodox majority of Banja Luka determined to rebuild the cathedral.

‘History is a burden,’ said Dragan Cavic. ‘There will be trials of the guilty,’ he continued, referring to the May 7 protest. ‘We did not organize or participate. If I am responsible I should take the consequences personally, criminal or otherwise.’ He then quoted Dr Cerić’s speech made immediately after the event, which angrily denounced the violent protest as indicative of a Serb genocide gene. Not only did the media ban this speech for being unnecessarily provocative, but even the international community condemned it. No one expressed sympathy for the Muslims, not even for the old man killed by the stoning, and most internationals expressed the opinion that the Muslims had brought this on themselves. The consensus blamed the victim.

‘History is a burden,’ Cavic repeated, sighing smugly in the knowledge of this consensus, and proceeded to speak about the concentration camps of the Second World War in which so many Serbs had perished. The chasm between the Muslims and the Orthodox looked wider than ever. However he admitted that Mufti Camdzic had been generous about the rebuilding of the Orthodox cathedral. There would be a trial of the people responsible for the protest. They would get twenty days punishment. ‘Maybe even forty days,’ Dragan Cavic conceded.

‘Archbishop Tutu said there can be no future without forgiveness,’ Donald interjected. The vice-president reminded us of what Donald had said on his first visit to Banja Luka, about his concern for the future of children and grandchildren. Perhaps the international community should initiate meetings between leaders, unofficially, to relax the relations between the different groups.

After meeting the nationalists we drove to Bishop Komarica, who greeted us in ebullient form. He had invited us for lunch, together with a woman from Germany representing Caritas and his chaplain, a taciturn young man who took no part in the conversation. Bishop Komarica needed to speak about the May 7 fiasco. The lies of the media and the politicians incensed him. ‘Mein

Gott!’ he kept shouting, banging the back of his hand on the dining table, hitting it hard with his episcopal ring. Children had been paid fifty Deutschmarks for every stone that hit a window in the Islamic Centre. The extremists were getting away with it. The war was being waged again in Banja Luka. The woman from Germany shook her head solemnly. However the bishop seemed in high spirits, constantly refilling our glasses with potent rakija, giving more details about the events of May 7, and constantly interrupting the narration with shouts of ‘Mein Gott!’

IN THE LION’S DEN, AGAIN

We had first met the speaker of the Assembly of the Republika Srpska outside the government buildings in February. He requested a meeting with us and we found ourselves being ushered into yet another magnificent, air-conditioned reception room, dominated by a polished mahogany table surrounded by numerous large leather chairs. A secretary took detailed notes. She smiled obsequiously, and on hearing of the Coventry Consultation announced Coventry to be her favourite of all cathedrals. She had not been there and her exaggerated friendliness perplexed us. We handed her a copy of the leaflet about the consultation. She passed it across to Dr Kalinic. The leaflet had been designed to raise funds for the consultation and contained some strong paragraphs about the genocide that had taken place in Banja Luka.

Dr Kalinic sometimes smiled broadly, while his eyes remained watchful. At other times his face became a mask, expressionless. He spoke about the ‘soul of mutual tolerance’ that existed in the Assembly. ‘There are thirteen parties, Serb, Bosniak and Croats. We are able to discuss difficult subjects and solve them in a normal way. At the end of the month we will discuss the events at Trebinje and Banja Luka - not only those, but also human rights in Bosnia. What happened is very sad. But they happen in other parts of Bosnia. They remind us of past history, stone

throwing, destroying of cemeteries, demonstrations imported from the Middle East. We are worried. When evil happens, it is not necessary to know where it starts. There is a domino effect. We have to solve the consequences. We have to keep control. The Soul of Europe has arrived at the right time. Another religion will help. Any help is welcome. You have your problems in Belfast. It is a very hard problem, and a long one. But there is also new hope for solution. There should be here, too. The police and any investigation must finish their job, mercilessly. People must be removed. Evil must be cut in the roots. You have a good initiative; most of us will come to Coventry. We hope nothing else will happen before September.’ This became a disturbingly prescient remark, considering 9.11 ‘We also hope that Banja Luka will not be the only subject. Your idea of small business initiatives will pacify people and should produce results. The president and all of us are interested in getting all religious leaders to Coventry. The president will meet with Bishop Jefrem. He must come. It is hard to divide politics and religion.’

All the time he spoke, his face impassive as a grim mask, we needed to remember his close links with Radovan Karadjic. I continued to fantasise about finding the Bosnian Serb leader so we could pick up the five million dollar reward which would fund Soul of Europe peace projects for years to come. Maybe Kalinic would take us to his leader!

Kalinic continued to speak: ‘Last night there should have been an interview with the Reis, but it had to be cancelled. Someone forbade it. It would have been inflammatory. I beg to reduce passion. We must give time to have quiet meetings. All three groups should be equal, constitutionally. It will be a big step for our country.’

‘The media in the UK have a problem with the perception of the Serbs in the Republika Srpska,’ Donald pointed out.

‘That is my anxiety,’ continued Dr Kalinic, ‘A terrible picture that ruins everything. We need

to do everything we can to prevent a repetition of the events on May 7.'

'Would the government repair the windows of the Islamic Centre?' asked Donald.

'At least pay for it,' responded Dr Kalinic, 'It is our responsibility.' He then excused the SDS party from any involvement. 'Someone else was behind all this, we will find out, but I don't want to accuse in advance.'

He then returned to the safer subject of Coventry. He looked for a while at the leaflet about the consultation then pushed it back to us across the table, his expression not changing an instant.

'What you say about the genocide is absolutely not right,' he said and repeated it: 'Absolutely not right.' He then left the room. I was apprehensive. After a lengthy pause he returned bearing a magnificent book on the history of Orthodoxy which he handed to us as a gift, together with two fine reproductions of icons framed in polished wood. 'That book would pay for several monthly salaries,' commented Roy Wilson afterwards.

'Not just one side is guilty,' Kalinic continued, 'The ceremony for the laying of the foundation stone took place on a main Serb public holiday.' In fact the public holiday had been the day earlier, on a Sunday, but once the authorities learned of the ceremony, they postponed the holiday to be on the same day, thereby releasing children from school to attend the protest. Still economical with the truth, Kalinic continued: 'One third of all Serbs celebrate St George on May 6. Loudspeakers were playing Muslim songs very loudly. It was a provocation. Not a good place or a good time.' Later we learned that the loudspeakers had been briefly tested for the ceremony the following day.

He then handed us two copies of a pamphlet printed cheaply and quickly, which accounted for the numerous printing errors and poor translation. They offered an alternative history of the war, especially the concentration camps and something sinisterly called 'gallowses'. This alternative

history made no mention of Omarska. Apparently the only concentration camps in Bosnia were ones in which thousands of Serbs had been tortured and killed, the numbers appended and rounded off, so exactly ten thousand Serbs turned out to have been killed in one specific camp. Most of the camps seemed to be in the area around Sarajevo. Considering the Serbs had besieged that city and shelled it for months on end it begged belief that the Muslims would have the opportunity to run such camps in the places controlled by Serb soldiers. True, evidence of Muslim torture and killing of Serbs did come to light after the war, but not on the scale of Prijedor and Srebrenica, and the perpetrators were sent to The Hague Tribunal. ‘Serbs are always accused,’ sighed Kalinic. ‘Muslims are a reality. We must not make trouble.’ He baffled us with a folk saying about a cow kicking the pale of milk before being taken home. ‘It is a mistake,’ he commented before showing us out.

We called in on Claire Fromentin, Hans Kretschmer’s EU representative in Banja Luka. Though appearing sympathetic to our need for funds for the consultation, she had clearly been instructed by head office not to help us, and repeated the now familiar political line that the ceremony on May 7 had been provocative. She declared that too many Muslims had been bussed in and although, for our benefit, expressing a distaste for violence and stone throwing, she also expressed sympathy for Serb feelings. We bit our lips and left for Sarajevo.

THE PAINTED MOSQUE

The ancient Bosnian capital, Travnik, stood at the southern side of the mountain range dividing the country. Banja Luka guarded the northern boundary of the Ottoman Empire. Precipitous mountain slopes protected Travnik in the heart of Bosnia, minarets rising like firtrees along the

banks of the River Lasva. Mount Vlastic towered one thousand and nine hundred metres above. Before the Ottoman invasion, kings of Bosnia ruled from this natural fortress. The narrowness of the valley prevented expansion, so Travnik retained the appearance of its affluent and powerful past, attractive old houses with walled gardens along narrow cobbled streets rising in tiers up the hillsides.

We made a habit of breaking the journey between Sarajevo and Banja Luka in this elegant, tranquil city. Platefuls of the local cevapcici, meatballs fried over smokey charcoal grills, were served with rounds of freshly baked flat bread, charred on the surface, warm and soft inside, accompanied by fiery chillies, lemon wedges and slices of raw onions. Then, like generations of visitors over the centuries before us, we sipped Turkish coffee and listened to the roar and splash of streams gushing down the mountainsides, over millwheels and into the River Lasva.

A celebrated ancient painted wooden mosque stood in the town centre. Delicate flower patterns covered the white outside walls. The floors and galleries creaked as we trod on the soft carpets in our socks, looking at the brightly-coloured painted wooden pillars, ceiling and walls. The decorations fused folk art with the elegant Ottoman style. The intimately comfortable space became a living room in which worshipping Muslims felt at home, Allah being part of the family.

Outside, a student backpacker washed his feet in the fountain and children played, shooting at each other with plastic rifles.

A FALSE PEACE

‘Where is the soul?’ shouted Dr Ceric, entering rapidly, dressed in grey suit and fez, looking harassed and distressed. This time he did not keep us waiting. ‘Where is the beef?’ he added

jokingly, but nonetheless we felt ashamed at taking on such a big title as Soul of Europe when quite rightly we found little evidence of it and certainly not in Bosnia.

We had expected him to be upset. Already the sad faces of Nermi, the doorman, and Ifet Mustafic, his chef de cabinet, had warned us of the gravity of the situation. We barely recognised Ifet, who had always been smooth shaven and immaculately groomed, polite to chilliness, formal and remote. This time his eyes shone kindly, though damp from much recent weeping and he had grown a small beard. He approached Donald with arms outstretched, clasping Donald's hands with gratitude, a completely different person. He talked briefly about 'justice', reminding us that Islam puts greater emphasis on justice than on forgiveness. 'You must look after the Reis,' Donald said. Ifet sighed and looked searchingly into Donald's eyes. 'Who else does? Of course I do!' he exclaimed reproachfully, indicating the difficulty of his task. Who looked after Ifet? Ifet had protected Dr Cerić physically from the stoning. The stress of his position took a fierce toll in later years. He succumbed to cancer and had to retire.

'What can I do now?' Donald asked Dr Cerić.

'Go to Karadjic!' Dr Cerić shouted in despair. 'Ask him: where are the stones? Where are the graves?' adding sarcastically: 'Perhaps I should apologise to him, just to stop the stone throwing!'

Dr Cerić spoke rapidly in a loud voice. He felt humiliated and needed to consider the wider implications of the events in Banja Luka on May 7. The Muslims were not wanted in Bosnia. Serb policy since the war focused on cleansing the region of Islam. International policy needed to be addressed. 'I don't know what the policy of Europe is towards Islam,' he said, looking to us to deal with that issue, and continued: 'The Republika Srpska is the result of genocide. Unfortunately there are fascists in the European Union who are sympathetic to the Serbs. We

have only God on our side. Thanks to God I'm alive. Whatever I do now, I have nothing to lose. But I don't know what you can do. The whole international community was held hostage - in danger of stones - and yet there have been no demonstrations in Europe. I don't feel safe in Europe any more. The Serbs are sick and no one has the courage to tell them. It was a coordinated protest. If you give these people the instruments to achieve power.....' He tailed off in despair. Earlier he had spoken incoherently about internecine battles being fiercest, such as between Russian and Chinese communists or in Europe among Christian factions, Catholics and Protestants. 'It is a psychological problem, a sickness. But in the case of the Muslims in Bosnia I am very disappointed.' He then spoke bitterly: 'On the one hand it is good what happened in Banja Luka. We have learned from our mistakes. From now on things will not be the same. Never say never though!' He then added: 'We are suffering because we want a multicultural society. But in fact we need another Utopia!'

While Dr Cerić composed himself, Ifet spoke to us about Petar Negoc's book, *The Mountain Wreath*, being read in schools again. This book, written in the nineteenth century, became a Bible for Serb nationalists. It warns of the Muslim threat to the purity of the Serb race, and is as pernicious a document as the anti-Semitic writings of Nazi Germany. Over five centuries ago Isabella and Ferdinand cleansed Spain of Jews and Muslims who fled, among other places, to the Balkans. 'Now five hundred years later we have another ethnic cleansing,' cried Dr Cerić. 'Milosevic wanted a Greater Serbia. Ethnic cleansing has not died. The spirit of Isabella and Ferdinand still lives.'

'I was born again on May 7!' he cried, throwing out his arms. 'I owe my life to God. But my second saviour was the American ambassador.' Ifet explained that no one noticed the Reis arriving at the ceremony. The car in front belonged to the American ambassador, instantly

recognizable. As Tom Miller got out of the car the crowd started to throw stones at him. The ambassador, hands over his head, ran into the offices, surrounded by his aides, a ridiculous and humiliating spectacle. Ifet realized that were the crowd to recognize the Reis he would suffer worse than a stoning. The Reis's life certainly in danger, Ifet stood in front of Dr Ceric and protected him while they quickly reentered the car, turned round and fled back to Sarajevo.

Dr Ceric gave two reasons for being reborn on that day. Firstly, his life had been saved. Secondly, he now fully understood the true extent of Islamophobia in Europe. It came as a revelation, like having the scales removed from his eyes. Back in England, Michael Sells, the American Serb author of *A Bridge Betrayed*, underlined this insight for us when we met him in London. He reminded us that Europe as an entity had an indistinct boundary in the East. Keeping Islam at bay determined this boundary. Lazar Markovic, our first translator, told us as we crossed the River Danube near Novi Sad in Serbia: 'This is the boundary of Europe - this is as far as the Turks conquered.' This notion of Europe excluded Islam, the Serbs seeing themselves as the front line troops preserving the Christian purity of Europe, protecting the continent from Muslim invasion. Mythical notions lead to false history. Islam had in fact been part of Europe for centuries. Muslim communities in the Balkans correctly identified themselves as European in every way. This made their present situation so perilous. Like the Jews in Germany in the Third Reich who had no where to go to call their own home, Germany having been their 'heimat' for generations, so the Muslims experienced insecurity in their own country. Just as the Jews looked in vain to the rest of Europe for protection, so the Muslims in Bosnia felt unsupported by the continent, their home. False history apart, the fact remained that now twenty million Muslims lived throughout Europe, one and half million in the UK alone.

The protest on May 7 signified more than stopping rebuilding the mosque, a national heritage

monument. A Muslim presence in Banja Luka made a statement that the war had been in vain. Despite being invited, the Orthodox Church's refusal to attend ceremony and the silence of the Metropolitan afterwards confirmed the Church's political affiliations. Had Bishop Jefrem been present, his flock would not have dared to protest. The Nationalist and Orthodox party governed the Republika Srpska, so Bosnian Serbs reckoned they had won the war, at least in this ethnically cleansed region. To underline this victory they altered the names of towns which hinted at Muslim Bosnian connections: Bosanski Brod became Srpska Brod. It might seem a small matter, and western politicians governing Bosnia reckoned it to be a minor concession to the Serb nationalists, preferable to war. These small concessions would, however, accumulate to encourage further conflict. If the international community genuinely wanted to create a multi-ethnic region, these names should not have been allowed to be altered.

Our meeting with Dr Ceric, though friendly and warm, left us in no doubt about the gravity of our task. We asked for his advice and he encouraged us to be naïv. 'The progress of the world depends not on rational people, who try to adapt to the world,' he told us, 'but on the irrational, who want to change it. Tolerance is a sign of power. Revenge is a sign of weakness.'

He finally spoke about Banja Luka: 'The false peace is worse than war. We have to cleanse the sickness of the Serbs.'

What Dr Ceric said struck us as a fair comment on recent events, but his speech on similar lines had been banned from broadcast because it might inflame the Serbs. However, some Serbs themselves realized, even better than the international community, the lunacy and shame of extremist behaviour. They could only express their opinions from the safety of Belgrade, Banja Luka being far too dangerous a place for such rational views, or, in Dr Ceric's terms 'irrational' ones: views that looked to change the world. It struck us that with few exceptions like Roy

Wilson, and the American and English ambassadors, no international we had met so far in either the Republika Srpska or the Federation, which Adnan had repeatedly to remind us were the same country, Bosnia and Herzegovina, expressed any embarrassment at the shocking events in Banja Luka on May 7. This implied that humiliating Muslims, throwing stones, even killing one elderly man, terrifying old women, and desecrating the foundation stone, constituted an acceptable form of protest. But when the Muslims expressed outrage and reacted with what turned out to be restraint, they were immediately condemned for offending the Serb nationalists. The sufferers were blamed and the violent protestors became victims, people who had to be protected from criticism.

Dr Ceric suddenly rose to leave, shaking with sorrow and fury and shouted: ‘I don’t know what you can do!’ He calmed down momentarily to thank us for our concern: ‘The problem is in Europe. This is my land. This is our responsibility. We must be free. We have to develop Islam in a European context!’ Unable to hide his distress he turned his back on us and quickly left the room.

Ifet, with tears in his eyes, showed us out. Upset for them we ordered a large cake to cheer the Reis, his staff and family. When we returned mid-afternoon to deliver it, we discovered that everyong, including the doorman, had departed, and that the locked offices were dark and abandoned.

The following meetings with Wolfgang Petritsch, the High Representative, and various agencies with which we hoped to establish contact fell beneath the shadow of this sad encounter. Petritsch looked grey and exhausted, impatient and peevish, like a schoolmaster having to deal with irritating, misbehaving students. He suggested we find Serbs in the US and elsewhere in

Europe supportive of our cause, people who would put up money for initiatives to help build up civil society in places like Banja Luka. Having defended his policy of appeasement to the Serbs, he interpreted the recent events as a crisis for the Republika Srpska government: if the Serbs did not use this crisis as an opportunity for changing their attitudes and side-lining the extremists their entity would wither away in anarchy and disrespect, ignored by the international community. The next ten years bore out this grim prognosis. For the present, Petritsch's advice offered some hope. The Bosnian Serb artist's black paintings above his desk glowered fiercely in the background. The High Representative talked about his deputy, Georges Bordet, being put in charge of a working group to ease the tensions in the Republika Srpska. Bordet had already told us he would be leaving in a year. Everyone seemed to be putting time lines on their presence and involvement in the region, talking incessantly about retirement or moving to better posts. Petritsch had only months to go before being replaced by another diplomat who would patiently endure the same pressures, also sure of a secure future elsewhere.

As to the Ferhadija Mosque, Petritsch firmly believed in the importance of performing the ceremony of laying the foundation stone quickly. It was a symbolic and literal act. The extremists must not be allowed to dictate policy. He had ordered the nationalist government in Banja Luka to arrange this within weeks. The ceremony took place on June 18. The place was cordoned off, helicopters flew overhead, SFOR and local police provided security for the guests and visitors. A large crowd protested. Water cannon had to be used and several police were injured.

‘Words are cheap. Actions are not cheap,’ said Graham Hand, the British ambassador, still smarting from the indignity of being stoned and having to hide in the offices of the Islamic

Centre in Banja Luka. He had been the last to leave the premises, ensuring the elderly Muslim women went first. He judged their safety to be a priority, and because of that had become a hero to Muslims throughout Bosnia. Adnan congratulated him effusively and Graham Hand responded by wishing his bosses in London might hear of it. He commented on the various leading players in typically robust fashion, describing himself as a ‘thug’ like Tom Miller, and therefore entitled to speak bluntly. ‘Dr Ceric is a tough political player, who knows about fighting! Don’t worry about him,’ he said in response to our anxieties about the Reis, but promised to pay him a visit. As for the Inter-Religious Council which had failed to support Dr Ceric, he had nothing but withering scorn. Even Jacob Finci came under attack: ‘To be Jewish is always difficult, but this is an exceptional situation.’ He described Cardinal Pulic as a ‘slimey layabout with the mind of a cunning peasant’. As for Petritsch, Graham Hand could not contain himself. ‘Work?! Petritsch?! He should go soon, the quicker the better!’ He called the High Representative incompetent, and even contributing to the fiasco in Banja Luka.

After discussing the myth about a ‘Greater Serbia’ he helped us draft a letter to raise funds for the Coventry Consultation from the Foreign Office. He recommended we contact Vuko Brat, a wealthy Serb in Belgrade who had attended school at the Banja Luka Gymnazia. Vuko Brat proved as elusive as all wealthy men, but when we finally reached him by phone he showed little interest in helping anyone, preferring to talk about his vacation in Deauville, an expensive resort on the Normandy coast: ‘You know what happens in Deauville!’ he said referring to the horseraces, and laughed.

The ambassador suggested we might also find funding from the European Stability Initiative, the Stability Pact, Landeck University and Green Visions. We ended the meeting talking about his next appointment. His time as ambassador in Sarajevo was coming to an end. Like every one

else we met there, only the prospect of leaving cheered him.

ADVENTURES IN NORTH AFRICA

LIBYA JUNE 2001

An invitation to Libya came out of the blue. Never in our lives had we thought to visit this closed country with a history of support for international terrorist groups, let alone apply there for funds to rebuild a mosque in Bosnia and help the process of reconciliation between Muslims and non-Muslims in Europe. Fraught relations with the UK, damaged by the siege of its London Embassy and the shooting of Yvonne Fletcher, a policewoman, reached their nadir when Libyan agents blew up an aeroplane taking American soldiers back to the US over Scotland and wreckage fell on Lockerbie, destroying the small town and many of its inhabitants.

Libya under Gaddafi seemed set to be in perpetual enmity with the West, but was seen throughout Africa and other parts of the developing world as a benefactor. In 2001 there was no reason to think that this might ever change. However Gaddafi had been signalling a thaw with the West for some time, wanting to become a respected member of the world community.

Dr Zaki Badawi, one of the leading Muslim clerics in the UK, suggested we contact the World Islamic Call Society based in Libya. Considering that the hottest issue emerging from our work in the Balkans had turned out to be Islamophobia, finding a Muslim partner became a priority. Ancient enmities and the traditional definition of predominantly Christian Europe as a traditionally Muslim-free entity made the Muslim world suspicious of western Christianity, all the more so because the definition was not only wrong, given the Muslims of the Balkans, but also out of date, considering the twenty to twenty-five million Muslims now living throughout

Europe. This suspicion had made it hard for us to make close contact with Muslim groups. The Reis ul Ulema in Bosnia deliberately took his time before giving us an audience, and we still sensed reserve, even though he appointed Donald Vice-President of the Ferhadija Mosque Project.

The first meeting on April 17 between the Soul of Europe and the World Islamic Call Society took place in the Muslim College in Ealing, West London, an Edwardian detached residence surrounded by semi-detached suburban houses, shaded by chestnut trees, fronted by small shrubby gardens and backed by long lawns, well-stocked borders and fruit trees. Large numbers of Muslims now populated this part of London. Dr Badawi had fallen over that morning and injured a hip, so we met the Libyan representative, Muftah Abuaisha, by himself. Smiling broadly he gave us a friendly welcome and listened carefully to our presentation of the work of the Soul of Europe, then suggested we visit the organization in Tripoli, Libya. After his report to Dr Sherif, the head of the World Islamic Call Society, they would invite us, pay our fares and look after us. They had been looking for this kind of partnership between Muslim and Christian organizations for some time. They wanted to bring an end to the mutual suspicions and lack of cooperation between Christians and Muslims. The rest of the world perceived Islam as being made up entirely of fundamentalist extremists, shouting in large crowds, oppressed women swathed in black, everyone waving fists, burning flags, prone to violence and in perpetual conflict with the West. He informed us that modern Islam embraced a wide spectrum of beliefs, traditions and attitudes. Together the Soul of Europe and the World Islamic Call Society could begin to educate the world and bring the two sides into closer understanding and cooperation.

‘How long should we stay?’ we asked, unfamiliar with the etiquette of being invited to Muslim countries.

Muftah Abuaisha, his kindly eyes twinkling, laughed and said: ‘When we welcome people it is not customary to ask them when they are planning to leave!’

It transpired that the World Islamic Call Society had already decided to be partners with us. They did not have to be told that we needed their money to help fund our projects. They knew all about our work in Bosnia. The visit was a formality, a chance to get to know each other, to talk at length and draw up a partnership agreement. We would receive financial help from them as well as ally ourselves with a major Muslim organization.

Within a few weeks we received a faxed invitation to bring along with us, so facilitating a visa immediately on arrival. Normally it took weeks to process a visa application to Libya.

The plane descended over a sandy patchwork of fields lined with almond orchards, cypress avenues and scrub; parched colours in contrast to the sparkling sapphire blue of the Mediterranean. Our anxiety about visas and being allowed through Tripoli airport evaporated the moment Muftah Abuaisha appeared, beaming and hurrying to greet us in the corridor leading from the plane’s exit. He gave us each two kisses and carried our luggage. A severe-looking grey-haired man, tall and sinewy, took away our luggage and passports while we were ushered into the VIP lounge packed with large sofas and armchairs. A boy served us coffee, juices and mineral water. Embarrassed by this unexpected attention, we wondered what we had done to earn this respect, having yet achieved little, our projects still in the process of being established. A journalist took photos of us for the World Islamic Call Society newspaper while we talked about the problems in Bosnia and the need to support Dr Cerić.

The severe-looking man returned with our passports enclosing stamped visas and we were ushered through the ranks of visitors still waiting for entry and a taxi drove us to Tripoli. The

suburbs of the city stretched for miles as we passed endless concrete low-rise flats, modern mosques and dry, dusty highways - the sober plainness accentuated by the striking absence of hoardings, except for an occasional gigantic poster of Colonel Gaddafi, jaw jutting imperiously, arms folded and looking with visionary zeal towards the future.

The taxi took us to the Al Kabir Hotel, a massive and imposing modern building designed to overwhelm the first-time visitor. A group of young doormen lounged and chatted by the security gate that led into a large entrance hall dominated by an enormous chandelier and two escalators to the first floor. These escalators were only for show. They did not operate.

African leaders in resplendent robes and head gear waited at the reception while their chauffeurs stayed with the black Mercedes outside, national flags fluttering on the bonnets. Waiting to be assigned a room, we sat in the cool dark of another reception area with three Serbian journalists stretching and yawning on a neighbouring sofa.

Then we were taken to our separate air-conditioned rooms, spacious with king-size beds. Each room had its own lounge, and a television that played only the CNN channel. The view looked out over flat roofs towards the Mediterranean Sea.

Exhausted by the heat, excitement and the strangeness of Libya, I spent the first afternoon dozing on the wide expanse of bed. Three pillows were laid side by side and I imagined a potentate lying there with his wife and family together.

Our sense of dislocation heightened in the evening as we sat alone in the cavernous dining room while a reception was taking place outside. A crowd of dignitaries, smartly robed, accompanied by their wives, costumed flamboyantly with elaborate, brightly coloured headdresses, sat dignified in rows around three sides of an empty swimming pool, while loudspeakers played an arrangement of Mendelssohn's *Spring Song* for xylophone and strings. The people appeared to

be waiting for a show to start, but apart from a group of musicians in Berber costume who randomly interrupted the Mendelssohn with vibrant sounds emanating from national folk instruments - pipes of various sonorities and drums - there did not seem to be any main event. After an hour of being seated, a few wives arose and, smiling benevolently at everyone, sashayed down the long corridors to their rooms. The hundred or so other guests sat expectantly around the swimming pool and several waiters arranged more seating on the fourth side of the pool, as though for special guests who had not yet arrived. Another hour passed; the evening grew darker and across the mysteriously silent assembly a slight breeze blew from the Mediterranean Sea spread in the background. Meanwhile we sat in the otherwise empty dining room, helping ourselves to a sumptuous selection of salads, meat stews and desserts at the central buffet. A waiter solemnly served us Fanta and Sprite. Being in an alcohol-free country, Libyans compensated for the dullness of the drinking, by choosing brightly-coloured fizzy drinks to liven the dining table.

