
. . . The phenomenon of the Yugoslav wars of 1991-95 was the signature event by and against which all other cases of "ethnic conflict" were defined and measured: Rwanda was worse; South Africa, Northern Ireland, and, for a time, the Middle East were better. . . Thus, Yugoslavia in the early 1990s was an exaggeration of the rest of us—a multiethnic and religiously pluralistic society that relied on the development of a civic culture to produce a level of social cohesiveness supple enough to accommodate such diversity by layering a national civic identity over the mosaic of multiple, layered, and intersecting local identities. It was a relatively open (more closed politically and more open culturally), innovative, and modernizing socialist society where the number of people becoming educated, the level of education, and the overall level of prosperity were steadily increasing, and as a consequence of these positive trends some forms of social stratification were decreasing or at least weakening.

Vjekoslav Perica brilliantly recounts the role of religious narratives, institutions, organizations, and, most importantly, church or religious authorities both in constituting the three dominant identities of Yugoslavs, and, in turn, in appropriating those narratives and identities for the destruction of the Yugoslav state and the possibility of civic and civil life in it. The meaning of the "ethnic" in "ethnic conflict," with the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s often regarded as the quintessential case, is, in my view, all too often used uncritically . . . Americans (and the Americas in general) tend to think of their own conflicts over identity in terms of "race relations," or as occurring between "racial minorities" and a "racial" (often unstated) majority, rather than ethnic conflict; religion is the relevant marker in Northern Ireland and the Middle East; old tribal affiliations in Rwanda . . . What Perica shows, convincingly, is that it is not the category of identity that matters but rather the meaning we ascribe to identities, ...md that meaning is socially produced through various kinds of narratives. . . . Though no doubt many people now and in the future who are or were Yugoslavs of one kind or another searching for an understanding of themselves (and their parents) friends, neighbors) and loved ones) and their societies in light of the tragic events of the 1990s will benefit tremendously from Perica's careful and detailed analysis, it is a mistake to regard the political and social forces that destroyed former Yugoslavia as distinctive and instructive only to the people who live there now, or even only to "multiethnic post-communist" societies. Political communities are not constituted by territorial space but by people whose loyalties (and thus compliance with or deviance from political mandates) are rooted in the way their identities are structured in relation to authority. It is our beliefs about authority that mobilize us to act politically—to make territorial claims, follow the commands of institutional or collective actors, and enact violence to achieve political objectives. Yet identities are intensely emotional, and so, therefore, is our attachment to authority. By revealing, in great detail and insightful analysis, the role of religious leaders and how they marshaled religious authority in the production of emotionally charged and socially destructive forms of nationalism, Perica provides
insights into the forces that create and destroy loyalties, tolerance, peace, and civility in all societies. The relationship between religious and political authority is both under-theorized and under-researched, perhaps because we have taken too seriously our own political narratives about modernity and how civic identities (and as Perica aptly points out, civic myths) are supposed to have displaced other kinds of authority-linked identities in the (presumed) evolution from kinship to contractarian societies. But the ability of civic myths to sustain civility in societies in the throes of political and economic instability wears thin, and people in such societies everywhere and anywhere are particularly vulnerable to the appeal of religious and cultural authority, particularly in times of social upheaval and uncertainty. Under such circumstances an alignment of political and religious authority can become a lightening rod for the detonation of explosive collective emotions and the behavior they enable.

Perica's remarkably balanced account illustrates how socially and politically destructive the volatile interplay between fundamentalism and the magnification of unresolved or unreconciled narratives of victimization (however derived from lived and historicized experiences though they may be) can be. And although many in Europe and the U.S. at the moment seem fixated on the appropriation of Islam by fundamentalist ideologues, Perica's research shows how moderate those tendencies were in the Muslim communities in former Yugoslavia in contrast to their Catholic Croat and Orthodox Serb former fellow citizens. Fundamentalism is the enemy of all that makes democracies functional and civility possible, whether in secular, religious, nationalist, patriotic, or ethnic clothing. Perica's contribution to our understanding of this phenomenon is Immense.


