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CROATIAN CATHOLIC CHURCH AND ITS ROLE IN POLITICS AND SOCIETY

Thomas Bremer

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The Roman Catholic Church is probably the most influential organization in Croatia, and it gained additional significance in the years of national awakening since the late 1980ies. It was the only organization in socialist Yugoslavia which was regarded as "Croat" without being influenced by the party and the ruling elites. The Church understood itself always as a national body, and it understood itself always as opposition to the regime – not as an organized opposition in the sense of an alternative to the political system, but as something which never accepted the system and its ideology, although it could cooperate in concrete questions with the authorities. But when it seemed appropriate to the Church, it acted independently – it organized manifestations, gathered people, printed books and journals, made utterances and thus showed how it did not regard the state system as relevant for itself and for its faithful.

When the Yugoslav system lost its credibility and alternative solutions were looked for, including a dissolution of Yugoslavia, this position of the Church within Croatia gave her a reputation of being always against communism and against "yugoslavism", and of being an organization which was undoubtedly Croat. Additionally, it had a continuity from before the Second World War, and the Catholic Church existed also in West European states where religion seemed to be a normal part of societal life, and where persecution of religion was unknown at least for the last decades. Therefore, the Church came into a position within the Croat society which it never had before, but it was completely unprepared for this position. The need to adapt to expectations, to find a new role in state and society, in the time of a very "young" state and in a period of war, and to fulfil its mission, characterized the Roman Catholic Church not only in the early 90ies, during the war, but also in the decade after the end of the war.

In Croatia there exist of course different religious communities. There are several Christian denominations (Roman-Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, Greek-Catholic, and others) and a significant Muslim community, besides the Jewish community. Other religions exist only in very small numbers and hardly play any role. However, there is a percentage of non-believers, be it (in the traditional perception) "atheists" or rather agnostics. In this chapter, I will deal only with the Roman Catholic Church, which is by far the biggest of the religious communities in Croatia. By naming it simply "Church" I do not deny that other communities are – in the sense of Christian ecclesiology – "Churches" as well.

¹ Thomas Bremer, "The Catholic Church and its Role in Politics and Society", chapter 11 in Sabrina P. Ramet, Konrad Clewing, Reneo Lukić, eds. *Croatia since Independence. War, Politics, Society, Foreign Relations*. München: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2008, pp.251-268. It was the only chapter on religion in that volume.

The Roman Catholic Church in Croatia Today

Organizationally, the Catholic Church in Croatia exists today in three metropolies: the archdiocese of Zagreb with the dioceses Djakovo, Požega, and Varaždin, the archdiocese of Split-Makarska with Šibenik, Hvar, and Dubrovnik, the archdiocese of Rijeka with Krk, Poreč-Pula, and Gospić-Senj. Additionally, there is one exempt archdiocese (Zadar), one diocese for Greek-Catholics (Križevci, suffragan to Zagreb) and an army diocese. The bishops form the Bishops' Conference which has three regular sessions per year, and additional meetings in case of necessity. The Catholic Church is by far the largest religious community in Croatia. It plays a significant role in society, has regulated its relations to the state in treaties (see below), and enjoys a high reputation within the population.

In the Catholic Church in Croatia, the role of monastic life is very important. The Franciscan order (OFM) has three provinces with more than 500 monks, and all together, there live more than 1,100 Monks in the country. Even more significant are female orders, with more than 3,600 nuns. The largest among them are Franciscan and Dominican sisters, Carmelites, Vincentinians, and other congregations which were founded mainly in the 19th century.

The Catholic Church is present in the school system today: It has its own kindergartens and schools, and in state schools, religious education takes place. There are faculties for Catholic theology within the state universities (Zagreb, Split), and there exist several ecclesiastical colleges, mainly for the formation of priests. The Church established in 2005 a Catholic University in Zagreb. The situation of religious freedom is regarded as being not so bad in Croatia,² including for the minority religious communities. Besides the Serbian Orthodox Church and some minor protestant communities, one has to mention the Islamic community in Croatia. The life of these religious communities was always influenced by the war situation, since they are narrowly linked with ethnic groups. Nevertheless, the situation can be described as good on the level of legal framework, although in concrete circumstances, problems can be observed.

The Catholic Church During the Years of War

In the years of the dissolution of Yugoslavia, the Church represented political views which were almost identical with the position of the Croatian government: Concerning the question of the right of secession and of the character of the borders, Church representatives echoed the position that Croatia had the right to leave the Yugoslav Federation, and that the borders of the Socialist Republic should also be the borders of the new independent state. Therefore, the regions under Serb control were always regarded as occupied territories, and the Operation "Storm" in 1995 was seen as a legitimate liberation of what was Croatian land. This position did not hinder the Church from trying to establish relations with the Serbian Orthodox Church. These relations appeared to be very difficult, since the Serbian Orthodox Church had political standpoints which reflected the position of the Serbian government, i.e., a possible disintegration of Yugoslavia should go along the ethnic borders (which were interpreted in a very broad sense), all Serbs should have the right to live within one state, and the different political bodies on the territory controlled by the Serbs were legitimate states.

