

were determined to “cleanse” totally Banja Luka, people were going to Komarica: “They begged me, ‘Bishop save us. Lead us out of this terrible situation.’ ” The situation was like many centuries before, when the people from Hippo, under siege, were going to Augustine.

But despite all this, because of Komarica and men like him, “history can document that evil has not triumphed.”

Interview: Bishop Franjo Komarica

Monsignor Komarica is bishop of Banja Luka. He was interviewed on March 15 by Umberto Pascali, and the interview was translated from Croatian by Margaret Casman-Vuko. The following is abridged.

EIR: Monsignor Komarica, your name has become famous throughout the world because of what you did during the worst period of the war; when, for years, you refused to abandon your office and your city, Banja Luka, which fell under the occupation of the Greater Serbians more than four years ago. Despite their determination to apply, in the most ferocious ways, the policy of ethnic cleansing—genocide—you and the clergy around you remained in the region. Could you describe that period, from the beginning of the conflict?

Komarica: Dear friend, and all our other friends, I thank you most sincerely for your humanity and the love you express to those of us in danger, many thousands of miles away. All of us are people, God’s creation. Although you are far away, on another continent, you are very close to us. Much more binds us to our fellow man than divides us. This fundamental truth, has been my life’s creed during the past years. I have always tried to conduct myself accordingly among people, especially among my neighbors of whatever religious or ethnic national affiliation.

I cannot accept that the most precious human values, mutual respect and love, are no longer valid. These precious values, common to every person, should not be displaced by enmity, hatred, war, destruction, egoism.

In response to your question, I am a witness to a volcano. I cannot explain, even to myself, where such evil in people’s hearts comes from. It seemed to rise to the surface overnight, in people’s words, in crimes. I can only explain this according to the Gospels, in the words of Jesus Christ: “. . . for from the fullness of the heart, the mouth speaks” (Luke 6:45).

We have tried, always relying on God’s strength, to forgive, forgive, and forgive anew. As Jesus teaches us, we must return good for evil. We have always encouraged each other with Jesus’ words: “I say, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you . . . pray for those who mistreat you” (Luke 6:27).

I thank God that the majority in our diocesan community

share the attitude [that] we consider our duty. We would rather endure injustice than inflict it upon our neighbors, other people.

Thus, on the one side, I am a witness to the terrible destructive forces of the Evil Spirit, the destructive effect of the Evil Spirit, the deeds of our contemporaries, our atheist contemporaries. On the other side, I am also a witness to the magnificent work of God’s Spirit, the spirit of love, the spirit of friendship, goodness, and forgiveness. I hope; actually, it is my lifelong duty, to raise my voice as a herald, to bear witness with my heart and lips for Christ’s faithful.

EIR: You were under house arrest for a long time in Banja Luka. You have witnessed great violence, including that inflicted upon priests and nuns, violence against Catholics and Muslims, the “non-Serbians.” I don’t want to stress that particular evil, but if you would, could you describe what you went through?

Komarica: Thank you very much for your interest in my person. I am of lesser importance. In this situation, I deliberately wanted to share the good and evil conditions with my neighbors, especially with my diocesan community, my colleagues, priests, monks, nuns, and, certainly, all the other faithful, who, as you know, actually were left without all their other leadership: political, economic, intellectual, etc. Unfortunately, their other representatives were prevented from helping the people. The only ones to remain as the representatives of this nation were priests, i.e., official representatives of the Church. I also could not be blind or deaf to the misfortune or problems of all the other people in our city and the entire region. All who were in need or misfortune had the right to seek help from me.

It was especially difficult for me when I could not provide as much help as people requested or hoped. They begged me, “Bishop, save us. Lead us out of this terrible situation.” I could not lead them anywhere, not even 100 meters, much less kilometers or even I do not know how many hundreds of kilometers, because we were actually all in a great concentration camp, enclosed on all sides. In this concentration camp, we were like mice before cats. The cats could do whatever and as much as they wanted to us.

The entire time, my belief in God did not abandon me. I was always prepared to weep with those who wept, to hope with those who hoped. I urged them to pray fervently so that God would not allow them to inflict any evil whatsoever upon anyone, so that God would protect them from enslavement by the Evil Spirit of hatred and vengeance. I was filled with profound admiration for the conduct of the faithful, the conduct of my wonderful priests, monks, and nuns who did not have to remain here, who could have found much greater safety and comfort somewhere else. They remained, completely unarmed, without any weapons or protection whatsoever, despite the destructive terror threatening them with liquidation, death.

