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CHURCH IN CROATIA AS THE OPPOSITION TO ITSELF: ECUMENISM AS THE VICTIM OF INNER CONFLICTS

By Branko Sekulić

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Paradise Lost

There is a belief that for each person, there is mostly no bigger enemy than the person himself/herself, but when the person is an important figure in a certain society, the impact can be most severe. This is because there is always a possibility that the consequences of one's inner conflict can cause a negative impact on the community where this person is a member. This was exactly the case with Frane Franić (1912-2007), a deceased archbishop of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Split-Makarska, and with Josip Bozanić (b. 1949), cardinal of the Roman Catholic Church and the current archbishop of Zagreb. I selected them not just because their biographies fit in this story of identity crises, but also because they are among the most important persons in the contemporary history of the Catholic Church in Croatia, whose life and work can be used as a kind of paradigm for demonstrating the nature of the Church policy in this region. Namely, the gap between the goals and actions of Franić and Bozanić when they were young, and what they said and did later in life (of which Bozanić's is still in progress), serves as the best example of the humanistic hole to which ecumenism in Croatia arrived. "Among us, it is hard to admit that the intolerance, hatred and contempt are institutionalized, that our structures are, top to bottom, infected with the exclusiveness and

fear of boundaries, that the negative, inhuman and disbelieving attitude towards the other, has become something self-evident, normal, and not only in the institutions of the government, therefore, not only in politics, but also in the educational institutions and schools, media, and those so called culture institutions.”¹ In short, the point is to show that in spite of all misunderstandings among different religions and policies in the areas of ex-Yugoslavia, the biggest impediment for dialogue at the end is solely found in the person. Namely, this person usually is the victim of our social duality, which is reflected through the two worlds: one private, our spiritual shelter, and the other, the home of our collective state of mind. In the collision of these two, sometimes completely different worlds, many great persons have failed due to the fallacy of the moment, which makes them the figures who hate what they have become, or as in the case of these two bishops, it in some way diminished what they had been in the past. The gap between their past and their present is the best example of where the Church in Croatia could go, and where it is now, when it flounders in the social and ethical mud.

The Mud Into Which the Pearls Were Thrown

The former Yugoslavia was mainly a multi-confessional, multinational, and multicultural socialist country, politically and economically stable, with a state policy that was conducted under the motto *brotherhood and unity*. Figuratively, this motto was a true way of life for Yugoslavia’s citizens, but in practicality, it was just an illusion, and had been possible only because of its economic stability at that time. But, in the eighties, when the state treasury started to run out of money by the day, all the hidden social differences

¹ Ivan Šarčević, „Laž i licemjerje su postali naš identitet,” *Dnevni list*, 5 November, 2013), accessed on September 8, 2014, <http://dnevni-list.ba/web1/2013/11/05/ivan-sarcevic-laz-i-licemjerje-su-postali-nas-identitet/>

between its nations came into being.² Soon, everything that united the people, became the argument against that unity, and when the arguments culminated, the war, ethnic cleansing, criminality, and cultural genocide became the reality. In this game of blood and contempt, religion played a significant role. Now, with Yugoslavia divided into seven new independent countries, the churches in these countries mostly find themselves in a position where they are confronting each other. The best example is the relation between the Roman Catholic Church in Croatia and the Serbian Orthodox Church, whose historical animosity culminated in the 1990s, with the situation not much better today, twenty years after the war. If this continues, there will probably not be much improvement for a long time. Namely, during the last three decades, the evangelical spirit in the churches was pretty much replaced by a military spirituality where the nation replaced the position of primacy to Christian values. Figuratively, national symbols have been placed over crosses, sacral things have been covered with the flags, and Christ's disciples have become a kind of ethnic magicians. The war created a conflict in the very heart of the people and one segment of church leaders could not resist this challenge. Instead of being guardians of human dignity, they became rigid preachers of the national untouchability and promoters of the interests of certain political regimes. The Roman Catholic Church in Croatia had sunk into impersonality, and in a way, the Church still lives under this ideological cloud, which is a pity, because throughout history, it has been a kind of keeper of Croatian identity and the generator of its cultural evolution, which is mostly lost now. On the contrary, today, the Church is a morally questionable institution, its credibility having been disturbed by inner conflicts. "The Roman Catholic Church in Croatia had begun vigorous acceptance of the ruling party, and it was