Although most treatments of Yugoslavia's collapse take for granted that religion was an important factor in that event, relatively little has been written in English on the subject. This book helps remedy that situation. Balkan Idols describes the politics of organized religion in Yugoslavia, focusing primarily on the Serbian Orthodox, Croatian Catholic, and Bosnian Muslim churches. Vjekoslav Perica, who describes himself as a historian of nationalism but who also has extensive experience as a journalist writing on religious affairs in the former Yugoslavia, is careful to note that he did not examine the "spiritual and cultural" (ix) aspects of the religions of Yugoslavia. His book successfully analyzes the churches, their activities as institutions, and their ideologies, but not the churches' influence within their respective societies. Generally, Perica argues that the Orthodox, Catholic, and Muslim churches played a critical role in the development of separatist nationalisms in Yugoslavia.

Balkan Idols is organized chronologically, starting with a broad background chapter detailing the relationship between the churches and the Yugoslav states from the 1930s to the 1960s. Perica then narrows his focus, examining the position of the Orthodox Church in communist Yugoslavia. Here Perica describes a church that survived under communism, but not without suffering some losses to its prestige, including the birth of a Macedonian church, a schism with its American branch, and the secularization of Njegoš, arguably the most important cultural figure in Serbian and Montenegrin history. In comparison with the Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church showed a greater tendency toward "erosion of religious affiliation" (50). Overall, the Serbian Orthodox Church emerges from Perica's narrative as a church on the defensive. Thus it is odd to read that the church "would successfully appropriate and virtually monopolize ethnic nationalist causes" (55)—along with the Catholic Church among Croats—from the 1960s. That comment overstates the influence of the Orthodox Church among Serbs and in the Serbian national movement.
The Catholic Church, however, played a much more vigorous role in the consolidation of a Croatian nationalist movement in the 1970s and 1980s, a time when the Croatian intelligentsia had been silenced by the state. The church "reintroduced the cult of the Virgin Mary as the major religious and national symbol of Catholic Croatia" (59), laid the groundwork for the celebration of Cardinal Stepinac as a national hero, and organized the Great Novena, a celebration of Catholicism in Croatia that would attract hundreds of thousands of pilgrims and participants by its completion in 1984. In the cultural and intellectual vacuum of post-spring Croatia, the Catholic Church could and did redefine Croatian identity and Croatian history.

Informative chapters on the Medjugorje phenomenon, Islam in Bosnia, and "civil religion" in Josip Broz Tito's Yugoslavia fill out the author's analysis of the churches in Yugoslavia before the great collapse of the 1990s. The second half of the book examines the role of religion in that collapse and the wars that accompanied it. Throughout this comprehensive study, Perica's analysis is institutional and political—he focuses on the churches' influence on the growth and nature of die nationalist movements that destroyed Yugoslavia.

Perica conducted primary and secondary research using a variety of sources, most important the reports of state and local commissions on religious affairs since late 1960s. He writes assertively, and the book includes not only well-founded analysis but also telling anecdotes and vital historical and demographic details. "Balkan Idols" will be read with satisfaction by academics, their students, and possibly a wider public.

3. The American Historical Review, Vol. 108; no. 5 December 2003; Reviewer, Carol S. Lilly, University of Nebraska Kearney pp. 1556-7.

