

# DUST

## BOOK TWO

### PART TWO: TRAVELS WITH BISHOPS

These pages written on April 9<sup>th</sup> 2002:

Today a young Israeli soldier will be resting on the beach, having been shooting at Palestinians on the West Bank of the River Jordan. He will have taken with him extra food and treats from grateful Zionist settlers, whose homes he has been protecting because they are built on land that is Palestinian territory. He reckons the suicide bombers will be no threat for much longer, because they are already killing themselves off. He celebrates Holocaust Day along with fellow Jews all over the world, a day that is now only of historical importance: something that happened to the families of his grandparents. He lives in a different violent time: war with the Palestinians, a problem to be solved by elimination. There are some Israelis who think of co-existence, even in the middle of a crisis when it seems there is no hope of solution. The soldier does not think about the future. This is a conventional war, because the enemy is not an army of other soldiers, but murderers: a situation that demands immediate and ruthless retribution. The fact that future generations of suicide bombers are being born and raised does not concern him. Future armies of soldiers like himself will have to be trained to deal with them, if there is a country and a world left.

Today a young Palestinian student has taken sanctuary together with Palestinian gunmen and civilians in the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. Israeli soldiers have been shooting through the walls and windows of the church and set fire to ancient books and manuscripts, as well as killing another young man. The student is wearing only a T-shirt because he had no time to get more clothes when he fled for cover. He sits next to the corpse of the fellow fugitive, who may or may not have been a gunman. The student knows he is likely to be killed also, and passes the time fearfully reading the first books of the Old Testament. He is a Muslim in a church built on the spot marking the birth of Christianity. Here, it is alleged, stood the manger where the son of God took on human form. *For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given and the government shall be upon his shoulders and his name shall be called: Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.* Is the Muslim student aware of the symbolism of waiting for death in this significant sacred place? What can these words mean to him at this critical time of his brief existence on this planet, when he might be shot dead at any moment?

Today in London the British are burying the Queen Mother who represented in person, more than a hundred years of English history, particularly the five traumatic years when for a while during the Second World War it looked as though Germany would defeat England. She walked through the bombed ruins of London wearing an elegant hat and dress ('Wouldn't you dress up to go visiting?' she declared), smiling encouragingly, congratulating the people on their guts. Her courage, politeness and decency seemed to represent the British spirit of defiance: plucky and even cheerful under pressure, responding to terror, without hysteria or despair, but with wry humour calmly continuing daily life, not permitting the surrounding horrors, homes reduced to rubble and bits of bodies lying around, to depress and discourage. The Queen Mother, who was Queen then, became the receptacle of myth, the way a country perceived

itself and its history. Myths tend to omit flaws and inconsistencies, the vagaries of human behaviour. Myths constantly require analysis, so the past can be understood as a whole, not just one part that suits the present. The Queen Mother's funeral celebrates a myth, of a person without flaws. Mythology is a history simplified and ordered to inspire ideology. The privilege of her role came with wealth and adoration. But she could not be seen to be human. No late-night escapades and secret lives for a queen. Questionable attitudes or imperfections must be excised to preserve the myth. Pushkin's Pimen, the chronicler monk in *Boris Godunov*, has the true measure of a historian. History should record events so generations of people can understand their past. It is all right to honour the memory of their leaders: *for their duty, their goodness, their glory; but for their sins, their dark deeds ... beg forgiveness from our Saviour.*

Today. April 9<sup>th</sup> 2002, Adnan reminded us by email that the 6<sup>th</sup> April, three days ago, marked the liberation of Sarajevo at the end of the Second World War, and also the beginning of the Serb siege of the city in 1992. Television was showing pictures and interviews from the time of the siege, stirring up emotions for a generation who survived. 'This is ten years after,' wrote Adnan, 'but the images are still alive. At the same time I feel pride and honour because I was here during the war, and I am still here. These few days I spent inspired by April 6<sup>th</sup> and thinking about our work I find it even more important than ever. I think that we will make a great job only if we are persistent. Justice may be blind, but we are not. Our, my obligation is to seek here until we find her. (Is Justice female? In my language she is.) Therefore let God bless us in our task!'

## SCHUBERT'S SIGNPOST

The chief purpose of our next visit to Bosnia in late April was for Donald to deliver a speech to the National Assembly in Banja Luka, an invitation from both the Leader of the Assembly and Vice-President Cavic: an opportunity to make this group of mostly hard-line Bosnian Serb nationalists face the facts of what happened to the Ferhadija Mosque, and accept the need for its reconstruction.

At the same time we came to occupy and furnish the office for a project to build a civic forum in Banja Luka.

First we attended a reception in Sarajevo arranged for us at the residence of Ian Cliff, the British ambassador. Originally planned as an informal meeting with Dr Ceric in the presence of the ambassador and a few relevant guests for a productive discussion about the Ferhadija Mosque project, the Reis however could not attend. Now he spent much time in the air, flying from one conference to another around the globe, building a reputation as a progressive, liberal Muslim leader, someone Western representatives preferred to talk with in a post-9.11 Arab world, where most other religious leaders were hard line supporters of terrorism and jihad against the non-Islamic world. This time he was on his way to Malaysia. So the ambassador had to find someone else who might be helpful to our work, and persuaded General Palmer of SFOR, a NATO led multinational peacekeeping force, to come in stead of Dr Ceric, along with several other guests interested in improving relations between the faiths.

We met Ian Cliff's wife, a distinguished academician, who greeted us with genuine interest in our work, asking pertinent questions. The ambassador had just arrived by the recently re-opened Zagreb to Sarajevo train link from Banja Luka. He preferred the slow four hour journey to a fast helicopter flight, not just out of enthusiasm for rail travel, but for the peace and time it provided him to work on papers.

Marko Orsolich, a Franciscan friar and director of the International Multi-Religious and Intercultural Centre in Sarajevo, whom we had met on our first visit to Sarajevo, arrived with his Muslim assistant, a grave-faced young woman in a headscarf. Marko Orsolich spoke mostly in German, but a bad cold prevented him from being understood by anyone. He snuffled and wheezed, wagging a finger over his rounded belly, and through the fog of sibilants and deep gasps for breath, I gathered that he wanted us to help fund a concert later that autumn. His assistant looked severe, and seemed either overawed by the occasion or aloof from it. She asked only a few questions and declined to join in any discussion. Her hijab either indicated that she represented the religious rather than the more typically secular Islamic community of Bosnia, or it was a personal statement about her faith and a declaration that her country should be acknowledged now as a Muslim nation.

We had met the general earlier in the day to discuss a proposal he wanted to share and administer with us, for bringing young people over from Northern Ireland to meet their counterparts in desolated areas of Bosnia. On the face of it this idea sounded depressing, taking deprived people from one set of ruins to encounter other deprived people in other ruins, but Adnan widened the brief and vision during the discussion to include young people from other parts of Europe, who would come to learn and bear witness. The exercise needed to be more than one bombed-out group visiting another.

The general lived and worked at the well-guarded SFOR camp in Butmir, just outside Sarajevo. Bulgarian troops manned the main gates, and spoke only their own language. The general's assistant, who would guide us to him, waited patiently in his jeep on the other side of the barrier, while unshaven soldiers studied our passports suspiciously and eventually, after a long delay, allowed us through. Affable and relaxed, the general stretched his long limbs and gesticulated with wide gestures as he spoke. He felt marooned in the camp, and welcomed stimulating conversation. The

view from his window looked out over an attractive hilly suburb of Sarajevo where there appeared to be little war damage. He showed us a map indicating those areas throughout Bosnia still dangerous to enter, because of activated mines. The thickest area of mines lay around the small town of Travnik, where it seemed no one could walk safely anywhere beyond the town-limits. It came as no surprise to see that the other main area of mines covered the whole region around Sarajevo. Banja Luka looked relatively free of mines, because the war never came there. The Serbs took charge of the city early in the war, and were able to carry out their program of ethnic cleansing efficiently and without fear of attack. The map, laced with red dots, looked bloodily scarred with clumps of mine-fields throughout most of the country. The general told us it would take generations for them all to be cleared. The former Princess of Wales had come to Bosnia to protest at the mine-laying, but her death meant that this world issue had once again become a no-go area for discussion.

At the ambassador's supper I sat next to the general and we discovered a mutual enthusiasm for Schubert. The general expressed particular admiration for the pianism of Alfred Brendel, a personal friend, so the evening began to pass pleasantly. Hearing the general talk about music and art, no one would have guessed his job. I suggested that he might help us persuade the pianist, along with a leading baritone like Mathias Goerne, to perform Schubert's *Winterreise* in Bosnia. This event would have special significance for a devastated country, in which young people, like the song cycle's protagonist, wandered confused, disorientated and desperate about their future. As the conversation proceeded I found myself hesitating with my proposal, because music represented a relaxing distraction for the general. It had nothing to do with his work, which he kept separate. What relevance could Schubert have for Bosnia? I talked to him about the grave beauty of the last songs where madness seems to be the only road left for the young man to take, even death eluding him: his only human

contact finally being with an organ-grinder, starving and being growled at by dogs.

What future was Schubert hinting at? The general looked impatiently across the table hoping to join another conversation. He glanced at me suspiciously, a look that suggested I was as mad as the man in the *Winterreise*.

Next day we visited the Canadian and Turkish ambassadors. They had appreciated Donald's speech given at the office of the OHR on our previous visit, and hinted that they might support our projects. The Canadians needed us to be more specific about our financial needs. We should tailor our proposals to their remit.

We found Ambassador Ahmet Erozan from Turkey in friendlier less combative mood than at our first meeting, but he sharply criticized the Soul of Europe leaflet on which the map of Europe had forgotten to include Turkey. He offered to make contact for us with the governor of the Central Bank in Istanbul on our next visit there. He laughingly described Bosnia as a kind of 'New World' being discovered by Christopher Columbus, and he attacked the Reis ul Ulema Dr Ceric, the Grand Mufti of Bosnia, again for obstructive tactics concerning the rebuilding of mosques. The Reis refused to cooperate with state policies carrying out Annex 8 of the Dayton Accord, which specifically ordered the rebuilding of religious objects. Dr Ceric claimed the authorities, being secular, had no right to give permits for mosques to be rebuilt. But this was more about money and politics. The Turks were offering to help rebuild them in the old style, but Dr Ceric preferred to accept more generous funding from Saudi Arabia, in gratitude to the Mujaheddin, who had helped embattled Bosnian Muslims during the war. The Saudis stipulated their own brand of Wahabi mosques to take the place of the Ottoman ones. For this reason the Reis rejected Turkish offers.

The Turkish ambassador, an intimidating and powerfully built man, shrugged his massive shoulders with a dismissive cynical smile at Dr Ceric's political manoeuvring. However he now considered us to be friends and said we should return later for whatever help we might need and he could offer.

We then crossed the river and knocked on the door of the Reis's offices in the hope of an audience with Dr Ceric, and by lucky chance, Ifet Mustafic, the young chef-de-cabinet to the Reis, happened to be there on his own, happy to talk with us. Our time with him was relaxed and informative. We were able to tell him that we had an urgent need to talk with the Reis about the project at some point, and passed on a letter to the elusive man, living most of the time a mile above the earth's surface. Far from being embarrassed and disturbed, Ifet looked delighted to meet us, and the absence of his boss made him more talkative than usual. He even accepted our invitation to visit us in England, on condition 'that it would not be anything to do with work!'

He described the young Muslims in Banja Luka as being at the end of their tether. If another disturbance happened, like the riot at the laying of the foundation stone, then the Muslims would quit the town for good. This was of course exactly what the Serbs in the Republika Srpska wanted. The policy of ethnic cleansing would then be successfully accomplished. 'We will never return home,' the young Muslims told Ifet.

Ifet was in no hurry to see us out, and the conversation flowed easier than with the Reis, who, though polite and welcoming, always lectured us.

To our surprise Ifet did not attend mosque and described himself as being a secular Muslim. With his lean ascetic body, bristling beard and penetrating black eyes we had assumed him to be a religious fanatic; his previous reticence in our presence implying a criticism of our lack of piety.



Ifet came from Bosanska Krupa in North Western Bosnia, just outside the Republika Srpska, and up in the mountains above Bihac. We had visited there a year earlier and saw the main town square with an Orthodox church, a Catholic church and a mosque on different sides of the main square; evidence that this had once been a balanced multi-ethnic community. All three buildings still stood, but had been damaged by war, as was the broken bridge over the river and the heavily shelled houses in the rest of the town. Gangsters seemed to be in charge; heavily built thugs in dark glasses and wearing gold necklaces sat with their leggy blonde girl-friends in the main café, and stared intimidatingly at strangers.

‘It’s not the same for Orthodox and Muslims,’ Ifet responded to our complaint about perpetually hearing the need for balance in our projects. ‘Muslims did not act in the same way as the Orthodox. It has to be emphasised that destroyers are not the same as protectors. Someone has to take responsibility for what happened.’ Ifet approved of our proposal to make links between the Muslims in Bosnia and Muslims in the rest of Europe. ‘Muslims treasure links to the country they were born in, they follow traditions.’ This reminded us of Samir and Mirza in England, developing the Banja Luka web site so survivors and refugees, now scattered across the world, could be informed of developments in the homeland.

‘You are doing something rare in Europe,’ Ifet said. ‘The whole of Europe should be doing this: helping people in need, those who are surrounded by your culture, all Christians.’ He added rhetorically: ‘What does it mean to you that one thousand and two hundred mosques were destroyed in the middle of your culture?’

Ifet rang for coffee, and someone received a ticking off for answering the wrong phone.

I looked at the small black and white framed photo of Izetbegovic, the former President of Bosnia, kneeling in prayer, flanked by a Muslim in a dhoti, bare-chested,

and an armed soldier. No other pictures adorned the Reis's office, just flags and pennants.

Ifet then showed us out, as friendly now as he had formally been severe and reticent. But it seemed unlikely we would meet the Reis for a long time.

An unpleasant conversation followed with Mufti Camdzic during a stressful drive to Banja Luka. He attacked us bitterly for not having rebuilt his mosque yet. Two years had passed since our first meeting and nothing had happened. At first the mufti welcomed us warmly, generously inviting us to lunch at a roadside restaurant and then, as we were about to bite into the barbecued meat rissoles, he hit us hard with criticisms and complaints.

Adnan could not conceal his anger with the mufti. 'He should know better!' Adnan exclaimed later. 'After all, I am working for you, he knows that, and he should know that you are doing everything to help him!'

The fact that Donald would be giving a speech to the National Assembly later, though impressing the mufti, also made him suspicious: 'You are in the hands of the Serbs now!' He then began to tell his people that the Soul of Europe was cooperating with the nationalists to prevent the building of the mosque. This made us more determined to put plans on a professional footing.

## PICKING A TEAM

After the beating from Mufti Camdzic we drove in silence to Banja Luka wondering about the inevitability of failure and only a fragile chance of success; our every step likely to land on a mine, metaphorically as well as literally. When even those we were trying to help doubted us how could we make progress? The mufti had asked us to give a young man a lift. The boy said nothing throughout the journey, answering

Adnan's questions with a grunt. On arriving he shook our hands politely before hunching his shoulders and walking away, trying to make himself invisible, fearful of the kind of welcome a young Muslim could expect in Banja Luka.

We spent the next day interviewing candidates for project coordinator and a team to set up the civic forum, but the people did not seem to have read or understood the job description. They were looking for any job with an international agency, anything that paid better than what almost non-existent local businesses might offer. Our experience with Denis Arifovic in Bihac made us wary of choosing the wrong person. Having prepared the ground so carefully in Banja Luka, a wrong word, an ill-judged opinion, even a less than friendly or cooperative attitude, could take us back to square one.

Adnan did not understand the need for more than one office assistant, but we decided to have a team of three, each representative of a different community, to offer Banja Luka an example of how it is possible to work across ethnic boundaries.

Choosing people is risky, whatever the process. When we first returned to Bosnia to prepare for the Coventry Consultation, we had to find a Muslim replacement for Serb Orthodox Lazar and we found Adnan. He sent us an impressive CV which implied a professional attitude to work, as well as enthusiasm. We picked him over some equally impressive CVs from women, because he had a car, and knew his way round the region. We chose Lazar and Denis because we liked them personally. Too late we discovered Lazar had a pro-Serb agenda, which threatened to sabotage our relations with non-Serbs. We never found out Denis's agenda; just that he did the minimum asked of him and needed regular chivvying to produce reports. This time we adhered to a more conventional process of interviews. Ros Tennyson joined us, and because the Coventry Consultation would not have happened without Adnan, we trusted his judgement. This turned out to be indispensable when choosing from a group of his

compatriots who seemed tired, stressed, lacking in skills, enthusiasm, and inadequate to any task.

Many of the candidates gave the impression of being traumatized by the war and the hardness of their lives. Armed with a minimum of qualifications, they spent their days fruitlessly going from interview to interview.

Father Vladislav's wife, Snowwhite, wanted to work mainly with young people. Emir, the Muslim schoolboy who had so expertly translated for us at Bajram, was too young and inexperienced. His mother rang us up, shouting that we were anti-Muslim. We employed him two years later as translator on a project of mediation at Omarska.

Nicola, Adnan's Serb friend from Mrkonj Grad, was also too young, although I personally would have chosen him above the others, because Adnan knew and trusted him. Friendship and trust counted for a lot in a wrecked country like Bosnia. These were the best along with the three we eventually chose. The rest left a sad impression of being inadequately qualified, and more concerned about working hours, shifts and money, not the nature of the work itself. None of them seemed capable of taking any initiative, and seizing this opportunity to make radical changes for their country.

Because international NGOs like the Soul of Europe were short term projects, never sticking around for more than a few years, they understandably feared lack of security, and were therefore more interested in taking financial advantage of us while they could.

Dejan Jovanovic, older than the others, thoughtful and sensitive, would head the team. He and Katerina his wife, a Croat Catholic, stayed friends with us long after the project ended. People could not resist commenting with amazement how he had managed to attract such a beautiful woman. Thin and frail-looking Dejan's surprising hobby turned out to be motorcycling. He dressed up in black leather, a scarlet kerchief fluttering round his thin neck, mounted a bike that seemed far too massive and heavy

for him, and then roared down the narrow winding Bosnian roads. A childless couple, they kept a menagerie of birds, various pets and fishes in their cramped flat, and years later ended up running a stable.

Two women made up the rest of the team. Majda Paranos, a Muslim married to a Serb, had been recommended by Roy Wilson. Mirjana Pejic, a Croat, with good contacts and qualifications, an experienced translator and efficient, had worked as a temp for the British Embassy office in Banja Luka. Majda was a survivor of the educated Muslim middle class of Banja Luka's past. Shy and a little nervous, nevertheless her calm authority and good education would previously have assured her a good job; now she felt lucky to find any employment at all. Mirjana on the other hand was full of self-confidence. A Croat refugee from Slavonia, where, in the war around Vukograd, Serbs were driving Croat families westward, she arrived in Banja Luka and made a good impression and landed a job as newsreader on a local television station, reading reports of war and atrocities in an upbeat cheerful tone, as though describing people going on picnics. She charmed politicians with her flirtatious manner and ability to massage their egos, so we valued her presence on the team. However her knack of asking inappropriate personal questions ('Why aren't you married?') became irritating. Perhaps her relentlessly cheerful banter worked as protection against some unspoken or unacknowledged trauma.

As I am editing this part of the book, June 2014, General Mladic has been found, arrested and is being tried at the International Criminal Tribunal at The Hague.

Serbs talk about closing a chapter of history. Meanwhile the political situation in Bosnia has deteriorated to the point where the secession of the Republika Srpska is being regarded as inevitable, just a matter of time. Apart from issues of justice and the threat of renewed conflict, a situation made more dangerous by Bosnian Croats also

demanding secession, the hard question to be levelled at the international community has to be: 'After fifteen years of taking charge, why did you fail to hold the country together?' Prime Minister Milorad Dodik threatens a referendum on secession.

Baroness Ashton, the present High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs, rushes to Banja Luka to stop him, and Dodik, with practised skill, runs rings around these foreign interventionists, and manipulates the situation to the Republika Srpska's advantage. He tactically agrees to postpone the referendum, which could force him into a decision that would isolate his country economically and politically even more than it is now, and is seen by the gullible Baroness Ashton as a man to do business with. In the same way Milosevic, Karadjic and Mladic persuaded European governments to trust them, buying time, which worked for their own ends. The Bosnia War continued unhindered and although these politicians did not achieve totality, they at least got half the country, possession legitimized by international agreement. In the same way, Dodik will eventually achieve independence for his country.

Milosevic, Karadjic and Mladic ended up at The Hague, but their policies continue.

