

Dear Reader

In our special issue (no. 20) of the newsletter in February this year, we included an article by Oliver McTernan that discussed the role of religion and the responsibilities of religious leaders in relation to conflict. We indicated then that we would look forward to exploring these questions further and in this issue we have four articles on this theme: first Tony Kempster addresses the relationship between 'Religion and War'; then Abdulah Fetahovic examines the role of religious communities in the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 'Responsibility – What is it?'; Goran Bozicevic considers 'The Pope's third visit to Croatia' and asks whether his message will be heeded; finally Roberta Bacic gives 'A brief testimony about the Chilean Churches' commitment to human rights during Pinochet's dictatorship' in an article reprinted from the July 2002 issue of The Anglican Peacemaker.

In addition we include an article by Andrew Rigby about return in Kosovo and some further thoughts on the subject by Howard Clark. A brief trailer for our next seminar on Monday 6 October concludes the Newsletter. We hope you enjoy it.

Religion and War

by Dr Tony Kempster, General Secretary of the Anglican Pacifist Fellowship

In this short article, I shall address what some might regard as the single most important question posed by the coupling these two institutions. Will religion trigger an apocalyptic war 'fought for God' or can it really be a survival mechanism for humankind?

Religion is the formal expression of a belief in a supernatural power considered to be divine and have power over human destiny. For the orthodox believer, the vital test of war or any other issue is how it stands up to the scrutiny of the Word of God written down through history in scriptures. But human beings have always tended to create the God that best serves their needs at the time – sometimes a warrior god; at others a god of peace. So the scriptures can be obscure and contradictory. Nevertheless, their essential message, reinforced by reason and contemporary interpretation, is about love and the achievement of peace in society.

Historically, war has only been permissible (in principal at least) within the framework of rigorous criteria set down to ensure 'just war'. Now in the context of modern warfare, which hardly lends itself to moral standards, theological thought is increasingly challenging the concept. This is true for Islam just as much as for other religions, although the misuse of the term 'Jihad' gives Islam a particularly bad press.

But, of course, scripture can be taken selectively and literally to justify other positions. The question posed at the beginning turns on the risk to peace posed by the fundamentalism which fosters militancy. With access to weapons of mass destruction, this

could easily trigger an apocalyptic war fought for their God against a more enlightened God.

A particular problem is that religious belief does not sit easily with the globalisation of Western culture. This is essentially a child of The Enlightenment; its underlying philosophy stresses the importance of reason and critical appraisal of existing ideas and institutions. In this sense it contrasts with the 'unprovability' of religious belief. The decisions of its politicians are geared to maintaining the stability of the international order and especially the economic system within which the prosperous nations can flourish. Limited war might be acceptable but world war is anathema.

The characteristics of capitalist, liberal democracy are powerful and persuasive. So much so that after the collapse of communism, Francis Fukuyama argued that we had reached 'the end of history'. The world would not experience further ideological struggles; culture would settle on the endless solving of technical problems and providing consumer satisfaction. Nevertheless, he speculates that the spiritual condition of the 'last man' in history, unable to find ways of striving for mastery, might lead him to plunge the world back into the chaos and bloodshed of history.

Now, with a smouldering conflict in the Middle East, a potential nuclear confrontation between India and Pakistan, the spread of nuclear weapons and growing Islamic militancy to US hegemony, history appears to be back with more terrors in store.

Islam is often singled out for its militant fundamentalism. But all religions have the flaw of exclusivism which allows militancy to grow. The liberalising force of the Enlightenment has tended to disguise this in Christianity: but modernity itself is a culture born in a particular corner of Western Europe and carries its own prejudices, one of which is a propensity to racism. From the colonial wars against indigenous peoples, through the Pacific War and up to Vietnam and the recent wars against Iraq, racism has been used to explain why the enemy is inferior and gets its just deserts. Today's smart bombs and cruise missiles may even be likened to the magical weapons used by mythical heroes to slay monsters.

As Jon Davies argues in the *Christian warrior of the twentieth century*, the European identity has come about through the formative experience of war and the evocative beliefs of Christianity. Together they have created a Eurochristian psyche that is easily provoked to self righteousness and acts of redemptive violence, one that generally supports the way Western military power is used in the world.