² Namely, the beginning of the end of Yugoslavia was when the surplus values of society, instead of being returned back into society started to flow into the banks, into the private sector, which started becoming independent. Then, political forces begun to concentrate themselves that capital, and step by step, they took control over the Communist Party. The consequence was that they used the Federal state to privatize the state property. The new technocrats demanded the privatization of common property and began connecting themselves with the conservative and national politics, in order to *divide et impera*. The rest is history.

feared that the Capitol³ will destroy all that moral credibility which it had gained during the communist era and during the first years of the Croatian republic.”⁴ The most progressive Catholic theologians in these ex-Yugoslavian areas widely recognized among European Christians—Vjekoslav Bajsić, Tomislav Janko Šagi-Bunić, Josip Turčinović—to mention a few, have left this world, while new forces with the same credibility have not emerged, a result of the Church’s engagement in political issues at the expense of theological matters during and after the war in the 1990s. For that reason, the Church has usually been understood to be the place of political agitation rather than the space of reconciliation. This is still largely the case. Instead of being a stimulator of reconciliation and a place of prayer, the Church has gained the reputation as an agency for political manipulation. “On one hand, the churches have encouraged the formation of states and national identities, and thereby, they have unconsciously contributed to the divisions among the people according to faith and nation.”⁵ The result is that we live in a social context in which most of today’s cleric’s and believers’ habits, are latently, but noticeably in contradiction with both Christian and civil values. Namely, they have passed through a more ethnic drill instead of a spiritual one, which of course, has caused the emergence of prejudices. These prejudices are the results of a blind and uncritical acceptance of an unenlightened ethnic and national ideology, based mostly on pure folklore –*I’m who I’m, because others say so*. This has created a paradox, which manifests itself as a kind of social schizophrenia, as we are torn between things we possibly like, which informally, we are not allowed to do, as they belong to another worldview which is not well received in *our circles*. In this schizophrenia, the institutional churches in Croatia and Serbia (mostly Catholic and Orthodox), unfortunately, but understandably have found

³ A part of Zagreb, capital city of Croatia. It is became a synonym for the Roman Catholic Church in Croatia.

⁴ Esad Ćimić, “Samo je Kuharić znao da se ne smije vezati uz stranke,” *Jutarnji list* (30 January, 2010), accessed date September 8, 2014, <http://www.jutarnji.hr/cimic--samo-je-kuharic-znao-da-se-ne-smije-vezati-uz-stranke/522714/>

⁵ Marko Oršolić, *Zlodusima unatoč*, [To the demons in spite], Rijeka-Sarajevo (Adamić-IMIC, 2003.), pp. 292.

themselves in the middle of a folk-carnival with the mask of ethno-religion on their faces. “When it covers itself with saint’s mask of holiness politics manipulates easier with believers’ values and sentiment.”⁶

So instead of a dialogue in the Spirit, we have an open confrontation among the Christian communities, in which each of those communities attempt to pull Christ’s clothes into their own yard (*they divided up his clothes*, Mt. 27:35). Simply, for them, God is love only if that love includes the ethnic symbolism, because in the ex-Yugoslavian areas, God and the nation have almost become synonymous, while proclamation of the Gospel has become a churches' side project. Namely, an aggressive apology of the nationalistic myths takes priority over the Christian's ethic of active absolution. Momentarily, we live under the repercussions of this fallacy, in the hope that someone will finally recognize the true values of the Christ resistance in order to place these wrongdoings into the hall of shame for ours and the Church’s history. For this task, the Church can play a significant role, but first, its most important leaders must rediscover the path of Jesus' praxis.