Over 500 civilians were killed in the greater Banja Luka region. The only reason these people were killed was because they were peace-loving. They were here and they wanted to remain where they belonged, in their homes, in their ancestral villages. They wanted to live with their neighbors as they had lived previously, in peace and honor.

As you know, six priests were killed in the Banja Luka region. These priests were completely innocent of any wrongdoing. They were killed, because they steadfastly urged the people to peace, forgiveness, good works, and charity. They preached that people should be human brothers, not wolves at each others' throats. Unfortunately, the disgraceful, racist, and neo-fascist destruction of non-Serbs was part of a plan, implemented by the most heinous means. Owing to the peace-loving conduct of our priests, monks, nuns, and faithful, this plan was not realized in the manner that its creators, local and *international*, had intended.

Therefore, as you are aware, a ferocious attack was launched upon the Church as an institution. Our church buildings were deliberately destroyed, one after another. Our monasteries, convents, and parish centers were also destroyed. I would ask, "People, why are you destroying our churches? What kind of a threat do our churches pose?" I was regularly told, "We know that churches are very important to you Catholics. The local church is the heart of your community, the source of your self-image as Catholics. Therefore, when we destroy a church, we attack your sense of community and you will have to leave."

I regularly asked local [Serbian] politicians, "Why are you doing this to us? What have we done to you?" They would say, "We don't have problems with you. You aren't guilty of anything. You are a peace-loving nation. However, you have to understand. You have to leave here." I could not accept this. One of the fundamental human rights is the right to the homeland, the right to one's own home. I publicly insisted that not only Catholics have this right but non-Catholics as well, Orthodox and any other people. Whoever they are, this is a universal right.

Despite the destruction of the churches, their ethnocide was unsuccessful. Then they began to kill priests. Nevertheless, the priests and the civilians persisted in remaining. Although the destruction of churches and the murder of priests was truly very painful, we did what we could, what we knew how to do. We prayed together, fervently.

Although 98% of us are in exile, I see that the majority of refugees have not lost heart. They have the greatest confidence in their priests because when everyone else abandoned us, i.e., when they did not do what they could have and should have done, the priests did not abandon their faithful.

One of my priests said the following to me, a few days before he was killed: "I am remaining in my post where the faithful have no one except me, even if I have to sacrifice my life for the glory of God and to help my neighbors. I urge my faithful not to harm anyone. I urge them toward goodness, forgiveness,

to love those who have inflicted great evil upon us."

These sacrifices shall not be in vain. One year ago, the Holy Father told me, during an audience, that he was aware of the striving by the Catholics in the Banja Luka Diocese in forgiveness and peace-making. He said we are doing something very precious for the entire Church, even during the period of this wretched war that was not caused by our conflict with our neighbors but by conflict among the egoistical interests of others. Although much evil and injustice was being inflicted upon us, during the war, we had already started the process of forgiveness and reconciliation. I learned later that other bishops also know about this in Europe and the world. They support our position. They say to us, "We could not have endured such an avalanche of destructive force and evil without becoming infected by it."

I want people to forge themselves into a huge precious chain as Christ's witnesses, to show themselves and all around them that God has the final word when the happiness of a person is in question, and not God's opponent, Satan. Satan can do nothing else, based on what I have seen, except destroy that of the greatest value, i.e., the person and what he has created by himself or in community with others through generations. Satan can only create death. The Spirit of God bears precious fruits for mankind, the fruits of love, the fruits of goodness, the fruits of philanthropy, and thus the fruits of forgiveness. Where there is forgiveness, there is reconciliation. Where there is reconciliation, there will be peace. Where there is peace, there is life. Where there is life, there is a future.

EIR: One of the most dramatic moments, but also one of the most clarifying moments, was, I believe, last December, when after you had opposed with so much sacrifice the "ethnic cleansing" by the Greater Serbs, you found certain factions inside Croatia itself that were calling for a sort of reverse "ethnic cleansing." For example, there was Ivan Milas, a member of the Croatian parliament and leader of the ruling party, asking Catholics to leave the Banja Luka area to the Serbs. At the time, you courageously protested, with an open letter against this type of thinking.

