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Bosnia and Job

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I went to a conference in Bosnia in July and talked with friends in Sarajevo about the social and political situation in the country. During the war, some eighteen years ago, people in Bosnia suffered war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide. Nationalist politicians leading the neighboring countries of Croatia and Serbia were directly responsible for these war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide. Recently, Croatia became a member of the EU. Now Serbia is starting the succession process into the EU.

The Dayton Peace Accords is best described as a straitjacket, written by foreigners charmed by the nationalist arguments of Bosnia's enemies creating a new Bosnian constitution and state structure ex nihilo. Every time a positive and progressive initiative is taken, the straitjacket tightens, resulting in no movement at all or great pain whenever movement is attempted. Because of these political knots that cannot be untied while the Dayton Peace Accords remains in force, Bosnia is unable to take even the first step into the EU. Bosnia must watch Croatia and Serbia, her former enemies, gain this state privilege with its social and economic benefits while Bosnia works as best as it can to recover from the aftermath of an unconscionable war. The war was stopped, but not its unconscionable character.

Bosnia's situation reminds me of the story of Job in the Old Testament, scripture important to Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. Although having suffered much, people in Bosnia are still convinced of their righteousness, closeness to God, and knowledge of justice. Europe, the United States, and now Turkey remind me of Job's interlocutors (Elihu, Zophar, Bildad, and Eliphaz): these countries come for a time and suggest to Bosnians in various rhetorical and artful ways that there must be something wrong here with you. "Surely," Job's interlocutors say to Job, "you somehow are responsible for your suffering." And Bosnians, like Job, answer, we are not. In the end, the Lord blesses Job. And the Lord asks Job to bless his detractors.

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