

THE ISM STUDY TRIP TO THE BALKANS

by Ivica Novakovic

IN MAY, MORE THAN 70 STUDENTS and professors from the ISM participated in a ten-day study trip to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Croatia.

Eighteen years ago, these three countries were still part of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Croatia, along with Bosnia and Herzegovina, gained independence after brutal wars during the 1990s, while Montenegro attained it peacefully in 2006. Here, however, I refer to “the Balkans,” a term with many meanings. Geographically, the Balkan peninsula is the part of Europe bounded by the Mediterranean (and its branches) on the west and south, and the Black Sea to the east; nobody agrees about its northern borders. Some inhabitants of the region, however, prefer to call it “Southeast Europe,” because they think that the term “Balkan” carries negative connotations of cultural inferiority and tribalism, especially in the eyes of their West European neighbors. Others, like the Croatians, do not recognize either of the terms, and describe themselves as part of Central Europe.

In the last several years, however, the work on the history of the term “the Balkans” and the images connected with it have caused a significant shift in the perception of this term. Numerous artists and musical groups from the region are now reclaiming it as a term that stands not for barbarism and old hates but for a rich and complex meeting point of different, and often opposing, cultures, such as West European and Byzantine, Central European and Mediterranean, and of different religions, such as Judaism, Christianity (Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox), and Islam.

We began our study tour in Sarajevo, a place that brings together all the elements of religious and cultural encounters that we wanted to study on our visit; it was also the site of the most intense fighting during the war in 1992–1995. There is

a complex history of the Croatian Catholic Church and Serbian Orthodox Church with the Muslim Bosniak community and a substantial Jewish presence. Even though after the war

the demographic structure of the city radically changed in favor of the Muslim community, the main representatives of each religious community remain, hardly a block away from each other. That makes for an interesting “religious walk,” as one of my friends there called it. Our first visit was to the Serbian Orthodox Cathedral. In the presence of the Metropolitan Nikolai, we were introduced to the architectural and iconographic features of the church, and heard an excellent concert of Eastern Orthodox music.

On Sunday, we visited the National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which has one of the best archeological and ethnographic collections

in the Balkans. The museum was founded in 1885 by the Austrians, and it is therefore a good testament to the way the imperial Austria-Hungary understood its cultural role in Bosnia after the Ottomans left. After that we went to the Croatian Catholic Church of St. Joseph. The service was a special one, organized as a Folk Mass by Zvonko Martić, a Carmelite monk and a folklorist. He gathered together folk groups from different parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina, all in traditional costumes. They sang traditional Catholic songs indigenous to their villages, with melodic intervals that deviate from the tempered system, and harmonies that often come to rest on the interval of the second. After the Mass, we were invited to a folk feast prepared for us in the basement of the church, with homemade food and drinks, and traditional dancing and singing, that included “ganga,” where a lone singer carries on a wail, joined by others. Many of the traditional secular songs performed there originated in the church liturgy and were then further developed to address everyday concerns of the people. Many of our students joined



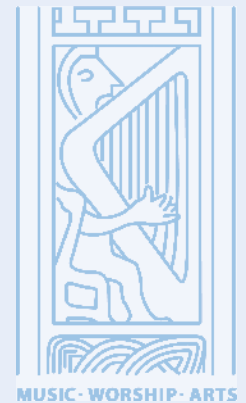
in, and we all marveled at our hosts' fascinating openness and great hospitality.

That afternoon we went to the University of Sarajevo, where we met with Muslim professors at the Center for Interdisciplinary Postgraduate Studies, and a Franciscan friar who founded the International Multireligious and Intercultural Center. Their presentations offered views of the role of religion in the recent conflict and its aftermath, the role of women in Bosniak society, and the state of human rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The discussion that followed showed that when we speak about the presence of religion in the public sphere, we share many common concerns, even when our histories differ greatly.