Komaric: Yes. I would reemphasize that in my direct experience, evil does not establish boundaries between one person and another, between one nation and another. Evil threatens every person, regardless of national or religious affiliation. Therefore, I would never draw a line between good and evil, good people and evil people, one nation and another nation. There are people who have succumbed to the influence of the Evil Spirit in every nation. It is also true that there are good people, worthy people, in every nation. This is absolutely true. I especially want to emphasize this. It is my profound conviction that a person will either be under the influence of good or will be under the opposite influence.

In this specific situation, when an official political representative of the Croatian nation and the Republic of Croatia rashly or thoughtlessly stated that Croats, i.e., Catholics, have

We must have the right to freedom. Freedom includes the opportunity to work, the opportunity to engage in productive economic activity, freedom to provide for our existence, and freedom to raise our children. We must have equality, regardless of national, religious, or ideological affiliations.

to leave the territory that the Serbs presently govern (or actually that the Bosnian Serbs have taken by force), I considered this statement to be a commensurate crime. Such people are attempting to usurp one of these people's fundamental rights, the right to their own home.

I personally rejoice that this is not the official policy of the Croatian Republic, as I have been informed by meritorious official representatives. I do not wish to doubt their assertion. However, I also expect them, as representatives of the Croatian nation, to respect the human rights, civil rights, and freedoms of all people, not only Croats in the territory of Croatia, but Serbs, Muslims, Bosnians, and all others.

Therefore, I was particularly pained when I heard that a member of the Croatian nation was behaving in an unworthy manner. I considered it my duty to confront this individual, my neighbor, publicly: "You do not have the right to speak in the name of the entire nation. You do not have the right to be a criminal in the name of your nation. Your nation did not elect you for the position of a politician because you were a criminal."

The nation has the right to be represented by its best spokesmen, in all aspects the best, the most capable, the most humane, the most honest. Therefore, whoever inflicts evil upon another must bear the consequences.

I was pained by the repeated lack of understanding from my neighbors in Banja Luka, Serbian politicians, when I asked them: "What have we done to deserve such injustice?" Although they had no reasons, they would say that they were carrying out a pre-existing plan prepared by others.

However, it pained me far more when I pleaded in vain for help from the political representatives of the Croatian nation. I think they should have done more but for whatever reason they did not.

This did not give me the right to become discouraged. Instead, I continued to issue numerous appeals to those who were supposed to know about us and provide effective assistance. I repeatedly informed them of our grave situation. We wanted to remain in our ancestral homeland.

EIR: There have been reports that forces from outside former Yugoslavia have intervened in some surreptitious way to provoke a war. Even in 1993, there were reports on the intervention of British special forces. Such intervention was

intended to stimulate conflict between Muslims and Catholics. Special gangs were created to provoke a war among the victims in Central Bosnia. What is your impression?

Komarica: I cannot answer you in an adequate way, now. I would like to have some time to think about it. But I can say this: I remember very well when I was told, actually in 1993, before the conflict between the Croats and Muslims in Central Bosnia, that the situation would not develop properly unless a quarrel would be set up between Croats and Muslims. This was said to me on several occasions. I remember very well when we heard about the first conflicts. And we said, "Here, that hellish plan is being realized." *Divide et impera* [divide and conquer]. I know that I also spoke with representatives of the Croatian government and said, "How could you let these secret services draw you into this conflict with Muslims? If I knew about it as a lay person, you had to have known about it."

This tactic was not merely of local character but international. Therefore, I confirm that I am familiar with what was asked in the question. It reached my ears that there were intentions, i.e., that it was necessary to set up a quarrel between Croats and Muslims in Bosnia. The situation became complicated and caused a grave tragedy throughout Bosnia. Obviously, for me, there is no doubt that our war is not merely of a local character but of international dimensions behind the scenes. The activity of various interests among the great powers was highly recognizable, especially European.

This was recently confirmed to me in a conversation with representatives of the great powers when I asked them: "Why do you treat us this way? In the name of God, we are people." A very influential [representative of a] European country, answered: "For me you are, but to my government, you are not people. However, I want you to know I do not share the opinion of my government." I do not believe this because he said it, but because I see abundant corroborating evidence.

EIR: The possibility of having a Bosnia in which people can work together, requires economic reconstruction of the country. According to several observers—and it has been particularly stressed by the founder of *EIR*, Lyndon LaRouche—the genocide by Greater Serbia is being replaced by genocide through financial means, in the sense that Bosnia is not given the financial or economic means for recon-

struction.

