

# HAMMERED BETWEEN THE EAST AND THE WEST

A Prayer Guide for Serbia, composed for, in particular,  
Western Intercessors participating in the 2007  
Prayer Initiative "God's Peace for Serbia"

## **A. Then so God loved the world...**

We intercede, repent, pray, and worship out of love. Unless we can truly say that we love Serbia, and the Serbian peoples (because there are many) we need to ask the Father to pour out his love in our hearts by the Spirit (Romans 5,5).

In the mid 90's Serbia was considered the "most hated" nation in Europe. Unless we come in the opposite spirit our prayers won't cut through the thick layers of hate covering and choking the Balkans.

## **B. Honoring Serbia's Destiny**

B1. Serbia is not a backward corner of Europe. Serbia is at the heart of Western history, and a key to our future.

This is a short summary to put us on track:

- World War One was triggered by a conflict between Serbia and Austria over Bosnia (the "Shot in Sarajevo").
- Strife between Serbia and other states or provinces in former Yugoslavia (Croatia, Bosnia, and Kosovo) sparked a particularly bloody, and cruel war in Europe in the 1990s – 45 years after World War Two, and the innumerable pledges of "never again".
- The Yugoslavian Wars in the 1990s offered to Fundamentalist Islamic forces a historic chance to establish their bases within modern Europe – in Bosnia and Kosovo. And they grasped it.
- For 1 500 years the forces that shaped Western civilization – Catholicism, Orthodoxy, Islam, the Roman Empire, the Turkish-Ottoman Empire, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Russian Empire, and today's UN, USA, Nato, EU, and Turkish, and European Islam – clashed, and broke like rival tsunamis in Serbia.

B2. But honoring Serbia's destiny involves more.

- The Cross teaches us that by God's intervention light emanates from the darkest places, and we pray to God that he would turn the negatives of the Serbian past into positives of the future. To name but one example: where peoples, cultures etcetera have clashed, they may meet.
- For this reason we do not focus on the negatives, although we deal with them in repentance, but set our hearts on the hope that is empowering us: revival, and the welfare of the people.
- We distance ourselves, with dedication and determination, from the tragically common attitudes of "Western superiority." The church leaders in Serbia are typically educated, well trained, and experienced. With the exception of finances they do not need help from the West any more than the West needs help from them. Together we all constitute the One Body of Christ, and no member can say to the other: I need you not.

### **C. Determining the Perspective**

C1. Many problems plaguing Serbia, and the entire Balkan region, have religious roots, or are rooted in church politics, or church related politics (however you choose to word it) – which gives to our intercession a special weight, and importance. What the church has made crooked, the church should again make straight.

C2. Because of the religious roots of many Balkan problems prayer – crucifying the past by asking forgiveness for sin at the Cross of Jesus, and opening our hearts to Cross-based reconciliation – must surely be the proper place to **start**, or in other words the KEY to a new start politically, and socially. The churches' failure to deal with these religious roots may very well explain why so little headway has been made politically, and socially.

C3. Abused religion, and church related politics on the Balkans have evoked curses for 1 500 years. Curses remain active until they have been nailed to the Cross of Jesus through repentance. Ideally this should be done by the representatives of the bodies involved, in this case the officials of, in particular, the Catholic and Orthodox churches, and the officials of a number of national governments (Austria, Hungary, Turkey, Germany, Italy, Russia...).

But in the meantime intercessors can, and should act vicariously.

## **D. A Historical Overview**

D1. There was much talk of ethnic cleansing during the recent Yugoslavian wars. But with the exception of the Kosovo Albanians the ethnic differences between the main people groups involved – Serbs, Croats, and Bosnians – are not primary, but secondary. All these people groups are ethnically South Slavs (which is what “Yugoslavs” means) speaking the same language. Even today’s spoken Croatian, Serbian, and Bosnian differ less than many dialects in other languages.

