

by Drago Pilsel:

Spirituality lived healthy: from fascism to anti-fascism!

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[Authorized text!](#)

Drago Pilsel:

Good morning, did you get some rest? I'm going to give a short conclusion or summary of what we talked about yesterday. Later we will talk about an example of how religion and faith can be positive forces in society.

Religion can not be reduced to a private thing or the private matter of any person. We did say yesterday that religion, if it is truly lived, always requires and presupposes a personal relationship with God. We also said that at the same time, religion is also a social phenomenon. And for this reason not only individuals, not only different people, but the whole society and the community have a responsibility.

The second point: We talked about the community of believers, the religious community of the church, of whatever form. Society in general has the role to testify the presence of God. It shows God as the only absolute; everything else that we call the world, politics, society, social values or religion should never be made absolute. What religion says is that God is absolute and that politics cannot be, the society and the world around us cannot be absolute. And this means that the role of religion in society is, as we said yesterday, to promote the human dignity. This is in contrast to making things of the world »holy« or »sanctified«. It becomes dangerous when we make things, objects or ideologies divine and given them this kind of a status. This is important to know, because

as we have seen in the last war here in the region and in many other parts of the world, very often within the state or the nation, certain political systems or ideologies become idols. This, in return, demands sacrifices. And the first thing that is usually sacrificed is personal freedom. This is very, very dangerous for society and for democracy. And this is what is so important in political theology. Its duty is to sound an alarm when something, which is an ideology is turned into something divine.

Political theology promotes a political system and a political dialog where the most important values are solidarity, service, promotion of human rights and of the rule of a free government under the law. This is something I did not understand when I was young. And there are people who are much older than I am who still do not understand this. Some of them are popes, some of them are bishops, and some of them are presidents or the heads of state, or the heads of political parties governing cities. Some of them are even just family fathers, grandfathers or uncles.

On the one hand, I was very fortunate and on the other hand very unfortunate to have been born into a family which was very politically active. As I said yesterday, my family name is of Czech origin, »Plzn«. This name was Germanised in the middle of the 19th century. My family lived near Berlin and the name was changed to Pilsel. As German constructors they went from Bavaria to Romania and that is where my grandfather was born, in the province of Bukovina. The family then moved from Romania to Bosnia. They settled in the town of Prnjavor, which is not far from Banja Luka. My grandfather was a policeman when he was young. One day he was sent to the house of a woman who had been robbed. This woman became my future grandmother. That is how they met. She was Croatian but her mother was Slovenian. She was from a small town near Mrkonjic Grad, called Varcar Vakuf. The family was in the

construction business, building houses and churches. They moved from Bosnia to Macedonia, from Macedonia to Kosovo and in Kosovo they were in Pristina, and in Prizren. There, the youngest child of the family, my father, was born in 1936. And since my grandfather was a supporter of Hitler, he named my father Adolf. In 1941, when the Independent State of Croatia was declared and the Germans entered Croatia and Bosnia, the family moved from Kosovo to Sarajevo and worked for the German army constructing buildings. My father's older brother became a member of the SS. And, as I mentioned yesterday, at the end of 1944 my grandfather realised that Germany was losing the war and decided to take the family and leave. First they went to Austria. At the end of the war they were in Poland and from there they went to Germany. They got German papers and they passed through Geneva as political refugees and took a boat to Argentina, Buenos Aires.

In 1945, Argentina was under the government of Peron, who was a fascist and had received his military education from Mussolini. The policy that he learned from Mussolini, was to welcome fascist immigrants into Argentina. In this way, he was able to enlarge the fascist community in the country, which served as a counter balance. This is why we have a very broad political spectrum in Argentina today: Nazis on the one hand and communists on the other, and everything in between. The government of the fascist Independent State of Croatia fell, so the government leaders also fled to Argentina. My grandfather became a personal friend of Ante Pavelic, who had been the head of the fascist State of Croatia. On Fridays, Ante Pavelic would come to our house and he would play chess with my grandfather.

In the middle of the 1950's, the Israeli secret service, 'Mossad', started to look for Nazis. So who did they find in Argentina? Eichman. When they found him they realised that he had a circle of friends, and among these friends was Ante

Pavelic. And Pavelic had a circle of friends, and among these friends was Pilsel. And Pilsel also personally knew Eichman. But Peron did not allow the Mossad to touch the Nazis. The Mossad had to wait until Peron's government fell. In 1955, a military government took over and Peron ended up in the jail. And this was the beginning of the hunt for the Nazis. They started with Eichman and then caught the others.

When the Yugoslav secret service realised that there were Ustašas and Nazis collaborating in Argentina, they decided to kill Pavelic. A group of young men with guns was gathered to serve as bodyguards for Pavelic. My father was one of them. So, at their parties, as a small boy they would put me on the table to dance while my father played the accordion. I was five or six years old at the time. I had a good voice so I would sing the Ustasha songs. And that is what things were like until I was 15.

On my mother's side, my grandfather was also Ustasha. He was born in Graz, but he was Croatian. He married my grandmother, who was a Hungarian that had been born in Sarajevo. After the assassination of Ferdinand in 1914, she left Sarajevo and went to Zagreb.

So from both sides of the family I have strong Ustasha roots. The Ustasha government was not a democratic government. It was a dictatorship under the Nazis in Zagreb. Pavelic had to give a large part of the coast to the Italians. That is why the Partisan movement was very strong in Dalmatia.

When the war was over, my mother's family also left for Argentina. My father and mother met in Argentina. They were among the young people around Pavelic. In 1959, Pavelic was shot by the Yugoslav secret service. However, he

did not die right away, and the Croatian Catholic Church dressed him and moved him first to Paraguay and then to Madrid, where he died in 1960.