Later in the evening Muftah Abuaisha came to take us for a walk through the city centre. Dense crowds of people swarmed over the squares, along the sidewalks and crossed the main roads where no rules applied. Since there were no traffic lights, people took blind leaps of faith, plunged into the stream of cars, weaving through them to the opposite side, like swimming across a mighty river trying to avoid treacherous whirlpools. The politeness of the Libyans, drivers and pedestrians alike, made the system work. Despite the lateness of the hour, parents were taking children for a walk; little girls dressed like bridesmaids and small boys in pressed uniforms. Muftah Abuaisha pointed out the ancient medina and the castle, with walls rising out of an artificial lake cut off from the sea. The shops were open and doing brisk business. We strolled along the elegant sea-front, aware of the European Italian influence, the grandeur and

scale of the city with imperious colonial-style buildings stretching along the bay in marked contrast to the intimate, narrow streets of the medieval market with its small mosques and courtyards and secret passages leading to private dwellings. The Romans had once governed the North Africa coastline and Italians had claimed the territory as theirs in the early part of the twentieth century, excavating magnificent Roman ruins, building similarly extravagant and colossal edifices. With the establishment of Colonel Gaddafi's Great Jamahirya Arab Libyan Popular Socialist Republic, Tripoli remained in dusty aspic and it seemed as though nothing had changed for thirty years, not even kept in repair. The country, though wealthy from oil production, spent little on infrastructure. The colonial architecture gazed across the Mediterranean towards Europe, but Libya gave the impression of turning its back on the continent to the north, preferring to face south towards the rest of Africa, where Libya considered itself to be a father state, dispensing aid to the poor countries and offering livelihood to thousands of Africans drawn to its oil-rich economy. Groups of these homeless migrant workers gathered under road bridges to rest and sleep in the shade.

The World Islamic Call Society reflected a new attitude to Europe and the rest of the world. For the last few decades Libya had been a pariah, but now wanted to earn respect. The organization had existed before the revolution and kept on by Colonel Gaddafi, chiefly as an aid agency, but also to encourage better relations between Islam and the West. The main form of Islam in Libya being progressive meant that the country had difficulty subduing its extreme fundamentalist groups. These had been violently suppressed, but the rise in influence of movements like Al Qa'eda, forced Gaddafi to seek help from outside. Our arrival on the scene of Muslim and Christian dialogue seemed to be part of a plan. The purpose of our trip to Tripoli was to visit the head of the World Islamic Call Society and agree to a partnership. This could be achieved within

hours, but we soon learned that western-style timetables and programs did not apply in this part of the world.

In the next few days we relaxed into the new rhythm of hotel life and got used to waiting for Muftah Abuaisha: sometimes a few hours, once even a whole day. We watched the potentates come and go, everything in a desultory fashion as though no one had anything better to do than arrive, hang around and leave. They stood outside the hotel while groups of boy-scouts paraded on the main road delivering leaflets to passing motorists, and policemen in smart pale uniforms and snow-white caps directed the traffic. The policemen appeared to be decorative. One of them guarded an empty car park next to the hotel and did nothing all day.

On Friday we walked through the deserted alleyways of the medina, peering into mysterious courtyards festooned with laundry, children and old men crouching outside front doors, paying us no attention. We passed a hammam attached to an ancient mosque, and the doorman, sitting outside with a large plastic bottle of mineral water, beckoned us inside where we glimpsed two elderly gentlemen wrapped in towels and lying prone on stone slabs. They might have been sleeping or dead.

Back at the hotel the African leaders continued to stroll about or sit listlessly in the hotel lobby, wives conspicuously absent, probably in their rooms, dressing up for the evening or looking after broods of children. The occasional western female stood out noticeably, so the atmosphere in the hotel, particularly the dining-room at breakfast time, bristled with the testosterone charge of all-male prison movies in which the strongest jostle for supremacy. The potentates and burly businessmen queued up at the buffet, to pile mixed salads, oven-fried chicken pieces, stewed lamb and beef, pan-fried potatoes and pasta on to their plates. The pièce-de résistance of the dessert menu was crème caramel, large round flat slabs shuddering sensually on wide platters.

In the evening we visited an outside café near to the Al Kabir Hotel. Men sat together at small tables and smoked hubble-bubbles. These flamboyant contraptions were a striking adornment to the relatively plain life of Tripoli. They came in different colours and were decked with trays of charcoal. The young men lifted the glowing pieces elegantly with delicate tongs to heat the tobacco, then settled back to puff at the mouthpiece, chat and stare at the passing males, peering round at us to smile, nod the head in polite welcome, acknowledging our presence.

On Saturday we were taken to the headquarters of the World Islamic Call Society

We had been assigned a chauffeur, a trim young man in a gold coloured light suit who smiled through a thick moustache and though he answered when we spoke to him, not speaking any English he did not understand the questions so our conversations were improvised. Mustafa drove a black Mercedes with special number plates giving him priority on the road, which meant that other drivers meekly allowed him to overtake and he could use private routes forbidden to them, as for instance the road leading past the Leader's residence. Guards made sure that these roads remained empty and deserted, but allowed our black Mercedes entry.

The day before, Mustafa had taken us on a tour of the city, driving us to a Catholic church where we observed a special service in Egyptian, with little girls dressed up like doll brides in frilly white frocks. The congregation smiled at us. Mustafa then took us to the main city market where crowds of tall, graceful slim black men mixed with the lighter-skinned Libyans.

Today he drove us through miles of suburbs of high rise flats and when two main roads intersected the traffic just mixed up in the middle, cars weaving in and out and somehow sorting themselves out.

The World Islamic Call Society offices stood in a spacious park area off a dusty back street on the edge of a college campus, the *doha*, with its own shops, a mosque and residential quarters. Later we were shown a chain of workshops, teaching motor-mechanics and carpentry to workers and students from Africa and Asia.

Muftah Abuaisa introduced us to various liaison officers, the chief of protocol and a number of eminent-looking officials who shook our hands briefly then disappeared. We were then ushered into the inner sanctum of the World Islamic Call Society and finally met Dr Mohamed Sherif, an immaculately groomed man in a smart black suit, who spoke fluent English with a slight Harvard accent. Educated in America, he had a direct line to the Leader and was evidently respected throughout the Muslim world because Western education and cosmopolitan background bridged the Eastern and Western worlds. Dr Sherif, well-spoken and kindly, put us at our ease in the manner of a well-bred aristocrat. He outlined the history of the World Islamic Call Society for our benefit, describing its involvement in Africa as an aid agency trying to go beyond aid to developing self-supporting economic structures in the poorest regions. Dr Sherif put special emphasis on dialogue between the religions, particularly in educating the West about Islam. He explained the history behind the problems of extreme fundamentalist Islam. The seeds had been sown in the Afghan war. Young men from all over the Arab world, trained for mortal combat, had religious extremism inculcated to foster fighting morale, a psychological weapon. After the war these young men dispersed, brain-washed to produce good fighters, and took extremism back to their homelands: hence the present problem. The new ideology destroyed the more liberal branches of Islam. We now associated Afghanistan with the extremist Taliban, but in fact tolerant Sufism used to be the traditional form of Islam in that country, a form extinguished there. ‘Such is the destructive power of ideology,’ said Dr Sherif. ‘Whether communism or

capitalism - it leads to war, special training and future problems.’

We discussed the relationship between the World Islamic Call Society and the Soul of Europe and agreed to seven principles, then fixed another meeting to work on the proposals with the relevant heads of department. An elderly man in an open-necked shirt suddenly entered the room: the founder of the organization and its first leader. He greeted us but took little interest in our discussion, animatedly preoccupied with the Lockerbie case, being a lawyer defending the accused men.

The long meeting with Muftah Abuaisha and organization officials took place later. At first it turned out to be heavy going with doubts and questions needing to be resolved. Muftah Abuaisha seemed to be our only ally and at one point had to leave to deal with an urgent phone call about aid distribution in Pakistan. Donald waffled for a while about the Coventry Consultation while I vainly tried to attract his attention to their lack of interest. All eyes glazed over and the treasurer looked particularly severe and unimpressed, idly turning the pages of our leaflet. Suddenly they began to speak with each other with animation: ‘Coventry?...Banja Luka?.... Mr Reevis....’ They seemed to need explanations and discussed among themselves in Arabic. When Muftah Abuaisha returned, the questions were about dialogue and clarifying our basic objectives. The treasurer was concerned with precise figures. Eventually their doubts seemed to be resolved and we promised to provide a clearer document for signed agreement. We would fax it to Muftah Abuaisha along with a rough budget for them to study and make amendments.

Dr Sherif invited us to a party that night, partly in our honour, but there also happened to be dignitaries from African states in Tripoli, all needing to be entertained at the same time.

Mustafa drove us through an unexpectedly affluent suburb of Tripoli, a street lined with luxury shops, lights sparkling, crowds of young people, nightclubs and bumper to bumper traffic. Eventually we arrived at a large restaurant by the seashore, waves crashing from the Mediterranean. An assortment of church leaders who had arrived early sat waiting to greet us. We were introduced to a beaming Indian Anglican priest who could not contain his joy at meeting us: 'It is a dream come true!' he sighed, clasping his hands, speaking in an educated voice and staring at us with round eyes full of emotion. 'I'm so happy! God has been good to me!' He had come to Libya as a young man to be an engineer and make money; then had received the 'call'. He introduced us to a Coptic bishop, a cherubic man, barely out of adolescence, with a curly black beard, full lips and moist eyes, which were perpetually creased by his smile. An Egyptian minder sat behind him, nervously protective of his young charge. We were then introduced to the African Methodist priest who looked robust and in no need of a minder, and the Catholic bishop who was the least assuming of them all, dressed in a plain grey suit and expressing genuine interest in our plans for inter-religious dialogue with Islam. Gradually all the other guests arrived, the most distinguished leaders last of all, somehow judging the exact moment to appear. Their chauffeurs sat at a table nearby and tucked enthusiastically into supper while we waited, sitting in an ever larger circle of chairs, being offered Fanta, 7Up and Sprite, until Dr Sherif arrived, greeting us all individually with a warm handshake before leading us into the main dining room where a large long table had been laid as for a banquet. I felt a finger prodding my back in a friendly fashion and found it attached to the Catholic bishop's chaplain, a Philippino with a permanent grin splitting his broad face. He muttered excitedly to me in an obscure English dialect so that most of the time I could not understand him, but he seemed amused by everything I said, laughing uproariously, even though

I was cracking no jokes. On my other side sat a mufti from Canada who seemed overwhelmed by the occasion and barely uttered a word. Donald sat next to the elderly founder of the World Islamic Call Society who talked obsessively all evening about the Lockerbie case.

Most of the guests were a distinguished gathering of black leaders wearing splendid robes and head dresses. They spent the whole evening sitting silently with melancholy expressions, not being spoken to but occasionally flashing friendly smiles when being looked at. To the left of Dr Sherif sat the Sufi leader from Nigeria, a young man, like the Coptic priest, with the smooth features of a girl, dressed in virginal white and also wearing an elaborate head dress. He could not speak English or any language shared by the others, so he too remained silent, smiling and self-contained. Dr Sherif tried to make conversation with various people, but the size of the table and the distance between those who could understand him made the task impossible. Always dignified, friendly and polite, he occasionally looked uneasy, as though he were hosting a necessary but arduous function. He had carefully chosen the leaders as representatives of moderate Islam and their presence bore out the policy of the World Islamic Call Society to influence a change of attitudes towards Islam in the West. Dr Sherif and Muftah Abuaisa told us at separate meetings: 'A good Muslim is a good citizen in whatever country he lives.' Dr Sherif had added: 'Only in anti-Muslim places should one demand rights. Muslims must participate in democracy and serve the community better.'

We were rapidly learning that bigoted attitudes to Islam led to injustice throughout Europe. After 9:11 the situation would worsen. Muslims were trying to be good citizens everywhere, but prejudice and even violence towards them made their integration into European society almost impossible. In Bosnia hatred of Islam reflected suspicion throughout the continent. The myth of the Muslim as a dangerous alien was accepted without question by the West, which found it

easier to live with the notion of a Muslim being an extremist, a terrorist and an enemy to be kept at bay. The only Muslims we had met so far, in Bosnia and here in Libya, were decent, educated people, though belonging to a different culture. It took time to get used to their traditional respect for hierarchy, their seemingly desultory and slow way of conducting business. Their passionate friendliness and generous hospitality made up for the debilitating sense of nothing happening.

A magnificent feast followed. Each place had its own selection of appetisers: baba ghanoush, hummous, olives and crusty bread. A spicy Libyan meat soup was followed by a platter of assorted fish, including a substantial portion of lobster, fresh from the Mediterranean. Dessert consisted of a trifle, a plate of fresh fruit including apricots, bananas and grapes, and a fresh strawberry milkshake. Different coloured fizzy drinks accompanied the meal, each one poured in a separate wine glass. Barely had mint tea been served to complete the feast when Dr Sherif announced with a smile that there would be no speeches and immediately everyone rose to depart and within minutes had shaken hands with their host and disappeared in their various chauffeur-driven limousines.

Mustafa drove us back through the affluent suburb, impatient at the stationary queue of traffic and eventually forcing the oncoming traffic off the road while he overtook everybody, his car's numberplates sufficient deterrent to any driver who might want to protest.

The next few days we sat in the Al Kabir Hotel and waited to hear from Muftah Abuaisha. It appeared they needed to examine our draft partnership document carefully. Urgent crises claimed their attention: getting aid to masses of refugees in other parts of the world, such as Indonesia, the Philippines and Nigeria where the conflict between Christians and Muslims was still causing misery, death and destruction.

While observing the laid-back way of life in North Africa, we learned about the economy of

Libya, the population surviving low wages by moonlighting, which accounted for the neglect of the infrastructure in favour of private dealings. The government purported to be in their name, the Jamahiriya, but in fact dictated their wishes. The painted portrait of the Leader, looking down from hoardings all over the city, perpetually reminded the people who was in charge. The artist had not flattered: the perspective of the head looking up and out towards the future, jaw jutting, meant that careful attention had been paid to delineating every fold of his middle-aged neck.

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Waiting for the call from the World Islam Call Society we assessed the seriousness of the issue of Islamophobia in Europe. A Bosnian Serb teacher in Banja Luka talked about raising children in a multi-ethnic society: ‘We should be kept separate,’ the teacher declared. ‘Muslims and Serbs must live in their own countries, but never work or live together. We will never get on.’ He paused, worried that he might be giving the impression of being prejudiced and added hurriedly: ‘I have nothing against Muslims of course. But we should not be expected to share a country.’ He then said indignantly. ‘I couldn’t tolerate it if my sons had to fight in the same army as Muslims. I would refuse to let them serve under some Osman!’ In the early years of the Third Reich nationalist Germans also refused to work with Jews. They burned synagogues, books, and then people.

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Finally, the day before our departure, we were summoned to the World Islamic Call Society headquarters. Mustafa, in his gold-coloured pressed suit and shiny leather shoes, drove us through the now familiar suburbs of Tripoli. Muftah Abuaisha had worked hard on the agreement, but it turned out there were only two small alterations, and just one of them of any significance. They wanted us to spread our brief beyond Europe, mainly for their sake. They

wanted to use our partnership as an example to the rest of the world, particularly in areas of serious conflict between Muslims and Christians in Asia and Africa, not just Europe: ‘to prove we can be in partnership. We want to show we can cooperate.’ They appreciated our need for their funding, and prepared a list of priorities. Muftah Abuaisha explained that funds went mainly on aid. Our initiative did not come within their remit, but he had access to other sources of funding, and therefore it would take longer to raise money.

We signed the partnership agreement in Dr Sherif’s study. The boss glanced at it, already knowing its contents and indicating he left all that up to his colleagues said with a smile: ‘You have made an alliance, not just an agreement’. Photographs were taken and presents given to us, two embroidered carpets for hanging, thick volumes of the Koran with translations and commentaries and a mass of literature about the work of the World Islamic Call Society.

The Anglican vicar from India had begged us to attend his service. Being a small community the Anglicans did not have a church of their own and met in a large room that had been painstakingly decorated to look like a chapel. Several Indian women in saris and head scarves sat at the front and joined in the singing of Anglican hymns in English, not understanding most of the words, but catching the gist of Jesus’s love. ‘Crown him! Crown him!’ they intoned commandingly, as though planting thorns even tighter round his head. A barefoot boy carried the cross, holding it closely to his nose as he padded towards the altar. Apart from the Indian women and the wife of the head of the British Council in Tripoli, the rest of the congregation consisted of young men from various African countries, looking solemn, crossing themselves, singing loudly and afterwards grinning broadly as they talked about football.

The perpetual loud banging of workmen repairing a door in the next flat accompanied the service, as did the frequent alarming explosions of firecrackers being thrown on the street to celebrate the prophet Mohammed's birthday. Loud shouts outside did not alarm the congregation, accustomed to such disturbance. The English ambassador's wife commented on the row afterwards, but she assumed it to be a domestic brawl, apparently also a common occurrence in the city.

The only other English person we met in Tripoli was the ambassador, who congratulated us on our agreement with the World Islamic Call Society, but told us we should bear in mind the close links between the organization and the leadership. We met at the ambassador's residence, one of the large colonial-style mansions along the sea front, each framed by oleanders covered in bright pink blossoms. Removal men were taking furniture out for a refurbishment so we sat on the patio outside and watched a couple of gardeners languidly moving a sprinkler across the lawn.

RELIC OF A MIGHTY EMPIRE

Even though we had always been confident of the positive outcome of our visit to Libya, it came nonetheless as a relief to know we had secured this partnership with a major Muslim organization. We wandered through the crowded medina, bought some copper trays, an embroidered waistcoat and decided to kill time by having a haircut. Two lean and eager Moroccan lads ran the barber shop we chose and were so excited at having customers from the UK that they put on a special performance of wizard skills with scissors and razors. They spoke incessantly in a mixture of poor French and hand gestures, dangerously fitted in between flicking the blades over our heads until not a strand of hair was left uncut. They did not explain why they had moved from Morocco. Photographs of the Moroccan Royal Family were stuck to the mirrors

along with personal snapshots and postcards from round the world, sent by grateful customers.

The day before our final meeting at the World Islamic Call Society's headquarters, we were taken on a trip to the ruins of the ancient Roman city of Leptis Magna, a two hour drive along the coast towards Egypt. At first Mustafa wanted to be our driver and he could not disguise his disappointment when the severe grey-haired chef de protocol, who had met us on our arrival, decided to take us himself in a larger and even more luxurious car, a Volvo with sofas for seats and noiseless air-conditioning.

We drove along roads pitted and ragged at the edges, scattered with rubbish, plastic bags clinging to spiky shrubs. Beyond lay almond and olive orchards, flat lands, semi-desert, empty beaches and the occasional mosque.

The Italians had excavated Leptis Magna at great expense early in the last century. The city had lain half submerged in the sands, and was therefore in a rare state of preservation. Italian zeal for history inspired justification for colonising this part of North Africa. We wandered down the straight paved roads along which chariots had once thundered, gazed at the monumental arches to the emperors, the largest being erected to Severus, born in this part of North Africa. This general of the Roman army took over from Commodus at a conflicted period of Roman history, the beginning of its decline and fall. Anthony Mann told the story of Commodus, a notoriously sadistic gladiatorial emperor, in a spectacular Hollywood film: *The Fall of the Roman Empire*. The film opens with the death of his father, Marcus Aurelius. The philosopher emperor recites poetry, prophecying the end of Roman civilization, against a backdrop of storm cloud covered forests. After the death of Commodus, the upright soldier Severus restored honour to Rome for a brief period before dying in the English town of York at the northernmost point and opposite end of the empire.

The grand scale of Leptis Magna reflected a need to re-establish the dignity and influence of Rome. The Severan Arch typified the grandeur of the city's chief monuments: Rome's attempt at reminding the conquered world of the might of its governing empire. Still under reconstruction, elaborately decorated and gigantic, it stood on its own in solitary splendour with sculpted friezes and pyramid shapes surmounting the pillars and facing in all directions, north, south, east and west.

The imposing Hadrian baths had been built for a city of twenty thousand inhabitants. There were warm and hot baths, swimming pools, toilets and rest rooms, still identifiable as a place of recreation and socialising, but worn by the sands and time,. The basilica had been turned into a cathedral two centuries after being built, reflecting the rise of Christian influence on the Empire. The proportions and scale of the structure inspired the future shape of Christian worship: its grand processions, the robes, the hierarchies of bishops and priests, a pomp and ceremony inherited from the pagan rituals of Rome, against which the early church fathers then reacted with monasteries and asceticism.

Searing heat kept tourists and visitors at bay, so we had the city almost to ourselves. The only people we met were a family of ten children enlivening the amphitheatre, jumping over the raked seating which overlooked the wooden stage, with its backdrop of a forest of pillars and the sapphire Mediterranean shimmering beyond.

We were taken to the Hunters' Baths, situated by the sea on the outskirts of Leptis Magna, across sand dunes where snakes left their scaly tracks, and looked at the exploits of Commodus decorating the walls, the emperor wrestling with lions and alligators in a series of colourful mosaics.

The forum stood at the centre of the city. Heaps of ancient stones, broken blocks of marble,

crippled columns and medusa heads were scattered over a vast arena, flanked by ruined temples. The scene presented a potent image of the debris of politics and the passing of civilizations.

FLAGS OVER THE MONASTERY

BOSNIA: JULY 2001

We were determined to meet Bishop Chrysostom again because his warm welcome on our first visit to Bosnia in 2000, had implied support for us. We had misunderstood his agenda which focused on rebuilding Orthodox churches, not mosques. We remained hopeful, remembering Patriarch Pavle's encouragement, but were in for a shock.

The road from Banja Luka to Prijedor runs through a fertile landscape of cornfields, woods and low-lying hills. At the heart of this peaceful country idyll stands the town of Omarska and the village of Trnopolje, where the discovery of killing camps with groups of malnourished and tortured Muslims peering through barbed wire fences shocked the world. The skeletal bodies of the survivors recalled the images of the liberation of concentration camps at the end of the Second World War.

The train from Krakow to Auschwitz in the southern part of Poland passes through urban plains becoming more agricultural with farms and pastures before suddenly arriving at a place that will always have dark associations. Omarska and Trnopolje also stand in a fertile vale with rolling hillsides; and a railway also runs through the former.

We had traced Bishop Chrysostom whom we considered a friend and ally to his present home: the Klisina Monastery several miles south of Prijedor in the valley of the River Sana.

We guessed that this visit to Bosnia would be difficult and perhaps even counter-productive. People did not reply to messages. With the exception of Svetlana Cenic, who answered every

letter promptly and thoughtfully, no one took the trouble to acknowledge receipt of them, let alone tell us what their plans were and whether they would be able to meet us. Dr Sherif in Libya explained how people in Muslim countries organized their diaries differently from those in the West: instead of making firm dates and commitments, they would put several alternative meetings in the diary, choosing at the last moment which one might take priority. This did not reassure us. Engaged in a complicated juggling act, we were trying to keep all parties interested and enthusiastic about coming to Coventry. Just one of them dropping out would scupper the consultation. The one party most likely to resist our invitation was the Orthodox Church. To help us persuade Bishop Jefrem we decided to approach him through Bishop Chrysostom, who had welcomed us so warmly on our first visit to Bosnia and had appeared in a video about the work of Bishop Komarica, supporting inter-religious and inter-ethnic peace and cooperation. Perhaps Bishop Chrysostom might even accompany Bishop Jefrem to England.

It came as a shock to discover that the one person in the Orthodox Church we considered a friend had in fact become our foe. Nothing on our visit, not even our meeting with Bishop Jefrem, turned out to be as disturbing and upsetting as our second encounter with Bishop Chrysostom.

We arrived in the late afternoon at Klisina Monastery, a house with a tiny church on a hill that overlooked the River Sana. Several burly men, dirty and unshaven, sat on the verandah in front of the house, drinking beer and eyeing us suspiciously. They did not look like priests or monks, nor were they labourers. They were nationalist militia. Since we had not been able to reach Bishop Chrysostom by phone or fax we could not warn him of our visit and therefore we arrived only on the off chance of seeing him. At least we could leave a message that we had called, he might appreciate the effort. The men scowled and shrugged their shoulders, implying they did

not know where the bishop might be. A shy novice cleared the table, looking nervous. After some commotion inside the house Bishop Chrysostom appeared. He greeted us formally but I detected hostility in his manner, as though the welcome were simply a courtesy - he couldn't order us to leave, we having come so far to see him. Besides which he had something to say to us.

Disheveled and sweating profusely, he embarrassedly told the militia men to leave the table with their beer, and they disappeared into the house. He then ordered the frightened monk to serve us coffee and rakija, which arrived in a bottle still iced from the freezer. The monk also brought a bowl of honey with a small spoon and glass of water for each guest. We exchanged greetings, ate the honey and clinked glasses of rakija, at which the bishop smiled broadly, baring his teeth, but his eyes were not friendly. Donald outlined our plans for the Coventry Consultation and hoped the bishop would accept our invitation.

To our dismay the bishop turned to him and said bluntly: 'I will not cooperate with you.' Our hearts sank like heavy stones. What had happened? The bishop launched into a bitter attack on us. He reminded us that a year ago on our first visit to Bosnia we had promised to build churches. Where were these new churches? Why had we not fulfilled our promise? Donald explained that on our subsequent visits we had learned that the priorities for people were not churches but homes and jobs, that the project to re-build churches could only take place within the framework of economic regeneration and people living together again in peace. The bishop attacked Donald for being too concerned with economics. 'You are a priest,' he said, 'You should only concern yourself with prayer and churches. It was a good project. A year ago you promised us churches. Nothing has happened since then. I will not cooperate with you.' Then he came to the heart of the matter. 'We see that you have been ambushed by Dr Cerić and the

mufti of Banja Luka to build their mosque. You have lost your way and are no longer doing the noble work we discussed a year ago.’

He had misunderstood the fundamental nature of our project, that the different religious groups should help each other rebuild destroyed churches and mosques. As far as he and the Orthodox Church were concerned, only their own churches counted. Donald patiently explained the trajectory of our objectives, that we still hoped to support the rebuilding of churches, that we had written to him many times, explaining our projects, and received no reply. ‘I wrote to you!’ exclaimed the bishop indignantly. ‘I sent you a list of proposals.’ Donald looked at me and we concluded that perhaps Lazar, our first translator, a Serb from Belgrade, had failed to send us the letter. We apologised profusely, but it struck me that this was a smoke-screen. The bishop had not written to us. He had however received all our letters, which we always sent with a translation, but he pretended not to know about them. Far from cooperating and being generous and forgiving to each other, the three Faiths of Bosnia still treated each other as enemies and rivals for foreign attention and funding. Bishop Chrysostom was no longer the pacific and kindly man we had met a year ago in that orchard by the waterfalls of Martin Brod.

Later we discovered that Lazar had misinformed the bishop about the work of the Soul of Europe, making us out to be a wealthy charitable organization with money to rebuild Orthodox churches. This explained the warmth of our welcome the previous year. To be fair, Lazar assumed correctly that the bishop would not have seen us unless we came with promises of funding.

Adnan explained the difficulty reaching the bishop by phone. ‘But you have my mobile number,’ the bishop said. Adnan dialled the number and handed the phone to the bishop. As always the announcement came that the number did not exist. The bishop had been caught out,

but he gave no indication of embarrassment. He listened to the message and shrugged his shoulders. He did not have to explain himself. The phone rang incessantly in the house, however, another number we used only to be fobbed off by an assistant or monk apologizing for the bishop's absence. The bishop answered the phone just once, registering the importance of that particular call, the rest of the time he told the timid monk to say he was not there.

Having come all this way, Donald persisted in reaching a mutual agreement about cooperating in the future and the bishop eventually relented, saying he would like to accompany Bishop Jefrem to Coventry. Earlier he had explained, reasonably, that since the consultation concerned Banja Luka, his presence might be unnecessary. But hearing that Mufti Makic from Bihac had been invited to accompany Mufti Camdzic from Banja Luka, he announced that he would accept our invitation. He still had no residence of his own, the house in Petrovac being occupied by refugees, and he could use this opportunity of meeting Mufti Makic in Coventry to resolve this problem. He then gave us an insight into how the Orthodox hierarchy approached invitations. He told us how he had been snubbed by the American ambassador not inviting him to the July 4th celebrations at the American embassy. We had told the British ambassador to invite Bishop Chrysostom to a reception given in our honour. The bishop apparently did not receive this invitation. When the ambassador telephoned the invitation the bishop announced he could only accept a written invitation. The embassy should send one and he would consider it.