Nevertheless, the Churches, which had never had a tradition of ecumenical relations or of encounters on the level of Church leaders, set aside the tensions which existed between them and established official contacts. In 1991, Franjo Cardinal Kuharić, Roman Catholic Archbishop of Zagreb, and Patriarch Pavle of the Serbian Orthodox Church, met twice. These were the first

² Religious Freedom in new and future EU member states – law and practice. November 2003, Jubilee Campaign NL, Netherlands.

meetings of the heads of the two Churches after 1968, when Franjo Cardinal Šeper and Patriarch German had met for the first Catholic-Orthodox summit in the country after 1945. The first meeting took place in Sremski Karlovci (Vojvodina/Serbia), the second in Slavonski Brod (Croatia). The mass media in Yugoslavia paid a lot of attention to these meetings, and not only the mere fact of the meetings, but also the details were reported, such as that the two heads of Churches kissed each other three times when greeting which is regarded as a typical Serb habit (Croats usually kiss twice). Each of both meetings lasted one day, and afterwards, a communiqué was published in which the tensions between the nations were deplored, and violence as a mean to overcome the differences was condemned. But the representatives of the two Churches also admitted that they had different opinions about the reasons for the war, and that meant also about the question of responsibility and guilt.

The Roman Catholic Church in Croatia was challenged by the war events in different areas. Many parishes could not function any more, because the faithful were expelled from their places. From all Croatian dioceses, only in the dioceses of Hvar, of Krk (which both consist exclusively of islands in the Adriatic Sea), and of Poreč-Pula in the very North-Western part of the country one could freely access all parishes. In the other dioceses, a part of their territories was inaccessible for the bishop or other representatives of the Church. Especially the Šibenik diocese which included the "Kraijina" with Knin, was affected to a high degree from the war. This meant beside the expulsion of the population also the demolition of church buildings so that even after the Croatian authorities had gained control over the respective territory in 1995, circumstances made it difficult to reestablish regular church life.

But for the Church in the non-disputed area as well, the war had enormous consequences. Thousands of refugees and displaced persons had to be taken care of. Some expelled parishes organized themselves "in exile", i.e., if many of the parishioners lived together in the same area, the priest organized services and pastoral care for them. Thus, priests frequently became also a manager for practical needs of the parishioners, from food and shelter to fulfilling administrative procedures.

The Church broadened at the same time its social activities, especially by extending the work of Caritas, the Catholic relief organization. The widespread activities of Caritas could take place only with international support. Western national Caritas branches, specially from Austria, Germany and Italy, provided the Croatian Caritas with material help, money, but also with advice of how to organize social help in a situation of extreme need for a large share of the population. The fact that the Church was part of an international network, namely the Roman Catholic Church worldwide, had important consequences for the situation, at different levels: in concrete help, in political support, in personal contacts and connections. Concrete help was not limited to Caritas activities, but included also relief actions by Catholic groups and individuals, above all in neighboring or close countries. Many parishes in those countries organized transports of food, medicine and other relevant goods for their Croatian partner parishes. The network of "Croatian Catholic Missions" in the world, which were once founded in order to organize pastoral care for migrant workers, could easily be used for this purpose.

Concerning political support, one must primarily think about the Holy See. It was the first state to recognize Croatia and Slovenia as independent states, on 13 January 1992, two days before Germany and other member states of the (then) European Community performed their diplomatic recognition of Croatia. Indeed, the Holy See had announced its recognition already on 20 December 1991. During the war years as well, the Vatican supported Croatia politically, although it always stated that its actions were not directed against Serbia or the Serbs. In September 1994,

the Pope visited Croatia for the first time,³ and for the only time during the war.

Political support came also from national Bishops' Conferences which expressed their concern for the events in former Yugoslavia and which urged their governments to act. Already in February 1991, the members of then "Bishops' Conference of Yugoslavia" had written a letter to all Catholic bishops in the world in which they explained their vision of the Yugoslav situation. But this letter and the events of the deepening conflict did not always lead to an unconditioned solidarity with the Church in Croatia, but frequently rather to an appeal to develop and strengthen the ecumenical ties with Serbian Orthodoxy. Croatian Church leaders felt sometimes uncomfortable with the positions of their fellow Catholic bishops from abroad: instead of supporting the vision of the Church in Croatia and of acting on the international level, Catholic representatives and organizations from abroad rather urged the Church in Croatia to establish better contacts to the Serbs. In a similar way, it was sometimes seen critically when foreign Catholics maintained good relations with the Orthodox Church in Serbia. One could mention in this context the contacts of the Catholic Peace Movement "Pax Christi" which had a tradition of being in good relationship with Orthodox Churches.

During the first years of independence, the Church gained a very high reputation among the population and in publicity. Papers and electronic media reported about Church events, priests and bishops obtained access to the media; there was a special interest among papers and in radio and TV programs to cover the (perceived) interest of the audience for themes of religion and Church. Since the Roman Catholic Church was the majority Church, and in the circumstances of the war situation, the other religious communities were not so well represented and sometimes even hardly mentioned in the programs, or with a negative connotation.

The Church itself did not have a proper approach of how to deal with this new public presence. Sometimes priests spoke out in the name of the Church (or they were at least seen as men speaking for the Church), who represented only a certain interest or one wing within the Church but who were perceived as "the Church". The late bishop Srećko Badurina of Šibenik once said to the author of these lines that he felt very uncomfortable when being in the focus of public attention, since from when he was young, his faith has always been half-suspicious in the society in which he lived. Now, when he had to be a public figure, he could never get used to it. But when he was invited to a public event, he preferred to go by himself, although against his own will, and not to send a representative because he did not know what this representative would say. These words illustrate the difficult situation of a Church which was in a certain way not mature enough for publicity, and which could not develop the respective means organically, but had to react under war circumstances.

The Bishops understood that the weekly *Glas koncila* (Voice of the [Second Vatican] Council) which was the main Catholic paper in the country could not meet any more all the requirements of the new situation. The AKSA news service, published by the famous Catholic theological organization and publisher "Kršćanska sadašnjost", ceased publication in 1991, due to financial reasons. This had been a weekly informative service, although produced in a quite unprofessional manner. The Bishops' Conference, therefore, decided to found a news agency named "Informativna katolička agencija" (Catholic Information Agency) in May, 1993. The first director was the well-known priest and journalist Živko Kustić. At the same time, the national TV channel established a weekly program "Mir i dobro" (Peace and Good) which covered Church issues.