Yet more than this, the irrationality of religious belief (of whatever faith) is dangerous because it can easily encourage an interest group, a nation or even a civilisation to take extreme military risks or commit suicide for fundamentalist beliefs. Apocalyptic

interpretations come easily to religions because they are about beginnings and endings. Beliefs about birth and death that comfort the believer, also appeal to the deep psychological insecurity that surrounds human existence, even to the point that confrontation with evil should be welcomed and death for a religious ideal sought.

Whatever the underlying reason for international tension – overpopulation, environmental degradation or the demand for resources – the conflict is more likely to reach apocalyptic proportions if one of the belligerents is willing to risk all for the sake of a religious belief. So what can be done?

The West in particular should recognise that the world is multicultural and that different cultures place widely different emphases on religious belief. Similarly, that religions vary widely within themselves and are not consistent in their beliefs. To say, for example, that Islamic culture is medieval and should give way to post-Enlightenment thought is a very crude analysis and confrontational. We need a new language for use across cultures and in international dialogue that acknowledges the importance of faith and spirituality as well as Western rationality.

By the same token, religion must not be placed beyond criticism by accusations (for example) of Islamophobia which has become a code for racism. All religions should be encouraged to restrain the fundamentalism that encourages terrorism and conflict, and look for doctrinal roots which are more consistent with the survival of humankind through love and co-operation.

Understanding and controlling the mechanisms whereby a beneficent faith becomes dangerous is an urgent task. Just how does civil society identify, constrain and eliminate the malevolent forces of religion? The key to such discernment is the litmus test of pluralism. Decent mainstream religionists accept what the fundamentalists deny: that pluralism is a virtue not a sin. Indeed, the primates of the world's religions could do much for humankind's survival if they openly said that their particular faith was but one of the many paths to God.

Responsibility – what is it? The role of religious communities in the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina 1992-1995

by Abdulah Fetahovic, a trainer for non-violent communication, conflict resolution and leadership currently studying at Sarajevo University

Eight years after the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina I have not seen any religious community or a church seriously or critically examine its responsibility for the war and everything that happened within it. The tens of thousands of dead people, hundreds of ruined buildings, enormous number of gatherings at which manipulation of faith for the purpose of the war was carried out openly, and the evil use of the religious symbols were not enough to waken the conscience of the religious communities. At many of those gatherings, where the representatives of all the faiths were present, I was an eyewitness to a silent alliance of non-negotiation and non-discussion of the war and war crimes, particularly about the role played by religion, its clergy and its institutions. The religious communities and churches mutually granted amnesty for and to themselves, for public show only. Within them hatred toward others has still been rife.

The manipulative use made of 'our' victims to intensify animosity has served their purpose in adding the fuel to the fire. It is rare to hear of our own accountability and of others who were tortured at our hands too. Even when such discussion has taken place it has been extremely superficial, and has not contributed to supporting the rebuilding and transformation of society.

This conspiracy of silence is one of the pillars supporting our failure to re-examine our responsibility, in the whole of Bosnian society. It could well be asked, "If people of faith and our spiritual representatives are not ready to face the responsibility of the past – all the crimes that have been committed – why should we?" This is a fair and logical question. The issue of our own responsibility has vanished somewhere into space and in this particular case it is the space of religious communities.

Members of those communities should ask themselves, "Where am I in relation to God? What is my duty to God?" Has any religious community expelled any of its members because they committed a crime? Has any religious community expelled any of its members because they preached and supported crimes – destroying religious objects, massacre, rape, concentration camps, mass killing, torturing, burning, plunder, extortion or anything else, including blasphemy? What would one have to do to be excluded from a religious community or church? Have any such exclusions taken place? (I have not heard of any, but if anyone knows of such a case, it would ease my heart to hear about it. Please write to: fetah114@yahoo.com)

Since Allah/ God is the Most Merciful and the Most Compassionate, repentance and forgiveness are possible, and this is an important truth for believers. But true repentance must include a willingness to accept punishment for the crime committed. To grant amnesty to a criminal is to risk usurping God's role. From the point of view of faith it is essential that believers should make a wholehearted commitment to accepting responsibility and to atonement.

