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Bosnia the Good

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In Rusmir Mahmutćehajić's narration of the sufferings of Bosnia as a cultural-political entity and regarding his Stolac as a spatio-personal one, one should be wary of being misled into thinking that his spirit is a parochial one. The cosmic significance of both Stolac and Bosnia lie not in the fact that they are where the author was born and raised, but because of the traditional planning and architecture of the city. In his work *Maintaining the Sacred Centre,* he details how Stolac is a city, built and structured in consciousness of the Sacred dimension, in line with Tradition. He shows how the *čaršija* mosque is at the center and hub of the city life. And he explains how the traditions of all the religions of Bosnia find their appropriate spiritual space and dimension in this pluralist and pluriform Islamic town.

'Bosnia the good' is a cultural landscape that has nourished the great religious dispensations of the world, the Catholic, the Orthodox, the Judaic, and the Islamic, which lived side by side, in mutual knowing, for centuries. And yet that is not how Bosnia presents herself, nor is that how Stolac presents herself. Man is born in Bosnia with the anxiety of inter-cultural hatred and warfare, one is born in a broken Bosnia that has not been allowed to live to her own true purpose.

And what shall tell us what her purpose is? To be an umbrella of the different, sometimes divergent cultures, to be the apartment where the faithful of Abraham gather, a caravanserai where the thirsty and hungry wayfarers gather, a supra- or trans-national asylum for the different nations of the surrounding (and for ages quarrelling) Balkans? And it is the same Bosnia, Mahmutćehajić reminds us, that has been subjected to the greed and frenzy of nationalism. The attempted division of Bosnia into Croatian Catholic and Serbian Orthodox segments, in the name of these individual traditions, and on the philosophy that the Bosnian unity in diversity is untenable, is the greatest affront to both Catholicism and Orthodoxy. The grim fate of Bosnia is painted thus –

> Centuries of religious experience, testifying to the transcendent unity and esoteric meaning of pluralism and polyphony, were lost in crude ideological radicalisation: all religions and their organisations became the cannon-fodder of the ethno-national oligarchies (Bosnia the Good, pg. 207)

Ethno-nationalism becomes the substitute of the Sacred. The predominantly relative is considered the absolute, and the destruction of Bosnia is the result, as it always will be. Bosnia will keep being destroyed all over the world unless the Sacred is called the Sacred, and no partners are ascribed to it. Yet this destruction is also an invitation. It is through wayfaring that the home is known, and desired and pined after.

The aetiology of the general problem is provided to us in *Bosnia the Good*. Here we are told:

> The destruction of Bosnia, the manufacture and exploitation of a false opposition between Islam and the Christian West, are merely a part of the general trend towards the destruction of spiritual unity in the world. For, regardless of what religion the participants in this destruction claim to follow, they are similar in their absolute hostility to Tradition.

With the centrality of Tradition follows the honoring of all the sacred paths to God, thus representing the spirit of Bosnia and of Bosnian Islam, unity and diversity being at the very heart of it.

I began with the observation about the destructive and miserable elements of life and how they are windows to both enter and block one's access to the divine, inward dimension. In Mahmutćehajić's body of work, one finds a focus on the centrality of space in this connection. How the destruction of the space spells an existential crisis for man, leading to his disorientation. And how the sacrality and centeredness of the human spirit is thereby disturbed. However, this is both a blessing and a curse, and this disorientation could be the beginning of the journey toward the centre, the spiritual axis, to the Sacred.

Bibliography

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