³ A documentation of this visit and of the relations between Croatia and the Holy See: Božidar Petrač/Franjo Šanjek (ed.), *Ivan Pavao II. i Hrvati* (Zagreb: Alfa, 1995).

There were negotiations between Church and state going on, aiming to reach an agreement. They were successfully completed in 1998 (see below). The Bishops' Conference began to re-shape its structures, since officially there still existed a "Bishops' Conference of Yugoslavia". During the spring plenary session of the Conference in April 1992 in Zagreb, the Catholic Bishops in Croatia founded a new "Croatian Bishops' Conference" which was later recognized by the Holy See.⁴

One of the main events for the Church in the war years was the visit of Pope John Paul II to the country in September 1994. The pope had first announced that he wanted to visit Sarajevo, Zagreb, and Belgrade in one journey. Due to the resistance of the Serbian Orthodox Church, a visit to Serbia never took place, and due to the war circumstances, the visit to Sarajevo had to be delayed several times. In Catholic circles in Croatia, the link between these visits were seen skeptically since it could give an impression of a Yugoslav character (or of what was called "Yugo-nostalgia") to this planned journey. In his speeches and sermons in Zagreb, the pope nevertheless stressed the necessity that South Slavic nations live together as neighbors, and he used the metaphor of the rivers Sava and Danube which connected Croatia with Serbia.

Although the media and the government reacted with hesitation to these allusions, the trip was regarded as very important for the country. The mere fact that the Pontiff came to Croatia, during the war (which presented a big challenge for security), was received as a confirmation of the independence of Croatia, and President Franjo Tudjman, his government, and his party perceived the visit as confirmation of their political course. During the war between the Croats and the Bosnian Muslims in Herzegovina in 1993, Cardinal Kuharić made an appeal to stop the war to the Bosnian Croats. This was seen by the Government of the Croatian quasi-state in Bosnia-Herzegovina "Herceg-Bosna" and its leader Mate Boban as wrong action which would weaken the Croatian position. President Tudjman and the Hercegovinian "falcons" in his government also disliked the cardinal's intervention.

At its fourth plenary session in June 1994, the bishops requested that Church property which had been nationalized by the communists after the war, be given back to the Church. The issue of Church property which was narrowly linked with the issue of financing the Church arose as an important theme within the next years and could be solved only in an agreement between the state and the Holy See. The Bishops' Conference was informed about the proceedings of the negotiations and about the proposals made by the state at its meeting in June 1995. For the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the end of World War Two, the Conference issued a statement. It was must be seen in the context of the country's "own" war which was still going on. The bishops mentioned in their statement also the victims of the other side (which they had not been so eager to do in earlier statements) and said that Croats also had to admit their own guilt and responsibility. It was necessary to review the past, to work on it, and to deal with what had happened; this was the main point of this declaration.

This theme became concrete when in the second half of 1995 Croatian troops regained the "Krajina" (alongside with the military changes in Bosnia-Herzegovina at the same time). The cardinal and the bishops expressed their satisfaction about this development; at the same time, they urged the Krajina Serbs to stay and not to flee. The official paper of the Church *Glas koncila*, however, published a text which rejected Western criticism, criticized rather the Western countries themselves and spoke about "war on the highest possible humanitarian standard". Allegedly, one has never seen such a clean war as the liberation of Krajina by the Croatian troops. There were also similar utterances by Church representatives which showed that there was little understanding of

⁴ All statements of the meetings of the Bishops' conference can be found on their website www.hbk.hr. If not quoted otherwise, all quotations of official statements in this text are from that website.

Western criticism of this “storm” (oluja) action. Don Ante Baković, a well-known clerical activist against abortion, said on 31 October in Austria, that the majority of Croatian Catholic priests supported President Tudjman⁵.

This was the situation of the Church when the war ended in 1995. It had a stable position in society, however, without regulated relations to the state. It could rely on the majority of the population, but not on a very deep religiosity. And it did not exactly know where its place in society was: It liked to be regarded as the main safeguard for Croatian national consciousness, but was also part of the global Catholic Church.

Developments and Issues since 1996: Personnel Changes

In the years after the war, some of the prominent dioceses received new bishops, and the Holy See restructured the ecclesiastical borders within Croatia. Archbishop Marijan Oblak of Zadar, the “exempt” archdiocese, i.e., not belonging to an ecclesiastical province, had retired because of high age. On 2 February 1996, the Holy See proclaimed his retirement and nominated Ivan Prendja (born on 31 December 1939) as his successor; Prendja had been already archbishop-coadjutor since 1990.

On 17 September 1996 one of the most prominent Croatian bishops, Srećko Badurina of Šibenik, died at the age of 66 years. He has been bishop since 1988 and he was well known for his open attitude towards the Serbian Orthodox Church; his diocese covered mostly the “Knin Krajina”. As new bishop of that Adriatic town, Ante Ivas (born on 26 December 1939) was consecrated in March 1997.

In the Slavonian diocese of Djakovo, Marin Srakić (born on 6 July 1937) became bishop in February 1997. His predecessor, bishop Ćiril Kos, had retired, and Srakić had been auxiliary bishop and coadjutor already since 1990. Djakovo is in the region of Srijem, part of which was in Vojvodina (Serbia) and therefore was now part of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro) and which was during the war and in the first years after the war accessible only with difficulty. For historical reasons, the Djakovo diocese covers the entire region up to the River Sava, so that the new part of Belgrade also falls under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of Djakovo. The diocese received an auxiliary bishop, Djuro Gašparović (born on 20 June 1951), who was in charge for this Eastern part of the diocese. Another auxiliary bishop for Djakovo was nominated and consecrated in July 2001, Djuro Hranjić (born on 20 March 1961). Bishop Kos died at the age of 83, on 7 July 2003.