The Pope's third visit to Croatia: Will his message be heeded?

by Goran Bozicevic, The Centre for Peace Studies, Zagreb

This June, Pope John Paul II visited Croatia for the third time in a less than decade. I feel it would not be correct to refer to him simply by his personal name, Karol Wojtyla, when these days he is most often called 'the Holy Father'. Croats were so excited about the Pope's visit, one could be forgiven for thinking that they must be in desperate need of a head of family. Yet their choice could be a cause of some surprise, given the doubtful ability of Croatian believers to hear the Pope's messages.

During his five day visit, John Paul II visited five Croatian towns: Rijeka, Dubrovnik, Osijek, Djakovo and Zadar. Rijeka, where he stayed, was seen as the main centre of opposition to the Tudjman/HDZ regime in Croatia in the 90s. It is a town proud of its tolerance, as its Mayor was keen to mention:

“Welcome to Rijeka, a city boasting a long and tumultuous past; a city bordering the Rječina River and the Adriatic Sea; a city whose residents take pride in their openness, tolerance and hospitality which, I hope, you will experience for yourself. In Rijeka, Your Holiness, we consider the coexistence of different convictions and worldviews to be an asset. In this city, the ecumenism that you promote so tirelessly is nurtured with great care. With great happiness and respect we will heed your messages on this occasion.”

The Pope's first words, soon after landing at Rijeka's Airport on the island of Krk, gave a clear and bold foretaste of his message to the Croatian authorities, Church and people:

“For almost thirteen years Croatia has trodden the path of liberty and democracy. As it looks to the future with confidence and hope, it now needs to consolidate, through the responsible and generous contributions of all its citizens, a social stability that will further promote steady employment, social security, an education system open to all young people and freedom from all forms of poverty and inequality, in a climate of cordial relations with neighbouring countries.” (My underlining.)

When The Holy Father speaks about Croatia's 'cordial relations with neighbouring countries', it makes sense, sounds right and is unequivocal. That said, it seems rather surprising how far it is from Pope's mouth to Croatian ear!

During the Pope's visit several Croatian columnists asked whether people were ready to receive his messages, and even before he came the respected theologian Fra Bono Zvonimir Sagi asked, “Will we be able to hear him?”

Are we ready to think of Bosniaks from BiH as our brothers? Are Croatian Catholic believers (according to statistics, 88% of the population) prepared to encounter Serbs from the other side of the Drina river? We will see. Soon.

Only a few days before the arrival of this 'dearest guest', Croatia cancelled (officially, temporarily 'froze') the existing visa regime for Serbian citizens. In plain English that means that Serbs can come to Croatia just by taking a direct bus (queues are increasing), train or car, without

being hassled in the Croatian Embassy in Belgrade for hours – or sometimes days.¹

Are Croats prepared for 'cordial relations with Serbs'? No we are not, but the problem lies much more in lack of preparation than in any fundamental impossibility. Are Croats ready to start rebuilding relations with Serbs? Luckily, there is always an easy and 'not wrong' answer (but not very useful, either): 'More ready than we were before.' Yes, Croats are ready in their own way.

I have worked to help (re)establish communication with 'the other side' (Serbs) for more than decade. But that didn't prevent me from being hugely surprised to find Serbian 'turbo folk songs' in the jukebox at the home for elderly people where my mum went recently. No more than two steps away from the big Croatian national symbol, everyone can choose songs by the Serb singer called Ceca! She is known as 'Arkan's widow' (Arkan would be at the International Court in The Hague if he hadn't been shot) and is currently imprisoned in Belgrade in the 'state of emergency' wave of arrests. Yes we listen to Ceca, but do we listen to the Pope?

