

IWPR Institute for War and Peace Reporting

REGIONAL REPORT

The Serbian Orthodox Church refuses to come to terms with Serb war crimes.

By Branko Bjelajac - International Justice - ICTY, TRI Issue 245, 29 Apr 01

Serbia: Church in Denial Over War Crimes

The Serbian Orthodox Church has yet to issue a public condemnation of war crimes perpetrated by Serbs, more than a decade after the outbreak of the Yugoslav conflict.

Clergy have focused their attentions instead on crimes committed against their own nation in the region. The Church's Pravoslavlje Press (Orthodox Press) continues to churn out publications, which perpetuate the myth that the Serbs fought a defensive and just war. Some churchmen express a different view, but this is very rare.

Mirko Djordjevic, a renowned publicist and expert on the Orthodox religion, is very critical of the Church's reluctance to address the issue of Serbian war guilt.

"The Christian stance is clear. A crime is a crime, and it must be prosecuted. Even the intention to commit a crime is unacceptable, let alone its commission," said Djordjevic.

"Our Church has been inconsistent in this matter, blinded by nationalist feelings. Thus it takes the view we all sinned equally, that the Serbian side suffered more.

"The question of whether we did harm to someone is being completely neglected. When Vukovar and many other similar things in Bosnia were discussed, the Church kept quiet. It spoke up to condemn the crimes of others, but is trying to cover up crimes committed by 'our side'."

Milorad Tomovic, author of *The Serbian Church at War*, also takes a dim view of the Church's role and attitude. The front cover of his book shows a photo of a bishop holding a machine-gun, taken somewhere in Bosnia-Herzegovina in the early days of the war. "I was scandalised by what I found in the Church literature and press," he said.

Tomovic believes the time has come for the Church to repent. "I'd like to see Patriarch Pavle (the head of the Orthodox Church), accompanied by a crowd of Serb people and oxen, candles in hand, head 200 km to Srebrenica on foot, in an effort to beg for forgiveness for everything the Serbian people did to others in this war," he said. "That is what Christ would have done, it is a Christian thing to do. Then let others consider what was done to us."

There have been few expressions of contrition by churchmen. One of the few exceptions came from clerics in Kosovo who spoke out against crimes committed against the Albanian community in August 1998.

"Our brotherhood expresses deep regret over everything that has happened and deeply sympathizes with all the innocent victims...regardless of what people they

belong to," said a statement of the Visoki Decani Monastery Brotherhood reluctantly published by the Pravoslavlje Press.

"No one has the right to build his own happiness and survival on the misfortune of others, regardless of the aim at issue."

Given its refusal to countenance Serb war guilt, it is not surprising that the Church is highly critical of the international tribunal. Djordjevic argues that clerics have the same attitude to The Hague as former president Slobodan Milosevic and the present Yugoslav leader, Vojislav Kostunica: that the entire Serbian people are being put on trial before a kangaroo court.

"This is all upside-down," said Djordjevic. "The tribunal's purpose is to free the Serbian people of responsibility. Those who committed crimes should be tried."

According to Tomovic, the Orthodox Church provided one of the pillars of "a well-worked out" ideology employed by Milosevic to justify the war effort in the 1990s.

"It was not the least bit easy to persuade an ordinary, average man to leave his peaceful family life for the battlefield," said Tomovic. "Or to make people believe that the levelling of Vukovar or the 1,000-day siege of Sarajevo was a God-pleasing deed."

After splitting with Milosevic over the Dayton peace accord, the Church sought an alternative patron, and they found one in the form of Kostunica. An openly religious man, he was ideal. In return for its support, he has allowed the Church to extend its influence in Serbian society.

A decree has been passed introducing religious teaching to schools in Serbia against the wishes of universities, intellectuals and many non-governmental organizations. Clerics have been given space in the media, special privileges and their offensive attitudes towards all "non-Orthodox" religious communities and movements continue to be tolerated.

Branko Bjelajac is the Belgrade correspondent of Keston News Service.

IZVESTAJ IZ REGIONA

Srpska pravoslavna crkva odbija da se suoci sa ratnim zlocinima.

By Branko Bjelajac - International Justice - ICTY (Bos-Hrv-Srp)
TRI Issue 245, 29 Apr 01

Srbija: Crkva porice ratne zlocine

Srpska pravoslavna crkva jos uvek, ni deset godina nakon izbijanja jugoslovenskog sukoba, nije javno osudila ratne zlocine koje su pocinili Srbi.

Svestenstvo se, umesto toga, usredsredilo na zlocine koji su u regionu pocinjeni nad njegovim vlastitim narodom. Informativna sluzba crkve, Pravoslavlje pres, nastavlja da propagira sve ono sto podrzava mit po kojem su Srbi vodili odbrambeni i pravedan rat. Jedan broj sveštenika izrazava i suprotno misljenje, medjutim oni su retka pojava.

