

In His Own Words:

Ivo Markovic on Hopes and Challenges for Promoting Ethnic Reconciliation

I believe the essence of ethnicity, of a group, is that each identity is something nice and noble. And to communicate with others in order to develop oneself, we develop each other as individuals through each other, but also as cultures and as ethnicities. And this is how we grow.

We have our own identities and groups of people connected by something common — language, for the most part, or relationship by blood, etc. These identities enrich themselves by communication with others. Every meeting with something “other” is an opportunity for encouraging that identity, enriching it.

In terms of inter-religious communications, we have had big pressures that we have lived with. A lot of imperialist traditions. And we haven't really thought about the source of our religions. And, on this level of relationships among religions, we are making a big step.

All of the people who have gained anything by their ethnicity, they have gained their wealth by contacts with others. And something primitive and biological within us happens. Instead of seeing a chance for love and a chance for an encounter and enrichment in somebody else, we see fear and danger. This is this automatic reaction and fear that you are not my chance, but competition and danger.

It is true that there are not many people that are truly aware, not even 80 out of 100 people. There are 10 to 20% of quality people who could be very easily noticeable. But now they are enemies of the nationalists and, therefore, they cannot be noticed.

Do you know that now in my Croatian nation, they are thinking that I am a traitor? I could go to Serb territory or Muslim territory, but if I go to Herzegovina, I am a traitor there. I have attacks against me. Every Croat who works in these prophetic missions is being called a traitor and people are being attacked and even killed. Their own political party would kill its own people because whoever tries to wake people up, he is an enemy. That's what the West and Europe and the United States — those who stopped the war here — don't realize. That's where we need help.

For example, with the choir, I don't have any help from Croatia. Not even one Croatian institution offered to help me. I have some help from the abroad and it's very difficult to maintain.

In Bosnia, many people are fanatic about their own thing and they are against us. On the other hand, other people are fanatically afraid of us. And I see how we try to approach those who are afraid of us. And we understand them. We are patient with them. And they begin to love us. So there is something that brings future options. In five or six years, there will be some results and it will become more clear how the results of such activities are admirable. When the first results of truthful democracy would be seen, that's when we'll realize that we can live together. All of that that has happened will very quickly become history.

As far as my experience tells me, people who come, they come to help us. They can help us because we need help from the outside because, oftentimes, people cannot get out of the hole in which they fell. We have difficulty beginning to communicate. There is somebody from the outside necessary to help us organize ourselves — meetings, so that we can resolve conflicts.

And, of course, it's not easy in Bosnia, Croatia, and Serbia where people are so oppressed by their life. It's not necessary to talk to them only. Yes, it's necessary to give them work, to ask them to cooperate so as to resolve their issues. This is why the biggest peacemaker in our country is trade because people get to communicate with one another.

You know, I personally have a really beautiful faith. I guess God gave me this good faith and the faith is always a gift. And I feel that there are many priests among us who have had this kind of water to swim through. And we have to fight so we can have greater spirituality and a sense of mission not only for the people, but for religion itself.

Even in the Church, many will not accept me. They are saying, "Why do we need that? Why do we need Muslims in our churches? Let Muslims honor ecumenism and dialogue. Let Serbs honor ecumenism and dialogue. Why do we need that?" Constantly in this environment they are saying that. But we cannot give up.