Recently, the Schiller Institute and others have promoted a Committee to Save the Children of Bosnia. The point is that the children of Bosnia are the most vulnerable part of the society, and are in such a terrible situation, because international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund are not allowing reconstruction that would provide a genuine basis for pacification among the ethnic groups. If I may, this can also be considered in the light of the social doctrine of the Church, such as the beautiful encyclical by Pope Paul VI *Populorum Progressio*.

Komarica: I thank you for such constructive ideas on the future of my homeland of Bosnia and Croatia following this terrible tragedy. Actually, I am not sufficiently informed concerning the intentions of the great world powers. We have the impression that Bosnia served and continues to serve as a drilling ground, not only for various military exercises and options, but also for others you mention, of a social character, economic character. This refers to the persecution and destruction of the individual person, individual nations, individual regions of Europe.

I do not know what is behind the scenes. What does the Evil Spirit have in store? What does he want to perpetrate against the people in this part of our continent? I would give you an illustration. A reporter asked a woman what she needed the most. She replied, "We need bread and a helping hand, but it's the same to me whether I have to be killed hungry or full. If I do not have the right to live, then I will not eat. Give food to someone you are going to allow to live. Someone you won't kill."

In other words, we need economic assistance. However, we need guaranteed international supervision, if the international community has intentions to guarantee our human rights, the basic human rights and freedoms. Nonetheless, based on the conduct of international political organizations so far, I am inclined to doubt that there are such intentions.

We must have the right to life, the right to own property, and the right to freedom. Freedom includes general freedom, especially freedom of conscience, religious freedom, the opportunity to work, the opportunity to engage in productive economic activity, freedom to provide for our existence and freedom to raise our children. We must have equality, regardless of national, religious, or ideological affiliations.

However, as a member of the Church and a 20th-century European, since I consider myself an inhabitant of the European continent, I am absolutely convinced that in no case whatsoever should the economic sanctions imposed upon this tormented country be permitted to reoccur. I do not want to hear the excuse that they will punish the country because it does not have human rights.

These poor people have already been trampled once. All our fundamental human rights and freedoms have already been taken from us. People are unhappy when they must seek

charity from others if they can work and earn money for themselves.

Unfortunately, I perceive a perfidious game being played with us by world egoists who, in truth, do not even consider us people worthy of protection. Christians and other worthy people, non-Christians who also have devoted themselves to mankind and for the good of mankind, must not allow world or local egoists to perpetrate new barbarianism; new, terrible, anti-humane endeavors like those of the past several years. The present generation of European powers and world powers has failed the examination of humanity.

This is my personal opinion, based on everything I have seen, heard, and experienced, not only in my native Banja Luka, in my Bosnia. My life's orientation, a gift from God, is to intercede for my fellow man. As the Gospels teach me, this is how I manifest my love of God.

EIR: In the region of Hercegovina, a terrible situation of confrontation between Catholics and Muslims is developing. A situation that reminds one of the artificially provoked clashes in Central Bosnia in 1993.

Komarica: I am afraid there is a collision of international interests in Mostar, not only European but Asiatic. It has been confirmed to me from various sides that the game also includes manipulations of the local people, that peaceful coexistence there is inconsistent with the goals of those behind the scenes. As long as there is no serious desire to treat the wounds but to keep them open, they will fester until the correct therapy is applied.

EIR: What is the situation in Banja Luka now?

Komarica: Three days ago, I wrote a letter to the president of the government of the Srpska Republic. I visited him personally and presented the letter to him, calling attention to four problems:

1. The authorities will not release the parish priest of Prijedor, Tomislav Matanovic, and his parents, from prison. The Serbian authorities acknowledge these people's complete innocence, but have kept them imprisoned since Aug. 24, 1995. There is no court case against the Reverend Matanovic, nor has any suspicion been aroused, but he is held as a hostage. This is incomprehensible and unacceptable. We are afraid that his health has suffered. We are also afraid that they could kill him. Too many of our priests have already been killed.

These people, the Serbian authorities, continue to treat us however they want. Actually, all of us here are their hostages. At any moment, they can kidnap us, arrest us. Before, they killed some of us and let others go. We have the right to ask them why they behave this way toward us.

2. A few of our parish residences, apartments, and monasteries are still standing, but have been confiscated. Some are being occupied by soldiers or other people, police. We cannot

hold mass or worship in many places where a few Catholics remain. We seek the reinstatement of freedom of religion and freedom of movement for priests throughout the region.