On 26 November 1998, auxiliary bishop Juraj Kokša of Zagreb died, some months after his resignation was accepted. He has been in charge of ecumenical relations and was therefore present in most meetings with representatives of the Serbian Orthodox Church. The second largest city in Croatia, Split, received a new archbishop in summer 2000. Ante Jurić retired after serving 12 years as archbishop and was succeeded by Marin Barišić (born on 24 March 1947), who had been auxiliary bishop since 1993 and had taught in the local faculty of theology as professor before.

On 28 May 2000, Archbishop Anton Tamarut of Rijeka-Senj died at the age of 68 years. He had been bishop of Šibenik since 1986, then archbishop-coadjutor in Rijeka-Senj, and since 1990 archbishop. On 17 November, Ivan Devčić (born on 1 January 1948), former dean of the Theological Faculty in Rijeka, became new archbishop of Rijeka.

At that very time, a new diocese was founded, the diocese of Gospić-Senj. On 25 May 2000, it was announced that the archdiocese Rijeka-Senj was split into two. Five deaneries which formerly belonged to Rijeka, now formed the new diocese. First bishop became Mile Bogović (born on 7

⁵ *Glaube in der 2. Welt* (Zürich), December 1995, p. 6.

August 1939). He was for some months auxiliary bishop in Rijeka; before that he taught church history in Rijeka. The seat of this diocese was Gospić. The Holy See fulfilled a wish of former archbishop Tamarut and of the Bishops' Conference: they all had appealed already years before to found a new diocese in this vast, but very sparsely inhabited area of Croatia, between Rijeka, Zadar, the Bosnian border (Banja Luka diocese) and Zagreb.

The most important personal change, however, was the nomination of a new archbishop of Zagreb. Cardinal Franjo Kuharić had been on duty since 1970. He offered his resignation to the pope when reaching 75 years of age, but the pope accepted it only in July 1997. On 4 October, Josip Bozanić, bishop of Krk (born March 20th, 1949), became his successor. He is from Rijeka, had studied Canon Law in Rome and was bishop of Krk since 1989. In the 1990s, he was responsible within the Bishops' Conference for laity, and he was chair of the *Justitia et Pax*-Commission. In 2001, Bozanić was elected vice chair of CCEE, the Council of [Catholic] Bishops' Conferences in Europe. In October 2003, Pope John Paul II made him cardinal. His predecessor died on 11 March 2003, at the age of almost 84 years.

With the nomination of Bozanić, Rome reshaped in 1997 the dioceses in Croatia. In the cities of Varaždin and of Požega, new dioceses were created; these areas were formerly a part of Zagreb Archdiocese. Marko Culej (born on 19 January 1938), who had been in Zagreb auxiliary bishop since 1992, became the first bishop of Varaždin. In Požega, Antun Škvorčević (born March 8th, 1947) was nominated and ordained bishop, having formerly taught in the faculty of theology in Zagreb. At the same time (5 October), the Holy See created a military ordinariate for members of the army and of police forces. Former Zagreb auxiliary bishop Jezerinac (born on 23 April 1939) became the first army bishop. On their first meeting after these changes, 14 October 1997, the bishops elected archbishop Bozanić chairman of their conference.

On 29 December, Zagreb received two new auxiliary bishops (since from the former three one was now bishop in Varaždin, the other for the army, and the third dead). Josip Marzljak (born on 19 January 1944) was a parish priest for many years and member of the cathedral chapter. Vlado Košić (born on 20 May 1959) taught dogmatic theology in the Zagreb faculty and had defended his doctoral thesis a year prior to his nomination. Both were ordained in Zagreb on 6 February 1999. Archbishop Bozanić's successor as bishop of Krk was Valter Župan (born on 10 October 1938) who was nominated on 31 January 1998. He had been vicar general and director of Caritas in Krk. On 18 November 1997, parish priest Ivan Milovan from Rovinj (born 22 September 1940) was nominated bishop of Poreč-Pula. At the same time, the retirement of his predecessor Antun Bogetić was accepted by the Holy See. Milovan was ordained on 10 January 1998. Another auxiliary bishop for Zagreb was nominated on 2 February 2001: Jesuit father Valentin Pozaić (born on 15 September 1945), a well known specialist for ethics, who had been professor for Christian Ethics at the Faculty of the Jesuits in Zagreb before. This provoked some surprise that none of the diocesan clergy had been appointed for this post.

Church and State Relations

In the years after the war, Croatia regulated its relationship with the Church in juridical terms. After longer negotiations, several single treaties were signed. The Holy See readily agreed not to press for a formal concordat since it did not want a conflict in a single issue to endanger the whole construction. The bishops formed a negotiation team, headed by bishop Bozanić, then still in Krk. The main issues discussed were the presence of the Church in the army and in police forces, freedom for the Church in its internal affairs and the possibility to exercise pastoral care in state institutions like prisons, hospitals, etc., then access to the media, and the presence of the Church

in schools and universities. There were long discussions about the system for Church financing. The bishops preferred the Italian model (each citizen had to allocate a percentage of the tax he or she paid to an organization, one of which could be the Church), but the state was reluctant.

On 19 December 1996, Apostolic Nuncio Giulio Einaudi and Vice Prime Minister Jure Radić signed three treaties, a fourth one about financial and economic questions was not yet ready for signing.⁶ In the first one, state and Church recognized each other as independent bodies. The Church gained a high degree of autonomy and was widely protected; any judge had to inform the respective ecclesiastical authorities before starting an investigation against a clergyman. The state accepted a marriage performed in church as valid for the state records, and even an ecclesiastical annihilation of an existing marriage would be accepted by the state and have civil consequences. The Church was guaranteed access to prisons and hospitals for pastoral purposes, and to mass media.