Mirko Djordjevic, poznati publicista i strucnjak za pravoslavlje, veoma se kriticki odnosi prema odbijanju crkve da progovori o srpskoj ratnoj krivici.

"Hriscanski stav je jasan. Zlocin je zlocin i mora se procesuirati. Cak ni namera zlocina se ne moze prihvatiti, a kamoli njegovo cinjenje.", kaze Djordjevic.

"Nasa crkva je tu bila nedosledna, i zaslepljena nacionalisticki pa zastupa stav da su svi jednako zgresili, zatim da je srpska strana vise propatila, a sasvim se zanemaruje da li smo mi nekome neko zlo ucinili".

"Kada se govorilo o Vukovaru i o mnogim slucajevima u Bosni crkva je ocutala. Javila se da osudi zlocine drugih, ali nekako pokusava da prikrije zlocine takozvane 'nase strane'."

Milorad Tomovic, autor knjige "Srpska crkva u ratu", ulogu i pristup crkve takodje vidi u negativnom svetlu. Na koricama njegove knjige nalazi se fotografija sveštenika koji u rukama drzi mitraljez, snimljena negde u Bosni i Hercegovini prvih dana rata. "Bio sam zgrozen sta sam pronasao u crkvenoj literaturi i stampi," kaze autor.

Tomovic veruje da je doslo vreme da se i crkva pokaje. "Voleo bih da vidim patrijarha Pavla da krene pjesice ka Srebrenici, pored cetiri bijela vola upregnuta u zapregu. Znate, on voli da hoda. I da pored njega vidim masu srpskog naroda, sa svijecama u rukama, koja ga prati u tom nastojanju - da u Srebrenici izmoli oprostaj za sve ono sto je srpski narod pocinio drugima u ovom ratu. Tako bi Hristos ucinio, to je hriscanski. A drugi neka onda misle sta ce prema nama uraditi."

Svega nekoliko puta su svestenici izrazili i kajanje. Takav izuzetak predstavljaju svestenici sa Kosova, koji su avgusta 1998. osudili zlocine pocinjene nad albanskom zajednicom.

"Nase bratstvo izrazava veliko zaljenje zbog svega onog sto se desilo i duboko saoseca sa svim nevinim zrtvama. Iskreno zalimo i zbog ostecenja i razaranja dzamija i starih 'kula', hrabro stajemo na stranu svih nevino postradalih, gladnih, proteranih bez obzira kojem narodu oni pripadali," kaze se u izjavi Bratstva manastira Visoki Decani, koju je preko volje prenelo Pravoslavlje pres.

"Niko nema pravo da u ime bilo kog cilja svoju sreću i opstanak gradi na nesreći drugoga."

Imajući u vidu njeno odbijanje da se suocí sa srpskom ratnom krivicom, ne čudi to što se crkva vrlo kritički odnosi prema Haskom tribunalu. Djordjević tvrdi da svećenici prema Hagu imaju isti stav kao bivši predsjednik Slobodan Milošević i sadašnji predsjednik Vojislav Kostunica: stav po kome je čitav srpski narod izveden pred preki sud.

"Sve je to naopako", kaže Djordjević. "Smisao Tribunala je u tome da srpski narod bude oslobođen krivice. A onima koji su počinili zločine treba da bude suđeno."

Prema Tomoviću, Srpska pravoslavna crkva poslužila je kao jedan od stubova "precizno razrađene" ideologije za kojom je Milošević posegnuo kako bi opravdao ratne napore tokom devedesetih.

"Nije bilo nimalo lako navesti jednog običnog, prosečnog čoveka da iz mirnog porodičnog života ode na ratiste i počne da ubija. I da još poveruje da je spravljanje Vukovara sa zemljom i držanje Sarajeva u opsadi više od hiljadu dana bogougodno delo srpskih pravednika".

Nakon razlaza sa Miloševićem povodom Dejtonskog mirovnog sporazuma, crkva je tragala za novim patronom, da bi ga konačno i nasla u liku Kostunice. Kao otvoreno religiozan čovek, on je bio idealan. Kostunica je, pak, zauzvrat dopustio da crkva poveća svoj uticaj u srpskom društvu.

Usvojena je i uredba kojom je u škole u Srbiji - protiv volje univerziteta, intelektualaca i brojnih nevladinih organizacija - uvedena veronauka. Svećenicima je pruženo više prostora u medijima, date su im posebne privilegije, dok se njihov agresivan pristup prema "nepravoslavnim" verskim zajednicama i pokretima još uvek tolerise.

Branko Bjelajac je beogradski dopisnik novinske agencije Keston.