At the public hearing of his indictment, Mladic smiled contemptuously at the relatives of the people he had massacred, and, while denying any responsibility, claimed he had done everything as a patriot for the good of Serbia. The victims might come to feel a degree of justice being done, and for that alone the International Tribunal will have achieved something. But while the war continues in people's minds, aided by the assumption that this part of Europe is a hopeless basket case, populated by different ethnic and religious groups hating and fighting each other for ever, then even this justice will be in vain.

The arrest of General Mladic, at a time when Serbia is keen to join the European Union, and the situation in Bosnia is deteriorating, gives urgency to this book, which is the story of my experiences there over the first years of this millennium, a chronicle

of our attempts at mediation, in the teeth of political corruption and international bungling: a shaming record of missed opportunities and mistakes. Like shrugging off Auschwitz as merely the inexplicable endemic ‘evil’ side of humanity, so dismissing the conflicts in the Balkans as inevitable does not take account of culpabilities reaching back generations, involving economic and political interests far beyond the region’s borders. Such ‘evil’ is not beyond influence, however atrociously it manifests itself; it is a consequence of human behaviour and has constantly to be addressed.

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The next line in my book as I am editing it now went like this: *evidently our first task would be to educate our staff into taking initiatives and assuming responsibilities for changing their country. This would be a proposition as tough as rebuilding the Ferhadija Mosque. **It meant altering the psychological make up of a society programmed to perpetual enmity by centuries of warfare and indoctrination.***

It profoundly depressed me to read these lines almost ten years after, and to realize that not only had the situation not improved, it had worsened.

Memories were not healing. Our travels with Bishop Komarica and Bishop Jefrem in May 2002 made us realize the degree of separation between communities, which existed as though in parallel universes, each blind to the other. Without acknowledging the violent crimes committed against each other, there could be no liberating of the spirit which would lead to a more positive meeting of the universes in the future.

Chehov says, in words spoken by the student Trofimov in *The Cherry Orchard*: ‘... it’s quite clear that to begin to live we must first atone for the past.’

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The candidates for our management team in Banja Luka looked puzzled and then alarmed when we discussed the necessity of healing memories. Every one of them

lived in survival mode and could not bring themselves to think of what had happened. It was easier to dream of emigrating to a place unknown and better, where they could forget the past and the trauma it had brought. The pain and fear on the faces of these young people, whose lives and futures had been destroyed by the barbarism of the last ten years, could not fail to rouse fury in us at their parents' generation, and at the international community, which had allowed the country to be torn apart by self-seeking politicians manipulating nationalist ideologies.

The candidates needed all the help we could give and we began to explain the purpose of our work in Bosnia at every encounter with the words: 'for future generations – our children and grandchildren.'

In between the interviews we attended a lecture Svetlana Cenic had arranged for our colleague Ros Tennyson, as adviser to the Prince of Wales International Business Leaders Forum, to deliver before a group of National Assembly representatives.

The grey-haired, middle-aged men filed into the room like a group of disgruntled schoolchildren being forced to attend an unpopular seminar. Ros gamely relished the challenge of expounding her theories of partnership to this array of stony countenances.

They were uninterested in new ideas. They were concerned with surviving on the rackets that kept them in expensive cars and houses. On the drive to Banja Luka, earlier that day, we had followed a Porsche being driven by a teenager, the flashy car strikingly out of place among the decrepit pick-up trucks and carts, negotiating the pot-holed roads of Bosnia. Adnan surmised the car to be the gift of a doting parent, rich on crime. In Bosnia, teachers, nurses and doctors, when they got paid, received about £100 a month. Politicians were supposed to earn the same.



## MLADIC AND *WAR AND PEACE*

Milosevic's favourite book was *The Bridge over the Drina* by Ivo Andric, the Croatian Nobel prize winning novelist who used to live in Travnik, the ancient capital of Bosnia. This figured. The novel, describing the brutal Ottoman colonization of the Balkans, particularly the gruesome depictions of torture, such as impaling and other ingeniously cruel forms of crucifixion inflicted on insurgents, inspired policies that lead to the Bosnia War. Muslims in killing camps across the country would then suffer the same tortures.

Mladic's favourite book is Tolstoy's *War and Peace*.

This raises the issue that has haunted Europe ever since the Second World War of the relationship between culture and mass murder.

The cultivated, classical music-loving SS Commandant became a cliché of post-war literature and cinema: listening to Schubert chamber music after supervising massacres. It got to the point where audiences could identify the villain from the soundtrack playing Mozart.

*War and Peace* is also one of my favourite books. It has influenced my style of writing in the way I try to describe people and the world as precisely as possible, focusing on character and nature as they are. Men read *War and Peace* for its forensically detailed descriptions of war, intended to show its full horror and futility, as well as those fleeting moments of danger when desire for glory and the nearness of death inspires ecstasy. Women probably prefer the peace sections, in which Tolstoy's insights into human behaviour and emotion are vividly revealing. The framework of the novel is Napoleon's invasion of Russia and defeat, an event that became not only a significant turning point in European history, but prefigured Hitler's invasion of Russia over a century later, with even more cataclysmic consequences.

Since *War and Peace* is Mladic's favourite read, how come it did not change him as a man? The book educated me and others to question the purpose of war. Mladic went on to authorize massacres on a scale beyond even what Tolstoy witnessed in the atrocious campaigns of the Crimea, and which he chronicled with an intellectual and emotional fury, honed to persuade everyone to end all warfare.

In *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger's seminal analysis of the relationship between art and politics, there is a disturbing juxtaposition of two clips from the Second World War. The first shows pure-blooded German Wilhelm Furtwangler conducting Beethoven's Ninth Symphony in front of a row of Nazi leaders including Goebbels. The next clip shows English Myra Hess, who happened also to be Jewish, playing a Mozart piano concerto in front of the Queen. Berger points out that the clips have the same purpose: to raise spirits in the war. The music however contradicts the jingoism. Mozart, the archetypal pan-European empathetic artist, composed martial music for its colour and rhythm, as in some Turkish marches, or ironically as in the jaunty soldier's chorus in *Così fan tutte* and an aria from the *Marriage of Figaro*, during which the barber mocks a young conscript's chances of survival. Mozart is the music of reason and passion held in balance. Beethoven's *Choral Symphony* is a plea for universal brotherhood. It should have been forbidden by the Nazis, who despised its sentiments. Yet they can all be seen smiling and applauding enthusiastically.

What is going on here? Why do they genuinely love the music and yet, the next day, continue destroying universal brotherhood? A critic once said that after listening to this symphony he felt so inspired and elated that, if he had possessed a thousand pound note, he would give it gladly to the first person he met on the street. This sensation lasted however no longer than a few seconds. For the Nazi leaders this momentary glow of empathy was only for their kind and not for those they considered subhuman. Goebbels would comment now: 'A no-brainer.'

Tolstoy acknowledges the seductive glamour of war, to which Mladic responds with patriotic zeal; but the writer describes in unflinching detail the pernicious consequences of young men driven to overcome their fear, and revel in the ecstatic moment of glory: the senseless violence, the excruciating pain, the waste of lives and above all, the appalling aftermath of death and destruction. Is it possible that Mladic did not understand Tolstoy, a writer who can never be accused of failing in his craft? Or is the truth more disturbing: that the general actually revelled in the horrific consequences of war?

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#### DONALD ADDRESSES THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

From the moment they signed the Dayton Accord, Serb politicians ran the Republika Srpska as a country separate from the rest of Bosnia. They paid grudging lip-service to the official government in Sarajevo, fought the Office of the High Representative over every decision, and resisted every attempt to unify the country. The Accord immediately cut Bosnia in two almost equal parts, and the Serbs made sure they would never be integrated again, however much the Bosniaks remonstrated and insisted Bosnia was indivisible. Whatever any High Representatives commanded, whether the kid-gloved Wolfgang Petritsch and Valentin Inzco, or the sterner, confrontational Paddy Ashdown, the Republika Srpska dug in its heels ever firmer, and waited patiently for the moment when it would become an independent country, like Kosovo in 2008.

Meanwhile the international community of politicians and agencies kept up the pretence that Bosnia represented a unified country and that changes to the constitution would ease relations between the different ethnic groups, which administered majorities in their various regions. The carrot of membership of the European Union became part of the diplomatic game played between frequently changing personnel

from the international community: ambassadors and High Representatives, with their staffs staying no longer than a few years while the indigenous politicians bided their time, learning how to manipulate the foreigners, and knowing that financial constraints imposed by governments with their own problems to solve, and eventual disinterest, would remove their resented presence.

If we had any doubts about this state of affairs, and still believed that Bosnia could become a functioning state again, the National Assembly in Banja Luka immediately dispelled such naïve optimism.

The Speaker of the National Assembly, Dr Kalinic, friend of Karadjic and keeper of the flame, greeted us with his habitual fixed smile that contrasted with his coldly watchful eyes. We sat on impressive leather chairs around a large polished table in his reception room. We were given envelopes containing sheets of Republika Srpska stamps, but the main purpose of this meeting was for the Speaker to present Donald with an award: a medal commemorating ten years of the Republika Srpska's existence. Adnan heaved a sigh of relief that this token of a state, created by Karadjic, had not been given publicly. It could have derailed our work if seen on Bosnian television. Dr Kalinic cracked a joke about the medal probably becoming an antique in the near future, but we knew that it represented his ultimate political ambition. The joke might have been alluding playfully to a different future for his country, given the presence of Roy Wilson, but the gift sent a clear message that the Republika Srpska became a reality the moment the Dayton Accord had been signed, in the presence of the most powerful countries in the world, which should now give up any hope of integrating the new state with the rest of Bosnia.

Roy Wilson arrived with Daniel Korski, a smartly dressed and sharp brained young man, with the model good looks of Rob Lowe in the *West Wing*. He introduced himself as a political advisor from Denmark. Dr Kalinic stared for a moment at this

new person, who did not take off his raincoat and watched the proceedings silently through hooded eyes. Dr Kalinic asked jokingly whether he was a spy. ‘Would I bring a spy in here?’ retorted Roy Wilson, with his customary charm and quick-wittedness. In other words both of them knew the man was a spy. Dr Kalinic presented Daniel Korski also with an envelope of stamps, and then lead us, Daniel Korski included, into the National Assembly.

Row on row of grey-haired men with stony faces packed the main benches, though empty seats at the back indicated that the usual group of international observers had declined to be present. Roy Wilson noted their absence with a sly smile: a successful British initiative had made them jealous.

Deputy-Speaker Sulejman Tihic, the token Muslim stipulated by the Dayton Accord, greeted us with a smile of relief, but looked anxious and out of place in this predominantly Serb gathering, which consisted of people who had tried to wipe out his community. He joined Dr Kalinic in introducing Donald to the Assembly. Adnan stood prominently beside Donald to translate. The young Muslim’s presence in those surroundings was extraordinary in itself, and he delivered the translation firmly and confidently, expertly marking Donald’s emphases.

The grey-haired men, who included former police chiefs who had killed Muslims and Catholics personally, listened wearily, depressed and expressionless. Among them sat a few women, Balkan matriarchs, who sneered contemptuously when Donald spoke about the Ferhadija Mosque and the need to support all communities.

Roy told us afterwards that three months earlier such a speech could never have been given to these people. Less than a year ago a violent demonstration had interrupted the foundation-stone laying ceremony. Now the same people who had encouraged and paid demonstrators, including young boys, to throw stones, one which killed an

elderly man, were listening quietly to the suggestion that it was in their self-interest to rebuild the mosque.

After the meeting Donald insisted on moving round the tables in the Assembly cafeteria where the grey-haired stony-faced men were sitting. Some turned their backs; others were prepared to talk, but complained: why do you keep going on about the Ferhadija? Some, but only a few, agreed that it was time to work towards reconciliation.

‘We have a problem!’ Adnan muttered anxiously to Roy Wilson as he watched Donald disappear among the tables of Bosnian Serb nationalists. But the politicians seemed either to be grateful for his presence or considered him not worth worrying about.

This is the address Donald gave to the Republika Srpska Assembly on 25<sup>th</sup> April 2002:

*I am grateful for the invitation to address the National Assembly. I realise that in its small way this is an historic occasion. I am the first Anglican priest to stand here.*

*Therefore I need to explain how it is that the Soul of Europe, a small organization of which I am the director, came to be in the Republika Srpska at Banja Luka telling you about the kind of work we do.*

*Last September fifteen key people from Banja Luka accepted our invitation to spend four days at the Centre for Reconciliation at Coventry Cathedral in the UK for a consultation on Steps towards Peace, Prosperity and Reconciliation in Banja Luka. The group was made up of religious leaders, politicians, business people and the mayor of Banja Luka and members of his cabinet.*

*On the final day of the consultation, your Prime Minister together with the Prime Minister of the Federation, the President of the Federation, Dr Lagumdzija and the*

*High Representative attended a presentation about our deliberations. As a result of the consultation we have been invited to continue our work in the Republika Srpska.*

*What happened in Coventry describes the sort of organization we are. We bring people together to promote a more humane and just world. We are not an aid agency. Sometimes a lean organization like ours can bring people together in a way in which the UN cannot.*

*And we are here in your country because Bosnia has been for centuries the region of Europe where East meets West, where Orthodoxy and Catholicism have been neighbours and where Christianity and Islam have lived together.*

*Everyone here has many different identities. All of you have friends and relatives who somewhere in the family are Croat, Bosnian, Serb, Jewish, Atheist, maybe even a few Protestants! All of us are a mix of families, of blood, of histories and cultures.*

*That is why the destruction of so many churches and mosques across former Yugoslavia, with the accompanying ethnic cleansing, was nothing less than an attack on a shared civilization. Everyone lost. No one gained.*

*So we and many others believe that if it is possible to help bring peace, prosperity and reconciliation to this region, then this will benefit us all in Europe.*

*It is enlightened self interest which brings us here – because whether we like or not, we are all interdependent.*

*Our work is about reconciliation - but that word is overused. It is too bland, too lifeless, too passive. When language decays so does the reality it is supposed to convey. When reconciliation begins to flourish then, not only is there evidence of change of hearts and a culture of trust, instead of menace and fear, but changes in the way a community functions. Think for a moment of your children, and of their children. As I speak, remember that you are fathers and mothers, grand fathers and grandmothers - what sort of future do you want for them? - you will want them to live*

*in a region where they can be well educated, where they can find good work, where they can marry, bring up families, where the streets are safe and where the practice of different religions and indeed of those who have no religion is at the very least tolerated. Your children and their children would want to be part of a community in which public service is valued and is not just an opportunity for personal gain, and be part of a community which provides many opportunities for the flourishing of the imagination. I hope too your children and your grandchildren would see that the elderly live and die in dignity. You could add more to this picture, but it is rooted in what your children desire. It is this which all of us, and I include myself, who work for the common good would endorse. It is of course much easier said than done.*

*The other side of reconciliation is more difficult, more painful, more long term - nothing could be less soft, less sentimental than the phrase 'change of hearts' - but that is indispensable to the putting some reality into that picture I have just painted.*

*What do I mean?*

*We look to the future. We also have to look to the past. People have said to me: let bygones be bygones - we have the future to live for. The trouble is: unless we remember the past it will return to haunt us. As you will know better than I, a nation does not emerge united when war is over. People do not suddenly become angels.*

*That is the most difficult part of my address. Now I can tell you what, with your collaboration, we are planning to do. And unless of course what we propose is 'owned' by you, then our efforts are useless.*

*We have five proposals*

*1*

*We wish to establish a programme for the Healing of Memories – opportunities for people to meet together, to speak about their lives and to set the record straight. I am*



*talking about those from all sections of the community, who have been hurt, diminished and traumatised by what happened here after the collapse of communism.*

*This is difficult. It is only too easy to say it will make everything worse – stirring up terrible memories, creating fears of witch-hunts, scape-goating and persecution.*

*But there are many international organizations which have experience in this work of mediation. The Soul of Europe is already in touch with two of them.*

2

*We shall establish a forum of partners from the public, civic and business sectors, open to everyone who is concerned with the welfare of the region.*

*This informal organization will be like a container in which new ideas can be discussed and realised – particularly in the areas of economic development, education and culture.*

*For each of these and other areas we will encourage the formation of task forces.*

*As the various projects are born, so we hope it will be possible to create strong links with Europe.*

*Already three schools in the UK have shown great interest in being linked with the high school in Banja Luka.*

*And the Soul of Europe is planning to invite the International Development Consortium to see what can be done to encourage inward investment in the economy.*

*We are shortly appointing a coordinator, and the mayor of Banja Luka has already generously found us office accommodation. Later we shall appoint a broker, one who can help different organizations from different sectors work together. This partnership forum will be the first of its kind in Bosnia.*

3

*The remaining proposals concern the religious communities here. We want to strengthen all of them.*

*The Catholic Diocese of Banja Luka.*

*Bishop Komarica's ministry and that of his priests and people is well known to you. His diocese almost vanished during the war and many of you will know how he has spoken day after day on behalf of all those who had to leave their homes, who want to return and find useful work.*

*Bishop Komarica and those from Caritas who work closely with him persist in drawing attention to the needs of the people. Like many of you he loves this city. He longs for justice and peace here. His family have lived in Banja Luka for three hundred years; one of the churches destroyed was built by his grandfather.*

*Our proposal is that a representative of those institutions which are involved in the issues raised by the Catholic Church should meet regularly with representatives from the diocese under the chair of the Soul of Europe. Such a group might more speedily expedite decisions and recommendations.*

4

*The Orthodox Diocese of Banja Luka.*

*Many of you here will know Bishop Jefrem. He too came to Coventry. Those of us who are not Serbs too easily forget what suffering the Serbs and their Church have endured during the two world wars and throughout the years of communism and now in Kosovo.*

*It was a privilege to be invited to preach at the liturgy at the cathedral last December. The bishop and the Soul of Europe are looking at practical ways in which the Soul of Europe can be useful. Once this has been agreed, it will be announced.*

5

*It was also a privilege to welcome Mufti Camdic at Coventry and his colleague Mufti Makic from Bihac. The Soul of Europe is committed to being a partner in the reconstruction of the Ferhadija Mosque - the rebuilding of this mosque will be the*

*first time in the history of the world that Islam and Christianity will have collaborated so closely. It will be a sign to the rest of the world that in Banja Luka it is possible for these two great religions to flourish in peace.*

*As this work develops, so your city will become one of the great European cities - people will visit you, marvelling at the reconciliation which will begin to happen. I am pleased to announce that at a meeting in London, recently, His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales said that he will do everything to help this project succeed. The international image of Bosnia is poor - a metaphor for bitterness and so many destroyed hopes.*

*As this image persists, so it will become difficult to attract the investment Bosnia needs.*

*And we all lose out – not just you, but the rest of us. As His Holiness Patriarch Pavle has reminded me many times, repeating the words of St Paul: ‘If one part of the body suffers, then all suffer.’*

*But the Soul of Europe, very mindful of many people and organizations already working in your country to the same end, wants to offer you a new start and with every part of this community take those five steps towards peace prosperity and reconciliation.*

*As you drive from Zagreb to Banja Luka you suddenly come upon Banja Luka guarding the entrance to the Bosnian mountains.*

*Banja Luka has always been a frontier town. Now there is the chance for it to be a frontier town of the spirit, showing the rest of the world how we can begin to live securely together.*

*New beginnings take courage, truthfulness and imagination. There is plenty of that in Banja Luka.*

*Thank you for listening to me.*

*May what I have said come true.*

## TRAVELS WITH BISHOPS

### MAY 2002

#### THREE PAINTINGS

Three landscape paintings haunted me throughout the next visit to Bosnia.

Above my bed in Bishop Komarica's residence, hung an original oil painting of bright sun on melting snow, with several tall birch trees glistening against dark pinewoods. I was struck by its power and lack of contrivance. How did such a fine picture come to be in a humble guestroom? The artist caught one of those rare moments we all experience when, on a clear day, nature glows with particular intensity and we are overcome by a sense of the fleeting beauty and fragility of life. Tolstoy describes this in *War and Peace*, usually at moments of battle when young men face sudden death. This scene is modest: just snow, trees and the back of a house; it might be glimpsed on the way back from a walk to the shops, or stretching the legs after a night's sleep, and we are suddenly made aware of the end of a long dark winter. A horse pulling a small sledge is the only living creature, standing patiently by the porch of the wooden house warmed by the rays of a bright sun. Tracks across the snowy meadow indicate that someone has either come or gone. Where is everybody? Perhaps they are busy. Their absence conveys melancholy. They are missing the beauty of the spring sunshine. Perhaps something more sinister is happening. The viewer feels momentarily abandoned, waiting for someone to appear, and stands alone looking at the porch, the horse, an unremarkable scene now drenched in sunlight. The

horse waits for ever. The trees contrast light and dark against the crystalline pale blue sky. A birdhouse swings from one of the topmost elastic birch branches. Who climbed so high to fix it there? The contrast of light and dark trees in the surrounding radiance, particularly the coal blackness of four trees in the meadow, like menacing shadows of the four delicately bending birch trees in the foreground, seems to suggest something ominous at the heart of this morning vision.

