

Situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina with Emphasis on Catholic Church

From Church History in Bosnia and Herzegovina

The First Records

According to the now known documents, Bosnian Diocese was mentioned for the first time in Split Metropoly between 1060 and 1075. It later belonged to the Bar, and then in 12th century to Dubrovnik Metropoly. Following the appearance of the Bosnian Church and Christians, the first missionaries, Dominicans, come to Bosnia to preach against heresy. They belonged to the Hungarian province which had its monasteries in Slavonia, and later on in Bosnia.

Arrival of the Franciscans in Bosnia

In 1291, Pope Nicholas IV issued an order to the Provincial of the Province Sclavoniae (Croatia), to send to Bosnia two Franciscans, skilled in language of the local population to continuously work in rooting out heresy. This year is considered as the founding year of the Bosnian Franciscans.

Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian Rule

Plagued by political and religious struggles, Bosnia fell in 1463 under Ottoman rule. In 1482, Herzegovina (Hum) followed. The Ottoman occupation in Bosnia and Herzegovina caused tremendous changes, not only political but also religious, social and ethnic. The number of Catholics was extremely reduced. The Ottomans occupation of Bosnia saw destruction of 464 Catholic churches and 48 Franciscan monasteries.

In 1878, by the decision of the Berlin Congress, Austro-Hungarian Empire occupied Bosnia and run the country until the end of the First World War.

Restoration of Regular Church Hierarchy

Pope Leo XIII in its formal letter (bull) *Ex hac augusta* of 5 July 1881, announced the renewal of regular church hierarchy in Bosnia and Herzegovina. His decision was implemented as of the next year (1882) by arrival of the first Archbishop of Vrhbosna to Sarajevo, Dr. Josip Stadler.

In four decades of Austro-Hungarian rule (1878 - 1918), the Catholic Church experienced a real prosperity in many areas. The number of believers increased and according to the first official census in 1879, there were 209 391 or 18.08% Catholics living in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Also, a number of new parishes were formed as Catholics from other parts of Europe came to this country.

The rule of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, and Communist Yugoslavia

After the First World War, Bosnia became part of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians, then the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Although the Serbian rule was not inclined

towards the Catholic Church, there was still recorded progress of Catholicism in the region in that period.

During World War II, the Catholic Church in Bosnia and Herzegovina was largely affected. Many believers and priests were killed; churches and parishes were destroyed, as well as cultural sights. Sufferings continued even after the war. Immediately after the 1945 many Catholics were killed also. Due to the war and subsequent prosecution, until 1952, 160 priests and several dozen monks were killed. Numerous priests, nuns and monks were sentenced to prison for many years. Some nunnery communities were completely banished. For a while, not one bishop was free in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Regime against the Church seized almost all of church's property and completely banned all church charities, cultural and educational institutions, with an exception to the Franciscan Seminary in Visoko and the Franciscan Seminary in Sarajevo. The Catholic newspapers were almost completely destroyed and over many decades were not allowed to exist.

Democratic Changes of the 1990s

After the democratic changes, the Catholic Church freely operated, but the following war (1991 - 1995) again left it devastated. Today the effects are still felt: the confiscated church property during the communist period has not still been returned, and the number of believers in Bosnia and Herzegovina has been halved, while they still continue to leave the country.

But, nevertheless, the God endowed this Church with a number of religious vocations which continue to bloom even today.

Situation after the War until Today

According to the Dayton Peace Agreement of 1995 that ended the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the country is organized in two entities, Republika Srpska and Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (which has 10 cantons), and Brčko District.

According to the Church data, in 1991 the number of Catholics in Bosnia and Herzegovina was 812 256, the vast majority of them were Croats. According to the blessing of houses and apartments of 31 December 2014, the number of Catholics in Bosnia and Herzegovina is 420 294, which means that compared to 1991 in Bosnia and Herzegovina the number of Catholic was reduced by 48.25%.

In what is now the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, before the war in 1991, there were 631 535 Catholics. According to data from 31 December 2014 that number has dropped to 403 988, meaning that in comparison with 1991 number of Catholics is reduced by 36.03%.

In Brčko District, before the war in 1991, there were 27 865 Catholics. According to data from 31 December 2014, that number was reduced to only 6 951 Catholics. In comparison with 1991 there is 75.05% less Catholics in Brčko District.

On the territory of the Republika Srpska in 1991 there was 152 856 Catholics (Croats), and according to data from 31 December 2014, that number dropped to 9 355, which means that in comparison with 1991 in the Republika Srpska Catholic population was reduced by 87%.

In 2014, according to church statistics, in Bosnia and Herzegovina 4 276 people were baptized and 6 188 died.

This situation in terms of the reduction of number of Catholics in Bosnia and Herzegovina can be attributed to the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina from 1991 to 1995, and subsequent emigration after the war. It should be noted that during the last war in Bosnia and Herzegovina nearly 1,000 Catholic buildings (churches, monasteries, parish houses and other church buildings) were destroyed.

Generally, it can be said that the country is still not politically and constitutionally regulated. Although the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina ended 20 years ago, General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina from Dayton (1995) is still in force. Unofficial figures from the last 2013 census show that the population of Bosnia and Herzegovina is 3.8 million out of which 48% are Bosniaks, 37.1% Serbs, 14.3%, Croats and 0.6% other.

