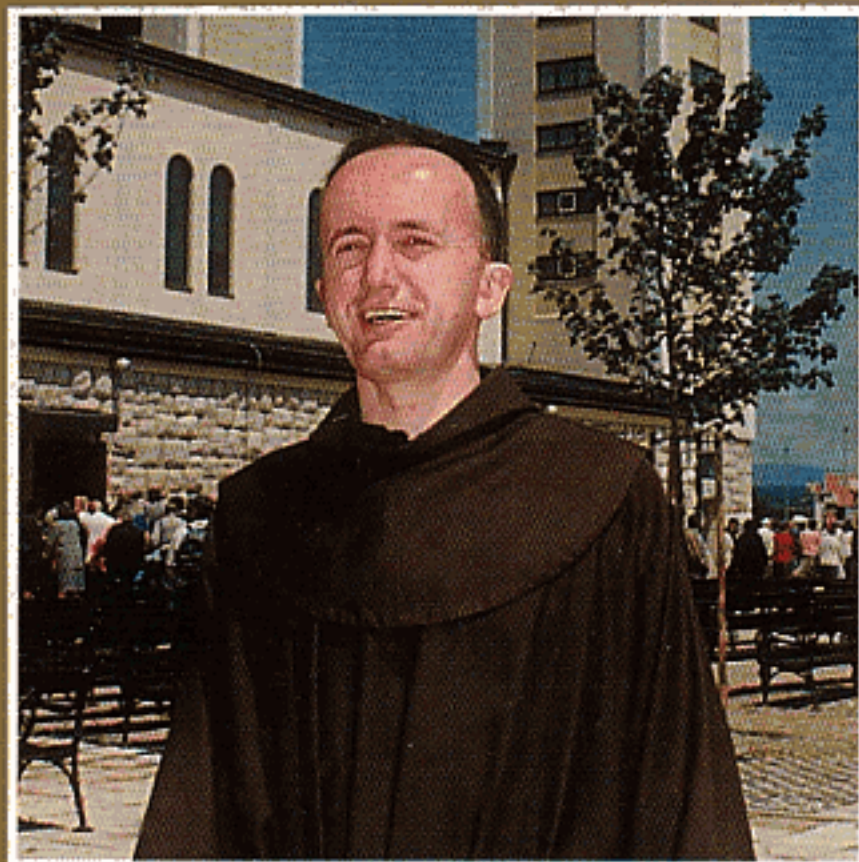


Fr. MILJENKO STOJIĆ



THOSE TIMES

WAR RECORDS OF A MEĐUGORJE PRIEST



Fr. Miljenko Stojić was born on 1 June 1960, in Dragićina near Međugorje. He finished primary school in Čerin, and graduated at the Franciscan Classical Grammar School in Visoko in 1979. After graduating he joined the novitiate of the Herzegovinian Franciscan Province. He studied theology at several Universities: Zagreb, Sarajevo, Jerusalem. He was ordained a priest in Mostar in 1987. He was awarded with a licentiate of Theology in the field of Christian and Franciscan spirituality in 1991, at the Papal "Antonianum" University in Rome. He is currently living and working in the parish of Međugorje.

Apart from writing poetry in this stormy period of recent years, he has written essays. He collects materials around his homeland as the Military Curate.

Fr. Miljenko Stojić has appeared in various newspapers and magazines with his scientific and literary works. He is a member of the Association of Croatian Writers and has featured in various anthologies.

Fr. MILJENKO STOJIĆ • THOSE TIMES

War records of a Međugorje priest

Translated by
EVELINE MISCHEL, M.A.

Editor
SILVANA PETER

CIP-Metalingrafija u publikaciji
Nacionalnog evidencijskog centra, Zagreb

UDK 541 : 303.018 (197.8 Međugorje)

STOJIC, Miljenko Miro

Those times : war records of a

Međugorje priest / Miljenko Stojic

(prevodilac Evelina Mischel) - Zagreb

"K. Križevci", 1995. - 128 str. - 20 cm.

(Biblioteka 777. knj. 14)

Prijedlog dr. T. Križevci

ISBN 953-6584-67-9

9789536584679

ISBN 953-6584-67-9

Series
TRN
Book 14

Translated by
EVELINA MIŠČIN, M.A.

Editor
SNJEŽANA PEZER

CIP-Katalogizacija u publikaciji
Nacionalna i sveučilišna knjižnica, Zagreb

UDK 241 : 355.018 (197.6 Međugorje)

STOJIĆ, Miljenko Mića

Those times : war records of a
Međugorje priest / Miljenko Stojić ;
[prevodilac Evelina Miščin]. - Zagreb :
"K. Krešimir", 1998. - 128 str. ; 20 cm.
(Biblioteka Trn ; knj. 14)

Prijevod djela: Ta vremena.

ISBN 953-6264-57-9

971218021

ISBN 953-6264-57-9

Fr. Miljenko Stojić

THOSE TIMES

WAR RECORDS OF A MEĐUGORJE PRIEST

K. KREŠIMIR
Zagreb, 1998.

A part of these essays were first published in Croatian in the book "Ta vremena", edited by "K. Krešimir", Zagreb, 1995

THOSE TIMES

WAR RECORDS OF A MEDUGORJE PRIEST

K. KREŠIMIR

Zagreb, 1995

***Dedicated to all those who
fought honorably for their
homeland in these hard
times***

PREFACE

Generally speaking, it is a great responsibility to describe the time you live in. All the events are still fresh and it is difficult to distance yourself from them. However, there are those times, which cannot tolerate simple, cold descriptions, but require engaged participation. We bore witness to this in these horrid moments of war. The truth is that it would be much easier to escape it all. However, then man becomes an unrooted individual, who forgets how sweet it is to be brave even when you would rather just be a coward.

When you decide to describe your time, the next step is to choose the language to achieve this. I found the simplest language the most suitable for these complicated events. I tried to avoid all the unnecessary theorizing and to reach the very essence of the subject wherever possible. Regardless of the pain, it is important to find the truth. And the truth is hidden in simplicity.

These written reports are a complete jumble: war, love, soldiers, Our Lady, God, drugs, criminals. My intention was to conjure up the present and to describe the effort of dealing with it all. In my opinion, you should not be alone during those moments. Our greatest friend and the biggest support that we can find is our God, who created us to His own image. But, turning to him should not be an escape, but rather a decision for even greater participation. The easiest way to approach your God is through yourself and through others. When I do not allow myself to despair I come close to God within the depth of my own self. When I do not allow myself to hate others, I come closer to God in his depths. The result of it all is the fulfillment of life even if we were heartlessly oppressed by the events.

IN GOD'S LIGHT

THE NEW ORDER

I watch the cross on the wall in my room. Jesus, who was God and man, was crucified because of his words and of his thoughts. They could not tolerate him, "the carpenter's son," to disturb the course of their lives. He had to suffer.

His followers suffered in the same way. They were persecuted like wild animals. They wanted to destroy them.

Due to their perseverance and ineradicability in the 4th Century after Jesus' death, the Christians were free to profess their religion. They entered society in a grand manner. Christian values had the advantage over all other values. Discussions began about who was more correct: theology or philosophy. Theology won. It seemed that a time of happiness and content could finally come. But, it did not. Everything was done and spoken in the name of religion.

"The New Age" meant a turning point. Philosophy awoke and declared war on theology. Sparks flew all around. Theology had to withdraw. Philosophy smiled triumphantly and started creating A New World. It would take too long to enumerate all the orientations taken in that creation. Let us just say that it resulted in creating the consumer society in which we live in today.

Let us dwell for a moment upon that notion of a "consumer society." It is constantly present in our consciousness in one form or another. We have been informed in various ways that we should create, create and only create. The purpose of that creation is not to help an individual to live easier in this world, but to accumulate material riches for himself. When he has that, he is appreciated, worthy and respected. As a result happiness is material and not spiritual wealth. To live your life without considerable wealth is a life spent in vain.

Such a way of thinking resulted in man's alienation from himself. He was afraid of his future. A world in which it was important what you had and not what you were worthy of, was not his world. Such a world was cold. It could not warm the individual nor help him in his anxieties. Something new had to be initiated.

People of various professions started speaking of "the New Order." There should not be any arms, man must not be afraid anymore; we must live in freedom and brotherhood. This sounded fine, but people were again divided into two sides: those who supported theology and those who supported philosophy.

Theologians said that the time that was coming had to be the time of return to religion. Holiness must "dash" into our lives. Only in this way an individual will be saved. If this did not occur, we would vanish.

Philosophers spoke of the great values of freedom, equality, brotherhood, the right of each individual for a decent life... Various secret societies were commissioned to be representatives and propagators of that new society.

Our Lady's apparition in Medjugorje foiled everyone's designs. This became a demarcation point. It did not support anybody's side. As if She was familiar with neither the dialogue of theology nor the learned dialogue of philosophy. She began to pronounce words and messages in a simple way, one that people had long forgotten. Millions have heard, and have passed through that place searching for their lost souls.

It would be wrong however, to conclude that Our Lady wants to underestimate people's efforts. It seems to me that She only wants to bring us to the real beginning, to the foundation on which something big and lasting can be built. Nothing else. She wants to point us to the wisdom of the cross. In that way she reconciles theology and philosophy.

However, it was not only God who was crucified. At the same time, man was crucified, too. Throughout history, our rooms will be decorated with that truth. Seeing the cross we come to the conclusion that we are neither

only the spirit, nor only the body. We are both. While we are walking in this world, we must be people who use what God has given o us. However, at the same time we face God who is waiting for us. These are two transversal beams of the cross. If one is missing, the cross is missing, too. We could almost say, "the New Order" is missing too.

SPIRITUAL RENEWAL

I do not know, but I assume that that day was gloomy and rainy. The year was 1943, the place Jalta. Three men met and played with the destiny of the world. They were not children unaware of their moves. They were adults, respectable, clever people. At least, that's what they say. They chose the empire of communism for my people and me. Having done that, they destroyed my childhood. Two of them comforted my people and other peoples with a similar destiny that they would help us if communism put us in jeopardy. We trusted them, not knowing that they had sold us. The third one laughed. He was right. We were let down in all our moments of difficulty.

However, Communism was overthrown. But neither thanks to those two men nor those similar to them. Suffering, blood and the tears of those who were confined overthrew it. Again, we did not receive any help. They who came to leading positions in this world (without mentioning how) did not want to help the slaves to rid themselves of their chains, to clean themselves and enjoy in their freedom. If they had done so, they could not have shown anyone "their glory and magnificence."

In spite of all that, the liberated peoples turned towards freedom. But, this was not the freedom of those who speak of the world and its movements reclining in their comfortable armchairs. This was the freedom that leads towards *the civilization of love*. In such a civilization nobody is denied to live freely and well, nobody is forced to accept our attitudes. A civilization of love is a state when we help someone not because of our own interest, but simply because he is a man like we are, created in the image of our common God. We do not try and live with him in the tension of rivalry. Our way of existence is the harmonious relationship between brothers and sisters.

This freedom for others cannot be obtained by some kind of *liberalism* (without the everyday political connotations) and other similar efforts. I am sorry that the word *liber*, which in Latin means free, has been opinionated. The question is, free from what or free for what? Liberalism is to be mostly free only from God. But, in that case, is there any freedom at all? No! Freedom does not mean to do everything that is not expressly forbidden. It is rather a contemplation of our entire human existence in light of God's thought. Liberalism is not capable of this because its comprehension of human reason has been placed in God's place.

Observing the world in this way and the relationships within it, I agree with the statement that the society we live in, must be renewed. I do not mean a renewal in which we, as the majority, should completely change our attitudes. I do not think I am immodest when I say that we were successful in previous historical events. In spite of all that, we kept our faith and belonging to the Croatian people. We were not broken even by the horrible period of Communism. Finally, after so many centuries we can, let us say, freely, within the framework of the international environment, decide our own destiny. That is why it is necessary to remove the mire from the Croatian people that was thrust upon us against our will. We have to see what has changed in our spirit as a result of outside influences. What kind of attitudes in life do we support? Furthermore, are our attitudes the result of our Christian faith or do we still feel uncomfortable for belonging to it. If renewal based on our faith is not the initiator, then our renewal will be in vain! We will be building a house in the sand!

But, I would like to expand a little. Wider society, in which we live, the society of Western Europe, also needs spiritual renewal. Once, it was a Christian society. What is it today? God was quite abandoned in that society. It started revolutions against Him, created philosophical orientations, which tried to replace God, by man. In such an environment the two greatest mistakes of contemporary mankind appeared: Communism and National Socialism. Nevertheless, attitudes, which led to all this were referred to as advanced and everything else, was

backward. Do we believe in this and are we confused for being Christians and Catholics or are we proud of being what we are?

How could all that happen? Dostoevsky in the character of Ivan Karamazov says; "If there is no God, then everything is free." Quite a satisfactory response!

A long time ago, the Pope said that Europe needed a new Announcement of Jesus' Good News. A long time ago, missionaries of God's word were walking around Europe. Today, deceitful missionaries are walking. They do not want to help other to easily pass through our common valley of tears, but rather to sell something along their way, no matter whether someone needs it or not. These groups who seized power are using it for their own personal enrichment and profit. It is always the same kind of men who decide the destiny of people, without asking these people whether they want them as their representatives or not. Europe, that is, the West, started crumbling as our common home. Shouts that Europe is uniting are all in vain. It is becoming disunited, as it has forgotten the foundations upon which something can be built. And that is love, justice, sincerity...

However, there are larger and smaller islands on which everything that can help us to return to our Christianity and ourselves is preserved. I will not mention them individually now. If we look around ourselves a little, we will recognize them. Distinct from other islands they can be linked and expanded to complete areas within themselves. I can already see them growing and blooming!

One more thing! I must be honest and say that I cannot have faith in something that is forcefully imposed upon me. Why do newspapers, radio, TV... have to be right? If they can think in the way they do, well then in the name of freedom at least, which they say they themselves appreciate, let them allow me to think the way I want to. Europe and the world are themselves not this. I am this too. It does not matter which nation we belong to. There is only one truth; there is only one God. When I get up in the morning, I will remember Mary's words from Medjugorje: "Convert", that is "Let us convert!"

TO PRAY FOR PEACE

Long before this war, I watched tanks and fatigued fighters returning from battles. It does not matter where and when. They were fighting for their homeland. I read their newspapers, I spoke to the people. Their main thought was we must have our own state. That is why their own soldiers walked the streets of their towns and villages with their finger on the trigger. Those people who were intermingled with them as a by the way, also wanted to have their own state in addition to the already existing one. They decided to fight. As a foreigner, it was difficult and tedious to decide who was more right and who less. I only wanted peace so that I could go on walking around the beautiful sites of that country. Everything contrary to that had to be eliminated.

Today it is no longer tedious to try and distinguish between who is right and who is not. The battle, as a way of solving confrontation among peoples reached the threshold of my parent's home. In that home, as well as in many other Croatian homes, we were always taught: Do not kill, but accept others with open hands and an open heart; do not steal... at the same time we were taught: respect what you have; do not let anyone or anything in life trample upon you... This however, is exactly what someone attempted to do: to trample us in order to destroy any recollection of us in this world. In honor of all parents' homes of the Croatian people, we could not let them do this. We stood in defense even this may have been tedious and disturbing to foreigners.

From the point of view of mankind we did not have to succeed as much as we already had. Everything was against us. Even "the great, freedom-loving world." It was afraid that someone would become free. It preferred to support the jailers rather than the inmates, be-

cause the jailers were old acquaintances. In face a great amount of money was invested in them. We all aware of this yet, we still went on.

They who were more conscious among us (this was the majority) turned to God from the very beginning. They knew that he did not have guns, tanks, or planes... but a sense for justice and a piece of freedom for everyone. They prayed to the point of begging, in gratitude, in happiness for being with their God. They rarely prayed for the destruction of their enemies. They just wanted peace to come to our homeland Croatia and to our homeland Bosnia-Herzegovina, as soon as possible. That peace could not just be any peace. It needed to be a just peace, it needed forever to uproot the cause behind the fighting.

I learned this prayer and intensified it watching our Croatian soldiers in muddy trenches and cold blockhouses. Even there they were aware of their humanity. They wanted to keep everything that was good and nice that they gathered in their lives. The Rosary was an integral part of their military equipment. It helped them not to be ruthless towards those on the other side of the front-line, so that they do not become the thing that had to be destroyed. They tried not to hate, but at the same time to defend their home.

Vukovar, the town that recalls an unprecedented outburst of evil, was a new source of inspiration for prayer. Survivors testified to this prayer, unity with their God created in them a courage and dignity unbeknown to them before that. People prayed in basements and trenches while shells, bullets and bombs were spreading death. After that, nothing was the same. There was a sense in sacrificing oneself and to defy evil. People, who yesterday were not distinguished in anything, were turning into people who made the enemy tremble. Today, we proudly remember their bravery, their example of love for their own.

Lighted candles in front of walls where each brick in the wall denoted someone who was killed or who disappeared, invited me to prayer. Candles burned as a sign of hope. Mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters... were searched for someone who was lost in the maelstrom of war. They believed that God could find them or at least give them peace.