We ended the visit politely and seemingly reconciled. 'You are always welcome to visit me,' said the bishop. 'It is my duty to offer you hospitality.' But he indicated that we could not depend on his cooperation and friendship anymore. He looked darkly at us, even as he waved us on our way. He stood alone in front of the house where the militiamen and the timid monk lurked.

THE GRAND INQUISITOR

The black silhouette of Bishop Chrysostom loomed on the hill overlooking the valley of the River Sana with its undulating meadows, woods and farms bathed in evening sunshine. He raised his hand and the ambiguous gesture recalled that of a Grand Inquisitor. Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor in *The Brothers Karamazov*, sets himself above temporal matters, beyond morality. His self-appointed task is to protect humanity from our humanity, our weaknesses and even our hopes.

Another Grand Inquisitor appears in *Don Carlos*, Italian Verdi's opera based on German Schiller's play about idealism and realpolitik. This inquisitor is the archetypal figure of blind supreme authority, representing a Church which enforces what it believes to be an eternal and absolute moral truth, reckoning itself to be above and beyond human fallibility. He has no name, appears shrouded in menace and terror and issues commands. Even the ruthless King has no influence over this representative of divine authority. Just moments before their encounter we hear the King's admission of loneliness, unloved by his wife, friendless, beseeching the divine gift of understanding the hearts of the people he loves but who hate and fear him. The Grand Inquisitor is ruthlessly unbending. Because the Church sees itself as guardian of a morality, bestowed from a higher, eternal, invisible and remote authority, religious leaders consider they have the right to issue commands regardless of the human cost, suffering and consequences. In Verdi's opera this means the subjugation, torture and massacre of part of the Spanish Empire which refuses to follow the Catholic Church. With pointed cruelty, the Grand Inquisitor also demands the sacrifice of the one man whom the King regards as his only friend, because this man supports the cause of freedom of religious and political belief. In Bosnia the Orthodox

Church blessed the weapons which killed Muslims and Catholics and bishops bestowed sainthood on the political and military leaders who carried out the massacres. The Church manages to keep its hands clean, claiming only to be interested in prayer and the spiritual life, but encourages the politics which lead to bloodbaths, suffering and the punishment of whole communities.

The Orthodox bishops in Bosnia were as convinced of their rightness as Verdi's Grand Inquisitor. As guardians of spiritual life they regarded us with thinly disguised contempt. Peace and cooperation were anathema to them. Only the cause of their particular Church mattered. Dostoevsky describes these self-righteous autocrats in *The Brothers Karamazov*, robed priests and ascetics arguing points of theology. His Grand Inquisitor, however, is a nightmare figment of the imagination. This Grand Inquisitor justifies acts of inhumanity in the cause of a higher good, claiming to protect people from their human weakness and ignorance, even so far as justifying the crucifixion of Christ. This figure is prophetic of the unassailable multi-national powers that regulate the world order today. The higher good they preach is as inhuman and unchangeable as that of the Grand Inquisitor. But to that good, which consists solely of their own interests, power and wealth, whole communities and countries are sacrificed.

The silhouette on the hill above the River Sana represented not only the implacable religious authority blighting the future of his country, but was a reminder of unseen sinister silhouettes the world over. The slight gesture of the hand, part blessing part admonition, as he looked coldly and fixedly at us leaving, recalled the final moments of the scene between the King and the Grand Inquisitor in Verdi's *Don Carlos*. The King asks the Grand Inquisitor for reconciliation, to forget their bitter argument. The Grand Inquisitor is leaving the stage, and, after a pause, emphasising his superiority over the King, replies icily: 'Maybe...'

START HEALING!

In Jasmin Dizdar's whirlwind of a film *Beautiful People*, a matron keeps order in a London ward shared by two Bosnians and a Welsh nationalist activist. The Bosnians: a Serb and a Croat, fight perpetually. They look alike. The Welshman is confused: 'So you're a Serb and he's a Croat then,' only to be told: 'No, I'm the Croat, he's the Serb,' deftly pointing out the lunacy of the conflict. The nurse admonishes them that they are there to heal, not to fight. 'So start healing!' she shouts. However, for all the farcical situations and sharp comments to be made about war, ethnic cleansing, and being an alien in the United Kingdom, there is a dark centre to the film, which also happens to demolish stereotypical attitudes. On the one hand, a group of violent drug addicts turn into caring surrogate fathers, reading bedtime stories to a wounded, blinded child refugee. On the other hand the hero of the film, a sensitive lover and gifted pianist, reveals to his wedding guests and to his shocked bride that he had been an ethnic cleanser, killing men, women and children. 'I was asked to do it and I did it,' he says with no flicker of emotion or regret. 'But now I have a different life, I am with you.' Earlier in the film, an artist discovers a hand grenade in a sock belonging to her reporter husband. She places it gingerly on the table. At the climax of the film the bridegroom's blunt confession metaphorically removes the pin from this grenade and the film ends abruptly.

Halfway through *Beautiful People* we are parachuted into the midst of the conflict, limbs being amputated without anaesthetic in makeshift field hospitals, mines exploding all round, gunfire raking people diving for cover. The madness affects the journalist so he begins to suffer Bosnian War Syndrome, in which he identifies with the victims, becoming one of them. This chimed with our experiences, identifying with the victims and feeling close to madness.

BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE

The staff of the Firenze Hotel in Banja Luka were like the cast of *Friends*. Dragana was the star, always smiling and in good humour. She served breakfast, preparing fried eggs or omelettes to order. At our first breakfast I asked for honey with a gesture describing bees homing in on a nectar source and making a ‘zzzzzz’ sound. Dragana burst out laughing and ever after insisted on giving us a big embrace whenever we arrived. Adnan always shook his head in embarrassment. This time we brought a little present, a joke bee on a bouncy string. But Dragana was not there. ‘She is in Montenegro on holiday,’ we were told. ‘She will be back tomorrow.’ Like the bridegroom in *Beautiful People* these charming and attractive young people seemed remote from a world of ethnic cleansing, massacres and destruction.

On subsequent visits Adnan struck up a friendship with Dragana. They talked a lot about the differences between Banja Luka and Sarajevo. Dragana wanted to visit Sarajevo and spoke readily about the trouble at the Ferhadija Mosque foundation-stone laying. She had been among those Serbs offended by the riot and thought that the mosque should be rebuilt. However a number of Adnan’s young Serb friends in Banja Luka stonewalled him, refusing to discuss the issue of the mosque. This hurt. Clearly we had much work to do.

In the evenings I would sit with the young barman who regularly fetched a special unmarked bottle of home-distilled rakija from under the counter. ‘On the house!’ he would say, wagging his finger each time I offered money. We chatted about football and other inconsequential matters as the potent liqueur burned a path down my throat.

BUILDING STONES OF SOUL

Bishop Komarica looked tired, as always, but welcomed us with delight, in marked contrast to Bishop Chrysostom. Bishop Komarica reckoned there were more important matters to attend to than building churches. Returnees needed homes built, jobs found, their rights respected. When we had told Bishop Chrysostom about Bishop Komarica's priorities he looked shocked - what could be more important for a church leader than building churches?

We outlined the process of the Coventry Consultation. The three communities must be equally represented. The participants should describe the building blocks for the future of Banja Luka and share their different objectives, putting them on the table for all to see and discuss. We would then follow up decisions made and arrange interviews with the press for the bishop. He had already been invited to preach at Westminster Cathedral in London and to give a lecture at the Bosnia Institute.

The bishop smiled and nodded saying in a weak voice: 'I am very tired. But thank you for your persistence and energy. I am happy with your plans. You come like a good doctor healing wounds. You are already aware of the diagnosis, perhaps not completely, but you know enough. The wound is deeply poisoned. But we are keeping the wound hidden. It is not healing. So the work of the Soul of Europe is precious, and at the same time even more difficult.'

Each time we visited Banja Luka we understood more the size of the task we had set ourselves. Professor Andras Riedlmayer from Harvard University e-mailed us a constant stream of reports, articles and opinions. These pointed out the gap between the promises and agreements elicited from the politicians and the reality of what they actually did. The politicians talked about cooperation and all ethnic groups living peacefully together, but their actions contradicted these fine words. This deception was like salt on the poisoned wound which did not heal. The main

hope for the Coventry Consultation was that all these different people being together for the first time might at least protect the wound so that the healing could begin.

‘How can we be of help?’ mused the bishop. ‘How to make one, two or three steps? We are building a house for the 21st century in which all people can be respected. It is a serious issue you are dealing with. You must be part of that re-building. The Soul of Europe represents the transcendental. We are all part of that. We cannot build the soul for Europe if we don’t see the image of God in every man. That is the essence of religion. People who are not believers are handicapped. Because of that there is even more responsibility laid on the shoulders of believers. So I hope the builders of the soul for Europe will give substance to these stones of soul, that the stones be solid and not made of mud.’

‘Powerful people from outside our country don’t want the wound to heal,’ he went on. ‘Last week I had many conversations on my travels and I am disappointed. They tell me that the Republika Srpska is an area of different and separate religious entities that are in perpetual conflict. That is unfortunately putting the worst interpretation on events. So your suggestion about doing work on building blocks is important. It is very sad that we Banja Luka people cannot meet, never meet, to converse and discuss. We are, after all, similar, we are all human beings. But it never happens. Let me give you an example. I spoke with Sarevic, our President, at the end of January, and gave him proposals concerning the return of refugees. I also spoke with Ivanic, the Prime Minister. Sarevic sent me to him. I was well received, but there has been no reply from either of them to my proposals. I looked forward to progress, but unfortunately nothing happened. We are forced to write letters and get no answer. Please, tell me what to do? These are questions about returnees, houses, schools and human rights. But there is no one to speak to. They are all obstructive. The High Representative’s property laws are not respected.

There is international disinterest. There is no will to help and the returnees are slow in coming back. No one wants to heal the wound. We religious people have an important role. We speak about reconciliation. But we must have people. The local politicians are backed by the international community. The politicians in Europe are not united on this issue. The Americans and Europeans have different opinions. The soul of Europe has to be present.'

'That is what is special about the Coventry Consultation,' said Donald. 'People from Banja Luka will go to Coventry and begin to listen to each other.' He then added: 'Justice is the reincarnation of the love of God.' To which the bishop commented sadly: 'But who believes in God now? It is a jungle in Europe.'

After pouring us some of his potent home-made rakija he thanked us again for our noble intentions and promised to participate. He didn't yet know who would accompany him. The bishop struck me as a loner, operating by himself. He would however be pleased to meet representatives from Catholic aid agencies, and also the Cardinal. Donald explained that he wanted the Catholic Church throughout Europe to be aware of the situation in his diocese and to find people from Catholic communities everywhere to be advocates for the bishop. When it came to dealing with local politicians who refused to answer letters, these 'advocates' would take up his cause. Such a sustained effort would not allow the issues to be lost.

'We will find six dioceses,' Donald told the bishop. 'They can be mainly Catholic but also Anglican or Protestant. We shall address the question of solidarity.' Donald then expressed astonishment at the lack of support the bishop was receiving from anyone.

'That's been true of the last ten years,' said the bishop. 'This stinking wound! The fundamental question is: why do people let this happen? Where is justice? We are convicted and yet are without guilt. We speak about reconciliation but there is no justice. If there is peace, it is only a

state-peace. I speak for all people without rights.’

Donald broached the question of Bishop Jefrem, the necessity of bringing him to Coventry.

‘He seems to be shy and frightened,’ explained Donald.

‘That is not my picture of him,’ the bishop responded with a slight curl of the lips. ‘I know him very well, have met him many times. How can one know a man? He used to be flexible before the war - always ready to cooperate. We made appeals together, even with the mufti. It’s strange though - he changed. He hung a portrait of Milosevic on his wall. During the war that is. He was influenced by extremists and has stayed in that position to this day. I tried to have contact with him. Now there is little of that. Bishop Jefrem doesn’t want to see me - he has never been here. I go to him, not the other way round. When I was under house arrest I sent a letter to Bishop Jefrem - especially about the matter of the captured priest from Prijedor. The police told me just one word from Bishop Jefrem would ensure the priest’s release. Not a word. The priest has since disappeared without trace. My impression is that Bishop Jefrem doesn’t like meeting with international representatives because of the awkward questions he will be asked, because of his involvement with extremists. So you have the impression he is scared?’ The bishop looked thoughtful, as though finding it difficult fitting this image with the Bishop Jefrem he knew. ‘We did have one meeting. It was OK. Then came the foundation-stone situation. It is worse now. The mufti upset Bishop Jefrem. The mufti is new in Banja Luka, the past one knew more about the troubled situation. But the new mufti is right.’ Bishop Komarica added with bitter irony: ‘We cannot build one religious community by destroying another one, unfortunately! Karadjic ordered the destruction of the Catholic Church and Islam. Karadjic’s portrait still hangs in Bishop Jefrem’s house. Only last week, French bishops visited Bishop Jefrem and he told them that Karadjic and Mladic are heroes. He told them that internationally they are considered war

criminals, but if they were to be arrested he, the Orthodox Church, would make them saints. What kind of a saint is someone who kills another nation?’

Irritated at having to think about Bishop Jefrem, Bishop Komarica preferred to talk about the consultation in Coventry. ‘This one thing is to come - but what will happen afterwards?’ he wanted to know. We replied: ‘That will be our responsibility.’

The bishop could not get the politicians out of his mind: ‘I’m afraid they only do things for money - like ransoming Milosevic. It is our duty to speak the truth. I spoke with the Americans about official reports. The international community makes any reports it likes - none connected with reality. One report from Banja Luka sent by an imam to Sarajevo was adjusted and readjusted so that it became just lies. So advocacy is important,’ he added, referring to finding advocates in Europe. ‘Not only advocacy for Catholics, but for all people. I was told there are two powerful fronts in Europe against me. My one crime is being a Catholic. God must forgive us all. Please don’t get tired or depressed.’ he appealed to us, ‘Please carry on!’

Donald mentioned the case of the Bleiburg Massacre raised by Cardinal Pulic when we met him in Sarajevo. The bishop did not look particularly interested in this matter. ‘The subject was taboo and suppressed under the communists. Now documentaries are being made about it. Brigadier Alexander was interviewed. UK arms were involved. Croats and Cossacks who had fought for the Nazis surrendered to the Russians. It happened in Austria. They trusted the British. So why did the Allies not deal with the problem instead of sending them back to their deaths? However I have problems of the present now, far more pressing than this one.’

Talking about which politicians the bishop could recommend to come to Coventry he exclaimed: ‘Among the present: none. None! They will not be constructive. From previous experience no one will do anything constructive. Even the mayor is disappointing. But at least

he is honest. When I asked him when people could start returning he said to me: “Father, we have enough people here already to worry about.” We have international representatives from the UK and even they complain about me going on about human rights - just the basic ones! They ask me: “What would you do if you were not here?” implying that I shouldn’t be here at all.’

On the walls of the reception room hung a variety of pictures - family portraits, views of the Mostar bridge, winter landscapes, washer women, farmers, seascapes, street scenes, Muslims in fezes talking, interspersed with icons and a Madonna with child. Before we left, the bishop took us again into his chapel with the photographs of the murdered priests and nuns. We knelt together saying the Lord’s Prayer, simultaneously in different languages.

He then took us into the cathedral which was in the process of being rebuilt. A bright modern stained glass window dominated the east wall. Built in the 1970’s, concrete arches loomed oppressively over the empty space that now waited for chairs and worshippers. The bishop trudged around the building while several surly builders sat outside smoking and eating sandwiches. Evidently this re-building had been only grudgingly agreed to by the predominantly Serb council. The bishop told us that he had been offered a hundred thousand Deutsch Marks to destroy the cathedral. ‘To make it safe!’ he explained, looking at us with bitter irony. He seemed defeated by the project - his main task remained bringing his decimated community back to the city.

Seeing us to the door he kept repeating: ‘Please don’t lose heart. Please don’t lose heart!’

VICTIMS AS CULPRITS

Some truths are so outrageous that they take time to sink in. We wanted to put the best

interpretation on people's actions, to understand their motives from a human point of view, taking into account their history and suffering. Occasionally we had to face up to hard fact that unpalatable truths are intrinsic to the nature of a person or an organization.

Only when Bishop Komarica told us about Bishop Jefrem hanging pictures of Karadjic and Mladic in his home, describing them as heroes and saints, did we at last understand the essence of Serbian Orthodoxy. What we had to understand, however difficult and distasteful, was that for the Orthodox Church in Bosnia, every murder, atrocity, massacre, destruction and act of injustice represented 'the will and work of Christ'. St Mladic and St Karadjic were martyrs of the Orthodox Church.

Furthermore, the victims, slaughtered Muslims, were seen as the culprits. The necessary act of ethnic cleansing caused suffering to the perpetrators. The victims should apologise to the murderers for provoking these acts of violence. This explained the sense of outrage expressed by the Orthodox Church; far from accepting guilt, the bishops demanded restitution and apologies.

Once you understood this vicious paradox you understood the position of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Bosnia.

There remained the as yet unanswered question: what should happen to such a Church? What possible future could it have?

It came as a relief from unravelling the theological tenets of the Orthodox Church, and interpreting their bitter political legacy, to visit the Gimnazia, the main Secondary School in Banja Luka and meet the headmistress, Slavica Njesic-Ivosevic. Given the toxic alliance of religion and politics it seemed particularly important to invite representatives of civil society to the consultation - teachers and business men especially. Claude Kieffer, from the office of the

High Representative, provided us with her name, and that of a colleague who could not meet us on this occasion.

The redbrick school was empty of children, all having left on vacation, and looked bleak with its bare walls and floors. But the headmistress, dressed in a scarlet twin-set and a black-lace blouse, brought a welcome glow of life to the gloom. She greeted us and led us along the echoing corridors to her office.

After the fiasco of the May 7 demonstration, blame had to be laid quickly by the authorities. They seized on the chance to sack the more liberal and troublesome head teachers, those who taught and encouraged multi-ethnicity, mendaciously blaming them for allowing children out of school to attend the demonstration, while protecting those schools where the heads had indeed permitted the children to throw stones at the Islamic Centre. The authorities intended to sack Slavica, but the parents and children protested. The authorities had to climb down and reinstate her. She listened to our presentation about the consultation, looking determined and untroubled by the recent danger she had survived.

Donald continued his presentation: 'There are important issues of justice. If we speak about the soul, then where there is injustice and suffering the soul has to be born and nourished. The question is always how do we achieve that?'

'You are in the right place,' said Slavica. 'I was a professor of sociology and know much about all the different religions here. When religions do a good job - like yourself - it is a relief. But you will find that here in the past ten years religion did no good. So whatever I can do to help I will gladly do.'

'We heard about your recent troubles,' Donald said quietly.

She smiled and nodded. 'I have one thousand and three hundred students. They were all in

school. People took pictures of the demonstration and could see that there were no students of mine there. The parents said so too. The accusation was deliberate. The organizers of the demonstration were angry with the school for not taking part. There are six foreign projects running in the school, one is Education for Peace and there are two co-ordinators from London who are in the school all the time. My only crime is cooperating with everyone from all ethnic groups. I am a child of mixed marriage, just like the school, which is a mixture of Catholic, Muslim as well as Serbs. I'm mixed. I'm a human being. The only difference between human beings is whether they want to work together or not.'

'Young people are important for the future,' said Donald.

'Religion is not the main preoccupation of young people,' she told him. 'But it is present. We have twenty classes on religion. It is my subject.'

We then discussed the possibility of connections between schools in Coventry and Banja Luka. Since Adnan's father was a headmaster of a secondary school in Sarajevo, they also discussed twinning with Sarajevo. It would be a 'project for peace'. She agreed that the rebuilding of the mosque should become a symbol of reconciliation between all religions. So a centre of economic reconstruction would be an important first step.

Donald repeated his statement about places of darkness being where the light has to come. 'I'm an idealist,' he said. 'It is difficult. It will take time.'

'We don't need a lot of time,' responded the feisty headmistress. 'Just remove the nationalist politicians who rule by force and frighten the people who are already suffering enough from economic collapse. Very few people are not afraid. They do not speak freely or openly. That is why the government here doesn't like me. But I believe in a brighter future.'

Donald spoke about the Soul of Europe wanting to open up beyond Banja Luka and the issue of

the mosque giving our work a European perspective.

‘The Ferhadija was always more than a mosque - it was a historical monument,’ said the headmistress. ‘All the politicians ordered its destruction. Not just one person - but all of them. We ordinary people were very shocked that something like that could happen. We could not even have dreamed such an outrage. The Arnaudija Mosque actually stood just behind the school here. But now there is nothing there. An empty space. We all hope it will be rebuilt. I try to teach the old best ways - forgetting the evil, looking forward. This is, after all, my country.’

PREJUDICE AND INDIVIDUAL FEARS

Our visit to Bosnia followed the sensational arrest of Milosevic and his removal to the Hague. Serbia ransomed him, biting its lip while doing so. But the threat to withdraw a promise of substantial economic aid forced the government’s hands. The future of Serbia looked secure, but now the role of the pariah of Europe had been thrown on the Republika Srpska, described in the media as ‘Serbia’s unlovely cousin’. Along with Karadjic, Mladic and other wanted war criminals were rumoured to have fled Serbia into hiding in the Republika Srpska, but they were in fact in Serbia all the time. Another rumour spread that Karadjic was giving himself up to the Hague Tribunal in order to discredit Milosevic, proving that the former president of Yugoslavia took ultimate responsibility for ordering the ethnic cleansing. International pressure lay heaviest on this small republic. The reasons for delaying the arrest of these war criminals, wherever they were, had more to do with the shared guilt of European countries supporting and encouraging these men during the Bosnia war. Too many politicians in the UK and other European countries were compromised, which explained the reluctance to bring these war criminals to justice.

We expected to find the politicians in Banja Luka to be nervous and defiant.

Owing to a bomb scare, we were ushered into the side door of the civic building to meet the vice-president. Svetlana Cenic waited for us in the ante-room, looking on edge. She seemed preoccupied, as did Dragan Cavic when he emerged from his office, accompanied by a henchman in a black leather jacket, face covered in stubble. Both men looked stressed and breathless, as though important decisions had been made in a hurry. The chetnik left and Dragan Cavic greeted us amicably, but both he and Svetlana Cenic looked nervous, puffing constantly on cigarettes, drumming fingers on the table and several times dropped their cigarettes. They were unsettled by pressures coming from the High Representative on one side and from their nationalist party on the other.

Every meeting with these politicians began with a degree of defensiveness, as though they expected to be lectured and accused. But we focused on the consultation, the future, suggesting that initiatives and agreements, however small, were important. This defused their tensions and they relaxed somewhat, gazing steadily at Donald as though not believing this kind of conversation could be happening in their offices. Svetlana Cenic looked troubled by matters she would not discuss. The future of these politicians hung in the balance.

For the first time Dragan Cavic invited us to sit more informally around the coffee table rather than at the large table and began to relax while Donald spoke about the process of the consultation, the promised input in particular from the Sacred Land Project, which believes that all land is sacred, but that sacred sites can be a force for unity. Donald told them he would facilitate the consultation and help them towards an agreement. When the High Representative came he would 'listen' rather than 'tell' them what to do.

'That is too good to be true,' commented Svetlana Cenic sarcastically, having endured many tongue-lashings from Wolfgang Petritsch and other representatives of the international

community.

‘There may be animosity,’ said Donald.

At which Dragan Cavic sat forward on his armchair, brightening: ‘I don’t think so,’ he said. ‘There will be no animosity. The basic problem is lack of dialogue. The lack of dialogue is because of prejudice, a kind of fear. It is human nature. Too many people here have prejudice which produces individual fears. The basic problem of Bosnia and Herzegovina and its future depends on resolving these problems and also establishing communication and dialogue and preconditions to exclude prejudices. I have lots of meetings with many people, with all the religious communities and politicians from other parties which are divided according to their nationalist backgrounds.’

We were cheered to hear these opinions, considering that his immediate boss, President Sarevic, had been pilloried in the local nationalist press for assisting the Reis ul Ulema in lifting the foundation stone of the Ferhadija Mosque at the recent repeat ceremony, which had only passed off more peacefully than the fiasco on May 7 because of a massive police and army presence. The crowds had been kept at bay, but there were still protests and bad feeling. The press depicted Sarevic wearing a mufti fez, above a caption: ‘Effendi Sarevic’, the equivalent of calling Hitler a Jew in Nazi Germany. The petty squabbles of the children’s playground still influenced policies in the Republika Srpska. Only they were more dangerous: these were grown men with guns. Vice-President Cavic could not help being influenced by these policies; he had to deal on a daily basis with chetniks. Pressure from the international community on his regional government to hand over Mladic and Karadjic made his position even more impossible.

Despite the inconsistencies between Dragan Cavic’s words and the reality of his situation he seemed to mean what he said.

He assured us that he enjoyed good relations with Zlatko Lagumdžija, the Foreign Minister of Bosnia and Herzegovina, a Muslim, also with Stjepan Mešić, second President of Croatia, a Catholic, and Alija Izetbegović, former President of Bosnia, another Muslim. ‘Why? Because I have no prejudices. Dialogue is the only way. So it is a good initiative you are proposing. People at meetings fear their public supporters from particular parties. That limits discussion. So it’s better to have such meetings on neutral ground. On ninety per cent of issues we share the same opinion. But on ten per cent we differ, but that ten per cent should not exclude dialogue.’ While he spoke Svetlana Čenić puffed furiously on a long black cigarette. ‘We should be able to work together,’ Čavić finally said, making a big gesture with his arms.

Donald commented on the need for a common perspective on the recent history of Bosnia. ‘It is an important issue for the whole of Bosnia and the Republika Srpska. Our information comes from the UK and America. It is second-hand information, from historians and commentators. We need your perspective. Then we can have a proper debate.’ We had already asked Svetlana Čenić to organise a presentation on this Serbian perspective, particularly after our last problems concerning reaction to our leaflet on the Coventry Consultation, stating that ethnic cleansing had happened in Banja Luka, which almost lost us the nationalist contingent. She complained that the Serb point of view was always being ignored and misunderstood. Now she seemed to have forgotten about this presentation.

‘No problem,’ responded Dragan Čavić, though he did not seem too concerned about the need for a presentation. ‘Let me put it to you another way,’ he went on, warming to the theme of diminishing Serb guilt. ‘Some weeks ago I watched an American film on TV about Mihailović. He was a leader of the resistance in Yugoslavia against the Germans in the Second World War, but was caught and tried as a war criminal. After the war he was the subject of a positive film

biography. But I grew up under communism. The image of Mihailovic was negative. You see how versions differ? Two different histories: one from the allies and one from the communists. Now we have a totally negative image of the Serbs. No positive images at all, not even moments of positivity. I don't say we don't have negative sides. But there is also a positive reality. Whenever there is conflict it is hard to reach conclusions as to who is right and wrong. In some issues many are right and in some issues many are wrong.'

He was subscribing to the myth of shared guilt for the Bosnia War.

We asked about the truth and reconciliation commission.

'We had a meeting shortly before the ceremony for laying the foundation stone of the mosque. It was the first time we got all the religious leaders together, though Bishop Komarica was away. Two representatives came, the mufti and Bishop Jefrem. We spoke about a lot of issues. I spoke of a new concept of religious dialogue: Dr Ceric, Cardinal Pulic and Jakob Finci all doing something together, something practical.'

'That is my hope for the Coventry Consultation,' agreed Donald. 'Partnership along the lines of Ros Tennyson's work in Bihac. Regular meetings between the three religious leaders. We will facilitate these meetings - maybe for up to one year. The three groups need help. Perhaps an outsider can help.'

Dragan Cavic carried on talking, barely taking breath as though inside him a dam had burst: 'I want to say that it's not enough to have religious council meetings. In every area of Bosnian society, so large because of the problems in places like Mostar, Tuzla and Prijedor, we have to establish practical projects. I know all three leaders are starting to meet without outside encouragement. I ask them: Yes, they have similar problems but can they discuss common problems together? Vanity is a problem, religious dignity. They are proud, so open dialogue is

difficult for religious leaders. There is more openness between Bishops Bishop Jefrem and Bishop Komarica than with Islam. But there is possibility for dialogue.'