Frane Franić: Lost on the Found Road

Frane Franić (1912-2007), archbishop of the archdiocese of Split-Makarska, was one of the most significant figures of the Catholic Church in the former Yugoslavia. In the early years of his ministry, the sacred role of his priestly call was permanently proven and characterized by his engagement in the Church, and with social issues. Therefore, it is not surprising that he became a member of the commission which had written the *Unitatis redintegratio* (1964) at Vatican II, as well as one of the key people in another extremely important project, *Trinaest stoljeća crkve u Hrvata* [Thirteen Centuries of Christianity in Croatia] (1976-1984), with which the Catholic Church had demonstrated its power in

⁶ Željko Mardešić, *Lica i maske svetog: ogledi iz društvene religiologije* [Faces and Masks of the Holy: Explorations in Social Religiology], Zagreb (Kršćanska sadašnjost, 1997), pp. 285.

Yugoslav atheist society. This kind of ambivalence would be the silent witness of duality in his future biography, a sign which shows the schizophrenic spirituality in the late history of the Roman Catholic Church in Croatia. This relation between the faith and the nation is a major burden and challenge for Christianity in the ex-Yugoslavia, and the tension between these allegiances is always present as a shadow over our history. During the last few decades, the nationalistic allegiance has been prioritized above church priorities, resulting in an ethno-religious filter which controls what is allowed and not allowed for our people to believe in our society. This stance is pretty dangerous for the development of civil society, and the Church, as an institution is incapable of resolving this problem. Worse yet, the institutional Church has become a source of these humanistic traps. The universal Christian's spirit is a hostage of the national identity and its liberation from these chains is a very delicate and complex process, more than our current historical circumstances can deal with. Namely, this liberation means the struggle to come to terms with the past (*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*), which was pretty impossible for our society in the time of war, and even now, when the spirit of the war in the 1990s is waking up again.⁷

This impossibility to confront one's own past was the trap which Archbishop Franić fell into, indirectly demonstrating the gap between the nature of Christian's service and the nature of the Church's praxis, the difference between the roles of Christ's disciples and priests with national aspirations. Frane Franić's life as a churchman began at a very specific time when priests were a kind of second-class citizens, and the main government project was the founding of the *Yugoslavian nation* without any ethnics specificities. These two things were culturally dangerous at that time, because the regime's unification efforts tried to erase the natural diversity among the people, which had been unacceptable. The goal should have been unity rather than uniformity. If the various traditions cannot be our common wealth, it is

⁷ Namely, fascism in our society never goes away. It is here all the time, and from time to time fascism goes out on the street.

better to separate them clearly, which we have generally understood some years after the war. For decades prior to this threat, Franić had fought against the marginalization of the Church and against the amalgamation of Croatian national culture into a Yugoslavian melting pot. Understandably, one of the Church's major roles during that time was the guarding of the Croatian cultural identity, the engagement in which, from time to time, the Church was known to overdo. That turbulence often caused small and permanent conflict in the relationship between the Roman Catholic Church in Croatia and the Serbian Orthodox Church, and between the Catholic Church in Croatia and the regime. But, the so-called *early Franić* was very aware of this situation and he had always tried to resolve these problems dialogically, which he usually achieved, as he was a respectable name and used that reputation to bring rational argumentation in those relationships.

In order to better understand the circumstances, it should be recalled that the Council renewal (Vatican II) in the Croatian Church was unusually well-prepared and wholeheartedly accepted in most of its parts. Let us mention the first Catholic papers, *Glas koncila* [The Voice of Council], the publisher *Kršćanska Sadašnjost* [Christian Contemporaneity], and more than 150 magazines and journals with religious themes. The theologians of the Catholic Church have led the dialogue with other religions at the theological faculties, and so was the chance to pursue the conversation with Marxists. One might question the degree of seriousness in these dialogues, but at least the initiative was undertaken. Therefore, the testimonies of the Council renewal have been manifold and self-sprouting, far above what could have been expected on these territories, where the clashes amongst the different nations and their ideologies were wrapped in religion, as we have seen a few decades later.⁸

The best example that proves this statement was Franić's engagement in a very specific thing during our Church history. On January 26, 1966 in Split, the 54-year-old

⁸ Željko Mardešić, *Svjedočanstva o mirotvorstvu* [Witnesses of Peacemaking] (Zagreb: Kršćanska sadašnjost, 2002), 74-75. Translation from Croatian by this author.

archbishop organized the first official ecumenical meeting, a prayer between the Catholic and Orthodox churches in Yugoslavia.⁹ Unfortunately, this date was the one of the rare true ecumenical meetings, from the grassroots, between Catholic and Orthodox churches in Yugoslavia. The top of the hierarchies in both these churches were not ready to hear this call of the new times. There were, of course, additional official and less official meetings, but generally, what took place pretended to be dialogue and did not grow into real ecumenism.