**D2. The main division lines between these people groups are religious, enforced upon them in history by rival super powers operating in the name of their respective religion, and using the region as battle ground, bridge head, and buffer zone.**

D3. When Ancient Rome split in

- West Rome (the “Catholic Rome” – called Ancient Rome, succeeded by the Holy Roman Empire between 800-1806, and finally the Austro-Hungarian Empire between 1806-1918 – that shaped our Western civilization, including today’s European Union, like no other single agent),
- and East Rome (the “Orthodox New Rome” – between 395 (or earlier; the date is disputed)-1453 the Byzantine Orthodox Empire, based in Constantinople, today’s Istanbul; succeeded by, on the one hand, the Muslim Ottoman Empire, till 1918/1920, also based in Constantinople, and, on the other hand, the Russian Orthodox Tsardom, till 1917, that shaped the East European civilization),

when this split first occurred the border was drawn right across the Balkans – more or less along today’s borders between Bosnia and Croatia, and Bosnia and Serbia respectively. The Croats became Catholics, the Serbs became Orthodox.

**D4. These ancient empires which made different people groups out of the South Slavs cannot be separated from their respective religions, Catholicism and Orthodoxy. Thus, these first divisions have religious roots.**

D5. There was more to come. In 1453 Byzantine’s capital Constantinople (after being looted, and weakened beyond recovery by the Catholic Crusaders from West Europe) was conquered by the Muslim Turks, and the Christian Byzantine Empire was succeeded by the Muslim Ottoman Empire.

D6. But the expansionist Turkish Muslims had started their march on Europe even before their Ottoman Empire was established. In 1389 Serbia fought the Turks in a legendary battle on the Blackbirds’ Plain – that is Kosovo Polje outside Pristina – and lost. The Serbian king Lazar pronounced an infamous curse while rallying his people against the invaders – approximately “*cursed be those who aren’t willing to die for Kosovo*”. Lazar died in the battle, along with most Serbian noblemen, but his curse lived on, and was re-invoked by Orthodox clergy 600 years later, 1989, in support of then-dictator Milošević’s war & dominion politics.

D7. The 1389 Kosovo Polje Battle plays a key role in Serbian folklore, and the Serbian people’s intricate self-image. Innumerable songs, poems, plays, and later on films were produced to glamorize the King-turned-Saint Lazar who “sacrificed himself” for Serbia. Around 1989 this folklore was used extensively to back the Serbian claim on Kosovo.

**D8. A key question to consider is to which degree the religious, political, and cultural glorification of a devastating defeat (!) has served to create a martyrs', or victims' mentality, a self-image of the Serbs as brave, and self-sacrificing fighters – who are nevertheless doomed to lose.**

D9. Serbia challenged the Muslim expansionism on European soil – and both failed, and succeeded. Political independence was lost. Between 1459-1878 Serbia (please remember that the borders varied greatly) was ruled from Muslim Constantinople. **But** the Serbs remained Orthodox, and never bowed to Islam – which leads to another important aspect of the Serbian self-image. **Serbia has considered itself a Christian bulwark against Islam, and as such, as being betrayed by the rest of the Christian world.**

D10. The Catholic West, now the Holy Roman Empire governed by the Austrian Habsburgs, fought the Turks for centuries on Serbian soil, but never allied itself with Serbia. (When the Byzantine Empire fell in 1453 both the Catholic West, the Austrian Habsburgs, and the Orthodox East, the Russian Tsars, claimed the Byzantine inheritance, including the Balkan lands.) Serbia remained Orthodox, and the enemy of the Muslim Turks – and now also became the enemy of the Catholic West.

D11. The Austrian Habsburgs not only used Serbia as a battle field, but also as a buffer zone against the Turks. In the 1500's and 1600's the Habsburg emperors established the so called Military Border to halt Muslim expansion. The Military Border – or Vojna Krajina in Serbo-Croatian – was a literal buffer zone stretching along the old West-East division line, that is between today's Bosnia and Croatia, and Bosnia and Serbia. The Vojna Krajina was populated by Serbs, hired as mercenaries by the Austrians. The area is still known as Krajina.