Why am I hesitating to even speak about 'preparation for Serbs'? Because I feel that everything is done to avoid it. But we are lucky – we have our Pope, who tirelessly keeps coming to prepare us for others (and ourselves). Long ago in 1994, speaking to a million pilgrims at the Zagreb Hippodrome, John Paul II said:

“In this region that is tested so seriously today, faith must become once again the force which brings people together and bears fruit, much like the rivers that pass through these countries. Like Sava, a river whose source is in Slovenia, that flows through your beloved country and then on along the Bosnian-Croatian border to Serbia, where it joins the Danube. The Danube is another large river that connects Croatia and Serbia with the other countries of Eastern, Central and Western Europe. The two rivers meet, much in the same way that the peoples that live on their shores are called upon to meet. The two Christian churches, the Eastern and the Western, must lead that effort because, in these parts, they have always lived together. The metaphor of the two rivers makes quite clear the path God wants you to take in this troubled moment of your history. It is the path of unity and peace and no-one should avoid it. It is the path that reason tells you to take, even before faith

¹ It should be mentioned that Serbia cancelled its visa requirements for Croatians in mid May, but these visas ceased to be problem last Summer when they became available on Serbian border.

does. Has your history not created so many ties between your peoples that you are bound in a way that can never be undone? Is it not true that your languages, for all their differences, are so similar that you can communicate and understand each other better than you can with languages spoken in other parts of Europe?"

That was nine years ago. In preparation for his third visit to Croatia, the Pope surprised Croatian

President Stipe Mesic with the question, "Do Croats remember my words?"

In its own way, this question itself made a deeper impact on the Croatian public than anything else. It is still not too late for each of us to come back to the metaphor of the two rivers and ask himself/herself: "Am I hearing its message?"

A brief testimony about the Chilean Churches' commitment to human rights during Pinochet's dictatorship

by Roberta Bacic, War Resisters International (and reprinted with thanks from the July 2002 issue of The Anglican Peacemaker)

Late in 2000 a Chilean friend visited London and my home. By then, Pinochet – who had been arrested for 503 days, with the intention of putting him on trial internationally for his responsibility in human rights violations – was back in Chile. She brought me two valuable presents, besides her warm friendship: a video with the suggestive title: "We cannot keep silent in front of what we have seen, and heard"; and the other, a book called: "Chronicles of a liberating church". Both were published in 2000.

We had seen each other frequently during the dictatorship years, when participating in blitz actions against torture. We denounced the institutionalised use of State terror, which used torture: not only to get information, but mainly to intimidate the population, immobilise society, create fear, break solidarity and social networks, and to disempower the population. A great percentage of the participants were religious people, and the public face of the group was the Jesuit priest José Aldunate, who himself is the narrator of the video.

This book and video, through story telling, chronicles, essays, episodes, interviews, anecdotes, reflections, analysis, photos and video images, give an account of what was being done to oppose dictatorship. It is an account of the commitment of the churches, as expressed through the social body of which they are part. They also show the dilemmas and challenges that this commitment created inside the church institutions.

Late in 1973, soon after the military putsch on the democratically elected socialist government, the 'Comité Pro Paz' emerged. This was set up by prominent religious and secular people and embraced all denominations. They organised swiftly and bravely to give protection to people in danger, to assist survivors and to denounce the atrocities. Very soon they were banned by the Junta, were persecuted and had to dissolve. Lutheran Bishop Helmut Frenz was not allowed back into the country, as he was away at the time. Later on he became Director of Amnesty International.

However, these people and institutions did not give up. Protestant churches set up FASIC (Fondo de Ayuda Social de las Iglesias Cristianas *The Christian Churches Social aid Fund*) and the Catholic Church created the well known Vicaría de la Solidaridad. Eighteen years on, both of these entities have passed on great part of their archives to the Chilean Truth Commission, as a witness of these events.

Without the direct involvement of these institutions, their men and women and the people of Chile, the danger of impunity would be all the greater and the Chilean case would not have reached the high profile it has in the struggle for human rights.

Impressions of Kosovo

by *Andrew Rigby, Professor of Peace Studies and Director of the Centre for Forgiveness and Reconciliation at Coventry University*

As most of the people in the CCTS network will know far better than me, as many as 200,000 Serbs – over half the pre-war population – left Kosovo either during or immediately after the NATO military intervention of March-June 1999. Those remaining tend to live either in enclaves, sometimes with their own vigilantes, or under international military protection. Something like 5,000 have ‘returned’ since the war, mainly to enclaves. In the year 2002, for the first time since the war, the number of returning Serbs (around 2,500) exceeded that of those leaving.