Also, it's worth mentioning that Franić had also been accused of proselytism by the Le Monde journalist Paul Jankovich, but that was short-lived, and did not discourage Franić. Moreover, together with his friend, Marko Plavša, a local Orthodox priest in one Split church, a very beautiful joint mass/liturgy was arranged in spite of criticism by Orthodox and Catholic leaders. This meeting was an ecumenical precedent, but I can freely say, this was also a kind of diversion in the inter-Christian relationships in these areas, because the general state of mind of the Croatian and Serbian relations, meaning of the Catholic and Orthodox Church, is usually verbal or even physical confrontation. The so called third way does not exist, at least officially. So we can regard this action of Archbishop Franić as a somewhat revolutionary one, in the hope that this episode will someday be remembered in the history of Christianity, both in Dalmatian and Croatia.¹⁰ Franić was very tenacious in his plan and he held these ecumenical meetings until his retirement in 1988, in spite of disapproval from the top. His colleague *in crime*, Marko Plavša, unfortunately did not have the same freedom and, according to Franić's diaries, he suffered tremendous pressures and even open threats, which may have been the major causes for his heart attack in 1967 when he died. He participated only less than a year in this project, but he had done more for our society in that one year, than most churchmen here in their entire life. On the other hand, believers from both the

⁹ Daniel Patafta, „Ekumenska gibanja u Hrvatskoj neposredno nakon Drugoga vatikanskog koncila“, *Bogoslovska smotra*, 84 (2014.) 4, 857.

¹⁰ I have emphasized Dalmatia, because in that part of Croatia the Serbian Orthodox Church has a long tradition.

Catholic and Orthodox side were much pleased with these meetings, which were a mix of the western and eastern traditions. We can say that an ecumenical spirit really dwelled in the church during those days. “That movement connected Catholics, Protestants, Jews, Orthodox, and Muslims, and out of it arose many religious events, mutual visits, meetings of the religious schools and faculties, tolerant theological discussions, and benevolent ecumenical articles in religious literature and print.”¹¹ Parallel with it, the Yugoslav project of *brotherhood and unity* was in its prime, and it was one more factor which indirectly, but significantly contributed to the satisfaction of citizens. This Christian fellowship was also a reflection of economic and political stability of that time. This happiness was short-lived however, and the ecumenical movement and the cosmopolitan Yugoslav society soon burst like a soap bubble under the national, cultural, and religious, and primarily economic differences. Almost any state without money can become like ex-Yugoslavia—something that should be always kept in mind. In short, ecumenism and Yugoslavia were a kind of utopia, unsustainable in these areas, rife with all kinds of historical animosity and tensions, which was hidden for a short period when the former Federation enjoyed a relative wealth and well-being, and of course, remembered the great anti-fascist victory in World War II.

The official end of these idyllic times began at the start of 1990s, when the nationalist circles undertook a frontal attack in that war madness, to which even Archbishop Franić succumbed when he supported Franjo Tuđman’s regime in spite of Cardinal Franjo Kuharić’s unwillingness. This led to a very questionable situation, in which the differences between the Church and regime were less and less visible. Culmination of this ethno-religious conception took place in 1996-1997, approximately two years after the war, when Franjo Tuđman enjoyed the status of a national savior. What had happened to the head and soul of Frane Franić at that time will probably stay a mystery, but it was obvious that his age and the

¹¹ Vjekoslav Perica, *Sveti Petar i sveti Sava* [Saint Peter and Saint Sava] (Beograd: Biblioteka XX vek, 2009), 56.

brutality of the war overshadowed his Christian zeal. “The war in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1991–1995 deeply disturbed the aged and retired bishop. He will begin to feel the blame for being so tolerant in his idea of dialogue with the Serbian Orthodox and the Marxists and he will more and more sink into mysticism and spend his entire days in prayer.”¹²