. . . Vjekoslav Perica's monograph holds the activist clergy of the Orthodox, Catholic, and Islamic faiths responsible for both inspiring and legitimating much of the nationalist violence that devastated the Balkan peninsula at the end of the twentieth century. While admitting to the beneficial activities of these churches in trying to create interfaith dialogue and provide humanitarian aid, Perica argues that the results of those efforts were often dubious and cannot compensate for the damage caused by the three religious hierarchies in establishing themselves as "hallmarks of nationhood" (p. 165). . . Perica provides a vast array of evidence concerning the activities of the three religions in mobilizing nationalist sentiments during the 1980s. He describes how Catholic and Orthodox clergy in particular used religious symbols, ceremonies, holy sites, and com-memora-tions to connect the fate of their church to that of the nation and to create a sense of national and religious exclusivity. For example, he delineates the steps taken to reestablish the Serbian Orthodox Church as the key feature of Serbian nationalism, including the construction of the Church of St. Sava, the national tour of the holy relics of Prince Lazar, and (the innumerable pilgrimages, jubilees, and festivals organized for the 600th anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo. Similarly, in dealing with the Croatian Cath-olic Church, he provides a fascinating description of the political and national significance of the Marian apparitions of Medjugorje and of the Catholic Church's decision to beatify the controversial Archishop Alojzij Stepinac. Finally, Perica explains the link between the Islamic faith and national identity of Bosnian Muslims, clarifying distinctions between the pro-Yugoslav Islamic community and radical anticomunist fundamentalists. . . The section from the outbreak and during the wars of the 1990s is less complete but does offer several intriguing theses, including the Serbian Orthodox Church's designation of the World War II Ustasha concentration camp at Jasenovac as a Serbian holy site and the role of the Catholic Church in securing the victory of the right-wing Croatian Democratic Community in the 1990 and 1997 elections. Finally, Perica comments on the three established religions since the wars' end, anticipating that, in their ongoing attempt to increase political and social influence, each will continue to promote nationalist exclusivity and will oppose the reform efforts of liberal and secular regimes.
Perica accessed an impressive array of sources, including Communist Party archives on the Commission for Religious Affairs, interviews, newspapers and periodicals, and secondary works. Perica is strongest in his work on Croatia and then Serbia, while his sections on Islam and Bosnia are less detailed. Nonetheless, Perica is to be commended for his balanced portrayal of the respective roles of the three religions. While the Islamic faith was initially less inclined toward nationalist exclusivity, none of the three emerges unscathed. Indeed, the strength of the book is its overwhelming evidence that Serbian Orthodox, Croatian Catholic, and to a lesser degree, Bosnian Muslim clerics consciously contributed to the processes of nationalist mobilization. In so doing, they facilitated and legitimized expressions of hatred and demands for revenge and must bear some responsibility for the resulting violence.


“Darlings of Their Gods”


The author backs up his assertions with extraordinary professional experience. Before the last cycle of Balkan wars, Perica wrote a column on religious issues for the Split, Croatia-based weekly *Nedjeljna Dalmacija*. He also served on a local government committee on church-state relations. . . . Perica is able to offer fresh insight, not so much by challenging the existing perspectives as by offering an additional angle, which, he feels, has so far remained in shadow. . . . His ambition is to produce what he terms a “political history of religion in the modern Yugoslav states,” stressing the role of religion in the rise and fall of the many regimes and states that have occupied the stage throughout the 20th century, while also “presenting a history of several religious institutions,” mainly the three major ones: the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church, and the Islamic community.

In other words, Perica's point of departure is located in looking at churches as institutions, corporate entities with their own histories, political weight, power, and interests, rather than looking at the religion as a phenomenon per se and at its ability, for instance, to "inspire" someone to adopt extreme political views. By saying so, one essentially speaks of several distinct things, or levels of things, all rather complicated and alternately reinforcing or discouraging one another at different times.

Another, more sociological angle aims to determine what happened at the “low level” of identity politics, looking at phenomena such as the deconstruction of old and the reconfiguration of new loyalties, in this case mainly through desecularization, reinvention of forgotten piety, the influence of nationalist mythologies (formulated as quasi-religions) in building self-identity, and the corresponding construction of the “enemy” image.

The action on the low level has the function of gathering popular support for the high level. It is generally assumed that on this stage, the churches played (and continue to play) their part—often promoting ideas that have little to do with “religion,” such as folklore, myths, and what has been described as the worshipping of “tribal gods” (a term used by Canadian scholar Lenard Cohen).