D12. This is how Serbs came to live in the otherwise Croatian lands between the Croat-Catholic part of today's Bosnia (called Herzegovina), and Croatia proper. And this is where the Yugoslavian war broke out in 1990-1991, when the Krajina Serbs refused to submit to independent Croatia – history is never past until crucified.

D13. But there is more to it. Bosnia was under Muslim Ottoman rule, and towards the end of the 1800's the Catholic Croats in Bosnia complained increasingly of discrimination. In 1878 Austria occupied Bosnia to protect the Catholic population. But the majority of the Bosnians were Serbian-Orthodox, and when Austria in 1908 annexed Bosnia, making it a part of their Catholic empire, the Serbs refused to comply, and intensified their resistance. In 1914 a Serbian nationalist killed the Austrian successor to the emperor's throne – the historic "shot in Sarajevo." In response Austria made such harsh demands on Serbia that even its ally, the German emperor in Berlin asked his "colleague" in Vienna to reconsider. But Austria insisted, and when Serbia, as was to be expected, failed to yield, the First World War broke out.

The First World War alliances seem unlikely from a modern perspective. Austria was supported by Germany and the Ottoman Turks (!) in fighting Russia, England and France.

Serbia was but a "Russian pawn," to be sacrificed. But enough strength was deployed to crush the Serbian army – and again the final battle was fought on the Blackbirds' Plain, the Kosovo Polje.

**D14. In 1389 Serbia lost its independence to the Muslim Turks, and in 1915 it lost its newly (1878) regained independence to Catholic Austria – both times in Kosovo.**

**And in between, for hundreds of years, the Muslim Turks and Catholic Austria battled each other, on Serbian soil.**

**Serbia has truly been hammered between the East and the West.**

D15. Both old Turkey and old Austria collapsed at the end of World War One, but for Serbia the ordeal continued. The nation allied itself with its close relatives in Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia, Macedonia, and Montenegro to form what was to become Yugoslavia. The strife for dominion between the East (Serbia) and the West (Croatia) remained bitter.

D16. In 1941 Yugoslavia was occupied by Nazi Germany, and Fascist Italy. Belgrade was the first European capital to be pronounced “cleansed of Jews.” In Croatia a puppet fascist state was founded – explicitly seeking to cleanse Croatia of Serbs by killing one third, expelling the other third and assimilating the remaining third. In Jasenovac, 100 km southeast of Zagreb, there was a concentration camp – not for Jews, but for Serbs.

D17. The Nazi and Fascist occupiers were defeated by Yugoslav Communist partisans, aided by the Soviet Red Army. Partisan leader Tito established Communist Yugoslavia in 1945. He took control over the area, subduing the Serbian-Croatian strife for dominion, and with them the religious power struggles.

But controlling does not equal resolving, and after Tito’s death in 1980 the old Catholic-Orthodox-Muslim antagonisms surfaced again, and soon burst forth in another cruel, and bloody series of wars.

D18. And again, external super powers intervened to control. Bosnia and Kosovo are totally dependent on the West financially and politically – but simultaneously the East (Muslim countries in the Middle East) has re-established its foothold, and is forwarding its position in both places.

If in history the claims of the East were overtly political, while supported and reinforced by religion, this time the claims are officially religious-only, while the political agenda is hidden. Whereas in the Middle Eastern Muslim “mother lands” politics and religion still go openly and unashamedly hand in hand (the way it did in the historical Ottoman Empire, but also in the Christian Byzantine, and Roman/Austrian empires), “European Islam” claims to be merely spiritual. This is hardly true. During last year’s Ramadan in Kosovo, for example, the lectures offered in the mosques were clearly political.