Our Central Bosnia did not allow me to stay calm. I had to pray. It was in pain, it was suffering, but it did not lose its head. It knew that God was with it, as well as all our people. The hospital in the Franciscan church in Nova Bila is significant. As if God was healing the wounds of His people. All those who were in the convoy known as the "White Path" recognized it. They recognized themselves as being more courageous than ever before.

I learned about prayer even from those who often blasphemed. They searched for their loved ones and swore. It was sad to look at them. What could they have done for their loved ones? Nothing! They could not conquer the enemy, they could not approach God. They stood alone in a field, which was ravaged by a storm.

Going down this Croatian 'Way of the Cross' towards prayer, I started to recognize that prayer for peace preserved the soul and body of my people. It reminded people that they were going to war not because of their desire to kill, but to defend their own. At the same time, they were trying to establish peace and to stop the hostility. He who prays for peace cannot at the same time incur danger without reason. He understands that the homeland does not need dead, but live heroes. They will continue to build their homeland. When everything is over, they will be richer by one new, deeper understanding of life and nothing else.

The Virgin Mary had for a long time been included in the prayer for peace. I will not repeat what she said at the beginning of her apparition in the Međugorje parish. I will only mention what she said recently: "You talk of, my messages but do not live them. That is why this war has lasted so long."

I do not believe that these words of Our Lady were directed only to the Croatian people. They were also directed to foreigners who may have been a little fatigued by everything that has been going on. In one way, these words were directed to all those people who call themselves Christians or say that they want to propagate the dignity of the human person. Unfortunately, they were led by those in their countries, whom for whatever reason it

suited them that the war last as long as possible. My belief was strengthened even more by the Pope's words who, several months ago, called us to fast and prayer to stop the war in these regions as soon as possible. He said this in spite of the opposition by those who wanted to rule the destinies of the peoples in Europe and the world.

We should listen to the Pope, mothers who lost their children, soldiers who came to realize what it means to kill, politicians who were not afraid to make just decisions, voters who demand morality and honesty from their governments. This will create in us a real sense of human brotherhood.

To pray for peace means to live, not to let war kill you. Do you pray, too?

FOOTPRINTS

War is always a cruel and useless reality. We all agree to this. But, at the same time, war when it is already here, is a moment in when you can no longer retreat or hide. We reveal ourselves for what we really are.

The layer of people who distinguish themselves in a war and on whom much depends are its soldiers. They are appreciated. People are afraid of them and depend on the intention for which they went to war.

I have met many of our soldiers. I appreciate them not because they are mine, but because the majority went to fight for honorable reasons. They did not even have to be called up. They were encouraged more than enough by the thumping of boots of the unbridled foreign army. Their intention was to defend their parents' home, their religion and everything beautiful and not, to come into something at the expense of someone else's blood, pleasure or power.

I recognized many of them here in Međugorje at Mass, confession, prayer... I recalled then their muddy trenches, the whining of shells, the simple reality which distances you away thousands and thousands kilometers from peacetime life. Judging by their behavior one could think that they came from another world. Gathered in prayer they resembled any other pilgrimage.

All these soldiers without exception wore a Rosary around their neck. Together with the Rosary they passed through the hell of war. It kept them from becoming despondent during moments when everything seemed in vain. It glowed like a light in the night. As their friends died they tightly clasped their Rosary just like a ticket to the other world. Others, who were imprisoned, were often

badly beaten for having a Rosary in their pocket. Sometimes, they were beaten more because of the Rosary than because they were on the other side. The wounded ones they had survived only thanks to the Rosary.

The Rosary was worn even by those who had once "parted" with God. They felt safer and more peaceful with it. It reminded them that they were people and that they should never forget it. It also told them that something else existed beyond our human fragility. Step by step, many of them came to lose faith. They reverted to their childhood when you know that with your God you are at the same time small and large.

It is not odd then that these soldiers requested to have a day when they could come to the Međugorje parish in larger numbers and direct their prayers to God through the Queen of Peace. They chose the last Saturday in May. On that day they would gather from all the different parts of the country. They did not only represent "brothers-in-arms", but also "brothers in faith".

Pilgrims from peaceful countries were amazed at what the Queen of Peace and soldiers had in common? On the most part, they could not comprehend it, yet their parents and fellow men understood these soldiers well. You cannot go anywhere without God's blessing, not even to war. Parents have deeply instilled in their children's souls that, if they have to wage war, they have to do it gallantly and bravely. One day, when they return from the war, they will have to render their accounts to God and their people i.e. where they were and what they did.

In other words, the worst thing possible is not to be able to say that you were honorable in war. This destroys the soul and mind; the feeling for justice is turned into disgust with yourself. You do not have to die, yet you are already dead. The footprints you left behind were not liberators, but destroyers. Many people cursed you and many of them wished you had never been born.

However, I have faith for the footprints made by those who pray even during the war. They can remain people even in the absurdity of the trenches. Even the most hardened enemies who will recognize in them will ap-

OUR LADY'S LOOK

They stood looking at each other resembling a painting by the best painters. A soldier and Our Lady of Medugorje. It was a day in May. Sunny and warm. Vehicles passed by regardlessly. They were looking at each other.

The story was as penetrating as the source. Words were not necessary. The soldier spoke with his heart.

He remembered the time when he was not particularly interested in Our Lady or God. He considered himself a Christian and was angry if someone denied that. He regularly celebrated church holidays with plenty of food and drinks. On these days he would absent-mindedly attend Mass, sitting somewhere towards the back. On Sundays he would not usually appear in church. He had something more important to do. In any case, he was a man.

From the very beginning of threats of war he went to defend his home. He did not have a uniform, nor did many others. He went to war wearing tennis shoes and jeans like a real child of the rock culture. Battles, victories and defeats followed. Many faces he met then went to their final resting-place.

He was angry and confused by it all. Why did his friends have to die and be wounded? Why was it not possible to win every battle; we are entirely in the right? These are difficult questions.

He came to know sleepless nights in a landscape, which could at any moment erupt with a battle. He gazed at the stars above him, bright and carefree. He remembered that in his childhood he was told that God lived there. He could not feel this. "I need God in my everyday life, if he exists at all", was a thought that crossed his mind once while he was on guard duty.

He was not familiar with this type of thought. He thought perhaps he had gone too far and had gone mad. He wanted to forget it all, but somehow could not. He felt his strength had been injured. A new kind of world entered his soul. What could this bring him?

He realized that he was looking for something, something he had not had until then. A bright light was glowing in the distance. Strange. Who could say that he had not had that same light before? However, this was somehow different. He felt that he would not need much to conquer it. It was simply inviting and offered him warmth.

This soul searching led him to Our Lady of Međugorje. He had sometimes before, read articles about cures, and about finding God. It always seemed too distant from him. It may be the truth, but what did it mean to him personally?

Taking part in everyday events in the shrine, being there when almost nobody was, he reversed the course of his life. Many bullets just missed him, he endured many difficult moments. Was it all pure coincident? He slowly started to realize that it was not like that at all.

He used to come here on his day off to spend some time and recover his strength; not physical, but spiritual strength. He recognized God's influence in his life, or what was more important at that moment, he learned to be a man and a believer at the same time.

Recently, too a bullet just did not want to hit him. He was walking light-heartedly to the last house of our burnt village. This house is now empty with no inhabitants and was the cover against the enemy. He was not familiar with the area. Having reached the house, he learned that only five minutes before, two other men had been fired at in the same way. The bullet holes were still visible on the neighboring house. He only then noticed them. He smiled.

And Our Lady smiled watching him engaged in prayer and in his desire to lead a human, Christian and Croatian life. She appreciated people such as this. Her gentle look was the look of a mother full of love. And outside, May continued to pass by.

VISITING OUR LADY

When the word soldier is said, this usually denotes a man who can fight. You can feel the smell of battles, fear and death. Nothing is expected of him except to be successful in these perilous places.

But, our Croatian soldier has one more characteristic: he can pray, deeply and piously. I saw this at the military pilgrimage in Marija Bistrica this year. Young faces, with a dose of seriousness gained in difficult battles, a look purified by the enthusiasm of prayer and feeling that these boys had to succeed. Prayer did not destroy them. It only strengthened them during their great decisions. One of was to defend their country. They who speak about pacifism from the safety of their countries cannot understand this. Our boys would speak about that if circumstances allowed them to. A lady journalist who was a convinced atheist realized this during her visit to my country. After her first sleepless night, marked by shells, machine-guns and bullets, pacifism in its current form to her looked like a soap bubble and nothing else.

The Croatian soldier proved his pacifism in Marija Bistrica during confession. Militarists would never do that as this could destroy their well-developed conceptions. They, who wish to conduct their life tasks with a pure heart and clear consciousness, confess. During confession a man meets his soul and answers its questions, no matter how difficult they may be.

A blackened statue of Our Lady in the shrine seemed to give all the answers and surmise our history in a nutshell. Let us remind ourselves, a few centuries ago (God, how recently was it) the statue was hidden in the ground facing the approaching danger. Wild riders rumbled through searching for it, but could not find it. It was waiting for our liberation, a liberation of any kind. It black-

ened due to the moist ground, but miracles started to occur, not due to the material the statue was made of but due to the love of our Croatian people who searched for their Lady's statue. Soldiers knew that miracles happened during the War for the Homeland. That is why they thanked Our Lady for these miracles and conducted their pilgrimages. There will certainly be more of them. Our Mother will not forget us. There is one condition only; not to forget Her. She will enable us to pray and fight, to fight and pray. Only in this way we will be able to remain here in these harsh and raging regions, even if others do not always support us due to their distorted opinions and false-hearted politicians.

SEDIMENT

Many wise books have been written about love. At this particular moment I do not want to remember any of them. I simply want to forget them all. I enter quietly and respectfully in my heart and into the good heart of my people and there I listen to a silent lesson about something that is called love i.e. love for the homeland.

For hundred years my people have not had a homeland in the sense that other people have. Their homeland was their heart and a piece of land for which they could not say belonged to them. Others shouted it was theirs. Greedily and shamelessly they reached out their hands and tried to break off as much as could be broken. My people did not give in. They were hurt, but not conquered.

Today, determination rules in the heart of my people. The times are once again leaden and hard. Deadly rains are falling and the fruits of evil are growing. The sun is hiding behind the storm clouds. Despite that, my people know that their good heart will be able to resist.

Yes, my people have a good heart. I am not ashamed to say that. Why should I be? There are peoples who should be more ashamed than my people. They are constantly shouting that they are good, democratic, honest, protectors of the poor. They would like us to believe that yet they know well this is not so. They committed countless crimes, they went to other countries to steal and become rich. They even built museums where they kept their spoils and are proud of it. I would never want my people to be like them. I would like them not only to be different from them, but also to be direct in their love of themselves. It is not a sin to love yourself, not to love yourself is an exceptional sin. A man who loves himself in the right

way will be able to love others as well. That is why the time has finally come to clean all the sediment of the past from our heart. That is what still rings in our ears while thinking about love for our people: when we hear the words nationalism, fascism, chauvinism...ism. It is like a poison throbbing in our blood circulation. It wants to scare us, it wants to destroy us, to tell us that we are wrong and that our heads should be bowed in shame. Sediments of the past want to continue living. Some of our skillfully designed newspapers go in favor of this. Disguised as democrats uncovering a few thieves they conduct their anti-national policies. They shock us, we criticize them, yet we continue to buy them, instead of forgetting that they exist. They try to persuade us that everyone in the government is a thief. Only they who write about this are not, nor are they those who would like to rule, or heaven bid, they who have already been in power. What are they really talking about? If everyone in government was a thief, would we not have been destroyed by the recent events if everyone in government was a thief... but let us put this aside. They are the thieves who raise doubts in my people, who cause pusillanimity, disappointment, they who simply destroy hope. These people live in the residue of the past and want it to continue to be our magic dust. Whenever they can, they try to connect us in the homeland and abroad with those similar to them and they holler and shout. In the meantime, my good are people bleeding and persevering to defend their freedom and their dreams.

Even Our Lady believes in the dreams of my people. In Her last message She said that She was praying and pleaded Her son Jesus to realize the dream that our parents had. What do you think this dream was, is and will be? Furthermore, She sent us word so we could continue to hope. As far as I am concerned, I have decided to obey Her.

I do not know whether those who have recently decided about the future of my good people, they who, although they were believers, continued to destroy my people will obey her. I want to ask them if they have made

an honest confession? If they regard themselves as believers, have they confessed their sins before a priest to their God in church and have they promised to love their people? Have they who are not believers, made their confession before themselves? The past has to become the past for them and for us alike. The foundations to build a new existence for my people have been laid now. Anything that was bad in the past should not and must not be included in this building process.

The good heart of my people has told me many other things. I will not mention them all. Even this is too much for someone who does not understand. He himself will understand if he starts contemplating about the word love and in doing this, eliminates the poisonous sediment of the past. Our people are no larger or smaller than any other peoples on the face of the earth. Sediments of the past in certain places have smeared their image. You and I can clean them if we want to. We should also not allow any foreigner to do this to his people.

A LETTER TO AN UNKNOWN PILGRIM

Dear friend, I am writing you this letter from Međugorje, a place to come to renew your soul. When you come here, we will not perhaps meet personally. But, I am still writing you this letter. It is not easy for me to write it. It hurts me, but I still feel that I must write it. Read it before you come here so that you know where you have arrived.

Like other people, you will certainly visit our two hills: the Križevac Hill and the Hill of Mary's Apparition. I do not know which you will first visit. I would perhaps start with Križevac.

Once, the Križevac Hill had a different name. It was named Križevac after our grandparents placed a large cross on its summit in token of gratitude to God. When you decide to climb to that cross, the path will lead you through our massive Herzegovinian rocks, which seem to have become gentler after the many feet, shod or barefoot, which have walked across it before you. Thornbushes will fetter you, maybe a thorn might prick you. Having reached the cross, look around you before you start praying. You will see densely populated villages in the vicinity and further away. Let us say that these villages "peacefully" sleep. The war is raging, but shells are not falling on these villages at the moment. Their residents however, are dying at the front lines strewn across our homeland. And we call this peace (God, where have we come to?) That cannons on similar hills are roaring in my homeland. Villages and towns within their reach cannot sleep peacefully. Dedicate some of your time and pray for us. It does not matter whether you are a foreigner or a member of my own people. If you belong to my people than you have already been aware of all this. I believe

that you know what you should do. If you are a foreigner, please, do not pay too much attention to the opinion you have brought from your country. You haven't come to a "no-man's" land, you have come to a country of living people. They like everything humane just like you do, they like everything divine just like you do. I could give you all the answers why these horrible things are happening in my country, and who is at fault, but I will not. Look for the answers yourself. They are offered in the search for truth. Believe me, if you find it, I will not only be satisfied, I will be more than that. I want to ask you one more thing: take this truth to the country you are returning to. Take this truth with you even if it is against my people.

When you come down from the hill, climb the other, much smaller one. The name "the Hill of Mary's Apparition" became domesticated 12 years ago. At the time, six children from my Croatian people testified that they had seen the Blessed Virgin Mary on that hill. Many people believed them. If you are not certain how to feel about it all, I would recommend to you to just to be there, breathe that air, watch other pilgrims, the nature around you and you will understand. I would just like to tell you that Our Lady, who appeared here, sent various messages from the very beginning, not only to my people, but also to all people around the world. She has been speaking about peace, fasting, repentance, conversion, prayer. I can testify to you that many of my Croatian fellowmen have seriously accepted this. Today however, they are waging war. In order not to influence your revelation of the truth, I will tell you only this: they do not like it. My people have always had a difficult life, but they have always been open to everybody. I believe that you will immediately recognize their hospitality. It was born in the living faith in their God. He was the only one who inspired these people with peace and kindness.

Having reached the valley, go to a large church. It was built before the apparition of Our Lady. No-one knows why it was so large. You will meet people there from various parts of the world. They are all welcome here. You will perhaps see them talking with groups of women and children in front of the church. These are our refugees. They

have come from the areas where history is being written with cannons. They will pray together with you in church. They will use words that belong to a language whose name was prohibited from use until yesterday. God will understand you all, not because he understands all languages, but because he understands the truth.

Forgive me for speaking about my people so much. You expect these people to support you when you disburden your soul. I believe that they will do so. In return they will ask a little in return: when you return do not say that you do not know what it is all about and where you really were.

We are waiting for you in Međugorje with open arms and an open heart.

THE WAY

It was dark all these years despite the abundance of sunshine. The boot of a Godless Communism was standing on the neck of my people. They moaned under it, as did the Israeli people once.

Did we not pray for Moses to be sent by God and to lead us out? But he did not come.

We saw the inevitable journey to our end. Its smell was already felt. Then we learned that the heavenly Mother had appeared to my people. It was in 1981, on 24 June. They who saw Her that first time ran away. It was too deep. They dared to talk to her the next day. And The Way began, the way out for my people and all the peoples who want to join them.

The meeting resembled something you do not want to lose. Questions and answers followed. The Heavenly Mother taught us what to do. Yet, Communism raged on.

After some time Our Lady started to systematically send messages. It was every Thursday. We listened to Her and it seemed that we could not believe? Was the Heavenly mother speaking to us? Yet, it was true.