I was born in 1962, and when I was a boy my grandfather had a parrot who was trained to say: “Viva Ante Pavelic”. So I was basically bombarded from all sides of the family!

The fascist Croatian State was founded on racist laws. We know that 90% of Jews, not only in Croatia but also in Bosnia, were wiped out. Of all the concentration camps in Croatia, the largest was in Jasenovac. The Jews in Croatia were round up and brought to Jasenovac, Auschwitz and others. My family never told me that the Croatian government's plan regarding the Serbs had simply been to kill a third of them, expel another third to Serbia and try to assimilate the last third! So what HAD my family told me? That our family had been the victims and that we had lost our state and our freedom. First of all, they said that a large part of the Croatian population had betrayed the Croatian State and joined the Partisans and had fought against the Ustashas, against the Croatian State.

But they also never told me that within the Partisan movement there had been a part that was made up of Croatian communists who wanted a communist Croatia separate from Yugoslavia and connected to Stalin. And they never told me that the Partisan movement had not started as a communist movement, although the first armed uprising, which took place in Sisak, some 60 km from Zagreb, had been organized by the Communist Party. Tito had been a Communist. In 1943, the Communist Party took control over the Partisan movement. But there were many Partisans who were Catholics or Protestants or Orthodox. Yesterday I was reminded that one of the Ministers under Tito, the Minister of Culture in the first post-war government under Tito, had been a Slovenian. So my family told me

that we lost the war because we had been the victims of a conspiracy of the Jews, the Communists and the Serbs. And this, of course, is not the truth.

Until I was 26 years old, almost 27, when I came to Yugoslavia I had actually no idea about the history of Yugoslavia. I had actually been educated to hate the Serbs. And in Argentina, I had been actively involved in acts of violence against the Jews. We attacked the synagogues many times. We either painted slogans or graffiti, or threw rocks at the windows. One time we threw Molotov cocktails. This was during the military dictatorship. What I was doing against the Jews, I was doing as a Croat, not as an Argentinean. I was actually a leftist, fighting against the dictatorship, helping poor people and those people who were the victims of the dictatorship.

One day when I was 16 years old, a priest who had been a friend of mine, asked me a question which basically changed my life. He said: 'Until when, Drago? How long will you be an Argentinean leftist from Mondays to Fridays, and a Croatian fascist on Saturdays and Sundays? How long will you have these two identities, which are actually in conflict with each other. Who are you? What do you want to do with your life?'

This was actually the start of a process. I had a picture of Ante Pavelic hanging above my bed. The first thing I did, was to take down the picture and replace it by with a cross. And I started to read. And I started to look for friends who had a lot of knowledge, who read a lot, who knew history, politics, sociology and who also received and read illegal press material from Croatia.

Something else which is very important in my biography is the year 1982. I was 20 years old and my country had started a war with Britain. I lost many friends in this war, including some Croats. This was also when the movements to end

the dictatorship started. At that time I was working on an oil rig even though I had started working as a journalist when I was 17. I decided to stop my studies of mechanical engineering and switch over to studying journalism and political science. While studying journalism and political science, I discovered that there were several different movements in Latin America that were fighting for human rights. One of these movements, as I mentioned yesterday, was Liberation Theology, which has its roots in Peru and Brazil. I had a girlfriend in Sao Paulo in Brazil, whom I went to live with. From there I went to Petropolis a number of times where a very famous theologian Leonardo Boff gave private classes. So I had the opportunity to listen to Leonardo Boff, as well as to hear Gustavo Gutierrez, a Peruvian priest who is considered the father of the Liberation Theology, and Jon Sobrino, who is actually a Spanish priest who went to El Salvador as a missionary. In 1985, the year that I was living in Brazil, 32 Catholic priests were assassinated by the mafia because the Catholic Church was pushing for an agrarian reform. The problem of agrarian reform has still not been solved! Even today, the President of Brazil has not been able to solve the problem of those who do not have land, who do not have any property. The fact that a large number of these priests who were killed were Franciscans motivated me to start studying the life of the Franciscans.

In March 1986, I began my life as a Franciscan. I spent five years living as a Franciscan, wearing the habit, the robe, and everything. As a Franciscan, I came to Yugoslavia in 1989 to study theology. You can probably imagine the culture, political, and social shock that hit me when I got here. I understood absolutely nothing. I spent the first three years studying the political reality and the history of Yugoslavia. But somewhere in my heart I still rejected, avoided and did not like the Serbs. One of the things that confused me the most when I got here was that I could understand Serbs when they spoke. I read some articles written by Croatian linguists who said that, from a linguistic point of view, the Croatian

and Serbian languages are not actually two different languages, but are two varieties of one language. Of course I did not accept this theory right away. But by this time, I had enough life experience to not just reject something, but to say, »Ok, wait a minute, let's think about this«. And at same way, slowly, I also started to recognize the positive aspects of Yugoslav society. The fact that in the Yugoslav state and society there was such a thing as social security, which was much better than in Argentina; the fact that there was a very low crime rate and that, for example, you could walk on the streets at night and nothing would happen to you. Or you could leave your car unlocked and nobody would touch it, even your house.

During this time I also started a process of dissatisfaction and lack of motivation to continue living as a Franciscan. Not only because the Catholic Church in Croatia was much too nationalistic, but because of a process which had already started in Argentina. I had problems accepting some doctrines and teachings, especially moral teachings of the Church. I had a very hard time accepting the very steep hierarchical structure of the Church in Croatia and the absolute lack of dialogue within the Church.

In 1991, on Easter, the war in Croatia started, and my younger brother who was 22 years old at the time, volunteered for the military. In July 1991, he turned 23 and on October 23rd he was killed in action. I had a very hard time dealing with the fact that he was out fighting and I was living in the very quiet and protected world of the Franciscans, in a monastery. So when he died, I left the Franciscans and I volunteered for military service in order to replace my brother. In March 1992, the international troops of the United Nations arrived to former Yugoslavia. My superior, the head of the Fourth Brigade, which I was a member of, offered me a military career but I declined. I did not want to

continue in the military. I wanted to go back and just be a civilian. I wanted to go back to study theology.