The painting of snow in the foreground is absorbingly detailed. The path is muddied all the way to the porch, where a blanket of thawing snow threatens to drop on some pieces of timber below. A dark shadow falls at a sharp angle against the open door. There the path, slushy, dirty and streaked from recent hectic human activity, now suddenly comes to a stop. On either side the snow drifts, thawing undisturbed, are smooth, blue and white, glittering like heaps of diamonds. What happened here? Where is everybody?

The picture comforts and makes us uneasy at the same time. For me it provided a representation of our work in Bosnia: the messiness, the contrast of light and shade, what happened to people and the eternal rhythms of nature. It made me aware of the impossibility of our task, the naivety of our hopes and aims.

This is a reproduction of *March* by Isaac Levitan, a leading Russian artist and contemporary of Chekhov, a friend and admirer, who both describe in their work a society on the brink of change. Levitan's paintings are a pre-echo of the urban landscapes by Edward Hopper, in which apparently depopulated apartments, hotels and streets absorb human sadness and failed expectations, a world of our making. These pictures don't preach; but implicit is a disturbing insight: this is the world we have built, but now we have become strangers in our own environment. Chekhov focuses on detailed observations of everyday life to reveal its comedy, tragedy, fallibility, illusion, and occasional moments of unexpected transcendence, which can

give our existence flashes of purpose. In the same vein, Levitan also expresses the undercurrents of life by depicting un-airbrushed moments of time in familiar landscapes. These raise questions. What has happened? What will happen? What are we doing here? The horse waits eternally for the next task. Meanwhile the first rays of spring sun warm its back.

The second picture that haunted me hung by my bed in the Vidovic Hotel on the outskirts of Banja Luka, where we stayed after our daily jaunts with Bishop Jefrem. Hotel managers and designers prefer to decorate rooms with on the whole relaxing and anodyne paintings of flowers, landscapes by numbers, or decorative abstracts which do not disturb the sleep of guests. Sometimes these mass-produced images touch me with their pared-down serenity: empty deck-chairs by placid waters in misty light. Like Stanford's *Bluebird*, which evokes the glassy calm of a lake under a cloudless sky, the bird's sudden flight only enhances the mood of mesmerising stasis, and induces nostalgia for perfection and a never-land of dreams.

The Vidovic Hotel stands on the left side of the road leading out of Banja Luka, and then winding up the Vrbas Gorge. The painting in my room, executed with bold brush strokes in muddy oils like a preliminary sketch, depicts three tiny figures on a raft being swept down a foaming river, flanked by rocky cliffs. One figure is trying to steady the keel, another is losing balance, and the third stands desperately and defiantly at the front of the raft looking for rescue or waiting for inevitable catastrophe. My amused head-shaking response to this image needs no explanation: recognizing an all too accurate portrayal of our progress in Bosnia. It also reminded me of John Boorman's film, *Deliverance*, in which three men from the city come to realize how poorly equipped they are, physically and mentally, to deal with the forces of nature and the hostility of natives who seem to be at home in their wild environment, and at the same time to be frighteningly alien.

The third picture that kept coming to mind used to hang in my grandmother's flat in Vienna. My grandfather had chosen it a few years before he died. The landscape with a small blossoming cherry tree in the foreground, a narrow road curving between green meadows and leading to a village in the distance, with a white church tower rising into a blue sky, reminded him of his childhood home. He caught sight of it in a shop window and stood for hours, transfixed. My grandmother bought the picture as a seventieth birthday present. It is painted in an unaffected style, the colours fresh and the delicate brush strokes sensitive to the stillness of the scene, bathed in May sunshine. The artist had not exaggerated or sentimentalised the view, which could be of any village in central Europe. Although lacking the disturbing, as well as transcendent, resonances of Levitan's *March*, this anonymous painting expressed a gentle nostalgia for the home of one's kindest memories. This is how my grandfather preferred to remember the landscape of his childhood.

However my grandmother told me a different story. When he took her to visit his home village in Moravia, half a century after he had left it, she was shocked by the poverty, the brutish existence of the peasants, the backwardness, the filth and the unrelenting hardship of life there. She learnt about my grandfather's cruel upbringing, the beatings, the starvation, his final escape to Vienna. His mother, resenting her son's attempts to educate himself, burnt the books she found him reading surreptitiously in the cowshed. He was needed for labour. These restrictions exercised his mind to such a degree that he committed books to memory, and could recite pages of Goethe and Schiller throughout the rest of his life. My grandfather preferred to forget the truth. The picture represented for him an idyllic version of his childhood. Nor would that necessarily have been a lie. As Levitan takes pains to show in *March*: while recording every mud-splattered detail of a spring thaw, beauty exists cheek by jowl with messy

reality. My grandfather would have remembered sunny spring days on the road to and from his village. Nature transfigured the pain and nastiness of his everyday life.

We came across many such villages on our journeys with Bishops Bishop Komarica and Bishop Jefrem through the valleys and over the mountains of Northern and Western Bosnia. Any one of them could have been home to my grandfather, and life there had not changed much since his childhood a century earlier.

In Bishop Komarica's diocese most of the villages had stood on the front line of the battle between Croats and Serbs. All were victims of the war. Looking idyllic from a distance, as we approached, the ruins and devastation became shockingly apparent.

In Bishop Jefrem's diocese the remoteness of the villages protected them from the damage of battle, but a sense of guilty survival hovered over those visits, as though the people were aware of a massive injustice, and could not bring themselves to contemplate the issues. Whereas we saw one dynamited Catholic church after another, and listened to tales of murder and persecution, new Orthodox churches were rising up like mushrooms, even in the remotest and least populated places.

The journeys with both bishops made it clear that the Bosnia War had been a war by religion against religion. The result was nothing less than the destruction of society. Justice and the rebuilding of dismembered communities became the main issues rising from our time with Bishop Komarica. The main issues that came out of our travels with Bishop Jefrem were the need to acknowledge what happened, to start the healing of memories going back centuries, to come to terms with history and to join the present world.



## TRAVELS WITH BISHOP KOMARICA

Bishop Komarica greeted us with affection and a sense of occasion. He had given up several days of work to take us on a harrowing journey.

The bishop has been called the Oscar Romero of the Balkans, an apt description because this unassuming man, who had little interest in Croat nationalist politics, wanted just to care for his people, and spoke out fearlessly against injustice, as had the Salvadoran bishop before being martyred.

During the war, Bishop Komarica discovered considerable resources of courage and determination to protect people from all communities: Orthodox and Muslim as well as Catholic. He told us that when the war came and the ethnic cleansing started, he had no choice but to stay and fight for the rights of all persecuted minorities. He pestered generals, police chiefs, mayors and politicians with constant phone calls and visits, badgering them, begging them to stop the killing. Finally they put him under house arrest. It had not been a difficult decision for him. It was his calling. So this modest, studious and musical young bishop, who had expected a life of quiet devotion, and who might never have been heard of outside Bosnia, suddenly found himself at the epicentre of a holocaust and rose to the challenge.

Someone later gave us an example of his bravery. In the months before his house arrest, he used to drive to Prijedor, a town which had become the centre of killing operations in the region, in order to plead for Catholics who were being rounded up and murdered. On one such journey, a group of Serb soldiers stopped his car. They marched him to a nearby wood where they planned to execute him. As the armed young men stood in a circle round him, ready to shoot, he calmly went from one to the other, took the guns out of their hands and laid them on the ground. He then said a prayer, blessed them, returned to his car and drove on to Prijedor.

Two memories add to this sketch of an exceptional man. The first is a general impression of him moving among his people, who mobbed him wherever we went, each of them desperate for help: old women in headscarves and poor farmers with tears in their eyes, haggard and frightened. He listened to their grievances patiently, one by one, giving all his attention till they calmed down. The other is of him walking with a group of Catholic bishops along the esplanade at Split on the Dalmatian Coast. The other bishops marched with an arrogant sense of their importance, keeping their faces averted from the people, who watched them in awe. However, the slight figure of the bishop waved at a group of young men and women, who were sitting in a café by the pavement, and called out to them a witty greeting. After a moment's surprised silence, they all waved back, laughing loudly and cheering. Perhaps they recognized him; or his words amused them. He possessed the touch.

The kitchen staff had rigged up a barbecue outside the bishop's residence. A group of eager young men and priests from Trento in Italy were already seated on benches round a long table, and drinking beer. Margit, the German woman from Caritas, whom we had met on several occasions before, joined in. Several languages were being spoken while everyone ate cevapcici and smoked sausage. The Italians came every summer on re-building projects in the Catholic dioceses of Bosnia, bringing cash and voluntary labour from youth groups. Margit had personally raised nine million marks for Caritas since the war, to help the Banja Luka diocese in particular. This money had helped rebuild the Catholic cathedral and also a few churches in communities across the Republika Srpska. Margit eyed us critically: what had we done so far for Bosnia?

The bishop however appreciated our strategy. Mufti Camdzic was understandably impatient, but Bishop Komarica took the longer view and understood the need to

establish solid foundations for the embodiment of our vision of a just Europe that would find its expression in a Christian Muslim collaboration rebuilding a great mosque. There would be initially little success or few visible, tangible results of our work. By taking on the reconstruction of the Ferhadija, a task so large it would be years before it could be done, we were trying to change the course of a millennium of European history. Mufti Camdzic needed and demanded a mosque: a place where his people could worship. Our conversations with him constantly focused on rebuilding the Ferhadija. For Bishop Komarica, who at least had his cathedral, issues of justice were more important than the reconstruction of churches, which is why our conversations with him ranged beyond bricks and stone.

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The following morning we left Banja Luka by a back road. As in many towns in Bosnia, the Catholic minority tended to settle in the poorer suburbs and villages. The Orthodox or Muslim communities, whichever made up the majority, colonised the town centres and pushed minorities to the outskirts. The Catholics in Bosnia, as in Northern Ireland, made up the poorest classes. As we drove through decimated Catholic neighbourhoods in the Republika Srpska, we met farmers and labourers who formed the now scant congregations. Richer, and more ambitious and successful, Catholics had relocated to Croatia or elsewhere in the world. The mostly elderly poor survivors cultivated land around the ruins and hung on in desperation for their lives to improve. These were the people the bishop had to care for.

He drove us into the hills, passing villages which had once been mostly Catholic but were now Serb Orthodox. The elderly Catholic returnees lived uneasily with their new neighbours.

Eventually we reached Mrkonic Grad, where Catholics were slowly returning. The war had witnessed fierce fighting between Croats and Serbs, and the town passed

from one side to the other. Eventually the Dayton Accord handed it to the Serbs, so the occupying Croats were forced to leave. This situation illustrated the clumsy and ignorant politics that brought the war to an end. To stop the killing, the Dayton Accord protected the retreating Serbs, and ignored peace processes for the future. The Croat squadrons, in fury at having to relinquish this important town in North West Bosnia, a town they had won at considerable cost of life, destroyed what they could, and torched the church as they left.

Ten years after the war ended, Catholics were slowly returning to their homes, finding them either demolished or occupied by Serbs. Muslims who once also shared this town were thinner on the ground, not daring to return to a place where both Orthodox and Catholics had driven them out.

The bishop took us to celebrate mass in a house next to the ruined church. Lilac blossomed on the road leading to Mrkonjic Grad and fragrant sprigs decorated the makeshift altar in the main room of the house. A crowd of worshippers had already gathered in the churchyard, and stood in small groups, looking frightened and vulnerable, in full view of their Orthodox neighbours, who watched with contempt and suspicion from the surrounding streets, pretending not to be concerned by the gathering, but whistling loudly and laughing noisily to disrupt the service.

Two feisty nuns and an elderly priest, who had lost all his teeth, lead the vigorous singing in a congregation, made up mostly of younger and middle-aged women and a few old men. The men sang, while tears streamed down their old faces, and then listened to the bishop's sermon. Some were crippled from battle, others suffered from nervous twitching, hands perpetually shaking. These people were as scarred as their church and homes. Many had travelled long distances on foot to attend the service, which took on an air of defiance, as they crowded in the small room and squeezed in

the hallway and up the staircase. A young girl and boy read the lessons, carrying out their duties with immense gravity, as though they were at St Peter's in Rome.

After the service everyone entered the ruins of the church. A group of people constantly surrounded the bishop, pestering him with questions and favours, looking aggrieved and desperate. They had no other advocate, no politician, no friendly official to speak for them, only the bishop. Bishop Komarica spoke to them with a sense of urgency, trying to cheer them, to encourage them to take initiatives, to explain how his powers were limited. Around them stood the gaunt ruins of the church, and someone pointed to where the organ used to be. It had been a fine and expensive German instrument, now burnt to ashes.

Long tables had been set up and laid for lunch in the garage adjoining the house. Guests were served cold lamb, pork, salad with bunches of large fresh spring onions, traditional Bosnian cheese pie baked like bread, sponge cakes and nut pastries, all washed down with home made fruit brandy, Dalmatian wine and beer. As with other banquets we attended in poor places round Bosnia, it seemed indelicate but necessary to ask who was paying for them. Perhaps the diocese or a rich donor covered the costs. Whoever made it possible, the poor Catholics of Mrkonic Grad looked delighted, their normally anxious furrowed faces creased for a while into gap-toothed smiles as they piled food onto plates. When would such plenty be given them again? The bishop surveyed his congregation and observed how these few moments of pleasure clouded over again with depression and fear. In a focused firm baritone, he began to sing a traditional melody. It was a song about home-coming, and everyone joined in. People entered the garage, and suddenly their voices began to lift the rafters. They sang one song after the other, songs of loss, of pain, of exile. Bishop Komarica translated for us in a low voice, then conducted with firm beat of his hands. The people were transfigured by the music. This was the first time they had sung in

Mrkonic Grad since before the war. The bishop was encouraging them to return, to claim their homes, and to reassure them that they need feel frightened no longer. The previously severe faced nuns began to smile, and joked with the bishop about his sermon; children came to sit on their knees and the old men showed us scythes, famous in the region for their craftsmanship. We ran our thumbs lightly over the sharp blades.

‘Now the fun starts,’ Bishop Komarica bent over and whispered to us. ‘We must leave quickly. They wait for the bishop to go so they can let their hair down!’ We departed rapidly, waved off by a crowd of people, cheerful but at the same time fearful.

The side-road out of Mrkonic Grad turned into a bumpy path, which ascended a thickly-wooded hillside, and eventually petered out at a heap of rubble, and some burnt-out houses which had once been a small town where a thousand people used to live. The ruins overgrown with weeds, the incursion of nature, and saplings sprouting through the remnants of kitchen and stable floors, made it impossible to imagine a community had ever lived here, let alone a town, so complete had been its destruction. Bishop Komarica led us over lumps of concrete, broken bricks, nettles and tall weeds to a graveyard packed with tombstones. Beyond, spread a panoramic view of rolling hills.

This would have once been a beautifully situated town surrounded by forests and meadows: a fertile region for farmers. The extent of the suffering of the Catholic community in this part of Bosnia reminded us of the devastated Orthodox village of Krnjeuscia, near Bihac in Western Bosnia. In that region the Muslims took the brunt of the last war, and lost more people and places, but Orthodox and Catholics also suffered the destruction of their homes and communities in towns like Krnjeuscia.

A four-wheel drive car arrived with two families, the first returnees who were planning to re-settle. The bishop lead prayers in the graveyard, and beckoned the families on to a flat piece of ground, where bushy weeds grew between stones and rubble. This used to be the church. As with the site of the Ferhadija Mosque in Banja Luka, the empty plot of land gave no indication as to what had once stood there. To make the ground safer for the children and women to walk over, the fathers took an axe and began to cut the saplings down, revealing more rubble from collapsed walls.

The bishop spoke earnestly and encouragingly with them. These sturdy young people represented hope for the future: families prepared for the daunting task of rebuilding their homes. It felt like the American Wild West in the early days of settlement, four-wheel drives replacing covered wagons, with the same mixture of dread and determination to make a home in the wilderness surrounded by enemies.

Some of the ruined houses were still standing, although burnt out and roofless. We trod carefully, mindful of mines. This derelict, deserted spot turned out to be the most dangerous place we ever visited in Bosnia. An old stove, wrecked and blackened, stood against one wall. Weeds and moss covered the damp floor; the roof and ceiling was open to the sky and the elements. A once large and comfortable home had turned into an inhospitably bleak and frightening place. The empty window frames looked onto orchards where the burnt trees were beginning to show a sprinkle of blossom among the charred branches.

The families looked in good heart and full of energy. They would rebuild these homes and begin again, as the Serbs were doing in Krnjeuscia. There the Serbs were being helped by Christian Aid, and blamed the Muslims of Bihac for the destruction of their town. The Catholics of Bosnia had to depend solely on Germany, traditionally Croatia's friend, for support, through Caritas and the indomitable Margit. The

Muslims across the valley were receiving more aid, and the neat rows of new houses there were a reproach to the ruins of this devastated Catholic town.

A truth began to emerge from this journey: the Catholics in the Banja Luka diocese were suffering for the sins of Catholics in other parts of Bosnia: nationalist Croats who had joined nationalist Serbs in committing atrocities during the war. Whereas the more powerful Catholic majorities in Mostar and throughout the Herzegovina region could continue to persecute the Orthodox and Muslim minorities there, build large churches, seize land and property through ethnic cleansing, the weaker Catholic community, as cared for by Bishop Komarica, was forgotten and left to fend for itself. The bishop might receive international recognition and awards for his ministry of peace and justice, but his community remained neglected, a cause for embarrassment. People in Europe didn't want to know. The bishop spoke vigorously and perpetually on their behalf, but the limited influence of a minority could never exert enough pressure on those who might help; in fact it had already come to the stage where no one listened to the bishop anymore. Our visit to this decimated diocese became a journey through a hellish limbo. The towns and people having suffered atrocities and injustice were now ignored, waiting for anyone to show kindness and help them.

All our journeys told us that the different communities of Bosnia were more separate than ever. This impression became emphatic during our journeys with Bishop Jefrem. His diocese covered the same area as Bishop Komarica's, and the Muslim muftilik; the Orthodox prosperous and settled whereas the other two were devastated. Each community focused on its own issues, fighting for its territory and influence, and had no energy to share with others. Aid agencies offered support to either one or the other. No one attended to the issue of how these communities in the same country, could



adapt to living as neighbours. An unbridgeable and bottomless chasm had opened after the war, preventing dialogue and encounter between the communities.

Another need became clear on this visit. The scars of Bosnia, physical and spiritual, so visible, so tangible and still bleeding, called desperately for healing. Lack of attention to this issue meant that the wounds could not close. Without this attention, whatever band aid might help a few communities to prosper and survive, peace and reconciliation could never happen here. Future generations, nurtured on the bitter memories of war, would initiate revenge and attrition. Another war was inevitable and already the seeds for that future conflict were being sown in the rubble of towns and villages all over the country. Silence on the matter, far from closing the wounds, kept them open, suppurating in the darkness of neglect. The next war would not be contained. Catholics and Orthodox in the Balkans could perpetuate ancient conflicts, but the wider Islamic community was watching, prepared to defend the Muslims there. The next war would be on an international scale.

Healing had to begin at once. The first task of the civic forum office in Banja Luka was to identify and report on the demographic, economic and social issues of the area, before practical projects could begin. The communities must be given time to acknowledge the past and the present, to tell their individual stories, the truth as it happened, chronicling the experiences of ordinary people, those who suffered, and those who inflicted suffering. People could then begin to talk to each other again; not just the leaders who came to Coventry, people for whom words and agreements come cheap and easy, but those former neighbours who had persecuted and eliminated each other, those at the grassroots of the community. Only then might future projects have a chance of success.

Meanwhile the two families clustered around the bishop, needing his encouragement. He exhorted them not to lose heart, said a prayer, and blessed them.

Perhaps dedicated and sympathetic outsiders, foreigners like us, with no political allegiances or ulterior motives, found it easier to cross the divides between communities. We did not lecture or threaten with sanctions. We respected all equally, yet never forgetting the crimes that brought about so much death and destruction.