Decisions by members of ethnic minorities about returning are determined primarily by security concerns and economic prospects. In addition, confidence-building between ethnic communities can be a critical factor. Whatever the context, return will always involve some degree of risk, and in such circumstances support from civil society groups and other actors can play a significant role in facilitating the process.

Howard Clark has initiated a project (for which we are still seeking funding) that is designed to encourage more Kosovars to work on the question of peaceful return, to strengthen them in this work and to stimulate more civil society activity on the issue of return in Kosovo by raising awareness of the range of activities undertaken elsewhere in the region – particularly in certain regions of Croatia. The preliminary stages of the project have been funded by Coventry University and in April 2003 I accompanied Howard on one of his field trips to Kosovo. Howard, of course, is a Kosovo expert – he has published widely on the civilian resistance to Serbian oppression and the dilemmas of peace-building in the country since it came under UN administration. I, on the other hand, am inexperienced when it comes to the Balkans in general and Kosovo in particular. This was my first visit. I accompanied Howard as an outsider as he met up with old contacts and new acquaintances in his search for those who might be willing to participate in the project. And it is as an ‘interested outsider’ that the following observations are made, in the belief that sometimes outsiders can see things in sharper relief than the experts.

Politicisation of the return process

The question of return is a significant one for the international community. The NATO forces did not go to war in order to create a mono-ethnic mini-state in the south-east of Europe. One of the agreed benchmarks for commencement of discussions about final status has been progress on the return of displaced Serbs and other minorities.

As many Serbs in Kosovo participate in elections in Serbia, Kosovo Albanians tend to see them as having allegiance to Belgrade, and dismiss Belgrade’s prioritisation of the issue of Serbian return as reflecting its pretensions to Kosovo and even as serving its goal of engineering some form of partition. Prospective returnees are thus under suspicion as representatives and symbols of Serbia itself.

Kosovars also try to link the return of displaced Serbs to the fate of the 3,400 missing Albanians, arguing that if they are expected to accept the return of Serbs, then the least they can expect in return is more effort to discover the final destiny of those that must now be presumed to have been killed and buried in secret mass graves somewhere in Serbia. They also insist that returnees acknowledge the crimes of the Serbian government of Milosovic and recognise the changed reality on the ground – they are not returning to the old Serb-dominated Kosovo.

So, the return of the displaced is far from being a simple humanitarian question – they are political pawns in a wider game.

Lessons learned about the return process

Most Serbs who have returned ‘spontaneously’ have not managed to return to their own homes but instead have gone to live in ‘enclaves’ with other Serbs. In organising the first collective return of Serbs, UNMIK did little to consult people in adjacent communities. Instead the returnees were more or less dumped in an isolated village in a hostile environment, being offered material support to rebuild houses, and

international military protection. One particularly noteworthy incident last autumn was the stoning of a busload of returnees in Pec/Peja when KFOR escorted them to open bank accounts for them to receive their Serbian state pensions. Again and again we were told the key factor in facilitating the return process should be dialogue and consultation with local communities – and indeed it would now appear that UNMIK is trying to learn the lessons from earlier mistakes and has published an impressive handbook for those engaged in the process.

Over-trained, under-employed

As I accompanied Howard on his rounds of interviews with civil society activists and NGO workers I was struck by how many different trainings (in capacity building, conflict resolution, democracy ...) so many of these people had been on. What I could not understand is why they needed more training – they should have been delivering the training themselves! From what I could gather very few trainings were linked with any kind of follow-up project – which seemed a significant failing.

The contrast between the experience of ‘foreign experts’ being paid significant fees for consultancy and training, and the levels of unemployment in Kosovo was particularly apparent. I was told unemployment was between 60% and 85%. Even those in employment were paid minimal wages. We were told that university professors received around 300 Euros a month. Meantime a middle-level manager within the international community could expect a tax-free salary of around \$50,000 plus the usual overseas living allowances. I could not get over the feeling that probably the most important initiatives for reconciliation in Kosovo would not be in the form of capacity-building trainings but in employment and income-generating projects.

Presumably the economic situation will get worse before it gets better, especially with the winding down of the international presence and funding. Whilst we were there we heard ‘internationals’ arranging to rendezvous at their next posting – in Iraq. The future would appear to be bleak for all those people who established their own NGO in order to benefit from the international funds that were made available to Kosovo as the UN took over responsibility for administration. Those days are in the past.