3. I also requested that the police should return the trucks confiscated from us. We used them for delivering humanitarian aid, Caritas assistance, to our remaining parishioners. Throughout the entire war, no other supplies reached these people, except what came through the Church. These people have no work or any assistance, only Caritas. Caritas also provides for a large number of Muslim and Serbian refugees. Why do they still keep our trucks? The trucks were mobilized, but the war has stopped and they should be returned to us.

4. I also asked him when people will be able to begin returning to their ancestral homes. Our people steadfastly wanted to remain in their homes but a representative of the Srpska Republic signed a joint contract with the International Red Cross stating that all the Croats, i.e., Catholics, from the Banja Luka territory had to be expedited, i.e., removed from that region in the month of August 1995, during the last wave of "ethnic cleansing." I am very sorry to state that the international community participated in this crime, instead of defending us. Unfortunately, the International Red Cross acquiesced to the Serbs' use of force and lawlessness.

There are many who want to return, the largest number of whom were forcibly expelled. Many of our houses there are vacant because they were heavily damaged.

If "ethnic cleansing" is internationally sanctioned, it will be a catastrophe for me; not only for me, but, in my eyes, a catastrophe for European civilization at the end of the 20th century. Then you will quickly have new Bosnias in many other parts of Europe. Other egoists will begin very similar, if not the same, crimes directed against mankind and, I say, against individual ethnic or religious communities.

This profoundly inhumane activity is so bizarrely designated by the words "ethnic cleansing." Such a term is unacceptable. No "cleansing" is involved. However, it occurs with the participation of the so-called humane and civilized world. We cannot and will not be reconciled to this as a definitive solution.

The Dayton Treaty is a terrible defeat for us. The demonstrably peace-loving non-Serbian population has been expelled from its territory, which was then offered to Serbs migrating from other territories, and the Dayton Treaty has somehow sanctioned this. However, it also stipulates that all who want to return to their lands can do so.

And on this issue I have to say that in conversations with American representatives and President Clinton in Tuzla; and with Mr. Christopher, Mr. Holbrooke, and Mr. Gallucci in Sarajevo, I had the impression they are serious people who will carry out their plans. The American representatives told me, "Bishop Komarica, your conduct and your support of a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-confessional Banja Luka territory has obligated us to defend you, to support you. This is the American goal and the commitment here."

Colombia

To fight drugs, beat narco-terrorism

by Valerie Rush

On March 20, the editorial of the Colombian Army newsletter *En Guardia*, written by Army Commander Gen. Harold Bedoya Pizarro, was dedicated to identifying the "sinister marriage" between guerrilla terrorists and drug traffickers as a serious national, and international, security threat. General Bedoya pointed to the hard evidence his forces have assembled on this *narco-terrorist* alliance, and appealed to both the relevant Colombian authorities, and to the international community, to defeat the scourge (see *Documentation*). He asserted that the mission of the Armed Forces of Colombia includes defeating the narco-terrorist enemy.

The Roman Catholic Church in Colombia presented a similar viewpoint in the lead editorial of its March 23 newspaper *El Catolicismo*, which described the narco-terrorists as "war criminals" who should be tried for crimes against humanity. The editorial protested the many obstacles that have been thrown in the way of "our worthy Armed Forces," in their battle against narco-terrorism, and asked whether Colombia, in its weakened state, can survive their onslaught.

The unholy alliance between guerrilla insurgents and the drug cartels, as identified by General Bedoya, may seem rather obvious to readers of *EIR*, which has been documenting the rise of narco-terrorism in Colombia for nearly two decades. And yet, the issue of whether or not to recognize that narco-terrorism even *exists*, lies at the center of a policy dispute both in Colombia and in Washington, which could well determine whether the war on drugs will be won or lost.

Leftover policy of the Bush administration

Exemplary of this problem is U.S. Ambassador to Colombia Myles Frechette, who addressed a seminar at Colombia's Superior War School in Bogotá in February. In response to a question on whether the United States was prepared to declare war against that country's narco-terrorists, as it has done against the drug cartels, Frechette reportedly answered that the United States "has no evidence that the guerrillas are making and exporting cocaine to the U.S."

This is not simply the personal viewpoint of one individual, but represents a strategic approach left over from the Bush era, and which is still ingrained within various departments in Washington, including State and Defense. For example, in a