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THE WORKS OF LEONARD AS A MODEL FOR  
INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE IN EX - YUGOSLAVIC  
AREAS IN THE XXI CENTURY  
(FROM NATIONALISM TO INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE)

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**Abstract:** The article examines the work of Leonard Swidler as a model for inter-religious dialogue in ex-Yugoslav areas in the 21st century. It aims to analyse the role of interreligious dialogue in the neutralisation of nationalism. This is particularly evident in the interweaving of nationalist and religious communities, where religious communities emerge as the instigators of nationalism. In addition, religious leaders assume the role of unofficial national and state leaders. The national and state interest is derived from the interpretation of religious interest. Consequently, politicians and national and state leaders frequently become mere puppets in their hands. This pattern was particularly evident during the Yugoslav conflict in the late 20th century. The traumatic effects of the conflict are still evident in the present day. Concurrently, religious leaders in the former Yugoslav territories occupy a significant position, not only in the formulation of state and national policy, but also in the formation of public opinion within the regions over which they hold religious authority. In his oeuvre, the American theologian Leonard Swidler analyses the processes of interfaith dialogue as a model for resolving conflict situations involving religious opposites. It should be noted that his works do not present a definitive formula for such conflict resolution; rather, they offer a contribution to this issue. Religious dialogue is a practice that is not characteristic of the contemporary era of bourgeois society; as a result, it is timeless and extraterritorial. It is for this reason that a sample of ex-Yugoslav areas was selected as representative, given that religious contrasts are a significant factor.

**Key words:** Leonard Swidler, interreligious dialogue, nationalism, ex Yugoslav territory, XXI century

## **1. Introduction**

The Yugoslav conflict, which commenced in the final decade of the 20th century, ultimately escalated into a violent armed conflict. In response, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) initiated a military intervention. This represents a typical pattern in which the only formal cause is the growth of nationalism and large-state projects. The historical and religious conflicts that have occurred in this region, along with the spread of three distinct faiths across a geopolitically significant area, have contributed to the current situation. The three principal religions are Orthodoxy, Catholicism and Islam. These are regions over which great powers such as the Ottoman Empire, the Venetian Republic, Austria and Russia have historically engaged in conflict. Each of these countries was characterised by a specific religious outlook and set of interests. The relationship between states and religions, or states as a religious synonym, is a defining feature of human society and state organisations throughout history. Such a relationship may be mutually beneficial. On the one hand, it signifies the state as a product of a religion, or alternatively, a religion as a product of the state (Thomas 1996, 25).

It is evident that areas of significant geopolitical importance are prone to the occurrence of religious conflicts. These conflicts often entail the domination of one religious group over another, with the national and state characteristics becoming secondary considerations. This is evidenced by the Balkan region and, within it, the Yugoslav region. Escalating forms of this area have been known to occur on an intermittent basis, with extremely bloody outcomes. Furthermore, from the end of the Middle Ages until the 19th century, the Yugoslav territories lacked both national and ethnic states, a period during which the Ottoman, Venetian and Austrian empires were in decline. The first national and ethnic states, namely those of Serbia and Montenegro, emerged in the 19th century. In consequence of such state practice, the first Yugoslav state was established in 1918. The newly formed state did not align with the national aspirations of various constituent peoples, including Croats and Slovenes, as well as numerous minorities who did not recognize it as their own. These minorities included (Albanians in Kosovo and Metohija and Macedonia, Germans and Hungarians in Vojvodina, and Romanians in Banat, among others).

