

■ BY LUCY GORDAN

JOSIP CARDINAL BOZANIC OF CROATIA

Born in 1949 in Rijeka, you are too young to remember Tito's split with Moscow in 1948, but what did your parents tell you about those times?

JOSIP CARDINAL BOZANIC: My family considered Tito a dictator responsible for the massacre of thousands of innocent people. Even if Tito split from Stalin, he was a Communist with no mercy for people who didn't accept his Marxist ideology; he sent them to concentration camps. Among them was my uncle, Father Jerko Valkovic, a Franciscan. Accused of spreading "religious propaganda," he was arrested in 1951 and sentenced to 19 months in Stara Gradiska's infamous camp. My parents often talked about Alojzije Cardinal Stepinac, also jailed for his Christian beliefs.

I remember how dangerous it was to listen to Vatican Radio. My parents kept the volume very low; if overheard, the Communist police would have accused them of treason. Although everyone knew about Tito's massacres and jails, no one dared to denounce them. Most of his atrocities took place after World War II. We must start shedding light on the horrors of Yugoslavia's Communist era; otherwise we run the risk that these atrocities and their innocent victims will be forgotten. The Church is ready to help discover the truth.

Bartol Bozanic, a relative of yours, was the second bishop of Krk from 1839 to 1854, and you were the 8th bishop, from 1989 to 1997...

CARDINAL BOZANIC: Today's diocese of Krk encompasses the territories of three dioceses in existence since ancient times. These were the diocese of Krk for the island of Krk; the diocese of Osor for the islands of Cres, Losinj, and the smaller islands of Susak, Ilovik, Unije, Velike, and Male Srakane; and the diocese of Rab for the island of Rab and the northern sector of the island of Pag. With the Bull of Pope Leo XII *Locum Beati Petri* in 1828, the dioceses of Osar and of Rab were suppressed and their territory incorporated into the diocese of Krk. The first bishop of this newly configured diocese of Krk was Bishop Antun Sintic; the second, Bishop Bartol Bozanic.

Bartol Bozanic and I are related but not by direct descent. My childhood parish of Vrbnik is very proud of its three consecutive bishops of the diocese of Krk: Bartol Bozanic (1839-1854), Ivan

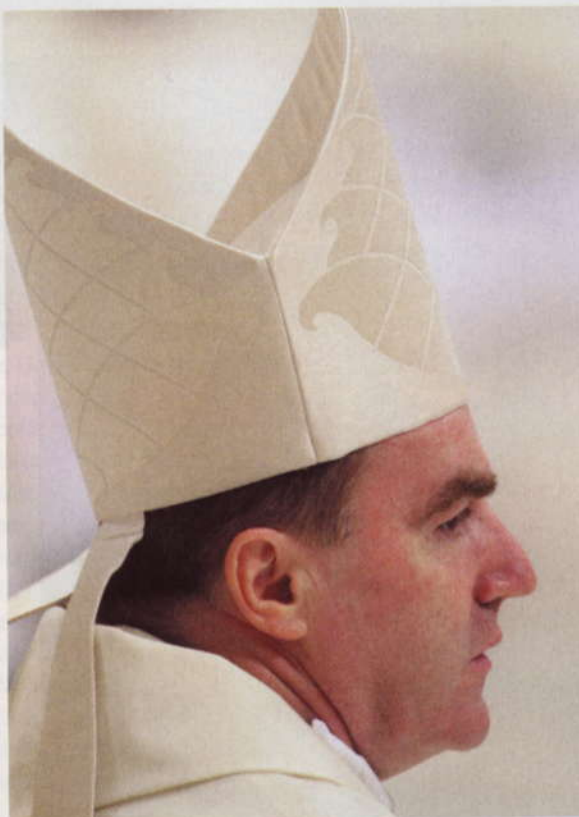


Photo: Grzegorz Galazka

Vitezic (1854-1877), and Anijan Feretic (1880-1893).

Besides yourself, are there other clerics in your family?

CARDINAL BOZANIC: My parish of Vrbnik has a tradition of numerous vocations. Almost every family has a relative who's taken vows. Both my parents did. Besides my mother's brother, Father Jerko Valkovic, my brother is the parish priest in Omisalj in the diocese of Krk. Another relative is a priest and a professor of moral theology at the Theological Institute in Rijeka, where I taught dogmatic theology and canon law from 1988 to 1997.

You were ordained on June 29, 1975, by Bishop Karmelo Zazinovic and served as his private secretary. Then in 1989 you succeeded him as bishop of Krk. Was he your mentor?

CARDINAL BOZANIC: Monsignor Karmelo Zazinovic was a great bishop. A true father figure and a spellbinding teacher, he was dedicated to educating future priests and rejoiced at their ordinations. He knew how to develop a good rapport with young people. We all respected him. Some considered him severe, but he had a big heart. He knew how to bring out the best in everyone and delegate appropriate responsibilities. After my ordination, I served as his private secretary for two-and-a-half years. Later, in strict collaboration with Monsignor Zazinovic, in 1986 I was appointed chancellor of the diocese and in 1987 the vicar general. Zazinovic was definitely my mentor; I'm deeply indebted to him. When, in 1989, I succeeded him as bishop of Krk, he continued to live in the bishop's palace until his death in March 1997, so I continued to benefit from his knowledge and the wisdom of his advice.