One should add that he had always been conservative and traditional, and on top of that, the representatives of the Serbian Orthodox Church gave him more reasons for his regret when one part of their clergy blessed the arms of Serbian paramilitary troops, who administered their idea of justice throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia. A special low blow was an anti-Christian letter, *Appeal Against Ecumenism* in 1997, which it seems, was a final strike to ecumenical attempts in ex-Yugoslavia directed by the Serbian Orthodox Church. It was a clear sign indicating what religion had become in the 1990s. Also, it was an end to all that Franić had dreamed of during the past decades, and moreover, to all that Franić represented in himself over the decades. For Archbishop Frane Franić, this was the proverbial straw that broke the camel’s back. His reversal of consciousness caused him to enter the same hole against which he had fought his entire life. This is a pity because Franić had always been the exception that had a chance to become the rule. Unfortunately, instead, he became one of the major pillars of Tuđman’s policy. In 1996 at the age of 84, Franić openly turned his back on Cardinal Franjo Kuharić in a verbal fight with President Tuđman about the future of Croatia, and about the role of the Catholic Church in that future. Franić, a then old and tired churchman, no longer understood the language of peace in the middle of the horrors of war and had changed his viewpoint towards it.

Soon, Franić was used as prototype for the Church in Croatia – the nationalistic one, and now his biography is completely different from what it could have been. With this

¹² Perica, *Sveti Petar i sveti Sava*, 116.

episode in his life, Frane Franić posthumously became an ideal-type to those people from whom he spent a good part of his life running away from—those people who use the Church as an excuse for their political decision. We can follow the line which depicts Franić's life, from the revolutionary priest in an officially atheistic Yugoslavia who initiated dialogue between two different churches, to the bishop who blessed the pro-nationalist policy, going from the main road to a kind of dead end. The main tragedy of this case lies in the fact that those people who work on ecumenical issues in Croatia today, have to take a certain distance from the “total” Franić, and instead talk about the “young Franić” who served as a model in the ecumenical movement against an ecumenically useless “older Franić.” Simply put, the “young Franić” serves as a possible utopia, while the “old Franić” represents the poor reality in which we live. Sometimes I ask myself what the “young Franić” would say to the “old Franić” if he had been given the chance, or what would the “old Franić” advise the young one if he could have met him. But this will forever stay as something between “them” and God. On the other hand, for us, both of them remain a vivid warning of how the Christian calling can be fragile under the pressure of profane forces. “We have drowned in a horrible war from which both Churches came out as losers. Someone had harshly toyed with us. We all need help now.”¹³ When we look back, the spiritual breakdown of this archbishop was a silent proclamation of where the Church in these regions will end, much like a bitter stepmother of the people which she was supposed to take care of.

Josip Bozanić – How to Explain to Yourself that This is Still Me?

After Franić's unfortunate fall into the nationalistic discourse of Franjo Tuđman, Cardinal Kuharić and his followers increasingly lost their footing. Peacemaking cost them position in the land, which became flooded with war profiteers and criminals. The retirement

¹³ „Na konferenciji Katoličkih biskupa Sjedinjenih država na kojem su prisustvovali i predstavnici Katoličke Crkve u Hrvatskoj i Srpske Pravoslavne Crkve 1996.“Cited according to report by the Croatian Catholic Press Agency IKA, June 8, 1997.

of Kuharić took place, as expected, in 1997 at directive from the Vatican, as the cardinal had become, for years, a hostage of his own message of peace.

However, it was not expected that an almost unknown bishop of Krk, Josip Bozanić, would become the new archbishop of Zagreb. Although the clerical and political circles did not know what to expect of him, the rumor was that his role was to break up the close relationship between the church and the regime, because many influential church leaders were completely militantly-minded, which had gone so far that one of the Franciscans, Tomislav Duka, for a while, carried a gun out of habit. In that kind of atmosphere of general social schizophrenia and very disturbed Christian spirituality, the fascisization of Croatian society flourished as a wicked foretelling of the near future. In that humanistic abyss the appointment of Josip Bozanić had undergone, which by some was perceived to be a necessary change, others expected for him to be the extension of the current politics. These two sides were like the banks of a river in which Bozanić was meant to swim—a very hard task. But nevertheless, without too much public hesitation, he momentarily accepted the burden of his calling, and in his Christmas letter of 1998 and Easter letter of 1999, fired a harsh critique from his altar to the sinful structures and institutional violence, and emphasized the importance of returning to Christian foundations and the preferential option for the poor: “The sudden changes of the political and economic system have enabled fast enrichment of few individuals and a growing impoverishment of numerous citizens. The structural sin is at work, which laws and regulations have made possible because the general good of individuals and community has not been the first goal.”¹⁴