In April 1992, I arrived in Zagreb and I started to work in television. I had two programs. In one of them, which was broadcasted Mondays nights, on prime time between eight and nine, I analyzed the characteristics of society. And slowly, using the show, I started to talk about the human rights.

At the end of 1992, a group of people decided to found the Helsinki Committee of Human Rights in Croatia. They invited me to be one of the founding members. And all of the sudden I found myself defending the rights of the Serbian minority in Croatia. As a result of this, my mother stopped talking to me. All my Croatian friends in Argentina turned their backs on me because they still continued with the fascist mentality. My mother had a very hard time accepting the fact that her younger son had died in battle. Her reaction was to blame all the Serbs for the loss of her son. My brother had also killed some Serbs, and the fact that there were Serbian mothers in the same position, because her son had killed their sons was very hard for her to understand. I tried to explain to my mother that she was not right in blaming all the Serbs for the death of her son.

At the same time, I was fighting with myself to accept the fact that I had changed so much - that I was not a truly committed Catholic any more, that I did not hate Serbs any more. Not only that I did not hate them, I was actually helping them now. I was not a Croatian nationalist any more. I had become a leftist liberal. In just a few years, my identity had radically changed.

Because of the nationalist attitude of the Church, I started polemics with the Catholic Church and attacked the leaders of the Church in my articles. For

example, in 1995, after the liberation of the territories, which had been occupied by the Serbs in Croatia, I registered and found about five hundred bodies of Serbs that had been killed. The last of these I have found in February 1996, in the town of Komic in the region of Lika. The oldest victim was 92. She had been killed together with her son who was 62. They were killed on October 12th of 1995. And their bodies had stayed there unmoved, untouched until February 1996, when I found them. You can imagine the picture. We had specific orders, instructions about procedures from the investigators from The Hague about what to do every time we found dead bodies, how to fill in the protocols, take pictures etc. It was a type of forensic work that we were doing. After all of that, we buried the bodies. But before this, we would notify the Croatian police in order to be sure and have the documents that the Croatian authorities had been informed about what had happened.

I had also been a war correspondent in Bosnia, and especially in Sarajevo. All the violence and all the dead bodies, this whole machinery of violence that I had seen, led me to specialize in the analysis and reporting of war crimes, political theology, and human rights. After nine years, in 1999, I started speaking with my mother again.

Today, sixteen years after the death of my brother, my mother has stopped blaming all the Serbs for what happened. It took a lot work to get her there, to get her to this point. For me it was very important, in 1997, to find the person, who had killed my brother, to talk to him and to tell him that I forgive him. I realized I could not and I did not want to live with a burden of hate inside of me.

So at this point, I want to take a break from talking about myself, and talk about something which I think is very, very important and that is that each one of us at some time in our lives will find ourselves in conflict. It is important to stop and

think. I think this is an excellent opportunity as the topics and subjects we have discussed do not apply only to the Balkans. I just spoke to our Turkish friends and they said that there are many similarities in the Turkish society today, because of the tensions which are going on. So it would be interesting to hear your questions, and after the answers and maybe have some discussion. So please, go ahead.

Petar: I was asked by one of the Turkish participants here how you knew about the situation in Turkey since you described exactly what is happening there?

DP: I have been to Turkey but only as a tourist. But for a number of years now, I have been following what is happening in Turkey. Especially since I started studying Orhan Pamuk as a writer. As you know he applied for residency in the United States. I also lived in Sarajevo from 1996 to 1999. I spoke with many Turks and many Bosnians who went to Turkey to study, and had a lot of discussions with them. One can also find a lot of information about the political situation and climate in Turkey also on the internet.

We have a magazine in Croatia which is very similar to the original “Le Monde Diplomatique”, and there are a lot of articles and political analysis in it. I was especially interested in the dialogue between civilisations. There is one dialogue which is especially interesting that started in 2004 between the Spanish Prime Minister Zapatero and the head of the Turkish State. This initiative was a response to a book written by Samuel Huntington and which is very conflictive. The title of the book is “The Clash of Civilizations” and I think that in BiH you can find some elements of this question of civilizations.

On a broader level, however, I believe that it would be very dangerous if we accept that the future will be defined by this clash of cultures. The war for oil,

which has already started in Iraq and Afghanistan, will extend to Central Asia, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. In 20 or 30 years there will be wars for drinkable water. This is a topic that I am very interested in.

An important part of this project is to create a dialogue between cultures and civilizations. I can give you an internet address for a project about world ethics. In 1994, in Chicago there was a meeting of representatives of all the Churches of the world. They wrote a document about the foundation, the minimum of what every religion and religious individual can accept as a basis for creating the minimum of values that all religions can agree on. The author of this project is a Swiss theologian Hans Küng, who has lived in Germany for many years. In 1979 the Vatican withdrew his license to teach in Catholic universities. He is a professor of Ecumenical Theology at the Faculty of Protestant Theology in Tübingen, Germany. It is a shame for Croats and for Croatia that it was a Croatian Cardinal, Seper, who withdrew Küng's teaching license. Ratzinger, who is the Pope now, used to be the head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith and before him it was the Croatian Cardinal Seper.

Emrah: What do you think about national identities? Should we overcome the nation states and create a different form of organized society? And do you think that Europe could be a model of that for the rest of the world? What kind of solutions can we find? Do you think nationalism and national states are the obstacles to that?