In the second treaty, the ecclesiastic schools and academic institutions were recognized by the state. Religious institution was enabled on all school levels. The institution was on a voluntary basis, but once the pupils or their parents (until the age of 15 years of the pupil) had decided for religion, it was compulsory for the respective pupil. The Church could also open its own high school and academic institutions, and their diplomas were valid also in state institutions. The state has to cover the costs for religious education in schools, for theology in academic institutions and to support financially ecclesiastic schools. In addition, the state acknowledged its responsibility for the cultural heritage which belonged to the Church, i.e., especially the care for church buildings. This second treaty was later concretized by a "Treaty on Catholic Religious Institution in Public Schools and in Public Pre-School Institutions" which was signed on 29 January 1999, by Archbishop Božanić and Minister of Education Božidar Pušnik. It just confirmed what was usual by that time, but now the practice was on the basis of a law, not any more on a simple decree of the minister. Bishop Srakić who was in charge of catechesis and institution within the Bishops' Conference, said that 80 % of the pupils in elementary schools (which includes in Croatia the first eight classes) and 60 % of all pupils in secondary schools (class 9-12) attended religious institution in school.

The third treaty regulated pastoral care in the armed forces and guaranteed the existence of chaplains for the army and the police. The Church would found an army ordinariate (diocese), and the state had to bear the costs for army and police chaplains.

The Sabor, the Croat parliament, accepted on 24 January 1997, only the second and the third treaty, but refused to pass the first one. There arose a debate about the position of the Church in state and society. The Church argued that there was nothing more than what was guaranteed in the Constitution. Finally, the Sabor accepted also the first treaty. After the exchange of the signed treaties, the treaty came into effect on 9 April 1997.

The fourth treaty was signed almost two years later, on 9 October 1998, between the same two persons, nuncio Giulio Einaudi and Jure Radić, chairman of the commission for relations to religious communities, and became valid on 14 November 1998. It was agreed that the state would support the Church in its activities and contribute to the living costs for the clergy, by paying the Church a sum of two average incomes per parish; (newly established parishes were taken into account only if they had more than 3,000 members in cities or 1,000 in villages). This monthly sum alone was not sufficient for Church financing, but offered a solid base. Nevertheless, the Church had to find additional financial sources. However, it was agreed in the fourth treaty that the state would finance those employees of the Church who did not work for the Church as such, but who worked in sectors considered useful to the Church: teachers for religion in schools, professors of

⁶ All the texts can also be found on the website of the Bishops' Conference.

theology, staff in schools, kindergartens etc. The state would also bear the costs of rebuilding churches and parish homes which were destroyed during the war years. The Church would receive back some property which had been confiscated by the communists, and it would receive compensation for property which could not be returned. In putting these treaties into force, Radić and Bozanić exchanged during a visit to Rome in the Vatican the charters. With that, the concordat came into effect.

The Church on Issues of Nation

The Catholic Church in Croatia has frequently been accused of its alleged nationalism. At a time, when the country was on war, the Church sided with what it thought were the forces and ideas which were best for the country. The inability of the Church to find its place in a modernizing society and in a situation of conflict and problems, already mentioned above, resulted in utterances which were sometimes hardly acceptable for observers from outside. But in general and in the first years after the war, the Church exhibited its national and patriotic feelings, maybe not enough distanced from the line of the state, but limited itself mostly to such cases in which it was affected. This could be seen in the 1993 intervention of Cardinal Kuharić, concerning the Croat-Muslim war in Herzegovina, which was already mentioned above. Later, it displayed national issues more openly, especially when HDZ was not in power any more the party in power and when the international community pressed on Croatia concerning the extradition of addicted war criminals.

Nevertheless, there were also individuals in the Church who represented and publicly displayed nationalistic views. One of them was Dominican priest Vjekoslav Lasić who draw public attention when he celebrated commemorative masses for fascist leader Ante Pavelić, head of the "Independent State of Croatia" from 1941 until 1945. In 1997, the Zagreb municipal authorities decided to rename a prominent square in the city center which had born the name "Trg žrtava fašizma" (Square of the Victims of Fascism) as "Trg hrvatskih velikana" (Square of Croatian Heroes). Civil organizations and groups organized demonstrations which attracted many citizens. Among the protesters was Catholic priest Luka Vincetić from Djakovo, a well known intellectual, who was suspect to his Church because of his openness to dialogue with communists (already in Yugoslav times) and because of his liberal standpoints. There were also counter-demonstrations, in which Vjekoslav Lasić played a prominent role. The pictures from May 1997, which showed him, raising his right arm to the fascist greeting, had such an effect, that cardinal Kuharić asked the provincial of the Croatian Dominican province to undertake measures. In the end, Lasić was sent to Germany to take care of a Croatian parish in Hamburg.

This case also shows how civil groups for human rights, for peace and for other issues in Croatia hardly did and do have any contact with the Churches. Church people like the aforementioned Luka Vincetić (who died in 1998), active in such movements or at least in contact with them, are a rare exception.⁷ Usually, they were ignored by their Churches. Vincetić himself, a very gifted man, after trouble with his bishop of Djakovo already in Yugoslav times, was sent as priest to a small village in the mountains where he lived for years without a phone and virtually isolated from the world.