Even though our intercession targets Serbia, these developments are highly relevant – in Bosnia there is a “Serbian Republic,” and Kosovo is, as we have seen, inseparably connected with Serbia’s history and identity, and claimed by Serbia as part of its national territory.

D19. Today a vast majority of people in the region seem to put their hopes in the European Union. There is a kind of logic to it. The EU is, officially, an attempt to unite the West and the East, including Turkey, to avoid future wars.

But are the root problems resolved? And if not, what chances are there of a different future?

We started out by saying that the roots are religious, and in a next step we will attempt a tentative definition, then to propose a prayer agenda.

## **E. In the Spirit of Babylon**

E1. In the Bible "Babylon" stands for the first and last opponent to God's plans for humanity, and the earth; we find "Babylon" both in Genesis (the Tower of Babel), and in Revelation. At the heart of "Babylon" is man's desire, inspired by Satan, to supplant God on earth, or, in other words, **to rule politically by divine authority.**

In Daniel 3,1-6 we read about Nebuchadnezzar, who was already the mightiest ruler of his days (king of Babylon 605 BC-562 BC), and also demanded to be worshipped as god.

In Revelation chapters 13, 17, and 18 the Babylonian rule of Anti-Christ is described in the same terms: Anti-Christ rules with absolute political power – and he is worshipped.

**E2. After Christ the main historical empires operating in the "Babylonian Spirit," whether Christian or Muslim, have all born down on, and clashed in Serbia.**

**Therefore, Serbia is a focal point of the earth's "prophetic history."**

E3. The Babylonian agenda of blending politics and religion is a perverted imitation of God's ways. And perverting God's message brings about a curse, Paul tells us in Galatians 1,8-9.

**In consequence history has brought curse after curse upon Serbia.**

(The principle seems to be that curses affect all people who are under the authority of the cursed one. Read Kings; the choices of the kings of Israel determined how their people fared.)

E4. These curses have not been crucified, and Serbia is still bound by the same forces. **Orthodoxy** is again a determining force in Serbia. Let us not be deceived by the fact that Russia, as the main historical carrier of the Spirit of Babylon's Byzantine-Orthodox variety, is no longer a super power; Orthodoxy is still a key player spiritually.

In Orthodox theology the Babylonian blending of politics and religion is spoken of as the "harmony of state and church" – with the state always having the final word. (This principle was worked out theologically in or around Constantinople in the Byzantine days). **Serbia's new law on religion** mirrors this by giving to some religions the status of "state recognition," whereas all other religions remain unrecognized, and pseudo-illegal.

E5. **Islam** has by no means given up on the Balkans; it is, as we have seen, revitalizing its historical spearhead in Bosnia, and establishing itself in Kosovo.

E6. The role of the West is less clear-cut – and, as it were, understanding why is of key importance to us (see 7. – the last paragraph).

Within the European Union the Byzantine principle of the state having the last word on religion is upheld formally in Austria and Germany, but in most member states it is applied in one way or the other. All of the EU is in full agreement that it is not only the right, but the obligation of the government to control religion.

The chief policy adviser to the President of the European Commission on matters of religion is the Austrian top diplomat Michael Weninger, formerly ambassador in Belgrade. In a 2005 interview with the Swedish Christian daily newspaper Dagen he made it very clear that he considers the "Austrian model" the future of the entire EU. This implies freedom of

religion – that is, for all religious bodies with state recognition. For religious bodies without state recognition it implies control, and restrictions.

Pentecostal, Charismatic, and Evangelical (the latter word used in its American meaning of, roughly, “bible believing but non-Charismatic”) churches are presently under severe pressure in many EU countries, for example France, Belgium, and Sweden.

Also, anti-Semitism is clearly on the rise in many EU countries. Putting pressure on the Jewish people is the foundational aspect of the “Babylonian Spirit” – that is how it started.