She first told us that She had chosen us. I do not know about the others, but these words hurt me. I could not bear the fact that someone had chosen me. I wanted to be the one to choose in life. But, I allowed this truth to penetrate through me, step by step. To be the chosen one! What did this mean in everyday life? It meant a lot. I felt it from the depth of my heart. Throughout it all Our Lady did not say that she particularly chose us for any specific reason. It was enough for us to want this. She chose us the way we are, without any special credit. If we listened to it all we would become the chosen people God would give us great mercy. We would rise above our everyday lives and start living in the higher phases of exis-

tence. We would realize more and more what God is and that we would come closer to him. We would become humbler, as we suddenly realized that more we know who and what God is, the less and less we know about Him. We realize our deficiencies and His great immensity. One day we would immerse into this immensity only if today, we learn to listen to its echoes.

Gathered as a community in the Međugorje parish, we will become the salt of the soil and the yeast of the world. We will be sent to Announce this news to the people just like Jesus' first disciples did. They, who have come to this parish led by our faith and our example, will approach God and leave behind the burdens they gathered roaming around this lost world. It is in vain to have called this world a human one, at least that is how those who obtained power for themselves called it. Life had become cold and dangerous for us, for God had been thrown out of our worldly events. "Freedom, brotherhood and equality" started ruling instead, coming out of the bloody revolution in which nobody knew who was killing whom nor why.

Naturally, this parish was also in danger influenced by the same deceit. Lady says that it will protect it in Her hands as the flower that She does not want to die. But, those who live here are still responsible. Lady can decide to give them something, but if they do not want to accept it, they will not get anything. Then, it will not matter that She said that She liked that parish more than the others where She was.

If man wants to answer his God in the right way, he should follow the numerous examples set by the saints. Many of them have been on the historical stage since the beginning of Christianity. Some of them have been officially made saints, but many more lived quietly in their sanctity and by their lives and examples contributed to the appearance of the former. When the Church proclaimed these saints it did not want to create small Gods of them, but wanted to encourage us in our everyday lives. Goodness spilled over to our valley of tears.

Naturally, nobody is forced to live the way God wants us too. In the same way, He does not consider

anyone who rejects Him as being backward, supporting past values and past times, but rather they who always support Him. He is then ready to open His door at his at the smallest wish. Our life is a gift and should be lived in this way. You can be happy in it, only if you want to. We do not need any pills called "ecstasy". Only they who have lost touch with themselves can look for this type of help. He attempted to be modern, when, in fact, he is lost. Modernness means to always be on the side of goodness, on the side of justice, on the side of beauty, on the side of... I would not say that supporters of techno music, disco clubs, alcohol, immorality... are on the side of modernness understood in this way. They are only on side with their lost personality.

Maybe someone will say that my intention is to condemn. I intend only to express my opinion and not to be ashamed of it. If supporters of modernness, which is not that at all, can think loudly, I can do that, too.

While I think about myself and the world around me in the light of Our Lady's messages, I remember that we have to build our world. This does not only mean to go to church, to pray to God, to be pious in one word to try and save your own soul. You should save the soul of the man next to you. We have to be engaged in improving the order of this world. With regard to music, we have to offer the music that makes us happy and gives us life. With regard to fun and association, we have to offer places where we can have fun and rest as real human beings. With regard to culture we have to create a culture that is a culture of life, and not against it. With regard to ... We must not close ourselves, but must go to the world and preach Jesus' message from the rooftops. This message does not consist of pious words, but of the greatness of living.

While I am writing this, I feel that God's messages directed through Our Lady is something that I need to hear in the silence of my heart. With God's message I am a modern man. And I care for modernness, no matter how you may comprehend this.

TO KNOW HOW TO ENDURE

This contemporary period has frequently been attacked in various ways. I do not know what to say. I was born in this period, but I prefer to attack myself and my way of thinking.

During my education I learned that there were two notions that deeply present our time: secularization and secularism. In simple words, the former denotes a man's wish to prove himself as a man, and the latter to prove himself as a man sufficient for himself alone. I can directly say, I support the former one and denounce the latter one.

Unfortunately, many people today do not understand either of these notions or, rather, they do not want to understand them. For them the world is what they say. They attack and mock everything else. They have different attitudes in life and have different positions in society.

It seems to me that they have forgotten to bow to the truth, which is greater than they are. They bow only to themselves. Those who do believe and those who do not believe do the same both. The former do not want to bow to God for whom they say was their Creator, the latter do not want to bow to the humanity in themselves.

For now I am a little more interested in those who say that they believe. Our Lady from Međugorje sent us a message to bow to God and the most Holy Sacraments of the Altar. Nobody can have anything against this regardless of whether they believe in Our Lady's apparition or not. This is simply the essence of Christian belief.

However, not everyone shares the same opinion. I read in sacral newspapers a statement regarding the world order. It went something like this; God, the Pope, the Bishop, the Parish Priest the, people... I do not understand that well. Naturally, I am not against God, or the

Pope, or the Bishop, or the Parish Priest, or the people, or against... I am worried by the rigidity highlighted in their roles. Whenever this happens, love is gone. For me, there is only sense in any order if there is love in it. If there is no love, then it means bowing to yourself and your role. It is useless then to refer to the law. Many things can be done according to law, but at the same time they need not necessarily be just.

With his arrival, Jesus Christ changed all our stale ideas. He was against nice dresses, long fringes, front seats at celebrations. I believe that today, he would be against built castles, self-sufficiency, regularity that has nothing to do with man.

I must say that I like this Jesus. I remember him in this special way every time I am in church, every time when I celebrate with others the memory of his breaking the bread and blessing the glass. I believe that he is then alive and present among us.

I particularly revive this belief in myself then when I reach the bottom of life of my existence. This is the point, which either destroys us or gives us even greater strength. It all depends on us. God is with us then and all that he asks from us is to rely on Him, to know that we are not self-sufficient. At first, it seems as if we are losing ourselves, while in fact we gain ourselves. Mysticism says that this is the union with God, who is almighty.

If we are renewed in God, the community we belong to, our parish will also be renewed. It can also touch the bottom of its life. Our Lady is aware that when She tells the Međugorje parish to listen to Her words and realize them in its life. The parish plays the role of an individual. If it is renewed, all those who come into contact with it will be renewed, too. That is why they who settle in this parish for the sake of money make a great mistake. You should only come here to hear God's words and nothing else. Our Lady warns that She will stop sending messages if the parish does not stir.

It is not mentioned anywhere that we will rid ourselves of all our hardships only by obeying Our Lady's instructions. But our endurance will do so. This is the magic

word that solves all our hardships. It penetrates the hardness of our everyday life like drops of water and leads us to a better life. That life is called the life of sanctity. It is promised to everyone and only those who really want it gain it.

Repentance and prayer are the necessary means for endurance. Great Christian men prove that by their lives. They say that prayer is the means, which controls our soul and repentance the means, which controls our body. United, they make a personality of us.

On the road of prayer and repentance there is no turning around and constant asking what others are doing and gossiping. That way we will not go anywhere. We will be lost in the side alleys, instead of going the right way. There will also be moments when we will wish to abandon it all. In these moments we have to be persistent.

Prayer and repentance lead us to God. Only then will we experience ourselves as real personalities and will we be able to endure the burden of any role in our lives. Do we think that it is that simple? If it was, the proverb that if we want to see what someone is like we only have to give him power, would never have been told. It refers both to social and religious structures.

Secularization does not appear suddenly, just like that. Our mistakes also open the door to it. However, armed with human and divine wisdom, we create a new, better life. Can you and I follow that direction?

GOD'S IMAGE

There was a battle on that morning. There were dead. There were wounded. The air was serious, as were the trees, rocks, grass. It seemed as if you had been thrown out of the world which your parents, school, Church had taught you about. That morning you were both the hunter and the hunted. You did not invite anyone for a cup of coffee and a chat. You destroyed in order to stay alive. You did not want to retreat. You knew that if you did not destroy others they, would destroy you. It was all useless. You searched for some sense in moments of rest and your thought were with the homeland, God, your children.

You remembered well that they had spoken about God to you in childhood. Later too, you heard something about Him. Mostly, God was good, He took care of you, He loved you. But today, with your own eyes you see the evil, which is erupting. Where is God? The evil bursts out and chokes you, want to posses you. You do not allow it and you call God to come, you look at his image and want to drown in it.

It all depends on God's image in you. If that image is pure and clear, nothing will destroy your smile and your trust in life. You will see the dead and the wounded, but this will not create hatred in you. You will just become more determined to defend your home, "to do" your bit. You know that hatred makes you blind, that it leads you to make the wrong steps and procedures. Once you regain your sight again it is already too late, as the fruits of hatred are too ripe. When your eyes are open and heart full of love for your people, without hatred for anyone, you will be able to recognize what you have to do to conquer those on the other side. If God's image in you is vague, do not expect any good. You will kill without reason, rape, torture and destroy. You will think that you are doing the right

thing, while in fact it will be your defeat. Some people will applaud you, but will never do the same. They like you may even pay you to do something for them. Do not accept their money, do not ever "work off" their dirty jobs. You have not been called to serve anyone, you are called to defend your sacred things.

I know that you are strong enough to clean God's image. The cleaner it is, the closer you are to God, which means closer to freedom, joy, life. When this is all over, together we will create a new world, be friends and smile. Nobody needs dead heroes, "a knight". Your people needs you as a live hero, one who will prolong their existence with his life in this fragile world. Listen to the prayer in yourself as a profound conversation with God. It will make a new man of you.

A PRAYER FROM THE TRENCHES

*Tonight, when you pass along our front-line
O God, stop by my trench
I will tell the most beautiful stories I know
I will be more honest than ever before
I will promise you that I will not be the same
as they on the other side
I will fight in the same way you did
when you were chased the merchants from the
temple with a whip
yet, you did not hate them then
you just did
what had to be done*

O God, come and see me in my trench tonight

*I will not have anything to offer to you
but you will understand me
they can fire any minute
we will amicably look at my present
and will make a deal
not to go anywhere without each other in future*

O God, come and see me in my trench tonight

I may not recognize your coming

so, please, be persistent

call me

I will certainly respond

if I hear your voice.

God can pass by the front-line at any time during the day or night. Can you see Him? Can you hear Him? His image is in your depths. You are, in fact, His image. Smile.

HUMAN SPEECH

I BELIEVE IN EUROPE

That afternoon it seemed that all my fatigue had gathered in me. It seemed that I could knead it with my hands, that I could cut it like a fog. That day needn't have been like that judging from the outside. I was working moderately and exerting myself; I attended to some smaller jobs, talking with people and listening to the news during the break. That day, the news reported on European politicians and their games, more so than usual. It echoed in me like a pain, like a scream. The future of my people was at stake. On the other hand, refugees spoke about their real and bloody stories. It all gathered inside me, became jumbled and then just snapped to become a determined attitude. I was fed up with Europe, its talk about freedom, protection of rights, protection of individuals and the rights of nations and the friendship of the European countries... It was all a farce.

Anyway, how could I believe it all? That same Europe tried to deny my people the right to be born. When they were born, in spite of all that, it tried to deny them the right to grow. It wanted simply to choke them by its negligence, supporting the enemy, pointing out even the smallest mistake or "so-called" mistake. It did not want to remember that in the beginning, it should have forgiven or, helped more. Naturally, everything was done indirectly. It was afraid of the threat of conflict, of ethnic cleansing, hunger and etc., etc....It sent its soldiers not to help, but to do everything in keeping with to the ideas of some European countries (not to say peoples). These countries cast an evil shadow over my people.

In the evening another man appeared in front of me. A foreigner. A European. Go home to your happy Europe, I shouted to myself. Why had he come here to bother me?

He told me he was a street cleaner in a European town. He knew that my people were in war. He saved some money and bought a few packages of food. He hoped it would help someone.

I do not know whether he had noticed anything in my look, but he had just touched a structure in my inner world, which had just started to be built. I thanked him more than I had thanked anyone before. I know that his gift was small, but I felt I should treat him well.

Who were all those perfumed and slicked up European politicians compared to this street cleaner? They were ordinary blown up colorful balloons. They did not have a heart, which is the most beautiful of human qualities. That is why they lied to us, as they had lied to the street cleaner. He elected them, but if he had known what they were like that, I believe that they would never have been elected. Individual politicians are not Europe, but individuals, peoples in that Europe. To be their friend means to start living happily. You will not live alone. But to live with others does not at the same time mean to sell yourself, to allow someone to rule over you.

There is a Europe outside the mass media, a Europe that has not lost its sense of justice and goodness. It can be met in all European streets, in all European towns. I have met and am still meeting this Europe. Its main characteristic is that it remains, it has not been destroyed, while politicians come and. This Europe helped us to survive during the war. It also helped us to grow and to be strong so that we could cope on an equal footing with all the selfish politicians. This Europe will conquer all the bad seeds in it. It will not allow its future to be destroyed by a certain circle of people - monsters. I believe in this Europe, too.

The worst thing that can happen to us, in addition to huge mess caused by politicians, is for us to start accusing certain peoples that they wished us nothing but evil. Only then they would completely conquer us. They would identify us with themselves. But we are not the same as they are. We are greater than they are. I would personally be ashamed to be with them. I do not want now to reconsider whether it sounds Christian or not, but I

do not want to have anything to do with them. If they desire so, let them go down in history with their frozen smile, rapacious eyes, treacherous movements. History will record them as bad people in responsible times. I want to be with those who will help good to be born among people. I am not ashamed of this.

Naturally, the Europe that I like and which I want to grow with and help it to grow cannot be found in this street cleaner. This would be a desperate consolation. My Europe is also present in people of various other professions. These are even certain politicians at the peak of Europe. These politicians have strength and the will to carry out all the good and beneficial laws that appear from time to time in the sky of the European policy. I want to get in touch with them so that we can win together. I am simply not interested in my idea of the world's order to be victorious. I am interested in the truth of winning. It is the same for all people, for all men at all times. I will not let any rotten politicians take away something from me. They do not have the right to be where they are. In spite of them, I will believe in Europe, our Europe.

THE STREET OF PROTEST

I am again reading the paper this morning: so many dead, so many wounded, such and such peacemaking movements have visited my country, such and such peacemaking movements held a lecture. I think to myself, for four years I have been reading the same headlines. Always more dead, more wounded, more peacemaking movements and so on. This too much unhappiness and pain every day.

I would so much like to change headlines. When I open the newspapers I would like to read that we have successfully walked through this country and that we are a land of prosperity and peace. I would not like to find the names of my friends in the obituaries who died defending our country. I would like a life, both for my people and the by the way traveler who visits us, to be free and safe.

Peacemaking movements I have read about or have met with, say they agree with me. Their very name infers that they bring peace. That peace is a peace without limits. They even know how to achieve it. I smile and remember.

Before the beginning of that war I lived in a big town, the capital of a European country. Beneath the window of my room there was a street through which all important protests, not only in this town, but also in that country, passed by. For me it was interesting for me to watch them, since I had come from a Communist country. In my subconscious was the constant thought beating that each protest meant a step towards the truth, brave proof of the disparity with social injustice. I did not participate in the protest since I did not feel capable of changing anything in a foreign, unfamiliar world. Watching various protests, I met the Gulf war. Everything was stirring. Newspapers, radio, television all addressed the justification of

the military raid. The protesters in my street did not share the same opinion. The streets of the town were first pasted all over with posters against the war. Any remaining free space was filled with graffiti. And then, one day a great protest started walking around the streets of my town. It passed through my street, too. I watched it from my window. Various kinds of people were together. Different Arabians, Communists, church flags, the flags of various liberal societies, workers, art societies. I was confused by it all. I could not understand the reason why they were all here together? Regardless of the justification for or against war, how was it they were all together? Only later did I comprehend this.

A war started in my country. Forces armed to the teeth attacked my unarmed people. Even though we were not guilty, the duel was unjust, the means disproportional. I expected a protest. There was not any. I comforted myself that they would start immediately after the biased reports had settled. Villages, which were even unfamiliar to me, were burning. People were disappearing. Next came the towns. I thought that everybody was familiar with them and that a protest had to start. Some towns were wounded, others killed. Even well paid reporters were shocked. But protests for my country did not pass through my street. In the meantime, they protested for the protection of animals, for pay rises, for the rights of homosexuals and lesbians, for... Time flowed irretrievably like in a sandglass.

I met various peacemakers wandering around the streets of my country, instead of my west-European street. They spoke of their theory of peace. They said nothing could be achieved by war. Towns, villages and people are destroyed in vain. Each man is our brother and he should be helped to show that, you should make peace with him. Love brings us together, it will bring us peace. I watched them and listened to them and usually asked two things. First, why do not they protest in the attacker's country? The victim always knows that violence is useless. It is the attacker that does not want to know that. He should change, not the victim. Second, why do not they protest in front of the doors of those governments and world associations which had allowed it all, which supported and wanted this

war to end but the way they wanted it to, regardless of the victims. For those governments and victims the war is just another exciting game on a computer and nothing else. For us, the victim, it is a bloody reality. The humanity in these men without a heart in various governments and associations should be moved and this war will stop. My people only want humanity from them and just decisions. Can peacemaking movements help in that? They looked at me silently. I disturbed their peacemaking peace. They left a bit disappointed. They, who were strong enough to meet on the other side, told me that they understood then. I doubted it, but at least it was something.