Other important influences?

CARDINAL BOZANIC: In 1997 I was appointed archbishop of Zagreb. From the very day of my installation I had the good fortune to live in the Archdiocese together with my venerated predecessor Franjo Cardinal Kuharic until his death in March 2002. He was a decisive figure for the Church in Croatia during the final period of Communism. Living beside him, I experienced his goodness and his charity. I feel particularly close to him because he was the consecrating bishop at my installation as bishop.

I'm also grateful for my close friendships with two other now-deceased bishops: Monsignor Antun Tamarut, Archbishop Metropolitan

Below, the Cathedral of Zagreb, the capital of Croatia; below right, a portrait of Croatian Cardinal Alojzije Stepinac. Bottom, Pope John Paul II praying at the tomb of Cardinal Alojzije Stepinac on September 10, 1994. Opposite, Cardinal Josip Bozanic

of the archdiocese of Rijeka-Senj, and Monsignor Srećko Baldurina, bishop of Šibenik. Our ties date to well before our installations as bishops, but strengthened while we were members of the Croatian Bishops' Conference. Both were influential figures in the Croatian Church during the fall of Communism and the immediate post-Communist era.

Donald Wuerl, the archbishop of Washington, DC, told me that "the role of a priest and therefore of a bishop is threefold: to teach, to lead, and to sanctify"...

CARDINAL BOZANIC: I agree. All three are equally important and interconnected. Anyone who practices a bishop's teachings about love, the holy sacraments and eternal life becomes part of the Christian community. But this community always needs guidance to remain a family of the faithful, united in showing charity and brotherly love. A bishop cannot neglect any of his three roles. They're the model Jesus set for us during his earthly existence, his example as the Good Shepherd.

Who's your favorite saint?

CARDINAL BOZANIC: I'm devoted to St. Joseph, my patron saint and the patron saint of Croatia. Like all Croatians, I also nurture a deep veneration for Blessed Alojzije Stepinac, whose self-sacrifice and faith left an indelible mark on the history of the Croatian Church. I trust in his intercession and I'm grateful for his help. His beatification took place in 1998, the year after I became archbishop of Zagreb.

Within the Roman Curia, you're a member of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, the Pontifical Council for the Laity, and the Special Council for Europe of the General Secretariat of the Synods of Bishops. What are your duties?

CARDINAL BOZANIC: All three signify being part of the College of Cardinals, of the episcopal ministry, headed by the Pope. The duties of bishops and cardinals are not limited to their local churches. Under the guidance of the Pope, we share responsibilities for the Universal Church. Being a member of the Roman Curia signifies steadfast service to the Pope.

The conclave which elected Benedict XVI was your first. What did you feel on entering the Sistine Chapel?

CARDINAL BOZANIC: A profound sense of responsibility to devote myself to the Holy Spirit and to elect the Holy Spirit's choice as the successor of St. Peter. I also felt deep communion and solidarity with the Church worldwide which was united in incessant prayer for the election of a new Pope.

Do you have a special memory of Pope John Paul II, who created you cardinal in 2003?

CARDINAL BOZANIC: We Croatians had a special tie with this great Servant of God because he knew firsthand the fate of the Church behind the Iron Curtain, the sufferings of its parishioners and its priests. Ever grateful for his three apostolic trips here, we'll never forget his solidarity during the conflict of the 1990s. The day the Holy Father beatified our martyr Cardinal Stepinac, October 3, 1998, was momentous, a signal from the Heavenly Father. Immediately after the beatification, during Holy Communion in our national shrine of Marija Bistrica, the sun suddenly broke through deep clouds. In my personal meetings with John Paul II, I felt I was in the presence of a mystic.

Do you have a special memory of Pope Benedict XVI?

CARDINAL BOZANIC: In 2001, we commemorated the 20th anniversary of the death of Franjo Cardinal Šeper, the archbishop of Zagreb and later the prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. His successor Cardinal Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict, participated in a symposium about Cardinal Šeper and celebrated Mass in Zagreb's cathedral. Ever since then I've never ceased to be in awe of his attentiveness, deep respect and kindness towards others.

In Croatia, of nearly 4 million Croatians, 87% are baptized Catholics. What percent attends Mass regularly?

CARDINAL BOZANIC: Croatians have a strong sense of belonging to the Church, of family, and of devotion to the Madonna. On her feast days they customarily make pilgrimages to her shrines. However, like other most European countries, only between 15 and

20% of the population attend Mass regularly.

You have visited the United States and Canada a number of times...

CARDINAL BOZANIC: Yes, my first visit to the US was in the early 1980s when I was a student in Rome. As bishop and as archbishop I've made several pastoral visits to the Croatian communities in North America, most recently last February to Ontario, Cleveland, and New York. North America's Croatian communities—not just the now elderly immigrants but their descendants too—care deeply about these pastoral visits from the bishops of their homeland. ○

Thanks to the Croatian National Tourist Office in New York, during a press trip to Istria and Zagreb, culture editor Lucy Gordan contacted His Eminence, one of the Church's youngest cardinals, for Inside the Vatican.



Photo: Lucy Gordan



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