Despite the involvement of numerous nations and ethnic groups on opposing sides of the Second World War, including Germany, Italy, the USA, Britain and the USSR, the conflict was fundamentally driven by long-standing religious tensions and the pursuit of religious and religiously defined territories. P. H. Liotta posits that the enmities between Serbs and Croats are rooted in ancient ethnic hatreds and that the intervals between

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periods of shared life are inconsequential (Liotta 2000, 3). An exception was the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, which was sponsored by the USSR and espoused atheism. As the end of the war drew near and the victory of this party became increasingly probable, atheism underwent a process of radicalisation. Following the end of the war and the assumption of absolute power in 1945, the Yugoslav communities, in accordance with the precedent set by the USSR, espoused militant atheism in all aspects of life (Starič – Vodušek 2002, 219 – 238). The propagation of atheistic ideology is conducted on an extreme scale, with a philosophical foundation in Marxist - Engelsist atheistic philosophy (Karl Heinrich Marx and Friedrich Engels), and the practice of the first such realised revolution in Russia known as - Leninism. (Владимир Ильич Ленин.). Marx's phrase: "Die Religion [...] ist das Opium des Volkes (Religion is the opium of the masses) (Marx 1957, 41). In particular, young people were exposed to indoctrination through singing at political rallies: „Ne vjerujem u čudesa, no u Marksa i Engelsa“ („I do not believe in miracles, I do believe in Marx and Engels“). A model of complete atheism of the state is proposed in conjunction with the economic devastation of religious communities. This includes (the expulsion of religious education from the school system, the seizure of property through nationalisation, agrarian reform and the colonisation of the landless) (Radić 1995).

## 2. Leonard Swidler and the resulting notions of religious, national and ideological dialogue (pattern of categories)

Does religion constitute the initial form of national and ideological identity? In the previous chapter of this article, the pattern of one of the conflicted Balkan societies was presented. This was Yugoslavia, where the resulting notions of identity, including religion, nation, and ideology, were the impetus for conflicts. Leonard Swidler states that *Homo sapiens*, which existed approximately 70,000 years before the Christian era, is characterised by equating the concepts of religion and nation. The formation of religion and the establishment of a religious civilisation are both initiated by human collectives. Swidler thus asserts that: "All of these ancient religions were 'primary religions,' that is, were coterminous with civilization or 'state'". The emergence of nations and civilisations is contingent upon the existence of these states, which are coterminous with the respective religions. To illustrate this thesis, Swidler offers the following example: „[...] all members of the Israelite 'nation,' and only they, were devotees of the Israelite religion“ (Swidler 2013, 3). Nevertheless, this pattern is not a constant feature of the development of human civilisations, states and religions. The course of global civilisations and religions has resulted in the emergence of numerous entities at various levels, including both national and ideological -political levels. Swidler observes that an historical precedent exists whereby the

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relationship between the state and religion has remained a significant factor in the evolution of human society. The fundamental connection between the state's identity and its religious identity gives rise to this process „state expanded the religion also tended to expand [...]“. Conquered peoples and states in a rush of strongest „[...] tended eventually to adapted the religion of the victors. For example, as the Christian, or later Muslim, armies were victorius, so too Christianity and Islam spread“ (Swidler 2013, 3).

For centuries, the Balkans represented a collision of religions, civilizations, peoples, nations and ultimately ideologies. Ex - Yugoslav areas have a first-class importance in this. The division of the Roman Empire into Western and Eastern in 395, during the reign of Emperor Theodosius I, ultimately resulted in a schism between the Roman and Constantinople churches in 1054 that is, until the creation of the Catholic and Orthodox Churches. In consideration of the prediction of the division of 395, which suggested the border would traverse the center of the later Yugoslav territories, that is by the river Drina, it is evident that the religious conflict between Catholics and Orthodox Christians, which has persisted for centuries in this region, will ultimately result in a bloody epilogue that will lead to genocide in the first half of the 20th century. It will have its continuation in the last decade of the 20th century in the dissolution of the Second Yugoslav (Socialist) Federal Republic. It is clear that there was no interreligious dialogue between these two religious groups over the centuries in the essential sense. It appeared in certain details out of simple interest due to the potential dangers of the new religion, Islam, which will be explained in greater detail later in this text. What were the consequences of the division of the Roman Empire in 395 in the Balkans, and the centuries-old conflict between the Church of Rome and Constantinople, which had been smoldering for some time? The territories of Serbia, Montenegro, parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Bulgaria and Romania remained within the civilizational and religious sphere of the Church of Constantinople (Obolensky 1982, 17).