We ended the meeting discussing the matter of what flag to fly in Coventry, agreeing that just the Bosnian flag would do; a concession on the part of the nationalists.

'I am a lawyer,' remarked Dragan Cavic. 'Best to keep things uncomplicated. There should basically be an official state flag. Perhaps smaller flags can indicate separate entities, but it is not important.'

Now they had to attend the Assembly where Jacques Klein would lecture them. We could hear his helicopter arriving. Svetlana Cenic sighed at the prospect and agreed to meet us at Bishop Jefrem's house the next day, where we hoped her presence would make him more amenable to coming to Coventry.

However, after our encounter with Bishop Chrysostom we were feeling hopeful.

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'WE ARE BEYOND TEARS NOW'

While the members of Banja Luka Assembly were being given an ultimatum by the United Nations representative - broadcast pictures showed them looking bored and irritated as Jacques Klein wagged his finger at them saying either they cooperate with the wishes of the international community or take the bitter economic consequences of neglect and decline - we drove down a dusty back lane to meet a small Catholic NGO working with returnees and helping to solve the legal problems of reclaiming their homes.

Children playing football on a waste patch of ground, perhaps where a mosque had once stood, pointed the way and we approached a house next to where a woman, cigarette in mouth, was draping a large carpet over a washing line. Two German women ran Pax Christi International's

office in Banja Luka from the ground floor of this house. A young Muslim man, Orhan, and a Muslim woman, Aisha, with expressions of despair and perpetual disappointment etched on their faces, helped them. We sat round a dining table drinking coffee and eating biscuits, learning about their impossible task.

They focused on being advocates for returnees, who happened to be mostly Muslims as the Catholics had their own support networks. The Muslims felt lost. They had nowhere to live elsewhere in Bosnia, unlike many Catholics who could at least find a welcome in Croatia, so the Muslims returned to Banja Luka.

The mechanism of 'return' consisted of going to the Municipal offices to register property they wished to reclaim. Serbs were occupying their former homes and these Serbs not only had no desire to move out, but were supported by the authorities, a policy called 'ostanak' ('staying put'), the policy of the government to keep Banja Luka predominantly Serb. So the Muslim returnees waited indefinitely. The government didn't support the returnees and the conditions where they lived, in sheds, sharing rooms, wherever they could find a foothold, were primitive.

Eventually there might be a decision. Legally, Muslims were of course in the right, so the decision always went in their favour. However, how to move the people occupying their house? Who were they? Where did they come from? There were two scenarios, one being 'double occupancy', where Serbs seized the property when the Muslims had been driven out during the war. This happened frequently, often with several properties being owned illegally by one family. Now children, relatives or students occupied these properties and they could not be moved out, since the local authorities protected their rights. The new owners also made money by on-selling these properties. The legal process dragged on with no end in sight and with no interest on the part of the authorities to reach resolution.

Another scenario was when the house was occupied by another refugee. This Serb refugee came from another part of Bosnia where the Muslims or Catholics were now in charge and the Serb had no wish to move back there. Pax Christi International had to find out whether these refugees could return, but they got no cooperation from the place of origin, particularly not from Croatia, which did not want Serbs on its territory. If permission was given for them to reclaim their former home, then they were given a period of ninety days to return. But nothing ever happened.

People made money out of this misery. Properties were on-sold on so the legal knots became ever more entangled. All cases were interlinked but even when all the legal problems were solved, the new occupiers didn't want to go back home and the Muslim returnees remained homeless.

Despite the commands issued by the High Representative in accordance with the Dayton Accord, which divided the country between the ethnic groups yet simultaneously specified the return of all refugees to their former homes, the international community showed little interest in solving the situation, meetings were perpetually postponed. Only promises. Evictions took place, but these were mostly in the Bosnian Federation. Since our meeting with Pax Christi we learned that the only returnees who eventually managed to claim their property were those from remote villages, now destroyed, places with no electricity or water supply.

We sat round the table listening to this recital of wretchedness. Also the computer had broken down and they had lost access to e-mail. The only time the German women smiled was when the conversation turned to the prospect of them moving on to other posts elsewhere in the world. Meanwhile the melancholic young Muslim couple looked as though they had not smiled in a life time.

We discussed the complexities of the situation, the mixed feelings in Banja Luka about the Serb refugees now living in the city. Many of the original inhabitants had been upset by the removal of their Muslim and Catholic neighbours, and expressed anger at the nationalist-led protest about the mosque foundation stone. These people knew about co-existence, had lived there for half a century, but during the war were told to treat Croats and Muslims as enemies. Now they had to learn how to live with them again. They also resented the influx of Serb refugees from the countryside. These village people were not used to urban life. They grazed cattle in the local parks and lowered the tone of the city. The newcomers didn't want to be part of city culture and this created tensions with their more sophisticated neighbours.

Orhan was not sure about rebuilding the Ferhadija Mosque. He described conflicts of interest. Would it be Saudi-funded, implying the influx of Muslim extremists, so feeding Serb paranoia? Raising money for the mosque also raised moral issues in a country where people had no homes or jobs. The process would be important. He was more in favour of joint building projects - of churches and mosques.

Pax Christi achieved positive results providing a support network for people in despair. They were seen as a neighbourhood project. They befriended 'floaters' - people who had to leave their homes and had nowhere to live. The Islamic aid agency Mehamet provided soup kitchens and the promise of help to restore flats once residents were able to return. These returnees had no friends or neighbours to trust. Building neighbourhoods where different groups mistrusted each other became a priority for Pax Christi. They could support those people for whom legal advocacy proved to be a constant disappointment. So they organised workshops, outings and events among Muslim returnees and Serb refugees. The poor helped the poor, beginning to relate to each other, encouraging a process of listening and even providing some work. On a recent trip

to Jajce a mixed group of Muslims and Croats were guided by a Muslim.

But the main issue remained that returnees could not move back into their homes. ‘We are beyond tears now,’ said Aisha. ‘We demand. But we are always being told: not today, no one is here, come back in a fortnight, there is a meeting....’ Lawyers also did little, were corrupt and made money out of returnees without achieving results. Out of eight thousand complaints only two hundred were attended to. Meanwhile the corruption continued.

Our plan originally had been to get all the participants together at a special meeting in Banja Luka. This would save Donald repeating his presentation endlessly, deal with questions at one go and also begin the process of everybody talking and listening to each other. It turned out that only the mayor and his deputy could attend the meeting, though they brought with them a member of the mayor’s cabinet, Milan Balaban, a mild-mannered person who barely spoke and seemed out of his depth but was spokesman on matters of culture and religion. They also invited a business representative, Anton Ruzic, a lean grey-whiskered man suffering from a weak heart.

To our relief Mayor Davidovic entered the room smiling and extending a hand in warm welcome; this in sharp contrast to our last visit when he looked grim and uncooperative. Our fear had always been that he and Bishop Jefrem might not attend the consultation, the latter because he did not want to face tough questioning; and the former because the bishop would not be there. We still had to visit Bishop Jefrem, and were lucky to have found an advocate in Svetlana Cenic who knew him personally and had his trust. We would see the bishop later. Mayor Davidovic no longer raised the issue of the religious leaders being needed at Coventry, the opportunity of coming there was now enough.

Donald reminded them of the purpose and nature of the Soul of Europe, that we weren’t an aid

agency, but that we could develop creative partnerships. He asked them to produce a paper with their analysis and hopes for Banja Luka.

‘Now I’m sounding like a headmaster,’ said Donald, and they all stiffened as though expecting a dressing down. But Donald smiled and explained that this offered a chance for them to show the positive side of the Republika Srpska.

‘We have not spoken to the other participants,’ said the mayor, and again I wondered whether they were coming.

‘Lighten the atmosphere!’ exclaimed Donald suddenly, smiling again, realising that they were all still nervous and used to being scolded by foreign visitors.

The mayor looked surprised; then smiled, noticing Donald’s good humour. ‘We’re not stressed,’ the mayor said, unconvincingly. ‘Perhaps others are. Yours is one way of helping us to communicate. When I became Mayor many people came to me with projects. I made no decisions. I met everyone, tried to do something. But we have had a lot of proposals and nothing actually happened. So I now ask, why should we waste time with no results? These people plan projects and nothing happens. I think we will have a different opinion on this proposal of yours, we need to focus on what the city needs.’

We pointed out the benefits of meeting outside the country, giving another perspective.

‘Linking people at the meeting points will provide possibilities for practical help.’

Bewhiskered Anton Ruzic introduced himself as a businessman, running a machine factory and working for an oil company. ‘We can trust you,’ he said warmly, after thanking us for our efforts. ‘Even though this is my first meeting with you I can see you are pure souls. I don’t normally say this. I have heard lots about you so I know your intentions and objectives. I am glad you chose Banja Luka for that reason. But I am sad you say Europe thinks badly of us. I

know it's true. We must make more efforts to show there are positives things here, that we are people of good will between all races and religions. What happened is now the past. We must go forward. To give an example: we are meeting today. I am a Croat and spent the whole time of the war in Banja Luka among these people. The whole time I ran my party, the HDZ, (the Nationalist Croat Party) which proves there are indeed good people in Banja Luka. So your noble intentions can be realised. We must be well-prepared for September. Of course we will cooperate. There is no question of that. Despite all the problems among the people of this town and elsewhere we can find examples of cooperation here and throughout Bosnia. If my health permits, I would like to come to Coventry. I am also a religious man.'

The atmosphere at the meeting became more relaxed, though Anton Ruzic's speech begged several questions. For instance, if the Catholic HDZ apparently functioned democratically during the war, why had Bishop Komarica been placed under house arrest? Why had the Muslims of Banja Luka not been part of this 'cooperative atmosphere'? The Muslim Vice-Mayor might have commented, but he kept diplomatically silent on this issue. Evidently they all wanted to put a line under the past and try to cooperate in the future. The past was now much in evidence on television. We saw Milosevic's first appearance at the Hague Tribunal being broadcast live on a screen in the café of the Bosna Hotel. Several elderly men were the only ones watching, the dozens of other customers paid no notice at all. The atmosphere in the streets of Banja Luka felt buoyant, like prisoners being let out of jail. These politicians had led their country to ruin. It was not their crimes which offended the people on the streets, but the fact that they had failed. So the trial at some international tribunal, far away, did not concern them. Mladic and Karadjic were still at large, but they too were of little interest to the majority. A few politicians might protect these hunted criminals, while the Orthodox Church prepared to bestow sainthood on them, out of

loyalty perhaps, but most people expressed relief that this chapter of their history was closing. They could wipe the slate clean and look to the future.

The vice-mayor then asked us to find people in the UK engaged in European Inner City Development whom they could meet in Coventry. He also proposed a representative of the cultural life of Banja Luka, so we invited Milan Balaban, although he had not said a word at the meeting.

Finally Mayor Davidovic expressed the main issue in Banja Luka in a nutshell. Asking to meet with representatives of local executive government in Coventry, he said: 'It is important for us to learn how to attend to the big problems of our city with only a small and limited budget.'

With that they all shook our hands warmly and we left reassured that they would definitely be coming to Coventry.

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THE BLESSING

Svetlana Cenic waited for us in a gazebo near the entrance to the bishop's residence. She wore a flimsy short white summer dress and blouse, surprisingly daring for a visit to the bishop. Reclining rather than sitting on the low sofa in his reception room, she looked like Sharon Stone in *Basic Instinct*, her dress seeming to shrink even further towards her hips as she kept crossing and uncrossing her mesmerising pale thighs. The bishop however did not appear to notice. He welcomed us with traditional Orthodox courtesy and hospitality, acknowledging our 'third meeting', it being in fact only our second, suggesting that this should be a good omen for positive results. He then sat stiffly like a stuffed bird on his throne-like armchair and, despite the politeness of his welcome, retreated into remote formality.

He played hard to get. When were the dates of the consultation? We had sent him all the

information, by fax and also through Svetlana Cenic, so he certainly already knew them. He told us he might make the time to come, but not for all five days. We assured him he needed only to appear for a short while, just to bless the consultation, which came as evident relief. The bishop became momentarily positive, pleased to have gained this concession.

Suddenly Donald pulled out every stop. 'I am begging you to come!' he exclaimed, sitting forward in his armchair and slightly alarming Svetlana Cenic with this sudden show of passion. 'For the sake of your Orthodox flock, I am begging you! They want you to come!' The bishop spluttered, looked at Svetlana Cenic and said: 'But they never listen to me!' What did he mean? Was he saying that they paid no attention to his words of forgiveness and humanity or rather that they had not carried out the holy mission to expel all non-Serbs from Bosnia? He reckoned himself to be the guardian of divine truth, his 'flock' proving disobedient and wayward. Portraits of past Patriarchs and Patriarch Pavle hung on the walls. Cloths attached to their mitres that looked like Muslim fezzes flapped with holy zeal. Portraits of Mladic and Karadjic hung in other parts of the house. Donald invoked Patriarch Pavle, saying that the Patriarch had given his blessing to our endeavours and that we had written to him to gain his consent for Bishop Jefrem to come to Coventry. 'Metropolitan Nikolaj reassured us you can come,' Donald told the bishop. 'Is there anyone else we can ask - God perhaps?' The bishop smiled politely at this teasing and muttered that Donald had approached sufficient authorities. However he expected first a formal invitation from England, perhaps from the Bishop of Coventry. This seemed reasonable in respect of the Orthodox Church's devotion to formalities and we promised to have such an invitation sent. Dragan Cavic had promised us he would persuade the bishop and the High Representative would also urge him to come.

At this point, the atmosphere congealing, Donald vehemently flung himself on his knees before

the bishop. Svetlana Cenic again looked alarmed. 'Please ask the bishop,' Donald pleaded, 'if he would kindly give me his blessing.' Donald gave him no choice because he then knelt down humbly at the bishop's feet, head bowed, waiting. He could not see the looks passing between the bishop and Svetlana Cenic, panic-stricken, not knowing how to react, but eventually the bishop pulled himself together, rose to his full height, and spoke a quiet prayer over Donald, touching him on the crown of his head and making the sign of the cross, but constantly glancing at Svetlana Cenic, as though asking for help in knowing what to do next. To an outsider the scene was a farce. But Donald understood the significance of a blessing, a gesture sealing human cooperation under the benign eye of God. He was trying to break through the bishop's defences, to elicit some human response and compel some kind of relationship. The bishop understood this too, finally, as Donald rose, both deeply moved and grateful. The meeting ended warmly. The bishop's manner had changed completely and he kept touching Donald paternally, stroking his shoulder, smiling, eyes shining with emotion as he ushered us out of the room.

Svetlana Cenic seemed sure now that the bishop would come, though perhaps only for a day. She promised to encourage him, together with the help of the vice-president. The bishop did not need to be part of the consultation as a participant, or even to join in the discussions. We could not yet imagine him being involved in the meetings and the sharing of thoughts, listening to the opinions of others. All he needed to do was turn up, bless the proceedings then leave. As the chief religious leader of Banja Luka he knew he had to attend the consultation, but he still feared taking on so much responsibility in case he would be blamed for the war. If we could guarantee to protect him from criticism he would come, in a formal capacity. On previous visits the politicians had insisted on the presence of all three religious leaders, recognizing the influence of religion on the war. The defensiveness of the Bosnian Serbian Orthodox Church, perceived as a

central pillar of nationalist policies, reflected an awareness of it now being sidelined and ignored. Whereas the politicians tried to move forward, hoping to draw a veil over past misdemeanours, and at least appear to be cooperative and tolerant, to be 'born-again', the religious leaders remained enmeshed in the past and could not separate themselves from the consequences of their involvement with nationalism. Perhaps that explained why Mayor Davidovic no longer insisted on the presence of the bishop, but nonetheless, if the mufti and the Roman Catholic bishop came it would look bad for the Orthodox Church not to be represented.

We stood on the main road in front of the residence and thanked Svetlana Cenic for her help, for her scrupulous responses to our e-mails, for being the only person who bothered to acknowledge them let alone answer them in detail. She had become our main contact with the politicians and the bishop, the nationalist Serb contingent and therefore the most difficult to persuade. She also understood the wider issues and purpose of the consultation, its importance for Banja Luka; an opportunity she knew they all had to seize, particularly now that the Republika Srpska had become the pariah of Europe, isolated even from its former protector, Serbia.

However, on this visit to Banja Luka, she looked stressed, more reserved in manner than before. Perhaps she feared for her own future as well as that of her colleagues. We had watched Jacques Klein lecture them on the television news. 'They are always lecturing us,' she complained bitterly. Donald reassured her that at Coventry there would be listening and discussion, equal and tolerant.

'That is what is missing here,' she sighed. 'People are always telling us what we must do, never listening to us.' But she avoided discussing the main issues: the need to arrest Mladic and Karadjic, the failure to comply with international demands and therefore the continuing lack of

financial and economic aid coming to the Republika Srpska and all that implied for the future of her country.

We offered to drive her back to the Assembly where the lecturing was continuing, but she declined and set off down the boulevard, her flimsy dress billowing in the breeze and her face, pale with a gash of bright red lipstick and framed by a mass of raven-black hair, set in a grimace of sad but defiant resignation, paying no attention to our wave as we drove past.

THE ROAD TO SARAJEVO

The road through the Vrbas Gorge had just that day been reopened. Road-closed signs had not yet been removed, but cars were driving through anyway so we followed them. The bridge over the river had been dynamited in the war and for years no one had passed through this spectacular natural phenomenon where steep rock walls rise for hundreds of feet on either side of the swiftly flowing River Vrbas. The sun hardly gets to look inside the narrow, deep ravine where the waters rush foaming and grey beneath the beetling crags. The road clung to a ledge carved into the cliff. Our journey would be cut by an hour and we could now avoid the steep climb and sharp bends of the narrow and poorly maintained road through the mountains to Mrkonjic Grad, beyond which Lazar had once told us grimly, when our car broke down: 'We are dead!'

We passed out of the gorge into a fertile valley where the villages had for years been almost inaccessible. Now the farmers and their families stood blinking and staring at the unfamiliar sight of cars passing through their territory. Wild flowers in full bloom covered the summer meadows and the river, swollen from recent heavy rains, surged and foamed within feet of the road.

At our regular stop in Travnik on the way to Sarajevo we were accosted by a young mother

with a baby and several ragged children. While we ate the traditional cevapcici, Adnan looked after one of the boy beggars, buying him a coke and a meal. The boy would clearly have preferred money, but being hungry, he sat at the next table, swinging his little legs while at the same time trying to preserve his dignity, and consumed a large lunch, all the while staring at Adnan who kept a fatherly eye on him.

I will forever associate Travnik with the painted mosque, the sound of fountains and rivulets gushing from the surrounding hills and the smokey flavour of cevapcici.

Adnan always arrived in Sarajevo with pleasure, each homecoming a relief. We now shared that sensation and as we passed through the suburbs of detached homes surrounded by meadows and orchards, the high rise flats clustering in the valley surrounded by high hills it felt as though we too were coming home. Adnan advised against buying a house in the hills because, however attractive, with the promise of spectacular views over the city, in winter the roads became inaccessible. Sarajevo managed to be both urban and rural within its few square miles. Once the infrastructure of the city had been restored and the public transport system extended over all areas, the city would become one of the great tourist centres of Europe. Memories of its terrible suffering could never be erased because large and prominent cemeteries wherever one looked, full of shiny white new gravestones, drew attention to the recent war and its extensive slaughter.

Adnan shared more memories of the war with us. During most of the siege of the city his father left to fight for the Bosnian army. His mother fell ill and had to spend time in hospital, leaving fifteen-year-old Adnan to fend for himself and his two little sisters. For safety the children had been moved to lodge with relatives, but Adnan preferred to stay at their home in familiar surroundings, despite being on the front line, in constant danger of snipers and Serb attacks. The flat was partly destroyed, and shells continued daily to smash windows and damage the walls.

He spent the time perpetually redecorating and repairing. Being so occupied kept his spirits up, regardless of the danger.

Adnan urged us to get invitations to the Independence Day Reception at the American Embassy. Anybody who was anybody in Bosnia would be at this social event of the year. Apart from the kudos of being seen there, we could talk to those ministers and officials who were being elusive. We emailed Tom Miller, the ambassador, who within seconds, responded personally with details of where to pick up the invitation cards.

We visited Chris Harland at the High Representative's offices. Always friendly and cooperative this time he looked distracted and preoccupied, smiling fixedly at whatever we said, baring his teeth and staring not in our direction but into the middle distance. He advised on matters of protocol at the Coventry Consultation and reassured us that the High Representative would definitely be attending.

Sitting at a desk in Chris Harland's office, we drank mineral water from large plastic bottles. The phone rang occasionally and he would answer, smiling in an alarming fixed, broad tooth-gleaming manner. We learned that Wolfgang Petritsch had asked to continue as the High Representative for another year-long term, despite being unpopular with the local politicians and most of the international community, the former angry with his interference, the latter angry that he did not interfere enough. Chris Harland listened politely to our detailed proposals for the consultation, commented briefly, and then ushered us out with the same fixed grin. Something else seemed to be on his mind.

We passed through several cordons of security guards, the American Embassy being notoriously well defended, unlike the British Embassy where only a small security door

protected the ambassador from an assassin. Most of the international community in Bosnia seemed to be at the reception, milling around in the large gardens, drinking coke and champagne while waiters carried trays of canapés. Mufti Camdzic and Dr Ceric threaded their way through the crowd, fezzes bobbing, and seemed to be the ones enjoying themselves most. They both greeted us with exceptional warmth, beaming as though on a victory high. Mufti Camdzic invited us out for supper later then continued to mix with the dignitaries, embracing Tom Miller with tears of gratitude for attending the foundation stone-laying ceremony and for always defending the Muslims.

Half of the guests turned out to be security. Young soldiers stared fixedly, challenging anyone to approach them, keeping a close watch on all guests. Graham Hand, the British Ambassador talked for a while with Donald. ‘No point in arguing with a force of nature!’ he good-humouredly exclaimed as Donald launched into another speech about the consultation. For the ambassador, parties were social occasions not to be spoiled with work talk. Adnan helped us identify the Prime Ministers and presidents. The president of Bosnia listened to Donald in the distracted, bored manner of people at cocktail parties who would rather be speaking to someone else at the other end of the room. However, Dr Lagumdzija, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, who had always been the most elusive politician that we needed to meet, but one Adnan admired most, expressed genuine delight at being introduced to us. He had heard about the Soul of Europe, mostly from Graham Hand, and assured us that he would do all he could to attend the last day of the Coventry Consultation. Since then we learned that Lagumdzija, young and energetic, had been elected the Prime Minister of Bosnia and Herzegovina, while holding on to his post as Minister for Foreign Affairs. The other politicians we met were elderly, exhausted and seemed simply to be holding on to their positions.

The 4th of July ceremony began and four young guards marched solemnly and stiffly with the American flag, someone sang the American anthem and Tom Miller, after reciting a sermon from President Bush, made a speech announcing he would be leaving that year, much to the dismay of the crowd, in particular the muftis. He could not conceal his relief, however, though he spoke politely of all the good friends he was leaving behind. Athens would be his next posting. An excited Bosnian shouted emotionally from the middle of the crowd, something about a baseball team and that the ambassador would never be forgotten. Tom Miller looked touched and then the party continued. After another hour of milling among the guests we passed like stars at a Hollywood premiere through several cordons of guards, while people watched from the other side of the road.

Mufti Camdzic arranged to meet us in the Ottoman quarter of Sarajevo. He had changed out of his mufti robes and wore a suit, his vigorous and muscular build making him look like the floor manager of a factory. We sat in a café where he ordered cevapcici for us and discussed the consultation. He had by now taken Adnan under his wing. By employing Adnan we had begun to gain their trust. Adnan became indispensable with his access to the mysterious world of Islam which still viewed the Soul of Europe with suspicion. We now moved beyond polite cooperation and formal discussions. Mufti Camdzic joked with Adnan, squeezing his shoulder affectionately, ribbing him like a son. Adnan had visited him several times and on the last occasion, while Mufti Camdzic's wife prepared supper, she overheard her husband joke about going on the razzle with Adnan in Coventry. 'What a fool!' she exclaimed, 'Do you think any girl will look at an old man like you when Adnan's around!?'

We drove the mufti home and dropped him off in one of the smarter suburbs on a hill overlooking the city. Getting out of the car he promised to invite us for supper on our next visit

to Sarajevo. Now at last we were being invited to be part of the family.

However, driving us back to the hotel, Adnan expressed unease about being under the wing of the mufti. In Coventry he hoped to be a free agent and not always be seen as part of the 'Muslim camp'.

RELIGION AND WAR

The issue of religion's involvement in the war dominated our next meeting with Dr Cerić.

Religious leaders were feared. Mayors of towns throughout Bosnia did not dare contradict them. The generals and politicians continued waging the war with their support and often with their blessing.

After the war, attempts were made to make peace between the religious groups. Jacques Klein urged a joint statement from the Inter-Religious Council. He put pressure on Metropolitan Nikolaj. He called a meeting and forced them to prepare a statement. But the Metropolitan complained, insisting that they should write a statement themselves, and refused to sign.

'I want to believe that the Metropolitan is a good man,' said Dr Cerić. 'He is innocent of crimes. We raised five hundred thousand Deutsch Marks to repair the Orthodox cathedral in Sarajevo. We hope to have his cooperation, not obstacles.'

Dr Cerić was not as despairing as on our previous visit, depression having now given way to a resolute determination. He told us of his recent conversations with Metropolitan Nikolaj: 'After the troubles in Trebinje and Banja Luka I warned the Metropolitan, telling him we are dealing with bad people. It could be you next time! We must break the cycle. We must meet each other. Let people see we can sit down and talk. Let's try to obey the Ten Commandments! A month ago, I waited to hear from you to meet in Mostar, in Banja Luka, anywhere. Let's meet. You

never responded. Cardinal Pulic was prepared to meet, although Bishop Peric in Mostar refused to see me.’

We had heard from Chris Harland in the High Representative’s office that the Catholic bishop in Mostar was throwing his support behind the extreme nationalists who now pressed for an independent Croatian Republic in Bosnia. Chris Harland gave us a bleak report about the cruel conditions in the Catholic town of Stolac, near Mostar, controlled by war criminals, who refused to grant permission for Muslims to return. Chris Harland looked at us sadly, asking, with a wry smile, if the Soul of Europe could help there after we’d sorted Banja Luka out. Stolac looked an even more intractable situation, with the Croat nationalists aggressively refusing to move towards peace and cooperation. We remembered the desperate sadness of the Muslim Red Cross representative in Mostar who looked at us baffled at our ignorance when we suggested Mostar could soon be a magnet for tourists. We could not grasp the truth that Mostar, like many towns in Bosnia, existed in a state of frozen war: the fighting halted by SFOR and by accords that had no meaning for the war criminals still in charge. Now we were slowly learning how the Church perpetuated this frozen state of war. Belligerent statements from leaders such as Bishop Peric gave authority to the politicians and town governors to continue the stand-off between the different ethnic groups.

‘Bishop Jefrem will not come to Coventry,’ declared Dr Ceric. ‘The mufti invited the bishop to the Trebinje ceremony. The bishop’s representative said he would be there. Afterwards the bishop told us he had not been told, he did not know the ceremony was happening. Dayton was a mistake. The Republika Srpska wants to clear the land of all non-Serbs. It is a Bolshevik mentality. The Serbs dominated, backed by Russia. It is a matter of injustice. Explosions, shouting, verbal abuse - in Banja Luka - it has all to do with religious hatred. It is very bad.’

Dr Ceric continued to talk about Metropolitan Nikolaj who had once notoriously declared that to support Mladic and Karadjic was 'following the path of Christ'. 'Do meet with Nikolaj,' Dr Ceric urged us. 'His colleagues are manipulating him. He lives in isolation. Go to Foca. It is a town surrounded by ghosts. It is worse than any place on earth. The mosque they destroyed was the most beautiful in Bosnia. Now they are establishing a school there to train Orthodox priests. All the war criminals are in that area, in and around Foca. The worst slaughter in the war happened in Foca. But Serbs are afraid of the ghosts. They themselves announced the laying of the foundation stone for the mosque! Serbs there are feeling isolated from the rest of the country, the rest of the world. They feel the guilt. They must be helped. They have to open themselves; open their hearts.'