We spent the greater part of Monday with the Muslim community, but we also visited the Academy of Music and the Franciscan Monastery. At the Faculty of Islamic Studies, we heard about mystical Islam and its pervasive presence in Bosnia to this day. A professor traced the changes in the role of sharia with the transition from the Ottoman period, where it was the law of the land, to Bosnia's integration into Austria-Hungary, where sharia played a more ethical and religious role. Interreligious openness and spirituality present in the mystical Islam thus went together with the ethicization and spiritualization of the sharia law itself, providing a framework for merging the religion of the heart with the religion of the law. The librarian from the Faculty of Islamic Studies showed us the Ghazi Husrev-Bey's complex, the mosque and the Medresa, and helped us better understand their role in shaping the Bosniak Muslim community. The Grand Mufti of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mustafa Ceric, spent an hour with us speaking about the challenges facing the Bosniak Muslim community today, particularly those coming from the emerging fundamentalist Wahhabi groups that preach religious intolerance not only towards other religious groups but also towards moderate Muslims, and about his view of the relationship of the Muslim community in Bosnia to the modern secular state. In the discussion, it became clear that his claim of the continuous role of the sharia law in the modern state differs significantly from the views of his former colleagues, Karic and Karcic. The Academy of Music organized a concert with two of their groups, the Ethno-Academic and Gaudeamus, who performed music from different religious traditions in Sarajevo and sang the love songs (Sevdalinka) characteristic of Bosniak towns.

FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK

by Martin D. Jean



THE 2008 ISM STUDY TRIP was four years in the making. You have just met our guide, Ivica Novakovic. He worked with a planning committee of faculty and students to construct an itinerary that would put students in contact with people in their own disciplines, while at the same time introducing them to those in various walks of life.

There were many reasons to travel to southeastern Europe: the close proximity of so many different religious communities (Catholic, Jewish, Muslim, Orthodox); the rich and varied practices of worship, music, and arts within those cultures, and, of course, our daily access here at Yale to one of the world's great theologians, Miroslav Volf, who calls that part of the world home, and who first introduced us to Ivo Novakovic.

Can we claim to know the Balkans? Of course not. However, there is one thing we did learn well during our ten days: the hospitality of those who live there. We were deeply touched by the openness and generosity of our hosts who were consistently willing not only to communicate the facts of their lives, but also the feelings. The people we met were brave and forthright in their sharing of what it has meant to be Serbian, Bosniak, or Croatian, particularly in recent years.

For my part, I look back on this trip with great thankfulness—to our hosts, to our beloved Ivo Novakovic and to his wife Lidija, and to the students and faculty who attended the trip. Their attitudes were positive 100 percent of the time, and their openness to new experience was truly humbling. I hope you have enjoyed this taste of our study tour.

Jean is professor of organ and professor in the practice of sacred music, as well as the director of the Institute of Sacred Music.

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We spent the evening in the Franciscan Monastery, where we had a conversation with friars and professors from the Franciscan Faculty in Sarajevo, including the head of Bosniak Franciscans; the chief editor of the main religious magazine *Svjetlo Rijeci*; and, the founder and leader of the Interreligious Choir Pontanima. Bosniak Franciscans showed us their commitment to multireligious and multicultural Bosnia, their interest in the future and the wellbeing of all people, and their respect for different faith commitments and communities. This was followed by a concert, where the Pontanima Choir sang songs



from all four traditions represented in Bosnia and Herzegovina—Jewish, Orthodox, Muslim, and Catholic—and a dinner party. Over supper, many of the choir’s members spoke about their love for Sarajevo and their decision to stay there even when conditions were most difficult.

On our journey to Dubrovnik on Tuesday, we made two stops. First, we visited the famous rebuilt bridge in Mostar. Then we spent a few hours in Medjugorje, the village in the Croatian part of Herzegovina, where, in 1981, six children reported seeing and hearing the Virgin Mary. According to the children’s testimony, the Virgin Mary has continued to appear to them and send them messages. Medjugorje quickly became one of the most popular shrines in Europe, surpassing Lourdes and Fatima in the number of pilgrims. Our guide to the Hill of Apparition and our host in a retreat center for priests was a prominent promoter of the authenticity of Medjugorje, a very controversial issue among Roman Catholics. For some of us visiting the shrine was a deeply moving experience, while for others it raised many questions. But for all of us it provided a theme for numerous lively conversations in the following days.

On Wednesday, we visited Herceg Novi in Montenegro. Most of the population here is Orthodox, but this does not guarantee religious unity. There is a great conflict between the Serbian Orthodox Church, which holds almost all church property, and the recently established Montenegrin Ortho-

dox Church, which is not recognized by the Serbian Church. During our visit to Herceg Novi, we had contacts with both communities. In the morning, we visited the monastery Savina, which is one of the most important sites of the Serbian presence in the region of Kotor Bay.