DP: The European constitution was rejected for many reasons. In France for example, one of the reasons that French workers were against the EU constitution was the fact that Polish workers can do the same work for a two-thirds less salary. This has led to decreased wages in France. In the Netherlands, on the other hand, there were elements of xenophobia and not just economic

aspects which resulted in the population rejecting the EU constitution. The German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, has made a huge effort in the last six months to try to bring all these parts together and to find a compromise. We will see what will happen when Portugal takes over the EU Presidency. Merkel was trying to convince the Netherlands and Poland that they are not being discriminated against in the EU. The problem, which the Polish government is presenting with the two Kaczynski- brothers in power now is that the present system of voting in the European government, the way the things are structured now, will always leave Poland in a minority position and they say that Poland will be discriminated against. If you analyse the political discourse of these two brothers, you see that for example they are saying things like: 'If the Nazis had not attacked Poland there would be many more Polish people today and they would therefore not be a minority'. But knowing the facts that the Poles, Ukrainians and the Yugoslav and Romanian Communists and many others were also guilty of carrying out campaigns of ethnic cleansing against the Germans minorities in their states, this argument is not just stupid but also pointless.

Claudia's grandfather was born in Vojvodina and was killed by the Partisans because he was a German soldier. So her grandmother became a refugee and had to start a new life in Germany. The same thing happened to part of my family. They lived in Sarajevo with a German family name, which has Czech roots. The original family name was Plzn. The surname was Germanised. The family moved from Germany to Romania, from Romania to Bosnia, from Bosnia to Macedonia, from Macedonia to Kosovo, from Kosovo to Sarajevo. In 1944, my grandfather worked for the German army and also had a son in SS troops. He realised that it would not be very intelligent to stay in Sarajevo and to wait for the Partisan liberation, so they left.

What am I trying to say? It is not just the question of lack of understanding between the countries of Western and Eastern Europe. If you remember what happened in Estonia not too long ago, in Talin, the Estonian capital, there were demonstrations against the statue of a Russian soldier. Protesters were young people, pro-Nazi youth. Almost all the Baltic states did the same because all of them want ethnically clean states. So there is another question of the nation state. Spain for example has huge problems with the immigrants from Northern Africa, especially from Morocco. One of the things that Sarkozy needs to solve in France, hopefully not in the way he did as the Minister of Police, but now as the President of the country, is to create a new model of society, which will integrate these young people from Northern Africa so they will not have reasons to start riots as they did not long ago.

I believe that Iraq will be separated into three parts. In the northern part of the country there is already a Kurdish state. It is still not recognised internationally, but the fact is that they have their own economy, police force, flag and the support of the USA. Whether Turkey likes it or not, it is a reality. What will happen to the Kurds in Turkey if Turkey does not accept to give them political and cultural autonomy is one of the questions which will determine whether Turkey will enter the European Union or not. Turkey has to change its concept of the nation state.

The situation is the same in Croatia. In 1995, Tudman started burning Serbian houses and saying that we have solved the problem of Serbs in Croatia. With this policy, the number of Serbs living in Croatia was reduced from 11% to only 4% of the population. We said to Tudman »Mr. Tudman, whether you will still be alive or not, whether you like it or not, but one day Croatia will enter into the European Union. The EU will not accept the fact that you were taking away from the Serb minority their property and citizenship. Within the EU, these are

inalienable rights«. And what happened later? The nationalist Prime Minister of Croatia, Ivo Sanader, had to change his political language and policies. He changed into someone who had to go into coalition with the party of the Serb minority in Croatia in order to be able to stay in power. Almost all of the houses of the Serbs which have been destroyed have now been rebuilt. Any Serb who wants to return to Croatia is allowed to. Even those Serbs who were part of the insurrection are allowed to return due to the abolition law. But every once in a while things are becoming clearer, Serbs who committed war crimes have also been arrested by the police.

Olgu: Can you tell us something about the concept of human rights in Muslim countries?

DP: The Islamic concepts of human rights are different than the Western ones. Even within the Muslim world, the position of women is very different. Take, for example, the situation in Iran compared to Turkey or compared to Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Yemen, Tunisia or Morocco, which are the most liberal Muslim countries. It is very important to be aware of all these differences. So in the same way as it is necessary to have dialogue between religions to establish the minimum of ethics that all can agree on in the West, it is also necessary, within the Muslim world, to have this kind of dialogue - and not only to discuss the future of OPEC and the price of oil.

Bojan: We are mainly talking about the religious, ideological concepts that are connected with society and politics. I will pose this question by telling you a simple story that I read in a book: There were some tribes living at some locations. And then a man came and he taught them how to make fire. The first tribe was very happy and successful. They learned how to make fire. So the man went to another tribe and he taught them the same thing. There were some

priests there and they felt endangered by this man, so they killed him. But to satisfy the people, they took his tools and made an altar. They said to all the people that he had been a holy man who had died there, and that they should respect his relics and that they were the people's medium to God. So I actually wanted to ask: Where actually is God in religion? Is religion just using God for posting ideas to influence people or is there God in religion? Where exactly is the place for God if religion comes from the people?

DP: The bottom line idea is God. God is present in any religious system that promotes the dignity of human beings. If the religious structure or the religious activities, in the Catholic Church for example, do not produce the phenomena of solidarity, then God is not present. He is always present in that sense - but He is not always present in the acts of the people. If we act in a way that does not promote solidarity and human rights, we are acting without the blessings of God. There is a discussion that has been going for centuries, which began with Luther, Leibniz and many other philosophers about the necessity of a religious system in order to establish a connection with God. In our case (Drago and his wife) we do not actually belong to any official Church. But in our lives, we live consciously that we are nothing without the existence of God. We pray together, we read the Bible, we read spiritual texts. We also visit different Churches, and different services which our friends attend. But after my experience with the Catholic Church, it is absolutely not necessary for me at the moment to officially belong to any kind of organised religious group.