Politics fail people. Communism imposed unity, compelling a truce; but pushed under an authoritarian lid, old rivalries and resentments seethed with ever increasing vehemence until they exploded into war. Change and reconciliation can not be decreed. They can only come out of patient steady work from below among former enemies who have to live as neighbours. The Dayton Accord compelled yet another truce, but without any attempt at minimum regional justice. Again the lid was being pressed on an unjust situation. Grievances continued to fester. While people needed to survive, memories of their suffering and crimes could not be forgotten. The deeper they were buried, the harsher would be future retribution. We kept being told that wounds were still painful and it was too early for anyone to start talking about the recent past. However, with each journey around the dioceses of Bosnia, the need for people to tell their stories, to share experiences, to weep, to shed guilt and say sorry to each other, became ever more urgent.

We stood with the bishop and the two families for a long while under the scorching early-summer sun, and listened to the deathly silence, suddenly realising that no birds were singing. Nature seemed to have died here.

The bumpy road snaked through more forests and over hills until we arrived at another group of ruined houses, that had once been a village on a bleak exposed plateau, below which fields and woods flowed over an undulating landscape. A family lived here, creating a temporary home in a shed, the only place with a roof. Despite their poverty, the young couple served us rakija and coffee in a manner as elegant as any palace reception. They kept the tiny space impeccably clean and tidy. Their two boys scampered along a brook and over meadows towards a large orchard which had been resurrected after the war and carefully tended ever since, the tree trunks painted white with pest deterrents. Plum blossom promised a harvest. The idyllic landscape contrasted with the family's poverty. Waving us off, the couple seemed cheerfully hopeful, but the burden of the task ahead of them filled their eyes with exhaustion and anxiety.

An SFOR land-rover was parked by a small farmstead on the next stop of our journey. One of the children had narrowly escaped being blown up by a mine and soldiers were defusing it and investigating the terrain. Both Serb and Croat militias had laid mines throughout the region, and concealed bombs threatened to remain a hazard for generations to come. The cheerful English SFOR driver spoke in a broad Yorkshire accent and told us he'd seen worse. Depressed at the implication of this observation, we spoke for a while about regional differences and enmities. In the relaxed English tradition of 'always looking on the bright side' he informed us of a local village where the different communities were cooperating well and being a beacon to the rest of the country. On all our journeys to dozens of villages throughout the next days we rarely came across examples of such cooperation.

A robust grandmother came out of the farmstead together with a lanky bare-legged grandson who seemed to be running the place. His parents had been killed in the war.

Guests came infrequently to this remote place so they smiled broadly with delight at our company, and offered us home made brandy in large plastic beakers.

Then the bishop drove us on a pitted bumpy road for a number of miles along the plateau, high above the River Vrbas, towards the city of Jajce. We passed one destroyed village after the other, remnants of walls clinging to the steep hillsides. At each sharp bend, a ruined homestead was being rebuilt, and the people were working the land around it, planting vegetable seeds and allowing poultry to scratch in the orchards. Breathtaking views over the valley stretched for miles, a balm to the eye, but lives and homes had been wrecked everywhere.

Mostly elderly people lived here, so it came as a surprise to meet a young woman, and we congratulated her on committing herself to settling in these poor conditions. She disabused us of our assumptions by saying she had moved to Vienna to accept work with a high salary and was only here on holiday to visit parents. Her father had worked for thirty years in Germany as a Gastarbeiter. Suffering from homesickness, he felt the need to return to his home village, and, despite the war and destruction, he insisted on spending his last days here.

As at Mrkonic Grad, the village community gathered to greet the bishop in the ruins of their church. The afternoon sun shone brightly. The church, perched on a hillside, looked over miles of forests and mountains across the deep Vrbas Gorge. The bishop celebrated vespers and women chanted and recited the repetitive prayers with a vigour and defiance that said: 'We are staying put. No one is going to remove us!'

The international community cited Jajce as unique in Bosnia, for being a town where the three ethnic groups were prepared to cooperate. We did not meet with either Orthodox or Muslim representatives there to check out this claim. In stead we were shown round what seemed to be the site for a large Catholic cathedral. As in Mostar, Catholics believed size mattered: the larger the church buildings, the more entrenched

the Catholic communities. We were met by the Catholic mayor of Jajce. In a smart hall next to the building site he offered fresh lemonade and coffee, and told us: 'We are a returnee municipality, multi-ethnic, and believe in strength in diversity.' These words we heard all over Bosnia from municipal authorities, including Banja Luka and Prijedor where there was no sign of such tolerance. In Jajce each community seemed to be concentrating on its own rebuilding projects. At least they gave permission, unlike in Banja Luka. Money had been invested equally between the three groups. The mayor wanted to convert the 'royal city' of Jajce into a tourist town which had once generated a fifth of Bosnia's economy. The whole country would attract visitors with its ancient traditions, unique multi-ethnic culture, as well as its relatively unspoilt natural beauty. Jajce is situated at the southern end of the Vrbas Gorge; Banja Luka to the north. Between them runs one of the most spectacular routes in all Europe.

The mayor then came to the point of his lecture: money. The committee for rebuilding the church needed a million Deutsch Marks, then the equivalent of a third of a million pounds. They were already in debt to over three hundred and fifty thousand. The church had so far been funded locally. Now the work had stalled for lack of money, and he begged us to use our influence to help find fundraisers. The mayor and his colleagues then stared expectantly into our eyes, waiting for us to reach into our pockets and produce the required amount there and then.

The bishop explained to them that 'big-hearted' Donald could only do his best to encourage people from all over Europe to help, and suggested that a link with another 'royal' city might encourage the establishing of a successful tourist centre.

Donald responded by talking about the appalling conditions we had just witnessed in the surrounding villages, how moved we were by the people's generosity and hopefulness, how we would alert the Anglican Franciscans to the needs of Jajce, and persuade Brussels to take on this project.

To protect our new Skoda, Adnan had preferred to let the bishop drive us along the ruinously rough mountain roads, and met us in Jajce to take us back to Banja Luka. He was horrified to hear about our wandering freely over and around ruins, not so much because of the devastation that upset us, but the risk we had taken, given the number of unexploded mines buried across the whole region.

Back at the bishop's residence Margit joined us for supper and told her story.

In 1989 she had taken her first holiday in Croatia and returned every year. During the war she worked as a nurse on the front line. Looking after children in particular, she found herself becoming hardened to the sight of small boys and girls dying, wounded, without legs, arms and eyes. Since that time Margit could not bring herself to feel any sympathy for Serbs. She organized aid shipments bringing shoes, clothes and medication to Bosnia. Her profession as an accountant helped raise large amounts of money for the Catholic cause in Bosnia, and Margit became indispensable to Bishop Komarica. She spent her vacations in Banja Luka and the rest of the year fundraising in Germany.

## ENDLESS KILLING

While driving along the road to Prijedor and noticing a sign pointing to Omarska, the Auschwitz of the Balkans, Bishop Komarica told us the history of this relatively little-known part of Bosnia. Here the Prijedor police methodically and enthusiastically carried out ethnic cleansing and the destruction of both Catholic and Muslim communities: whole villages and towns razed to the ground.

'Europe talks about Srebrenica, but this was worse,' said the bishop. 'It was not just one place. It was scores of villages and communities, countless dead victims, stories of terrible persecution and slaughter, as well as concentration camps. And no one

knew or talked about it. Every day when I drove along this road seeing the villages burning to the right and left, I begged God to send an angel, to tell the world.'

The bishop told us one horror after the other, just a tiny fraction of all the untold stories of this region. During the massacre of Muslims in one village, the Prijedor police corralled a group of local gypsies to round up victims, promising the gypsies immunity. When the Muslims were gathered by a large pit the gypsies had dug to be their grave, the police shot the gypsies as well. Two of them had by chance been still on a hunt for Muslims when they heard the shooting, and escaped to tell the world.

A priest returned from visiting his parents in Croatia to be with his congregation, aware of the risk to his life. The parents begged him not to go back, but, like other priests and nuns, a sense of care for his people forced him to return to his parish. Enraged at his insistence on returning, the Serb police murdered him with especial ferocity. They punctured his body with over fifty bullets.

Some Serbs also showed exceptional courage. A family protected Muslim neighbours, and stoutly resisted the Prijedor police. They too were slaughtered; the whole family, including several young children.

Driving through Prijedor, the bishop pointed out the once Muslim town centre destroyed in the war, and rebuilt immediately afterwards as offices for exclusively Serb businesses. In Prijedor there would be no justice. Serb cafés and restaurants stood on what used to be Muslim property, and there was no sign that Catholic churches and mosques had ever been there. The bishop pointed out the police station he visited regularly. The police had not known how to handle him. They threatened to shoot him, but he brushed their guns aside and insisted on speaking to the police chiefs. These complained to the authorities in Banja Luka who put the bishop under house arrest, so the ethnic cleansing could continue undisturbed by his complaints and interference.

‘There was no war here,’ the bishop told us, ‘just killing. Endless killing.’

International indifference made it worse. He alerted the Germans and the Americans to the massacres and they told him: ‘We can’t do anything about it.’ This response echoed the chilling message from the English politician David Owen to the Bosnian Muslims, when they appealed for help: ‘Don’t dream dreams that anyone is going to come and help you. Don’t dream dreams.’ The Americans and Germans told the bishop: ‘It will soon be over.’ They were implying that not only could they not care less about the fate of victims: they also hoped for an outcome when the victors would take power and all the crimes be forgotten or brushed under the carpet. But when the war began to turn against the Serbs, the foreign powers rushed to make peace, ostensibly to end the killing. This peace rewarded the criminals, and the war smouldered below the surface, waiting for an opportunity to be rekindled, so the task of ethnic cleansing could be completed without international interference. As I edit this part of my book, twelve years after this journey with the bishop, the conditions in Bosnia are preparing for just such a conflagration again.

Bishop Komarica told us how SFOR troops were sent to arrest the chief of police in Prijedor. Though ordered to capture him alive the soldiers made sure to shoot him dead so he could not be brought to trial where his evidence would have not only incriminated politicians, who now ran the country together with the Office of the High Representative, but also have damned the indifference and collusion of the international community throughout the war. Silencing him meant that once again justice could not be achieved in this part of Europe.

Thanks to that fateful day of judgement for the chief of police, his colleagues and fellow-ethnic cleansers were now sitting in the National Assembly in Banja Luka. ‘Murderers are in positions of power,’ said the bishop. ‘Internationals are protecting the foxes, and hypocritically telling the chickens it is safe to go back in the coop. I



spoke with Prime Minister Kohl of Germany and asked him how he could expect the chickens to return with the fox still there. He told me be to be patient. I tell you, Prijedor was worse even than Srebrenica. One day the truth will be known!’

## ANCIENT VOICES

Shattered by these grim stories we arrived at the small Catholic village of Kalajevo on the outskirts of Prijedor. The Serbs had not been given enough time to complete the ethnic cleansing in the region, so enough Catholics and Muslims remained to start rebuilding their communities. They would meet with harassment, but persisted.

A large crowd of Catholic worshippers gathered around the little church in the village. A group of German lorry drivers had helped with the rebuilding, devoting their holidays to the task. Small contributions from parishes in Holland and Germany accumulated enough funds to pay for necessary materials. The priest of the Dutch donor community attended the event, and sat next to the bishop along with an elderly Dutch couple who were the chief fundraisers. Proud of their achievement, they had helped rebuild a Catholic church in the aftermath of war. A Catholic presence existed here again. During the service, a glistening new Jaguar drove slowly up to the church. It brought wealthy Catholics from Croatia to witness the celebration. The price of this one car would have covered a large proportion of the rebuilding costs.

The people, including visitors from Croatia, and a number of Franciscan monks striding about purposefully, gathered under large marquees for a banquet. Like in Breughel’s painting of a peasant wedding, everyone drank beer juice and wine, and sat on benches at long tables which were decked with platters of salads and cold meats. Children gathered in secret huddles; a girl stung by bees needed attention and war-wounded legless cripples scurried on low crutches between the feet of the guests.

The bishop again tried to lift the people's spirits by singing folksongs. For a while everyone joined in with enthusiasm. When the bishop began another song something unexpected and spine-tingling happened. His lone voice, though well trained, strong with focused tone, was suddenly extinguished by an altogether different sound. It came from three stocky elderly men sitting further down the table. They opened their larynxes to utter a deep roar, a sound from the earth itself, a call from over the centuries, pagan and terrifying. These voices staked a defiant territorial claim. The song was wordless, persistent like a thunderous rumble emanating from the earth beneath them. Their bodies, hard and muscular from years of labour on the land, were the conduit. A slight variation of pitch between the three voices, skilfully modulated and not accidental, gave the song its shape and purpose. The piercing half tones and quarter tones, modulating with focus as well as delicacy around a robustly immovable drone, immediately silenced everyone. The singers sat triumphantly facing the bishop, faces glowing with concentration and effort. At last their peasant music could be heard again. This is our land, the voices said. The people held their breath and listened awestruck. These visceral sounds of ownership and challenge that echoed over the surrounding landscape had not been heard in many years.

The bishop looked crestfallen. His attempts at bringing the community together with gentle soulful songs of reconciliation and belonging had failed.

As we left, the burly German lorry drivers came to shake our frail hands with great fists. They seemed at home with this community of farming folk. The local priest had persuaded them to stay and help build the little church. They needed to tell us how important the experience had been for them. Tears filled their eyes so that for a moment these intimidating macho men looked shy and approachable.

The bishop then drove us to another destroyed church in the village of Surkovac, also within the region of Prijedor, isolated and surrounded by fields and woods. Soldiers had marched unhindered across this landscape, setting fire to houses and killing people with no one to witness the atrocities.

The ruins stood like a remnant of an ancient civilization, the roof caved in: massive beams and metal girders swinging dangerously above our heads; weeds growing among jagged heaps of stones. A shy young woman welcomed us. She lived on her own, next to this broken monument, in a house that had somehow survived the war. A large Alsatian dog and a scrawny cat kept her company. Standing in the rubble under the broken roof, the bishop told us that what had made this place unique before the war was the extent of intermarriage between the communities. Mixed marriage couples were especially targeted for killing. Many tried to hide, but most of them were murdered. The bishop celebrated the first Christmas mass after the war in the ruins and only a few survivors had dared to attend. Everyone wept.

‘Did Bishop Jefrem help in anyway?’ asked Donald.

‘You can’t expect the bishop to spit on himself,’ said Bishop Komarica. ‘Throughout the war he was forever jumping at his own shadow. Whenever I managed to meet him he would tell me: we have to kill you first before you kill us. This is what he’d been told by Karadjic.’

That evening at supper the Dutch and Margit looked at us with suspicion. What were we doing practically for the bishop? Where were our good works? They had brought considerable material aid in their BMWs, and nine million marks. We seemed to have just brought ourselves and some fine words. Now we were taking up the bishop’s precious time and enjoying undeserved hospitality.

But the Italians from Trento were more sympathetic, and smiled at us. They worked on building projects, the poor helping the poor, and planned a conference later in the year. People like us would be invited to attend, share our vision and establish contacts so people begin to work together across boundaries, collaboratively.

Margit had prepared a special German goulash and proudly carried the large tureen to the supper table already laid with crusty white bread, salad and local wine. She and the nuns washed up afterwards, and, at the cleared table, the bishop asked everyone to sing something from their own country. The Italians roared enthusiastically; the Dutch and Margit were more timid, and sang hymns. Donald chose *Amazing Grace*, which seemed apt after the day's journey. Everyone joined in, so when we couldn't remember the words after the first two lines, no one seemed to notice or mind. The bishop beamed, conducting everyone. This was his kind of music. But the memory of those three stocky elderly men in the village of Kalejevo, opening their throats to release the earth's roar, could not be extinguished.

#### GENERAL EMMANUELE

A Trappist monastery stands outside Banja Luka on the banks of the River Vrbas, in clear view on the left driving in from Croatia.

The bishop had several times spoken about his wish to establish a college for European Responsibility and Economic Ethics there. The monastery certainly had enough room for that. It stood in spacious grounds with a large church and residential buildings. German monks had settled here in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and built the first hydro-electric power plant in Bosnia. Several small industries then grew up around the monastery. Before the war, two thousand Catholics lived in the vicinity, but now barely two hundred remained. The bishop arrived to lead a service, and a number of these survivors attended: mostly elderly people with gnarled hands and

heavily lined faces. The large depopulated church felt desolate. Many among the congregation, including a small boy in the seat behind me, were weeping, because the leader of the Trappist community, a kindly and hospitable, elderly, silver-haired friar was retiring and leaving the area. The freezing interior of the church intensified the melancholy atmosphere. Dreamlike pictures of massive lambs and palm trees, painted in pale colours, hung round the chancel. A nun played snatches of tunes on a ciphering organ, which made the music sound demented. Prayers boomed from microphones through the cold cavernous space.

The church had experienced several traumas in the last hundred years, including an earthquake which knocked down pillars and statues of angels. That same earthquake toppled the minaret of the Ferhadija Mosque. The service went slower and slower, as though freezing to stasis. A chant after the communion seemed to be dying interminably, the heart beating ever more haltingly. Finally long speeches of thanks were given to the departing friar, and the old women wailed loudly. He had been their only support during the war, in an area where so many priests had put their lives at risk, being persecuted and murdered.

A black and white photograph of a young priest was propped against the altar: Father Merz had died young in the First World War, and would be canonized by the Pope later in the year. The old ladies, crossing themselves before this icon of a shy withdrawn young man barely out of his teens, expressed the sorrow of limited expectations: people killed while doing good works, superstitious reverence and the painful awareness of unfulfilled lives.

The smell of soup being prepared for lunch permeated the church, bringing a welcome sense of community and comfort. Once the nuns, monks, priests and invited guests had gathered in the refectory, the gloom lifted and everyone determined to enjoy the feast.

Two Trappist monks took care of the monastery. Fra Filippo the slightly older one, came from France by way of North Africa, and had been put in charge. He spoke French in a soft high voice as though not wanting to be heard. The younger monk, tall and slender with a punk haircut and a small ponytail, hurrying anxiously between the kitchen and the refectory, served the meal. He said nothing and might have been local. Both of them looked stressed with responsibility and also the isolation, living in that large cold monastery, with only each other for company.

Several elderly nuns sat at our table, laughing loudly, chatting and eating with good appetites. One of them, Sister Emmanuele, spoke fluent English. ‘We call her General Emmanuele,’ the bishop announced proudly, then added, with a sly smile: ‘Do you know why?’ He then told us how, during the war, the sisters shared responsibilities for distributing aid to people. When the Red Cross brought provisions, they would measure out equal quantities of rice and bread. On a day when Sister Emmanuele was in charge, a Serb policeman pushed his way to the head of the queue, much to the consternation of all those waiting patiently for their portion. He pointed at the provisions and ordered Sister Emmanuele to hand over everything, threatening her with his gun. The people froze in terror, knowing the police never hesitated to shoot. But the sister took her walking stick, waved it at the policeman and ordered him to go to the back of the queue and wait his turn like everyone else. Since she was now sitting next to us at the table, the man must have obeyed. From that day on, the bishop and local priests and nuns called her General Emmanuele.

Nuns in Bosnia are strong, educated and capable women, trained teachers, charity workers, nurses and doctors, as well as being expected to run schools, churches as well as households and offices for priests and bishops. A nun from Mrkonj Grad walked several miles to one of the villages we visited, and prepared lunch for twenty people before returning on foot to her regular duties. Sister Mirna, a dentist, helped

administer the Caritas offices in Banja Luka, and, being fluent in English, also translated for the bishop and clergy. Her life seemed to be a perpetual string of tasks, moving from one place to the other, wherever she might be needed, but always turning out fresh, neat and unflustered, friendly, smiling sweetly, petite and radiant but with an inner core of steel like Audrey Hepburn in *The Nun's Story*.

In contrast to these powerful women, the priests who had survived the war looked beaten and depressed. These broken men joined the feast and looked at us with hollow eyes, barely conscious, weighed down with traumas. Each of them had a story. All of them had been beaten, sometimes so severely they had been left for dead.

One, with a particularly mournful expression, had been attacked by General Mladic's soldiers, and taken to hospital. The bishop rang the general and asked why he was beating his priests. 'We do not beat priests,' said the general. The bishop told him: 'Go to the hospital and see for yourself.' The general rang the bishop later and said: 'You are right. We did beat the priest. We probably beat him too much. But he should have been tougher!'

These priests needed counselling. They received no attention and were expected to continue their work as though nothing had happened.

#### BLOOD STAINS IN FRONT OF THE ALTAR

The bishop then took us to the village of Presnace outside Banja Luka.

On the 12<sup>th</sup> May 1995, as the war was coming to an end, Serb militia murdered the priest and a nun there. The priest's house, with the bodies inside, and the church next door were then burnt down. The priest and the nun had been loved by the villagers, because they attended to everyone's needs: Orthodox, Muslim as well as Catholic. Sister Mirna had spent the day with the nun in Zagreb just a day before the murder, and, knowing the danger, begged her not to return. 'Are you not afraid?' she asked the

nun, and the nun replied: 'Yes, I am. And so are my people. If I do not return they will be even more afraid.'