After all that I was left with a bitter taste of comprehension of misunderstanding of various peacemaking movements. Understandably, I have nothing against peace or peacemaking movements. I am only against their misunderstanding of life. Many of them were deceived that neutrality is the most that a man has to do. I ask myself, how can you be neutral? In other words, justice either exists or does not exist. There is nothing in between. Someone who does not see that is either deceived or deceives others on purpose. After each protest, the truth should appear and not the silence of the graveyard.

Yesterday, I seriously questioned. Protests for my country have still not passed through my west-European street.

A GAME WITH THE WRONG LIGHTS

We need light to see. Nobody without any sense opposes this statement. However, today there are false lights, which give us a distorted view of reality. And then difficulties arise. We agree that there are such lights, but which are they? Each man will offer his own answer. It will depend on what is considered to be the Sun. In other words, the sun is in a way the source of all other lights.

All this crosses my mind on the eve of a sad Anniversary. Soon, a thousand days will have passed since Sarajevo came under siege. A certain nation settled on the hills of that town and has been shooting at it from there. If it was a bird, a rabbit, a fox... that town would certainly run away from the valley in which it is situated, but it isn't. It was long persuaded that nothing would happen to it. They who shooting at the town, had until yesterday, all the power and privileges in this town. So any reasonable causes are out of the question. Only those causes relating to evil are left. The town has been trying to escape anywhere even into the ground.

The same thing was done to another town: Vukovar. They tried to kill it cruelly before everyone's eyes. It resisted and succeeded. It was destroyed, its inhabitants were driven away, but it was not killed. It expired honorably on a piece of land and continued to live in the hearts of many people. Those hearts will resurrect it and help it to reappear on the very spot where it expired. When it was all happening, many people said they did not know what it was all about. They said that they lacked light to clearly see all these complicated things.

Politics, which in Europe asserted itself as the loudest and most responsible compared to the rest, was one of those who sent the wrong lights on purpose. It

sent its observers, they who feed their victim before it is killed (as if it did not matter whether he was fed or hungry when he had to die), cried over hungry and animals killed in the Zoos, talking about a civil war, about savages who are fighting, about the inability to understand that this is the Twentieth Century when differences supplement and penetrate each other... I do not want to list further. There has always been a double measure in it all: one for them and the other for everybody else.

I dare say that the mentioned European policies are responsible for the conflict. For a long historical period of time this politics has been encouraging greedy aspirations in one people in this area by playing with the wrong lights. Unfortunately, these people do not see that they are just a toy in other people's arms and they can never achieve their nebulous aims.

Maybe someone will ask whose politics is this? But, is it necessary to mention that? They will recognize themselves without mention. When they do, they will not be able to accuse anybody for being called up. The only thing left will be either to reform or to drown in the mud of immorality. This is the end for all those who bow to a fake Sun.

Jesus Christ taught us the clearest and the simplest way to look at events and people. He commanded his followers to be on good terms with everyone and to bring peace wherever they go. Today, the Church tries to sum it up in the notion of "Ecumenism". As much as I understand Jesus and as much as I understand the texts of the Second Vatican Council, Ecumenism is a state when each is aware of his own, but it is not an obstacle of living together with the others.

Unfortunately, not everybody in Europe understood the spirit of Ecumenism. It was not quite understood even in the bosom of the Church itself. If it was, then the Church hierarchy of some people, I am not speaking about ordinary people, would give an official statement, do something, influence the government of its country. On the contrary, it was mostly silent. According to this Church this was not their war. They had forgotten that they should help their fellow-brothers wherever they suffer in the world. If the in-

nocent suffer, they have to help them and protect their innocence. If guilty people suffer, they have to be helped to realize their guilt and to find a way out of it. If... but they were silent. They were frightened that by speaking up this would not be Ecumenism, by taking someone's side. But, at the same time, our Pope shouted against the injustice. If they only had listened to him, they would have understood something.

The game still continues. Wrong lights have been flashing on all sides. Some men have already looked through, some haven't. We accept everybody's misbehavior and do not want to remember the past. This is Ecumenism, too. The fog has to clear and the Sun has to appear. Then it will be revealed whose sun is the right one. We will certainly hold out, as we recognize the game.

CROSSING, BUT WHERE TO

When we were children, we dreamed about being adults. We wanted to experience what it means to breathe life deeply, to make decisions, to do what adults do. When we stepped into adolescence we had the opportunity. It happened when we were about 15. We knocked on the door of adulthood with an open heart and mind and began our pace. It was different for each of us, depending on the experience of the first encounter and everything that we had taken to be the heritage of our ancestors and childhood days.

And today, while I write this, someone is knocking at the door of adulthood. They did so yesterday, they will do it tomorrow. We, who are called adults, watch them and the story begins.

One of the first conclusions is that today's youth do not know what they are doing. They go to cafés, take drugs, fornicate, listen to wailing music, just vegetate... We say that everything was different in our time. Then, there was order. You knew what you could and could not do. No-one ever did 'such and such'. If they had by chance, they would have been expelled from society. And today...

I do not know, maybe it is so. But, I am disturbed by one question. If there had been order in our time and if we by being that way, created history, would not the situation in our world be different? A difficult question, a difficult answer! This requires justice and which could hurt.

Let us remind ourselves what Our Lady says. She says that we have to love. We read in the New Testament that the greatest commandment is to love the Lord with all our heart, with all our soul and with all our mind. A commandment equal to that one is to love thy neighbor as yourself. When we examine these commandments, can

we say that we have responded to them from the depths of our heart?

Even if we do not believe, the commandment of love is still valid. We see that we are worthless without it. When it is present in our life, our life is enlarged, more fulfilled. Only with love around do we become full and warm.

Numerous philosophers, poets, musicians, people of all generations and professions have concerned themselves with love. It was the foundation of their existence and their breathing. Through it, they approached something deeper in themselves, regardless of how they had called it.

Someone passing from the world of adolescence into the world of adulthood deeply experiences love. He believes that it will lead him and those he comes to. He opens the door of the adult world full of confidence. And then, he is confronted.

The world of adults is not a fairy tale that you enter, especially in these war times. It is only the reality of existence. The saint and the thief, the executioner and the victim live side by side. Everything is so difficult and everything is so easy. On one side we meet those who are dishonest, who learned to adjust, to hide, on the other side those who destroy that darkness and on the third side those who destroy everything in front of them.

What should one who wants to enter this world do?

In the beginning he wants to live his special life. Later, he realizes that this is impossible. He has to go somewhere. Then he joins one of these groups. He signs up and joins. Let us say that he has a guitar. Everybody meets him with arms open wide and understands his language. They *who fight* see in him the prolongation of their good wishes. Not everything is lost, evil is not so black. It can be conquered and every day there are more of us. *The disappointed ones* together with him, drown their thoughts and their lives in sadness and in wine. Drugs can also serve, nothing is better than that. The poetry of clouds and the Sun that appears. It does not matter what it looks like. All that matters is that everything is blurred. This is not the case with *those who destroy everything*. They can do anything. Everything has its purpose. You live

to overpower, to be hot. The song goes on. Words and music are intoxicating.

The crossing is open. Everyone has to cross it. It is not difficult. The question is what is on the other side. It depends on those who already crossed. They have already had the honor and bad luck to live in serious times. What have they made of them?

THE LOST ONES

I am standing over blank sheets of paper. I do not know what to tell them. Many things have rumbled through my soul in these serious times. Now I feel tired and somewhat empty.

I have written many sheets before these. They have left traces in me that are manifested in my changed way of behavior, my acting. They confronted me with myself, in moments of taking sides they whispered a decision to me.

Currently, I am writing many letters about the war. I want to make it clear that I am not pleased about it. I have never taught that misunderstandings can and may be solved by force. Such an attitude was installed in me by the faith of my mother and my father, the education I completed, thoughts that I was not afraid of. But I have never doubted that I had the right to defend myself if I was attacked. It was quite obvious to me, that in a state of defense I have to do my best.

It is probably not necessary to say that we were attacked, we did not wage a conquering war. World leaders do not share this opinion and try to equally blame all those who are or are not involved in the war disorders.

I read the internal bulletin of the UN soldiers called "Hope". have never yet felt cynicism, like I just felt. I ask myself, hope for what? They cannot answer that, as it would be against them. They pass through these areas deliberately deaf and blind to the troubles of the people here. Naturally, they are not deaf or blind when it comes to their own interests. The bulletin "Hope" is full of big words, big intentions which have nothing to do with reality. They are only a shield behind which is hidden a big machine set to achieve a new order on Earth. The question is only what kind of order and in whose name. But we will not

Speak about that now. Let us talk about those who are consciously or unconsciously on the side of "hope".

Looking around me I have concluded that these serious times cannot over if we all do not contribute to defense. To some people this will seem petty bourgeois, or petty-political, or... but does it really matter? If it was up to them, neither I, nor anyone else would write anything about the war. We would not have a chance. Everything would be over very quickly.

Sometimes they who ran away, (deserted), now walk our streets. They felt a lull in the war (does it exist in war?) and full of their lostness, look at what they have missed. They do not recognize their acquaintances from yesterday nor do they recognize their friends either. Now, they are in two different worlds. They are richer for the amount of money in their wallets, but poorer for the amount of humanity they have lost. If you have to choose between the two, all those who are mature enough will choose the latter.

It would be good, of course, if we could have both. Nobody serious is against it. But this is impossible in the present times. We either have good or bad luck, to create a future for our people by ourselves. What we do now will be the same for all of us, for a long period of time.

Do not pay attention to those from the times of 'comradeship' who say that this is the building of a "bright future". They built a distorted, inhumane and anti-people world. Today, we laid the foundations for a world in which we will be able to express all our wealth as people. All those who were building their world with their "comrades" cannot understand this. They can only comprehend a time of darkness and nothing else. And today, it is a time of light for our people, in spite of all the deaths and difficulties.

Of course, it has always been easier to utter words than to realize them. It is not easy to be self-confident in these times. It is difficult to examine your conscience, but it is the only way to remain sane and with your head high. We do not have to do this, but then we would be lost and this would determine our future steps.

I wrote these few sheets without any real intention. I do not know who to dedicate them to. Maybe to myself or maybe to you. The answer lies in us alone.

ALIENATION

Since stepping in to the adulthood of this world, I have read newspapers. Sometimes, I try to find what it is that attracts me in them. It seems that it is the wish to learn about someone else's experience, to rely on that and then, to try and understand this world. I see that I am not lonely in this task. Others do it, too.

Today, I am shuffling two newspapers: the first are primarily political and cultural and the other cultural and political. In the present times, both these notions are very important to me.

I think that the names of the newspapers are not important. More important however, are the thoughts they represent, as these thoughts flow through many newspapers that we buy at newspaper stands.

I more or less like the way political matters are presented in the first newspaper. Matters can be objected, sometimes to the point of exaggerated enthusiasm, but the Croatian self-confidence, which they were trying to steal from us for years, arises in everything.

It is more difficult to determine the cultural section. The editors put a lot of effort to the first section of the newspaper. It appeared that way or perhaps it really was, whichever way you like it.

I was interested in the meaning of life offered by written words. I was led by the thought that only a positive attitude to life is the Croatian attitude to life or at least our involvement in victory over the misfortunes that have befallen us.

Referring to this year's film festival in Pula. A headline struck my eyes: "The Final Separation from State Cinematography". I instinctively thought it would be something good, something bringing the State into question. My shock was a remnant of my reactions left from the Com-

munist period, but I quickly remembered that this was another State.

From its very first sentence already, the article struck me with its sense of loss, which finally turned into alienation. The author behaved like a cat on a hot tin roof. He was dancing a strange dance.

The keenness of the majority of films was praised. This keenness, it was written, is manifested in the quantity of darkness coming from the screen. This shows that: "terrible times give good films, but we had to wait a little. Instead of their characteristic escapism, Croats reacted to life in a black wave of direct transmission from hell. We cannot resist to admit that the black wave has a great start". Is any explanation necessary for these or the following words: "If only one shot could represent Pula 1995, then it would be the one from Salaj's film *"See you"* when the hero, at his friend's funeral condemns God by spitting at the sky. Almost everything good that we could see in Pula was in a way, spitting at the sky: the spitting of the generation duped by both the Serbs and Croats, a generation destroyed both at the front-line and in the background and a which had no reason to be polite to those still alive.

Let us add to our hearts, the words that are missing here, as a review of the mentioned attitude and let us move another step in revealing the darkness of alienation.

In newspapers that deal with culture and politics I come across "an interesting" review of three books. By the way, this newspaper constantly claims that it is a 'real' Croatian newspaper.

The first review deals with a collection of poems. The writer is recognized as being able to write and that his book is in some parts pure poetry. The quality of the collection is particularly lost when he writes about God and country. "Something that started as the simplicity of the form turns into monotony, thematic variety turns into destructive incoherence and loss, and lyrical subject comes out from its intimate mood to the importunity of the appearance and attitude... Black and white world, we and they, black past and bright future, new building of spirit on sane foundations of collective freedom - are the elements

of the programmatic, party and a very bad handbook, and not a collection of poetry". Let us stop mentioning similar words and let us say, really, whose past has not been dark and whose future will not be bright (let us use a favorite Communist expression), in that it is enlightened by the Croatian spirit?

The review of the second book was much better. It was about a collection of essays, which express regret "for the good old times". The writer says that there are no more times in which his generation experienced varieties traveling from one part of the country to the other. Then, they were doing something that has just now come into fashion in Europe. One of the events that enlightened them at the time was to play "Bijelo dugme" ("White Button") near Hajdučka česma (Robber's well) in Belgrade. The conclusion is that these are all nice memories and experiences and that this attitude should be understood. This is justified by the fact that the writer was never interested in politics, neither then nor now.

The title of the third book is "The Encyclopedia of Nothingness". Two articles are dedicated to it on the same page and in the same issue of the papers. It seems to suggest that the value of the book is beyond any doubt. One of these articles says: "Proportionally to the complexity and hermetic quality of the book (even in the sense of mystic-religion, Gnostic and esoteric knowledge) the following themes/notions in the dictionary are proof: Number, Demonology, Eschatology, Original Sin, Madness, Nothingness, Superstition, Order, Sex, Thanatology, Water, Time...), its innovative side is also emphasized. The *Dictionary of Nothingness* is a breath of fresh air after so many futile books, poetically exceptionally self-confident and autonomous, so the best advice without many praises would simply be: take it and read it". Is it?

The conclusions themselves are in the form of questions derived from the mentioned articles: when we spit at God, we should find the speech on God and the Homeland the result of ignorance, understand and justify the regret for the past times, and then add the Encyclopedia of Nothingness to all these, and then where have we come to?

THE OPINION

Once, speech took place only in a face to face encounter. Not only was the color of speech felt, but the wrinkles on the face, the presence of the look were also observed. Today, everything is tried being replaced by machines. A cold machine sends someone's opinion via his voice, which seems natural to us. But it only seems so. There is no human face anywhere.

Our Croatian post office has the means necessary to send someone's voice or their message. Dialing a certain number you can hear the latest political news, songs, your horoscope, spiritual thoughts, news from Međugorje, sports headlines.

Each of these automates has its circle of listeners. Quite a natural thing. I don not know whether it is in fact natural that the majority of listeners owns an automate with the latest horoscope? How has it all come to this, after it all, we believe more in the stars, natural forces and something else, and yet do not believe in our experience of God?

I believe that we should blame our way of thinking. We have allowed ourselves to think in the wrong way. We say that we are Christians. Recalling our faith we are satisfied with our knowledge of a few prayers and nothing else. This attitude is a result of our inability to face everyday's temptations in life. When life puts pressure on us, faith is suddenly not enough to rely on, and so we search for something else. Many people deceive us in this way.

The outcome of the war we are experiencing has greatly determined our thinking. If there were not those who sacrificed themselves without thinking, a great deal would have been different. They disappeared in muddy

trenches, in cold forests, among harsh stones. Today we experience the freedom given by them.

Today, we are faced with a great responsibility to shape the area we live in. It should not be shaped by our despondency, but our courage. It should not be lost even in the most difficult moments. It helps us to live. Sometimes it takes only one wrong step and everything goes the wrong way to what we expected.

As a result, I cannot today accept the lamentations how those who had been in hiding took some of the most important positions of power and there is nothing we can do about it. How can this be? If they have, then expel them from there positions by our good work and example. Leaving everything to destiny and astrology will not help us. We have nothing to expect. Our best times have already arrived and we have to make use of them.

While I am writing this I can hear the rain talking with this day. Pleasant or unpleasant talk, it all depends on our mood. We only know that after it, nothing will be the same.

WHERE ARE WE GOING

These days I have been turning over the books of writers, thinkers... of a modern time. Most of them have one thread in common and that is that their books are charged with tragedy, absurdity, breaks of all kinds. Only a few books express hope, warmth, light. Nice stopped being nice and ugly stopped being ugly. Now ugly became nice and nice ugly.

A writer who dared to be different was the Frenchman Charles Péguy (1873-1914). He criticized the society he lived in, having no pity for those on the left, nor those on the right. That is why he had friends and enemies in all the classes of French society. He was not afraid to say that politicians should be moral and should do their job according to Christian mysticism. He denounced any dishonesty, insincerity and hypocrisy in life. He tried to be what he was. He bravely stood against the worship of money and achieving prosperity regardless of the circumstances. To him, ambition was a notion to be ashamed of.