That evening, the Faros Cantors from the island Hvar performed for us the elements from the Passion Week. This tradition, which developed almost five centuries ago, is preserved to this day, when six towns on the island perform it together. Some of the chants were very old, particularly the *Stabat*

mater dolorosa, and stand firmly in the tradition of Glagolitic singing, while other chants contain the elements of tonal music and more recent harmonic progressions. Even though we had already been introduced during a Colloquium presentation to the singing traditions on Croatian islands, we were all surprised by the power and beauty of liturgy presented to us that evening in Dubrovnik. For me, it was one of the most moving experiences of the entire trip.

We next visited Zagreb, the capital of Croatia and its cultural and religious center. Zagreb was in full mid-May swing, with a fair of antique crafts in the central square of the city and the Urban Festival, the public presentations of the artworks, in other squares. The first evening we went to hear Verdi’s *Nabucco* performed by the Zagreb Opera at the Croatian National Theatre and attended the rehearsal of the famous choir “Ivan Filipovic.” In Zagreb, we visited the Catholic Theological Faculty and its Institute of Church Music, the Music Academy, and had several presentations in the Baptist Church, which placed our experiences with different religious communities into a fresh perspective, and had an extensive discussion with our group about the role of religion in this part of the world, historically and against the backdrop of the recent wars in the 1990s.

In addition, ISM organists visited the Basilica of the Sacred Heart of Jesus with the great Croatian organist Mario Penzar and played on its Rieger organ (built in 1905), while ISM

choral conductors had an hour with the conductor Goran Jerkovic. On Saturday, organ players went to the Church of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Lepoglava, about an hour's drive north from Zagreb. The church houses the oldest organ in Croatia. The rest of us remained in Zagreb to visit the Museum of Naïve Art and the Gallery of Modern Art and were introduced to Zagreb as a typical Central European city, with its medieval and fortified uptown and well-structured and open nineteenth-century downtown. Sunday morning was reserved for visiting local churches, from those with Eastern liturgy (Greek-Catholic and Serbian Orthodox) to the main Roman Catholic cathedral. At the end, we all gathered in St. Mark's Church, where we attended the Solemn Mass concluding St. Mark's Festival. On the same weekend, a small group of those interested in Glagolitic singing visited the island of Krk, attending the Sunday Mass in the town of Dobrinj, which incorporated traditional Glagolitic chanting performed by a local choir.



Ivica Novakovic

Our last stop on the visit to the Balkans was Istria, known for its intercultural context and picturesque coastal towns that date from the Roman period and remained under Venetian influence until the end of the 18th century. In Pazin's Museum of Istria, we saw several presentations on different cultures of Istria, medieval frescos, traditional musical instruments, and Istrian religious music built on the five-tone Istrian scale and characterized by two voices singing in a harmony at very small intervals. On Sunday evening, we had the ISM dinner party in the former fish market in Rovinj, with music performed by the local group "Batan," which introduced us to "bitinadas," a special type of singing involving a peculiar imitation of the background instruments. This was our last evening together, which we used to enjoy each other's company and appreciate the contributions of all who made this study trip such an excellent learning experience.

Before saying goodbye to the Balkans, we made a visit to the old coastal town of Porec and the medieval hill town of Motovun. In Porec, we visited the impressively well preserved

episcopal complex of the Euphrasian Basilica (the basilica, atrium, baptistery, and episcopal palace), built in an early Byzantine style in the sixth century. Here, the bishop allowed us to sing Duruflé's *Ubi Caritas* in the Basilica's apse, known

for its extraordinary acoustics. In Motovun, the birthplace of the 16th-century music printer and composer Andrea Antico da Montana, the organist Mario Penzar gave us a short but very impressive farewell organ concert on the organ built by the Venetian Gaetano Callido in 1797 and restored two years ago.

Thanks to the arrangement of our flights, we left Europe via Venice and Vienna, two of the places that – together with Constantinople/Istanbul – made the deepest impact on the culture and spirituality of the part of the Balkan peninsula that we visited.

For many of the ISM travelers, the study tour created a new awareness of the rich layers of transculturality that so pervade the whole region. It also induced us to think deeply and in new ways about religion, culture, the role of political and economic powers, and their impact on our lives – the issues that we face with intense urgency in today's increasingly globalized world. The Balkan experience will in many ways inform our understanding of our own world and our tasks in it, even at a far remove of time and place.

Ivica Novakovic was visiting lecturer in religion and culture at the ISM during the previous academic year, and the chief architect of the 2008 study tour.