Claudia: Drago asked me to tell a story that demonstrates that it is not necessary to have an institution, but if the individuals have faith and are committed to establish human dignity, solidarity, if they as individuals – even when the Church is not - are faithful to these values, they CAN actually change the course of history.

There is popular song "Amazing grace", which is known all over the world. It is usually associated with Black Americans, as their anthem. Does anyone know the story behind it? Does anyone know who wrote this song? Ok!

The song was actually not written by a Black American, or a (former) slave, but by a man named John Newton. Newton was an Englishman who had been very active in the slave trade. This slave trade involved ships which sailed from England to Africa to pick up slaves, they then sailed across the Atlantic to America where the slaves were sold. With this money, cotton and other products were bought and taken back to England. He was an active part of this slavery cycle. One day, he had an experience with God which turned his life around. He started to seriously study God and the Bible. He began to understand what God expected of him, by which values he should live. It was as if a curtain was pulled to the side and he saw his whole life and all he had done from a different perspective. It was a shock when he realized what he had been doing all these years to other human beings. This experience inspired him to write the song. Knowing this and hearing Black people, the former slaves, singing it makes it even more powerful.

But the story did not end there. He did not just write a song and stop there. He actually got together with another British man William Wilberforce, who was a member of the British Parliament. They found others who shared their view that the slave trade was absolutely, morally completely wrong before God because of how it treats other human beings. They were way ahead of their time, because they recognized these black people, these Africans, as human beings. They started a movement in the Parliament to have the slave trade abolished. It was a big scandal at that time because the whole economy in Britain depended on the slave trade, and what they were proposing would destroy the economy. However, they insisted on their position that what was going on was morally

wrong before God. It is never justified to sacrifice other human beings - just so that we can live happily.

For more than 40 years they fought for the abolition of the slave trade in Parliament. They never stopped talking about it and bringing in more facts. Shortly before William Wilberforce died, the British Parliament not only passed the law to abolish slavery but also guaranteed the freedom of all the slaves in the British Empire.

This caused a domino effect all around the world and everybody who was involved in slave trade was shocked. The reason is simple: If one country stands up and says this is morally wrong, we stop - then you can not pretend and you can not fool yourself anymore. It has taken a couple more centuries for slavery to be abolished in other parts of the world as well. It even took much longer for the US to get there. But it started because a few individuals decided to stand up for what they considered right before God - and it changed the course of history.

This was just one example of how, not the institution, but individuals motivated by their faith were able to change history.

Esra: This question is about the scarf to all of you. As you know in Iran, Iraq and Arabian countries the women have to wear a scarf and in some other countries like France or Turkey women who wear it can not go to schools. The French Parliament passed this law and this has created big issue in the whole world. How come that a piece of clothing made a such big problem and do you think that the wearing scarf is restriction for woman or if it makes her free?

DP: I think it is hypocrisy of the Western world to forbid the Muslim woman to wear the hidyab. Why can Catholics nuns wear their habits and no one has a

problem with that? Also some orders of nuns have their whole face covered. There are also different kinds of hidyabs. So in your example you can see a little bit of hair, but there are Catholic nuns, where everything is covered and nobody has a problem with them going to schools like that. What I am saying is that there are certain prejudices against Muslim women, and what is behind this is fear. It is an irrational fear: What will happen if we allow Muslim women to go to hospitals, to the Parliament, public offices wearing the hidyab? So one day they may come and demand the robes that Taliban women have to wear. The problem is that these prohibit communication or makes it difficult.

I have not thought about this topic much. But in Turkey and Tunisia and in Bosnia when I see women that are completely covered, my reaction is not a positive one. I do not feel comfortable if I can not see the face of a person. I understand their arguments, but I do not think it is necessary. And I do think it is a cultural derivation of Islam, because in original Islam it does not exist. The same way the Christians have added many things to Jesus that were not there in origin of Christianity, they were invented and added on later. The position of women in the Hebrew and Greek-Roman society was a lower one and one of submission. In the 12th century, St. Thomas defines women as a mistake of nature. Today, women and feministic theology are trying to put women in the same position as men. But I can not be a Catholic if I believe that a woman can be a priest.

Emrah: I find it very dangerous to talk about the clash of civilizations because if you talk in this terminology, then we accept an attitude that there are civilizations that are naturally against each other and that there is no need for dialogue.

DP: So I think we should talk in another framework because they are like the two sides of a coin. One side says, ok, there can be dialogue between civilizations, but we must open a third front which says that the problem is not about civilizations but about democracy or social justice, etc. In Turkey, a Muslim villager feels closer to a Venezuelan worker than to a Turkish boss with whom they share the same religion. It does not matter if the boss is Muslim or Christian because there is some kind of exploitation going on in both places.

I find it very tricky to use the words dialog, civilizations or whatever because Turkey is not just a Muslim country. There are also people from different religions living there. I think that Turkey is different from Algeria. Maybe Turkey has more similarities with Greece, and also some similarities with France. So what we need is to find a different terminology to overcome this ideology of hate.

When I use these terms, I use them as a journalist and a theologian to explain what is happening in terms of theology and politics in the world. What I was saying is not my personal opinion, it is a general description about what is happening in the world. It is clear and obvious that there are people like you, who are aware of the importance of things like labour unions and syndicates, who understand, for example, how important it is to work on solidarity and communication between workers in various countries in all parts of the world. You are people who understand that it is not enough to only discuss topics like religions and civilizations.