Unfortunately, the West did not follow his teaching. It did not want to give up its fake Gods. It seemed easier and better for the West to believe in superficial brilliancy rather than in real values. In an effort to disguise it all, it started talking about the rights of the man. Associations dealing with it appeared everywhere. In this way, a new religion was formed. Politicians became its priests, synods the place for its worship.

Maybe it does not seem this way. Maybe! Let us look around ourselves these days. It is almost Christmas. The West is quite aware of it. It is less aware though of the time of Advent. At Christmas time, Christmas trees are decorated and Christmas presents are bought. Shops are open non-stop, special discounts are given. At first sight, a real Christian Christmas atmosphere. But it is not like

that at all. The majority of those who buy Christmas presents and decorate Christmas trees will not attend Mass, pray, let alone confess. To them, it is the past finished time. Others maybe will, but they were not to be seen anywhere during the entire year. In one word, for both cases, Christmas just became a nice custom and nothing else. It is an interesting event, a change from the everyday boring way of life. It is not a change though, that will bring something new, but a change similar to TV events. When everything is over, you yawn out of boredom and that's it.

Life in today's West is just a soap bubble and nothing else. It simply does not exist. Strange, but true. Everybody hurries to do something. Few of them can stop and look at themselves for any sense of beauty, love, dignity... Haste, haste and only haste.

Christian values are not in first place in this society. Instead of them destruction, leftist and liberal ideas rule. The insides of society have been turned inside out, and only the form, the illusion is left. Christmas is celebrated as a custom and every day there are more and more similar circumstances. Compliments take place everywhere, but only few look at the background of it all. It is important to present yourself as a guardian of tradition, and what you are inside is something different. It is believed that a people's memory is bad and that they will not remember everything bad done by certain parties and their representatives in the past. As such, they will do the same tomorrow, only given the chance.

The West dashes against us, too. It waves its colorful balloons in front of our noses with. It tells us it does not want us in its association unless we are like this or that. It imposes its conditions on us and wants us to be happy. What corruption!

As distinguished from the West, Our Lady tells us something completely different. She wants to teach us a different way of behavior. She tells us not to rush, to leave time for prayer, for then, we will know which way to go to. Our Lady sends those who realize this in the role of prophets who will change the society they live in.

Where do we belong? Where do we want to come to? Are we prophets? These are questions to be answered before the eyes of this Christmas!

FINDING OUR BEARINGS

THOSE TIMES

What is life, what does it consist of, where is it going to...? Questions burst out while you try to concentrate in the present time, to stop and be more aware of yourself. The time is in front of you, of the past, present, future. How to make out of all that something worthwhile living, something that you will remember peacefully regardless of how it was at the time?

You remember. Two thousand years ago they tried a man who was also God. They did not acknowledge his divinity. If they had done so, they would not have tried him. To them, he was just someone from the crowd. They accused him that he deceived everyone around him, that his teaching was bad for others. When they tried him with the help of a foreign authority, they crucified him. They cynically thought it would be easier to see what was happening with his disciples from above. The crucified God-man, Jesus did not take it to heart. He continued on his way. However, his disciples did not follow him exactly. At the first sign of troubles, they dispersed like a soap bubble. One even betrayed him, the other denied him. Only his mother Mary stood with one disciple under the cross. That disciple was John. The others considered him the most sensitive and therefore the least resistant. But, at that moment he proved to be different.

Today, they are again trying someone. You feel it is you. You are being tried not because you are bad, but because you pointed at their defects by your own existence. They would like to see as nothing but a toy. They yell at you that you have turned in the wrong direction, that you smashed their image of the world. They persistently built that image in the coldness of their darkness. They think that they will be able to impose the same upon everybody. They have not succeeded thanks to obstacles like you.

There is no sense in listing them, in listing the judges. Their names are not important. The only thing that matters is not to allow them to try you. Remember, they can try you, but they cannot sentence you. They cannot achieve anything by their injustice, they cannot achieve anything by their cynicism. If you can look them freely and courageously in the eye, then you have conquered them.

While I say this, do not think that I am saying this only to you. At the same time I am also talking to myself. We have the same task, but each of us in his own way.

And when they crucify you, you have to be aware that one Mother, your Croatian Mother will be standing under your cross. She will recognize your pain and make it hers. It will heal you both. A new life will flow through your veins. The Croatian Mother knows well what pain is. She is also familiar with the feeling of victory when you overcome all the obstacles with your head high. She has experienced it for thousand of years. She has been crying for her sons and daughters in all the countries of the world. She has been dressing their wounds while others rejected them. She has been sitting up late and softly telling them the story of their home, of their country which is only theirs and nobody else's. Naturally, anyone is welcome, but this does not mean that they can destroy that home, rule over it.

That mother who stood under the cross two thousand years ago taught your mother and my Croatian Mother which attitude to take. She told her not to despair. There were similar times in history. Times, which did not break your grandfathers and great-grandfathers of the nothing that at first sight it appeared life, had given them. They created something for the future. Even when they had to run away and leave everything behind, they did not leave their paintings and their statues of their Mother Mary. She followed them in their steps. How could they then not return to their homes, how could they then not win in the end?

There will be other Johns, believe me. They may seem fragile and vulnerable at first sight, they may be laughed at because of that. However, you must be aware that they will continue your mission. They will not stealthily

watch what is going on, but will actively engage themselves. Times of war, times of disorders are the times for them. These times provoke in them a strength and goodness, like the sculptor who creates a nice statue of rock with his merciless blows. The Johns will create a New World. The future belongs to them.

There will be some people who will deny you and betray you. Forgive them, but do not forget. They were destroyed a long time ago. Do not look upon them because you will not get anywhere. They should not be condemned, they should be pitied. Do not let them destroy you by their inhumanity. Instead take your cross and go on.

These times are strange. I know that. You can easily be a hero or a coward.

The choice depends on each of us personally. School, social status has no role in it. When we decide to be a hero or a coward, we are all equal. Then, we stand in front of ourselves, in front of God and history and we make our decision. There is no middle road.

Light your candle. Not a real one, but the one in your heart. Let it always burn there. It will remind you of your dignity, the path you have to follow. The future is before you. Fill it with God, with your friendship with Him. He was tried and sentenced two thousand years ago, but to the regret of his persecutors, he rose from the dead. You will be resurrected, too. The times you are in now do not have to mean your defeat. They are just thunder, rain and the storm, which will certainly pass. After them, you will be much stronger, only if you want it.

THE DEAD ZONE

I like twilight. I like watching the sunset, the closing of the day. But, there was one twilight I did not like. We were visiting some friends at the front-line. I was not afraid (at least, I thought not), but I do not like twilight, mornings or days when someone shoots at somebody else. I do not like them, but still, I accept them if there is no other way out.

In one moment, the driver said, "From here on, it is the dead zone". It dawned on me. A bullet could hit me, but it need not. Everything is pure coincidence. The Russian roulette started. My life and the life of the others around me were the only stakes. God, do not miss this game.

We drove with the lights turned off. The car was bumped along on the road where we could not drive fast, even if we wanted to in our dreams.

There was no-one around. Only us and our vigilant opponent on the other side. If he was to shoot, we would know if he is really awake.

While I now think about it all, I realize that I was living on two levels. Something like an advanced computer. While a computer performs one set of commands, at the same time, we can perform another set of commands on the same computer. Then, I laughed, talked, tried to make jokes, and within my soul I spoke to God. Then, he was my friend who could help me to solve my present condition. I was prepared to meet with him, if necessary, face to face. My wishes and efforts not to be afraid helped me to remain sober. I told God I believed in Him, to forget the moments when I was disloyal. I felt He could hear that. I knew He would not leave me alone.

Frankly speaking, my Croatian people helped me in my decision to behave in this a way. They fought, died,

laughed, traded, married... while deep inside they stood before their God. My people were aware that they were in the dead zone. They could be shot, but they were prepared for that moment. At the same time they went with God the way that awaited them. My people knew that just men would not be destroyed. They would be wounded, many would go to God, but they could not lose. You lose only if you become scared and, as such do not have the strength to contact your God. Then, you are left with the support, which kept you upright.

The thieves who steal and become rich while my people are living two levels of existence are not important. They are nothing but a house of cards. It built and then, in one moment, everything collapses and vanishes. I would not like to be in their shoes and I would not like to have restless dreams. They are left without God and exist only on one level, with the smile of a plastic dummy.

When I am already talking about what I do not want to be than I would not like to be the one who constantly asks himself whether he has done too much, and others have done too little. That question destroys the soul, makes a man sell all his dreams and leaves everything to mere events. Fear, cowardice, selfishness... penetrate through such a question. In the end, when we achieve what we wanted, we cannot recognize ourselves.

I watched the buildings we passed by. Once, they were full of life. Today they are like shells from which a pearl has been taken. Their inhabitants could not take them with them. The only thing they could take was their soul. Was their soul happy with them?

"Here we are ", I heard the driver's voice. We knew that, of course, but his words were somehow more convincing than our thoughts. We were met by a hole in the wall, ruins and ashes. You could say, not a living soul. But, life flourished deep in the ruins. They greeted us heartily. We were happy to see each other. It was no longer the dead zone. The darkness was conquered. Thanks to these places "dead zones" will disappear. Life will spring up and people will ask if the dead zone had ever existed.

A FRAME FOR THE PICTURE, A PICTURE FOR THE FRAME

To Mary

We were in a hurry. War devastation surrounded us. A village destroyed in the battles. Once, it seemed unusual, unrealistic, now it is something, which goes without saying. We wanted to attend a funeral of a Croatian soldier. My friend and I.

However, we arrived earlier. The wind was blowing, the soil was soaked with rain. Mud and coldness. The funeral procession was approaching. Nothing new. A priest, lots of people, very serious faces (without pretense), the Croatian flag and a platoon of soldiers. As usual, relatives wailed loudly. And that was all.

This time I was touched by a photograph. It was carried by a fellow-soldier. It was in a dark wooden frame. It showed the deceased who was smiling. Hope, closeness and love were in his eyes. I could not tare my eyes away. It stood out from everything.

The smile on the photograph chased away the bitterness, which started gathering in me. It did not allow me to go that dangerous way. It seemed to tell me: "Look, my body went away, but you remained. If you start hating, you will be ravaged by that hatred. Instead smile and do your part."

But, what was my part?

I know that it was not to run away as far as possible from here. And I had a chance for that. Even for "honorable" reasons, which could not be objected to. I did not do so. Maybe I was influenced by the destiny of the one who escaped in the previous war. He gained everything in the foreign world, but in reality, he was running away all his life. He knew, and it was well known that he was a coward in crucial moments.

I do not believe that my part is to allow myself to behave, as I have never behaved before. Even now I can not steal, kill, or attack. This will not bring anything good to me. It will destroy me as a person. These "crazy" times will end and if no-one asks me where I was and what I did, I will ask myself. What will I answer?

Really, what would be my part?

I have to build a picture, which will fit your frame. That frame is my whole life. I was placed somewhere by my life. It does not matter where. The only thing that matters is that what I do is done with commitment and honesty. In this way I will create a frame for my picture. People will recognize me by this frame and by this picture. I will not be able to avoid their judgment.

When I create a nice picture and a nice frame, God will put me in His room. He will be happy that He found me, and I will be happy that I found Him. Even in these war days He passes through a piece of land where my life is. He calls me. He feels sorry when He hears me saying that He does not want to help us. And He really wants to. He offers his hand so that we can walk together. We have to go down our path. No-one can do it for us. This is the price of freedom, both internal and external.

I was listening to these words in me and this replacement of the pronoun "I" with "we". I knew that I am not alone in this country. Someone wants me to help him in difficulty. That someone is my homeland. My thoughts were going further away.

Having created my personal nice frame and nice picture, we have created a nice frame and a nice picture for our homeland. In the company of nations, which have the honor to live on this Earth, our homeland must not be dirty and messy. I beautify its appearance by my presence. I am a dot put on the picture by the artist.

It does not matter if my homeland beautified by my picture sometimes stands out from its environment. Does it really matter if any people are ready to exhibit an ugly picture in an ugly frame? When history and God pass and collect the pictures of the peoples and the frames in which they put these pictures in, our picture and its frame

should stand proudly. They should not be swept away by the wind nor suffocated by fog.

The priest said "May he rest in peace!", the platoon of soldiers showed their honors to their fellow-fighter by shooting, and the Earth was shot. Four children who were left without their father embraced their mother who was left without her husband. The picture of Croatia was ready to be put in its frame. For now.

ANA

"**R**aise your hands high and wave them. The angels who are watching us will take these regards to my dad who is in heaven."

Children's arms were waving on that Herzegovinian hot morning in a dugout near Ana's dad's house. Yes, that was her name. Ana. She was six years old, had blonde hair and blue eyes. With her child's mind, she was already aware of the events around her. She just learned to spell her first letters, she could write her name, her mother's name, her dad's name and her sister's name. She did not care about other names. Some letters stubbornly escaped, but there will be time to tame them.

Today, she was playing with children from the village. She was the leader, as usual. She liked company and her company liked her. This time it was somewhat special.

Her dad probably played in the same hole where she was. He loved his grandfather and he frequently visited this half-wild area with him. He never understood why, but grandfather loved these rocks, forest and holes. Whenever there was a new great family event, grandfather would plant a pine here. He told him, his grandchild that it would be good to build a house there when he grew up. Grandfather died, but his grandchild did not forget that. When he decided to build a house, he built it on the very spot that grandfather had chosen.

Ana was not familiar with this history in details, but she remembered something from her father's stories. She liked birds' singing, the nature that breathed. When she was bored with that, she went to her grandfather and grandmother who lived in the neighborhood. Sometimes, they took her to the region where her mother was born, to her

other grandfather and grandmother. She loved their sea and a thousand other unexplored things.

Suddenly, in the last few days everybody gathered around her. This had never happened before. Both grandmothers and both grandfathers, uncles, godmother, many others who she knew more or less, were in the same place. And everyone was good to her, they fulfilled each of her wishes. Something bothered her? Why all the fuss?

Dad did not come in the evening. She asked about him. She was told that he suddenly had to go to the doctor. "But why" - she went on asking. They had to reveal the truth. She was told bit by bit. They kept telling her that she was grown up and that she would understand. She knew she was grown up and was pleased that they finally knew that. But, the way they pronounced the word "grown-up" was strange. She was looking in her mother's eyes to see how she should behave. She had never seen her like this. Their souls met and they decided to put up with this with dignity. Words were not necessary.

Little Ana decided proudly to show everyone that they could rely on her. She opened her blue eyes widely, pretending at the same time that she did not see anything and did not understand anything. She let them take her here and there, buy her everything. She tried to smile in a child's way. She was playing with other children more enthusiastically than before. The only thing she could not put up with was the coffin, dad's coffin. She ran away from it, not saying anything. She could not stand dad's framed photograph, either. She felt it had a strange meaning, different from those in the album full of pictures of dad, mum, her sister and of course, herself. The soldier's uniform too was not ordained with her words or looks. Today it seemed threatening and she did not want to be near her. It was not the Croatian uniform from mum's and dad's stories. She was told that a shell killed her father and she felt it had something to do with that uniform.

Persuaded by the adults and at her mum's wish, she finally approached the coffin with her friends. She prayed to dear God, the way her mum and dad had taught her, she touched the flag and the cold wood under it with

her children's fingers. Tears started to roll. "You know, mum, I had to cry, although I did not want to. I just felt like doing it" - she said later.

From a corner, she watched a priest who prayed for her dad. She had nothing against him, but she also had to carry flowers for her dad to the cemetery — was what was going through her mind.

At the cemetery where she attended Mass on Sundays, there were lots of people. She had never seen so many of them. They were all very serious, more than ever before. More priests celebrated Mass this time. There were soldiers here and they behaved nicely. She did not feel that anybody had anything against her. Not even her mum. She was confused by it all.

She saw a tomb which she had never seen open before. They put the coffin with her dad inside. Soldiers shot. She was scared a bit, but she quickly pulled herself together when she saw that everybody else remained calm. Everybody was shaking hands with mum, grandmothers, grandfathers. Some people stroked her hair. She did not like that. Her uncle suggested that she goes to church, where many interesting things for child's imagination went on. She agreed, though it did not mean anything to her at that moment. Mum told her to listen to him and she did not want to disappoint her.

"You know, my uncle will buy me an ice-cream and tomorrow I will again bring flowers to my dad at the cemetery" - she said when we met after the funeral. We tried to comfort her, in an adult way, but she did not listen to us, she did not want to listen to us. She told her story, something about a black dress and shoes that her god-mother had bought her, keeping the fragility and greatness of her child's world.

"Mum, wake me up tomorrow on time, because at eight o'clock there is a mass for my dad" - said Ana before going to bed. Mum did not know that she knew that. But Ana did know. And a lot more.

THE "SHOT PLACE"

Until recently I used to divide places into beautiful and ugly ones, depending on the feelings that predominated in me while I watched them. Today, on the contrary, I know about places that were "shot" and those that were not. I learned about this division one afternoon when my friend told me about the death of two and wounding of four soldiers who belonged to the town's military formations. Although in my life I had learned many words in various languages, I did not know the word "shot". Anyway, I was not interested in the actual shooting itself. My walk in life led me down other roads. At the beginning of the war shooting became a notion to which a better attitude had to be found.