In 1991, according to the information of the Catholic Church in Bosnia and Herzegovina 835 170 Catholics lived in the country, while at the end of 2014 church statistics shows that there are 420 294 Catholics in 280 parishes. Shorter statistical overview of the believers in the parishes of the Archdiocese of Vrhbosna, and Banja Luka and Mostar-Duvno and Trebinje-Mrkan shows that 77 parishes have less than 100 believers, 27 parishes 100 to 200 believers, 47 parishes from 200 to 500, 36 parishes between 500 and 1 000 believers, 51 parishes between 1 000 and 2 000, 60 parishes between 2 000 and 10 000 believers, and only four parishes are with more than 10 000 believers. The whole northern part of Bosnia and Herzegovina was severely damaged, and only a small portion partially recovered. In a series of black figures Derвента Deanery stands out. This was the area with nearly 50 000 Catholics before the war, while today there is only 985 Catholics.

The Catholic Church has never accepted the current situation as such, and this is best seen in numerous appeals by bishops individually or jointly when they urged all and in particular the international community and their senior representatives.

The prospect of Catholics in Bosnia and Herzegovina can be described in the spirit of the evangelical words (Luke 12:31): If the Church in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and if the Croatian people in Bosnia and Herzegovina are to seek firstly the kingdom of God, everything else will be given to them and they will have a future. Founding word for the rule of the kingdom of heaven is love. Where love dwells, there is the kingdom of heaven, and everything else is added, because love multiplies the good in each and every way. This longing for the heavenly kept our nation at the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina for more than 14 centuries, and during even more difficult days than today.

Catholic Education

Pre-school education:

In 2014, there were 13 Catholic pre-school insitutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Primary and secondary education:

There are 7 Catholic School Centers with 14 schools in the academic year 2014/2015 attended by 4766 students and employing 546 teachers and support staff. They include:

- Catholic School Center St Joseph in Sarajevo (Primary School, Gymnasium and Secondary Medical School),
- Catholic School Center Petar Barbarić in Travnik (Primary School, Seminary and Gymnasium),
- Catholic School Center St Francis in Tuzla (Primary School and Gymnasium),
- Catholic School Center St Paul in Zenica (Primary School and Gymnasium),
- Catholic School Center Don Bosco in Žepče (Gymnasium and Secondary technical and vocational school),
- Catholic School Center Ivan Merz in Banja Luka (Gymnasium),
- Catholic School Center Ivan Pavao II in Bihać (Primary School and Gymnasium).

These schools bear the title Catholic as they have been founded and run by the Catholic Church. However, their program fulfills all requirements set for public schools and are open to students from all nations and religions. In the academic year 2012/2013 student body of the Catholic School Centers consisted of 69.5% Croats-Catholics, 10.7% Bosniaks-Muslim, 5.7% Serb-Orthodox, and 14.1% of others (mostly children of foreign citizens working in Bosnia and Herzegovina).

Catholic Higher Education Institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina:

- In Sarajevo – Catholic Faculty of Theology and Franciscan Theology
- In Mostar – Theological Institute educating catechists (branch of the Sarajevo Catholic Faculty of Theology)

There are institutions for education of future priests in Bosnia and Herzegovina:

- Archdiocese's Seminary Petar Barbarić in Travniku
- Franciscan Seminary in Visoko
- Franciscan Novitiate in Gorica/Livno
- Archdiocese of Vrhbosna Seminary in Sarajevo
- Franciscan Faculty of Theology in Sarajevo
- International Seminary Redemptoris Mater in Vogošća near Sarajevo

Interreligious dialogue – building coexistence

Bosnia and Herzegovina is multicultural and multi-religious community. Four large religions are interwoven: Catholic, Islamic, Orthodox and Jewish. Each of these religions to some extent has received certain elements of this culture making them somewhat specific.

However, the war from 1992 – 1995 affected and destroyed a lot of this multi-religious features of the country. The highest religious authorities have now been trying to rebuild broken ties and establish interreligious dialogue. This dialogue should be also built among ordinary people, believers to re-establish mutual trust, tolerance and coexistence.

This is mostly done through Interreligious council in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The work of Interreligious Council is founded through 5 working groups: legal and expert group, media group, group for education, group for women, and youth group. With its experts, the Council has prepared: the Draft Law on Freedom of Religion and Legal Position of Churches and Religious Communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Glossary of Religion, Book on Customs of Muslims, Orthodox, Catholics and Jews in Bosnia and Herzegovina, magazine Religious Views. The Council has organized numerous seminars for children, youth, women, priests, religious teachers, etc. Based on monitoring, the Council has issued a Report on Religious Freedoms in Bosnia and Herzegovina and implemented numerous other projects that contributed to building tolerance and civic society in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Interreligious Council in Bosnia and Herzegovina works to fulfill following goals:

1. Reducing prejudice and increasing awareness on importance of interreligious dialogue and cooperation through improvement of relation among churches and religious communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina.
2. Improvement of relations between churches and religious communities with the state through joint efforts.
3. Networking of the Interreligious Council in Bosnia and Herzegovina with other regional and international initiatives.