Priests and nuns were killed with exceptional barbarity, because the police judged them to be leaders of their communities, and therefore dangerous. The more atrocious the murder, the more afraid would be their people, who might then be more easily persuaded to leave the country. Also, as the bishop constantly reminded us, mixed communities were targeted for especially brutal treatment, to discourage relationships between ethnic groups.

All the people in Presnace, Orthodox, Muslim and Catholic, were horrified by this brutal murder. After the war they gathered to help rebuild the church, the first and only example of collaborative action we had come across in Bosnia. Money for materials came from Caritas and small individual contributions, with the villagers providing free labour. Now the roof needed to be finished, but funds had dried up.

A young priest, Father Zvonko, supervised the rebuilding of the church. He had vowed not to cut his hair until the church was finished. 'Everything is in God's hands,' he told us.

The room where the former priest and the nun had been murdered is now a chapel. In stead of a sharp chill and sense of horror, the room feels warm with an unexpected atmosphere of peace and welcome. Sister Mirna lifted the carpet by the altar to show us the large blood stain that could not be washed away. Apart from the blood, there was nothing in the room that spoke of anger, hatred, revenge or atrocity. Evil had not triumphed. The priest and nun, while being tortured and slaughtered, must have felt unimaginable fear, but they left a legacy of tranquil acceptance and forgiveness.

The bishop went to meet one of the murderers in prison, after his arrest at the end of the war, and was told the full story. The priest and the nun were not only tortured. The priest had been ordered to rape the nun. He refused, and then they were killed.



Aware of the special atmosphere in the chapel, the bishop realized the place could become a shrine. To prevent crowds of people from all over Europe descending on this quiet village disturbing its peace, he did not speak publically about the atrocity. He preferred to make the place a model of reconciliation and cooperation in Bosnia,

#### THE BISHOP'S MOTHER

At around the same time as they were committing this atrocity, Serb police arrived at the house belonging to the bishop's mother, then in her late seventies. They ordered her to leave saying: 'There is no room for a bishop's mother in Greater Serbia.' At first she refused, declaring: 'I am Yugoslav. I have as much right to live here as you!' But, realizing they were going to kill her, she went upstairs, put on her best clothes, and then walked proudly out of the house to join her Catholic neighbours, who were waiting to be transported out of Bosnia. People never forgot her dignity. Afterwards, however, she suffered a heart attack and almost died.

Now she had returned home, and this kindly but tough matriarch sat in the porch and greeted us warmly. Children, grandchildren and great grandchildren played in the garden. They took us to a small shed which, in honour of a bishop in the family, had been converted into a chapel. The children sang a hymn they had just learned and the bishop's mother prepared coffee and brandy. She narrowed her eyes, and muttered something to her son, who laughed. She was upset because we had visited at the wrong time, too late for lunch and too early for supper.

#### THE CURSE OF THE MADONNA

The ruined Franciscan church on a hill outside Banja Luka looked across the flat valley of the Vrbas, where the river flowed towards the Croatian border. Several years after our visit we learned of a dark chapter of Catholic history that took place here

during the Second World War, something the bishop did not tell us. A rabidly nationalist Croat priest went amok, and, with his followers, slaughtered Orthodox women and children on the street, while the German Nazis and Croat Ustashi were fighting partisans in the hills around Prijedor. When the war ended the priest was tried and executed. His crimes explained the ferocity of the attacks on Catholics during the recent war: a continuous cycle of revenge and violent retribution. When eventually we spoke with the bishop about it, he began to cry and in a piercing scream, expressing years of suppressed despair, he wailed: ‘And must we go on suffering for ever for this terrible crime?’

Father Evica Matic, the bishop’s assistant who accompanied and drove us, lived next to the Franciscan church. He looked perpetually haunted and never smiled, having escaped death by a whisker. Four grenades thrown into his bedroom, while he slept, brought the house down, but, by a miracle, he remained unhurt. He reckoned he had been given a second life.

A statue of the Madonna stood in the chapel that served as a place of worship while the original church waited to be rebuilt. This statue had a history dating back to communist times. In their attempt to discourage Catholic worship in Banja Luka, the communists ordered four zealous young people to destroy the statue. They hacked at it and broke it in pieces. The congregation rescued the fragments and put them together with such care it was difficult to see the damage. The four young vandals died however; each in terrible circumstances. ‘That is the story,’ the bishop said, shrugging his shoulders, as though prepared for a sceptical response, and added: ‘Make of it what you will!’ He then prayed briefly in front of the statue.

Later, Adnan tried to explain to us the complicated history of communist policy regarding religion and ethnicity. The war that followed the collapse of communism had not come out of the blue. This story of the Madonna’s curse, with its superstitious

overtones, pointed to issues seething beneath the lid of communism, and which boiled over to devastating effect during the war.

On the last day's journey with the bishop we asked why so few people knew the history we were learning: why did he not inform the world? After the war, he told us, journalists and visitors wanted to see and write about the destruction of his diocese. At the beginning he drove them everywhere, just as he had taken us, but their apathy and subsequent lack of action discouraged him, and he vowed to stop. 'They felt shock and horror, and afterwards nothing happened. They were spiritual voyeurs. I could not continue to do it.' Also he did not want to use the horrors as a stick to perpetually beat the Serbs. He understood the pressures most decent Serbs suffered during the war. For instance Dushan Antel, the Minister for Faith who participated in the Coventry Consultation, used to work for the former mayor of Banja Luka, a hard line nationalist who had declared: 'Croats and Muslims should never make up more than five per cent of the population'. The mayor had also begun the rewriting of Banja Luka's history, stating that Muslims had always been in a minority, and there should never have been so many mosques. Dushan Antel could not be expected to radically change his opinions and prejudices. We needed to tread with sensitivity.

The bishop's qualities of forbearance and understanding impressed us as much as his courage. After braving guns from police and militia, as he attempted to stop the persecution of his people, he then had to endure nightly telephone death threats, during the long period of house arrest: 'We are coming to get you!'

Like his nuns the bishop remained resilient and unbroken. 'I had no choice,' he told us. 'My people needed me. They had no one else.'

When the war started, and he witnessed the atrocities and destruction of his community, he did what he had to do, and persisted. Even now the war was

continuing, under the surface of everyday life. Only that morning, he learned that a Catholic family in a village outside Banja Luka had been too scared to call a priest to take the funeral of a dead relative. They were afraid of upsetting their Serb neighbours. Since the war there had only been two marriages in the diocese, and only four baptisms.

The day ended with a friendly and cheerful group of young Catholics gathering outside the bishop's residence for choir practice. The girls and boys belted out a hymn at full throttle. Then the bishop asked them to sing a Banja Luka folksong for us. Half way through the melancholy piece their good humour disappeared and they all became sad. The music brought back unhappy memories and fears.

Listening to these boys and girls, sensitive, hopeful, and determined not to be victims like their parents, it became clear that healing wounds and memories would have to be a priority in our work. There could be no reconciliation without acknowledgment of what had happened. And without reconciliation none of our projects could succeed. We received reports about a gathering of religious and political leaders at a truth and reconciliation meeting. With the exception of Prime Minister Sarevic, all of the participants had attended the Coventry Consultation. They met just once, and were not intending to repeat the event. We were being constantly told it was too early to speak of wounds and memories. But the situation we experienced on our journeys with Bishop Komarica, and later with Bishop Jefrem, showed that the communities were more divided than they had ever been, and that such a sharing of memories and healing of wounds could not start soon enough.

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At supper Margit fixed us with an angry look and expressed the hope that we would not be taking any more of the bishop's valuable time. A kindly, thoughtful and determined woman and sensitive to the stresses of his life, she did everything to

protect him, especially shielding him from undeserving people, who might disturb and stress him further. The journeys upset us; how much more than the bishop who had to live with the consequences and aftermath of war every day, whereas we could return home? So she looked after him, brought money from Germany and helped rebuild churches. Working for Caritas, her priorities were Catholic, so she remained suspicious of us, because of our links with the other communities. What were we doing but raking over past traumas and engaging in endless impractical chatter?

When Margit, whom I loved and admired, learned that we were going to spend the next days with Bishop Jefrem she turned crimson with outrage. She hated the Orthodox, with no forgiveness in her heart, and had little time for Muslims.

She laughed cynically about the grim situation in Bosnia, as much as to say: 'The world is an awful place and everybody's motives are suspect. No one does enough; but at least I am doing my bit!'

She shook a finger at us and said: 'When you have gone, the bishop is mine!'

## TRAVELS WITH BISHOP JEFREM

Almost immediately on leaving Banja Luka, Bishop Jefrem's jeep took a narrow side road, plunging into thick forests which opened occasionally onto overgrown meadows, and into narrow valleys leading to remote hamlets and farms along stony tracks, unchanged since the Middle Ages. While the Orthodox Church kept a foothold in town centres across Bosnia, that were chiefly Catholic or Muslim, it also occupied the furthest and most neglected parts of region, places though which traffic rarely passed. Monasteries were situated at the head of sparsely populated valleys; churches stood isolated outside villages, so these places were cut off throughout the winter months. Situated miles from towns and maintained roads, they remained relatively

inaccessible, even in the summer. The Muslims scattered evenly over town and countryside. With the exception of their heartland around Mostar, the Catholics settled in suburbs and villages around towns. The Orthodox lived in the remotest rural areas.

Distance from the main centres of population explained the timeless quality of Orthodoxy, and its problems adapting to the modern world. The incense-perfumed interiors of small, jewel-like churches echoing with the chants of ancient, unchanged liturgies and decorated with brightly coloured elaborate murals, stood in meadows and forest clearings. Here a few dedicated worshippers, made up of farmers and their families, attended the liturgy, which described another world, a fore-glimpse of heaven to come, which shone a ray of transcendence on the daily grind of seasonal tasks: feeding livestock, tilling the land, growing essential foods, harvesting and preserving. Meanwhile, nuns, monks and priests devoted their lives to worship and the farmers' pastoral care. Gifts from wealthy professionals, politicians and businessmen in turn nurtured the monasteries, so they became relatively comfortable retreats for guests, who made the effort to reach these distant and sometimes inaccessible places. Timeless rituals of worship and agriculture discouraged any need to attend to the world beyond. Political and social changes, the consequences of a brutal war and years of oppression, had forced the Church and its congregations to consider matters of justice and cooperation with other communities. For the time being these isolated communities and places existed in a time warp, where they carried on, eternally untouched and unbothered by anything beyond their own world. However, the ravages of the recent war, and their effect on neighbouring communities, Catholic and Muslim, as well as those Orthodox villages which suffered attrition, could not be ignored.

In Kosovo, the triumph of Albanians, backed by NATO, and the retreat of Serbs, meant that isolated Orthodox communities, those monasteries and churches not

destroyed, had to accept police protection and to depend on modern communication technology. Nuns and long-haired bearded monks now strode about with mobile phones tucked in their ears, opened websites on which they blogged enthusiastically, and were guarded constantly by heavily armed soldiers. Bishops flew by helicopters, or travelled in armed convoys to visit all parts of their diocese.

Bishop Jefrem had not yet succumbed to what he described as newfangled developments, but nevertheless owned a mobile phone, whose number we were never given. He told us about the oppression of the Serb Orthodox Church over centuries under the Ottomans, and then for decades under communism. He focused particularly on the persecution of the Orthodox community during the Second World War.

The bishop did not mention the Bosnia War. Only the Second World War half a century earlier counted: the still unhealed trauma of Serb persecution under the Nazis and the Croat Catholic fascist Ustashi. This had now become part of the eternal myth of Serb suffering throughout history, a crucifixion symbolised by the betrayal of Serbs and their defeat at the Battle of Kosovo, over six hundred years ago. Communism put a lid on this mythology, but Karadjic and Milosevic resurrected it in their drive for an ethnically-cleansed Greater Serbia.

Since, for many, the Second World War had become an event from a past remembered only by their parents, it seemed perverse of the bishop to continue to complain about the suffering from so long ago when few people were still alive from that period. His comments about this history confirmed the importance of sharing memories, talking about what happened, people telling their stories immediately, not years after the event, to counteract mythological accretions, and above all to heal wounds. Memories call for healing. Silence makes bitterness and pain fester.

Serb atrocities did not feature in the bishop's talk. He merely reiterated his ambivalent criticism of politicians: that they had not listened to him. This could mean

they were either not being zealous enough in ethnic cleansing, or that they should desist. Since Bishop Jefrem admired Karadjic, and had portraits of the nationalist leader hanging in his house, we could not be sure what the bishop's criticism implied. The Serbian Orthodox Church had received moral support from nationalists, who encouraged the building of churches and strengthening Orthodox communities across the whole region, to counteract the centuries of Muslim expansion, and to cleanse the region of 'alien' traditions such as Islam and Catholicism. Nationalist support flattered the Orthodox Church, which could not remember a time when it had been so honoured. At public meetings, the bishops would be seated on the front row, and nationalist politicians acknowledged their presence before delivering speeches, bowing their heads and asking for prayers of blessing. Unaware or uncaring about being manipulated, the bishops basked in this unfamiliar attention. Building Orthodox churches and monasteries became Bishop Jefrem's priority. They would mark Serbian territory and establish a permanent Orthodox presence throughout the country.

An antiquarian, obsessed with Orthodox traditions, Bishop Jefrem supervised the building projects personally. Never had we witnessed so many churches being raised simultaneously, half finished, and undecorated, apart from a small corner consecrated for immediate worship. They stood mostly in places far from where people lived, with no sign of congregations. Whereas Catholic churches, if not destroyed outright, stood grotesquely damaged, roofs open to the elements, the Orthodox churches were half complete, the walls waiting to be painted, and the sanctuary area protected by a roof. The bishop had only one request to the Soul of Europe: not how to improve relations between the communities by helping his people deal with their part in the last war, their own traumas, and to integrate with Europe and the rest of the world, but to persuade the authorities to give him permits to build more churches.



Bishop Jefrem agreed that the communities across his diocese were poor and backward, and he acknowledged the need for his priests to be up to date with political, social and economic developments in the rest of the world. At the same time, wherever he took us, his people seemed prosperous, and their hospitality was generous and unstinting. When asked where funds came from to pay for so many church buildings and priests' stipends he readily admitted that the Serbian Orthodox Church was richer than the state. He just required permits. He had sufficient money for materials and labour. Where did this cash come from? Large donations from wealthy Serb families and businessmen making large profits from nefarious activities financed the bishop's projects: perhaps to clear their consciences. We had met such a family a year earlier in Western Bosnia, celebrating the baptism of their eldest sons by Bishop Chrysostom, in the small Orthodox monastery church of Martin Brod. The father managed a building firm and had become rich in dealings during and after the war. The family supported the bishop and had paid for the monks' new home. Those Karadjic supporters who benefited from the war and its outcome, mostly from corrupt business and illegal trafficking in cigarettes, prostitution and drugs, had turned Bosnia into a rogue state in Europe. They bowed their heads however to the dignitaries of the Serbian Orthodox Church, and expiated their sins by helping fund massive programs of church building, in the manner of Christians in the Middle Ages buying indulgences to shorten their time in Purgatory.

Some Serbian Orthodox bishops, such as Porphyry at the monastery of Kovilje, followed a liberal agenda, being more open to political and social changes. Bishop Jefrem narrowed his focus on reinforcing Orthodox traditions and influence in his fiefdom of Bosnia. He remained a monk at heart, loving the isolation of his monasteries. Each time we returned home, and joined the smooth asphalt main roads into Banja Luka, he expressed regret, despite the journeys having been bruising and

uncomfortable, the jeep jolting for hours over bone-shaking rough tracks. As we left the narrow winding valleys and forested hillsides, he sighed wistfully: 'Here nature is not so beautiful.' He preferred the silence of retreats, and the undisturbed tranquillity of a way of life untouched by modern developments and their more frantic pace.

In *Evening Bells*, Isaak Levitan, whose end of winter landscape, *March*, overlooked my bed during our stay with Bishop Komarica, depicts the towers, cupolas and domes of a monastery surrounded by trees skirted by a placid lake. The artist specialised in landscapes with churches, either solitary as in this painting, or surrounded by peasant shacks, often in isolated places by lakes or rivers, on islands or promontories, and surrounded by impenetrable forests or boundless steppes. In all of them a misty light, characteristic of this artist's style, bleaches the colours and creates a mood of melancholy reflection: timeless, inward, dreamlike. Bishop Jefrem would feel at home in these places. The landscapes are covered in greens that lack the vivid emerald sparkle of full sunlight, and give the impression of a divine radiance withheld, but forever on the point of being revealed. The pictures hold their breath. Most are deserted scenes. But in *Evening Bells* a boat with a crowd of worshippers crosses the lake, in which the trees and cupolas are reflected. The sketchy dark figures, huddling together, are dwarfed by the landscape. The monastery churches rise above the green woods, flecked with blue shadows and tired brown foliage. A pale light, from a mysterious source, reflects off pearly white walls. Levitan paints sound: the picture's title suggests a sense of community protected by the secure home of its shared faith.

When I sent Bishop Jefrem a card of this painting for Christmas, he thanked me for it in particular. This is what Orthodoxy meant to him. Jewish Isaak Levitan captured the nostalgia, a trait of Slav piety, through landscapes of subdued colours framing familiar buildings, which radiate light from within.

This is not the church triumphant representing the oppressive authority and the infallibility of popes, bishops and patriarchs. The isolation of these places speaks rather of endurance.

Tarkovsky's films pick up on Levitan's theme: religion represents hope and comfort for people at the extremity of suffering. Such faith is depicted as a defiance of state authority, and is a rebuke to the cynicism which claims to 'know the truth about life'.

The setting of Tarkovsky's film *Stalker* is a polluted industrial wasteland, inhabited by a holy fool, a figure traditionally respected in the Russian Orthodox Church. This representative of faith, hope and love, the three basic Pauline attributes of a Christian, guides, but fails to convince, two men of the world, who are looking for answers to questions about life and happiness, and an alternative to their worldly ambition and existential doubts. In the final moments of the film, broken by humiliation and defeat, he receives an unexpected blessing of love and acceptance. Bread and wine stand symbolically on the table of his ramshackle hovel. There is no answer, simply an understanding that we can find transcendence even in the bleakest situation.

In *Andrei Rublev* Tarkovsky creates an epic about the 16<sup>th</sup> century artist's position in apocalyptic times of war and persecution. Rublev witnesses the violence, including a massacre in a burnt-out church. Blocked by despair at failing to make sense of the capricious brutality of his fellow men, Rublev is unable to paint. Tarkovsky's film suggests that atrocities carried out from generation to generation are the inevitable consequences of politics and power games. The Bosnia War proved him correct. Nevertheless the horrors cannot extinguish the light of Rublev's murals, which appear at the end of the epic black and white film, mysteriously emerging in full colour, transcendently, like a blessing, out of the shadows. War and its evils are generally assumed to be part of human nature. However, an alternative vision of what humanity is capable of, as revealed in art and film, questions this assumption. But

before we see the paintings, the film shows the epiphany moment, when Roublev suddenly finds his inspiration again. It occurs in the middle of chaos and despair. A boy, in order to save his life, claims that he possesses his slaughtered father's secret of how to cast a bell. He is spared, and allowed all the materials and assistance necessary for the task he is then commissioned to complete. The film follows the awe-inspiring process, from finding the right metals and the correct kind of wood to fire the kilns, to the construction of a tower which will raise the bell. Crowds gather, princes and church leaders as well as the whole populace. The bell is raised and begins to ring, the rich deep sound rolling far and wide over the heads of the people and the landscape beyond. Roublev finds the boy curled up hiding somewhere, sobbing uncontrollably. There had been no secret. His labour had been an insane act of desperation, its success a miracle. The confession inspires Roublev to paint again. Out of the darkness the frescos begin to appear, caressed by Tarkovsky's camera.

In Pushkin's and Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov* the Tsar crushes all dissent, but a holy fool is allowed to speak the truth and reprimands him for his crimes. Most of the time, historically, the Orthodox Church established its empire independently of rulers, so the tsars and boyars had alternately to fight and destroy the Church, or to beg for its support and forgiveness. The Orthodox Church faced either extinction or survival on the fringes of political society. After the collapse of communism and during the Bosnia War, it became an instrument for politicians manipulating popular support. Karadjic bowed before the patriarch, as does Putin. But we know who is boss.

Bishop Jefrem was ordained at a time of persecution, and never expected a revolution of circumstances, in which nationalism co-opted Orthodoxy into its politics, and he was suddenly handed unanticipated power. He had seen himself as no more than a humble monk who would have preferred to spend his days in quiet prayer

in the kind of remote monasteries Levitan painted. In reality he became a man of influence, convinced of his rectitude, keeping a tightly controlling grip on his diocese.