The religious and national conflict in the former Yugoslav territories led to significant religious reconciliation in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina (Glenny 29 July 1993, A23). In his analysis of the role of religion in the outbreak of wars in the former Yugoslavia, Paul Mojzes posits that: „The role of religion in the dramatic events at the end of the 20th century in the Balkans is very controversial. Some argue that they were religious wars, and others believe that religion played no role at all. I think that religion played an important but not crucial role. In any case we cannot compare them with crusades nor with  *jihad* “ (Velikonja 2003, 12). This thesis is supported by Misha Glenny (Glenny 1993).

“At the heart of dialogue is inter-religious dialogue“ [...] (Swidler, Mojzes, 2000, 51). Despite numerous political negotiations, even under the auspices of the UN, it became evident that this was not the case! Religious

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leaders of two religions (in Croatia), or three (in Bosnia) have never met to end the conflict! In the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, there was no representation from religious leaders at the Dayton negotiations in 1995 (McMahon/Western 2009, 69; Belloni 2009, 163-180). In Bosnia and Herzegovina, according to the last census from 1991 (the war broke out in April 1992), there were about 43% Muslims, 30% Orthodox, and 14% Roman Catholics. (Cvitković 2001, 32). In order to provide a comparative example in relation to Bosnia and Herzegovina, it is possible to take Swidler's information that six years after the Al Qaeda attack on the USA „[...]Islam began to join global inter-religious dialogue in a massive way“. He presents the argument that this fact is analogous to the entry of the Catholic Church into interfaith dialogue. All this resulted in the fact that 138 Muslim scientists and religious leaders from all over the world published a public letter on 13 October, 2007. „A Common Word Between Us“. They invited Christian leaders and scholars to join them in dialogue (Swidler 2013, 9).

Could this form, which Swidler notes, have been used earlier in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in the last decade of the 20th century? Of course it does, but it's not. However, it may serve as a model for the post-Dayton conflict society of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is constituted by two entities. The state constitution depended and depends on the agreement of the two entities. Entities are a reflection of ethnic, national and religious groups. It is therefore possible to discuss the history of conflicts in this country, which include political and media mobilisations. Faith is behind everything (Branković et al. 2017 13-51). Should the conflict precede those of Yugoslavia and Bosnia and Herzegovina in terms of temporality, one may begin with the model put forth by Swidler. *Dialogue Decalogue (Ground Rules for Interreligious, Intercultural Dialogue)* was published for the first time in 1983. This document was first published by the *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* and was then translated into twenty languages. In accordance with this document, Swidler offers a definition of the essence *Dialogue Decalogue*: „Dialogue is a conversation in a common subject between two or more persons with differing views, the primary purpose of which is for each participant to learn from the other so that S/he can change and grow. This wary definition of dialogue embodies the first commandment of dialogue“ (Swidler 2010, 1). Swidler lists ten commandments that facilitate dialogue. The field of inter-religious and inter-ideological dialogue can be divided into three distinct areas. (Swidler 2010, 1-5). The operational use of the *Dialogue Decalogue* document, in accordance with the ten commandments and three areas of dialogue proposed by Swidler, would have prevented the war from occurring in the Yugoslav territories, and particularly in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This is due to the fact that the document in which Swidler discusses the essence was published eight years prior to the outbreak of the Yugoslav conflict.

### **3. Leonard Swidler and Radically New Age or Age Global Dialogue (Or how to arrive at a pattern of application to ex-Yugoslav societies in the 21st century?)**

The discussion of Radically New Age, or Age Global Dialogue, by Leonard Swidler is worthy of note. Swidler considers these two theses in isolation, but ultimately synthesises them into a unified proposition. From these initial propositions, he derives several sub-propositions. The first thesis posits the downfall of Western civilisation. The concept is primarily represented by the German historian and historian of philosophy Oswald Spengler (Spengler 1922/23) and the American sociologist of Russian origin Pitirim Sorokin (Sorokin 1941). Additionally, various scientists throughout the 20th century proposed this hypothesis but their conclusions were „dead wrong“, as Swidler asserts. These theses were developed prior to the First World War, between the two World Wars, and after the Second World War. Another thesis is that Western civilisation will evolve into a Global Civilisation. Western civilization has created a nuclear civilization, which can destroy life on the planet. While this is also claimed by its opponents, it is nevertheless a defining characteristic of the Western world. It seems probable that Swidler is here referring to the nuclear achievement, given that it ultimately originated in the USA and the key figure in its discovery also belongs to Western civilisation (Albert Einstein). Nevertheless, as Swidler himself asserts: „Still, there are solid empirical grounds for reasonable hope that the inherent, infinity-directed life force of humankind will nevertheless prevail over the parallel death force (Swidler 1996, 1).