Foca remained the one place where Adnan hesitated to drive us. 'Not because I'm afraid,' he assured us, 'but out of respect for all the Muslims who were killed there.' I remembered my visit to Birkenau, Auschwitz, and the startling revelation that came to me there that it was not the ghosts of the victims who haunted the place, but the ghosts of the guards and murderers. In Foca these people are still alive, and Dr Ceric's penetrating observation chimed with my own experience that it is the perpetrators of atrocities who are haunted and will forever haunt the places of their crimes.

Having plumbed the depths Dr Ceric suddenly became cheerful. We discussed our visit to Libya and he laughed loudly: 'Gaddafi must break the glass of his isolation. He needs a good reputation. He has money. You need money!' Then he became serious: 'Remember he worked for the Serbs. I met him and spoke frankly to him. I told him: "you are helping Milosevic, and now Milosevic is killing Osmans and Amars everywhere." You, the Soul of Europe, must ask hard questions, particularly about the European network. Just know where the money is coming!

Be careful!’

Thinking about our bizarre alliance with Libya amused Dr Ceric and he began to speak good-humouredly about Europe. ‘Bosnia and Herzegovina used to have a Sultan in Istanbul. Now he has gone to Brussels, but we don’t know who he is. We must find out his name, discover where he lives.’ Dr Ceric became expansive, allowing his imagination to soar: ‘Let us find him. Who is he? Then we can kneel at his feet and tell him about the suffering of Bosnia. We will talk to his wife, find out what he ate for supper, how he slept, give him gifts, ask how he is feeling, whether there is anything we can do for him. Who is the Sultan now?’

Donald mentioned it might perhaps be Chris Patten, but I found it hard to imagine Chris Patten as a Sultan, or him being remotely accessible. When Donald managed to approach him at the Sarajevo Assembly, Chris Patten looked startled and said: ‘Please write me a letter!’ before disappearing in a crowd of security guards. Sultans now were beyond the reach of people. According to tradition, the Sultan gave an audience to members of the public, regularly, at least once a week. Anyone could approach the Sultan with a request or plea. No longer. Not even talking to Mrs Patten would help.

‘We have to start the process of the Ferhadija Mosque in the context of Europe,’ Donald said. ‘We will start the dialogue throughout Europe.’

Dr Ceric agreed: ‘We have to form the Sultanate into a multi-faith entity. It is on both sides, we have Europhobia as well as Islamophobia. Serbs really need our help. The Orthodox are backward, conservative, not skilled. They cannot handle the modern world. They are atavistic in their relations with nationalism. Serbs don’t listen, accept no arguments. Dr Owen wanted to help the Serbs. So do many Western leaders. About Bishop Jefrem. He is a human being somewhere inside. He should come to Sarajevo - see that we are open. We could of course

organize a demonstration when he comes, but we won't do that. We know he supported Karadjic shooting from the hills. But it is our tolerance that is killing them more than anything else. If you kill tolerance you kill dialogue. Behind it all is the Orthodox Church. Serbs are now becoming more political, they know that ethnic cleansing is impossible. They have to enter the modern world.'

We then discussed the next stage of the Ferhadija Mosque project. The deadline for the preliminary drawings fell in February 2002 and we needed to raise ninety thousand Deutsch Marks. The work could start in the spring of 2002. We asked for copies of the plans; the mufti should bring them to Coventry. Adnan would ask for slides and whatever else was needed. After the consultation we would begin work on the international aspect of the mosque project. This reminded Dr Ceric of our visit to Libya and he burst out laughing again: 'Someone had the nose to go to Libya!' he exclaimed.

Adnan had already described how he attended the second foundation stone laying ceremony in Banja Luka. It passed off relatively peacefully. But avoiding running the gauntlet of strict security, he walked around the whole town centre in order to reach the Islamic Centre. Crowds of demonstrators were being held at bay. Dr Ceric informed us that most of the people had been observing. The demonstrators consisted mainly of very young people, children looking for fun, and the elderly, die-hard nationalists.

Donald suggested that Dr Ceric should one day meet Prime Minister Blair - discuss the misconceptions about Balkan history. 'It is not difficult to understand - but not to justify,' emphasised Dr Ceric. 'Understanding means one can forgive.' Dr Ceric left it open whether he would come to Coventry, but he said: 'Despite me, Bishop Jefrem should come to the consultation.'

‘He has to be part of the solution,’ said Donald, ‘Not the problem.’

‘There has to be an end to hurting,’ Dr Ceric said finally.

Having been winkled out of the office where he hoped to be left in peace, Ifet Mustafic entered, bearing a large diary. He looked even more exhausted than the last time we saw him, his eyes watery and beard bristlier. Dr Ceric joked about Ifet being able to work so hard because his chef-de-cabinet was not married. ‘We should find him a wife!’ Dr Ceric teased. Ifet shook his head: ‘No wife please!’ as though a wife would mean even more work. Unbeknown to all of us then, he was actually suffering the early stages of cancer, which would not be diagnosed until two years later

As we left we invited Ifet to come for a coffee. ‘You are embarrassing me,’ sighed the worn-out chef-de-cabinet. He opened the diary. Long lists of names, neatly written in an elegant script, covered each page. ‘It is not that I don’t want to come, but as you can see I am so busy.’ .

A FORCE OF NATURE

The dinner for the Soul of Europe at the British Ambassador’s residence promised to bring our latest visit to Bosnia to a grand conclusion. So as not to mix business with pleasure Graham Hand fixed to have a short meeting with us first, at the Embassy offices. He repeated his observation about Donald being a ‘force of nature’, after listening with an ironically patient smile to Donald’s lengthy report about our progress in Bosnia. He then laughed with a shrug of his shoulders, as though to indicate that he had no choice but surrender, and offered to help with the issuing of visas.

Dr Ceric had accepted the invitation to the dinner, with Jakob Finci from the Jewish community and Mato Zovkic, the Cardinal’s vicar-general. But no Orthodox. Discussing Bishop

Chrysostom, whom the ambassador referred to contemptuously as ‘Chrysanthemum’, Graham Hand’s eyes narrowed suddenly with fury. They had tried for days to reach him and when finally they succeeded, the bishop insisted on receiving the invitation formally by fax or post. He would then give it consideration. Graham Hand fumed for an instant. ‘I told my staff they dare do nothing of the sort!’ Bishop Jefrem had not replied to his invitation.

We discussed Dr Ceric for a while, learning to our surprise that he was still a young man in his forties. At the July 4th reception at the American Embassy we had met Dr Ceric’s wife, a young and beautiful woman whom we took to be his daughter. The election of Dr Ceric as leader of the Ulema, a group of elders, made his position political as much as religious. Well-educated and much travelled he was one of the founders of the nationalist Bosniak Party and a skilled operator. We should be careful not to give him all the advantages.

Donald broached the subject of the Bleiburg Massacres that Cardinal Pulic had made such a fuss about. Graham Hand again narrowed his eyes with anger: ‘He can stuff it! That piggy, slitty-eyed, slimey....’ he spluttered. And we all laughed. Fortunately the Cardinal could not attend the dinner.

The rest of the meeting was spent discussing the ambassador’s future. He was retiring in September, but unlike the American ambassador, he had as yet no promise of further posting. Apparently he needed to go through a painful process of interviews for possible appointments. Young men in grey suits at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office were making the decisions. Experience counted for little. It was whom you knew that mattered. His predecessor, now Ambassador in Belgrade, had passed unfavourable reports about him to the FCO: ‘We do not mention his name! Except as Beelzebub or Satan!’ Graham Hand said bitterly.

So he prepared to retire to his home in Somerset and apply for a job outside the FCO. The

diplomatic service needed men of his experience and intelligence, not lose them just as they had reached their prime. Young know-alls, without those qualities that can only be gained with experience, could become liabilities in places like Bosnia.

The ambassador would therefore not be able to attend the Coventry Consultation. ‘We will be on vacation then,’ he explained smiling, ‘And if you were to interrupt that you would have a force far mightier than any you have met so far to deal with.’ We tried to imagine whom this might be when he lowered his voice conspiratorially, muttering: ‘The little woman!’

He then confirmed the exact spelling of all our names, because his wife, ‘the little woman’, liked to put place-cards on the table and was a stickler in these matters.

‘Don’t forget to bring your invitations!’ he shouted after us as we pressed through the security doors.

BOGUMILS AND THE HAGGADAH

A chef de protocol ushered us into Prime Minister Behmen’s reception room. The chef de protocol pranced and gestured flamboyantly as he took us into an elegant room decorated and furnished in French Empire style, pastel colours, chairs with delicately carved legs, and a bunch of roses placed in the centre of the coffee table round which we sat. Watching the man fussing reminded us that only a week earlier in Belgrade a small group of gays celebrated the demise of Milosevic by marching openly down the main street. The timing could not have been worse for them. A host of Milosevic supporters, having just demonstrated against what they considered the betrayal and illegal arrest of their leader, released pent-up rage on the slender youths, beating them to pulp in front of cheering crowds watching from sidewalk cafés. Having ‘defended Serbia’s honour’, according to the later press reports, they congratulated, embraced and kissed

each other passionately. Adnan condemned the attack as a disgrace. Even though he did not understand gays, he believed they should be allowed to live in peace.

In contrast to the elegance of the Prime Minister's office, a large painting hung on the wall: a dark, brooding depiction of Bogumil monuments standing in pale moonlight. The Bogumils were a heretic Christian sect that flourished in Bosnia in the late Middle Ages, fiercely independent from both the Orthodox and the Catholic Churches. The Pope sent Franciscan monks to try and convert them back to Rome, with no success. Like the Old Believers in Moussorgsky's opera, *Khovanschina*, the Bogumils clung ferociously to an extreme doctrine of dualism, recognising the world and the universe as being irredeemably divided between good and evil, and were prepared to die rather than convert. Their remaining monuments, carved stones and monoliths scattered in remote parts of Bosnia, showed an earthy pagan sensibility and this was reflected in the painting on the wall. Bosnia in those distant days was one of the wildest and least accessible parts of Europe. The Bogumils' intense hatred of compromise remained evident in the character of the Balkan conflicts. The Ottoman Empire subdued the different warring races and for several centuries brought a civilizing influence. Adnan reminded us that neither Serbs nor Croats rebelled against the Ottoman yoke, which by the 19th century had become despotic and oppressive. It was Bosnian Muslims who initiated the revolt - they wanted independence from a now corrupt and cruel empire. Outsiders always drew wrong conclusions about Balkan history.

The Prime Minister of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina entered, a smart and thoughtful man who looked at us intently, listening respectfully, while Donald explained the purpose of the Coventry Consultation, particularly the presentation on the last day. Dr Alija Behmen knew the story of Coventry Cathedral and told us that our initiative had come at the right time.

‘I was raised in a multi-religious, multi-ethnic society and country,’ he told us. ‘I belong to those who want to resolve issues in this kind of way. I accept your invitation and will do whatever is necessary for the success of the consultation. You can see in Sarajevo how close the religions are to each other. For centuries our grandfathers built lives together. We also have had Anglicans living here,’ he surprised us, pointing at the view outside the window. ‘If you look at the river bank over there, you see the beautiful Academy of Art. That building was sold by the Anglican Church to Sarajevo, before the Olympic Games. The building is still the same as it used to be. So holding to these values was a kind of soul of Europe, which we now have in this city. From this soul we hope to gain peace. I support your work.’

‘The consultation is a modest exercise,’ said Donald. ‘There may be disagreements. But I shall facilitate the meeting - push them towards a common agenda for that city.’

The Prime Minister was optimistic: ‘I can assure you, subjectively, that you will have no problem with the mufti and Bishop Komarica. I visited them both separately after the recent events in Banja Luka. I tried to find out what the government could do to help. I received reports that even Bishop Jefrem is more cooperative. I intended to visit him also but they told me he was busy.’ We all smiled, recognising a familiar story. The Prime Minister admired our success in having actually met Bishop Jefrem twice. ‘I consider Camdzic and Bishop Komarica my friends,’ he continued. ‘Because we are in constant dialogue and we try to find a way to improve life in Banja Luka. They are on your side. Also you have support from the government. It is multi-ethnic, plural politically.’

Donald spoke about encouraging media interest in the UK about the consultation, and the possibility of establishing informal meetings with government officials, though these meetings could not be guaranteed.

The Prime Minister repeated that he would do all he could to help and abruptly left the room. He returned shortly afterwards with the chef de protocol, solemnly bearing a present for us: a facsimile of the Haggadah, the rarest book in the Sarajevo Library, a world treasure dating from the early Middle Ages, packed with paintings illustrating scenes from the Old Testament. Several times in its history the book had been mysteriously saved. Wars, persecution and pogroms failed to destroy it. When the Serbs shelled the library and priceless historic manuscripts fell in a rain of ashes from the sky onto the streets and buildings of Sarajevo, the Haggadah was feared lost. Again it had been mysteriously removed and saved.

We were speechless at this unexpected generous and beautiful gift, feeling fraudulent, having not yet achieved any of our major objectives in Bosnia. The Prime Minister felt that the present reflected the purpose of our task and wished us luck.

Before meeting another Prime Minister, we endured a stonewalling from the World Council for Religion and Peace. We could not meet Mike Engelking because he had left for travels around the Middle East. He had been friendly on our first visit to Sarajevo when we took him out for supper with Saba Risalludin, but since then had indicated ambivalence about our work. The World Council for Religion and Peace brought religious leaders together to sign agreements. He judged the Soul of Europe to be political and did not want us involved with his organization. He evidently had warned his representative to keep a distance. She sat and listened to us in silence as we asked her to use her influence on Bishop Jefrem and the Orthodox Church and persuade him to come to Coventry. She explained that all bishops in the Orthodox Church are equal, and therefore that Metropolitan Nikolaj would have no authority over Bishop Jefrem. She told us the World Council for Religion and Peace had no connections with Bishop Jefrem. She grudgingly

admitted that some of the bishops were difficult. The World Council for Religion and Peace did not want us to upset the peaceful balance they were fostering between the religious groups.

Afterwards we drank coffee and consumed cevapcici at Leonardo's Artist's Café - a café-gallery in a residential area near to the Square of Heroes, a housing estate which had been on the front line during the siege of Sarajevo. One building remained a monument to the war, completely gutted by shells. The rest were repaired. The artist himself served us as we sat on low sofas, the floors covered in brightly coloured carpets, masses of paintings on the walls.

The Prime Minister of Bosnia and Herzegovina could not see us because being also Minister for Refugees he was facing heavy fire at an important parliamentary session. His deputy and Prime Minister came instead. The two softlyspoken women joined us in his study, which overlooked the old ruined parliament building, a monument to the war, shelled into submission, the place gutted and black from fires. It too used to house all the ministries which were now scattered across Sarajevo. We had been waiting for the two women for some time, the sun streaming in through the windows, admired the view of the city, noting the Red Cross flag draped over the television set, and fiddled with the display of dried flowers on the coffee table.

The Deputy thanked us for coming and explained that Prime Minister Zubak knew all about us and understood our objectives, and thanked us for working in this field. 'We need a healthy society,' she told us. 'Your work is important for us.' The Prime Minister would try and be present at Coventry, the consultation reflecting his interests as Minister for Human Rights, conscious of the issue of refugees needing to return home to Banja Luka. He knew about Bishop Komarica and the work of Pax Christi International. 'We are aware of the problems,' the deputy concluded before showing us out. The Prime Minister took us to the lift and explained how she

had worked there for the last twenty years or more. Her calm and kindly demeanour belied a steely determination which had been her only protection throughout the war years, when, as she told us, she walked to work every day under constant fire as she lived in the part of Sarajevo that suffered the fiercest and most uninterrupted attack from the surrounding hills.

We were now promised a rare meeting with the best known Bosnian political leader, former Prime Minister Alija Izetbegovic. He had personally invited us to a book-signing earlier that day, but seeing Dr Behmen and Mr Zubak took precedence, so we fixed to meet him later at his offices. We arrived to discover that Izetbegovic, being elderly and ill, had been exhausted by the book-signing and needed to sleep. We spent the time with Sulejman Tihic and his assistant Sehada. We sat in the offices of the SDA (Muslim Party of Democratic Action) headquarters and Sulejman Tihic stared at us intently, making critical observations, determined that the consultation should not be a waste time but a productive event.

‘It is very important to make sure Bishop Jefrem comes,’ said Sulejman Tihic. ‘The fact is that the politicians in the Republika Srpska are dependent on him. His presence is essential. In our personal view the Orthodox Church blessed all the crimes, so without the Orthodox at the consultation there will be no forward movement.’

‘That is not completely true,’ Donald disagreed. ‘Bishop Jefrem’s absence will be a shame, but only the Anglican hierarchy will miss him being there.’

Sulejman Tihic was surprised at being contradicted but reassured us of his cooperation, regardless of the participation of Bishop Jefrem. Perhaps the bishop’s presence should not be stressed.

Donald explained the Muslim presence to be more important. ‘If you are all seen to be together we can achieve a lot.’ He then spoke about the Asian Muslims in the UK and their difficulties

adapting to the western way of life, and how the Bosnian Muslims could teach them.

‘I’m glad you are aware of the difference between Muslim groups,’ said Sulejman Tihic, relieved. We had remembered the lessons he had taught us on our last visit.

‘Bosnian Muslims are a precious contribution to Europe,’ said Donald.

Sulejman Tihic looked forward to his first visit to the UK, but it turned out that political manoeuvring by Serb nationalists in the National Assembly at Banja Luka ensured Sulejman Tihic, as deputy speaker, could not attend the consultation, fixing an important debate on Muslim rights at exactly the same time.

Donald revealed his own hidden agenda, ensuring regular meetings between the religious leaders.

‘It is strange to see how we’ve all been suffering,’ said Sulejman Tihic. ‘So many mosques destroyed. But we have not destroyed their churches. We still want to live together with them, but they don’t want to live with us. It is difficult to explain, but we forgive them.’

We spoke about Srebrenica. Soon there would be a proper burial of the bodies of slaughtered men and boys, found in mass graves after the war and removed to a morgue awaiting identification. The town lay in the Serb heartland of the Republika Srpska and everyone was anxious about what might happen when crowds of Muslim mothers and wives came to bury their dead and attend a public ceremony.

‘The Church is the base of all the evil going on,’ avowed Sulejman Tihic. ‘They have to make concessions!’

The world media reported the ceremony a week after we left Bosnia. Wailing and ringing their hands, the women sat mourning in the fields where their husbands and sons had been massacred. Cordons of police stood around them while Dr Cerić led the ceremony, with the High

Representative standing grimly at his side. We noted a reference in his speech to the objectives of the Soul of Europe when Dr Cerić emphasised the need for the religions to live at peace together, that ceremonies like this should initiate such cooperation. The mourning women seemed oblivious of the speeches, drowned in their sorrow. The media also filmed groups of Serbs watching from the hillside, their faces set in hatred and anger. These people, looking poor and downtrodden, resented and feared the return of Muslim families who might take away the land and homes they had occupied ever since the massacres. Like the Orthodox Church, these Serbs, far from feeling guilty or even repentant, blamed the Muslims for demanding justice and the permission to return to their homes. ‘Someone should apologize to us!’ were the words etched unspoken on the faces of these Serb onlookers. The word ‘genocide’ irritated them to such a degree that it was now being used jokingly in Belgrade, as in: ‘I’m committing genocide on this sandwich!’ This reminded me of Lazar’s black humour during the NATO bombardment of Belgrade in 1999, when he e-mailed aerial photos of the White House lawns with the caption: ‘mass graves discovered: burial of the truth’. The Serbs could not bear to face the truth of what was being committed in their name, so they made a joke of what they most feared to hear.

We ended our meeting with Sulejman Tihic and Sehada by discussing the ‘stepping stones’ and ‘building blocks’ for the future of Banja Luka. ‘To overcome ethnic conflict,’ said Suljeman Tihic simply.

‘I used to have Orthodox neighbours,’ he continued. ‘But they weren’t all that religious. The Catholics in this country were the most ‘religious’ group, faithfully and regularly attending their churches. Muslims, like the Orthodox, tend not to be so religious. Now we are living in a mostly secular society. The young are not interested, and most of them want to leave.’

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On the slopes of the hill overlooking the centre of Sarajevo was a cemetery, within yards as the crow flies of the great library which the Serb army destroyed in the war. The view took in the whole city and in particular the four major religious buildings, the Orthodox cathedral, the Catholic cathedral, the synagogue and the Begova Mosque, all within walking distance from each other. The River Miljacka cut its straight, shallow and narrow way through the city and into the distance, surrounded by hills and skeins of villages. A small wooden mosque guarded the cemetery and in its shadow stood the house where Adnan was born, the family home. He grew up with this view of Sarajevo. A couple of minutes stroll down the steep narrow road was the city centre: the Ottoman quarter with its craft shops, fountains, cafés and mosques. On the left another road led to the government and administrative buildings. A network of narrow streets rose steeply into the residential quarters of the city.

Adnan's father decided to leave the family home to his aunt. He had been offered a job as headmaster and needed to live closer to the school. Adnan hoped we might rent the bottom storey of his aunt's home as an office for the Soul of Europe in Sarajevo. Given its proximity to the centre this seemed a sensible option.

Earlier we had visited a typical flat in the Dobrinja suburb where Adnan's and Daria's families lived. These were cheap to rent as they were still in disrepair, this having been the frontline during the war. Most buildings bore the scars of shelling and some were derelict.

Daria shared a small apartment with her parents and a dog. For all the crush and lack of space they kept the home immaculately tidy. Even a piano found space along one wall. Bookshelves reached from floor to ceiling, a computer, sound system and television tucked in between. Families would need to get on well living so cramped, but now it felt cosy and peaceful, the parents being on holiday on the Dalmatian Coast. The windows looked on to the hillsides

beyond, where Serb artillery had bombarded all these homes throughout the long siege. Home suddenly seemed vulnerable.

We then drove to the more distant suburb of Ilidza where the houses were larger. The not-so-poor citizens of Sarajevo lived here, commuting to work on the regular tram routes. Houses here had gardens and orchards and stood within walking distance of large modern shopping malls. Beyond Ilidza lay the park where lakes and springs surrounded the source of the River Bosna, gushing from the mountainside behind, an area that remained inaccessible because of the multitude of land mines laid by the Serbs during the war. Children were still being killed and mutilated from straying there.

‘RESISTANCE IS FUTILE’

The ambassador lived in the wealthy quarter of Sarajevo where the steep narrow streets wound their way between walled residences each with extensive gardens.

We arrived at a piece of Home Counties England. The lawns glistened emerald green from being regularly sprinkled, gnarled fruit trees bent their branches over well-stocked flowerbeds and Sarajevo, with its Ottoman minarets, lay beyond like a landscape from a different dream.

Most of the guests had already arrived and were sipping champagne on a patio under trees. Dr Ceric arrived breathless and without his wife, who had to entertain some unexpected visitors. The ‘little woman’, Mrs Graham Hand, quizzed me about our work and, as I had been warned by Graham Hand himself, her questions were sharp, to the point and difficult to answer - basically suggesting we were attempting an impossible job, that trying to develop peaceful solutions in the Balkans represented a vain hope. She was ‘little’ only in respect of Graham Hand being so tall, but looked feisty and capable. A shame she could not run the Coventry Consultation - she would

soon knock heads together and tolerate no nonsense. We spoke about gardens and her home in Somerset where she looked forward to spending more time once they had left Sarajevo in September. Then she became distracted by the kitchen staff announcing that dinner was ready.

Donald sat on Mrs Graham Hand's left side, Dr Ceric in high spirits on her right and me next to him. Wanting to break the ice of formality I told him how happy I was to see him again and he unexpectedly gave my hand a warm squeeze under the table, bending over to me and whispering in my ear that he was delighted as well. Later in the dinner he expressed sorrow at the ambassador leaving Sarajevo, 'just when we have got to know and love you'. He and the ambassador engaged in sophisticated but friendly banter, which meant they could speak honestly, take any offensive observation as a joke while acknowledging its honest purpose. Graham Hand was an expert at this kind of diplomacy, which accounted for Dr Ceric's respect.

Christopher Harland sat next to Donald and they discussed the uncertain future of the Office of the High Representative. Adnan had been placed with Jakob Finci's wife, who could not speak English. She listened and hardly spoke; looking disinterested and distracted most of the evening. On my right sat the ambassador's second-in-command, Daniel Fearn, a representative of the new Foreign Office, bright, educated and learning the diplomatic skills of which Graham Hand was a master, knowing just when to apply the pressure of a forthrightly held opinion and when to be distant and reserved. Graham Hand recognised bad eggs and did not hesitate to say so. He identified the questionable aspects of all the political figures in Bosnia and judged how to support and censure them. In Bosnia, where so many people in power were compromised by their questionable past, it was vital that the ambassador be seen to know the truth. Balance and compromise always benefit those in power, and the weaker rarely receive justice.

To Graham Hand's right sat Jakob Finci, representative of the Jewish community in Bosnia and

also leader of the Inter-Religious Council. He held forth wittily, his statements peppered with self-deprecating Jewish humour. The Vicar-General to the Cardinal, Mato Zokic, sat on Graham Hand's left and, though friendly, treated the dinner as a business meeting. It struck me that the three members of the Inter-Religious Council present barely talked to each other.

After a few minutes of stilted conversation over a smoked salmon starter, during which I shared with Dr Ceric my thoughts about the Orthodox Church, so noticeably absent from the table, Dr Ceric dismissed my observations, having his own opinions based on more direct experience and not wanting to share them with me at that moment.

Roast duck followed and a dessert of summer pudding ended the dinner. We then moved to a lounge where the conversation became more relaxed and domestic. Mrs Graham Hand talked about her son, visiting on vacation from university and spending his time in Sarajevo drinking all night with friends, sleeping all day. 'There is nothing I can do about it,' she said with a laugh and a shrug. Privacy of internet communication, the lack of structured family life and children's demand for independence seemed to have created a gulf between the generations. However, in Bosnia children could not afford to move away from the parent house, and family frameworks remained traditional, each member sharing responsibility for the other. So Adnan took his younger sisters under his wing, and protected them like a father.

Towards the end of the dinner, an issue triggered a sermon from Donald. Graham Hand, forever the perfect host, keeping the conversation flowing smoothly, sat back in his chair smiling ironically, then interrupted Donald at a point where breath had to be drawn and announced: 'I have a motto for the Soul of Europe! I don't know what it is in Latin, but it goes: 'resistance is futile!' At which point everybody laughed and our latest visit to Bosnia came to a good-humoured end.

THE SLOW TRAIN TO ZAGREB

The train took thirteen hours along the recently reopened line from Sarajevo to Zagreb. It wended its way slowly through idyllic landscapes, mostly along fertile river valleys, villages and towns scattered among meadows and woods, the delicate fingers of minarets in Bosnia giving way to compact Orthodox churches and then to dark, cavernous Catholic churches in Croatia.

Occasionally the train crossed large stretches of remote countryside with isolated farms surrounded by deep forests and wild meadows. At the end of one such wilderness it stopped a couple of hours outside Banja Luka where the electricity supply had been cut off due to building work on a bridge over the Vrbas. The perpetual clatter and squeaking of the old train switched to a dead silence while a hot afternoon sun burnt through the grime covered window panes.

An hour after leaving Banja Luka we passed Omarska, it's neat freshly painted station festooned with pots of geraniums. Outside the town lay barracks, warehouses and the iron-ore mine which had been a killing camp during the war. Beyond them, orchards and cornfields, including a meadow where a mass grave of over four hundred murdered men, women and children had just been discovered, stretched towards woods and hills, where, during the Second World War Serbian Orthodox, Croatian Catholic, Muslim and Jewish partisans succeeded at huge cost of life, in driving the fascists of Germany and Croatia out of Bosnia.

MEETING OF ENEMIES

COVENTRY SEPTEMBER 2001

THE GIANT IN THE FOREST

The Coventry Consultation took place in the shadow of an event which changed the course of

history and witnessed worsening relations between the western world and Islam.