Our first day with the bishop took us into the rural heartland of Bosnian Serb Orthodoxy. The second day followed a route parallel to the one taken with Bishop Komarica, and the final journey brought home the silent and complete division between the Catholic and Orthodox communities. Two worlds carried on side by side, and yet neither acknowledged the other: the suffering of the one invisible to the other, which lived in relative security and prosperity. The Republika Srpska as experienced by the two dioceses existed in a state of schizophrenia: two natures seemingly unrelated and yet part of the same body.

As for the Islamic community, it did not figure: at best ‘something over there’ in a neighbouring village. One lone small minaret appeared on our final journey, like an exotic alien in the landscape. Apart from that visible sign, all traces of a history, in which Muslims had been a major part of the country’s life, had vanished.

These issues gashed Bosnia like deep fissures in a rocky landscape.

## GOMJANICA

Small villages scattered widely over the rolling, thickly-wooded countryside. Here families tilled the soil with ancient ploughs, scythed the grass and piled it on hayricks which stood next to stables, alongside compost heaps, vegetable plots and orchards. Weeds and wild flowers filled meadows, the earth as unpolluted as the crystal streams gushing down the narrow valleys. Eternity folded the landscape here, the seasons passing over the same scene year after year, century after century. The Orthodox Church felt at home in these inaccessible and unspoilt corners of the world. They matched the theology of transcendence, which considers God all powerful and

timeless; where the daily pains and struggles of human existence are irrelevant in the cosmic cycle. Only the permanence of the divine mattered and all our sufferings are a preparation for our own spiritual entry into eternity. In this corner of Europe, life carries on its unchanging perpetual cycle; the rhythms of nature, the grip of hard winters, the fresh start of spring, the fertile torpor of summer and the abundance of autumn. Similarly, the fixed liturgy of the Orthodox Church, separate from the rest of the world, could last for ever.

The first monastery we visited nestled high up at the end of a valley. It reminded us of *The Search for Karadjic and Mladic*, a 2001 television Viewpoint documentary made by Maggie O’Kane, which took her to a similarly remote monastery, carved into a mountainside in the bandit country along the border between Bosnia and Montenegro. Before the intrepid Guardian reporter accosted the Orthodox bishop as he emerged from the church after liturgy, she noted the surveillance cameras covering every corner and entry around the buildings. Nature might be unpolluted, but the traditionally pure and innocent lives of monks, nuns and local farmers had been tainted.

A small group of nuns lived in Gomjanica, the first monastery on our tour of the diocese. Their diligence, devotion and skill had turned the place into a haven, with immaculately tended gardens, herb beds, lawns and orchards. A muscular nun, with a beaming sun-burnt face, welcomed the bishop by vigorously ringing the monastery bell housed in a tower, separate from the house and church on one side of the garden.

We were then given a tour of the ancient wall paintings in the old chapel, reminiscent of the startling murals in the similarly remote monastery of Manassija in Serbia. Mildewed walls, the place unheated and dank, meant it could only be used in the summer months, not in the winter.

The nuns preferred to worship in a modern chapel in the main house. Here, more recent murals covered the walls with scenes of nativities, saints and angels, familiar from monasteries across the Orthodox world, and depicted in light bright colours.

The nuns' residence looked like a Flemish painting from the early Renaissance, those interiors by Memling, Van Eyck and Van Der Weyden, where soft light bathes the walls, and the soft furnishings are draped with scrupulous care. The tranquillity and perfect order, kept both inside and outside, expressed the Orthodox belief in eternal transcendence, human life being a brief sigh on its way to the never-ending peace and bounty of God.

The beauty of Gomjanica took us by surprise. We had expected such places to be decaying and in need of repair and that the bishop might ask for help to make them habitable. All the monasteries we visited were in immaculate condition, seemingly no expense spared to make them comfortable, the walls pointed, the interiors clean and freshly decorated, rooms ready for guests, the whole place in readiness for the Messiah. The war had either not touched this region, or the Orthodox community had made all the repairs quickly in the last few years. Bishop Jefrem also showed us unfinished churches all over the diocese. Gomjanica was however complete and ready for a future that would continue indefinitely. This was a place of spiritual and physical calm: a dream, a haven where all worldly cares and fretting could be soothed away by the gentle wind from the surrounding hills, the perfume of blossom and herbs, the cocks crowing in the morning, the birds singing in the woods and fields, the gushing of springs, the occasional peal of bells and the chants of daily liturgies.

In accordance with legendary Bosnian hospitality, each faith community we visited prepared feasts, which reflected different traditions and tastes. The mufti of Banja Luka had entertained us elegantly at his home in Sarajevo, where his wife prepared a variety of different, delicately-flavoured Ottoman dishes with refined skill. The

Catholic farming folk did not let poverty prevent them from serving lavish portions of country-cooking at banquets, to welcome the bishop and his guests. The Orthodox cuisine reflected Slav and Turkish influences: dishes prepared from complex recipes, accompanied by a variety of fresh salads, hot chilli peppers, garlic, and capped with extravagant desserts.

Because of the long journey ahead of us, the bishop restricted hospitality, but we were permitted time for morning coffee. Hard boiled and exquisitely decorated, Easter eggs were piled high in large bowls on the table. This meant a game of knocking the heads of eggs together. Like conkers, each person picks up an egg; bangs them together and the first one's to crack loses, and the player must eat the egg. Lacking skill and afraid to hit too hard we lost, much to the amusement of the bishop and the nuns. We ended up eating a dozen eggs between us. Refreshed by coffee and monastery brandy but also stomach-bound, we left this idyllic spot, protected on all sides by hills and woods. The fresh springs, providing a perpetual supply of water, flowed from a fountain into a stream that we then followed for many miles all the way down the valley.

The bumpy path crossed wooden bridges and hugged the edge of the stream, which became a small river, on either side of which stood farms, surrounded by plots of cultivated land, orchards and pasture, with a few cows and goats grazing. Women in kerchiefs put hands on their hips and stared at the bishop driving past.

It was the season of acacia in bloom. Intense scent pervaded the countryside. The bishop's deacon, muscular like a labourer, eyes coal-black under white hair, stopped driving, and, with a tender gesture, plucked a branch covered in frothy acacia blossom from the hedgerow, and handed it to me, bringing heady fragrance into the car.

We drove slowly for fifteen miles down the valley, negotiating potholes, muddy ruts and bumpy curves to a tarmac road, which then conveyed us more rapidly on our way.



Bishop Jefrem wanted to show us the church where he had been baptised: a small black wooden building standing near the road on a tended patch of lawn, and beneath large spreading sycamore trees. The landscape stretched on all sides but there seemed to be no sign of other habitations, no villages, no house or farms; stillness everywhere, just the rustling of leaves. The bell started to peal, sounding dolefully over the fields and hills. Inside the modest, austere decorated church, only the iconostasis was painted. The place being special to Bishop Jefrem, he made sure to keep it in good repair, even though hardly anyone came there to worship. The church felt like a tomb, reminding me of a song by Mussorgsky, to words by Pleschtschejev:

*Forest leaves rustle sorrowfully*

*In the peace of the night.*

*The coffin is laid in the grave,*

*The coffin bathed in moonlight,*

*The coffin bathed in moonlight.*

*They buried it quietly, without tears,*

*And departed to far away places.*

*Only the branches bend over the grave,*

*The leaves rustling all night long.*

Why are the mourners not crying?

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The priest who rang the bell took us home for coffee and cakes. He and his wife looked frightened and in awe of the bishop. They had prepared a large quantity of butter-cream gateaux and home-baked biscuits, piled high on platters. After consuming more hard-boiled eggs, lubricated with coffee and home-made rakija, we barely touched the cakes and biscuits before departing on another long drive.

## THE MONK AT LIPLJE

From the church where Bishop Jefrem had been baptised, we followed a bumpy road up another valley, driving slowly along a river, which became a stream as the path climbed higher and the valley narrowed, the hills hugged closer and the meadows folded around us.

At the head of this valley stood the monastery of Liplje, like Gomjanica a haven far from any town. As we approached, the path curving round sharp bends, and the acacia woods thickening on either side, Bishop Jefrem became noticeably excited and happy. ‘This is my spiritual home,’ he said. He had spent six years here as a monk before studying, then becoming a professor, and finally being appointed a bishop.

Dedicated to St Sava, Liplje monastery had been founded as early as 1219. It suffered neglect and decline during the Ottoman era, but had been rebuilt and refurbished in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was more imposing than Gomjanica.

The bishop stood proudly in front of the church which towered behind him. All around us streams could be heard gushing from springs, and hurling torrents down the valley.

Every time we entered a church on our journey, the bishop’s deacon went ahead, chanting in his powerful piercing baritone that seemed not just to resonate from his diaphragm but from centuries of tradition and devotion.

We lit candles, and balanced them in tanks of gravel and water placed in the porch.

Two monks lived in the monastery, along with a nun, who cleaned and cooked. They took us to the dining room, where a feast had already been spread on a long table.

More hardboiled eggs, smoked meats and sharply flavoured local cheese were followed by a clear soup with corn dumplings, roast turkey garnished with horseradish, corn bread and cheese pie, and finally a cake with nuts and banana.

One of the monks seemed shy and frightened, bowing his head in deference to the bishop, and not daring to join in the conversation. The other monk, however, a tall lean man with a long black frizzy beard, stared intently at us with dark and challenging eyes, watching our every movement, as he changed plates, and served one dish after the other. When the meal came to an end, he provoked a discussion about his hero Karadjic whom he declared to be a great nationalist leader. Eyes suddenly flashing, he angrily attacked SFOR for invading the sanctity of an Orthodox church in the village where the troops thought Karadjic might be hiding. Bishop Jefrem looked embarrassed at this unpleasant turn in the conversation and left the table to attend to business. Monks like this were Karadjic's faithful supporters and could be relied on to offer him sanctuary at any time. The monk's zeal bordered on obsessive, almost crazed. He lived in this remote area, rarely visited, except by the bishop when he came on retreats. For a young man, with only the company of the other silent priest and the timid nun, there was much time to brood.

The monk seized this chance to talk with us and enthusiastically told us how he had first studied to be a lawyer, then, against his parents' wishes, chose to become a monk, and spent the last fifteen years helping to rebuild the monastery. He taught religious education in a school several miles down the road, and we assumed he also exhorted the children to be good Serbs, discouraging them from any thought of living in a mixed society. He told us how the monastery had not functioned throughout several centuries of Ottoman rule, and that there was now need to build a library and museum, to house a treasure of books and historic remnants from pre-Muslim times. Builders were already starting work, and piles of stones and cement-mix lay in heaps by the monastery gates.

The monk described how his parents became rich, working in Germany. When his younger brother died in a traffic accident they returned to Serbia and the parents experienced yet more grief at their surviving son's decision to become a monk.

'Prayer holds the world together,' he declared.

Donald mentioned Bishop Bell, the Anglican bishop of Chichester, praying for peace during the Second World War. This reminded the monk of the Orthodox Bishop Nikolai, a friend to Bishop Bell. The monk told us how Bishop Nikolai came to a peasant in a dream, prophesying hard times for the world. Since then, people had come on retreats to this monastery, disturbed by the stresses of city life and suffering from war traumas.

'The wounds of the war are still too deep,' said the monk. 'There have been three conflicts in the twentieth century, very bloody ones!' Excited, he raised his voice and declared: 'When the last war started, people were saying let's live separately. That's how it should be!'

His words echoed that of the schoolteacher from a village outside Banja Luka, who, a year earlier, had told me that the only way forward was for Muslims, Catholics and Orthodox to live completely apart, and have nothing to do with each other except trade. The monk however expressed no tolerance or sympathy at all for other communities.

At this point the bishop's deacon, sitting next to me and who had kept silent all day, could not restrain himself, and interrupted the monk, saying defiantly: 'We must bring people together! We have to live together in love!'

'Families were torn apart!' the monk retorted, and went on to declare: 'I am not an ecumenicist. NATO bombed a cemetery. SFOR broke into a church. Now they are charging Karadjic. How can I be friendly with people like these?'

'Don't preach hatred,' the deacon interrupted. 'Preach love!'

But the monk was unstoppable, and began to attack Islam. ‘Old evil cannot become new good! Stick to facts. We can’t love each other! We must judge by mind and feeling!’ At which point Donald interjected: ‘No, by divine grace.’ The monk, momentarily abashed, muttered a saying about people bitten by snakes being afraid of lizards, explaining: ‘There is fear among the Orthodox that Muslims are desecrating our churches.’

Donald’s presence seemed to be encouraging new thinking in the monk’s mind, and all of a sudden, this young man remembered that Serbs had not always hated Muslims. ‘Serbs used to go to the local imam for healing,’ he told us, ‘asking for prayers when they were ill or in trouble. It is an interesting tradition.’

At least he now acknowledged a fact about a multi-ethnic life he had, only moments earlier, been decrying.

‘I would like to visit here again,’ said Donald, holding an olive branch out, not wanting to lose this moment of tolerance and agreement. ‘You will wake me up to the wicked ways of the world, and I will wake you up to some good matters,’ hoping the flattery would encourage a further change of heart. ‘These places are important for civilization.’

‘There used to be a million Orthodox all around,’ the monk told us. ‘These monasteries from the thirteenth century make a strong impact on visitors. Even NATO was impressed. People talk about culture and education, but we are not an African tribe.’

‘Don’t worry about being so few of you,’ said Donald encouragingly. ‘Your presence here is what counts.’

The bishop returned, eyed the monk disapprovingly, wishing he would keep silent, and led us to his private rooms in the monastery. Above a single bed hung two photographs, both of the bishop himself: one as he looked now, slim, gaunt and

forbidding, in black robes ringed with two heavy chains, each carrying a large icon arrayed carefully and separately on his chest. The other showed him as a young monk, unrecognizable: fuller faced, plumper, with shiny smooth skin and a fanatically devout look in his dark eyes. In those days, communism marginalized the Orthodox Church, and Bishop Jefrem had made a courageous commitment to a modest monastic life. He might have continued in isolation, contented for the remainder of his life. Then along with the collapse of communism, and the triumph of nationalism, came influence and authority. This unexpected power seemed to have devoured the flesh on his body with stress and anxiety, leaving him lean and lined.

‘There is hardly ever time for me to stay here,’ the bishop told us wistfully. ‘I have too many tasks.’ But the flat was always kept ready for him, with freshly laundered sheets turned down in readiness. Another reason for not coming more often may have been the dread of long arguments with the young monk: such hotheadedness had no place in a tranquil retreat. Here, men’s opinions should count for little where the permanence of nature expressed the eternity of God.

On the other hand, without the monk’s zeal and hard work, the monastery would not survive.

For a while we sat in the porch outside the monastery, looking at the church and the forested hills behind, listening to streams rushing all round, and sipping Bosnian coffee. The bishop signalled the fiercely combative monk to sit further down the table. The monk obeyed, but then stared at us eagerly, hoping to prolong the conversation. The bishop wanted to keep politics out of the visit, and may have been trying to prevent the monk from giving the Orthodox Church a bad name, though, silently, he may have shared the same views. Bishop Jefrem let very little slip, and controlled the trajectory of our conversations. Above all, he wanted to make a good impression on this first day of our travels with him, particularly in this monastery, his spiritual home.

In all our time together the bishop could not bring himself to talk about the war and acknowledge his support for ethnic cleansing, except on one of our last meetings some years later when in response to comments about Muslim demand for a memorial at the Omarska killing camp near Prijedor, part of his diocese, he retorted: ‘Muslims have too vivid an imagination.’ In other words: nothing had happened. and victims had invented their suffering and crimes committed against them.

Whenever we mentioned the other communities, reminding the bishop of the reasons for our presence in Bosnia, he responded without hesitation in support of what we were doing. When we passed a Catholic church, and the single mosque standing by the road between Croatia and Banja Luka, he kept silent.

Only on one occasion did he make a comment. Donald was enthusing about the idyllic countryside and spending time in monastic havens, declaring them to be ‘special in the Christian scheme, providing a great reassuring presence, that God is with us even in times of suffering.’

The bishop responded: ‘When Catholics suffer, the west reacts. When Muslims suffer, the east reacts. When the Orthodox suffer, all are silent.’

He went on to inform us that, since the communist revolution, up to two million believers, priests and nuns had been killed. He did not specify whether just in the former Yugoslavia, or, as more likely, across the whole Orthodox world, including Russia.

Donald told the bishop: ‘Open your archives. Write your history. Monasteries are the heart-beat of Orthodoxy.’

To which the bishop replied that he devoted over a third of his time to his monasteries alone. Then he went on to talk in generalities about the necessity of peace and freedom.

‘We must help build up rural communities, make the economy viable,’ Donald urged, wanting to lead the discussion into more practical proposals, beyond myths, and as a way of clearing prejudices.

‘We need political stability,’ said the bishop. ‘Everyday we are shaken up. We never know what will happen. As a bishop I try to do everything I can, but not be involved in politics.’

We remembered Bishop Komarica telling us how he had regularly appealed for help from Bishop Jefrem during the war, but the bishop never replied, and did nothing to stop the persecution and killing. Bishop Jefrem went into retreat throughout the time of conflict, refused to celebrate the liturgy, ordering his priests to cover for him.

It must have been a confusing time for the bishop: on the one hand receiving moral and financial support from the nationalists. He must have been aware of what they were doing, and the support they expected from him in return. Perhaps he did not want to believe what was happening, which explained why he locked himself away voluntarily, while his nationalist supporters put the Catholic bishop under house arrest, so that they could complete the task of ethnic cleansing without having to put up with his protests. Young Bishop Jefrem on the photograph above his bed in Liplje appeared to be a man playing a part, the role of bishop protecting him from the vicissitudes of the outside world. The Church, the faith, the liturgy and the tradition of Orthodoxy were all that concerned him. The world remained irrelevant, frightening and challenging. This explained his retreat to remote monasteries, and his dislike of having to attend synods in Belgrade. This fear and shyness would eventually lead him ten years later to being driven around in cars with blacked out windows, and living in a sumptuously furnished grand new bishop’s palace in the centre of Banja Luka. His increasing remoteness, and capriciously authoritarian manner, alienated and infuriated Orthodox worshippers, who resented this extravagance and megalomania: a far cry



from the modesty of his early days as a monk. He became ever more reactionary, blocking social programs set up by his own priests, forbidding communication with other faiths, and supporting right-wing extremists within the Orthodox Church.

The window, that had opened briefly in Coventry, rapidly shuttered down while he focused on a large-scale program of building churches throughout the diocese, as many as he could, to establish Orthodoxy, in the way a cat marks its territory and does not tolerate intruders.

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At Liplje the nun clearing the dishes took an interest in my camera, and insisted on having a picture taken. She smiled enthusiastically. The arguments and discussions with the fanatical monk meant little to her. Like the farming communities in the valleys around the monasteries, she followed the seasonal tasks and rhythms of daily life diligently, unquestioningly, faithfully and seemingly content with her lot.

The monk who supported Karadjic waved us off, and immediately moved purposefully towards the bags of cement and stones. A furrowed brow indicated determination to continue work, alone with his thoughts and resentments.

#### THE UNFINISHED CHURCH AT STUPLJE

The next monastery, on the second and final day's journey with Bishop Jefrem, also lay at the head of a valley. In order to reach it, we drove at a snail's pace along a bumpy path next to the railway line from Banja Luka to Doboj. We could have walked there quicker, passing several poor villages and rows of houses, where people seemed to have only recently returned. Single cows were tethered along with a few goats. Poultry scratched in the weed-filled barnyards. Rusting chassis of cars lay half-buried in the earth, like metal corpses turning into skeletons. Only old people worked here, solitary men in fields, and women stooping with effort to plant seeds.

Stuplje Monastery stood between three hills and at the conjunction of three streams. Bishop Jefrem had only just begun to rebuild the monastery, which had been destroyed by the Ottomans, the place forgotten, and the fields used for growing corn. Bishop Jefrem had discovered the foundations, and on them raised another half-built church, the land around it covered in stones, planks and building equipment.

Where did he find the money for these projects? ‘We need peace and freedom,’ explained Bishop Jefrem, ‘to find good people to help and pay for the building works. The Church is richer than the state.’ He then added jokingly: ‘We are better economists. There is not so much corruption.’

A local priest and his wife offered us rakija and coffee in a shed decorated with nineteenth century paintings of effeminate saints. Bishop Jefrem again evaded the unpleasant subject of politics by saying: ‘It is people who need to be served, not politicians.’