In everyday military vocabulary, as I learned, that "shot" places are those places which were shot at and whose exact co-ordinates are noted on a piece of paper by those on the other side. That is why it never took long for them before they sent a new shell to the same spot.

The word "shot" seemed a little bit strange to me. As far as I recall I had not come across it in better Croatian writers. It could be found only in rare Croatian language dictionaries. As far as I know, this word is not of our origin. It came together with the presumptions of a brotherhood between the South-Slav nations. Dictionaries did not say anything about the Croatian word that could replace the word "shot". They only mentioned that a "shot" place is the one that was shot at. In this way that place distinguishes itself from others. In war you can easily get killed there, you can cease to exist in this world in a mere moment.

In spite of the danger, people will continue going to "shot" places. Certainly not to enjoy the landscape, not for the sake of the trip. You go there because of the irresistible need for freedom. That was the reason why these six

men were in such a place that day. Unfortunately, they were not as lucky, as were the rest of us. Someone from the other side noticed them and was fatally faster.

I do not know how many more "shot" places are in the homeland of my people. (I will not mention now where my homeland extends to.) I know that there are many of them. They increased in number in these war times, they condensed and unpleasantly bite the soul.

Though I would like it to be different, "shot" places have existed in my homeland a long time, since my ancestors had moved to the blue Adriatic and its deep hinterland. Many people could not stand to watch us grow happily and decided to punish us because of our fortune and prosperity. Many "shot" places (without co-ordinates at that time, but still dangerous) turned our country into a "shot" country. Our history in the history of the world became a "shot" history. They tried to break us. They wanted to seize what belonged to us. Some said they had the right to do so, others wanted to destroy us egoistically, thinking that it would be better for them.

The existence of "shot" places in our homeland is a sign that we have not been destroyed. Despite the discouragement felt by "shot" places, "the shot" country, "the shot" history, our grandfathers remained steadfast there where they belonged. They frequently had to die in foreign armies, on the wrong side, but in their hearts, they always carried the thought of freedom of the Croatian country. Who can condemn their longing, or say that it was wrong.

Having accepted Christianity, my people went through their "shot" history strongly looking at the confusing sign of cross. Their God was crucified. A man from the crowd did not kill him, but by those who considered themselves to be just, who spoke about justice to others and who enjoyed their self-pleasing greatness. But, they did not succeed in killing Him. That God-man resurrected from the cross. For three days only, His opponents could think that they had completely succeeded. But, that was doubtful, too.

Knowing all that, my ancestors died and yet they tightly embraced the cross, the secret that signifies life. It

was not the end for them, but only a sacrifice, so that their people could experience resurrection after "three days".

My people are doing the same today. One of the two, who was killed, while heavily wounded, realized that death was approaching, crossed himself, prayed the Lord's prayer and then died. (Does it matter which one of them it was, maybe even both of them.) It was courageous, both in a soldier's and a Croatian manner, it was correct in a Christian manner. It was consistent to the image of the Croatian soldier, which is in all of us.

It is difficult to say how many more people with their own blood will revenge the "shot" places in my homeland, my "shot" homeland on the Earth. The only thing I can say is that we have to be persistent. We are in those "three days" before resurrection. They who remain after it all will enjoy freedom of all the "shot" places of our "shot" country in the name of us all. Let them be happy and let their children forget the word "shot".

ALL SOUL'S DAY 1993

They came uninvited from the darkness. And it was a sunny day. They wanted to destroy our life, our dreams. We did not let them. Many of us remained in the crags, in the flower fields, wet and warm earth. We felt too deeply what sorrow means and what it means to cry. The darkness was penetrating.

These days, I am recalling everything. They say that All Soul's Day is coming. Has it not already come? Every day in this land where my people live, someone else is going to the 'other coast'. It seems that those from yesterday went a long time ago. Our All Soul's Day has been lasting painfully.

God, how difficult it is to walk in this world!

The Rosary around the neck of a tired man flashed before my eyes. Quite suddenly. It was whispering to me quietly: "To be a man means to be brave in spite of everything"! I held on to these words. The more I thought about them it appeared as if a face was approaching me through a fog of events. It was the face of the Mother Mary from Međugorje, from Široki Brijeg, from Sinj, Marija Bistrica, Olovo... I knew the lighted candle I noticed was hers. We are just passengers in bad and difficult moments, but one candle has always been the light lighting in our darkness. It could be seen in the windows of destroyed and burnt homes, all those place which accepted more and more of the exiled people. Jesus, the Mother's son and our brother asked Her to watch like a true mother. And She watched over us.

That's why a candle is lighting in the deep night. Those who come uninvited nor those who come from the darkness cannot extinguish it. Only we can extinguish it.

THE CHOSEN PEOPLE

This word "chosen" is a responsible one. It puts a burden on someone's back, it makes them more serious with its seriousness. Suddenly, they are not who they were. The history of the chosen people is a big sign of responsibility not only for itself, but also for others. That is why I have never liked this word. I wanted to be free. Watching my Croatian people these days, something has changed in me.

The Pope visited my people. He did not come with an army, with tanks, with airplanes. He came with love. He showed that he was aware that we were at war and that we were suffering, that he knew that we had been unjustly attacked and that those who seized power in the world unjustly wanted to justify the attacker. However, he did not speak about revenge, but of peace and forgiving. Maybe this is a strange speech?

Long before the Mass was to begin, many people went to the place where it was to be held. The night was cold and foggy. The icy-coldness penetrated to the bone. I did not see anyone complain. The young and the old were awake together, they waited together. Columns of people passed by the entire night and the next afternoon. Everything went smoothly. They carried inscriptions showing their support for the Pope. None of them were against him like in some other western countries that he had visited.

There was exaltation during the Mass celebration. The Pope was touched and honest. We who represented the immense crowd, we felt that. He felt that we understood him. The air was charged with goodness. It dawned through my mind: we were the chosen people. In our time no-one had yet met with the Pope in this way. He understood, we understood. We had the same task.

Truly, our history is the history of the chosen people. Who knows how, but one day we found ourselves in the sea of a stormy Slav world. Some said that we had moved here from Biblical history. Our future generations should determine our true roots. However, in the sea of the Slav world we were the first to accept Christianity. Later, we left our bones all around our country and wider in witness of our Christianity. In the meantime, we sinned, but we remained faithful to our God. There were always those who lifted themselves out of the crowd like the prophets and showed us the way.

Today, we are once again leaving our bones in honor of our faith. Many among those who attacked us do not want to kill us, but the God in us. Our God reminds them that they are doing wrong. They who follow orders are only a toy who are fatally identified with this role. The creators and masters of war and peace are standing a little bit further away hidden behind honorary names, money, tales of a new world order, innocent names of humanitarian associations... They are creating an empire of evil and that is why we, as God's people, are an obstacle in their way. They are not shocked by blood, suffering does not surprise them. They are only surprised when they see that they have not succeeded in their intention.

Yes, the messengers of evil can never succeed. Their wax faces and arrogance are losing the battle with determined gentleness. Who can stop goodness and gentleness that was reborn in my people by Pope John Paul II? That goodness and gentleness prevent us from becoming the same or worse than they who would like to destroy us. At the same time they are themselves preventing our destruction. He who stands the right way is indestructible, as he can always find a way to destroy evil.

One of the ways to conquer evil to forgive. The Pope spoke about it a great deal. Only they who are great can forgive, and my people are great. Naturally, they will always remember what has happened and will prevent it from happening again. At the same time they will not develop hatred which eats away and which turns day into night.

I believe my Croatian people are the chosen people. Several millennia ago it was the Jews. Why should it not be us in these modern times? Does this sound arrogant? Why? I am not saying that we are greater than the others are. I am only saying that we are carrying the weight of being the chosen people. Whoever envies us should try to become the chosen. I will not envy him.

Our being chosen cannot be destroyed by anybody, but ourselves. It is preserved in the silence of our homes, it has been carried through history like the light, like the voice. It is demanding, but it liberates. It clears our interior and it heals us. In this way we really become we.

DESPITE EVERYTHING

Soul and substance. Two completely different elements. History is full of their interchanges, in fact, it is guided by them. If we put aside the philosophical grumbling, man is aware that he lives in this world. But, at the same time he is aware that he surpasses this world. That is why he himself is divided. All the religions try to solve this unpleasant division within him.

Niccolo Macchiavelli was aware of that division. First, he tried to solve it by literary works. It seemed to him that he did not succeed. Later, he started with political work. Again, he was not successful. He was exiled. But, he succeeded in one thing: he theoretically organized and in a way justified all the filth in politics. His motto was that everything was allowed in politics, i.e. that the end justifies the means. When you are engaged in politics, you should be engaged, according to the truth that suits you. (It sounds familiar, does not it?) You need not be concerned with any moral principles. You can use violence, deception to achieve certain goals.

Naturally, with statements such as this, the Church did not favor Macchiavelli. But, he found refuge with those who liked to call themselves humanists (in other words, philanthropists). Let us just remind ourselves of the French revolution and the events surrounding it. Sons of that The sons of the French revolution are ruling the world today. Just how, can be seen in the example of Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. People are killed here as if on an assembly line. The sons of the French Revolution are those who pull the strings of that bloody game from the background. They are prepared to call all the peoples taking part in the game as unreasonable savages, speak about the lack of humanity, yet they are not particularly trying to stop that bloody game. They mapped out its end

and do not want this end to be against their will. The worst thing is that this is not the first time. They have been doing this in the entire world throughout history. However, with all their power and might they try and hide what they have done. All in all, for them it is a Roman circus. You can choose the way someone will suffer. You are the ruler. What pleasure!

You should, of course, resist them. I will not mention how. There are thousands of them. I would like only to briefly mention that I do not want to allow myself to say that I am tired of the struggle. When I say that, I am finished. Until then, I will succeed when it seems to me that it is impossible to succeed. Our brave Croatian spirit has proved this to all of us through these past several years. We decided to resist and we have been coping well with all the difficulties. The resistance has not ended yet.

It is natural, if we can say so, that our opponents cause problems in our progress. But, it is not natural that they who are called "ours" do the same. And some of them are like that. Sometimes, it seems to me there are too many of them. Thinking about them, I have divided them into two groups.

The first group of "our" opponents includes those who are not quite aware what they have been doing. They say, there is war, everybody is doing this, why should not I. I heard one true even about these people. A soldier was on the front-line. It was Sunday morning. His acquaintance came along, greeted him, entered the first house and started taking things out. "Are you going to Mass today", the soldier asked him. "Yes", the acquaintance answered. He took some more things out on his second trip. The same question, the same answer. It happened the third time. The acquaintance answered with surprise: "I do not understand why you have asked me the same question for the third time?" The soldier answered: "Do you really not understand?" I would say the same: Do not we really understand?

The other group of "our" opponents are they who are ours only by name. They stopped being ours a long time ago. There is no sense telling them: do not you really understand? Only you can only stop them and you have

to do so. They are those who are ready to sell out a battle, a town, open gambling-houses, brothels, sell and produce drugs, who are hired killers... In one word, they are mere criminals. They cannot be ours as they are not familiar with belonging to our nation, religion, homeland... They are only familiar with belonging to substance. For them, the soul is unknown and odious country. They collect money, houses, cars and think they are safe in that way.

We do them the greatest favor if we bow to them and if we are afraid of them. We also do them a favor if we at least unconsciously try to imitate them. Then, they enjoy their corruption. If we want to keep our dignity, we must resist them. A Herzegovinian has never been a thief, a bully, or corrupt person. He has always had a heart to resist injustice, despite any repercussions that could happen to him.

I also do not support those who proclaim everything spiritual. Our homeland is in the sky, but it is also here on Earth. If this visible world was unnecessary, I do not think that God would have created it. It seems to me that He created it, so that we can have a place where we can freely decide for or against it. If we build our world thinking about God and according to His ideas, I believe that we will be met at the other coast with outstretched hands. Am I right?

I know, these days many questions and many troubles have been rearing over us. It is not easy to cope. However, the main question is: am I tired and am I leading the way despite everything. History and our descendants will not forgive us for cowardice and fleeing to shelter.

THAT INTOXICATING SCENT

The question of man's self-realization has also always been a question of his way of approaching reality. You had to first think about your attitude, so it could become the essence around which the whole our life rotates.

So many men and almost as many different attitudes. I will mention only two in the characters of a philosopher Diogenes and the world's person in power Alexander the Great. Together with other particularities, Diogenes spent most of his life living in a barrel. Once, Alexander the Great visited him and asked him which wish he wanted to be fulfilled. Diogenes answered: "To move out of the Sun".

Two contemporaries, two completely different attitudes. Diogenes saw life as a "game" which gave freedom, Alexander the Great saw life as something "serious" which gave superiority, power, the feeling that you can do everything.

I will mention only one person who has lately been writing a lot about the experience of life as if it were a game. A German theologian, Jürgen Moltmana. He is a mouth-piece and is followed by many unknown people. On the other side, there are many people who would like to become leaders of those who like calling themselves "serious".

This tension has been experienced in both the illusions of human living: in the social and the religious field. The essential point is "power". It attracts like an intoxicating scent and forces man to reveal himself.

People are ready to give everything in the name of power, even their lives, time and dreams. I saw many of them, and read even more about them. It seems to me that a mistake is that they experience this power as a way of healing their life traumas, a moment when they can lift

themselves above others and become free in that way. The question is still open, of course, whether this is really freedom or a way of closing oneself to the loneliness of a Being without others.

In the regions inhabited by the Croats and which are considered their homeland, historical heritage of the Turkish Empire and heritage of the Communist craziness has influenced the understanding of power. At the same time, there are two influences that each Croat would swear do not exist here. Yet they do! How could you otherwise understand the whole period we have been experiencing through the past few years. Apart from the war and the games by the world powers, what is going on with our heads and our behavior? Are we not watching our role in this responsible time only from the point how much we have lost, i.e. gained as individuals, and not as a community? Who has left us with the deep wish to cope as individuals ignoring others and our desire to rule others regardless of whether we deserve it in keeping with our natural abilities. What are our social and religious superiors like? They are frequently only "superiors". With all due respect to those who are not like that. When they cannot be justified by anything else, then these "superiors" act in the name of the law. In that name they preach love, brotherhood, forgiveness, freedom, democracy, a free market... They condemn in the name of the law and they never apologize for their wrong judgment. And when all this is connected with the Turkish and Communist heritage we have: *disorder*.

With these thoughts in my head I remember what Jesus said one day: "Whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: and whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. " (Mk 10, 44-45).

ON THE BRINK OF IT ALL

He was looking with his eyes wide open. There was no radio, no television, no newspapers, no disco, no cigarettes, ... Nothing! Just work and prayer, prayer and work. And lots of, lots of time. They told him he could be cured if he wanted to. They had been in his shoes. They knew what it meant to be on the brink. They were different now. They again came in contact with something that is called life.

It all started foolishly in his life. He always wanted to be free. Early on he came to the conclusion that no laws, no rules should be obeyed. His parents spoke about matters, which had been out of date for a long time now. School is only to capture the mind. He dreamt of a society in which you can truly live freely. He hated the lies, the hypocrisy. He wished for a society of pure love. He searched for people similar to him and he found them. There was not a great deal of them, but they shared his opinion. One day someone brought him a cure for all his disappointments. A drug! While you are high, you are free from everything and you float in the beautiful clouds. Unfortunately, those first feelings were soon lost. He realized that something was wrong, but who could think about it.

The war started soon. He joined voluntarily driven by his patriotism. He was accepted. He was given a rifle. With it, it seemed as if he had completely broken any connection with the world that had surrounded him before. It seemed to him that he was completely free. The smell of the battlefield did not scare him. For him, it was important to dream and create a new world.

At that time a beautiful girl appeared from somewhere. Everyone was crazy about her. She acted as if she cared about each of them. They went to places where she was. They found a better drug there. It was more ex-

pensive, but they could find the money. How, was not important. They who spent more could be closer to the girl. They spent days being crazily driven by the beauty and the drugs. Much later, at the end of the road, he learned that the girl had not been using drugs at all and that she had not loved any of them. But, it was already too late.

Now, he was faced with a decision. He had nowhere else to go. He did not feel like going home, the army expelled him from its ranks. He was sorry at first. He talked to his commander. The commander did not treat him with indulgence. He confessed everything to his face. He put up with that, for he knew what he was doing. He only could not bear to go with "the game". He forgave the girl, but he could not forgive those who were at the bottom of it all. He understood that they had destroyed him and the girl and other similar people. The commander energetically told him that their turn would come. Something had already been done about it. At the moment they had powerful protectors, but their position was already shaky. He also told him to remember that our fight was not only against the enemy, but also against these people.

One day quite by accident he saw the light. He did not have any drugs yet he needed them. His previous friends did not want to give it to him free of charge. They turned him away like a dog. He was hurt. He had strong feelings of pride. It was this day when the thought first appeared in his brain: to cure himself. Then he looked at his life in a new light. The next days he found money and pretended to be like he was, carefully observing events. He connected words and faces. He understood "the game". He felt sick. He found out their names. The true actors. Many people who were not involved them, already knew this. But he did not.