E7. Still, though freedom of religion may be threatened in the EU it is nevertheless prevalent. The “Babylonian Spirit” is again gaining ground, but it does not go unchallenged.

The freedoms and socio-economic opportunities that so many in the former Yugoslav countries hope for the EU to provide have stronger roots in some EU member states than in others.

The picture is complex, but in general terms the political culture that is known as “Western democracy” – including political, social, entrepreneurial, and religious **freedoms**, and **opportunities** for all, irrespective of race, ethnicity, gender, social class, and religion – this political culture was developed in such countries and regions that experienced substantial revivals – in other words, where enough people were strongly influenced in their attitudes, decisions, and lifestyle by God’s Word, and God’s Spirit.

North, and Northwest Europe, plus North America are such places. In Central, East and South Europe there were “pockets” only, for example in Vojvodina, with a measure of blessing following.

God blesses those who bless Him: who preach and live an unperverted (though certainly not perfect) Gospel - who care for widows, and orphans etcetera. Had the same people also blessed Abraham’s children, the Jewish people, on a much broader scale God’s blessings would have flown freer still.

As is often the case the pendulum has swung over, and the North and the Northwest are now taking the lead in Godlessness. The effects of the revivals are wearing off, and both freedoms and opportunities are decreasing. (There is not less money, but less justice, and righteousness – a wider gap again between the rich and the poor – less morals and ethics – more anti-Semitism, and xenophobia – and there are, as mentioned, discriminatory laws and measures against revivalist churches.)

**If the remaining effects of the revivals have balanced out the influence of the “Babylonian Spirit” in the EU, what will happen to, for example, the freedom of religion, and the family business opportunities (two typical “fruits of revival”) in the EU when these effects are no longer to be felt?**

## F. Prayer Proposals

### Introductory Comments

This is a prayer guide primarily for Westerners, or, in any case, non-Serbs. There are obviously many grounds for repentance for Serbian wrong-doing, in history and during the recent wars. The mass killings in Bosnia cannot be swept under the carpet. The discriminations against minority groups – be it Gypsies, Albanians, Hungarians etcetera – the ousting of the Germans after World War Two (however understandable, in light of the Nazi occupation), bear evil fruit. And even though the primary responsibility for the Holocaust in Serbia rests with the Nazi invaders, there was flagrant, institutionalized anti-Semitism in Serbia in the 1800's.

The cry for reconciliation within former Yugoslavia, and within today's Serbia, is desperate. The Serbian intercessors must deal with this.

The unspeakable cruelties of the recent Yugoslavian wars, committed by all sides but certainly also by Serbs, may be explained, partly at least, by the religious roots of the conflicts. Firstly, cursed people curse people.

"Curse" signifies the "active withdrawal" of God, a state that can also be accurately described as "hell," and in hell people behave hellishly.

Secondly, people who believe that God is behind them, and even ordering their doings, are typically much more fanatic, and ruthless than others.

The Islamist terrorists, including the Palestine "suicide bombers" are current examples. In history there are many Christian examples of the same fanaticism: the Crusaders, the Catholic and Protestant militias on Ireland – and the Yugoslavian wars.

Thus, although Serbian intercessors must take on the Serbian issues, visiting intercessors will help considerably by dealing with the religious roots outlined in this prayer guide.

**F1. Repentance** – The basis for intercession is our identifying with the sins committed, whether or not we contributed to them.

**• Above all, let us repent of the perverted, political "gospel" preached and lived in Serbia – by the Orthodox, and the Catholic churches – all through history, and of the political ambitions of today's Serbian-Orthodox Church.**

- Let us repent of the ruthless abuse of Serbia as a battle ground, and a buffer zone for foreign super powers; the ongoing "rape" of a land, a culture, a people – and wasting of their God-given destiny.
- Let us repent also of the invasions, and occupations (in varying forms) of Turkey, Austria, Nazi Germany/Austria, Fascist Italy, and the Communist Soviet Union.
- Let us repent specifically of Austria's establishing of the Military Border, Vojna Krajina, and the cynical hiring of Serbs as mercenaries against the Turks, and of Austria's annexing of Bosnia against the will of the Serbian majority in Bosnia.
- Let us repent specifically of the extinction of Jews, and the destruction of synagogues during the Nazi occupation.
- If wished for by the Serbian leadership and intercessors we could support them in repenting of the specific "King Lazar issues" – the flagrant abuse of religion for purposes of war.