Other persons were accused of not representing the opinion of the Church. It was above all the weekly *Glas Koncila*, which gave the authentic interpretation of the position of the Church, especially in its editorial on page 2 which was never signed. At the time when Živko Kustić, a Greek Catholic priest and well known public figure, was the editor-in-chief, these texts became something like the authentic *magisterium* of the Catholic Church in Croatia. And the national issue

⁷ See the interview with Vincetić in: *Glaube in der 2. Welt* (Zürich), April 1995, p. 27.

always played a prominent role in these utterances, frequently in distancing towards the Serbs, but also in critical position to the international community.

Another reason for sharpening the national vocabulary was the question of the 1991 – 95 war. On the one hand, there was the evaluation of the war itself. The bishops regarded it as a just war, a war for liberation, and therefore rejected any attempt to give the war a negative interpretation. As mentioned before, this resulted in utterances like “In a just war, there cannot be war crimes” (as army bishop Jezerinac once stated). Once the war was seen as correct, there was no possibility any more to judge about its details in a differentiated way. Every attempt was condemned by the ecclesiastical media.

However, the new archbishop, Josip Bozanić, brought in a new accent which was in a certain way an attempt to overcome this perception. But his fellow bishops did not follow him in all these efforts. The Bishops’ Conference made utterances which clearly had a different accent than the standpoints of its chairman, especially with regards to the war in the nineties and to persons who had been indicted as war criminals. In their autumn meeting in 2000, the bishops said that Croatian history must not be rewritten, and they spoke against a “criminalization” of the war. In the affair about the indicted war criminal Norac, archbishop Barišić of Split wrote a personal letter to Norac’s parents, and the bishops of the Split Church province (Split, Hvar, Dubrovnik, Šibenik) and bishop Bogović of Gospić-Senj published a joint statement in defence of Norac. These examples underline the involvement of representatives of the Church in national affection. There was hardly a voice to hear within the Church which would call for a more distant attitude. Therefore, the opinions of the new archbishop of Zagreb were received in public with interest (especially in the period after the HDZ government, and especially those utterances which tackled themes of social injustice), but did not have a great echo in the Church.

The views of the majority of the bishops show, that the question of nationalism became concrete with the treatment of indicted war criminals. In the first years of the third millennium, the national feelings were expressed more sharply. When The Hague (which became a synonym for anti-Croatism) requested in September 2002 the extradition of retired general Janko Bobetko, the Bishops’ Conference made a statement where they rejected such an idea. A similar observation could be made in 2005: when the Tribunal searched for former General Ante Gotovina and when the suspicion that he was hiding in Croatia (allegedly in a Franciscan convent) even hindered the negotiations for a Croatian EU-membership, the Church was outraged. Gotovina was arrested some months later in Spain.

Criticism of the Croatian government came not only from the bishops. In September 2000, the male and the female provincials of the Dominican provinces in Croatia wrote an open letter to President Stipe Mesić in which they harshly criticized the way he performed his office. This letter was widely discussed in Croatia. The president reacted with a short press statement.

The narrow connection between the Church and the nation could be seen, when in December 1999 Franjo Tuđman, the first president of independent Croatia, died. *Glas koncila* devoted its first several pages to this event, and the editorial of this issue had the title “Da živi djelo velikog Tuđmana”, i.e. “The deeds of great Tuđman shall live” – a slogan which is very similar to the ones used in communist times.

Inner Development of the Church

Besides the attitude towards state and society, there were lots of inner developments and problems within the Catholic Church in Croatia. The main events, which were noticed worldwide, were the visits of Pope John Paul II. The pontiff visited Croatia three times, once during the war

in 1994 (see above), and then in 1998 and in 2003. During his visit from 2 to 4 October 1998, he was in Zagreb, Marija Bistrica, and in Split. In Marija Bistrica (on 3 October), the pope beatified Alojzije Cardinal Stepinac, the onetime archbishop of Zagreb, one of the most disputed figures in the Catholic Church in Croatia in the twentieth century. Accused by official Yugoslav historiography of having been a collaborator with the Ustase, sentenced for a long prison term, and released to internment in his home village, the cardinal had died in 1960. Within the Church, he had always had a high reputation as a martyr of the communist regime. The process for his beatification was started already in the communist time, but without knowledge of the state authorities, and it found its culmination in this act of 1998. On the final day of his visit, the pope met with the members of the Bishops' Conference in Split. In his speech, he stressed issues like the meaning of the family, the need for a re-evangelization of Europe and the need for candidates for priesthood.

The third and last visit of the pope took place 6–9 June 2003. John Paul II visited Dubrovnik, Osijek and Džakovo, Rijeka and Zadar, i.e., the main dioceses where he had not yet been so far. Because of his high age and his weak health condition, the program was not exhaustive. After the beatification of Cardinal Stepinac, and even before, there arose a cult about him in the Church in Croatia. *Glas koncila* has published articles about his life and his work, streets and parishes have been named after him, and every year on his memorial day (3 February), celebrations take place all over Croatia and in Croatian churches around the world. In 2002, there was a polemical debate in *Glas koncila* when historian Jure Krišto wrote critically about a book, written by two well-known historians, Slavko and Ivo Goldstein. Although the authors acknowledged that the trial against Stepinac was an intrigue of the regime, they said that the Church, and Stepinac in particular, could have done more to protect Jews during the years of war. Krišto harshly and polemically attacked them and argued that Stepinac had helped many people directly, and also indirectly, by setting a good example to other Catholics. In a similar way, every (perceived) text against Stepinac is met with agitated criticism, and it is hardly possible to show within the Church critical distance to the Stepinac cult.