Just twelve days before the Coventry Consultation, Islamic terrorists from Al Qaeda crashed two planes into the World Trade Centre and one into the Pentagon. The world prepared for war, while trying to understand the causes of this outrage. The United States, stunned and shocked by this first outside attack since Pearl Harbour, immediately closed ranks against the rest of the world. The people were baffled: 'Why are we so hated?' The media obsessed about a turbaned master-villain in a remote and exotic wild mountain region of the world, who now provoked the western alliance of rich master nations into a pitched battle. For that reason the event in Coventry passed unnoticed by the press, with the exception of an article in the Daily Telegraph by Damian Thompson, the journalist who accompanied us on one of our previous visits to Bosnia. Few were interested in notions of mutual understanding, of finding ways to cooperate and live together in this world everyone shared. The consultation happened at a time of renewed anti-Muslim feeling, our dissenting voices drowned out by the clamour of a majority bloodthirsty for revenge. Muftah Abuaisha rang Donald from Libya before the consultation and expressed a deep fear and sorrow as to what the future held. Thoughtful Muslims, probably even more than their western counterparts, were immediately aware of the world catastrophe now imminent. This would not just be a battle between extremists and those they hated, but as the extremists intended: a war between rich and poor nations, global organizations and those they exploited. A turbaned Osama Bin Laden, the enemy's commander in chief, squatted with a rifle in front of a rocky cave and sent defiant messages to presidents and Prime Ministers, who were dressed in smart suits and issued responses from luxurious offices. Bin Laden's propaganda rivaled the spin of any Western government. He came from a hugely wealthy Saudi family and was able to bankroll a movement

that challenged Western global influence. Posing as a desert Arab, living rough, he manipulated the contrast of image between a modest foot soldier for the army of Islam and the Western tycoons of global capitalism. This inflamed the dispossessed of the world by reminding them of the injustices heaped on them for generations by the economic colonialism of the richest and most powerful nations. The fact that extremists manipulated both sides no longer mattered. War was on its way. On the one hand the rich aimed for world hegemony in the guise of democracy. On the other hand the poor hoped to exact revenge, claim justice or be destroyed. One way or the other they had nothing to lose.

When the twin towers came down they looked fragile, like cardboard stage props - impossible to believe that two planes could have caused such damage. In Palestine a woman danced and ululated on the streets while young men in rusty cars gestured defiantly and smiled approvingly. The mighty had indeed been brought down from their seat: now was the time for the humble and meek to be raised up. In Pakistan, crowds of young, mostly unemployed poor men, roared their approval for Bin Laden. World issues simplified into black and white: good and evil; the world superpower determined to protect its business interests and global influence and the attackers, martyr-like, prepared to sacrifice their lives, destructive and unpunishable.

Bitterly violent and still undigested history of the 20th century lay immediately behind this 21st century conflict. For the first time in a year of preparation for the Coventry Consultation, I began to remember and ponder on my own history and experiences. From now on, this reflection became a significant part of our work. In 1963 I had witnessed the wretched dusty Palestinian refugee camps across the border from Israel in Lebanon, many years before anyone took notice. My family in Israel took no interest in the plight of these people: they were someone else's problem. Palestinian terrorists eventually saw to that indifference. How could my family, who

had suffered so much in Nazi Germany, not see that they were carrying on similar persecution? I worked alongside cheap Palestinian labourers, despised second-class citizens in their own land. The Israelis organized the work force; the Palestinian young men and women followed orders. Arab nations hated Israel. Soldiers on the Golan Heights regularly shot at Israelis in the kibbutz Tel Katsir near the Syrian border where I worked alongside educated Jewish immigrants from North Africa. Several friends were killed during my stay. Young people ran this kibbutz. Children of Jews who had survived Auschwitz and Buchenwald, they expressed deep shame that their parents had allowed themselves to be persecuted. They were determined this would never happen to them and their children. 'This is our home' they told me, 'No one will drive us out.' Their parents told me: 'This is a place where we no longer feel we are guests.'

I have always believed that we are all born on this earth as our communal home and must learn to share it together. Perhaps it was too soon to discuss this view with people who still could not come to terms with the traumas they had so recently suffered. I studied Hebrew with Jewish refugees from Iraq and Iran, young men from prosperous families who did not appear to have suffered persecution. The Palestinian refugees in their camps had no such privileged wealthy backgrounds, no one to protect or advocate for them. A new generation of energetic young men, raised in the camps and passionately resentful, would find a way of alerting the world to their sufferings and indignities. It did not occur to me then that they would resort to terrorism, such was my youthful naïvety. A few years later I met a young Lebanese man in Austria, where a Greek banker who worked in Beirut had a summer residence in Kitzbuhel and commissioned a painting from me. Son of the banker's Lebanese chauffeur, the young man had considerable charisma, tall, dark and handsome. He arrived with his French wife, who seemed frightened and ashamed. He spoke little at the dinner table and fixed us all with an intense stare and ambiguous

smile. He worked for a political organization and kept a determined silence about his plans. No questions were asked either and I observed his ruthless determination, using his French wife to gain him access across Europe. He laid his muscular arm across her back and she shuddered, looking sorrowfully into her plate, acknowledging her inescapable predicament.

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Some years later I breakfasted on the top floor of the taller of the two towers of the World Trade Centre. Manhattan lay far below: a meccano set. Small planes and helicopters flew like insects between the towers, clean-lined pristine monuments, elegant and majestic. The view had to be the best in New York, offering witness to the economic might of America, and we shared vicariously in its confidence. The young staff, professionally polite and friendly students bolstering their income, served typically large American breakfasts of crisp bacon, hash browns, grits and eggs sunny-side up, and perpetually refilled coffee mugs. High above the turmoil of the streets below, surrounded by space and silence, this must have been how it felt at the top of the tower of Babel, too close for God's comfort. Watching the towers' destruction, my first horrified thought was of the staff, going about their business, not imagining they would be dead within an instant, their bodies tumbling, crushed to death by the concrete and metal debris, and acres of glass.

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With just a few days to go before the consultation, we worried whether any of the participants would actually turn up, and how the events on 9:11 affected them. It turned out that the Serbs and Bosnians we spoke to could not rouse any concern about the attack - they had suffered years of bombardment and daily terror for their lives, so had little sympathy for the Americans and were not interested in the political repercussions. They said with a shrug of the shoulder: 'Now

they know what it feels like to be bombed.’ For the Bosnians the attack represented a private battle between Americans and Muslim extremists.

Yet historically the Bosnians had much to teach the world about living with difference. In their one small country Catholic people looked West, Orthodox people looked North and East and Muslims looked East and South for their culture and support. These traditions would not only help the country rise again, but teach the rest of the world about the equilibrium of cultures which had enabled these different people live together for centuries.

Talk of ‘good and evil’ and ‘the clash of cultures’ suggesting a new world war with its inevitable sacrifice of innocent lives, meant that the world still refused to learn any lessons from history. Those who had the power in the West propagated a myth of itself as the repository of democracy, justice and free speech, ignoring the fact that justice and liberty remained the privilege of the wealthy, the lucky few who had won life’s lottery. They dubbed dissenters embittered failures. The powerful had basically three attitudes towards the rest of the world: patronizing, exploitative and indifferent. Each side accused the other with equal prejudice, fear and hatred. Ovid warns: *fear breeds fear where ignorance fails*.

Our efforts to organize this consultation suddenly seemed more necessary than ever, and yet more pathetic, like a whisper drowned by a cacophony. Were we too late? The consequences of 9:11 pointed to Armageddon.

The United States, the major world super-power, had been like a giant asleep in a mythical forest. Now it was roused, wounded and seriously humiliated. The rest of the forest waited for it to wreak havoc as it flailed around destroying everything in its way.

Days before the consultation, while we were preparing for it in England, Bishop Jefrem let it be known that he would not be coming. Donald travelled immediately to London, arrived at the Bosnian Embassy and demanded to see the ambassador, the deputy ambassador and all the embassy staff. They gathered in alarm.

Donald addressed them with as much gravity as he could muster: 'In as much as you have no control over institutions in your country, I wish to protest in the strongest possible way about Bishop Jefrem's behaviour with respect to the invitation to come to Coventry Cathedral. If I do not hear that he is coming within twenty four hours I will refer the matter to our government, the United Nations, the World Council of Churches and the Prince of Wales.'

Without waiting for a response he left and took the next train home. Donald had played his final card.

Later we were told that the deputy ambassador immediately rang President Cavic who hurried round to Bishop Jefrem's residence and told him: 'If you do not come there will be an international incident.'

Next we were informed that Bishop Jefrem would come after all, but was bringing five priests with him.

We insisted that he come with just one.

Then we were informed that Bishop Jefrem would fly from Belgrade, not from Zagreb along with all the other participants, because he did not trust Croatians.

We insisted he fly from Zagreb, because all the tickets had been booked.

There were no more cards up our sleeve and to the last moment we did not know if Bishop Jefrem, or indeed any of the participants, would actually come.

THE BISHOP'S HAT

On September 24 2001 Heathrow Airport was almost deserted. No queues of cars and buses. Hardly any passengers; and these stragglers looked lost and stunned in vast spaces of the usually crowded arrival and departure lounges. Such had been the effect of the plane hijacking on September 11: a sense of shock still palpable. Extra precautions now made travel safer than ever before, but just the thought of being one of those people in the plane knowingly being flown to imminent destruction by a suicide pilot continued to terrify passengers.

We had received no message from Adnan all day, so could only assume that the participants were coming.

Problems included perpetual shortage of funds and rows with the Centre of Reconciliation at at Coventry, forced changes of plan and last minute hitches, such as suddenly being informed that all hotels in Coventry were full and could not accommodate us because the Ryder Cup Golf Tournament had been scheduled for those dates. However 9:11 cancelled the tournament and suddenly the hotels had plenty of rooms available. Such stresses were to be expected but dealing with the deeply ingrained cynicism of all the young people we met in Bosnia exhausted us most. They smiled at us with contempt and pity, telling us we were a couple of yet more naive do-gooders who would be taken for a ride by the politicians in particular, taking advantage of our hospitality and stinging us for extra shopping expenses, yet nothing would change, even though they might agree to a few public statements which are easy to make and none of which need to be turned into practice. The young cynics had seen this happen before and shaking their heads sadly told us they just didn't want us to suffer the same humiliation.

On the one hand this cynicism created knots in our stomachs, a sense of failure even before the consultation had started. On the other hand it fed an anger, a determination to make these

powerful and influential people face up to their own failure in answering the interests and concerns of their people, particularly in regard to the young people who were so bitterly disowning them and desperately trying to leave their country. Now it seemed ever more important to pursue our initiative, regardless of failure and humiliation, whoever might or might not turn up.

We kept reminding ourselves that the presence of the participants - all of them together – constituted the most important aspect of the consultation. Therefore until we had seen them actually arrive, we could not be sure even of this success. Imagine our relief when the first person we recognised coming through the arrival gate happened to be the lean, tall and black-robed figure of Bishop Jefrem in his bishop's hat. So pleased to see the one person we most feared would not come, I behaved like a fool and in the middle of the airport promptly bent down on one knee and kissed his hand. Overcome with shame, I then lost my head completely and momentarily forgot the coach driver waiting outside in his coach. In one flash of a second I realized we had succeeded, and more, that the work of the Soul of Europe would pan out in ways we had not dared to imagine until now. Not only was the bishop there, but also in rapid succession I recognized Bishop Komarica, both muftis, the mayor of Banja Luka and all his group, Svetlana standing out with her jet black hair and smart two-piece, Vice-President Cavic, the Minister of Culture and the teachers. The absence of Sulejman Tihic dismayed us, as we realised the muftis would feel excluded within this group of mainly Serb nationalists. At least Mufti Makic's presence, along with Omer Visic, prevented the mufti of Banja Luka from being completely isolated, a possibility we had taken into account from the start of our planning.

'There have been problems,' Adnan whispered to me the moment we shook hands. 'The people were not too pleased to discover they were all flying out together. The politicians arrived in

black cars and were given VIP treatment at Zagreb Airport while the muftis had to wait with the ordinary passengers. The atmosphere was not good. They felt insulted.’ This reminded me of Bishop Komarica’s joke to us in Banja Luka, when he heard for the first time that everyone was travelling together. He lowered his voice as though he might be overheard: ‘If the plane comes down,’ and he paused for effect, pointing at the floor and further lowering his voice to a whisper: ‘We will for sure all be going to hell!’

Sulejman Tihic and his assistant had failed to contact him, but Adnan discovered that they were in fact in Banja Luka and had been forced to attend a special meeting of the Assembly regarding returnees, and this prevented them from coming to Coventry: a political manoeuvre on the part of the Speaker. The muftis looked wan and vulnerable, but so in fact did all the participants. The first impression we got of them as they emerged from the plane into the arrival lounge was of an exhausted, beaten and depressed group of people, old and grey before their time. In fact their faces brightened the moment they saw us, and within those few seconds the particular nature of the consultation became manifest. Whatever issues these people brought with them, the personal rapport with us mattered most, a trust in our friendship and faithfulness, which meant that both Bishop Jefrem and Mufti Camdzic, Vice-President Cavic and Mayor Davidovic, as well as the others who were already devoted to us, smiled equally on seeing us.

Their arrival proved the nay-sayers wrong, including Mike Engelking at the World Conference of Religion and Peace who made no effort to help us get the Orthodox to attend the consultation because he thought we were too political, as well as academics and businessmen who judged us too amateur to have any success at all in the Balkans. We had also vindicated the faith of friends and supporters, not least Graham Hand, the former ambassador to Bosnia, whom it would have been a shame to disappoint, after all his efforts going out on a limb to help us, and Roy Wilson,

who travelled separately to Coventry. We were also relieved for Damian Thompson, the reporter, who had already produced an article which would appear the following day in the Daily Telegraph announcing the presence of all the participants.

While in Sarajevo, only a week earlier, sorting visa applications for the participants, we were greeted by Dr Ceric with the words: ‘What have we done to deserve you?’ a worrying remark considering we hadn’t succeeded yet in doing anything. He shared our doubts about the presence of Bishop Jeffrem, and said: ‘I will book you a holiday in Hawaii if he comes!’ Relief was tempered by our awareness that rebuilding the Ferhadija Mosque remained our main objective. Only then could the Soul of Europe be considered a successful venture.

The first objective to bring the participants together had now been achieved. A carefully chosen team: Peter Ashby, the consultation facilitator, Ros Tennyson, the partnership adviser, and John Smith, from the Sacred Land Trust, would help guarantee a dynamic outcome to the consultation process.

Meanwhile a group of people who only a few years ago had been in conflict, sat squeezed together in a cramped small bus trundling along the motorway from Heathrow to Coventry. Vice President Cavic, stretching a leg in the aisle, joked with Svetlana and the other politicians; the two muftis sat behind them in grim silence and the rest looked silently and sadly at the English landscape. Most seemed apprehensive, probably wondering what they had let themselves in for.

The Revd Canon Andrew White, resplendent and beaming in his cassock, gown and hood, welcomed the group off the bus outside the Leofric Hotel. Svetlana shot off the bus, signed in and went to her room while the rest disembarked. Most of them looked disorientated, like children in a strange land. We had come like supplicants on all our visits to their grand offices,

and now they found themselves in our hands and looked uncertain and defensive. This sense of vulnerability rapidly turned to a cold hostility. The atmosphere at the first supper together could have been sliced with a knife. Noone spoke and it seemed in the silence that people were retreating behind their barricades. The men exuded pugnacious testosterone-fuelled aggression. Sitting next to Dushan Antel, the Minister of Faith, and Pero Bukejlovic, the Minister of Trade, I felt intimidated as they chomped noisily through their food and glowered at their plates, their burly shoulders broadening alarmingly. Preparing themselves for the next few days in unfamiliar surroundings and having no clue as to what might happen, they seethed with angry regrets at agreeing to come. They feared disappointment - what could we really do for them? They were also sitting for the first time with former enemies, people they rarely if ever spoke to. They eyed each other furtively across the table. The two muftis sat together in solidarity, opposite the Serb nationalist politicians; the bishops hardly uttered a word and the teachers looked frightened at the other end of the large table. Breakfast would be a dismal and strained affair, with forced small-talk and people hastily swallowing some coffee and toast before disappearing back to their rooms.

Future meals became more relaxed with banter and laughter. By the final dinner, given by the mayor of Coventry, Mufti Camdzic was joshing good-naturedly with Pero Bukejlovic, two people who at best would before never have talked to each other. I caught the moment on camera and considered this cheerful encounter one of the triumphs of the consultation.

Given the initial mutual mistrust and hostility between the participants we had engaged a professional conference facilitator to guide the discussion. PeterAshby, who had worked at the Trades Union central offices and spent years organizing similar consultations, was a skilled facilitator and took the Coventry Consultation on as a challenge. Knowing little about the

participants or their backgrounds helped him pilot the consultation through often perilous rapids because he treated them equally and did not allow protocol, political position or special authority to jam progress. He prepared the meeting room with care before any of them arrived, setting out the exact number of chairs in a circle, then planned the choreography so people changed their partners regularly and did not stay fixed in a particular grouping. At all costs we had to avoid the obstruction and barrier of a large table, across which these politicians were used to conducting business. Tall and slim, smiling indulgently to encourage trust, while keeping an eagle eye on everyone, controlling the dynamics of each meeting in order to hold a fair balance of involvement by all the participants, he gestured powerfully with long spidery arms like a conductor of an orchestra. He took advantage of those uncomfortable moments, when the atmosphere congealed, to move the discussion forward, making people listen to each other, shushing those conversing while someone was presenting a case, raising eyebrows, laughing, throwing penetrating stares at crucial moments. Aware of brief attention spans, he frequently broke up the groups, commanding people to meet for limited periods of time, always keeping things light so people would listen to each other more attentively, ensuring the issues be given their due. This kept the consultation vibrant. Such management of the event's dynamics could be interpreted as controlling, but given the difficult relations between the participants, their unfamiliarity with democratic procedures, and the shortness of time to produce results, the consultation would otherwise have failed. Peter Ashby paid attention to every detail, even removing the carefully placed flower arrangements so that there could be no visual obstacle between people across the room. Peter Ashby's expertise saved the consultation at crucial moments when discussions were disrupted by emotional outbursts. Without him there would have been no signed agreement or a positive conclusion, given that our funding allowed for only

a limited conference. Everything had to be solved in four days. This brevity concentrated all minds, but it required skill to make those days count.

The diverse characters of the translators and helpers also contributed to the success of the consultation. Both Muslim Adnan and Orthodox Igor Solunac were liked by everyone. Igor interpreted throughout, only once refusing to translate. The mufti of Banja Luka delivered one of his tirades, and though urged to tell us what he said, Igor sat sullenly, shaking his head and muttering in disgust: 'It's far too rude!' The other participants however understood and sat silently making no comment. Ros Tennyson's imaginative presentation on working collaboratively broke the tension of the consultation's controlled structure and provided a creative respite as she produced diagrams and revealed fresh ways of thinking and approaching the issues. John Smith, tall and long-limbed, looked relaxed. With years of experience working in some of the most conflicted places in the world, latterly in East Timor, he ruminated on issues in a leisurely manner, smiling seraphically when not looking earnest, his eyes lifted to the ceiling. The participants looked perplexed, never having encountered this kind of input, but they appreciated his serious attention to their problems, especially at mealtimes. Donald mostly kept a back seat, occasionally towards the end of a hard day's discussion launching into a passionate speech intended to inspire and lift spirits, to move the discussion away from despondency, past recriminations and complaints to future possibilities. Reflection and inspiration provided variety within Peter Ashby's tight structure.

Smoking immediately became an issue. Already Svetlana had warned us that a ban on smoking would cause unnecessary stress. No one argued with Svetlana. At the hotel on the first evening she strode up to the reception desk and announced that there would have to be a lifting of a smoking ban in the dining room, or there might be an international incident. For the whole

consultation there were ructions with the Centre for Reconciliation staff at Coventry about smoking in the meeting rooms. Canon Andrew White read everyone the riot act but to no avail, and ticked us off for holding small group meetings in the rest of the building's empty rooms. Not on loan to the cathedral, these rooms were apparently out of bounds. For facilitating the meetings and motivating discussion of issues the upstairs rooms were better suited than those below where large intimidating tables dominated the cramped space. Being in an empty room, standing up, being able to move around freely became part of the facilitation process. When the crunch came with Canon Andrew White, Peter Ashby told him bluntly: 'If we can't have the empty rooms we might as well end the consultation right now. It just won't work.'

Occasionally the group balked at so much time spent inside, Svetlana complaining that the afternoons should have been free. However, even these full days were too short for the process, and the intensity of the group meetings significantly affected the end result. There were a few longueurs, generally during times of long presentations, but these provided moments of respite from the struggle towards a practical outcome of the deliberations. All the participants were used to listening to and delivering interminable speeches, part of their communist heritage still continuing in Bosnia today, with mostly bigwigs from the international community lecturing the natives. This consultation had to break that pattern. The participants' agenda being the substance of the consultation, there would be enough difficulty making people listen to each other, particularly as the specific concern of each group did not always interest the others. We intended this mix and friction of economic, religious, educational and cultural issues to spark a change of attitudes, to open up new avenues of progress and create a practical response to the problems in Banja Luka. Facilitation became the crucial factor of the consultation

John Smith doubted our wisdom in bringing the participants to Coventry to look at more war

ruins. Before the consultation began, Canon Andrew White led the participants on a tour of Coventry Cathedral. The climax of the tour took them to the bomb site of the old cathedral; its few remaining walls a perpetual reminder for future generations. The group of politicians, religious leaders, business leaders and ordinary people from Banja Luka, countenances tired and grey, followed Andrew White politely, initially more concerned with their own problems, preparing to share grievances and make demands. But in the ruins of the old cathedral, reading the carved exhortations to reconciliation, they looked humbled and shocked, as though unexpectedly coming face to face with the reality of their own situation. Even the normally proud and aloof Svetlana turned a sorrowful gaze in our direction, momentarily looking vulnerable.

‘HAVEN’T WE MET BEFORE?’ THE FIRST DAY

On Tuesday afternoon, all the participants sat together in a circle, ready for the first session. They behaved respectfully throughout the consultation and on the whole submitted willingly to the process, breaking up into small groups without hesitation, returning to give carefully considered presentations and entering into the spirit of cooperative discussion with surprisingly little animosity. John Smith remarked jokingly: ‘I’ve seen more conflict at church parish council meetings!’ The consistently high level of attention and forward-moving discussion between these former adversaries, people with no cause to trust each other at all, could have been a model for groups with barely a fraction of their problems. The very gravity of the issues held this group together. Only when people are discussing frivolities and minor matters do personal conflicts luxuriate viciously. The desperate situation of Banja Luka concentrated the group’s collective mind, calling on all reserves of sympathy and understanding. The expected moments of conflict,

particularly regarding the most painful and intractable issue, the plight of the Muslims in Banja Luka, were handled swiftly and positively. There would not have been the signing of a declaration by the religious leaders otherwise, nor a final consensus that such a process was useful and should be continued.

At the beginning of the consultation the participants sat and looked at each other and us expectantly. Donald attempted to relax everybody: 'Feet on the floor! Put your handbags down! Look around you! We are all children of God!' He then went round the circle, attentively introducing each participant giving his interpretation as to why they had come. Trying to lighten the atmosphere he jokingly divided them into groups of 'enthusiastic', 'unwilling' and 'wise' guests, reminding them with a smile of the difficulties of persuading some of them to come at all.

Peter Ashby described the facilitation process, explaining the need to uncover hidden agendas and for everyone to be candid, trust each other and handle disagreement. He reminded them that this was a creative, brainstorming event, totally private so people could develop challenging ideas freely without the fear of being quoted and having their statements thrown back at them, or having to hold on to them if, as it would be hoped, they changed their position.

Only the teachers produced their reports. We had asked each participant to write a page about how they saw the situation in Banja Luka and suggest some steps to improve it. This should not be the expression of a party line but an individual response from the heart. Most of the participants resisted this 'home-work' - they were, after all, not children any more. But the teachers, recognizing the purpose of this request, wrote about the need to re-educate children and raise them towards a more tolerant and democratic society, one that could take its place in the modern world. On our last visit to the school we encountered a sharp example of intolerance. A boy noticed Donald in his black cassock and asked one of the teachers what religion he

represented. 'He is an Anglican priest,' said the teacher. The boy shook his head, wagged his finger and glowering menacingly told her: 'Only Orthodox are allowed here!' The headteacher now stated: 'What's done is done. The future is more important than the past. The perspective we need now is to be educated to be citizens of the whole world.' So education became a key theme of the consultation.

Her remarks led to an observation that the present reality in Bosnia was the consequence of war and raised the issue of justice. So the second theme of the consultation became returnees and refugees. More than just an administrative procedure concerning property laws, the economic and cultural conditions in Banja Luka had to be improved. Therefore the third theme of the consultation became the economy. The issue of culture tended to be subsumed under education.

Some of the participants commented on the difficulty of speaking sincerely and honestly with one another, but being afraid refused to say why. Throughout the consultation the politicians glared with impatience and hostility at the other participants, the leaders' body language intimidating, seated like shoguns. But all agreed that jobs, employment and decent salaries were priorities: the point also being made about putting Banja Luka in the context of the whole of Bosnia, of Europe and the world. Argument over which issue took precedence, economic regeneration or forgiveness and reconciliation, caused the chief friction within the consultation. The return of refugees would become the linking issue. The first session ended with a plea from Mufti Camdzic that we should persist in this difficult process. 'The ecumenical setting should strengthen our goals. We come from mixed backgrounds. We quarrel but come back for reconciliation. Bosnia is not the only multicultural society in the world. If Coventry can do it, so can Bosnia.' He was referring to a meeting earlier in the day when the mayor of Coventry had formally welcomed the group of participants in the Guildhall and several city dignitaries had

given speeches about the multicultural and multi-ethnic nature of Coventry. But the participants wanted to focus more on the points made about the economic changes Coventry managed to adjust to after the post-war collapse of the car industry, such as developing a variety of small businesses. Throughout the consultation the politicians changed their position radically, moving from demanding the help and support of multi-national companies to recognising the importance of encouraging small businesses, relying on their own skills and not being so dependent on outside, large-scale funding.

The religious leaders, however, persisted in talking about more than the economy. ‘Priests and imams can’t stop talking,’ said the mufti of Banja Luka, while the politicians stiffened and looked even grimmer. ‘Reconciliation and forgiveness should be more than theory and empty talk, they should be for real.’ The mufti went on: ‘Even if we are insulted we can forgive. We are always ready to apologise. We expect the rebuilding of destroyed churches and mosques, Orthodox monasteries, religious objects. There should also be education for all religions.’ This last observation referred to the years under communism when there had been little or no religious education. However, throughout the consultation the theme developed from religious education for each group to a more multi-religious education for all groups, to raise tolerance and mutual understanding at all cultural levels.

Donald tried several times throughout the consultation to dissipate the stiffness in the group by getting everyone to sing, a normal and popular activity in the Balkans. But the participants were in no mood for that. ‘He who sings, prays twice,’ Donald appealed to them in vain, quoting St Augustine. ‘Someone should call a doctor!’ Svetlana joked sarcastically.

The main themes for the consultation had been quickly agreed upon. The rest of the consultation elaborated, then refined the thinking on these issues, a process which reached its

final form in the early hours of Friday morning, just before the presentation to the Prime Ministers and the High Representative.

Cardinal Pulic turned up unexpectedly in the middle of the first session. Catching sight of Igor, he approached the young man with the face of an icon and said: 'Haven't we met before?' Later the High Representative's advisor for inter-ethnic conflict management, Dr Anwar Azimov, a Russian diplomat, also joined the consultation and, not content with being an observer, kept pushing the participants to reach agreement and resolution. Dr Azimov, extrovert and passionate, continued to correspond enthusiastically with the Soul of Europe long after the consultation, until Moscow removed him from Sarajevo and posted him to Baghdad. We then lost touch with him.

