

SEVEN THESES ON RELIGION AND WAR IN THE FORMER YUGOSLAVIA

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Colin Sparks read an earlier version of the text intended for presentation at the 7th Colloquium on Communication and Culture (Piran, April 7-10, 1994), and made several useful comments.

I have to apologize for focusing my contribution exclusively on the problem of religion and war in the former Yugoslavia in an international conference of wider scope on "Ethno-religious Nationalist Conflicts and Communication". However, I should like to emphasise that there is a particular value in exploring extreme cases and in using so-called "thinking in extremes". Such cases and such thinking offer an opportunity to disclose something structurally very important that may remain hidden in other cases.

I The first thesis is that the course of events in the former Yugoslavia since the mid-eighties, including the war now going on, may be considered as a stimulating case for a debate on some aspects of the ethno-religious nexus in the context of contemporary social divisions, social cleavages and social conflicts. It is also the most appropriate testing ground for detecting some consequences of a possible religious involvement in a hot war on European soil. In other words, the starting assertion is, that the course of recent events in the former Yugoslavia has a very important symptomatic charge for an exploration of the central problems of this conference.

It is, of course, possible to dismiss in advance such a thesis on three major counts. First, by insisting that the war in the former Yugoslavia has been a totally anomalous contemporary phenomenon with no symptomatic value at all. Second, by underlining, that it is essentially outside of the mainstream of modern European political history due to the peculiar nature of the war being fought in the former Yugoslavia, and by the type of political ideologies used to motivate and legitimize it. Consequently, it is to be taken as a temporary phenomenon of purely marginal relevance. Third, by maintaining that it is a temporary phenomenon, resulting exclusively from a very peculiar convergence of essentially contingent Balkan historical and social circumstances, and not something with any paradigmatic relevance.

However, it should be remembered, firstly, that, as B. Barber has underlined, there have been more than thirty wars waged recently round the world, mostly of a tribal, racial, ethnic and/or religious type (Barber 1992, 843). Secondly, it may be plausibly maintained that the course of recent events, exploding in a war in