We asked why so many churches were being built in an area where so few people lived, and commented on the secularization of Europe. Churches were dying everywhere, even in the Balkans. Perhaps Bishop Jefrem could turn his monasteries into places of pilgrimage, and discover a new purpose for significant surviving buildings, often examples of exquisite architecture and painting. They could be made relevant to the needs of people today, not following old traditions, which no longer had meaning for many.

Bishop Jefrem considered this issue for a while then commented simply: ‘I did not close the monasteries. I feel obliged to rebuild them. Monastic life is pre-eminent, not the architecture. Books and libraries are important. Monasteries belonged to churches. They were a constant inspiration to them.’

He did not seem to understand our point, that these holy sites should become relevant to the world, or he was politely deflecting the argument, because he could not

tolerate such openness. On the other hand these monasteries did have a tradition of welcome and hospitality to anyone who wished to visit.

Perhaps he was thinking about another site of an Orthodox church and monastery he wanted to show us, high up on a precipitous hillside overlooking the Vrbas Gorge. Bishop Jefrem claimed the Ottomans had destroyed it. The foundations remained visible and large stones with runic carvings were recently discovered under the grass and weeds. He wanted to rebuild this place too.

After wandering over the ruins and admiring the spectacular view across the gorge we drove to Prijedor, the town where ethnic cleansing during the Bosnia War had been planned, organized and carried out in several killing camps.

Unlike Banja Luka and places such as Srebrenica that claimed media attention, the massacres around Prijedor were not so widely known. Only intrepid journalists, like Ed Vulliamy, took considerable risks to report on the killing camps, which the international community then insisted should be closed down.

Ashamed and afraid of offending Serb warlords and political leaders, the international community turned its collective back on these places of horror, as though they had never existed. Only survivors kept the memory alive, trying in vain to put up memorials to the victims. To this day they are discouraged from even visiting the sites.

When we met Marko Pavic in 2004 and 2005, the then and present mayor of Prijedor who had taken charge of the program of ethnic cleansing in the war, he not only refused to accept responsibility for what happened, but insisted that the past should be forgotten and everyone move on. By that time the multinational steel company, Mittal Steel, had taken control of the mine at Omarska, which had been used as one of the killing camps, and the new owners did not want business disrupted by angry

Muslim survivors demanding a memorial to the hundreds tortured, raped and slaughtered there. Mayor Pavic made sure to quash any notion of a memorial, except to Serb fighters who lost their lives in the war. A cunning operator, he managed to evade arrest for any involvement in the program of ethnic cleansing, survived an embarrassing trial for embezzlement, and even managed to explain away a cache of firearms found in his garage. Muslims were returning to settle in the villages around Prijedor, despite his attempts to discourage them by blocking essential supplies, such as electricity, water and new roads. Muslim returnees refused to be intimidated. They raised money from relatives, who had fled abroad in the war, and found well-paid jobs. They rebuilt homes and villages, regardless of the obstacles put in their way by the mayor. Their affluence further fuelled Serb hatred and resentment: nothing was more galling for the ethnic cleansers than the return of their victims, rich and successful.

I tell this story in my book *the white house: from Fear to a Handshake*, written and published in 2007.

There is an ironic epilogue. In 2014, as I correct this manuscript, the survivors are still waiting for a memorial. Despite his prejudicial treatment of Muslims and Catholics in the Prijedor region, Mayor Pavic was awarded a prize in 2010 for being the best mayor in South Eastern Europe. The reason for this prize being that there were more returnees in his town than in any other part of Bosnia.

Immediately after the war, the town of Prijedor had taken advantage of its relative anonymity by taking over the Muslim and Catholic quarters, establishing Serb businesses and building on the sites of former Muslim and Catholic properties in such a way as to preclude any changes back to their former ownership. Bishop Komarica had pointed out cafés, businesses and shops, formerly belonging to his community,

now run by Serbs, and car parks where mosques used to be. The Catholic priest's house still stood, next to a barn converted into a chapel. A few Catholics were returning, but, given the tense atmosphere in the town, the priest looked perpetually frightened: traumatized by his experiences in the war, apologetic for being alive, and anxious about what might still happen to him. The war was not yet over. A short time after our visit, a group of Serb youths beat him up on the street outside his house.

In a parallel universe, Bishop Jefrem showed us a prosperous and thriving community in Prijedor. His churches there had been completed and decorated. His silence about the war and atrocities that happened in the town and region chilled us even more than Bishop Komarica's distressing stories on our previous visit to the town: in his view as much a 'heart of darkness' as Banja Luka, and 'a place of even greater evil than Srebrenica'.

The Orthodox priest of Prijedor gave us a warm welcome, his wife and family having prepared a sumptuous lunch in honour of the bishop's visit. The priest's son, training to be a priest in Paris, introduced us to his fiancée, and announced that he had no intention of living in Bosnia, wanting to stay in France.

Being in a place of such brutal recent history made us feel awkward. We could scarcely speak, let alone eat. The delicious food stuck in our throats. Yet the priest and his wife welcomed us with such warmth and generosity that it became impossible to talk about all the matters that needed to be aired. These kindly people did not seem to be the kind of characters who had committed crimes; nor did they possess the strength to acknowledge what had happened.

We would probably not get another opportunity to talk with the bishop, so on our final drive back to Banja Luka, I prepared some conversation in Russian that didn't

need translation. Carefully I spoke about our time with the mufti and our determination to help rebuild the Ferhadija Mosque, our sympathy with the suffering of the Muslim community and also our time with Bishop Komarica, visiting the decimated Catholic diocese, the frightened people, the destroyed churches and how much we had learned about his community. Finally I thanked Bishop Jefrem for what he had taught and showed us on our journeys with him: about the Orthodox community, its history, about the bishop's work, rebuilding the diocese, giving Orthodoxy a firm foothold in a country where it had survived for centuries, yet had so often been oppressed and even destroyed.

'It is important to know about all the communities,' I said, emphasising the word 'all'.

Then I leant forward from the back seat in order to touch the bishop's shoulder in a gesture of gratitude for the time he had given us. I expected him to be either silent, or to argue with me about the special needs of the Orthodox, ignoring the other communities.

To my surprise he threw his hands in the air in an uncharacteristic display of emotion, as though lost for words. He seemed to be on the verge of tears.

After a long choked silence he managed to say in a broken voice: 'Exactly! All we want is to be understood. Thank you!'

Then he took my hand and pressed it.

## OF LAMBS AND SERPENTS

### POSTSCRIPT TO THE JOURNEYS WITH BISHOPS

The mayor of Banja Luka had found a small office space for our new staff on the outskirts of town. It used to be a shop and we worried about the premises having been

the property of evicted Muslims. But since Omer Visic, the Muslim vice-mayor, took responsibility for handing us the keys we assumed there was no unpleasant history to contend with.

We needed to fix a phone line, furnish it, and organize running water and electricity supplies: administrative matters which occupied Dejan, Majda and Mirjana for several weeks. The project stalled temporarily, but not destructively, as it would later.

We doubted whether the staff had the necessary chutzpah to tackle political leaders, which had been Adnan's strength. Dejan obsessed over details of administration, but proved himself to be thoughtful and sensitive, commenting critically on all our documents, pointing out the delicacy of Serb feeling when it came to being accused of genocide and other atrocities. He and Adnan got on surprisingly well, and both educated us about Muslim and Serb attitudes. Majda seemed to be as self-reliant as Mirjana, but not as noisy, and less intrusively personal. Majda's silences were intimidating; we could not be sure what she was thinking, but eventually she would give her opinion, trenchantly and with a kindly laugh. We were surprised at the tension between her and Adnan. They argued fiercely in Bosnian, so we could not understand. However we noticed that Majda refused to lose an argument. She was married to her Serb childhood sweetheart, and some of Adnan's closest friends, like Nicola, were also Serb, so we could not assume that one or other was taking a more conciliatory line. Dejan didn't translate for us and just looked alarmed, wanting everyone to be friends.

We decided not to interfere, judging it better to let them settle differences on their own. While the office waited for furniture and supplies, they worked from home and embarked on systematic research of what services were available and what were missing in Banja Luka.

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The point of this return visit to Banja Luka in June was to strengthen support for the project from the political, municipal and religious leaders who had come to Coventry. They would guarantee its success. Our neighbour Simon Goodenough came with us to help sort out administrative problems with the staff. He came to Bosnia out of curiosity, to observe our process and meet people we had told him about.

## THE CATHOLICS

First we wanted to thank Bishop Komarica, and reassure him we were not spiritual tourists who had wasted his time, but were already acting on what he had shown us on the grim journey round his diocese.

He in turn wanted us to meet two of his main helpers.

Sister Mirna and Miljenko Anicic, the head of the Caritas Catholic aid agency in Banja Luka, welcomed us in a wood-panelled meeting room, on the ground floor of the bishop's house. We sat round a large table that was covered in an embroidered cloth, and discussed our proposals for helping the diocese.

The chapel-like room, with religious pictures hanging from the sweet-smelling pine walls, reminded me of chalets in the Austrian Alps, permeated with the same consoling fragrance of dried wood and sociable evenings around the dining table after daytime strenuous mountain climbing. Sprigs of pink alpine rose and intensely blue gentian would be placed in front of smoothly painted images of a pretty Madonna and Child. The table cloth had similar flowers delicately embroidered over the pristine whiteness like blossoms scattered on a snow-field. This blend of light and peasant sentiment contrasted with the furnishings in Bishop Jefrem's home, just a few metres down the road. There, heavy maroon drapes, dark green pot plants, grimly staring icons, photographs of the bishop in full regalia, and the pervading smell of incense, created an atmosphere of mystery and gloom. As for the Islamic centre, only steps



away in the other direction, the few photographs of the destroyed mosque, and some chunks of painted stone rescued from the rubble, represented yet another exotic and different culture.

Donald outlined five proposals which were intended to inform the rest of Europe about the plight of the Banja Luka Catholic diocese, wake people up and elicit support. German Caritas seemed to be the sole source of funding for the diocese, and, although the redoubtable Margit had raised millions of marks, the money went mainly on buildings and supporting survivors. The world needed to learn about the political, economic and social realities determining the condition of the diocese in Banja Luka. As the bishop put it: 'The fox is still in the coop. How can we expect the chickens to return?'

Firstly we intended to find advocates for Bishop Komarica among the Catholic bishops and cardinals in the rest of Europe.

Secondly, we would encourage visitors and exchanges between parishes and priests. Thirdly, we would mobilize help for those priests traumatised by the war. They needed counselling and above all, a vacation.

Fourthly, we aimed to establish an independent committee comprising representatives from the diocese, and also from the local authorities, to speed the return of refugees. The civic forum would identify obstacles and monitor process.

Fifthly, was an article, *The Forgotten Diocese*, written by Donald, and published by The Tablet, a Catholic weekly edited in England, and distributed world-wide. Local voices, not only that of the bishop, needed strengthening with outside support and we were doing all we could to inform people everywhere.

Miljenko Anicic and Sister Mirna were encouraged to hear that we had already made contacts with organizations and people who wanted to help. The St Egidio community from Rome planned to visit later in the autumn, and establish a community house

where they could be useful to the poorest and most desperate of the people in the diocese.

We were reminded that many people had already visited the diocese. ‘But without scenes of horror, people are not interested,’ sighed Miljenko Anicic, echoing the bishop’s comment to us earlier about spiritual tourists, who came to gawp at the debris, then returned home and did nothing. The diocese had strong links with parishes throughout Europe, five in Holland, also in Italy. Language was a barrier, but, crucially, the diocese did not have the structures to help organize projects. They needed our help to establish such structures. The civic forum would be a start.

On the issue of beaten priests, Miljenko Anicic made the observation that the legacy and decades of suppression of Catholic communities under communism had become an obstacle for priests receiving practical help and support they needed from their own constituencies. The lay community itself needed building up and educating.

As for creating a group of advocates for the diocese, small initiatives tended to evaporate. People visited, such as a young German with experience in human rights work, sent recently from Brussels. He stayed for a year and nothing happened. We might help with a more systematic approach.

We talked about Presnace, the place which had made the strongest impression on us, not only because of the ruins and the horror of what happened there, but because the diverse community of Orthodox, Catholics and Muslims were together rebuilding the church. This represented hope in a country where ethnic groups had still to communicate, let alone reconcile, with each other. Miljenko Anicic and Sister Mirna agreed that churches should now become places of reconciliation as well as prayer. The process of rebuilding the Ferhadija Mosque could learn from the example of Presnace.

Simon Goodenough, who sat in on all our meetings, asked what practical things the Soul of Europe could do for Banja Luka.

‘Find people,’ answered Miljenko Anicic and Sister Mirna in unison. ‘We don’t just need material help. We need to change the conscience and minds of the people here to help people work and live together. It is not just a matter of healing. We need work and jobs.’

Through the civic forum we could set up meetings between the Church and the local authorities, to open lines of communication in the same way we were doing with the Ferhadija. The perpetual cycle of complaints, demands, dismissal, and ignoring had to stop. Those responsible for returnees needed to change their minds. Communities should be mixed as they were before the war, and all human rights observed.

The civic forum could and would play a significant role in Banja Luka. During the war international agencies sent material aid. After the war these agencies provided development, money to repair the infrastructure and encourage economic growth. Now there was the need to sustain this growth, which had stagnated, to develop a civic society, in which the people could take charge of their political, social, economic and cultural future. Given the political realities of the Republika Srpska, the corruption, the persistent intolerant ideologies, and subsequent lack of support from the international community, such a civic society needed to be established and encouraged immediately. Svetlana Cenic had declared at one of our meetings: ‘It is no longer five minutes to midnight. It is ten minutes after midnight.’

The marked absence of a professional educated middle class created a problem for Banja Luka. The war and ethnic cleansing had destroyed it. Returnees needed to be encouraged, particularly those with experience in business and administration, despite the argument that the present economy of the country could not support them. The returning professional class would be the economy.

Miljenko Anicic and Sister Mirna smiled hopefully, despite the gloomy situation.

‘We need new ideas. Good will is here. We are prepared to work.’

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#### THE MAYOR AND VICE MAYOR

Mayor Davidovic greeted us now with big smiles and warm handshakes. Ever since the Coventry Consultation his attitude had changed. Gone were the severe, steely looks, the defensiveness and resistance. He no longer spoke about the need to restrict the Muslim population, and about their disproportionate influence on the life of the city, words which had echoed identical sentiments expressed by the Nazis about the Jews in Germany seventy years earlier. His predecessor as mayor had declared that the Muslims did not need fifteen mosques, since they were a small minority. Six would suffice. Mufti Halilovic, before he died, had asked that mayor why he had then permitted all the mosques to be destroyed, leaving not even one.

Difficulty in coming to terms with this injustice explained Mayor Davidovic’s former defensiveness. After Coventry, he realized that the future of his city depended on reparation and a change of attitude. Supporting us might even help his standing in the international community. However, he still did not grasp the extent of international disgust with Banja Luka. He had recently written to a small town in Sweden, to renew a twinning arrangement that the Swedes brought to an end during the war, because of the ethnic cleansing. The Swedish town council distributed copies of the letter to several European embassies in Bosnia. Astonished and amused, the ambassadors read Mayor Davidovic’s letter, which described Banja Luka as a city with a clean human right’s record and that all communities lived in peace together, so there was no reason why the twinning should not be resumed.

As a rule, mayors met us in conference rooms next to their offices and we would be kept waiting several minutes before their intimidating entrance. They were the power-

brokers in this part of Europe, not the elected honorary positions in English councils where councillors shared authority. This time, Mayor Davidovic, as a favour and sign of his trust, welcomed us into the more intimate space of his office. Its sparsely furnished modesty reflected the mayor's own Spartan manners. Some years later we were allowed a glimpse into the private office of Mayor Pavic in Prijedor. In contrast to Davidovic, whose authority in Banja Luka city was restricted by the political parties in the offices on the other side of the square, Pavic enjoyed substantial political influence in the region, because of his leading role in the ethnic cleansing, and having politicians in his pocket. While making strenuous efforts to discourage our work of mediation, he remained friendly and, when we asked to see his office, he willingly showed us. To our surprise, expecting nationalist flags and posters, the walls were covered in magnificent modern abstract paintings, blazing with colour, and indicating unsuspected taste, and an inner spiritual life that bore no relation to his politics of intimidation and slaughter.

Davidovic and Visic, the vice-mayor, talked about the civic forum, plans for school exchanges between Banja Luka and Exeter, attracting investment to the city, and encouraging the religious communities to reaffirm the agreement the bishops and the mufti had signed in Coventry. The mayor was a stickler for procedure, and insisted on us submitting plans to relevant ministries, but offered to provide letters of introduction. Then smiling broadly and shaking our hands warmly, he left for another meeting and the vice-mayor remained to discuss plans.

Omer Visic understood our role in establishing the civic forum. He listened intently and responded positively. He kept the dignity and quiet authority of the office he had occupied before the war when he had been the Muslim mayor. He now lived in Sweden and commuted weekly. Though his present appointment was no more than a gesture of Muslim representation on the municipal council, as stipulated by the

Dayton Accord, and had no influence or even authority, he seemed to be biding his time, knowing that the bigoted nationalist attitudes which had almost killed him, and were still influencing policy would gradually subside. He saw our work as helping this process.

He understood the importance of finding non-Muslim support for the Ferhadija Mosque project: confidence-building measures such as a series of public lectures on the theme of 'Respect', in which all three communities could exchange thoughts, opinions, share experiences, misgivings and hopes. Bringing these issues into public debate would begin to foster a new civic society in Banja Luka. We proposed practical measures too. The Ferhadija Mosque project should include improvement to the surrounding area: renovating shop fronts, and sprucing up the space, which used to be the city centre, and improving the appearance of the city, to attract tourists.

On the issue of psychological trauma caused by the war, Omer Visic approved of proposals to call on professional advice from those parts of the world, which had suffered similar ethnic conflicts, and were finding ways to deal with the aftermath, for example South Africa and Northern Ireland, with experience in truth and reconciliation processes.

#### THE LAST SERB VICE-PRESIDENT

'I am the last Serb Vice-President,' announced Dragan Cavic proudly.

He was reminding us of the recent cross-entity agreement throughout Bosnia, including the Federation and the Republika Srpska, in which all communities had to be represented at the highest level. Since the Serb nationalists retained overall power in the Republika Srpska, the job of vice-president would from now on go to either a Muslim or a Catholic, assuming these could be found, since most of them had been efficiently ethnically cleansed.

If Dragan Cavic were to be elected President in October, Roy Wilson considered it would help not only our work with the civic forum, but also the country, because the President had attended the Coventry Consultation. He might even be persuaded to be a patron of the Ferhadija Project, but the continuing influence of the backwoodsmen, who provided the core support of his party, would veto that.

Despite these persistent nationalist strictures, Vice President Cavic was encouraging. He praised the Coventry Consultation, the creation of a Coventry Group in Banja Luka, and repeated his offer to keep all doors open. He appreciated our balanced approach to the three faiths, and told us that Donald's speech to the National Assembly was well-received. He also appreciated our integrated approach to future projects, such as the rebuilding of the mosque and the civic forum, taking issues around the economy, education, the environment, culture, and religion also into account.

Svetlana Cenic sat in on the meeting as usual, monitoring the discussion with an eagle eye, and occasionally interrupting nervous Dejan's halting translation, in stentorian Margaret Thatcher tones, which intimidated him even further. However we detected a decrease in her interest in the Vice-President's agenda. She had either lost faith or was focusing on her own future. Perhaps the Cambridge course with Ros Tennyson had radically changed her thinking. Some time after the meeting, and during lunch at the Castle Restaurant overlooking the Vrbas, Simon Goodenough tried to disrupt the stilted conversation with challenging remarks, which provoked her into being more forthcoming. She launched into an impassioned monologue about her country's desperate need for investment and business regeneration, implying for the first time that regional nationalist politics and corruption might be obstacles. Nevertheless she laid most blame on the international community, claiming it to be more responsible for the crippled economic state of the Republika Srpska.

Back at the meeting with Cavic, we asked Svetlana where the Orthodox Church found enough money to build so many churches and monasteries. People gave money in large quantities, she told us. Some of the donors might be people involved in crime and corruption. Someone had told us to look closely at the recently cast cathedral bells, standing outside the half completed edifice on the square between the council offices and the government headquarters. The bells were waiting to be raised into the tower. The name of a Bosnian Serb general had been carved into one of them.

The future President Cavic, wanting to prove his tolerance, declared that he did not mind having a Muslim or Catholic Vice-President. But we knew that the future Vice-President would not be allowed the power Cavic enjoyed now. Once his office moved to non Serb hands, the new incumbent would become a cipher, like Vice-Mayor Omer Visic to Mayor Davidovic.