Leaving the structural analysis of nationalist myths or any such vantage point completely out,
Perica moves in essentially two directions. The first is in historical narrative--going back to the so-called "concordat crisis" of the mid-1930s, the quarrel between the Orthodox and Catholic churches following the royal Yugoslavia's decision to set up diplomatic ties with the Vatican--of the churches' mutual relations, as well as their relations with the states that existed in the given time frame.

The second direction is an analysis of Titoism as a "civil religion" (a term espoused in the 1960s and further developed by American sociologist Robert N. Bellah), a competitive creed in its own right that managed to pull a number of souls away from the churches while it lasted, especially in the generation commonly called "baby boomers" (in North America) or "sixty-eighthers" (in Europe).

The strategy renders a powerful historical synthesis that ultimately endeavors to attack what probably amounts to the last surviving myth about the former Yugoslavia: the construct of Tito as a ruthless dictator who held Yugoslav ethnic groups together under his "iron fist," thus holding down the lid of simmering ethnic hatred--in contrast to the fact that the vast majority of people actually supported his regime with the utmost sincerity, for rather complex reasons, some of which Perica's narrative neatly sorts out.

The passages readers will probably find particularly interesting bring to light some internal, previously unpublished communist documents that show the squeamishly precarious political treatment of churches (as opposed to public discourse, which was usually based on vulgar brutality and permanent threatening). Others recall the syncretic religious qualities of the Tito cult itself, especially in the displays of public grief after his death in 1980. Examples are sometimes outright exotic, such as adoration of Tito by Sufi dervishes from Kosovo, who publicly prayed for him and whose leader Perica himself interviewed in the late 1980s.

The evasive idiosyncrasies of Yugoslavia's "funky communism," which for decades charmed so many and so different people--from the "Frankfurt School" philosophers who gathered every summer on the Dalmatian island of Korcula to discuss "critical Marxism" over the exquisite local wine to various Third World leaders who saw in it a model of post-colonial emancipation for themselves (Perica covers this angle by quoting the autobiography of Egypt's former leader, the late Anwar Sadat)--are still too complicated to be explained away. But Perica at least puts this moment back on the agenda where it belongs. . . . Perica does not forget to tell his American reader how "paranoid" Tito was about the possibility of the Yugoslav peoples starting to kill each other again. . . . Bojan Korenic has written for publications throughout the former Yugoslavia and a number of other countries. He is currently pursuing graduate studies in sociology, at the University of Alberta, Canada.