The Cold War and the nuclear era warn of the possibility of „global disaster“. Swidler posits that it is conceivable that each idea or movement may exhibit a tendency to manifest on its periphery. „presence of `the crazies`“. The actions of these individuals have the potential to precipitate a global catastrophe (Swidler 1996, 2). It is evident that the appearance of Hitler and Mussolini provides an illustrative example of Swidler's assertion in the context of modern history. Similarly, the advent of Al Qaeda, regional troublemakers such as Saddam Hussein and the communist dynasty in North Korea at the end of the 20th century, and the beginning of the 21st century, serve to reinforce this proposition. However, despite all of these experiences, as Swidler suggests, humanity enters „The Age of Global Dialogue“. In order to explain this phenomenon, Swidler analyses the views of the American theologian Ewert Cousins and the Swiss theologian Hans Kung (Kung 1987; Cousins 1993, 417-425). Swidler believes that they were partially mistaken. The current period is not the culmination of a long series of significant paradigm shifts, as postulated by Kung. This is a more comprehensive explanation than that provided by Cousins with regard to the phenomenon of the *Second Axial Period*. Swidler posits that the "Age of Global Dialogue" represents a radical

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shift in human consciousness. In the context of human history, he represents a new phenomenon. He is, in fact, a revolutionary figure, capable of effecting radical change (Swidler 1996, 14). According to Swidler „humankind is faced with ultimately with choices: Dialogue or Death!“ (Swidler 1996, 16). The most recent developments in Ukraine and the Middle East, where nuclear weapons are being deployed on all sides, serve to corroborate the assertion made by Leonard Swidler.

The Balkans serve as a testing ground for the prestige of global powers, with ex-Yugoslav areas particularly vulnerable due to their history of conflict. In the final decade of the 20th century, the former Yugoslavia served as a training ground for the settlement of Western civilisation, engaging in conflict with opponents from the period of the Cold War. This period saw the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the transformation of the USSR into the new or old power Russia. In contrast, there was a conflict between Western civilisation and the relics of atheistic civilisation. However, the atheistic civilization that had its roots in communist Yugoslavia transformed rapidly in the last decade of the 20th century into a new religious civilization: Catholics (Croats), Orthodox (Serbs, Montenegrins and Macedonians), and Muslims (Bosniaks and Albanians). The old divisions have been re-established. The combination of Swidler's *A Radically New Age* with Western Civilisation experienced a clear victory within its own territory at Dayton in 1995. However, Western Civilisation provided an opportunity for those who historically and religiously never constituted its population (Bosniaks and Albanians), as well as for those who only partially belonged to it (Serbs, Montenegrins and Macedonians) (Jeremić/Jayasundara-Smits 2022, 335-360).

In the late 20th century, elements of Leonard Swidler's theses can be observed in Serbia, specifically during the last decade of the 20th and the first decade of the 21st century. At the outset of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, representatives of three major religious communities (the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Islamic Community, and the Roman Catholic Church) participated together on occasion in joint condemnations of the war. The Serbian Patriarch publicly condemned the series of terrorist attacks that occurred at the *Bajrakli* Mosque in Belgrade. Additionally, he visited a former Yugoslav rabbi and sent a poignant ecumenical message in response to the publication of an anti-Semitic text in the official newsletter of the Serbian Orthodox Church, *Pravoslavlje* entitled "Jews Crucifying Christ Again," the text was swiftly followed by the dismissal of the editor. In response to the public criticism directed at some Protestant communities, one of the Serbian bishops, Lavrentija, offered a reaction. He took the next step by authoring the foreword for the publication *Book of Life*, which was distributed to several educational institutions. The text offers a popular description of the life of Christ (Vukomanović 2002, 5).