His harsh words echoed throughout Croatian media space in the best manner of the Latin American theology of liberation, for during the war, an entirely new social class gained its privileges on the unjust division of the social property, and often that class became the

¹⁴ Josip Bozanić, „Božićna poruka“, *Informativna katolička agencija* (1997), accessed date September 6, 2014, <http://www.ika.hr/index.php?prikaz=vijest&ID=62413>

ruling power. In short, he vigorously attacked the criminality that made it possible for certain individuals loyal to Tuđman's regime to become wealthy on the corps of Yugoslavia, and on the account of the people who became collateral victims in that war, like those who fought in the war without any forethought. Bozanić had been persistent in condemning those types of individuals from the first day of his appointment, which rumor says, had even caused a warning from President Tuđman himself to watch his words, since those were the ideological times during which anyone who criticized the actual regime was regarded as a state enemy. Croatia's official President Tuđman, an unofficial dictator, had considered that his actions were the consequences of the democratic process, while the real picture depicted a transitional sludge that had still not been cleared. Therefore, Bozanić's call for a wider social solidarity was viewed as salt on an open wound in a society that had been intertwined with corruption and conformism, and with the regime's idea that the creation of two hundred wealthy families of Croatia will solve its economic problems. At the end, this idea backfired upon the whole country and its consequences today is that this time of economic crisis is being felt, more and more. The artificial polarization of progressive and retrograde forces took place, where mutually both blamed each other for the state of the country. The Catholic Church and lay circles played a special role in the camp of the retrograde forces who had difficulties understanding and admitting that the contemporary world was constantly changing. For example, they found themselves in a position where they kissed the hand of a convicted war criminal after his return from serving a sentence, while at the same time, they cursed homosexuals and kept silent on the abolition of the Cyrillic alphabet as the official letter of the Serbian minority in Croatia.¹⁵

¹⁵ „Croatia anti-gay marriage petition sparks fears of intolerance,“ *Agence France-Presse* (June 13, 2013), accessed date September 6, 2014, <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/news/afp/130613/croatia-anti-gay-marriage-petition-sparks-fears-intolerance>

However, this was only the tip of the iceberg for the social pressure which dominated the time of Bozanić's service to which the church hierarchy had succumbed. Bozanić himself unfortunately did not endure this and any similar pressure, and soon upon issuing those two letters, he also started to follow the nationalistic rhetoric. His sudden shift from being a constructive critic to becoming part of the problem, remains one of the biggest mysteries of the contemporary church in Croatia. Subsequently, his role became that of an abstract social chronicler and paranoiac who, for example, would raise the apparition of communism, which, in his opinion, was skillfully hidden in our ex- socialist government. The church is now characterized by absence of social criticism and the presence of nationalistic propaganda speeches. "The Church in Croatia must decisively resist this kind of idolatry of the state, because it is possible that in the process of forming the cult of the state (which can be easily perceived in prior experiences), all Christian principles about the human being, society, politics, and state can be trampled."¹⁶

The four agreements between the Holy See and Croatia of 1997-1998 have given the Catholic Church in Croatia so many privileges that it seems that Cardinal Bozanić was drawn into this conformism so deeply that he cannot perceive things realistically any longer. His falling into a lethargy was characteristic for the churches of the post-communist societies, which have, with the disappearance of those regimes, seemingly, lost their *raison d'être*. Or, as Nietzsche would have said, "under peaceful conditions, a militant man attacks himself"¹⁷ Deprived of serious enemies, and brimming with privileges, the Church in Croatia became misanthropic toward those who wanted to change it. It was around this time that Bozanić's spiritual breakdown took place; he sided with the status quo rather than with those who asked questions in the spirit of the praxis of the Gospel. That breakdown signified his transition

¹⁶ Luka Vincetić, „Kršćanin i država“, *Erasmus 17* (1996): 56.