Reconciliation – don’t push too hard

Again and again informants would comment on the manner in which all the different communities in the region were trapped in the past, ‘pickled in their own history’ as one contact phrased it.

So painful are some of the memories that there can be considerable resentment against those potential donors who make funding conditional on there being some inter-communal dimension – there was a widespread feeling amongst those that were committed to reconciliation that they should not be pushed too hard or too early, they needed time to work at their own pace in their own way.

One important method pursued by the chair of the Kosovo Women’s Network, Igballe Rogova, was by commencing every encounter with Serbian women by sharing their stories. According to Igballe, by listening to the other’s story you are acknowledging them and preparing for a relationship – “We should not forget the past, but we should talk about the past as a way towards the future.”

One positive indication of progress along the pathway of reconciliation was the affirmation from all the civil society actors interviewed that any study trips that Howard might organise to enable Kosovars to witness the work of human rights activists in Croatia should be composed of members of all the different communities – no need to keep them separate. For what seems like years I have been listening to Howard talk about the importance of Kosovo Albanians beginning to distinguish between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ Serbs. Here was evidence that such a process was underway.

One of my pet themes is the significant role that can be played by opinion leaders and prophetic individuals and groups that possess the courage and the vision not only to advocate reconciliation but also to practise it in their lives, thereby acting as exemplars to others and helping to legitimise the reconciliation project, opening up the symbolic space within which people can begin to engage in sustained dialogue and commit themselves to creating a new future rather than perpetuating past cycles of vengeance and violence. What was apparent in Kosovo was the abject failure of the ‘president’ of the provisional government, Ibrahim Rugova, to make any public gesture towards encouraging

the return of Serbs or members of other minorities.

The marginalisation of non-violent resistance

Rugova had been the leading symbol of the Albanian civilian resistance movement that had been superseded in 1997 by the armed resistance of the Kosovo Liberation Army. Kosovars are convinced that it was the bloodshed occasioned by the armed resistance and the response it provoked that caused the international community to intervene. We did not find one person amongst the Albanians interviewed who did not applaud the military attack on the Serb forces by NATO. One consequence of this has been the marginalisation of the non-violent civilian resistance in the 'official' and the

collective memory. The memorials one encounters are of the 'martyrs' of the KLA. I discussed this phenomenon with Howard and he came up with a few explanations: a culture which celebrated the gun – and from which non-violence had been a deviation; the political reality that reflected the success of the leading figures of the KLA who claimed the role of liberators of their fellow citizens; and finally – war is an eventful drama, so much of non-violent resistance is 'unremarkable' and 'un-dramatic' – and hence 'un-memorable'.

Those of us who still believe in the efficacy of non-violent resistance as a means of change and liberation from oppression should ponder on this.

Return in Kosovo

by Howard Clark, author of 'Civil resistance in Kosovo' and other studies, who is currently working with civil society groups in Kosovo to facilitate the return of Serbs who fled the country. Here he makes some additional comments following on from Andrew Rigby's article above.

I have a few additional remarks on the current situation, including taking up some of the points that have been discussed in CCTS meetings.

First, I should comment that the project that Andrew and I were developing resonates very much with the early phase of CCTS and our 'accompaniment' of groups in Croatia, and specifically Osijek. In the decade since, these groups have been through several phases – both in terms of their own development and in terms of the political situation in which they operate – and now have a rich and varied experience, one of the advantages of having had 'their' war early. Organising a study trip of Croatian peace and human rights groups will, I hope, be one form of making this experience accessible to Kosovars who want to work on the issue of return.

I would go further than Andrew in his criticisms of Ibrahim Rugova. He was never the 'Albanian Gandhi', and now he is just another shabby politician. He is not the person to confront either the ethnic hostility that exists in Kosovo nor the organised crime and corruption that have taken hold in the post-war period, and still less after the murder two years ago of his closest advisor. However there has been progress at the level of political leadership in recent months. As the ground is prepared for the opening of high-level talks between Belgrade and Prishtina, the leaders of the three main Kosovo Albanian political parties issued a joint appeal to Kosovo Serbs to return. UNMIK has greeted this statement as a significant breakthrough, and let's hope that they are right. On the other hand, there should be no illusions: Kosovo Albanian leaders know that any hope of attaining independence depends upon them being 'on message' in support of UNMIK's rhetoric of multi-ethnic democracy.