#### **4. Lenard Swidler or Nurturing a Culture of Dialogue – Report of the Visit to Skopje, Macedonia (An example of a resolved national-religious conflict)**

A case in point is the crisis in Macedonia between the Macedonians (Orthodox Christians) and the Albanians (Muslims), which represents an obvious example of a resolved national-religious conflict in the former Yugoslav territories. Of the former Yugoslav states, the armed conflict in Macedonia was the most recent, occurring two years after the Kosovo crisis between Serbia and Kosovo, in which the NATO alliance also intervened. The resolution of the crisis was formally concluded in Macedonia as a neutral third country, with the signing of the *Military Technical Agreement/Kumanovo Agreement* in Kumanovo on 9 June 1999. At the time, no one was aware that Macedonians and Macedonian Albanians would become involved in the conflict two years later. The conflict between Macedonians and Macedonian Albanians came to a conclusion with the *Ohrid Agreement* of 13 August 2001.

In the midst of the ongoing conflict, Leonard Swidler and Paul Mojzes undertook a visit to Macedonia and the capital, Skopje, from 14 to 19 June 2001. They were received by the President of the Republic of Macedonia, Mr. Boris Trajkovski. The activities described above were made possible thanks to the financial support provided by the USIP grant. Upon arrival in Skopje, Swidler and Mojzes met with Mr. Michael Engelking, the representative of the World Conference on Religion and Peace. He came to help them from Sarajevo a center of very vulnerable traditions of interreligious and interethnic conflicts. During the meeting, President Trajkovski introduced the five-point plan for cooperation with NATO and the EU. He also highlighted the willingness of Swidler and Mojzes to facilitate a conference of leaders and scientists from diverse religious communities, both domestic and international, with the aim of resolving the conflict in Macedonia (Mojzes/Swidler 2001, 2).

The earliest contact between Swidler and Mojzes and representatives of the Muslim Community in Macedonia was made on 15 June. This was with Mr. Arif Emini, the current Reis-Ul-Ulema, and Mr. Jakub Selimoski, the former Reis – Ul - Ulema of Yugoslavia, who expressed support for the initiative to engage in dialogue. It is evident that Emini and Selimoski espoused the religious beliefs that were in conflict with those of the Albanians, who were Muslim. It would be wrong to assume that they were the exclusive political supporters of the Albanians. On the same day, Swidler and Mojzes met with Archbishop Stefan of the Macedonian Orthodox Church. In his remarks, Archbishop Stefan underscored that it is „more than important“ of the conference of religious leaders and the accompanying events. It is evident that this religious leader was aligned with the majority of the other conflicting party in Macedonia, the Orthodox Macedonians, of which President



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Trajkovski was also a member (Mojzes, Swidler 2001, 3). A significant aspect of Swidler and Mojzes' engagement with the representatives of the Orthodox Macedonians was their meeting with Rev. Jovan Takovski on 18 June, the newly appointed Dean of the Orthodox Theological School, and a younger professor Rev. Aco Girevski (Mojzes, Swidler 2001, 4).

It is important to note that, outside the context of the mission of Swidler and Mojzes and the conflict in Macedonia, the history of the Orthodox Church in Macedonia in the 20th century is complicated. Until the end of 1912, it constituted part of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, with its seat in Constantinople (Istanbul). At that time, the region of Macedonia, which is today the state of Macedonia, was liberated by Serbia from the Ottoman state and subsequently joined the Kingdom of Serbia. From 1921 these territories became part of the unified Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC). Following the establishment of the communist government in Yugoslavia in 1945 and the formation of the Republic of Macedonia in Yugoslavia, a series of conflicts commenced between the Orthodox Church in Macedonia, which ultimately resulted in its separation from the Serbian Orthodox Church in 1958. This secession was not recognised by the Serbian Orthodox Church, nor by any autocephalous church in Pavoslavlje. The dispute was only resolved in 2023, when the Serbian Orthodox Church acknowledged the autocephaly of the Orthodox Church in Macedonia, in accordance with the church tradition of the Ohrid Archdiocese, which dates back to 1019 (Slijepčević 1969; Belčovski 1985; Puzović 1997).