The sun shone upon him. He watched some boys working. He could be like them if he wanted to. God, how it hurts, "if he wanted to": He could have children one day, a place in society, like his commander whom he remembered. He could again learn to pray and turn to God and return to the girlfriend he had left behind. He heard that she still loved him and that she had not found anybody else. Some time ago, she tried to pull him out of it

all. He left her when he found a new beauty and new friends in the smoke of gunpowder. Now he could improve everything. Yes, he can really do that.

The boys had finished their work. They went to pray. A young man, a Croatian man was making a decision. Somewhere far away, on the brink of it all.

A POEM TO CLOSENESS

I can remember that day quite well. Shots were fired in my homeland. A bloody war. The fears had come true. It had happened.

At that time I was in a worldly town which had twice as many inhabitants as my homeland Croatia. I came there by accident like many other times before. A short-wave radio was my faithful fellow-traveler. I spent an hour in the evening, together with some others, listening to the news through various noises and interference. Until then, the only news we could obtain was on TV and in a foreign language.

Deep in my heart I was touched by all I heard. I tortured myself trying to find a solution about what to do with myself. My country was on fire and I had to decide. Then, my life was planned for at least several years, I had tasks that had to be done. I paced up and down the room for fifteen days. Fifteen difficult days. I listened to the reason in my heart and the reason in my head. I tried to reconcile them. I made a decision.

While I listened to the news, it seemed that the shots were reaching me. I asked myself what would I do if I was "there"? I really did not know. I was taught and I taught others that human life should be respected. But, this was war and they were shooting at us! I really did not know! Suddenly, there was news of the death of several of our police officers. They were killed in an ambush, coldly, in a place where the war had only just started. At that moment, everything was clear to me. I was ready to be a soldier in the full sense of the word. God, how magnificent and how foolish!

Later, when I analyzed that particular moment, I realized that it resulted in me due to something else: a greater need for closeness. The soul wanted to defend it-

self. It did not allow me to put it aside and take it up in a few years or perhaps never again. It needed the closeness to calm down, to rest, to see clearly what it should do. You cannot go to war with a cold heart and soul and a hothead. You go to war with a red-hot heart and soul and a cold head. War is the serious side of reality.

I do not assume that I know what closeness is. I have been collecting its fragments all my life and am still doing so. Now I am doing it much faster, as there is a lot of darkness, which wants to alienate me. When all this ends, I would like to see as much closeness as possible. It is like an olive-tree. You have to plant it, gently care for it for some time and after that it becomes almost indestructible. Frequently, it fights its way up through life despite the unfavorable weather and people.

Closeness to whom? I would say to many people and each individual. Closeness is an impenetrable armor of the soul. It opens only to known and dear ones. Who that is, is the responsibility of each person. We only know that it is manifold. When we are near someone, it is gathered in one unique closeness to someone. If we are close to someone, we are close to certain people. It has many forms, but only one face. They who forget this, forget themselves, too.

All the people that we say are worthy of something in life, do so for the sake of closeness. In one moment of their life they felt such enthusiasm and gave themselves to it. It returned with our faith in life and readiness to give everything for real things. In that way you became simultaneously immensely gentle and immensely harsh. It depends on your need.

The guns are still roaring. I am a soldier for my people in my own way. I am trying to compose a poem about closeness.

THE JOURNEY "THERE"

Police officers and I are in the same vehicle. Once, we could not put up with each other. But, times are different, and the police officers are different.

The regions pass by. Our areas are ravaged by war. Nothing unusual. I have already been here. At one moment there was a sudden hold up, an armed escort joined us and police officers with different insignia greeted us. We entered the area under their control. Now, all of us in the vehicle were the guilty ones. Each in his own way, more or less. The same goes for their people on our side. In this way, justice has been done, a balance has been struck. I could not think about what would happen if something suddenly changed during our journey, if one of ours attacked or even theirs in mere rage or anger. I consciously went on this journey and only when it ended did I have the right to ask myself what would have happened if such and such had happened.

I allowed myself to review the purpose of this journey. My people are there where we are going. It does not matter that I have never been there. I just never happened to go in that direction. But I have read and listened about the history of these regions and knew that they were mine, too. If someone was to take them away, he would take them from me. When they cry, I cry too, when they laugh, I laugh, too. They were called central Bosnia. We know from everyday life that life is always in the center of everything. If it is destroyed, everything else is in danger. Now I know why I was shaking when I listened to the news on the radio and when I, unfortunately, still have to listen. I remembered the names of the new places, some hills, villages, lawns... The areas and I knew well long before we saw each other. But, it had always been "there". Today, I was on my way "there".

We were met in a friendly way. A report by the commander, speeches, cutting the ribbon at the opening of the new police station, prayer, celebration. I tried to see the section of the town, which had been on the news. It was here. From there our people were shot at by snipers, shells, bombs. Traces can still be seen, though a lot of effort was put to repair the damages. Everything was so close, yet still so far. Someone conceived this and it had to happen. I do not think that his children were killed here. That is how it happens in life. The real culprits are usually far away. I console myself that they cannot be saved by this. Consciousness speaks in silence and asks what you had done. I want to give it a satisfactory answer.

We passed by the houses for which fierce battles were waged. At first sight, they seemed insignificant. Traces of the war were present as anywhere else. But people were dying here mercilessly. The best of our and their soldiers. We visited room by room, house by house. Each of them had a great role in a bloody game. I prayed for those who died here and in the silence of my heart I thanked them sincerely. They defended my freedom as well. Words were not necessary. Real love is experienced in silence.

We again passed the area under foreign supervision. Vehicles passed us by very quickly. Just in case. We come to an agonized town. Battles were waged for each house. Mercilessly. I met one of the town's defenders. Once, at the beginning of the war, he lined up with his friends, volunteers. Today, there is on-one in that line except him. But, he will not give up. He goes on. Nothing is over yet. He says he is not used to speeches. He prefers working. I believe him completely. People like this cannot lie. They can love. To them, love is not a time for quick and making fortunes. For them, war is a time when you defend your own at any cost.

I again listened to stories about the work of police officers. There are difficulties, but they are ready to turn over a new leaf. Crime, drugs... should not be the inhabitants. When they say that, I feel they really mean it. I only wonder, how much they will be supported in that? Will they be supported equally by those who have power, as

well as by the crowd who seems to be without power. It frequently happens that each person looks for his own interest. And justice is the only thin which is both equal for those who have power and those who are at the bottom of the social scale.

The determination to be different, to be real, is seen in the crosses that are on the walls of the police stations. It is not mentioned anywhere that these crosses have to be there. They were put there as a result of personal inspiration of the people who work here. The faith in these areas proves that. We learn from history that it was never easy for them. But, they have always known how to remain on top, to keep their faith and their Croatianism. They called their priest, friar, uncle, a part of the family. In this way, the unbreakable bond between faith and life has been formed and it still lasts today.

Our visit was charged by people on the social scene. I did not say politicians on purpose, as this sounds bad like a remnant of previous times. They told the people they were with them. Why would they not be? These people invented them, sons of these people defended them and let them take power. Therefore, their actions should be according to the justified needs of these people. The more they recognize that, the more the people will love them. There are no more times when those who have power are the masters. Today, they who have power should be servants to those who gave them that power, they should thank them for the honor.

During our return, a close encounter with the soldiers of the other army. We bravely approached them and asked them for directions. They showed us the way without unnecessary words. We came to the bridge that should be open today. They did not let us proceed. There was something tense is in the air. We were told that the governor of the town, of foreign origin, does not want the bridge to be open. He wants two ordinary flags to be taken from the bridge. Our flags on our bridge. A hundred meters away, a foreign flag was flying on our destroyed church. The governor of the town did not demand it be taken down. What an enchanting sense of justice!

However, the bridge was opened. The people opened it without unnecessary speeches, with a blessing and a prayer by the priest. I do not know what the governor did then. If he had gone on a journey with us "there", maybe he would have understood something. He would have understood that a journey "there" did not mean propaganda, the realization of a personal idea, but it also meant serving the truth. That truth is not the cold realization of reality or in technical terms "real-politics". That truth is the good that is being looked for and propagated without any other second thoughts.

TO RESURRECT

I was sitting with my friends drinking coffee. They had experienced many battlefields and survived many battles. They were telling me their stories while the afternoon was entering their souls. Fortunately, the war had not particularly affected them. They laughed as they once used to, they were capable of making decisions, to be ready to help others. You could even say that they had become more serious and conscious of the events around them.

"They've done something stupid again" – said one of them. I was surprised. "Were there some heavy shots" - I asked watching my friend. "They took a man's car and beat him" - my friend went on. I understood. They were in action again. Who were they? An interesting question which cannot be answered easily. Or can it? It depends on the degree of courage that you have.

It really is not important to know their names immediately. It is much more important to recognize the way they work, the way they think. Later, the names appear themselves.

In simple words, their worldly wisdom was to love yourself. They were ready to give everything up just to satisfy their pleasure, power, glory. They bowed to evil without thinking about the consequences. They forget that Jesus denounced all this with one wave of his hand 2000 years ago. The devil tempted him with it, but he resisted. He preferred going his own honest and sincere way.

When today, people like this say they are Christians, they lie. How can a Christian be someone who steals, sells drugs, organizes gambling, prostitution...? No, he is not a Christian. Let him answer himself what he is. He should do this as soon as possible, as this will be the only way to seize the opportunity to return to normality

and to clear his name. The more he stays where he is, the more difficult it will be to return. The name that is given to each of us so that people can recognize us as good and noble, becomes a name which is pronounced as something dirty. What a misunderstanding of life!

Sometimes they try to justify themselves unbearably easily. They shout about their war credits. You can even read where they were during the war, in the newspapers. You can even read that the enemy was afraid of them. They "were responsible for such and such", they helped our boot to gain back such and such an area. Who had the right now to tell them anything?

They have forgotten something though. Nobody needs those who fight to be someone's masters even at the cost of their own lives. What do we need such people for? To give someone freedom does not mean to capture them. To give someone freedom means to become their friend, to free them from any kind of fear. They who act like that will be recorded in history forever.

Wartime is not a period when you can do what you want. Wartime is a period when all together we purify ourselves. We go through torture like Jesus did. Some people yell that we should be crucified. There are some who expect that we have to and can be persistent. Others are disappointed with us, others are... Everything is intermingled: hate and love, beauty and ugliness, trouble and relief. The war leads us to ourselves. We cannot hide anymore, we have to look at each other face to face. What is the response we give?

Let us remember Jesus. He was not conquered by evil. He resurrected. He tread on his path of life with his head high. And he could avoid evil. He needed only to have listened to Judas, later to be his traitor. This man told him about reality, taking him away from thoughts about what had to come. Jesus remained deaf and dumb to that speech. That is why he was resurrected.

Can they who have forgotten the story of Jesus be resurrected? Yes, if they once again listen to their hearts. It will tell them that it is possible to wage war and not to lose your soul. True fighters are those fighters who fight with their soul rather than fighters who have turned into

machines. They will not be injured or killed. Their body may be injured or killed, but their person will be untouched. They will be spoken about from generation to generation in the warmth of Croatian homes. The enemy will not like them, but will remember them with respect and envy.

I was watching my friends and wanted them to remain like this forever. One of us paid the bill. Somewhere up in the hills the homeland had to be defended. It does not matter if it was snowing or cold. The only thing that matters is to be resurrected both as an individual and as a nation. This cannot happen without persistently dealing with both the good and bad. Only in this way can you break the cold stone of history.

THE UNFINISHED TEXT

We were already coming out of the town. The last houses behind us. Suddenly, a terrible bang somewhere close behind us. We knew we were faster this time and smiled with satisfaction. The shell had not hit us. Death rushed past us like wild horses.

The whole day was filled with a strange smell, the smell of death. Early in the morning we went to visit our soldiers at the front-line, the front-line which was focussed on all the TV and radio scoops that day. The newspapers we had written that our soldiers had advanced the day before. Advanced, this echoed in my ears. I could not have concluded this looking at the poppy fields by the roadside. Or could I? Who knows? They were growing, red and smiling at the mountains and hills liberated by our people in this area. They remember the boots of the foreign soldiers, the shells that have not stopped falling. They remember and grow watching our everyday Russian roulette.

We found our soldiers. The sign that brought us to them was a church hit by a shell and the Croatian flag waving in the wind. As soon as we sat in the nearby town, several shells of the highest caliber exploded. Our soldiers returned. A duel continued above our heads for several minutes. Mercilessly. Intensely. Later we heard it went in our favor. A soldier was killed in the center of the town, another was wounded. They had already experienced so much. A shell found them when they least expected it. We were not interested then what happened on the other side.

We left this peaceful area (now I think that way) and went on. Somewhere up in the mountains, our soldiers were fighting. Traces of recent battles and if for a

while, we forget what has been happening, a beautiful landscape surrounded us. We tried to see where they had been shooting from at our soldiers. They did not need this. Drunk with myths and godlessness, they could not recognize the signs of the time. They built a world of illusions inside themselves, a world which destroys them the more they believe in it. The way out is certainly not in the sentence: "I am not guilty, I was mobilized", but in breaking the unrealistic world of theirs. When will they realize?

I met a friend. Exhaustion and indomitability can be seen in his eyes. Last night he was leading his people, our people. They liberated a clearing where the enemy tanks had quickly moved in, shot our soldiers and hid again. All our soldiers returned safe and sound from that night visit. That tank did not go cruising any more. Its flirting with death stopped.

There was a change in shifts. Young boys with their packs on their backs went to a thick forest. I knew some of them. We had met on other battlefields. They were as brave then as they are today. They did not have to do all this. They had the means and contacts to choose an easy way out of this mess. Yet, they did not. They would not have been able to look themselves in the eye.

You could see them today and maybe never again. This forest was the front-line. Evil. It was impossible to determine the line and control it. This would not be possible until the enemy was chased away from the forest. Until then...

All this was passing through my head when we were leaving the town. The people around were looking where the shell had fallen. We did not. What for? I only wanted to get out of the vehicle and chase away all those who were spying on our houses or better still to send them to the front-line. I do not appreciate voyeurs.

We took a young soldier in our vehicle. Without the uniform he would have just been an ordinary boy from one of our streets. He had fought everywhere and seen many things. He was going to have a rest in the barracks as he did not have anyone at home. He said that

they were ready for some action. He spoke about that as if it was an ordinary game.

I could not tell him anything, just like I cannot say anything to anyone while I am writing these words. All I have is unfinished text.

THE RETURN TO THE ROOTS

I do not know nor am I really interested if I started writing more by accident especially during those times when some hotheads, in our former common country (not homeland) wanted to completely capture our mind completely. They were shouted frantically about their rights and our faults. According to them, everything should have ended with us finally becoming obedient and calm, without questioning our freedom and rights. A rich, well-fed, "freedom-loving" world gave them this right. The present could begin, as could the "wise" discussions of the conceited master minds in the mass-media.

Thank God, they did not succeed. We dared, and managed to break the strength of our bonds.

While writing, I so many times, wanted to write about the difficulties, which other writers in the West wrote about. Why should I be an exception? The West was the area of my civilization, no matter how that sounded. I do not think however, it is the only area worthy of human living. I was lucky to have seen other regions, and to conclude from my experience that any area is worth of human living when we make it that way. I was born in the West by accident and I spent my childhood there by accident. That coincidence intentionally became my reality.

Sometimes I think about the coming of that West to my personal spiritual world. I always then remember the dazzle of all the technology, the hamburgers the people who eat so fast, alone and not speaking to others, and in the end a sip of Coca Cola, which by the way, you have no idea nor want to have about what it is made of. Some other western characteristics could be mentioned, but I think that these are quite enough to take us to that complicated and fragile world.

This cut out image of the world is supported by mass media. They interpret that world trying to characterize it seriously even when this world mocks ordinary human seriousness. Freedom should be the result above all. Even numerous institutions have been established which make sure that this it is taken into consideration. Many associations have been established, individuals recruited. A lot of money started circling through this newly established world. Freedom, was shouted everywhere. Freedom in the name of man, Marx, secret societies,..., but not freedom in the name of God. They have been trying to expel him from this world.

Why is this serious circus going on, while the so-called developing world is still starving. What is even worse, they who shout about the misfortune and needs of that world make their fortune from it. While each of them takes from some of the material goods given to the developing world for themselves and very little is left for this very world. It is even worse when these people are intentionally kept at this developing state, so that others can live in luxury.

Am I exaggerating maybe? Maybe, but why has the western world been left without humanity? This question is enough.

The developed Western world is not free. Shouts about peace and prosperity are in vain. Its mind is captured. It stopped being able to recognize and support justice. Not only ours, but all around the world. There have been other wars, apart from ours, but even then the world did not act properly. The truth is that not enough is known today. The same world wrote the history books. Do we expect it to speak against itself?

Once, we longed for that West more than today. We were deceived by its beautiful words, programs on the radio that we listened to in spite of threats of prison. We expected that they would do what they had promised. But they just promised and laughed at us and that we could be so kind-hearted and actually believe them.

Now, it would be wrong to say that we could and wanted to live without that West. Why would we do that? We are part of it Christianity, which is in our heart so

much, is the foundation of that West. Together we have to find it and get rid of the captivity of our mind. Let us realize that we too are captured, and not only they.