The politicians expressed shame at the need to have such a consultation in Coventry, realizing the difficulty of doing this back home in Bosnia. Unlike the UK, Bosnia had suffered not one but two crippling wars since 1939, and it was crucial to understand the issue of the relations between the ethnic groups. Bosnia now consisted of all races and nations which called for a mutual confession of guilt and attention to the transition of the new state of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Relations had to be acknowledged: displaced people became an important issue. Freedom of choice regarding where people lived touched on one of the most painful issues: the ethnic divisions now imposed on the country at the end of the war, and the way each group wanted to exist in their own area, so making the return of refugees to their homes problematic if not impossible. Laws were in place for the handing over of property, but these did not solve the problem as to where the present occupiers should go or where they now preferred to live. They too were refugees. And if they wanted to stay in either the Serb, or Catholic or Croat entities, why should they be forced to leave? The catastrophic state of the economy exacerbated this problem. The issue of education loomed ever larger as a means of re-educating children already

conditioned by their parents to hating different groups, bearing grudges and being both aggressive and defensive. The fear of speaking openly, the mistrust of one group for the other, highlighted the urgency of this issue, which remained unresolved at the end of the consultation. At least the participants agreed that education, learning tolerance, had to go hand-in-hand with solving the issue of justice for refugees and returning property, at the same time as rebuilding the economy. The role of the Soul of Europe would continue to be important in Bosnia: helping people with the process of deliberating and coming to joint decisions, then encouraging each party to carry them out.

As often happens in such consultations where different factions remain locked in perpetual differences of priorities, here in Coventry, between the urgent need for economic regeneration and the need for justice and reconciliation, an unexpected and serendipitous turn of events helped to unlock the conflict of concerns.

It turned out we needed more than one interpreter. Igor's Serb background helped appease the defensive Bosnian Serbs and the presence of Muslim Adnan reassured the muftis. Only Svetlana and one of the teachers spoke fluent English. Translation needed to happen not only during the sessions but even more at mealtimes and when people socialized in groups, when the most significant, sincere and candid discussions took place.

The Bosnia Institute put Donald in touch with a group of refugees from Banja Luka in London. Many people think of refugees as asylum seekers and illegal immigrants, glum and ragged, skulking in council accommodation, huddling depressed in groups on the streets, claiming benefits and refusing to assimilate. These refugees from Banja Luka had wanted to be involved in the consultation as soon as they learned about the work of the Soul of Europe, but we feared

they might arrive at Coventry and heckle the politicians, and disturb the process of open dialogue we were planning. Donald met the representatives of the Banja Luka Association in London some weeks before the consultation and discovered a group of young, educated people in wellpaid jobs, running successful businesses. He invited them to the last day of the presentation to witness whatever agreements and resolutions were reached in the presence of the High Representative and other politicians. But suddenly we needed more interpreters and two of them agreed to come to Coventry immediately to help us out.

Mirza Basic and Samir Ceric arrived earlier than expected and found their way to the Centre for Reconciliation next to the Cathedral. Smartly dressed in suits and ties, trim, confident and well-mannered, they stood out from the crowds of glum and ragged Coventry shoppers. At the age of fourteen the boys had been driven at gunpoint from their homes with their families, taken to the Croatian border and left in camps, before managing to escape to the UK where they finished their education, ended up in university and were about to be granted British citizenship. They had completely assimilated into British society, and looked forward to successful careers.

They initially sat and listened, joining in the groups, being lectured to by their mufti, translating at the dinner tables. Then they became more involved, so that by the end of the consultation they were helping Ros Tennyson draw up the list of statements to be made at the presentation and had established strong links, in particular with the politicians who seized on this young, energetic and amenable couple, realizing that through them they might not only help revive the economy of their home town, but also break through to a solution concerning the return of refugees. The issues of persuading youth to be actively involved in the future of Banja Luka, encouraging a multi-ethnic society and regenerating the economy seemed to have found an answer in these young men.

These young refugees from Banja Luka were of great benefit to the consultation. Both subsequently returned to visit their hometown, Samir brokering business deals and Mirza establishing contacts with former friends. At the consultation, their enthusiasm and good relations with the politicians helped progress on the proposals for the final presentation. Their confidence and sophistication made it difficult to think of them as refugees. When Mirza talked about swimming and fishing in the river, it came as a shock to remember he was talking about the Vrbas and not the Thames. He valued his Bosnian roots, even though he had made his home in the UK, and had formed a choir with other refugees, family members and friends who performed Bosnian folksongs, accompanying them on the accordion and traditional instruments which he played proficiently. Both experts at computer technology, Mirza and Samir had established a web site, the Banja Luka Diaspora, to provide information and newsletters for refugees from Banja Luka, worldwide. They had done well as refugees, and the politicians looked at them and saw the bright future of Banja Luka.

On the first day the group had to start considering the presentation of proposals they themselves could initiate, and which would attract financial support from the international community. They had to deal with issues of refugees and displace people wanting to return home, as well as repairing a crippled economy. This meant moving from a position of demanding help to one of learning how to present proposals they themselves could initiate, and which would attract financial support from the international community. They complained about most of the aid money going to the Federation, and little to the Republika Srpska. At the same time they avoided discussing the reasons for this unfairness. These included endemic corruption at the highest levels of government and business, and an unwillingness to arrest war criminals. No one mentioned the stoning of Muslims at the foundation-stone laying ceremony for the Ferhadija

Mosque earlier in the year, an event that coloured the international community's perception of Banja Luka more negatively than the politicians were prepared to concede. However the subject was alluded to tangentially and everyone agreed that the 'image' of Banja Luka needed improving, particularly in order to attract outside investment. 'Money won't come to an unstable country.'

A major disagreement arose about the splitting of the group into those who wished to discuss the economy and those who wanted to discuss religion. John Smith interpreted the underlying tensions and issues, explaining that this particular process was designed not to leave one area solely for the attention of experts, but that each person should bring their experience to the group as a whole. Bishop Jefrem acknowledged that money would only be given to a democratic system of government, therefore the people 'should not be punished for the politician's mistakes'. To which the vice-president retorted: 'Without religious differences we would never have had a war. We live in post-war circumstances and have to deal with the indoctrination of a whole generation.' Economy and the return of refugees were judged the most important priorities, and with that tension between politics and religion the consultation ended its first day.

'STOP BLAMING!' THE SECOND DAY

Abstract thinking comforted the participants. Although they agreed that something practical had to come out of the consultation, they found it painfully difficult to decide what to actually do next. This might have been due to fear as to what the repercussions might be once they returned home. The headmistress made that clear to me privately over lunch. A long tradition of being 'told what to do' under communism discouraged people from taking the initiative. Even in the apparently democratic West, people, fearful of failure and being left with egg on their faces,

balked at creative action. How much worse in Bosnia which suffered a devastating war immediately after the collapse of communism? This turned out to be the major stumbling block throughout the consultation: a sense of a desperate need for such proposals, combined with a fear of voicing this need. The participants avoided this issue by blaming others and making demands. Ros Tennyson's contribution became significant because of her particular experience in the field of developing partnerships of trust in countries going through transition from authoritarianism to fragile democracy. Like John Smith she listened, looking serious as though bearing the grief and pain of the whole group. John worked by achieving objectivity, Ros by empathy. Together with the facilitation skills of Peter Ashby, these three differing methods managed to cut through the various impasses.

Once the proposals on the economy and the return of refugees began to be clarified and substantiated through 'buzz' groups, people standing in threes and fours, gesticulating, arguing animatedly before agreeing, it rapidly became clear that a major obstacle to action in Bosnia was the extent of corruption and the weakness of the present legal system to deal with it. People spoke about the need for a 'political will': local institutions and authorities as well as politicians and religious leaders, in common appeal, should unite in taking concrete steps to protect property and human rights. But there was little evidence of such political will. The difficulty remained that by allowing all people equal human rights, the practical solution to the problem of refugees would never be solved, not unless the economic situation in the country improved markedly. The rights of ownership and respect for human rights which most of Europe took for granted depended on a stable economy. At this point of the discussion I observed Mirza looking depressed and obsessively picking his nails. Eventually the group concluded that the fundamental right of ownership had to be the main priority.

A breakthrough seemed to have been made with a consensus on human rights and the authorities needing to be encouraged to administer them. This called for regular meetings between all sides, both with the religious leaders and the authorities. First would have to come the detoxification of children's minds, a whole generation of which was being educated to take revenge in the future. The splitting of Bosnia into ethnic entities, encouraged by the Dayton Accord, meant that the problem of returnees existed not just in Banja Luka but everywhere in the Federation and the Republika Srpska. So the principles of human rights should be applied throughout the whole of Bosnia.

At this point Donald lurched forward in his seat and interrupted the circular argument. 'Stop blaming!' he urged, 'Go forward. Take the next steps.' The group broke up into smaller groups to sharpen thinking on the issue of returnees. Profiteering among lawyers taking advantage of the distress of returnees trying to repossess their homes, meant that political initiatives needed to be taken to end this corrupt state of affairs. There had to be a 'civic determination' (in the words of John Smith) for encouraging individuals to help this process. Dr Azimov summed up the proposal as three-fold: accelerate the process of returnees, stabilize the economy and the social structures, and enable the political environment to be supportive.

A group was then formed to prepare a presentation on this issue for Friday. It consisted of the mayor of Banja Luka, his deputy, Omer Visic, Mufti Makic from Bihac and Bishop Komarica.

The Minister of Trade, Pero Bukejlovic now weighed in impatiently on the issue of the economy. The international community had a duty to pour investment and financial support into Bosnia, particularly the Republika Srpska. Having permitted the war to happen, the rest of Europe had a moral duty to help. This would mean encouraging rapid privatization, creating a central registry for businesses and sharpening the laws to prevent corruption and tax evasion.

Privatization would change the rationale of the economy. John Smith kept silent at this point, though later he gently suggested that rushed privatization may not be the answer to Bosnia's problems. Svetlana had a wider perception of the problem and pointed to the need for changing the image of the Republika Srpska, which, in the eyes of the rest of Europe, was unattractive to investment. She and the politicians preferred to believe this was due to ignorance about the natural resources of the county. They could not accept it might be due to the world's perception of the country as a place where minorities were persecuted and denied human rights. The Financial Times wrote recently about business in Bosnia: 'Don't go there!' 'Selling the country' should now be a priority. The country had a well-educated workforce, as well as natural resources, but lacked experts, many of whom had fled persecution. Representatives from the European business world should be encouraged to visit Bosnia and see the potential, including the prospect of low wages and a good strategic position in Europe. Major companies and the media should come - immediately.

Bishop Jefrem had brought with him Father Vladislav, whom we had met on our first visit to Banja Luka in June 2000, when he hosted Professor Bigovic from Belgrade at an evening lecture to several hundred science students on the need for the Orthodox Church to move away from its antiquated bigotry. Here in Coventry Father Vladislav spoke for the youth and encouraged future gatherings of western business leaders in Bosnia, and particularly in Banja Luka, which had once been a thriving centre of electronics and metallurgy. The city boasted a university of twelve thousand five hundred students, who should be educated in western ways. People would then spend less time thinking of nationalism; poverty, he said, encouraged racism and extremism.

The main reason for the bad image of the Republika Srpska could not be spelled out even though the mufti sat there, himself a present reproach to the authorities and the politicians, an all

too corporeal Banquo's ghost attending the banquet. Persecution of the Muslims and Catholics, destruction of mosques and churches were unspoken issues that vibrated subliminally throughout the consultation. Meanwhile the politicians spoke about persuading multinationals to visit Bosnia, making efforts to solve administrative problems such as passing laws, so making it easier for foreign capital to be registered, establishing a secure banking system, improving business manners, learning how to behave with foreign visitors, being cultured and establishing good business relations, and getting rid of trading barriers which restrict movement, as Svetlana vividly put it: 'like being on a French balcony'. She and the other politicians viewed the Republika Srpska as a new country, separate from the rest of Bosnia, which needed promoting. Foreign capital would get the ball rolling, and be profitable to the investors: 'Who dares wins!' Eventually the group examining economic issues reluctantly accepted that small market projects were more likely to succeed than attracting multinationals to a country still considered unsafe and unprofitable: a chicken and egg situation. To make this part of Bosnia attractive to foreign investment it had first to improve the infrastructure and prove itself capable of taking initiatives and establishing economic and political stability. But for that it needed immediate foreign investment. There should be multinational forums to discuss investment in industry and in young people, so they would want to stay in the country and help build the economy instead of seeking to move abroad, taking with them good qualifications needed at home. The politicians eventually acknowledged through gritted teeth that economic and political stability also depended on the process of reconciliation.

A multinational company did come to Bosnia in the following years. Mittal Steel took a fifty-one percent share of the Omarska iron ore mine. Whether the company knew or preferred to ignore the fact that it had been a killing camp will never be known.

Cynics might doubt the end value of the consultation, but by engaging in the painful and frustrating process of talking through intractable issues, the participants showed enormous courage, and a level of openness to change. They took the first steps to break free from a legacy of decades of moribund and corrupt communism, and to emerge from the ruins of a debilitating and atrocious war. This process could not happen overnight, but at least the participants had begun to engage with each other. Occasionally Pero Bukejlovic, a future Prime Minister of the Republika Srpska, sighed impatiently, reckoning all other issues to be secondary to the economy. ‘Just give us the investment!’ he demanded, bored with anything not directly concerned with business. He spent time with Samir, the very type of person he had once hounded from their mutual homeland but whom he now courted to return and help get this same country on its feet again.

Before our first encounter with Bukejlovic in Banja Luka on our last visit, Adnan described him as ‘a handsome man’, implying the minister had charmed his way into power. He resisted the idea of a multicultural society, considering that the Republika Srpska had achieved its aim of ethnic cleansing and could now be considered a peaceful, prosperous country. With Ros Tennyson he developed a ‘grunting’ relationship, as she put it, though he began to take an interest in her methodology, requesting a translation to be made of her books. He took an inexplicable liking to me. We spent the evening hours lounging in the hotel lobby, discussing the merits of rakija, and whether we could find a market for this potent spirit in the UK. He described the large pear orchard at his home in Doboj, and explained the tradition of placing bottles over pear blossom so the pear would grow in the bottle ready to be pickled in the rakija later in the season. I laughed at this absurd idea and he invited me to come and see for myself. He would teach me Serbian and I would teach him English. Though we behaved like friends I

feared him, imagining him capable of organizing atrocities and that he could as easily cut my throat as put his arm round me. He terrorised the teachers during the consultation and bullied some of the sessions, though finally his closest ally, Svetlana, had had enough, slapping him across the face with her papers shouting: ‘Enough Pero, enough!’

Bukejlovic had a standing joke with me throughout the consultation. His communist background led him to expect detailed minutes after every meeting. Observing me continuously taking notes, he gestured imperiously for them at the end of each session. ‘Zapisnik!’ he shouted, which I understood to mean: ‘Secretary!’ We explained the fluid nature of this consultation, unfettered by written statements, so the participants could feel free to change their minds and not be chained to their opinions, be influenced in discussion, open to new ideas. Unpersuaded, Bukejlovic continued to gesture at me throughout the consultation: ‘Zapisnik!’ with a broad smile and wink.

Before breaking up for supper, Bishop Komarica tried to draw the different themes together with a proposal for establishing a European Academy for Industrial Ethics and Inter-cultural Meetings in Banja Luka. He distributed leaflets and articles. Cardinal Pulic opened the evening session with the theme of healing inner wounds as a first step to changing the image of Banja Luka. ‘A full belly is good for the state of the soul,’ he quipped. The muftis moved impatiently in their chairs: what about issues of justice and their particular needs?

Again economic and spiritual needs collided. Bishop Komarica described the iceberg of western capitalism destroying the moral values of the young; Svetlana spoke about the basic right to work and Omer Visic, the vice-mayor, talked about the need for a multicultural, multi-religious and multi-ethnic education. Even Bishop Jefrem agreed to a course in comparative theology. The teachers, always expressing themselves cautiously, not sticking their necks out too

far in this company where reprisals might be harsh and swift, spoke about investing in children who would eventually earn all the participants' pensions, about work bringing dignity. There should also be free development of the arts and the spiritual life. Mufti Camdzic then spoke about the need to teach reconciliation, that there should be not only multi-ethnic teaching in schools but also multi-ethnic teachers. We in the UK had to remember that the religions in Bosnia went beyond worship: they represented the culture and identity of their people. The teachers declared salaries to be the main concern, not issues of race or nationality. How one taught was more important than the ethnicity of the teacher. 'We have only one planet!' Again the chicken and egg situation: with a better economy would come a better education, yet a healthy multicultural society must first be healed of inner wounds. From the evidence of the hard-line attitudes of the children at the main school in Banja Luka, whose parents, hardened by years of war and atrocities, passed on extreme views to the next generation, healing the wounds would be a long and difficult process. The teachers bravely tried to counteract this baleful parental influence and needed to be encouraged and supported.

'Understanding difference' became the nub of the issue in educating children towards a multi-ethnic society. The nationalist line taught children difference, declaring: 'If they don't know the answer as to who they are, children are upset. We are different but equal before God. We are all human, but customs are different. Faith and family constitute differences of culture and national feelings. Children should be taught to respect difference and love each other, a job for religious leaders.' This argument failed to take into account mixed marriages. It assumed total separation of groups and religions within one country and ignored the years of atheism under communism. The teachers countered with a proposal to teach 'the beauty of diversity' not just in Bosnia, but as it existed throughout the world. Skin colour, religion, culture, attitudes and opinions were part

of this diversity. So both teachers and pupils must cooperate, make decisions together and take responsibility for them. The Cardinal warned against syncretism, though he recognized the importance of respecting diversity and the need for justice. During the war in Bosnia he had become an international figure, like Bishop Komarica, bravely speaking out for the persecuted and for minorities. Since the war he had come into conflict with his political bosses in Croatia. Croatian nationalists funding the Catholic Church threatened to withdraw their support if he continued to speak about reconciliation and coexistence. They bullied the Cardinal into silence and by inference he became associated with the nationalists. Here in Coventry the Cardinal voiced his opinions freely. He described the desperation of young people in Bosnia, their dependence on drugs, the high rate of suicide, collapse of a supportive family life and lack of a moral upbringing. Father Vladislav spoke about the need for compulsory religious education in schools where each religion should be represented. Intimidated by his bishop, the young priest declined to join the education group, dominated by Bishop Jefrem, and chose to be in the economy group, speaking for the young and the need to plan for their future.

The participants proposed two cultural centres: one in Sarajevo, the other in Banja Luka. However this issue begged an important question. It assumed that as administrative centres of their regions both cities were equal in importance, but Sarajevo was the capital of the whole country. Too many issues about recent history, the traumatic siege of Sarajevo by Bosnian Serbs for instance, prevented this proposal from being taken seriously. Far more likely would be an equal relationship between Banja Luka and Bihac. If anything, a multi-ethnic cultural centre in Sarajevo would have branches in towns all over Bosnia.

The headmistress emphasised the need to instil, rather than impose, human values in the children, through schooling, arts and socialising. The Minister of Faith recommended censorship

of offensive literature and media bias. This raised the issue of constant indoctrination being perpetuated in the Republika Srpska, where the nineteenth century anti-Muslim novel, *The Mountain Wreath*, was now on the syllabus in most schools, a situation comparable to Hitler's *Mein Kampf* being on reading lists in German schools after the Second World War.

At the end of the second day the fundamental problem became clear. Such a meeting of different parties and interests had no precedent. The Second World War ended with the Nuremberg War Trials in which the political leaders of the defeated Nazi regime were indicted, found guilty of inspiring and encouraging the carrying out of atrocities, even though few had personally committed crimes, and then punished. The present problems of The Hague Tribunal in bringing Bosnia War's leaders to justice emphasised the difference with that other war, which Germany lost. Bosnia had no victors or losers. The war's instigators had been rewarded with territory and power. This fact prevented anyone from accepting responsibility and acknowledging guilt for what happened. Imagine Goehring and Himmler attending a consultation in Coventry six years after the Second World War, to discuss the future of Germany in the presence of business leaders and heads of the Church, who had also been complicit in the war and atrocities, and with a few Jewish leaders sitting in on the consultation. Yet leaders of the Bosnian Serb Nationalist Party, friends and supporters of Radovan Karadjic, whom they venerated as Goehring and Himmler did Hitler, now sat with the Orthodox bishop who had announced publicly that if Karadjic were to be arrested and tried at The Hague Tribunal he would be sanctified. They engaged in discussions with business people who had taken part in the war, and faced former victims across the room.

The issue was further complicated by the claim that the people presently in power felt victimised. Svetlana came from Sarajevo, had chosen to live in Banja Luka, and could not find a

place to live, moving house seventeen times in only half as many years. She saw herself as a refugee too. Never any question of degree of persecution, they all felt themselves equally victimized and agreed to leave that issue undiscussed. But the issue was further complicated by international involvement in Bosnia, both historically and presently. The paradoxical consequences of the muddled international politics in Bosnia could best be illustrated by the particular problem of Karadjic and Mladic, two of the chief instigators of the war. The international community was demanding that these two men be given up to the Hague Tribunal, while at the same time it funded the government of the Republika Srpska, providing money for repair of infrastructure and to develop a democratic process of elections. The nationalist government of the Republika Srpska used this money for, among other things, allegedly paying the eighty guards protecting Karadjic and Mladic from arrest by the international community.

The present movers and shakers of the Republika Srpska now sat together with the people they had once persecuted and over whom they still exerted power and continued to intimidate. The issues of justice, guilt and responsibility had been muddled by international involvement in their country. This presented the consultation with a major unresolved issue, one we had to work with. How could we expect any positive outcome from such a knot of issues? Yet this was precisely our main task. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa and similar commissions in other parts of the world provided us with an example of how one could proceed in such an apparently intractable dilemma. We were not just dealing with guilt and forgiveness, we were attempting to get these people to work together again, to cooperate, to lay aside their differences, to overcome mutual mistrust and fear, to overturn history, to achieve what had never before been thought of let alone attempted. We put this realization behind us and simply went on as though only the future mattered. What else could we do?

The second day ended with a clarification of the three main themes which would provide the basis of the presentation on Friday and which constituted the main issues for the future. Returnees, the economy and education for a multi-ethnic society went hand in hand, none taking precedence over the other, all needing to be attended to simultaneously in Banja Luka if there was to be any chance of progress there. The mayor's team joined Bishop Komarica on the theme of returnees. The politicians were joined by Father Vladislav on the theme of the economy. The teachers united with both Bishop Jefrem and Mufti Camdzic on education for a multicultural and multi-faith society. This final group represented the most explosive combination, which did in fact ignite at the end, as we expected, but this outburst actually led to the most important document to come out of the consultation, the declaration by all three religious leaders. Bukejlovic, the Minister of Trade, snorted impatiently, declaring the process to be wasting time, that 'it's all very simple: we just need investment!' This perpetually begged the question: why did the Republika Srpska have such difficulty in attracting investors?

There followed the low point of the consultation, a moment when we felt that we had failed utterly, and were being taken for a ride by everybody, when we saw our money disappearing out of control through our fingers. This happened at the dinner at the Bear Inn at Berkswell. As a break from the consultation we planned to take the participants to a traditional pub in the countryside and beforehand show them an old church nearby. The participants were worn out from the stress and intensity of the day's deliberations. It rained constantly and the village of Berkswell never looked more dismal. The participants gathered in the smartly refurbished church, decorated with coats of arms and which looked more like the private property of an aristocrat than a place of worship for ordinary people. The building celebrated confident middle-class prosperity. Even the surrounding graveyard had been spruced up and kept closely cropped

and tidy; the tombstones stood upright in neat rows. The place had none of the atmosphere and history of country churchyards around the country, where picturesque decay and disorder indicate death, and, at the same time, how the spirit and eternity have more significance than the brief vanity of our individual lives. In Berkswell's church we were meant to reflect on the security of wealth and social order, where we all knew our place and money counted most. It had a depressing effect on the participants, even though a number of them were intrigued by the polish and good condition of the building. Afterwards they emerged into the drizzle and looked ashamed, as though considering themselves unworthy of such a resplendent show of ostentatious prosperity and self-confidence, coming as they did from a war-ravaged country in which each had experienced varying degrees of culpability and suffering.

Bored with the tour of this affluence and snobbery, I waited outside and noticed with surprise Cavic, the vice-president, all of a sudden rushing out of the church on his own. He cast a sorrowful look in my direction, evidently trying to keep his tears in check, hunched his shoulders and shuffled up the path along the graveyard keeping so close to the wall that he occasionally knocked himself against it. He did not seem to care where he was going, or how much the knocks hurt him. I did not know why he so suddenly left the rest of the group and never saw him look more shaken, a man in despair.

The participants then gathered in the Bear Inn where the staff had arranged several long tables in such a way that people sat isolated, unable to feel part of a whole group, so compelling them to confine their conversation with either the persons opposite or in the adjacent chairs. The muftis immediately planted themselves in one corner and remained separate from everybody else. The politicians raised their spirits by gathering around one table and ordering expensive bottles of wine. Various members of the Centre for Reconciliation had also joined the feast,

reckoning this to be their reward for hosting us. We stared in dismay at the huge final bill, which came with no discount, and felt embarrassed that the many small contributions from the not-so-rich friends of the Soul of Europe were covering this expense. The indifferent food and the counter-productive nature of the evening, where the participants retreated into their own groupings, using the occasion to blow a raspberry at the process we were trying to establish, turned this gesture of hospitality into a disaster.

Attempting to cheer the silent and gloomy muftis, I told them how happy we were that both of them came: it fulfilled a promise I had made over a year ago that we would get both muftis to England, whatever happened. The normally taciturn Mufti Makic, nodded, sighed and pressed against me warmly. He looked genuinely touched. I told Mufti Camdzic about the book of my first visit to Bosnia, in which he appeared. He reacted aggressively: ‘And I’ve written a book about you! And what’s more, the last chapter is not yet written!’ wagging his finger. Despite his good-humoured laughter, he spoke the truth: the follow-up of this consultation mattered. Only when the Ferhadija Mosque stood again would we be able to say it had been worthwhile.

We returned disconsolately to the Leofric Hotel and struggled through a difficult staff meeting, trying to establish a method of bringing the consultation to a positive conclusion so the three main themes would produce practical results. The issue turned on the relative importance of the Friday morning presentation as well as preparing the participants for ‘Monday morning’: for what would happen next when they returned to Banja Luka, to a situation which would not have changed. Eventually we decided that both were of equal importance. The level of disagreement between the staff members, a clash of methods between controlled facilitation leading to resolution on the final day and open-ended discussion to encourage the participants to take the

consultation further once they returned home, disturbed Adnan, unfamiliar with robust democratic process. I assured him that such disagreements indicated strength rather than weakness in the group, but we were all whistling in the dark. Though the Friday presentation signalled the consultation's success, impressing the political leaders and enabling the participants to finally put their name to some definite concrete proposals for change, that 'Monday morning' would be more important. The staff did not resolve their differences.

Young Adnan, Mirza and Samir listened attentively, doubts stiffening to steely resolve as they shared stories of troubled histories, coming to realize that this consultation provided a unique opportunity to ensure change and achieve practical resolution for the future of their country.

'I HAVE NO PLACE!' THE THIRD DAY

The day began with a plea from Peter Ashby for us all to encourage each other. The statements from the three groups should be short and to the point and would be judged on clarity, how realistic they were and on their scope, which could be widened, allowing room for more ideas to be brought in.

The mayor began on the theme of returnees. There should be cooperation between the ministries for refugees between the Republika Srpska and the Bosnian Federation, right of choice where people lived - an issue which already created problems, since returnees could not reclaim their homes while other people, unwilling to move, occupied them - and political will backed by the religious leaders. There should be financial assistance given to returnees, a return of ownership to properties once owned by the different religions - under communism all Church property had been confiscated - and improvement in the economy to hasten the process of finding employment for returnees. Human rights must be extended to all people, including

employment for returnees in the public sector. These issues had to be respected throughout Bosnia. Returnees should include those from and to Croatia and Serbia and financial aid given for the reconstruction of religious buildings.

For clarity and scope this presentation could not be faulted. However, Bishop Jefrem himself sounded a more realistic note: much was being asked of good will and resources, personal giving and sacrifice, of which there had been little evidence since the war.