¹⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future* (New York: Courier Dover Publications, 2012), 47.

from being a minister of the Gospel to becoming a pure administrator, for whom the testimony of truth changed into the propaganda of a certain ideology.

Franić and Bozanić: Return into the Future

In the case of Frane Franić and Josip Bozanić, as part of their private weakness, both were victims of the nationalist twilight zone which reduced their universality to a strict national frameworks, leaving little chance for a positive valorization of their personas. *Summa summarum*, if they had at some point in their later phases taken off their robes, there is a great possibility that we would not have noticed significant differences between them and the pro-regime followers. Wanting peace is one thing, working to achieve it is something entirely different. Both Franić and Bozanić, it seemed, at the start almost succeeded, but ultimately, they were denied the experience of Christ's *kenosis* (Phil 2:6)–God for people, which should always be the true engagement of the Church–the Church for people, not merely the Church for certain people. If anyone could have been a role model to a nation in which almost 90 percent of citizens declared themselves Christians, surely it would have been the two of them. Unfortunately, both missed their chance. Our church history had enough exceptional examples of so-called men of God, but these two are simply taken as a paradigm, as a pattern of hard period in Croatian church history, who had the possibility for a wider social influence, but they failed that exam.

The pressure by the regime was huge, this is clear, but this cannot be an excuse for a true Christian for missing the chance to act in the most crucial circumstances. Despite their intellectual and spiritual strength, they missed the chance to evangelize politics and to help in the development of civil society, the two features that are almost entirely missing from the functioning of the Church in Croatia. Somehow, it seems, the Church has become a foreign entity in the society in which it resides, and part of the blame rests on both Franić and

Božanić. As previously stated, one can understand their disappointment with the ecumenical contacts with the Serbian Orthodox Church in the relation between the churches, as well as the bitterness due to Serbian nationalism where they had to stand in the defense of Croatia's independence, but their turning away from the nature of their initial activities is regretful as is their subsequent effort to squash civic efforts for change. It is a pity because Christian praxis has the strength to be one of the generators of social progress.

Croatia has travelled a long way from Tito's Yugoslav regime to Tuđman's quasi-democratic state, but in essence, little to nothing has been adopted. It seems that the Church has not learned very much from that history. The church leaders are often in significant opposition toward civil associations in Croatia, which hampers social development. The consequence is that it is impossible to have both, a practical religion and a politically useful concept. Hence, cacophony of social conflict continues and ecumenism in its wider context, of church and society, is stuck in the same mud as interchurch dialogue. Nationalism seems to be only an excuse by which the Church wants to keep its relevance. However, this is a dangerous walk on a razor blade. Regretfully, we have accepted and gotten used to this kind of situation as normal. "Catholicism can mark the ethnic identity, but it should never coincide with it completely. An effort should be made, purely for theological and ecclesiological reasons, that the Catholic identity should be quite clearly differentiated from the ethnic."¹⁸ History is now judging us, having become the ones who performed a *salto mortale*, and a once possible peaceful social disintegration (the breakdown of the former Yugoslavia) has become stranded on barbed wires and minefields. The Church suffered enormous sacrifice in this episode, both physically and morally. This metaphorical barbed wire has divided the early Franić from the late Franić and the early Božanić from the late Božanić, leaving the church and its ecumenism to the uncertainty of individual efforts and attempts. The current

¹⁸ Zvonimir Bono-Šagi, *Da sol ne obljudavi* (Zagreb: Kršćanska sadašnjost, 1999), 129-130.

situation, it seems, does not bring anything different. Nothing can be different when one wishes to travel forward, while constantly looking backward, as the institution of the Catholic Church in Croatia does. This retrograde process should be stopped, and the church should look at what it must do, and what it has actually done, because here consists the whole rise and fall of what we have in the church today. This especially applies to people like Božanić, who should step up and say: *“Learn from me, because I’m the future which I’ve abducted from myself.”*