However, the new archbishop quickly displayed attitudes toward the state which were not expected and which were quite different from what Cardinal Kuharić was used to say. He criticized the concentration on one's own nation, the negative position toward "Europe", and the social imbalance in the country. Since he became archbishop, he put a special accent on the question of social ethics; so he supported the "Center for Promoting the Social Doctrine of the Church" which was established by the bishops in 1996, and he delivered a famous sermon in which he spoke about the "sin of structures". He also developed relations with the Serbian Orthodox Church, met with Metropolitan Jovan (who is the Orthodox bishop in charge of Zagreb) and went to Belgrade where he met Patriarch Pavle. But his activities did not result in an overall change of the ecclesiastic mentality in Croatia. However, one can take notice of a younger generation of open-minded specialists in theology, priests, and even some bishops who put an accent more on inner-church issues and try to keep in touch with theological and Church developments in the Catholic world.

It is difficult to give exact numbers about the Church and Church life. There exist objective numbers like those of priests, nuns, and monks. But it is very difficult to assess the number of believers and about religiosity. In the 2001 census, 87.83 % of the population declared themselves Catholic while 4.42 % declared themselves Orthodox. 5.21 % were agnostics, undefined or said they were not religious. Although Croatia is regarded as a country with a relatively high religiosity, it can be presumed that there are quite a number in the population – which underlines its belonging to the Catholic Church in order to stress that they are Croat. This can be seen when asking details about their religious life. One will find people who define themselves as Catholics, but never go

to church, or pray, and even may not believe in the existence of God. In West European countries, similar phenomena can be observed, e.g., in Scandinavia with its traditional system of state Churches, or in Germany with the system of church taxes. But in Croatia and in other countries of Central and Eastern Europe, the “belonging” to a respective religious community is narrowly linked to the belonging to a nation.

Another phenomenon is the question of lay people in the Church. The Vatican II Council of the Catholic Church (1962–65) called for increased lay participation in the life of the Church and underlined the need for the clergy to respect the rights of the laity. But the Church in Croatia had a hard time accommodating itself to this new spirit or, for that matter, to the relatively liberal atmosphere in Yugoslavia in the 1960s and 1970s. Famous theologians wrote about this issue (among them the probably best known, Capucin father Tomislav Šagi-Bunić, who died on 21 July 1999), and men and women within the Catholic Church became active. For the clergy in Croatia, such a self-understanding of laity was not always easy to accept. In the years of communism, lay activity could only be voluntary, since the state sector did not offer working places for theologians. After the political changes, the situation became different. School teachers with a theological background were needed, the majority of students within the theological faculties were lay people, and the Church is for the first time in the situation of having a relevant group of well educated theologians, men and women, who are not ordained. The nominated but not yet consecrated archbishop of Rijeka, Ivan Devčić, spoke in an interview about the need of a “declericalization” of the Church.⁸

The bishops saw quite early the need for thinking about the role of laity. The Bishops’ Conference had a commission for laity, and Bishop Bozanić chaired this commission prior to his nomination as archbishop. Also as chairman of the Bishops’ Conference, he saw the necessity of lay engagement. This could be seen in the attempts to form a Catholic academy in Croatia, and a Catholic university, later. The academy should not be a place of education, with courses and a curriculum, but rather a forum for free exchange and encounter, and among its topics should be questions of social ethics, of Christian engagement in politics, and of general relevance. This was related to the model of the German Catholic (and Protestant) academies. The establishment of a Catholic university underlined the need of having a Church institution within the academic world in Croatia. It can be disputed, whether in a relatively small country such a university makes sense. But obviously, for the bishops, the symbolic presence of the Catholic Church in the public sphere was of high importance. This is also valid for Church presence in schools, by religious institution and by founding own Catholic schools.

Social care became an issue of high significance for the Church, especially in the situation when the country was affected by the consequences of the wars (refugees and displaced persons, need for reconstructing parishes in formerly occupied areas) and by the difficult economical situation. The Catholic “Caritas” was one of the most important actors in distributing help to people in need. Catholic orders took over some hospitals which were alienated from them by the communist regime. The Church organized kindergartens, homes for elderly people, and other social institutions. Caritas even managed to supply help when in other places of the earth, after a disaster, relief was needed. As said above, the engagement of Archbishop Bozanić in this question led to a new awareness of social activities of the Church.

Another important topic was the place of the Church in mass media. The bishops complained sometimes about unjust reporting about the Church in secular media, and *Glas koncila* had more than one polemical debate with other journals without ecclesiastical background.

⁸ *Glas koncila* (Zagreb), 17 December 2000, p. 7.

Especially the popular *Feral Tribune*, which had started as a satirical paper and became a serious weekly, was the favourite enemy of *Glas koncila*, and vice versa. But also articles from *Nacional* or from *Novi list* frequently incited debates. The Church began to be more conscious on how it could have a better performance in the public space. On the other side, open-minded priests who were ready and able to speak publicly also on issues which were critical, i.e., in which it was more difficult to defend the standpoint of the Church, were desired by the media as partners for interviews and programs. The main utterances of the Church, however, remained the statements of the Bishops' Conference meetings and the statements of single bishops. In order to strengthen the Church's presence in the public, the bishops founded on 18 May 1997, a "Croatian Catholic Radio". First director became Franciscan priest Mirko Mataušić, a well-known specialist in communication.

The position of the Church is not undisputed in Croatian society, especially not among intellectuals. In 2001, the dean of the Faculty of Theology, Tomislav Ivančić, was elected rector of Zagreb University. It was above all the Faculty of Philosophy, from where protest arose. A priest had allegedly split loyalty and therefore could not serve as rector. Some weeks after his election and before taking over duty, Ivančić resigned by reasons of bad health. Archbishop Bozanić denied that there was a deal between state and Church in this question.