- If possible without ending up in political dispute we could (or should?) repent of the Nato bombings of Serbia during the 1999 Kosovo Campaign. As intercessors we cannot side with the Serbs any more than we side with the Kosovo-Albanians (and all other people on earth), but the Nato campaign was perceived by most Serbs, including many believers, as “yet another Western attack,” and thus it is closely related to the patterns outlined in this prayer guide. Possibly the Kosovo-Albanians could have been protected without Nato bombing, for example, Novi Sad. If we cannot agree on specific prayers of repentance, let us cry out together for peace, and healing!

**F2. Breaking Curses** – Jesus became a curse for our sake, Galatians 3,10, and we break curses (after repenting) by pronouncing them nailed to the Cross, or, in other words, by confessing that their power has been broken by the Blood of the Lamb

- Let us break the curse of a perverted, political gospel being preached, and practiced in Serbia, for centuries.
- Let us break the curse evoked by the cursing of the Jewish people, both in earlier days, and during the Holocaust.

**F3. Petitioning Prayer, Proclamation & Worship** – After crucifixion comes resurrection; after praying for repentance we pray for the **good** we hope to see **replacing the bad** we repented of; to dispel the darkness we “turn on the light” through praise and worship, and the proclamation of God’s Word.

▪ **Above all we pray for revival, and the establishing of loving, sound, growing, and courageous churches. The key to the freedoms and opportunities that Serbia craves for is not simply joining the EU, but asking God to “plant the hotbeds” in which these freedoms and opportunities have been known to grow, in the history of Europe – that is, to send revival.**

- The preaching of a “perverted gospel” evokes a curse, because it equals cutting the only lifeline there is; there is but one source of life, namely God, and therefore confusing people on who God is, and how to connect to him, or pointing them in the wrong direction is as bad as it can get.

Let us pray for God to anoint many – full time church workers, and lay men and women – to preach & live the true Gospel in Serbia.

- Let us pray for the leaders of the Orthodox Church, in particular, and the Catholic Church to be convicted by the Spirit of Truth, and to repent publicly of the role their churches have played, and still play in Serbia.

Be encouraged: the Catholic Church has apologized (though admittedly in somewhat vague terms) for its anti-Semitism.

- Let us pray for the government of Serbia to assume responsibility, and apologize for Serbian wrong-doings both historically, and contemporarily.

- Let us pray for the governments of the involved countries – in particular Austria, Turkey, Russia, Germany, Italy, and Croatia – to apologize publicly for their wronging of Serbia in history.

Be encouraged: governments do apologize! Germany has, to Israel, and to Russia.

- Let us pray for the Jewish community in Serbia, and for Serbia as a nation to start blessing Israel.
- Let us pray for the schemes of the Islamists to be laid open, and for miracles, and conversions among Muslims on the Balkans – just like it is happening in many Muslim countries, and communities around the world.
- Let us pray for a new self-image among the Serbian people! By God's calling the Serbs are **not**
  - cursed people who curse people, **but** blessed ones who do good to their neighbors,
  - betrayed, and isolated, **but** welcomed, and welcoming bridge-builders between the East and the West, as well as between the many ethnic groups of Southeast Europe,
  - fanatic, and aggressive, **but** creative, warm, and intuitive,
  - shaped by many defeats to be constant losers, **but** born troubleshooters!
- Let us praise & worship, and proclaim God's friendliness, reconciliation, and healing over the people groups, and lands!