

# THE DIOCESE OF MOSTAR-DUVNO AND THAT OF TREBINJE-MRKAN

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As delegate of his Excellency the Bishop Ratko Peric, I convey to you his greetings and prayers for the success of this meeting.

My task today is to present you with a brief presentation about the situation of the Church in Herzegovina.

## 1. - A brief history

According to Canonical Law, the Church in Herzegovina is divided into two dioceses: the diocese of Mostar-Duvno, and that of Trebinje-Mrkan. In actual fact, in order to ensure effective pastoral work, these two dioceses work together as one diocese (one bishop, one presbytery, one common institution). Even though history shows negative results in both these dioceses, their respective stories are different. For this reason one must consider them separately even in their brief presentation.

### 1.1. - The diocese of Mostar-Duvno

In the present territory of the diocese of Mostar-Duvno, at the time of Lower Empire, there were two dioceses called after their See: Delminium, Naronia and Sarsenterum.

I will speak on Delminium because of its denomination, so I will start with the diocese of Duvno. We must not forget the important role played by the bishops of Makarska, who were influential in the actual territory of the diocese of Mostar-Duvno but also in the greater territory.

In the Lower Middle Ages, as well as during the Ottoman Rule, it was the Bishops of Makarska who worked very hard for Herzegovina. Some of the Bishops who stand out are Kacic, the Franciscans Bartul and Peter, and later on their successors the Franciscans Marijan Lisnjic and the servant of God Nikola Bjankovic.

The diocese of Delminium, on the territory of Duvno, was mentioned in 591 in a letter by Gregory the Great, addressed to Malchus, bishop of that Municipality.

In reality it was there that St Venanzi, the missionary-bishop, was martyred after the second half of the 3rd century. But this is not recorded in any writing before 591.

The diocese of Delminium was suppressed at the beginning of the 7th century. In the first ten years of the 14th century it was re-established by the Popes of Avignone as a defence against the Patarian Church, which was already widespread in all Bosnia and which threatened the Croatian territory. Madija was the first bishop of the re-established diocese, from 1337 to 1345.

Even if the succession of bishops continued up to the 16th century, it is difficult to believe that the greater part of them had never treaded the soil of that diocese they never lived there. Its last bishop was the Franciscan Mihal Jahnn of Praga. He tried to live in the diocese but did not succeed because the diocese was devastated and was almost uninhabited so much so that finally he had to leave it. It was the time of the long and bloody war of Candia (1645-1669) which was most devastating especially for the countries bordering the Turkish-Venician territory.

A new page for the diocese started with the political separation of Herzegovina from the Ottoman Bosnia in the 19th century. In 1844, the Franciscans of Herzegovinian origin, returned to Bosnia and built their first convent in Sioki Brijeg (1846) which was the Centre of the independent mission which later became a Custody in 1852 and later a Province in 1892.

At the same time, an Apostolic Vicariate of Herzegovina (1846) run by the Franciscan Rafo Bausic (1852) who was considered as the founder of the Vicariate in Herzegovina and later of the diocese, was established.

When the Hierarchy of Bosnia Herzegovina was being re-established, the mission in Bosnia-Herzegovina was given regular canonical status by Pope Leo XIII in his Bull *Ex hac augusta* of the 5th July 1881. Besides the Archbishopric and the Metropolitan Province of Sarajevo, another two dependent dioceses of Banja Luca and Mostar (diocese Mostar-Duvno) were also founded.

The Franciscan Paskal Buconjic, up to this time Apostolic Vicar, was nominated bishop of the diocese. From then on, five bishops were appointed, one after the other, to occupy the apostolic seat in Mostar (two Franciscans: Paskal Buconjic and Alojzije Mistic, and three diocesan: Peter Cule, Pavao Zanic and Rutko Peric). The number of diocesan priests increased and they carried out pastoral work in this old diocese together with the Franciscans.

## 1.2. - The diocese of Trebinje

The diocese of Trebinje was called so after the bishopric of Tribunium (Trebinje) which was the capital province of Trebinje. The diocese was mentioned for the first time in the Bull issued by Pope Benedict VIII (1012-1024) on the 27th September 1022. In its long existence the diocese had to face many difficulties. Sometimes the difficulties, which arose from different political and social circumstances, seemed to disappear. The decisive time in the life of the diocese of Trebinje was, when the See Tribunia-Travunja, followed by that of Trebinje fell under the rule of Raska. Uros I (1242-1276) between the year 1252 and 1254, expelled the bishop of Trebinje Slavija. Although he was an Orthodox, there was also a political reason behind it. In fact the diocese was put under Dubrovnik, and Uros wanted to free it from the political influence of Dubrovnik.

Bishop Slavija moved to Dubrovnik, while the Episcopal office remained vacant. Pope Martin IV (1285-1285) through the Bull *Ad audientiam nostram* and later his successor Pope Honorius IV (1285-1287) with his Bull *Lecta coram nobis*, empowered the Archbishop of Dubrovnik to nominate and consecrate the bishop of Trebinje until the 18th July 1432. After having given the small island of Molunat, the Dubrovnik Senate assumed this responsibility up to the fall of the Ragusean Republic (of Dubrovnik) in the year 1808. Already before this, in the year 1361, the Ragusean Republic, had already given to the bishop of Trebinje, residing in Dubrovnik, the small island Mrkan, in the vicinity of Dubrovnik, as his future residence so much so that the bishop became known as the Bishop of Mrkan.

The already difficult situation became even worse when the whole of Herzegovina, along with the diocese of Trebinje, fell under the Ottoman rule in the year 1482. At that time, the few faithful left remained not only without bishop but also without priests. This situation lasted for a very long time.

