

Observers have long inculpated religion as a major cause of ethnic conflict in the former Yugoslavia. However, the author of this well-researched and cogent study, Vjekoslav Perica, aims to dispel this “popular misconception that religion,” which he defines as “the different beliefs and styles of worship,” “suffice[s] to cause...serious conflicts” (vii). Rather, Perica blames the three major *religious institutions*, the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Croatian Catholic Church and the Islamic Community, along with their respective leaders, as one of the main catalysts for the acerbic, and ultimately fatal, relations between Moslems, Serbs and Croats of the former Yugoslavia. As implied by the terminology thus far in this review, Perica’s book is partially an indictment of these religious institutions and leaders for thwarting Socialist Yugoslavia’s peaceful shift to a liberal democracy, precipitating the breakup of the country in the early 1990s, and fueling the concomitant wars fought along ethno-national lines.

"Perica finishes his narrative by presenting the ways in which the Islamic Community, the Croatian Catholic Church, and the Serbian Orthodox Church stirred up ethnic nationalism and hatred among their members and helped catapult the country into war."

But Perica’s book is much more than simply a book-length accusation; it is more so a “political history of religion in modern Yugoslav states,” zooming in on religion’s social and political sphere vis-à-vis nationalism (ix). As such, Perica concentrates on the three religious institutions (and their leaders) listed above, their interfaith and church-state relations, and the mobilization of their ethno-religious membership. (For Perica, ethnic, national and religious are intertwined.) The book’s title somewhat belies the extent of its content, thus those interested in the common religious experience, spirituality, and other religious institutions and minorities in the Yugoslav states should look elsewhere. But the book does cover religious myth-making, symbols, celebrations, building construction and so forth.

The book is a combination of narrative and analysis. The chronology begins with the conflict over the 1935 Concordat and the never-forgotten participation of religious institutions in the atrocities of World War Two. Perica’s major contribution to the literature, though, is his in-depth narration of church-state relations in Socialist Yugoslavia and his discussion of “the civil religion of brotherhood and unity” (89). Based on the assumption that religion serves “above all else as the important source of political legitimacy,” Perica argues that the concept of *bratstvo i jedinstvo* (brotherhood and unity), when citizens bought into it, served as a sort of civil religion that legitimized Socialist Yugoslavia and kept ethno-religious animus in check (x). Accordingly, the major religious institutions destabilized the country (as they had royal Yugoslavia) by refusing it legitimacy, the result being ethno-religious and ethno-national conflict. This idea of legitimacy is one of the book’s central themes. Perica finishes his narrative by presenting the ways in which the Islamic Community, the Croatian Catholic Church, and the Serbian Orthodox Church stirred up ethnic nationalism and hatred among their members and helped catapult the country into war: “The three largest religious organizations...were among the principal engineers of the crisis and conflict” (166).

Perica has composed a well-written and well-documented book which fills an important gap in the historiography not only of Yugoslavia but of religion as well. Perica should also be commended for his use of previously inaccessible archives. Some may disagree with his characterization of the religious revival in the late 1980s as superficial—enmeshed more in national identity than spirituality. Also, Perica's analysis and conclusions are sometimes lacking in the overall narration. With the objective to stamp out the "popular misconception" of religion's role in conflict, Perica's book should appeal to a broad public audience and not solely to scholars and students of the Yugoslav states. Religious scholars should also benefit from this nuanced discussion about the place of religious institutions in politics and society. Readers will encounter many editorial and typing errors, transpositions, and misspelled Serbo-Croatian words, but this should detract no one from poring over this valuable study. Perica's study will hopefully stimulate new research into religious institutions among Slovenes, Albanians and the region's religious minorities, as well as the role of religious institutions in conflicts worldwide.

Shay Wood, Utah State University