‘The OHR imposed changes in both the Federation and the Republika Srpska,’ Cavic told us, adding as though soliciting our admiration for his change of attitude: ‘We had problems with our past. The party was not popular with the international community. So that forced us to change our profile. We take the constitutional changes seriously. Multi-ethnic composition of government is an obligation now. The Vice-President does not have to be from the same group as the President. We have changed; we are reconstructing the party. Bad spirit has been broken, but many are yet unaware of these changes. The issues of reconciliation and returnees are important for the international community, the return of property etc. Now the scale of return is greater than it used to be in the war. Property must be returned to former legal owners. There are steps now towards integration into Bosnia and Herzegovina, and therefore towards European integration.’

Cavic had always struck us as being sincere, not simply saying what he thought we wanted to hear. He never needed to do that, certainly not with such a small and



seemingly insignificant NGO like the Soul of Europe. I noted the enthusiasm in his voice, along with the pain in his face, contorted with the effort of holding two opposing opinions together. Unlike his more extreme party colleagues, Cavic was a pragmatist. He needed to please the international community while unable to agree with the concept of multi-ethnic integration after a war in which he and others had tried to ethnically cleanse the country. He was aware of what needed to be done for the future, and at the same time carried the weight of his party's past on his shoulders. Karadjic had publicly endorsed Cavic. However much Cavic might want to change his party and country, such a strong tie to the past could not be easily severed.

'We have joined the Council of Europe,' he announced triumphantly as though this were just a short step to joining the European Union. Roy Wilson had commented about this significant step during one of his arguments with Adnan in Belgrade. The Council of Europe focused attention on human rights. The Republika Srpska had not taken this issue on board. If they did so, then the nationalists would have to radically change their politics. Cavic continued: 'We have now adopted a new, less conservative program since last month. You are the first to hear about it.'

'Supposing you lose, will you stay on in politics?' Donald asked slyly.

Cavic laughed, and joked he might have passed his sell-by date. The election would be run according to the law. 'Professionals will guide the campaign. It is based on a detailed manifesto and tax reductions.' At the previous election the nationalists ensured victory by giving kilo bags of sugar to voters.

We told him about our plans to carry out a mapping exercise in Banja Luka, and introduced Majda who sat silently trying not to look overawed. Cavic appreciated this part of the project, and said we could always count on his support.

The atmosphere being so cordial Donald risked mentioning Mladic and Karadjic.

Cavic responded without hesitation. ‘The Republika Srpska is obliged to help the international community in arresting them. The trouble is that people are protecting them, and not handing them over. Recently five policemen have been arrested. They murdered a Catholic priest in Prijedor and are now in jail. We have the processes of law now. Twenty officers have been suspended, also in Prijedor. These are just a few facts. The prosecutor of the Republika Srpska is investigating and preparing their case. SFOR also arrested a number of war criminals on an indictment list which has been kept secret from the public, so they don’t evade justice. Prime Minister Ivanic has announced publicly for people to be handed over. It will be a test of the willingness of the country to comply. However, pressure from the western press has helped turn Mladic and Karadjic into folk heroes. Had all this been done quietly it would have been different, people would not have cared so much.’

Speaking about the civic forum and our intention to deliver significant results, Cavic made a play on the words revolution and evolution. ‘These are the real changes: we must move from revolution to evolution.’

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A few days after this meeting, Vice President Cavic was elected leader of the party, which then won the election. On 25<sup>th</sup> November 2002 he became the next President of the Republika Srpska.

However, his liberal tendencies lost him the following election to the more hard-line and ruthless Milorad Dodik, who refused to negotiate with anyone, and had no interest in the processes started at Coventry. Dodik’s main focus was achieving the devolution of Republika Srpska from Bosnia. Svetlana Cenic and Pero Bukelovic, ‘Mr Economy’ from the Coventry Consultation, founded another party and lost influence. Dragan Cavic became an ordinary citizen, having to accept the likelihood of never holding the reins of power again. Milorad Dodik, though faithful to the Serb nationalist cause, and

wanting to be united with Serbia, had established distance between himself, as well as his party, the Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD), from Karadjic.

Dodik manipulated the international community into accepting him as a bona fide, untainted leader of the Republika Srpska. Dragan Cavic's ties with Karadjic proved to be a handicap, and once he had been ousted from power, there was no return.

Fathers tend to pass incomplete or failed ambitions down to their sons. Like vendettas, these carry on across generations, the poison distilling rather than diluting. Sons don't always welcome this demanding heritage, that is inextricably bound up with blood-ties, and claims of shared race and faith: the more violent, paranoid, and excessive, the heavier the burden. One of the themes in Wagner's opera cycle, *The Ring of the Nibelungs*, focuses on the relationships between different generations: fathers and daughters, fathers and sons, fathers and grandchildren.

The linking passages between scenes reflect on the action. Their eloquence has made them among the most popular parts of the opera, particularly in the final part: *The Twilight of the Gods, Götterdämmerung*. These orchestral passages, without voices, describe transformations and shifts of mood. *Siegfried's Rhine Journey* starts full of naïve optimism and bracing hope as the lovers part and he sets out on new adventures but, in the space of several bars, curdles to murky confusion and doom. *Siegfried's Death March* shifts from celebrating the life of an individual, music full of noble grandeur, to doom. The ever more insistently swirling death motif presages a catastrophe that will engulf the whole world, and the gods also.

Another linking passage describes a son's reluctant shouldering of his father's quest to reclaim the ring of the title. At that moment the music shifts from thundering triumphant low chords, the whole brass section of the orchestra at full blast, gradually whittling down to a wistful melody on a single clarinet as we become aware of the

scene shifting and observe the central woman of the drama gazing at the said ring, unaware of imminent betrayal. The opera returns to those deep chords in the preface to the second act: one of the most haunting exchanges in the whole drama. A good production, like the one at the London Coliseum in the 1970s, highlights the pathology of this encounter between father and son. The son seems to be asleep when his father appears, so it could be a dream. In the production at the Coliseum the father rises like a menacing ghost behind the son, who is seated, leaning on his sword. They don't look at each other. The father's voice could be coming from the son's head.

The father keeps repeating: 'Are you asleep my son?' while urging his son not to forget, and to fulfil his inherited mission.

The son throughout the opera is an intimidating, sinister, and finally murderous presence: he is the one who kills the naïve hero. But at this point, for a few moments, he elicits our sympathies. Clearly oppressed by his father's obsession for recovering the stolen ring, which was itself fashioned from stolen gold, he bears the burden of his father's demands unwillingly, calling him a 'schlimme Albe' 'a bad spirit'. In this sombrely scored episode, with the voices of two basses seeming to flow in and out of each other, Wagner vividly depicts the poison running through generations, and portrays the son as a tragic rather than a diabolic figure.

## SACRED SPACES

Our last meeting with the Islamic community of Banja Luka had been a painful one, like several rounds with Mike Tyson, and we approached the Islamic Centre with anxiety. Mufti Camdzic had lost patience with us, and was now telling everyone we were in the hands of Bosnian Serb nationalists, who were using us to make sure the Ferhadija Mosque would not be rebuilt. We faxed him the script of Donald's speech to the National Assembly, and he complained that the Ferhadija had only been

mentioned in one paragraph, and jumped to the conclusion we were losing interest in the mosque. Irritated by this paranoia Adnan asked the mufti directly whether he wanted us to stop helping and go away. 'We are friends,' the mufti told Adnan, and reluctantly agreed to continue trusting us.

At our last meeting with Reshad Salihovic, the lawyer, Meliha Filipovic, had arrived with a stack of papers about plans to build high rise offices all round the mosque, and accused us of not have taken any notice of her warnings, when the mufti brought her to the Vice-President's office the previous October, for the first meeting of the Coventry group. Reshad had fixed us with a steady look, and announced that if these plans were to go ahead the whole Muslim community would vacate Banja Luka, leaving no one behind.

There was no doubting how demoralized the weak Muslim community in Banja Luka felt. It had been a surprise that as many as a few hundred attended Bajram the previous December. Sarajevo did not seem to care about them, as though, in Adnan's opinion, the Federation actually wished the community to fold up completely. This would mean the Bosnian Serb nationalists had achieved their aim of ethnic cleansing, and, for that reason alone, we could not allow the community to die. A deeper and more positive reason rose from the historical fact that Banja Luka had once been a unique place in Europe, where all the ethnic and faith communities, including Jews, had thrived. Europe and the rest of the world needed to be inspired by this example of mutual tolerance.

We arrived at a meeting where the atmosphere felt strained. The imam we had met at Bajram entered the room without smiling and excused himself. He had to attend another meeting. The mufti was 'somewhere in the field'. Reshad listened with a stony face, while Donald talked about the first Ferhadija Mosque committee meeting coming up on June 28 in Sarajevo, hoping Reshad would be there.

‘You have done all the work, all the preparation,’ Donald said trying to be encouraging. ‘We need to know about the historical aspects of the project.’ He talked about our program for the regeneration of the whole city and the mosque being built in five years, adding: ‘We are your servants. You need to feel really supported.’

Reshad began to speak and suddenly the clouds lifted.

‘I hope the mosque will be built quicker than you propose, in two years not five,’ he said. ‘Because there are now so many of you. The fence around the mosque has been constructed by Orthodox builders. We did that on purpose. You see that we are able to cooperate. And I have news to tell you. Only an hour ago we received permission to rebuild our first mosque, the one by the Police Station. Despite obstacles being put in our way, I kept visiting the urban planning department, a Mr Vladic. This morning I went as usual and asked for the permission. There has always been a delay, they kept putting us off. This time I told them you were coming to Banja Luka today. “Do you want me to tell Mr Reeve’s delegation? Do I have permission or not?” Within two minutes the permission was signed. I hope you don’t mind that I used your name!’

So our name delivered enough clout to start the ball rolling, and the first mosque since the war would be built. Surprised and impressed by such leverage with the local council, we hoped this presaged well for the future, and especially our plans to rebuild the Ferhadija Mosque.

The atmosphere became less strained and the discussion moved to money issues, which would take up a major part of the committee meeting.

‘We shouldn’t have to wait so long now,’ Reshad said, but Donald recommended that the project needed careful preparation, step by step, but more quickly than before. Confidence building measures were important so that eventually all the people of Banja Luka, especially the Serbs, would begin to realize how good it would be to have the mosque again.

‘I agree,’ said Reshad. ‘After the Coventry Consultation, conversation has been about other mosques, and the mufti’s house, a temporary residence, and an office. There has been no implementation, though we submitted all the documents. Nothing happened. Serb refugees are still in the house, not being evicted; obstruction from all sides and no permission for any mosques, except today for one mosque. But they stipulated that the minaret could only be fifteen metres high. Last month they agreed to eighteen, but the original height was just below twenty two metres. We have prepared the foundations and have all the materials, but need to wait another three to four months for new permission. We send letters directly to the mayor asking why we are waiting. But we will start to build the mosque anyway. If they forbid or stop it, then we will inform you.’

Donald suggested that all these issues be raised at the committee meeting in Sarajevo. ‘Everyone knows my priorities,’ he told Reshad, hoping to allay suspicions about our lack of commitment to the mosque. ‘Eventually even Bishop Jefrem will agree. We need to find friendly Serbs. The aim is that, when the rebuilding starts, we have the support of all the people of Banja Luka.’

‘But we do not have time,’ Reshad reflected sadly. ‘Ten years our people have been waiting. Now there are many Serbs in the city, refugees from other parts, who never knew the old mosque. People are getting used to there being none. Put simply, no Muslims will return to Banja Luka while there is no mosque. We need a sign of religious life. Otherwise we are without human rights. But we have rights now. So let us begin something. In Kotor Varos, all the mosques are rebuilt in Muslim parishes. They start to rebuild without money, put the foundation stone down and people are beginning to send money. But with the Ferhadija Mosque no one knows about the project: what, where or who to contact.’

Kotor Varos was a town in the Muslim Croat Federation however, not in the Republika Srpska.

‘We will make the decision on June 28,’ Donald promised. ‘Then we will invite the mufti and yourself to the UK. We are already inviting Muslims all over Europe to come forward, to visit Banja Luka and support you.’

Simon Goodenough suggested drawing up a list of people who had left Banja Luka, and who might be interested to know about the building of the mosque. We should start a mailing list, include it on the web site, and discuss at the committee meetings on the 28<sup>th</sup>. Our conclusions should be then quickly disseminated, along with a subscription list and youth activities.

We gathered outside the Islamic centre before leaving. The sun shone hotly on the ground where once the great mosque had stood. The grass grew long, making it look more like a piece of wasteland than ever, but we hesitated to tread on the sacred space. The ghost of the mosque hovered there. It might materialize at any moment before our eyes, as in an Arabian Night, and take its place at the centre of the city again.

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#### VISITING BISHOP JEFREM

‘Are you trying to bribe me,’ joked Bishop Jefrem when we arrived with whiskey and chocolates in thanks for the hospitality we received during our last visit.

Having welcomed us with special warmth, served us brandies, fruit juice and coffee, he sat on his throne, looking benignly at everyone in the room, smiling broadly, stroking his sleeves, picking at threads, and constantly rearranging a pectoral cross laid over his chest. Relaxed and in no rush, he seemed prepared for a long discussion.

After thanking me for the card of Levitan’s *Evening Bells*, which, as I guessed, he particularly appreciated, we discussed the matter of Orthodox students visiting



England. Bishop Jefrem had considered this and concluded that these students needed to have completed their studies first and be already working.

He would give them a pep talk before leaving, along the lines: 'love your country, be modest, work hard. If you do this, then the time will come to be proud of your country. But don't think of abandoning your country. If you do go abroad, don't forget where you come from, and return. Use the knowledge you have gained to help your own country. A country without youth is without a future.'

He expressed the suspicion, residual from decades of communist oppression, and now from present poverty and lack of opportunity, that young people would seize the opportunity of travel to emigrate.

He had also been considering the wider implications of such exchanges. 'Western countries have problems with immigrants. It would be simpler for Western countries to support poor countries. I really believe in the potential of this country. Older people suffered two wars and are more modest in their demands and expectation. They put their hope in their children.'

For different reasons, Bishops Jefrem and Komarica did not want to send seminarians abroad on visits and exchanges. Bishop Jefrem feared losing control and influence. Experience of secular Europe might seduce his priests away from sacrosanct traditions. Bishop Komarica, though positive about the beneficial effects of such exchanges, did not have enough priests. Sending them meant parishes would have no priest in charge. The terrorist attack that killed over fifty people in London on the 7<sup>th</sup> July 2007, gave him the perfect excuse: 'I can't afford to lose any more of my priests!'

For all his prevarication and suspicions, Bishop Jefrem could not have been friendlier. We were enjoying the privilege of being entertained in his private sitting room upstairs, and he delayed ending the meeting as long as possible.

As we left, he insisted on embracing us all, kissing Donald and myself not with a polite air peck but with feeling, so we felt the penetrating prickle of his beard around his soft lips. We were friends now. He even tried to embrace Adnan, who hated these shows of male affection. Even I would not presume to do more than shake hands with Adnan; and maybe a touch on the back, sensing him freeze, in case any further intimacy might happen. But Adnan observed the change in the bishop's demeanour with relief, remembering how frosty the bishop had been at their first meeting, a year earlier, when Bishop Jefrem extended his hand from a distance, as though put out by the presence of a Muslim in his house.

We were changing this rigidly Orthodox man, who supported Mladic and Karadjic, and had warned the international community publicly that if anything happened to these hunted war criminals, he would make them saints.

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#### VISITING BISHOP KOMARICA

Thinking of Levitan's wintry scene hanging over the guest bed in Bishop Komarica's house, it cheered me that the two religious leaders shared a taste in this artist's work.

They also shared a history of church property. When we told Bishop Komarica that Bishop Jefrem had taken us to his monasteries, and singled out the beauty of Gomjanica, Bishop Komarica sighed and murmured: 'That used to be one of ours.'

The history of ownership of religious properties, buildings, churches and mosques needed unravelling. Centuries had witnessed them changing hands, replacing each other. Bishop Peric of Mostar insisted that mosques had been built on the sites of destroyed Catholic churches, so now the mosques had been destroyed, the Catholics could rebuild what had allegedly once been there several hundred years ago.

In fact, traditionally, for diplomatic as well superstitious reasons, the Ottomans had avoided such sacrilege, and conquerors were advised to respect places of worship and build mosques on other sites. This tactic ensured the subjugated people did not feel too resentful towards their new masters. However in some places, like Bihac, we came across an ancient mosque growing out of a medieval Catholic church, a curious and touching example of two cultures meeting; not imposed one on the other, as in the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, but organically entwined. Sabira Huzedjinovic had shown us pictures of similar examples in Jajce, where she hoped one of these religious buildings could become a place of joint cultural heritage for the three faiths and others.

The bishop was not suggesting the Orthodox should hand over Gomjanica back to the Catholics after almost a thousand years. He accepted the fluctuations of history with more equanimity than any other religious leader we had met. For the bishop people mattered more, their well-being and future.

He had just met the new High Representative, Paddy Ashdown, a more impatient and confrontational political presence in Bosnia than Wolfgang Petritsch. Bosnians had come to tire of the Austrian's diplomatic approach towards all sides, seeming to humour the Serbs, preferring dialogue and discussion rather than threatening deadlines. They welcomed the more robust methods of the British former military man. However within a short time the new High Representative became equally unpopular. Sacking high ranking officials in large numbers and forcing changes with minimum consultation came to be seen as highhanded, arrogant and ultimately futile. Wolfgang Petritsch appreciated the importance of processes of mediation moving hand in hand with diplomacy and threats when necessary: sticks and carrots. Paddy Ashdown showed scant interest in our kind of work, and we were never invited to talk to ambassadors, or to visit his offices in Sarajevo. He would not have supported the

Coventry Consultation, mainly because he had no time for religious leaders. He could not deny that the consultation had been useful and productive, but considered his muscular and less touchy-feely approach to be more relevant to Bosnia. After his stint as High Representative, despite forcing top-down economic and police reforms, which attempted to unite all parts of the country, he left a country entrenched in division and a Republika Srpska even more determined to go it alone.

Bishop Komarica had little to say about Paddy Ashdown, because he was fretting over a document from Brussels concerning returnees which ignored the Catholics. But he cheered up at the prospect of the St Egidio community in Rome coming to help, and encouraged us to be represented at conferences in Italy later in the year.

Despite his exhaustion at banging in vain against the closed door of Europe, he retained his sense of humour and was as embarrassingly hospitable as ever.

#### THE MONUMENT ON THE HILL

Adnan had made friends with Dragana, the friendly and attractive young woman who used to serve us breakfast at the Firenze Hotel. The din from an all-night club across the street made it impossible for us to sleep at the Firenze, so we decamped to the quieter Vidovic Hotel on the road leading out of Banja Luka into the Vrbas Gorge. But Adnan kept in touch with Dragana, a Serb who had nothing against the Ferhadija Mosque being rebuilt and wanted to visit Sarajevo, a city of her dreams. She was married with a young child, but had taken a fancy to Adnan. On one of his visits to Banja Luka, when we were not there, she had taken him up a hill to a monument raised after the Second World War, and Adnan wanted to show us.

The narrow road curved up through dense woods, occasionally clearing to offer views over the city, and we drove past joggers and courting couples.

At the top, the monument reared, carved out of a massive block of blindingly white stone. A gigantic sculpted naked man seemed poised to take flight and soar above the landscape of villages, forests, rivers and fields stretching into the distance, as though to escape from brutal conflicts on the ground.

Adnan pointed out the figures on one side of the monument: Muslims, Catholics and Orthodox, each wearing their folkloric dress and standing tightly shoulder to shoulder, joined in the fight against the Nazis. The victors of this war had wanted to represent the community in all its variety. The monument celebrated these people from different traditions with pride, as a fact of history.

Weeds were beginning to cover the now neglected monument, the stone crumbling. Bits of noses and fingers lay on the ground. Large slabs of stone threatened to fall away. Even this piece of history was disappearing. The sculptor had carved the violence and suffering he witnessed in that preceding war: feet grinding faces, guns ramming into bodies, women and children cowering.

Below the monument lay the Vrbas, emerging from its gorge and winding through Banja Luka and flowing on towards Croatia. Wooded hills stretched on either side for miles, with farms and villages clustered on the slopes.

Back at the Vidovic Hotel the view from the toilet in my room looked on to the hill where the monument perched. It glistened in the morning and evening sun: a mysterious lump of snowy white.

I go on now to describe our journeys in Europe to raise support for rebuilding the Ferhadija Mosque and establishing a civic forum in Banja Luka.

END OF DUST BOOK TWO PART TWO: TRAVELS WITH BISHOPS