In the year 1622, the Holy See constituted the Congregation for the Propagation of Faith (Propaganda Fidei). The diocese of Trebinje, which the Holy See declared as "partibus infidelium" was governed by this Congregation. The attention given by this Congregation towards the preparation of priests and the opening of some Institutes (Loret, Fermo) brought a ray of light to the diocese. There were missionary priests in the diocese but the Bishops did not reside there. However on the instructions of this Congregation, they visited their diocese more frequently.

After the death of bishop Nikola Feric in 1819, the succession of bishops was interrupted in the diocese of Trebinje. From 1839, the diocese was run by a Vicariate appointed by the Dubrovnik Chapter. In 1839, Pope Gregory XVI, in his Bull *Apostolici nostri munera*, entrusted the running of the diocese

of Dubrovnik to the Bishop of Dubrovnik and this time as Apostolic Administrator.

When Pope Leo XIII, established the regular canonical hierarchy in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the diocese of Trebinje became an integral part of this new ecclesiastical province, administrated by the bishop of Dubrovnik as Apostolic Administrator until decreed otherwise.

On the 8th July 1890, the same Pope, entrusted the administration of the diocese to the bishop of Mostar.

## 2. - The diocese to-day

### 2.1. - The diocese of Mostar-Duvno

Today, the diocese of Mostar-Duvno, has about 200.000 inhabitants. According to the Canon Law, it is divided into 7 Deaneries and 66 parishes. The diocesan priests, along with the Franciscan fathers, carry out the pastoral work. Because of its past history and of its lack of preparation to accept the canonical dispositions, for over 100 years, an unfortunate situation has prevailed in this diocese, referred to as "The Herzegovina Case". This presents an obstacle to the encouragement and carrying out of pastoral work within the diocese. The diocese does not even have a minor and a major seminary. The function of instructing lay faithful is carried out by the Institute of Theological Studies. Already about 100 catechists have graduated in Theological so that they may be fully prepared to share in the mission of the Church in the whole of Bosnia-Herzegovina. They work as teachers of the catholic religion, as assistants to their pastors and carry out any other pastoral work in the Church and in Society. The See of the diocese is in Mostar.

The city of Mostar is the residential place of two provincial religious communities: the province of the Franciscan Minors, and that of the Franciscan Sisters. In the Diocese, besides the Franciscan Sisters, who are the most numerous, there are another five religious congregations: the Sisters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, who work in hospitals and other health centres; the Daughters of Charity, who run the kindergarten "St. Joseph" in Mostar; the Sisters Servants of the Child Jesus - SMI, who run the Centre for the handicapped "Sacra Famiglia" in Mostar; the Carmelite Sisters who run a Parish Centre and a kindergarten centre in the Parish of Gabela-Polje and the Sisters of the Precious Blood of Jesus who carry out pastoral work in the parish of Prisoje. Besides the Franciscan fathers, there are no other male religious communities.

## 2.2. - The diocese of Trebinje- Mrkan

Today in the diocese of Trebinje-Mrkan, there are about 20.000 faithful. It is divided into two deaneries and 15 parishes. Pastoral work is carried out only by diocesan priests. There is no seminary and there are no male religious communities. The female religious do pastoral work in two parishes. These are the Sisters of Charity at Stolac, and the Servants of the Child Jesus at Neum who run a kindergarten centre within their convent. The diocese is administrated by the Bishop of Mostar as Apostolic Administrator.

## 3. - The destruction of the war

The last war has hit the Church in Herzegovina both from the material as well as from the religious point of view. In the two dioceses 106 sacred places have been completely destroyed. The parish of Trebinje-Mrkan has totally disappeared, the other is completely uninhabited and the third one is inaccessible. The three parishes are only sparsely inhabited. In the territory of the diocese of Mostar-Duvno, nine parishes have been totally or partially destroyed and the faithful have been expelled. During the night between the 6th and 7th May 1992, "the heart of the diocese" that is the residence of the Bishop of Mostar was set on fire. Besides precious articles, this housed a well established library containing 50.000 books. At this time of the so called *peace*, the Church is doing its best to restore that which has been destroyed during the war and to resume with a normal pastoral activity in the parishes and in the places hit by the war.

## 4. - The role and place of the laity in the Church in Herzegovina

History has not favoured much the Church in Herzegovina as it has not allowed space for lay people to involve themselves within it. However, it would be unfair not to mention the many witnesses of their faith during the various difficult periods that is during the occupation, expulsion and dictatorship. I maintain that it is the local Church's obligation to ensure that these martyrs, husbands and wives, remain as shining lights for today's and future generations.

It was only after the establishment of a regular canonical hierarchy that an intensive involvement by the laity in the life of the Church could start. The setting up of different Confraternities within the parochial communi-

ties confirm this. However the commitment and existence of these groups did not last long. In Yugoslavia, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, three great wars and above all, recently the communist regime, suffocated every religious commitment both in the Church and in Society. Yugoslavia has been divided into so many different parts. Many witnesses to the faith, simply because they have loved God, the Church, their fellows Croatian countrymen and mankind, were sent to the gallows, where they have ended their lives. The Third Orders of the religious communities, called Lay Orders, have survived in spite of the communist dictatorship. They still carried out their spiritually oriented activities within the Church.

Lately, after the recent "democratic changes" the need for a stronger commitment by the laity has become more evident. In most of the parishes, in the Parochial Pastoral College, and even in others, several committed groups and associations, embracing young people and adults have cropped up. Their aim is to commit themselves actively in the life of the Church and in society. However this move has not taken root deeply as yet and at the local Church's level, there are no associations and movements of organized lay people recognized by the local Church.

We hope that this international meeting proves to be a favourable occasion for the promotion of new initiatives.