On the other hand, you have to accept the fact that there are very strong prejudices among religions, and that there are conflicts that need to be resolved. If Pope Benedict XVI, for the second time in 7 years repeats that the Catholic Church is the only right Church of Christ, and that the Protestant Church can not

even be called a real Church, and that the Orthodox Church can maybe be called a church, but it is not as complete as the Catholic Church. This thesis requires responses from theologians. And theologians like myself will answer the Pope: »You are wrong, sorry, Sir. But when you were a child, you were a member of the Hitler youth. And when you were young, Hitler was saying that the German race was the only true race. And what is happening with you now? Are you repeating what is still in your subconscious? Where in the Bible does it say that anyone has a monopoly on the Word of God?« The Word of God is on offer, and if you want you can accept it. And if you do not want to, you do not have to accept it. Jesus was always saying if you want to follow my words, take your cross and follow me. But he respected the will of those who did not accept it.

The Second Vatican Council concluded that the Holy Spirit is present in all religions. So what does this mean? It means that Muslims who live their faith in perfection reach the same level of salvation as Christians do.

Esra: I find religion very important, but sometimes in some misinterpretations of religion there are some strange ethics that are obliging people and limiting their freedom like in case of gay couples. In Islam they are not allowed to marry, in Catholicism also. So I am just asking questions...

DP: We really have to be careful about these things. For example, after September 11, 2001, we started to talk about Islam. It existed before and nobody was talking about it. And all of a sudden everybody talks about it. Before that, communism was the main enemy. And, in general terms, the enemy of this time is Islam. Next could be maybe Latin America, who knows. You see, before we were talking about communism and I do not know what could be next. What about the other kinds of dictatorships or like, for example, Iraq? There are Shiite and Sunis there. They are fighting each other. Sadam was a tyrant and dictator.

Theology, politics and culture are areas where there are no easy solutions. Forgiveness, for example. I am forty four years old, and I have to say that I am just now starting to understand my identity - and I started this journey when I was sixteen. Can you imagine now how difficult it is for a state which has a centuries of history and traditions behind it to start this process? It is especially difficult when you know that the capacity for internal dialog is lacking, that universities do not encourage dialog between students and professors, and where there is no freedom of press, where it is not allowed or possible to have a party that can criticise the government, and where it is almost impossible to create a climate of dialog.

I want to repeat that none of these topics are easy. But we will not get anywhere if we do not start to move and start to do something. The small step is just not enough. The point is to be intelligent and to take the step at right moment and right place. Maybe Martin Luther King or Mahatma Gandhi would have stayed completely anonymous in world history if they had not had patience and if they had not had the ability to form a group of friends around them. In history, these type of events were always motivated or run by a group of people - and they changed something in the course of history.

If I understood correctly the purpose, or one of the goals of this project, maybe the most important one, is to create a network, to help you all, or to enable you to communicate, to exchange information. Maybe in twenty years you will be a university professor. And for me it is important that you would be an open-minded professor and not one of these narrow minded ones, who will only repeat what he has read in other books. It is not the same thing if you are person with international connections, who attends seminars in other countries and has experience in dealing with different cultures, if your films have participated in

international film festivals - or if you are always just talking with a group of people who think the same as you.

Nora: I have a question. You were mentioning Peron, you were mentioning Adenauer and yesterday you were also speaking about heroism. I was living in Argentina too and now days Peron is received very positively because of the rights he established for the workers. The same is with Adenauer in German memories. He is received very positively because he rebuilt the Western part of Germany and nobody is really mentioning the things like that he put a lot of Nazi people in positions in his government, for whatever reason. This is a complicated issue. And he also participated in dividing Germany into two countries by not having contact with comunists at all. So this is really a complicated issue. But I read that people do need hero leaders in some way. But it is also very dangerous how political leaders are received in memories.

DP: The point is that there are some historical events that actually require several generations to be seen realistically. Germany would not be what it is now if after Adenauer they would not have had people like Schmidt, Willy Brand who opened the communication and politics towards the East and who also introduced the new policy. Or people like Helmut Kohl who was there when Germany was reunified, and people like Gorbachov, who opened Russia to the world.

This is very closely related to the process of gaining maturity in society. The responsibilities do not lie only with politicians. Milosevic is not the only one guilty, and he is not responsible for everything that happened. He was used as the element of political power by a group of people who had the specific idea. And the same thing happened with Tudman. He became the head of the Croatian State by accident. In the beginning, he was not the candidate for the head-of-

state. But apparently the secret service and the Church did everything they could to help Tudman to become and stay President for ten years. The result is that today, young people in Croatia do not know the difference between fascism and anti-fascism.

There are also fascist movements in Serbia, such as the radical party of Vojislav Šešelj, led by Miroslav Nikolic - because the party leader Šešelj is on trial in The Hague for war crimes. It is the largest political party in Serbia and they claim that they are anti-fascist. This is just one of the results connected with lack of understanding and education in politics.

The important thing for you is to try to be sure, that at least YOU try to find the meaning of your existence, and to give direction to your life. This direction depends on what you decided to do.

The most important thing is to stay authentic. Listen to the voice inside and what your heart tells you. This is the most important thing for you. As an intelligent person you have a responsibility. It is very important to eliminate all these things - lack of education, lack of understanding. When you need to dedicate yourself to study, you need to be sure that you will not be wasting your time. You need to be sure that at the end of your life, you will be sure that you did not miss anything, and that you did not make a wrong pattern in your life. Make sure that you did something good for others, that you knew you are able to love, to forgive. To be able to do this you have to put order into different concepts. You have to understand that you are a part of a process, a cultural process, a process of maturity between relationships, a process of clarification of your identity. It is important to understand that our world has a lot of details.

Sometimes our life is a little boring because we are not able to capture these little details. A very good movie director or producer knows that if he wants to make a good film he needs more than a camera to capture what is happening in the foreground. You also need to have an actor who will be able to interpret details, who can make facial expression, or show emotions. Sometimes we lose too much time discussing things that are highly theoretical like religion, nation, culture, identity and we forget that life is made up of small details. Why are documentary films produced by the BBC or the ARD in Germany so good? For example, they show a countryside, a panoramic view of, let's say, the Gobi desert. But then you see how a tarantula eats an insect. This composition of the universal and the local makes a movie good in our eyes and gives it quality - no matter if they are talking about politics, nature, culture or living in Europe.