Certainly, the meeting of Swidler and Mojzes with Bishop Joakim Herbert of the Catholic Church should not be avoided. It is important to note, however, that the Catholic population in Macedonia is of a secondary character, and that, apart from some enclaves in the larger Macedonian cities, it is not more pronounced. It is noteworthy that Bishop Herbert informed Swidler and Mojzes that he is uncertain whether the conflict was transmitted to Kosovo. As part of the campaign of Swidler and Mojzes, there are also meetings with cultural and media representatives of Macedonia: director of the Balkan Center for Peace Studies of the University of Skopje Dr. Olga Murdzeva-Skarik on June 17/18; Prof. Slobodanka Markovska, who participated in the debate on religious freedom at Columbia University a few years ago; Mr. Saso Klekovski, head of a large NGO Macedonian Center for International Cooperation; noted poet and director of the Radio/TV Skopje Cultural program, as well as editor of a literary magazine etc. (Mojzes, Swidler 2001, 4).

It would be advisable to direct particular attention to the concluding part of Swidler and Mojzes. The question is whether interreligious dialogue can be an effective means of preventing destructive processes? They believe that they are unable to achieve this on their own. It can be reasonably concluded that religion is a primary factor in the basis of conflicts. While religion serves as the underlying foundation

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for numerous conflicts, its role is not as pronounced in Macedonia as it is in Bosnia. Nevertheless, should the clergy observe examples of successfully resolved conflicts in Europe and Asia, and engage in joint meetings with scientists, it would be evident that progress was being made. While they do not provide concrete examples, Swidler and Mojzes indicate that there are priests in Macedonia, whether Christian or Islamic, who promote war and the annihilation of others. Should a voice wholly antithetical to their own be organised, it would similarly be subdued. In combination with internal and external factors, this kind of action would result in the normalisation and tolerance (Mojzes, Swidler 2001, 7). While the visit of Swidler and Mojzes cannot be regarded as the determining factor in achieving peace, it did make a significant contribution to the signing of the Ohrid Agreement.

Notwithstanding the signing of the Ohrid Agreement and the mission of Swidler and Mojzes, the situation remained tense, as did the relationship between the religious leaders. Progress has started, unlike „last year mosques and churches were being destroyed and vandalized, religious symbols and allegiance were stressed, and the role of Macedonian Orthodoxy for the Slavic population and Islam for the Albanians was being stressed by both religious leaders and the media“ (Mojzes 2002, 2). The progress reflected in the conference, which was held in Macedonia from 10 to 14 May 2002. The conference was entitled „Confidence Building Between Churches and Religious Communities in Macedonia Through Dialogue“. Indeed, it was a continuation of the aforementioned campaign that was initiated by Swidler and Mojzes the previous year. The entire process originated several years ago, when Swidler and Mojzes were in contact with Trajkovski. The founders of the Global Dialogue Institute, Swidler and Leonard Mojzes, were inspired by their contacts to propose interreligious Jewish - Christian-Muslim dialogues. These dialogues were sponsored by numerous renowned international agencies. (Mojzes 2002, 2).

More than forty theologians of all three faiths came to Skopje. Archbishop Stefan from Macedonian Orthodox Church, the Reis-ul-Ulema of the Islamic Community Hafiz Arif Emini, and the Catholic Bishop Joakim Herbert, as a president Trajkovski. Additionally, the meeting was broadcast by Macedonian television. One of the sessions was held at the Orthodox Theological School, after which the Orthodox Dean delivered a presentation at the Islamic School. The outcome of these sessions was the formulation of proposals including: an invitation to five representatives of religious communities in Macedonia to establish a Council for Interreligious Cooperation; quarterly meetings of religious representatives, especially the archbishop and Reis, be convened. Furthermore, a model for religious schools to cooperate in order to promote interfaith dialogue and tolerance should be identified. In order to gain the consent of the religious leaders, namely the Catholic Archbishop and the Islamic Reis,

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in the Orthodox and Islamic communities, and in accordance with the knowledge of President Trajkovski, Leonard Swidler, Paul Mojzes and David Smock of USIP undertook a visit. (Mojzes 2002, 5-6).