Review Essay Images of Yugoslavia: Past and Present

. . . By contrast, in Vjekoslav Perica's Balkan Idols, Yugoslavism is revealed as the ‘Yugoslav civil religion of brotherhood and unity’ (p. 89). In a single chapter devoted to this issue, Perica demonstrates the manifestations of the Yugoslav regime's legitimacy more plausibly than Malešević’s and Djokic’s volumes combined. Similar to Malešević’s analysis of operative ideologies, Perica puts an emphasis on the affective element of nationalism. However, in this 'first political history of religion' in Yugoslavia (p. ix), nationalism and religion appear as two sides of the same coin. Such a 'civil religion' reflects the similarity between and fusion of religious and secular national symbols, rituals and myths in a 'public patriotic worship' (p. 5) of the nation. This merging of national and religious identity defines the objective of Perica's monograph: rather than attempting to explain the dissolution of Yugoslavia by factors related to religion, the aim is to trace the influence of religious institutions on nation-formation and political legitimacy in Yugoslavia. In
a chronological account of the principal developments in Yugoslavia’s churches, Perica documents their contribution to the construction of their respective ethnic nations and, consequently, to the destruction of interethnic harmony. In Perica’s perspective, the congruence of ethnic, national and religious affiliations among Yugoslavia’s constituent nations was the main factor of the country’s instability. While this is not to suggest the existence of civilizational fault lines running across former Yugoslavia, religion is a crucial obstacle to successful state-building in multiethnic and multiconfessional states. More than instruments of political propaganda, the individual churches emerge as interest groups with their own agendas and objectives. Their aim is to attain state-wide ‘religious monopoly’ (p. 213), that is to become established as national churches in ethnically based national states. The religious hierarchy and the secular government legitimize each other, and their joint rule is claimed to ensure the survival of the ethnic nation. Reflecting the initial premise of his work, Perica’s term for this phenomenon, ethnoclericalism, thus becomes an ideology that integrates both secular political and ecclesiastical elements. And while ethnoclericalism was strongest in the autocephalous Serbian Orthodox Church, it became a central, reactive feature of Croatian Catholicism and Bosnian Islam as well. Through continual reinterpretation of history, the representatives of the church hierarchies ethnicized the religious and public discourse. Perica uses extensive evidence to trace the instruments of ecclesiastical mythmaking. Sermons, speeches, publications as well as the symbolism of shrines, saints, celebrations and rituals aimed to mold national identities by replacing history with mythical narratives. Perica convincingly details how the churches’ manipulation of popular and official discourse in the exclusive ethnic direction took place throughout the entire history of Yugoslavia, and how, following their power objectives, the representatives of Yugoslavia’s ethnic churches worked to undermine the legitimacy of the common state. Subsequently, it was only when Yugoslavia ceased to exist that the churches emerged as the central elements of state legitimacy. In this respect, Perica’s monograph serves as a complement to Malešević’s analysis. The operative ideology in Malešević’s Serbia and Croatia contained the affective elements adopted from the popular culture in order to attain the elite’s legitimacy. Hence, the political establishment borrowed the traditional religious themes, and the religious institutions were only one of the instruments of disseminating the dominant ideology. By contrast, Perica suggests a much stronger influence of the churches on the new regimes. Church and state are intertwined to such a degree that they are almost indistinguishable: the state, the church and the nation cannot exist as separate entities. However, while the congruence of ethnic, national and religious identity is a crucial element of post-Yugoslav nationalisms, ethnoclericalism sprang from the ethnic religious institutions pursuing their vested interests and did not become the dominant ideology. Governing political elites everywhere are always on guard against other actors impinging on their territory. Even if religion plays a major role in many types of contemporary nationalism, the establishment of legitimacy of modern states remains the domain of their governments. Perica intermittently touches upon the role of external actors in the developments he follows. . . 


The roots of the Yugoslav collapse


Vjekoslav Perica . . . provides documentation of the contribution of Yugoslavia’s religious organizations to the erosion of the communist system. He cites a 1980 police report which claimed that “many clerics, particularly Serb Orthodox and Catholic, were jubilant” at the prospect of Tito’s demise, hoping that it would bring about the collapse of communism in the country. In the years following Tito’s death, frictions flared in relations between Church and state in Croatia and Bosnia, and in 1985, as Perica reports, an influential newspaper columnist warned,

If we let the clergy continue their apology for clerical fascists like [Zagreb Archbishop] Stepinac and processions and marches across Yugoslavia, we must fear the repetition of the horrors of the Second World War...We communists began to believe that the crimes of the Second World War would never be repeated, especially not in Europe at the end of the 20th century. But I am afraid that we have been wrong.

To cope with the challenge they saw coming from the religious sector, the authorities combined a policy of repression of more radical clergy with appeasement of clergy more receptive to cooperation with the regime. Differences among the clergy were reflected even at the highest levels, with, for example, then-Archbishop of Zagreb, Franjo Kuharić, actively promoting the beatification of Stepinac – a cause considered anathema by the regime – and Archbishop Frane Frančić of Split expressing positive sentiments about the Partisan struggle of World War Two and encouraging believers of his archdiocese to adopt a cooperative attitude vis-à-vis the authorities.

Nor was Serbia free of problems in the religious sphere. Perica cites an internal Croatian government document from the early 1980s which reported that Serb Orthodox clergy working in the Republic of Croatia had been stirring up problems “…over land, property, or trivial conflicts between the locals and the authorities in Serb-populated areas, in order to charge discrimination against the Serbian minority and unequal status for the Serbian Orthodox Church in predominantly Catholic Croatia.” For the Orthodox Church, the point of all of this was to place itself at the helm of an ethnic-confessional revival which would both draw more Serbs into the Church and inflate the Church’s authority and social relevance. The Orthodox Church was playing with fire.