In the Balkans we realize that we are surrounded by holes. These holes are purposeless and you have to give them some purpose. I do not know if maybe through this seminar you will create something that will start a revolution. This seminar will be a success, if you will be able to convince yourself that is necessary to abandon, to live beyond any types of stereotypes, attitudes, hypocrisy and if you allow others to define themselves as they like. This is the core, the foundation of any political or cultural activity. In any type of situation, society should be constructive and should allow every individual and every group, of course if they respect constitution, the state, and the freedom of others, to feel accepted and to be free to express themselves. It is also important to find the truth about human beings. Not only the one truth but many truths, and as a Theologian, I can say only that every human being is created by God. I do not have the right as a member of Croatian society, or as a journalist or as a professor of journalism, or as a member of the Social Democratic Party to say that my view of the world and the process of democratization in Croatia is the best. I can not say that my view is more important than the view of the atheist.

The motivations that I have are the right motives for my life. To a certain point it is like the life of Che Guevara. However, the moment that he became an authority in Cuba, he renounced a number of his ideas, which were very important, and became an assassin. He killed people without justice and lost his idealism. But when he was young, he was a revolutionary. He talked and focused on what good politicians are doing to defend the people's identity and their concepts of life. There are some words that Che Guevara said that were good: "You have to become firm, but without losing tenderness". Think about the dynamics of this, please. Become firm, be firm, be strong, to be able to lead a revolution - but do it without losing the capacity to see the other as a human being, even if they are completely wrong in their ideas.

What I wanted to say yesterday and today is that we need to fight against any type of hegemony. We need to find a simple answer to complicated questions. We need to promote human respect. We need to renew and recreate our relationships with other human beings and nature in a way which is pacifist and which includes dialog. We need to know that we are only passing through this world and that we do not own it, but that we are here to serve.

Sara: I have a more private question. Can you tell us something about why you left the Franciscans and went to the military in your brother's place?

DP: Yes, that is a contradiction. Franciscans are actually pacifists and it is a contradiction that someone who is a pacifist should take a Kalashnikov and be ready to kill other people. I am aware of the fact that these were very confusing times for me. I do not think that I actually killed anyone. I did shoot, but my task in the army was to scout out enemy territory during the night. I was also a translator for an Argentinean instructor. We trained Croatian soldiers to enter the enemy territory at night and to check what is going on - with night vision

devices and in silence. Mainly we took pictures and filmed, marking the enemy positions on the maps so that the artillery could shoot and hit these targets the next day. We worked in silence, but a number of times we were discovered and we had to escape. And when you are escaping, you do fire at the enemy in order to protect yourself. But I do not think that I actually killed anyone.

Anyway, the fact remains that I was ready, I was prepared to act violently. These are maybe reasons why I became a defender of the human rights of those who had actually been my enemies. And I had the necessity to find the person who had killed my brother and establish contact with him. I established human contact with him in order to liberate myself from any feeling of vengeance.

Why did I leave the Franciscans and go to the army? Because even while I was with the Franciscans I continued to be a nationalist. It just seemed did not seem right that my younger brother, who did not have any type of political identity or ideology and was only twenty two, was out there risking his life every day, and that I was safe at my home in the monastery. I was the one who was the nationalist, who had all these ideologies and a political identity. Before the war, when I arrived in Croatia, I started this internal process of criticism. And during this process, I noticed that my motives for being a Franciscan were not pure anymore. They were not idealistic. I also had problems accepting this type of lifestyle.

Question: So what is the difference between religion and moral principals, ethics, like in philosophy? Everything that you talk about in religion is based on morals and ethics. So, where is God in this? I mean, why do we need God when we have morals and ethic principals?

DP: To behave in an ethical way, you do not need to believe in God. But to give your life a purpose, and to be able to accept such things as injustice and suffering, it is easier if you believe in God. The gift of faith, and that is what it really is, a gift. That is why someone who is a believer should actually be a very humble person and conscious of the fact that he has actually received the gift. And that is also why someone who is a believer should have an attitude of dialog towards the atheist or agnostic, not only verbal or philosophical dialogue, but a dialogue of ethical behavior.

If you are someone who knows me, someone who has listened to me speak, or if you know about my life, you should be able to recognize that I am a believer in God, even if I do not verbalize it. But I want to repeat my experience: I have found a lot of humanity, a lot of capacity for sacrifice, the capacity to give up yourself among people who are not believers. That is why I believe that there are two types of believers, those who are believers consciously, and those who are not. Both of them have the same values. In the eyes of God, the one who does not consider himself as a believer is not less worth in the eyes of God. In God's eyes he has the same value.

It is difficult to know why one person believes and the other person does not. It is not just a question of education or culture, maybe it is a genetic problem. Maybe there is a psychological explanation. There are lots of people who believe, their belief or their faith is motivated by fear or by insecurity. The reasons why some people define themselves as believers could be different. We can discuss that, there are many kinds of reasons. It can be a problem of family tradition, like in my case. But at one point in my life, I had to say: The God that you showed me, is a God of war, and I do not want to believe in this God. I want to believe in a God of peace and reconciliation. This attitude created a huge conflict in my family and among my friends. I was expelled from the Croatian

Association of Catholic Journalists. Bishops and priests attacked me publicly. I received death threats numerous times. So the price of living ethically and morally is sometimes a very high price to pay. I opposed the church because it was serving a dictator, such as Tudman. They said absolutely nothing to defend the human rights, especially of the Serbs in Croatia. I oppose this Church because it does not serve the poor. The church needs to have as an absolute priority to serve the poor. That is the example of Jesus.