A significant advance was made which was not, in itself, radical. However, it is evident that there have been no further conflicts from that point until the present day. It is noteworthy that shortly following these sessions, with the patronage of the Macedonian President Trajkovski, a form of Macedonian National Prayer Dinner was held on 23 May. The mediator was an adviser to the president Trajkovskog Brad Joseph and Adjunct Fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (Washington, D. C.). The event was hosted by representatives of the six most prominent parliamentary parties in Macedonia. In total, approximately 35 party representatives from Albanian (Muslim) and Macedonian (Orthodox) parties were in attendance. In addition, twelve guests from Europe and the USA, together with the entire Macedonian government, were in attendance. Selections from the Quran and the Bible were read. Despite the fact that each party offered its own stereotypical explanations for the cause of the crisis, President Trajkovski put forward three goals for consideration: acceptance of the environment, religious education, and the prevention of cultural imperialism. These were all accepted by all parties. (Joseph 2002, 54-56).

## 5. Final Considerations

It is advised that Leonard Swidler's works be considered in three parts. The first is the theological aspect of the theory of interfaith dialogues. The second is related to the history of religion, with a focus on the primacy of religious dialogues, particularly those that occurred in the 20th century, and the tendencies of messages in the 21st century. The third element is a scientific practicum of taking his works to specific regions of Europe and the world where conflicts are situated at their root in religious intolerance. The objective of this article was to demonstrate the relevance of Swidler's work in the context of the conflict regions of the former Yugoslavia, which constituted a significant geopolitical issue in Europe during the late 20th century. The conflict in these regions remains unresolved and there is a risk of further escalation.

From a global perspective, Swidler's dialogue suggests that individuals and communities do not learn passively; rather, learning occurs in dialogue with the real world. Rather, that learning becomes a dialogue with the reality of the Balkans, which can be both brief and intense, as well as lengthy and arduous (Swidler 2013, 13). Swidler's interfaith dialogue, as deployed in the context of ex-Yugoslavia, represents a theoretical approach to comparative religion, or, more broadly, *Religionswissenschaft*. He explains it in a way that encourages religious scientists to make comparisons between religions, identifying

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first what they have in common and then what differentiates them. This approach seeks to identify a universal structure that has an impact on human life (Swidler, Mojzes 2000, 135). As Swidler asserts, the inter-religious dialogue of the modern era and the 21st century has yet to reach its full potential, with the result being the advent of modernity and the Enlightenment (Swidler 2011). In addition to the Orthodox Church (Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina), and Islamic religious communities (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, Kosovo and Macedonia), the Catholic Church (Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Macedonia) in the former Yugoslavia. Unlike the other two religious communities, which are heterogeneous, the Catholic Church has a homogeneous character. In contrast to the first half of the 20th century, when interreligious dialogue was rejected on the condition that all Christians return to the auspices of the Holy See from which they originated, the Una Sancta Movement saw a complete revision of these views (Swidler 1966).

The significance of Leonard Swidler's contributions is further exemplified by the establishment of the *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*. In these pages, for the first time in the history of theology, the topic of interreligious dialogue is addressed in a comprehensive manner, from theoretical considerations to models for practice, with reference to all religions. In the 1980s, a new topic, the "Third Search for the Historical Jesus", was initiated in this journal amongst Christian and Jewish scholars. It started from the idea of the source of Judaism and Christianity, and their mutual contact. Furthermore, the fact that Islam was born in the same area is also a contributing factor (Swidler 1988; Swidler et.al 1990). In conclusion, the works of Leonard Swidler and the aforementioned magazine, which he founded, can be considered a model for the application of conflict resolution or the resolution of conflict relics in the 21st century ex - Yugoslav territories. A transparent and comprehensive procedure was carried out in Macedonia.

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