The Minister of Trade began his presentation with a demand for finance and capital in all shapes and forms to enter the Bosnian economy. But before this could happen there would need to be legal reforms to deal with corruption and also the removal of administrative barriers to the rapid circulation of funds. There should then follow a transparent and efficient process of privatization. Resources and expertise would be needed to ensure this, international factors being mobilized: 'We don't have the money.' There would have to be training, not just in democratic procedures and creating efficiency, but also in providing concrete help in establishing preconditions for future development. As to the crucial issue of improving the image of Banja Luka, he recommended that workshops be organized with round-table discussions between representatives of international companies, economists and advisors like Ros Tennyson, with experience of helping countries in political transition, and the media. How to make all this happen constituted the final issue: it depended on improving the infrastructure - no system could survive without investment. All these issues must be tackled in parallel: legal systems, production and infrastructure.

No one criticized the clarity of this presentation. Doubts about international interest and readiness to help made the prospects unrealistically hopeful, the issue of credibility being critical. As to the scope of the proposals, the group was reminded of the alarming figures

concerning unemployment in Banja Luka. Only forty thousand people, about sixty per cent of the work force, were employed, the rest, about twenty-six thousand were unemployed. These figures were optimistic; probably a far greater percentage of the population being unemployed, a situation needing urgent resolution. After bandying around more figures and repeating demands for international assistance and investment of millions of Deutsch Marks, the point was made about drawing on the gifts and talents of refugees outside Banja Luka. The return of their skills would inject hope into the economy. From now on the presence of Samir and Mirza became more significant and they were approached individually by the politicians and the mayor's group.

Above all, everyone agreed on the need for expert advisors, the point being made that so far international funds had been spent on the democratic process, paying for elections which happened so frequently that no money remained for other projects. The issue of corruption having to be tackled so as to stop the haemorrhaging of these funds, begged another question no one dared raise: corruption among the politicians themselves.

With the exception of Pero Bukejlovic, who constantly raised objections, no one criticised any part of the presentation on education for a multicultural society. The long-term process needed the cooperation of all generations and institutions from primary school to college. Standards in the media needed to be improved - education in multi-faith issues being a priority. International and inter-religious contexts had to be encouraged, religious studies teaching respect for other religions as well as one's own. Already a law had been passed permitting religious education for all, according to Dushan Antel, a man suffering visibly from a painful hand injury after contact with acid while pickling vegetables back home, and who therefore looked most of the time in the middle of a nervous breakdown. No one dared think about the pickles and whether anyone could eat them. Despite Dushan Antel's Orthodox loyalty, he grudgingly admitted the need to establish

a multi-ethnic teaching force, young people learning about being part of the world, and living within a multi-ethnic populace. Humanism needed to be taught, along with the highest values for work and life. Also diversity should be recognized and valued; prejudices needed to be broken and destroyed and respect taught. Perhaps he said these things to please the group.

Bishop Komarica observed that from recent experiences, referring to the stone-throwing at the ceremony for laying the foundation stone of the Ferhadija Mosque, the objectives seemed unrealistic. But still we needed to push the parameters forward in such a way that everyone could follow. John Smith pressed for more clarification about the scope and purpose of media re-education. The idea should be replicated not just for educational products but also to encourage a stronger relationship between teachers and society, each supporting the other to fulfil the ambition for a multi-ethnic society.

Pero Bukejlovic complained about the direction of the discussion. A supporter of ethnic cleansing, central to the policies of his nationalist party, he spoke frankly on this issue, unlike Svetlana and the vice-president, who kept their opinions to themselves in this multi-ethnic gathering. Bukejlovic raised the problem of a multi-ethnic approach to employment, which meant sacking people in order to make room for other groups, creating friction in the workplace. Who would pay for these changes? Mufti Makic shrugged with a sigh that said he expected nothing different and brought the subject back to religious education and resolving these problems in Banja Luka by following the examples of Sarajevo and Bihac (though we had seen no evidence of multi-ethnic employment in Bihac on our recent visit). Then Dushan Antel, the Minister of Faith, informed the group that new regulations were in place and should be followed, though he did not specify the precise content of these regulations, which, for all we knew, might be serving a nationalist Serbian Orthodox agenda.

The rest of the day was spent working on the presentations. The participants came under pressure to come up with concrete proposals. Agreeing on resolutions proved a slow process. Those with ideas grew more fearful of expressing them, unaccustomed to taking the initiative. Anwar Azimov weighed in with a challenge, warning the whole group that not only their future was at stake, but also, incidentally, that of the Soul of Europe. The onus fell on the participants to make the consultation a success, so that the Soul of Europe could be seen to be of use and be able to continue its good work elsewhere in Bosnia. They should come up with concrete proposals that were not general or woolly, but realistic.

A number of obstacles, raised by the participants as they moved on to the next stage of the consultation, underlined the difficulties of implementing fresh ideas and stating practical goals. 'Factors outside this room', as the mayor put it, became elements which might prevent steps being taken towards a multi-ethnic society, whatever decisions were made at the consultation. The High Representative and the ministers coming with him would already know what they were coming to hear, and being only institutional figureheads, nothing would be binding on them, so the decisions had to be made by the participants, not for the ministers, but for Banja Luka.

Igor had taken the morning off to buy a suit for the presentation, so the dynamics of the group changed as the two refugees, now charged with interpreting, disciplined the participants. Still no concrete proposals were forthcoming. The group discussed matters concerning religious instruction in schools and the teachers insisted on a rapid reform to enable a modern method of education without prejudice and free of all ideology. The Office of the High Representative should be asked to finance this. As to the laws of restitution the participants stressed that the State itself must compensate returnees.

In terms of the economy, proposals began to be sharpened and refined, leading to the idea of

small and medium investment in small crafts, and while still demanding international help and accelerated privatization, there should be a round-table forum established for the discussion of all these projects, possibly by the end of 2001. This should be covered by the media.

The politicians demanded that international organizations help in the process of passing laws on land ownership and the environment to secure investment, and enforce taxation to discourage corruption. Svetlana emphasised the need to re-educate managers of businesses, inviting international business leaders to help improve business practices in Bosnia, making them more efficient, modern and investment friendly. Independent organizations like the Soul of Europe could help this process. Despite the 'worthwhile thinking behind these proposals', as Bishop Komarica optimistically observed, the body language of the politicians, sitting back in their chairs, legs wide apart, became increasingly bullish and intimidating. The pressure to agree on practical proposals was putting them on the defensive.

While sharpening proposals concerning returnees, the group acknowledged the urgency of creating political will in both the entities of Bosnia, as well as in Croatia, Serbia and in the international community, so as to create a time frame on stricter implementation of ownership rights. The authorities needed to take responsibility, and establish financial support for returnees, especially for destroyed homes. People should be allowed to choose where they live, and do what they wanted with their property. After discussing at length the instrumentation of property laws, looking at both entities of Bosnia, and finding funds to help the state authorities implement these laws, the group grew restless and people began to express anger about the delays and the corruption preventing people's rights being recognized. They demanded respect and finally the group turned on the international community itself for not helping to improve the situation. The international community had a responsibility to Bosnia, after all; it had done nothing to prevent

the war in the first place. Had they done so, it would have cost less. The international community shared accountability for the break-up of the former Yugoslavia and therefore must take a responsibility for its future. It began to appear that the rest of the world, and not the people of the former Yugoslavia, were actually guilty of the war.

After these heated views had been aired the participants broke up into the last groups of the day in order to prepare for their individual presentations on Friday. But as the presentations were worked on up until the last moment, nothing could be written down or translated. What was finally said was recorded intermittently on tape, then transcribed some days after the consultation ended, though large parts of these significant presentations went missing.

Before leaving for these important final groups Bishop Komarica enjoined everyone, particularly the religious leaders, to keep in mind the fundamental objective of ‘all-round reconciliation and the building of peace, a spiritual dimension which brings people together who have been torn apart’.

John Smith and Ros Tennyson and Peter Ashby outlined three goals to help the deliberations, advising how to proceed: ‘a lesson in democracy’. The three goals were written on large sheets of paper on the floor, each with a translation in Bosnian. Goal One urged the development of political will and the capacity to achieve basic human rights and freedoms for all returnees and displaced people. Goal Two promoted economic rebirth, redevelopment, employment and raising living standards. And Goal Three was to create a truly multi-ethnic society.

The participants needed to be eased through a difficult process. So in the case of the group discussing returnees, people had to pay special attention to the detail, the dilemma being how to describe the goal of rights for everyone compatible with the hopes of the returnees themselves. The goal had to include all returnees, foreigners and the international community. The refugees

should not be isolated in a different group. 'Keep the objective universal.'

The aim of the economy group focused on strategic issues concerning the logic of privatization and capital investment. Issues of corruption and passing new laws needed to be attended to, also the issue of youth unemployment and setting up business round tables.

Full equity of human rights guaranteed by a declaration signed by all the religious leaders would provide a framework for creating a multi-ethnic society. But the reforms must be precisely defined to help create a multi-ethnic society. Discussion on this theme led to an issue which caused particular stress in the group. The word 'multi-ethnic' raised the temperature of the group. 'We don't have discrimination at work!' declared Pero Bukejlovic. 'We have laws to deal with that.' All week he had been repeating that there were no problems in the Republika Srpska regarding people working and living together, meaning that ethnic cleansing had left most areas of the entity free of Muslims and Catholics, so Serbs were left to work together in relative peace. This begged the question about refugees and returnees and the need to rebuild a multi-ethnic society. The issue had never been fully addressed at the consultation, so as not to raise too many ghosts from the past and thus prevent movement towards change and progress. For that reason, the stress became a way of expressing unease over an issue not resolved.

The explosion, when it came, changed the course of the consultation and led to a resolution of sorts. At the end of the evening Mufti Camdzic suddenly threw down his gauntlet in the middle of the whole group who sat stony-faced, having expected such an outburst from the beginning.

'I have no mosque, no home, no office!' he shouted. 'I feel as though I shouldn't even be here. I have no place at this consultation!'

He then stormed out.

His words and action electrified the participants. Many of them gathered in his defence, though

with much shaking of heads and apologies for his rough manners. The vice-mayor chased after the mufti to calm him down. Bishop Komarica and Bishop Jefrem agreed to spend the rest of the evening working on a declaration that Mufti Camdzic could sign. Back at the hotel they sat round a table, working beyond midnight, wrestling with the precise wording of the document, which Adnan then typed on his laptop to be read aloud the following day. Bishop Komarica and the mufti rolled up their shirtsleeves and Bishop Jefrem hitched up his black surplice revealing longjohns.

After several hours the mufti still refused to sign, but Adnan kicked him under the table hissing at him: ‘You are an old man with perhaps twenty more years to live. I am a young man with forty or fifty years to live. For me you sign!’ At which point the mufti picked up his pen and all put their signature to the document.

Before this drama took place, Ros Tennyson had concluded the last group day with a presentation, *Beyond Tomorrow*, to help the participants look beyond Friday, towards Monday and the future of Banja Luka. ‘What do you take back with you from the consultation?’ she asked. ‘Not just action, but being together in the same room for three days. Is there enough happening to continue the process? Is it worth exploring? How shall you continue - if there is something to explore - in a process that is appropriate? Can you continue a conversation like this in Banja Luka?’

She then turned an encouraging mirror back on the group, a gesture meant to give them heart for the future. She praised the quality of interpersonal relationships she had observed throughout the consultation: ‘the shared dedication to produce an objective everyone could stand by. That alone is a big achievement!’ She advised them to simplify formal procedures which were complex in a society emerging from decades of communism. ‘If the procedures are too

complicated, nothing will change.’ She congratulated them on their strong will to change the situation, for giving opportunities that acknowledged the creative and imaginative process of encouraging new initiatives. As to the image of Banja Luka, she noted a shift of emphasis from simply presenting an image to working towards building confidence in Banja Luka, an exercise out of which the image would grow.

Accountability became the underlying issue for the future, ensuring work on these projects continued. How would they be accountable to each other in an informal way? Ros Tennyson produced a diagram based on three revolving and interlocking circles describing a movement of building confidence in the town through transformation, by simplifying legal processes and protecting rights, supporting initiatives and working on the basis of human dignity towards changing the image of Banja Luka so that investors and international support would be attracted there. The circles described her own partnership model taught at her centre in North Wales.

The key ingredients that the participants themselves had suggested were to do with multi-ethnicity in education and culture, a respect for human dignity in jobs, everyday life, work and tolerance of diversity. They had also suggested doing things in a new way. ‘Wherever you have new ideas, as in enterprise development, innovation, initiatives, all have agreed to a new way of doing things. People came here with a loaded history so it is very good you repeat these new words.’

Ros reminded them to support and help each other across these different divides to ensure their work did not lose momentum. ‘It was encouraging how people came to the defence of different individual opinions - a great achievement in four days!’

‘Do you agree?’ Ros continued. ‘If you do, we can continue this process.’

This was the point in the consultation in which the participants could share their feelings about

the Soul of Europe and whether they wanted us to continue. Up to now we had visited Banja Luka uninvited, forcing meetings and trying to persuade the participants to come to a consultation. Now we could only continue on invitation.

‘Is there enough value in this process to continue in Banja Luka?’ we asked

‘Of course!’ was the immediate and unanimous answer.

Bishop Komarica then urged the participants to take moral responsibility for what happened in the future. The mayor felt that the consultation had been useful in any case. ‘Results will make it worthwhile. Since this gathering is devoted to Banja Luka, it will be worth monitoring how it happens elsewhere in Bosnia.’ For the vice-mayor the consultation went beyond personal expectations: ‘But as to results, we must continue these activities. There should be a Coventry Declaration as a result of the Friday Presentation, based on the three main topics.’

Ros posed the inevitable question: ‘What needs to happen so that all can work more closely and support each other when you get back to Banja Luka?’

The participants promised to inform Banja Luka and the media of what happened in Coventry; that the group would meet among themselves in October, to see who did what, to share impressions, to decide on next steps, and then meet on a monthly or two monthly basis. Since all the institutions in Banja Luka were represented in this group, they should be able to solve problems through the various institutions, not separately, but together.

Then the participants suddenly began to voice practical proposals and actions: the religious leaders in their robes walking together through the streets of Banja Luka, children helping to clean up vandalised Muslim cemeteries, in particular the ruined plot of the former Arnaudija Mosque next to the school, preserving it as a garden of remembrance. At this point Bukejlovic turned aggressively to the head teacher, saying something which made her shudder, cower and

blush. Clearly he had threatened her. Aloud to the group he accused the teachers of ‘being political’, but the others paid no attention to him and spoke for more tolerance. For the first time they discussed the Ferhadija Mosque, referring to proposals to widen the road running past it, which would make it impossible to re-build the mosque in its old dimensions. But no one mentioned the plans to build six-storey blocks around the mosque, to prevent it being seen. The consultation momentarily rendered that pernicious proposal null and void; but a year after the consultation, the proposal remained on the municipal agenda as a reminder to the Muslims of Banja Luka that the mosque would never be welcome. The vice-mayor proposed cleaning all the nationalist graffiti from the streets, making the city beautiful once again. The nationalists, not mollified, insisted that the proposal should take place throughout Bosnia, including Orthodox graveyards.

The participants accepted with relief the notion of widening the scope of the themes and proposals to take in all Bosnia. The mayor told us: ‘You have the inspiration but I have to make it happen!’ They insisted that the Soul of Europe continue its presence in Banja Luka and elsewhere in Bosnia.

Vice-President Cavic took it on himself to ensure the group met again and regularly. He joked: ‘One thing is clear - all people here have changed their opinion about each other - I won’t say whether for better or worse! I hope for the better!’ He then added: ‘Communication should now become a matter of course for us so these consultations will continue. We will keep relations open. Don’t be pessimistic! We are indeed in a better state and I’m convinced time heals all wounds. To sum up: What can I do? We will meet and talk about our daily problems. Mufti also can help me as well as I him!’

Before summing up her conclusions on the consultation Ros responded to Cavic: ‘I was invited

to provide a framework. I wanted to discover what you wanted to do. Collaboration in this way is good, in that you can make the rules as you go, decide on how to proceed and build. Because of my obligations I would like to share the main ideas of the framework, particularly as you are already implementing it.’

She then outlined a broad way of working together for the future. ‘You made statements on three themes and have already agreed to set up checks and support one another. You have made a commitment to work on shared principles and you have agreed on initial projects. You already have a structure to help take these steps forward: a meeting in October. By reviewing whether people are doing what they agreed on you are being accountable to each other, enabling each other. Everyone is responsible for their task, and not just leaving the work to others. There is also a balance of individual responsibility which at the same time commits support to one another. So, as a group, you already recognise that it is not right for just individuals to go ahead, leaving the rest of the group behind, but there is pride in each other’s achievements, not just your own. An international company coming to Banja Luka to invest is as important as cleaning graveyards.’

Donald brought the evening to a close by praising the group: ‘You are our teachers. You are the ones taking risks. Some of the things I have heard you say and the seriousness with which you have carried out the consultation would have encouraged priests not twenty minutes away from here in Coventry. We will help facilitate your decisions and actions. We will raise resources to help you in this task. We want to be of use to you. We know the dark situation in Banja Luka, but you yourselves have to take ownership of what we are establishing. It takes time as Bishop Jefrem has warned. But partnership is happening. At the end of the day, it is your city.’

Earlier it had been proposed that the religious leaders and teachers be seen taking tea together in

public. Bishop Komarica declared: 'Before November we drink coffee together!'

It was precisely at this moment of rare unanimity, just as the participants prepared to leave the meeting room for the last time, that Mufti Camdzic threw his grenade. He picked his moment to make the strongest impact, but the group had coalesced to such a degree that the participants dealt with the situation without our interference. Whatever the outcome of the consultation, they ensured the mufti remained part of the whole group.

BANSHEE HOWLING

The participants had sat together in the same meeting room for three whole days and worked on proposals to present to the Prime Ministers of the various parts of their country. They discussed, argued, mostly cooperating, often in good humour, with rare but telling flashes of unpleasantness. They had begun to dream about the future of Banja Luka. Most of the time the muftis kept themselves apart, emphasising their isolation in the absence of Sulejman Tihic, who had been detained in Banja Luka by a deliberate ploy. However, they could count on the support of Omer Visic, the Muslim Vice-Mayor. Both muftis joined in the discussions, and flared up occasionally as they fought their corner. Bishop Jefrem confounded our expectations by his willingness to listen, yet in the small groups he occasionally reverted to being authoritarian. The politicians generally used their position to intimidate the rest of the group with a haughty froideur and impatience, yet their words expressed a desire to solve differences and work towards a democratic process of government. Attitudes could not have been expected to change overnight. The fact that they sat together for three days, socialised and were prepared to work through some difficult agendas represented a personal triumph for them. Damian Thompson's article in the Daily Telegraph on September 27 quoted Donald as saying that though persuading

everyone to come to Coventry could be construed as a success, they might end up disliking each other even more, *'but at least they will have been forced to listen to each other. If this works, then we will have discovered something useful, not just for Banja Luka, but for the rest of Bosnia and the world.'*

On the last night of the consultation, banshee howling of binge-drinking youngsters in the town square by the Leofric Hotel kept me awake. I looked at the slender spires of the old ruined cathedral pointing into the night sky, each separated by the empty ruins between them, isolated in the gloom, and I reflected on what had happened on the final evening at the mayor of Coventry's dinner.

Vice-President Cavic presented the mayor of Coventry with an icon of St Lazar, scourge of the Muslims and patron saint of the Serbian Orthodox Church. For a moment it seemed as though the consultation had been a waste of time and that nothing had been learned or achieved. The muftis sat stony-faced, accustomed to this kind of insult. Senad Pecanin, the journalist from Sarajevo, who came to cover the consultation for one of the main newspapers in Bosnia, threw down his pencil in disgust, shaking his head, and looked sadly at Donald as though to say: 'I told you so!' Where was reconciliation in this gesture? Where a recognition of multi-ethnicity? Possibly we had indeed been taken for a ride, the politicians carousing at our expense, their attitudes unchanged, probably laughing at our naïvety. The present was an expected gift for the Bosnian Serb Nationalist party to offer their hosts in Coventry. The muftis would probably have offered a picture of the Ferhadija Mosque, and Bishop Komarica a Catholic artefact. Nevertheless the icon represented an error of judgment, indicating that no thought had been given to the nature of this special event, specifically intended to improve the chance of

reconciliation between different groups.

I perspired for several hours, wondering how we could have been so foolishly naïve, and contemplated what appeared to be a disastrous and costly failure. Then, like the ghosts appearing before the leaders of opposing armies in the final act of Shakespeare's *Richard III*, promising defeat to one and victory to the other, the participants presented themselves to me, showing how the whole process of the consultation had changed them. The demeanour of the mayor of Banja Luka had passed through a total transformation since our first encounter with him a year ago. At our first meetings he had been grim-faced and defensive, but arrived in Coventry already a different person, kindly and grateful, squeezing our hands, eyes shining with affection. His personal gift to the mayor of Coventry illustrated this change. After his bitter rewriting of history only a few months earlier, informing us that the Muslims had always been a tiny minority in his city, and that it was only fair that there should be more Orthodox churches and no mosques, he now handed the mayor of Coventry a book about Banja Luka, written and published long before the war, filled with pictures of a lively multi-ethnic and multi-cultural town, mosques standing next to churches. Such books were rare in Banja Luka, and the mayor of Coventry probably did not appreciate its value. The mayor of Banja Luka had made a long journey in a short time, and I would feel the warm tight squeeze of his extra long handshake long after he departed. As the consultation progressed, the nationalist politicians began to look isolated, even from their own supporters. Their words and proposals searched for a change of heart but their attitudes remained solidly nationalist, clinging to the notion of an ethnically pure state. At one point in the discussions, an imaginative proposal had been put forward to get children to clean up the neglected Muslim graveyards as a way of re-educating them to be tolerant of different religions and groups. 'That's a political matter,' snarled Pero Bukejlovic,

and turning to the head teacher muttered something to her which made her shudder and turn crimson. She contributed little to the rest of the consultation and told me scornfully at lunch that though I could freely speak about reconciliation, she was now frightened. Whatever decisions and proposals were agreed in Coventry, once she returned home to Banja Luka she dared not do anything about them.

The banshee howling continued in the street below my window, young people lurching drunk, bored and angry. Earlier that evening I accompanied the muftis to the mayor's dinner and passed a pub out of which several louts staggered, spitting and yelling: 'Fuck you Muslims!'

'COME ON, LET'S HAVE A PICTURE!' THE PRESENTATION

The climax of our first year and a half's work as the Soul of Europe came on Friday morning at 11.00am on September 28, 2001 in the Guildhall, Coventry.

In a semi-circle sat the High Representative Wolfgang Petritsch, Dr Alija Behmen Prime Minister of the Bosnia Federation, Dr Mladen Ivanic Prime Minister of the Republika Srpska, Karlo Filipovic President of the Bosnia Federation, and Dr Zlatko Lagumdžija, both the Foreign Minister and Chairman of the Council of Ministers and the men of biggest influence in Bosnia apart from the High Representative, also Canon Andrew White and Peter Ashby. Donald sat next to the High Representative. They faced a bigger semi-circle of chairs upon which were seated the participants, each of them ready to make their presentation, organized in groups of the three topics. By now, at the end of the consultation, they were no longer sitting with their own people, but mixed together, former enemies and even present adversaries next to each other. The religious leaders sat in a row, the muftis in their fezzes looking solemn and intent, the Orthodox bishop in black robes and hat, while Bishop Komarica wore a modest suit, his face expressing

utmost seriousness, paying close attention to every word spoken. In the UK and other mainly secular countries in Europe, equivalent figures did not raise much interest or respect, but in the Balkans these leaders represented more than their faiths, embodying the identity of communities which had recently killed and persecuted each other.

The semi-circles facing each other across a round space recalled the theatre at the Centre of Cultural Decontamination in Belgrade - a defined expanse of emptiness pregnant with hope and possibilities, where the imagination could flourish unrestricted. Such space put human beings in perspective. Not one person dominated; each presentation and response given equal weight and attention at the centre of the circle. Emphasis rested on the words spoken, not the personality of the speaker. These words might be followed up and taken note of or disappear into thin air like the word 'honour' as spoken by Shakespeare's Falstaff: an abstraction, a breath, a nothing. However, these same words, for all their material slightness, airy manifestation of the imagination, could ignite a revolution.

After the presentation, which went smoothly and to plan, the journalist Sehad Pecanin poured cold water on our optimism. He gazed at us with contempt and pity. 'I've heard all these words before,' he sighed and his look implied we had wasted our time and money. He returned to Sarajevo and wrote an article lambasting the Serb participants. He was being a good journalist; his job depended on cynical appraisal. We were not so naïve as to expect more than their presence. To assume that the consultation represented a conclusion misunderstood its purpose. The process started in Coventry: how it was followed up mattered more. The consultation provided a start, since the people who mattered were there. They would have to make good their words. They brought their proposals to a public meeting, shared them and received the encouragement and blessing of their peers. This was the purpose of the consultation.

One by one the participants read out the statements they had refined and worked on all morning.

To round off the proceedings Donald entered the circle, the first person to claim this space, to the dismay of the consultants who judged it crucial that the participants claim sole attention for their moment. Right or wrong, Donald felt the necessity to wrap up the occasion, repeating his statement to the group, the night before, for the ministers' benefit: that they should be proud of what they had achieved and how people in England and all over Europe, let alone in Bosnia, could learn from their dedication and courage. Donald wanted the participants to leave the consultation with a sense of achievement.

The participants then gathered in the ruins of the old Cathedral to witness a ceremony in which Andrew White welcomed the Soul of Europe into the Community of the Cross of Nails. Paul Oestreicher placed a cross of nails around Donald's neck, saying: 'This is for service. You have done good service.' Andrew White presented us with a replica of the statue of reconciliation, which Adnan received as though it were the crown jewels. He took it back to Sarajevo: this symbol of reconciliation now in another city to have suffered the scars of war.

The participants then dispersed to meet contacts we had set up for them. Imams from Birmingham entertained the muftis, a Serb Orthodox community hosted Bishop Jefrem, the teachers went to a high school, the mayor and his delegation visited the mayor of Birmingham. The politicians had a packed programme laid on by the Foreign Office and Bishop Komarica faced several preaching engagements in London.

The participants gathered together at a Mayorial dinner in the Guildhall for the final evening. Vice-President Cavic presented the mayor of Coventry with the icon of St Lazar. The journalist Senad Pecanin threw down his pencil noisily in disgust and confronted Cavic afterwards: 'Where

is reconciliation in this gesture?’ he asked ‘Where is there any sign of willingness to build a multi-ethnic multicultural society?’

After more speeches, Andrew White informed the gathering about his imminent tour of world hotspots, Nigeria, Iraq and the Middle East. This put us all in our place. He once told us in his office, gesturing around the room, while the phone rang incessantly: ‘It is hard being vicar of the world!’ Since then he became famous as the Vicar of Baghdad.

Melancholy pervaded the hotel when the participants returned. The intensity of the last few days had dissipated. The night before, the hotel had buzzed with creative activity, participants jointly finishing their statements, the religious leaders around the table hammering out the declaration, Mirza, Adnan and Samir tapping furiously on their laptops, the consultants working on final touches to the statements and the order of the presentation. That evening represented the high point of the consultation: drinks flowing, people in good humour, everyone friendly. The group had coalesced and it could be said that our ‘noble’ project, as Svetlana always called it, for a while really did live up to its epithet.

The thought of returning to Banja Luka, the dread of the Monday morning, made people nervous after the boldness of their statements. The cynicism of the journalist would also be shared by the majority of people in their city. However we had a record of what they achieved and whatever happened, nothing could change the event that had been the Coventry Consultation.

The mayor’s dinner ended with a dispersal of guests and participants. Taking photographs of informal groups, I caught Mufti Camdzic sharing a joke with Pero Bukejlovic. Then Adnan saw Svetlana standing on her own and off the cuff said: ‘Come on, let’s have a picture!’ She agreed enthusiastically and both stood together arms around each other, the Muslim boy and the Serb

girl both from Sarajevo and yet standing on opposite sides of the Bosnian divide. They could have been a couple, Svetlana shedding years with Adnan next to her, tall, dark, handsome and confident.

Leaving the banquet room we asked Bishop Komarica whether he considered the vice-president's gift insensitive. Looking astonished, the bishop put his arms around our shoulders and exclaimed with a laugh: 'If that was the worst we had to suffer, we would be in heaven!'

END OF DUST: BOOK ONE

THE FOUNTAIN IN THE WALL