Julia: I have another question. You said that you found the murderer of your brother. So maybe you can tell us something about it, because you said that you forgave him. But how does it work? So you talked about it, maybe he apologized I don't know... Maybe you can talk about that?

DP: I did not find him by accident. I was looking for him for years. It was a very conscious decision I made. I had a plan with different options. Because maybe he would not want to talk to me. One of the conditions was that I did not want to know his name. Why? Because he could have been afraid that I could use the meeting to reveal his name to the judicial system because his boat had also attacked Dubrovnik. I was aware that he was just obeying orders. My brother also blew up two tanks. He killed at least seven people. It was a war. And for me it was necessary to say that there are mothers who are still suffering for something that he did. If he thinks of what he did, I believe he should not feel guilty. Not only because we were just very small elements in the whole scene of what was happening in the war, but because no amount of hate or desire for vengeance would ever bring my brother back, or be able to bring peace to my mother - and would not give peace to this man.

It was just a very short conversation of five minutes. He was on the boat, he is a first officer, and I was on the pier. Maybe it was something huge, a scene that

would need to be described and written in more depth in a chapter of my autobiography or something. But for me it was very, very important spiritually and internally. It was something that actually set me free. It liberated me inside.

Ana: I'm particularly interested in what happened in Argentina during the dictatorship. Is it true that people who were against that government were taken into planes and thrown into the ocean?

DP: Yes. In the trial of the former police captain, some paramilitary activities were proven. For example, when the police was interrogating people, they also made prisoners suffer. They gave them drugs, and then threw them out of the helicopters into a river or into the ocean. Some had weights on their feet so that they would sink immediately. Others were thrown just to make them suffer more and to drown slowly. The level of sadism was very similar to the level of sadism that you can find in regimes like Pyong Yang in North Korea or like the Nazis had in their concentration camps.

Last week the trial against a Catholic priest started. He had been a police chaplain in the province of Buenos Aires, and he is of German origin. He was accused of participating in the murder of seven people, the disappearing of 47 people and the torture of 34 people. During this trial they also proved that he had actually used, or better, »misused« the secrecy of confession, giving information to the police. In the Catholic Church it is considered a mortal sin to abuse the secrecy of confession. A priest who violates this vow of secrecy of confession is supposed to be expelled from the Church immediately.

This is just one example of what was happening in Argentina at that time. I was only 14 years old when the dictatorship started. My school was controlled by the military. I was in secondary school, which lasted for six years, and in the final

grades there were some young people who were engaged in revolutionary activities. These kinds of schools were actually Catholic and the close collaboration between the Catholic Church and the military dictatorship was always present. The director of my school was a criminal. After many years of political and social development, in 1983, democracy was returned and in the year 2000 Pope John Paul II actually made numerous public declarations asking for forgiveness because of the activities of the Catholic Church under the dictatorship. He obliged all the bishops in Argentina to ask the people for forgiveness for having participated in the dictatorship. This was in September 2000. In October 2000 the generals who had been in power at that time did the same thing. They asked people of Argentina for forgiveness.

Pope John Paul II was very contradictory person. He put a lot of effort into facilitating ecumenical dialog. He also fought for human rights and he also faced many internal conflicts in the church. He also did some other things that were very good. For example, he required all the North American bishops to come to the Vatican to have an open discussion about the problem of pedophilia in the Church. He required them to ask for forgiveness from all those victims of pedophilia. He decided to punish those bishops and priests who were guilty and to provide them with psychological aid. It was also decided that compensation be paid to the victims. Five parishes in the US have gone bankrupt because of this. The last one was in San Diego. In California alone, at this point, there are nine hundred cases of pedophilia that are being processed. And yesterday, the parish of Los Angeles had to pay 600 million dollars to the victims. All this happened because of the sense of responsibility that Pope John Paul II had.

Before that, the Catholic Church was trying to hide the cases of pedophilia and to not talk about them. In Argentina, the same thing happened. The Catholic Church did not want to talk about the violation of human rights during the

dictatorship. Afterwards, they said that they had followed the example of Pope Pio XII who was the Vatican Ambassador in Berlin at the time of the Nazis, and later became Pope. He avoided criticizing the Nazis publicly because he was afraid that this could provoke reactions that would be much more violent than the behaviour of the Nazis.

The conclusion of this internal dialog in Argentina was that the truth must be told - no matter what the cost. War crimes do not age or become »outdated«. Sooner or later, the judicial system will find those who committed war crimes if they are still alive. Today, the tribunals in Argentina are absolutely full because the Supreme Court has all the old cases of amnesty – but if there is evidence of some atrocities, the investigation starts immediately. The same thing will happen in Croatia. It is already happening.

I would like to finish with a quote from the Nobel Prize winner for Literature, a Polish woman named Wislawa Zimborska. She wrote that life is a theater performance without the possibility to practice before, and that the only thing that we can do is to improvise. The title of her speech when she received Nobel Prize was “Life is a Stage”. A large part of your life will be improvisation, and you should try to do well. It is about being conscience of your bodies, without being afraid of its limitations. It is about being conscience of our heads and minds, and being open to any type of thought even if they are completely heretic. It is possible to develop instincts and to be able to improvise. It is the capacity, ability to find happiness, even if the scenes of life are cruel. It is also about patience, because at any step in life we can stumble and fall.

That is why I said before that it is important to become aware of all the details in our lives, to be able to ask for forgiveness especially in cases when our own attitudes or actions are very nervous due to the lack of patience. It is the ability

to resist the frantic phases of life, to be able to slow down and the ability to be able to control our emotions. Because many times we say and do things and other people say and do things to us that we do not understand or that we can not control.

Many Thanks for your kind attention.