

## Croatian bishops' 1991 statement becoming prophecy

By Agostino Bono  
Catholic News Service

ROME — As Serbs consolidate their military gains in the former Yugoslavia, a warning issued more than three years ago by Croatian Catholic bishops is on the verge of becoming a prophecy.

The warning was that, as the old Yugoslavia started shattering into independent countries in 1991, Serbs wanted to create a "Greater Serbia" by biting off chunks of neighboring Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

As 1994 drew to a close, Serbian militias controlled 30 percent of Croatia and 70 percent of Bosnia-Herzegovina, with little indication that they could be pressured to give up significant portions of either. The prospects point more toward a major redrawing of borders in the ex-Yugoslavia, with Serbian battlefield victories incorporated into new maps.

The military conquests began after Croatia declared independence in June 1991. Serbs living in Croatia opposed autonomy and resisted, aided by the Serb-dominated Yugoslav army.

The fighting resulted in a Serbian land grab which was intended to establish a "Greater Serbia," said Cardinal Franjo Kuharic of Zagreb in December 1991.

"Serbia wants an enlarged territory and will not accept cooperation with Croats" and other ethnic groups, he said at the time. Other Croatian bishops voiced similar views.

When Bosnia-Herzegovina declared independence in mid-1992, virtually the same scenario occurred. The Yugoslav army withdrew but left behind its heavy weapons and many of its Serb members,



AP/Wide World Photos

An unidentified refugee child from Bihac Dec. 7 carries a loaf of bread for her family through the destroyed village of Turanji, located 25 miles south of Zagreb. An estimated 4,000 refugees — mainly women and children from the Bihac area — are living in a U.N.-controlled no man's land between Croatia and Serb-occupied Croatia.

who became the core of the Bosnian Serb militia.

The Croatian bishops interpreted the grab for a "Greater Serbia" as an effort by Serbia, which dominated Yugoslavian life under the former communist regime, to maintain its power in the region, which was reconstituting with new borders and ministates.

Serbian leaders have a different view. They have insisted that the real problem is safeguarding the rights of mi-

nority Serbs in these newly independent countries. The leaders, headed by Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic, have said that Serbs naturally rebelled when faced with the prospect of living under governments dominated by their historical Croatian and Muslim enemies.

For Serbs, Muslims are reminders of centuries of domination by the Turkish Ottoman Empire, which spread Islam in the region, while Croats stir up memories of World War II slaughters of Serbs by pro-Nazi militias.

Muslims and Croats also have histories laced with horror stories of Serbian atrocities, reinforced by the current fighting. International human rights monitors have said that all three groups are responsible for war crimes. But, according to the international reports, the Serb actions have been more widespread and involve clearing occupied areas of non-Serbs through killings, internments

in concentration camps and forced exile. These Serb actions have made "ethnic cleansing" the latest household word for war atrocities.

The bitterness caused by the fighting has spilled over into religious antagonisms, since Serbs are mostly Orthodox and Croats are mostly Catholic.

In April 1993, the Croatian bishops spelled out what "ethnic cleansing" meant in Serb-occupied Croatia. They complained of "the destruction and annihilation" of Croatian and Catholic life.

Catholics "are continuously under threats that they will be killed" or forced to flee, "the number of injured or killed is increasing," Catholic bishops cannot visit most of the area and 200,000 displaced people cannot return to their homes, they said in a letter to U.N. military officials.

The letter was also a strong criticism of the ineffectiveness of U.N. troops in preventing Serbs from carrying out their policies. The letter was sent to U.N. officials because the zone referred to by the bishops was under U.N. military protection.

Twenty months later, Cardinal Kuharic was complaining about same U.N. ineffectiveness in protecting zones in Bosnia.

"The territories officially under international protection, such as Sarajevo and Bihac, are deluged by grenades and sniper fire," he said in a statement Dec. 6 with Cardinal Vinko Puljic of Sarajevo.