Although Serbs would later say that they mobilized in Croatia only in response to Croatian President Tudjman’s policies, in fact, as Perica notes, “the Serbian Church turned militant and anti-Croatian even before Tudjman’s electoral triumph.” The Serbian Church backed Serb nationalist parties in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, and, in Serbia, tied its fortunes to the Milošević regime. The Serbian Orthodox also played the central role in transforming Jasenovac, site of the most fearsome concentration camp run by the Ustaše (Croatian fascists) during World War Two, into a major pilgrimage site and symbol of the Serbian historical experience. What was not noted at the time was that by selected a site associated with genocide, hatred, intolerance, and ethnic strife for such emphasis, rather than a site which might be associated with ecumenism, tolerance, and ethnic and confessional dialogue, the Church was stoking potentially explosive emotions.

As Yugoslavia plummeted toward breakup and strife, the Orthodox clergy, rather than working toward reconciliation, “…held liturgies near long-forgotten [Orthodox] ruins where no religious activity had occurred for decades or, in some cases, for centuries,” in order to document Serbian claims to territories lying within the Republic of Croatia. Not surprisingly, when the war finally broke out, even though it had diverse roots other than religion, it quickly took on religious dimensions: specifically, the rival forces targeted each other’s places of worship so that, by the end of 1995, 1,024 mosques, 182 Catholic churches, and 28 Serbian Orthodox churches and monasteries had been destroyed.

Perica closes his book by noting progress, since the end of the war, in “faith-based conflict management, reconciliation efforts, religious relief, and interfaith understanding,” though even here he finds “ambiguous outcomes,” and by registering a plea for “mutual respect [among peoples], tolerance, and observance of the laws, norms, and standards under which Western democracies operate.”
Vjekoslav Perica's masterfully written and extensively researched book fills an important gap in the historical scholarship on the twentieth century southeastern Europe. By carefully examining and defining the political role and influence of religion, the author argues that none of the main ethnic religions, the Serbian Orthodox, the Roman Catholic "Church of the Croat People," or the Yugoslav Islamic community, ever fully endorsed the idea of multiconfessional and multiethnic Yugoslav state. For Perica Yugoslavia did not implode and disintegrate into a bloody civil war in the early 1990s solely because of the deep seated nationalistic intolerances or because of a clash of civilizations. Powerful ethnoclericalism prevented full legitimization of both the inter-war Yugoslav monarchy and of the post-war socialist Yugoslavia. The politically active clergy fused religious intolerance with nationalistic animosity to create "ethnic churches" in form and nationalistic parties in substance. The clergy departed from their original purpose and became hypernationalistic, antiliberal, and antisecular leaders who lacked the accountability of their secular counterparts. Perica skillfully differentiates between the idols the religious establishments disseminated from the secular ones the socialist regime imposed and suggests that the civil religion of Titoist "brotherhood and unity" was a far better solution for the South Slav complex landscape: "nothing better than Titoism has been seen in this part of the world" (226). Perica correctly concludes that the Myth of the Three Evils of the Twentieth Century, namely Nazism, fascism, and communism, is an imbalanced oversimplification that could not explain the complexities of the Yugoslav case.

This is a very useful, well written and challenging book, highly recommended for everyone studying collapse of Yugoslavia and relations between religion, nationalism and states in former Yugoslavia and its successors. The author offers a wealth of data on size and structure of three largest religious communities present in the former Yugoslavia – Orthodox church, Catholic church and Islamic community – over the whole post-WWII period. . . . The author supports his strong conclusions with an overwhelming wealth of sources, including extracts from interviews he conducted with the leading members of these churches, and archival sources produced during the socialist period. Perica makes the best use of his access to confidential party and state documents which he had while being employed as an analyst in state commission for relations with religious communities in the 1980s in Croatia. The book thus presents both new sources and an original argument, which is indeed (as Dusko Doder said in one of advance praises) ‘shockingly provocative’. Within the existing scholarly literature on both the collapse of Yugoslavia and on religious communities in that region, no other book offers a more critical account on the role that churches had played in igniting intolerance and destroying a spirit of multi-culturalism and tolerance between the Yugoslavs. The author therefore concludes that ‘attacks on them is civic duty and a struggle for civil liberties’, not infringement of human rights or the rights of expression.