Andrew refers to the Serb 'enclaves', a term to which some Serbs have objected in workshops facilitated by CCTS members, preferring Serb 'communities' instead. Personally I think the term 'enclave' seems more precise, indicating the exceptional nature of these areas. 'Communities' on the other hand tends to be normalising, ratifying the process through which they have been created and legitimising them as permanent features of Kosovo in advance of any negotiations.

There has been some discussion in CCTS about the potential for bridge-building of ethnic minorities such as Bosniaks and Turks who are trapped between the Albanians and Serbs. I have been cautious about placing much hope here. These minorities are in a precarious position, many of their members see no future in Kosovo and are looking for opportunities. This visit, however, gave me more grounds for optimism as a growing number of Bosnians and Turks seem to be sceptical about what future they have outside Kosovo and would now argue that working for a multi-ethnic democracy in Kosovo is their best communal survival strategy.

The international operation has paid much lip-service to civil society but hitherto has generally failed to engage local Albanian bodies in supporting return with more than words. The call by political leaders for Serbs to return might accelerate attitude change in the majority population, but the obstacles are substantial. It is more than the emotions generated by Serbian war crimes. The indeterminate status of Kosovo gives rise to suspicion about Serbian motives for return, and there are complaints that international bodies make money available to support returnees when the real need is to invest in the revival of the economy as a whole.

Also, it should be recognised that international bureaucrats are often pretty clueless about how to involve local groups. Foreign money has spawned a huge number of 'new' NGOs – the numbers are now into four figures in a population of 2 million – most looking to be paid to carry out projects (and I would say some just go through the motions of carrying out a project without actually trying to surmount the obstacles that exist). Such NGOs are much more malleable than authentic self-motivated bodies that are often led by activists with experience in the pre-war nonviolent struggle.

However, when an international body does turn to an authentic civil society body, there are other problems. The tendency is to bring them in late into the process without inviting any input into the overall strategy being pursued. The Prishtina-based youth group KIDS (Kosova Initiative for a Democratic Society, formerly the Nansen group) was asked to help in facilitating the return of some Roma living elsewhere in Kosovo to their original homes – but this request came less than a month before the date set for the return and after there had already been threats of violence against the returnees. KIDS did what they could, the return went ahead, and the returnees promptly had to abandon their homes once more.

Finally, I can't resist one anecdote about a breakthrough in trust-building. Igballe Rogova is one of the great characters of Kosovo civil society, a risk-taker who has flouted innumerable taboos. Immediately after the war, even she could not bring herself to reach out again to Kosovo Serbs, but after a year or so she became curious about the emergence of Serbian women's groups in Kosovo, and by now working with them is one of her passions. Visiting one village, she felt hostility from the husband of one of the women activists. "I decided to do something about this. So I went to visit him when his wife was out, and I thought that as he liked to drink and so do I, I'd take a bottle". And by the time his wife returned home, let me put it like this: the husband had become an enthusiastic supporter of her new inter-ethnic feminist activity.

Next CCTS seminar

The next CCTS seminar will be held in Monday 6 October at Friends House, Euston Road, London. The topic is 'The ethics of post-war intervention: dilemmas of conflict transformation practice'. We have not commissioned a paper for this seminar. Instead we will begin with a series of brief contributions from a panel of practitioners from a variety of backgrounds. The rest of the day will be the usual mix of plenary and group discussions. Full details will be publicised nearer the event.

CCTS: Participating Organisations

Conciliation Resources, London

Quaker Peace & Social Witness, London

Responding to Conflict, Birmingham

War Resisters International, London

Centre for Study of Forgiveness & Reconciliation, Coventry

St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace, London

International Alert, London

Charter19, London

Saferworld, London

International Fellowship of Reconciliation, Alkmaar

Richardson Institute for Peace Research, Lancaster

Conflict Analysis and Development Unit, London

Moldovan Initiative Committee of Management, Belfast

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