"The besieged cities are concentration camps where hundreds of thousands of people are suffering from hunger, cold and mortal danger," they said.

"Ethnic cleansing is unabated," they added. "The international forces did not do what was expected of them."

The cardinals re-emphasized the importance of maintaining the internationally recognized Croatian and Bosnian borders.

But, as Serbs continued winning on the ground, the bishops' call for maintaining territorial integrity sounded more like a plea than a prophecy.

## Former Knights' head dead at 87

NEW HAVEN, Conn. (CNS) — John W. McDevitt, past supreme knight of the Knights of Columbus, was praised as "the very embodiment of a committed Catholic layman" after his death Dec. 6.

The praise came from Virgil C. Dechant, his successor as head of the Catholic fraternal society. McDevitt was supreme knight from 1964 to 1977.

"Under his leadership, the order weathered a sometimes confused and tumultuous period in ecclesiastical and secular history, and emerged from it even stronger, more united and more dedicated to the service of the church and society than it was before," he said.

McDevitt, a New Haven resident, was born Dec. 27, 1906, in Malden, Mass. He was superintendent of schools in Waltham, Mass., from 1942 until his election as deputy supreme knight of the Knights of Columbus in 1960.

He was a graduate of Boston College, where he earned bachelor's and master's degrees. Besides serving as school superintendent in Waltham, he also served as chairman and member of several school boards in Massachusetts and was a former chairman of the Massachusetts Board of Education.

In addition to numerous honorary doctorates and civic honors, McDevitt was named a Knight of the Grand Cross of the Order of St. Gregory the Great by Pope Paul VI in 1968. The next year, Pope Paul appointed him to Order of Pius IX, the highest papal honor that can be conferred on a Catholic layman who is not a head of state.

A funeral Mass was celebrated Dec. 12 at St. Mary's Church in New Haven. Another Mass was celebrated Dec. 14 at St. Mary's Church in Waltham. Burial was at Holy Cross Cemetery in Waltham.

## Death sentence for clinic killer called part of 'horrifying' cycle

WASHINGTON (CNS) — The U.S. bishops' pro-life spokeswoman said the death sentence given to Paul Hill Dec. 6 for murdering a Florida abortionist is wrong because "you should not kill people to show that killing people is wrong."

"But a judge has decided that the State of Florida should kill Paul Hill because Hill killed Dr. Britton because Britton killed unborn children. The cycle of violence is horrifying," said Helen Alvare.

Alvare, director of planning and information for the Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, made the comments in a statement issued the same day as Hill's sentence.

Circuit Court Judge Frank Bell ruled that Hill, a former Presbyterian minister, should die in Florida's electric chair for killing Dr. John Britton and clinic escort John Barry outside the Ladies Center abortion clinic in Pensacola July 29.

The previous week Hill received two life sentences for his convictions under federal laws protecting clinic entrances. The state death penalty takes precedence.

Alvare's statement noted that although Catholic teaching allows gov-

ernments in some cases to apply capital punishment, the purpose of punishing Hill could have been achieved by a life sentence. She also said the U.S. bishops have a longstanding position opposed to the use of the death penalty.

"In a society saturated with and sick from violence, capital punishment is a tragically mistaken sentence," she said.

A prominent supporter of legal abortion also opposed the death sentence for Hill, though for different reasons.

Karl Meckler, president of the National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action Fund, said supporting Hill's death sentence would "undermine the moral authority of the Catholic Church."

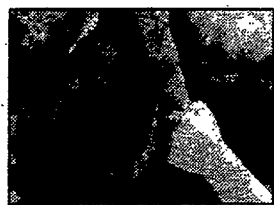
That support also came from Rep. James Rogan, R-Ill., and Sen. Jesse Helms, R-N.C., who said they would vote against the death sentence because the judge overruled the state's plea that the killings were justifiable homicide.

Florida law provides for automatic state Supreme Court review of capital sentences. It typically takes about 10 years to exhaust all possible death penalty appeals in Florida.

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