If merits of the book are to be specified, one can emphasise four. First, this book is a good analysis of the dynamics between the politics and churches in both the socialist period and in its aftermath. It shows that this relationship was by no means a simple and non-controversial. Secondly, the book documents interesting and telling divisions within all analysed religious institutions – to moderate and radical factions. No simplification, Perica shows, would be useful here too. Thirdly, it is a good source of data and chronology of main events. The author’s access to archival material enabled him to present a detailed analysis of internal structure and political views of the main church figures over a lengthy period. Finally, the book presents a new interpretation of Tito’s ‘secular religion’ of brotherhood and unity. . . . The Yugoslav civil religion of brotherhood and unity was a public worship compatible with the Western liberal idea of religious
tolerance, Perica says, and concludes: 'Unfortunately, to this day, nothing better than Titoism has never been seen in this part of the world'. . . . It is an exciting, well-researched and enormously useful contribution to – by now already very large – body of literature on the roots of the problems which resulted in disintegration of Yugoslavia.


. . . The book makes two major contributions. It provides a detailed reconstruction of the roles of the Serbian Orthodox, Croatian Catholic, and Bosnian Muslim churches in providing a religious base for nationalist thought and movements in the past century, and it uses this evidence in the author's argument that a link exists among religious institutions, symbols, and practices in state-formation and state-destruction. Perica draws two conclusions. Ethnic churches and ethnocracy provided the competing myths that were the driving forces behind the fear and hostility underlying violent intercommunity relations in Yugoslavia. And, although leaders who perpetrated nationalist atrocities have been removed, the ideologies, political organizations, and religious institutions on which they based their power continue to exert influence in domestic and international politics. **Summing Up:** Highly recommended. Upper-division undergraduates and above.

10. **Amazon.com**, 10 March 2003. **Reviewer:** Sonia Lucarelli, Associate Professor, University of Bologna, Italy. ([http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0195148568/qid%3D1048887302](http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0195148568/qid%3D1048887302))

⭐⭐⭐⭐⭐ **The best account on church-state relations in former YU.**

This is a masterfully written and extensively researched book that fills an important gap in the historical scholarship on the twentieth century southeastern Europe. The author carefully examines the political role and influence of religion and argues that none of the main ethnic religions, the Serbian Orthodox, the Roman Catholic “Church of the Croat People,” and Yugoslav Islamic community, ever endorsed the idea of multiconfessional and multiethnic Yugoslav state. Powerful ethnocracy prevented full legitimization of both the inter-war Yugoslav monarchy and of the post-war socialist Yugoslavia. The author correctly argues that politically active clergy fused religious intolerance with nationalistic animosity to create “ethnic churches” in form and nationalist parties in substance. The clergy departed from their original purpose and became hypernationalistic, antiliberal, and antisecular leaders who lacked the accountability of their secular counterparts. I commend it highly.


This is the first political history of the three principal organized religions in postwar Yugoslavia and its successor states: the Croatian Catholic Church, the Serbian Orthodox Church, and the Islamic community. Perica carefully explores the relationships of each to Tito's Yugoslavia, to one another, to the wars, and to the new states. The Serbian and Croatian churches, in particular, have long arrogated the definition of nationhood to themselves. Because ecumenical moments in Yugoslavia were few, empathy for those of another faith was limited, and commitment to an open-armed, united Yugoslavia was weak, the link between religion and nationalism was neither liberal in the communist period nor benevolent during communism's collapse. All too often, the role of the churches -- at times the leadership, at other times the clergy -- has been to enlarge the sense of victimhood and to justify revenge.