"Foreign Relations" of the Church

The Catholic Church in Croatia must always be regarded in terms of its interrelationship to people and institutions abroad: it belongs to a worldwide Church, and developments within this Church affect also the Catholic Church in Croatia. It has a very close relationship to ethnic Croats in other countries, especially in Bosnia-Herzegovina, which was after 1992 a foreign state (although the Croatian governments did it not always treat as such), in other successor states of Yugoslavia and in traditional migration areas like Western Europe or Northern America. And it must be regarded in its ecumenical relations, above all to those to the Serbian Orthodox Church, which were multi-fold: Even after all forced and voluntary migration, it was the largest Christian Church after the Catholic Church in the country, and there was a very long and very difficult relationship because of the common history. After the war, there was the need (which was stimulated from outside) to overcome the consequences of the war and to work on reconciliation.

The connection to the Catholic Church worldwide was a stable and constant factor in the time described. The local Church considered the support of the Holy See to be of high importance for its own position within the state, and also for the evaluation of the war. Tensions with other local Catholic Churches and their representatives, who interpreted the war in another way, have already been mentioned, but did not affect this relationship in a significant way. The election of Archbishop Bozanić as vice chair of CCEE confirmed the reputation of the Catholic Church in Croatia (and most probably of Bozanić himself) in Catholic Europe. After he participated in several meetings of chairmen of the Bishops' Conferences in South Eastern Europe, from 2001 on, Croatia did not take part in these meetings any longer (as Slovenia and Hungary), because the situation in a country with a Catholic majority was so different from the Catholic Church in Bosnia-Herzegovina or Romania. This was in a certain way a signal that Croatia and its Church belonged to Europe, not to the Balkans (as these notions were perceived in the region).⁹

Concerning the Croats outside Croatia, there was always a very special relationship toward those in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The recognition of Bosnia-Herzegovina as an independent state brought a new situation. The war situation in both countries sharpened this constellation.

⁹ See the statement of archbishop Bozanić in: *Glas koncila* (5 January 2003), pp. 1 and 3.

Especially nuns, but also monks in Croatia were to a high degree ethnic Croats from Bosnia-Herzegovina. The Church regarded the Catholics in Bosnia-Herzegovina as closely linked to the Church in Croatia, which can be seen in *Glas koncila* which treated Bosnian themes in the same way as Croatian themes, even after the launching of *Katolički tjednik* (Catholic weekly) in Bosnia-Herzegovina, as the official paper of the Catholic Church there. It is usual that in meetings of Bishops' Conferences representatives of neighbouring Conferences take part, but in the case of Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, this participation was always special.

Croat Catholics could also be found in other successor states of Yugoslavia, above all in Serbia (Vojvodina, Kosovo, Serbia proper) and in Montenegro. The Church in Croatia also took care of these Croats. The same can be said about the Croats in the diaspora, in Western Europe (Austria, Germany, Switzerland and other countries) and in other continents (U.S., Canada, South America, South Africa, Australia). Bishops frequently visited these parishes, celebrated confirmation and maintained connection to these Croats. Within the Bishops' Conference, there was a priest specially assigned for this task.

Ecumenical relations were weakly developed in socialist Yugoslavia. This was due to the tensions which were – although not exclusively – connected with the Second World War. There were biennial meetings of the theological faculties in Ljubljana, Zagreb and Belgrade between 1978 and 1990, initiated by the faculty in Slovenia, and there were sometimes good relations on a local or personal level. But officially, and on the level of Church leaders, the Churches did not have relations at all. This changed with the tensions in the early nineties. The Patriarch and the cardinal met several times. They issued common statements in which they requested a cease-fire and a nonviolent solution of the conflicts. As known, these statements did not influence the war events. But they resulted in an although slow change of the attitude on both sides. Archbishop Božanić displayed a personal interest in relations to Serbian Orthodoxy, visited Belgrade and received the patriarch in Zagreb in March 1999. On 18 November 1998, the joint Commission between the Catholic Church in Croatia and the Serbian Orthodox Church met in Zagreb, for the first time after 1992. Orthodox theologians were invited from time to time to speak on conferences or meetings. The differences in perceiving the common history, and in attributing guilt and responsibility for the war, still existed, but there was a growing readiness to talk to each other. But one must not neglect the difficulties in such processes: Although Serbs formed the largest ethnic and religious minority in Croatia, the Serbian Church was now a Church abroad. It seemed to be easier to maintain contacts with bishops and Church representatives in Serbia than with those who were in charge of Orthodox dioceses and parishes in Croatia. And of course, the consequences of the war still were to be felt almost everywhere.

This change in the relationship was also motivated by bringing forward the issue of reconciliation to the Churches in the region. Churches and inter-church bodies in Europe and elsewhere stressed the need for reconciliation after the political changes in Central and Eastern Europe. The second "European Conciliar Assembly" in Europe, in Graz 1997, took place under the theme of reconciliation. It was organized by the Conference of European Churches and the Council of European [Catholic] Bishops' Conferences jointly. This brought the reconciliation issue forward, and several conferences, meetings, and publications treated this theme. It also meant that the Churches in the region understood more and more the need for reconciliation and for their contribution to such a process. This did not change their attitude, and they understood and interpreted the war in the same way as before. But now, they spoke more frequently to each other, they understood, that the other side had another view, and they continued their contacts. It must be added that this was a special change for the Serbian Orthodox Church which had before a very

critical stance to ecumenical relations, and above all to those with the Catholic Church in Croatia.

The Roman Catholic Church in Croatia is characterized by two elements: A narrow link to the own nation, with a concentration on inner issues and developments, on the one hand, and on the other hand the consciousness for the need to act in a modern society and to meet all challenges of globalization and secularization. Time will show how these two directions will develop, which one will be dominant. For successfully coping with modernity, it is unavoidable that the Church has to confront itself with the challenges and issues of modernity. But that cannot be done with recipes from the past.