Communism trampled us for years and threw mud at us. Some of it is still on us and it strengthened our previous captivity. I would just like to mention one unusual captivity. Our language. In a previous century we unwisely flew into this slavery. When we decided about the way our people would speak, we chose a language, which could bring us closer to the people living near us. We chose it, and made a tragic mistake. We forgot that if we could not appreciate what is ours, the others would not do so either.

Our linguists persist in these mistakes. They justify themselves by saying that it is difficult to go back, even though we made a mistake. I have nothing to tell them. I just turn to my people.

In this war my people knew how to think about themselves and let their soul speak. It returned them to their roots and has not connected them to the West or its personal captivity. It connected them to goodness.

A LETTER ABOUT SPIRITUALITY

Tons and tons of books were written, thousand and thousand words were spoken about spirituality. What is this though? I could perhaps find certain learned books and say, this is it. I will not though. It is not that important to give a learned answer, but to answer the question personally.

From my knowledge of books and my thoughts I personally conclude that spirituality is a life that consists of experience and knowledge. Both these poles are important. If one of them is excluded, a healthy balance is destroyed.

When I say life, I do not mean only the life of us Christians, but life in general. Each of us has his own kind of spirituality, whether we want it or not. The effort to destroy another spirituality is again spirituality.

It would be difficult to determine what kind of spirituality we have as Croatian people at the moment. It is the truth to say that we are Christians and that most of us swear to our Christian values. But, it cannot be seen so clearly in our lives. It is not a coincidence that, at the moment, we do not have a strong democratic party. This Christian spirituality failed somewhere. It did not succeed in imposing itself as a strong and determining factor, but was lost in various forms.

If we wanted to determine which wider society we belong to, difficulties would again arise. Are we in the East or in the West? Each of us has his own answer, but I think that the majority would like to say that we are in the West. But, now the question is what is the West and what is the East? Let us forget about learned opinions, which we do not even know where they came from. What is the West and what is the East really?

It seems to me that we are now living the spirituality of transition or success. An entire empire collapsed, our empire of darkness called Communism. In my homeland might and force was used to try and resist this collapse. But, it had, i.e. Communism, to leave the history of my people.

We were used to it, whether we want to admit it or not. Each of us in his own way. Some supported it, some adapted to it, some fought against it. Today almost nobody needs it. There is room for something new. Just what is new depends on us. We are in transition and we have to succeed. Defeat would not only be another bad moment in our life, but just that: defeat, destruction. We would only be mentioned in dusty history books.

To prevent this, we all together have to live out this spirituality which will strengthen us and lead us to success. In difficult and demanding moments it is the light which offers us the real way out. Then, there is usually not much time for thinking. We support what we have already accepted.

The police are one of the important factors of this new spirituality. Is this statement too courageous? What do they have to do with the realization of this spirituality?

We have to stop thinking of our police officers as obedient servants of an odious social order. Today, they are here as an expression of our consciousness and our spirituality. Their role is to help us preserve this spirituality from all those who are still not quite aware that even in these blurred moments it is better to be prepared for better times. Sometimes, they will use "a whip". Let us not forget that Jesus did not run away from. When he could not bring reason to those greedy merchants in the Temple with kind words, he did it with a whip and upturning of tables.

A police officer himself will try to justify the expectation of his people by his own life and work. He will experience his everyday life and draw conclusions out of it. He will not be bribed by anyone, not by the tycoons of this world like Soroš, who offer money and demand obedience in return. It will never occur to him to realize his personal ideas, but the ideas of us all.

Also, he will not neglect his knowledge. He will develop it in order to build himself as an integral personality. Knowledge completes our experience and helps us to draw what is valuable from that experience.

Yes, I know, this speech sounds like cheap propaganda, moralizing. Maybe. But, tell me what kind of police officer would you like, what kind of your personal life, what kind of spirituality?

THE RAINS AND US

Night was falling accompanied by heavy rain in the Croatian land, our country. I was listening to its pounding on the roof. I wondered how many rains have pounded my country and left its traces? And what kind of rains?

Recently, I was watching a man who was fighting for our freedom. He did it honorably and successfully. Suddenly, some people from abroad said he was not honorable and they mentioned some far fetched points. Like, he could have stopped everything if he wanted to. God, what corruption! As if we could not recall the beginning of this evil and our understandable conviction that all those who regarded themselves as democrats will recognize and stop the evil. This did not happen. On the contrary, they let the evil spread. Today, they tell those who resisted, that they, could have stopped it and that everyone was equally guilty. God!

The rain is pounding on my people, like the years in Bleiburg, in... The rain of evil. We have to cope and cannot let it scatter us around like the wind that scatters autumn leaves around. We live in spite of everything. Let us have strength for that.

In good and peaceful times you can put up with all the blows a lot easier. Everything is predictable and follows its natural course. It seems to you that difficult times belonging on the TV, something that is apparently present.

However, stormy times demand that man constantly takes sides and frequently walks on the brink of ruin. To remain straight in these circumstances in one word means to experience what responsibility is.

The question is now: whose responsibility. It depends on the times themselves. For us today, this would

mean our homeland and religion. They are both in danger and they have been destroyed in many ways. We have to keep them and pass them on to our future generations. Any other way of thinking is pure selfishness. One day, when all this ends, it will be pointless to regret and say: if I had only known. Everything will be over then. You have to respond to your duties today, no matter how difficult they may be.

While we are taking the effort in honor of our homeland and religion, it does not matter in which part of this Earth we are. We are all one when we want to belong to a certain community. To deny that community at any time means to deny yourself. And it is not worth it. Your then, become a human ruin, a man without roots who is thrown back and forth by the winds.

The Western selfish way of thinking will certainly attack us because of this: what homeland, what religion, they will say. While they say this, they are completely protected by their already established homeland and religion (lack of religion is also a form of religion where man believes in nothing.) Others will ask why are we not like them and live peacefully, intentionally forgetting that things just have to be that way. Yet again others ... But, what does it matter?

We have to reject all wrong opinions. We are sufficiently strong people who can endure all difficulties. If we were not, we would not have survived until the present day, considering our historical darkness and the rains. We were even expatriated, scattered around the Earth, but we have not expatriated ourselves. We celebrate and live in our usual Croatian way.

I say that there is only one condition that is to have self-consciousness. This does not mean not to want to learn something from others. Self-consciousness is the ability to love your own and to love that, which belongs to others. To exclude one or the other, leads us in the wrong direction.

Many rains will pass before we become a people who live only in their homeland. But these rains must not destroy us. They can fall and nothing else. Let us recognize them and conquer them with our own dignity.

OUR CHRISTMAS

Even when we were small children, Christmas feast days meant joy for us. However, we could not understand why we had to go to school on Christmas Day, why they who educated us spoke against that joy. We understood well though, when our parents told us clearly that we could stay at home on that day and that they would excuse us at school. Something like that had not happened before. When we were growing up, that day was still a great joy to us. We celebrated it with all our hearts in spite of the danger, not thinking about the consequences. We thought about it the next day.

Today, we celebrate Christmas in different circumstances. We can say who we are loudly and clearly. However, more than ever before, we resemble our Savior in the desert cave. We shiver with cold, we haven't made a strong stride in life and they would like to destroy us. Dangerous clouds hang over us. They look horrible.

In those moments when the dawn of our freedom was born, some people did not offer us their hand. They shouted that they supported the rights of every man, but they were not for our rights then, even though we are men, too. They closed their eyes, they closed their ears and constantly shouted that they could not understand what was going on here. Anyway, it did not stop them from making decisions and making us obey them without any objection. They counted on our weakness, disappointment, anger. That way they tried to denounce us and push us with our backs to the wall. We were simply in their way.

Today, we see that they have not succeeded. We conquered them because we realized who they were. They were those who, under the guise of the struggle for human rights, struggled for their own selfishness and their own loss. We can find them in all walks of human life.

They are easily recognized in the field of culture, as culture reflects the condition of the human spirit like a mirror. They are full of words, ideas, yet none of these things can be understood. On the contrary, they say that it is wrong to try to understand anything. A painting, a statue, a poem, a novel... require thousands and thousands of interpretations. They are then great works. The emptiness of the soul who painted a painting, created a statue, wrote a poem, a novel... is behind this attitude. He simply does not have to say anything and that is why he escapes into incomprehension. If it was nice and good it would not have to be hidden. All beauty is obvious. Its incomprehension can be found only in the fact that it is up to us and how we will succeed in placing it in ourselves. If we are closed, we will certainly not succeed in doing that.

The wrong attitude to life is to be afraid of such people. It does not matter if they jump about and rage. We can and we have to conquer them. They will try to deceive us with the mass media and in various other ways. Do not let them. We recognize them these days and we remember that. They considered the attacker and the victim impudently and insolently equal. They are not interested in justice and good. And that is their weakest point. Each person who tramples human and divine values, will be punished. They will be punished either by God or history, depending on whether we believe or not.

We who believe, know what we have to do. We have always known. Faith is the strength that gives us two important qualities in life: strength and tenderness. Strength is necessary to resist all outside difficulties, to be able to resist when evil starts attacking from all sides. Tenderness is necessary to shield of our soul. It must not be hurt by anything, for it carries our life light.

Our Croatian people knew how to be strong and tender throughout history. They walked perseveringly through their Christmas feast days. And they truly experienced it. God's and our mother Mary came to us fourteen years ago. She prepared us for a mission in this world. She still speaks to us today yet it is difficult for us to believe that all this is happening to us. We are afraid of this and that. We listen to the wrong voices.

Snow is falling and invites us to be kids again. They, understand joy and forget their troubles. Our Christmas will be here, very soon. It is different from the Christmas of other peoples, nevertheless it is ours. We have the right to it, as do others. Having passed through all the difficulties of the past few years we will understand it better than they who spent their time sitting in comfortable chairs and only experienced our woes as another news item on TV. They have forgotten what it means to rot in cold trenches and have a full heart because you know that you are defending your home. They were cheated by the selfish and lost ones and they made them equal to themselves. We will not let them do the same thing to us. We know what our Christmas is.

THE WIND AND THE FLAG

He knows what a battle is. A bloody one. He gave the best years to his homeland and he is not sorry for it. He will give even more if necessary.

Today, he sat in one of our communal offices. He has been going there for three months now. At the beginning it all seemed so simple. He did not ask for anything illegal. And they knew that. However, all that time they were telling him that everything would be over soon, because after all, he was a soldier. This disturbed him. If everything was legal, why did he have privileges as a soldier. He asked them that. They looked at him absent-mindedly. And the time passed by as did his patience. He could not tolerate so many visits to achieve something that was apparently so simple, something that could be completed in just fifteen minutes.

Today, they told him to wait a little. They went for the person who was given explicit orders to finally settle his request. This after all was her job.

He looked through the window. A picture of a familiar town. The morning peak hour rush. He noticed remnants of the Turkish period in some of the buildings. Others oozed out their Austro-Hungarian heritage. Others still carried a grayness of the Yugoslav spirit, both the first and the second state. Other houses were built with money earned somewhere abroad. So much life in such a small area. He felt sick. It occurred to him that reality was so complicated.

He remembered that they were talking a lot about peace during Christmas and New Year's time. Each had the right to say something. Church people, politicians, believers and non-believers, God-fearing people and thieves, communists and honorable people... were intermingled.

Many of them did not know what a battlefield was, or what it meant to freeze for your homeland.

But, he was most disturbed by the arrival of foreign soldiers to his homeland. They arrogantly dashed in from all sides saying they were bringing peace. What has he been doing all these years? Others were here before. They did not do what they were asked to, even to the most minimal standards. But, this did not prevent them from coloring their vehicles, changing their uniforms, naming themselves differently and to continue just like before. Nobody cared that it was not fair. "Interest", world leaders would shout. They meant theirs, not ours.

Foreign soldiers came in the name of various world associations. Some of their documents say that each nation has the right to self-determination, help when it is attacked, etc., etc., etc. ... Yet all this time, these documents were not applied to our case. They first allowed evil to come out in one nation and then to attack all other peoples. Later, they did not do anything to help the victim to survive. When they realized it could succeed, they imposed peace. The lid was calculatedly and callously put on the boiling pot. Nobody wanted to even consider that this pot needed to be removed from the fire.

Now they are here. Soldiers of some other nations. But we are here as well. Our national soldiers.

The former will try to impose their values. They will tell us that they will not wage war, that they are civilized people. At the same time, they will die of drugs, alcohol, they will drown in the mud of contempt towards everyone else. They will say they are great people. How interesting. That means that we should say that our people are small. No way.

We have to oppose them, with our spirit, our self-respect, not with arms. We were not well treated by history and we have more right to existence than many others. We could survive as a nation in more difficult times. Apart from that, we are spiritually healthier than many others are. Justice has still to be done to our nation and they are still longing for it.

They will leave as did the many others who tormented us throughout history as aggressors. But, let us not be hostile towards them. Let us teach them to appreciate us and to leave as our friends. That will be our greatest victory and the defeat of all shameless policies.

He would consider many other things in his head if he was not interrupted by their arrival. People who only had to do their job were coming and everything would be settled. They were with a lady who he had known from the previous system. Just like before, she had too much make-up and her face was filled with boredom. "We have not settled your matter" - she said coldly through clenched teeth. No greeting, not a single word of excuse, nothing. It did not matter that he had been told that everything would be finished that day and that, that lady had to only sit for fifteen minutes and finish her part of the job. He had sat for hours in cold trenches for her and similar people. He faced storming gun barrels, walked through mine fields. This did not mean anything to her. He felt that feelings were stronger than he was. He could not stand it up anymore. He wanted to scream and throw everything all over the damned office and people in it. Enough with them, it was drumming in his head. It seemed they felt something, too. A hush fell. He stood up and took the first chair he could reach in his hands. It was facing the window. At that moment, the wind waved the flag, the flag he was ready to be buried under. He stood still. It was watching him. He did not want to smear it. The chair fell from his hands. "I will come again tomorrow" - he told them determinedly and went out full of dignity. They watched him speechlessly, they watched each other speechlessly.

FOGS AND A LIGHT

Since the beginning of the human race, that is, since Adam and Eve made their incautious mistake, people have been looking for the light. They are ready to give everything up for it, because they believe it belongs to the essence of their being. They are ready to give everything for it. Sometimes they make mistakes. They call the light something that it is not.

And where is the light?

An interesting question, which is difficult to answer. Maybe it isn't? It depends whether our curiosity is strong or superficial.

Let us start from the question where our Croatian people are today, how are they? It seems that the best answer is: heavy fogs have been trying to engulf them. What does it have to do with light? Do not give up! The fogs have a lot to do with the light. It is strange, but so.

The war days tempted us and they threaten to continue to do so. We are still not entirely free. Someone keeps rattling their guns, others are putting pressure on us. Everybody would like us to be the way they want us to be. Yet we are one and unique. We do not have another body, or another history apart from the one that we have.

To spite us even more, they took this piece of Earth where we have always lived away from us. They simply gave it to another neighboring nation. It did not matter that this land had never been theirs and that we were left without our home. This is a great political skill, a great contribution to peace, stability in the whole region, historical necessity..., speakers foaming at the mouth told us over the radio. Nobody asked us what we were though about it all. Yet we did have an opinion!

However, everything could have been simpler. It is well known who started the avalanche, who should be re-

turned to his frames, who should be determinedly told to keep away from something that did not belong to them. This was not done for various reasons.

The fogs wanted to cover our lives even more. They wanted us to start wandering lostly in them, to give in to them.

Have we done that?

Let us remember Jesus and his behavior. He lived justly, he helped people, he did not steal, did not kill. In one word, he was all you could want. It did not suit the authorities of that time. His compatriots firstly captured him. They said he wanted 'such and such', that he caused confusion among the people and did many other things. Foreign authorities watched it all and finished the job at a suitable time. Peace could come.

But, did it?

Having killed Jesus, the Jews then made a terrible mistake. They missed their opportunity to determine a different history for themselves. Although they hated and refused foreigners, they had allowed them to interfere in their lives. They were shrouded in fog.

Sometimes, people in our homeland do the same thing. They are not careful to keep the light of their national constructivism. Selfishness prevails over caution and reason. In such a mess it is easier to listen to the voices of those who do not wish well for our people. They first did everything against the existence of our state. While others fought, they hid in their shelters conquering power. Today, they shout at everyone else trying to hide their bad intentions. The tragedy though, is when we listen to them and decide them our vote.

Maybe this is too political? Maybe? But, is this really politics or the wish to keep your spirituality, your right to existence? When we tell someone that he ran away, that he did not help his people enough, is that politics? Let us think about it!

The fogs are thick and heavy, but they are not unconquerable. Jesus Christ teaches us this. He was killed, but he resurrected. This was conditioned by his being prepared to face his own death. Many people have done

the same for us in recent years. This was not in vain. They did this with a Rosary around their neck. It gave them the necessary light and they just passed it over to us.

Can we see the light that is inviting us and clearing our fogs?

EASTER WITHIN US

When an essay is given such a title, everything seems completely clear. It deals with Easter, it deals with us. It need not be read until the end.

In fact though, everything is unclear. What is Easter, who are we?

I do not delude myself with the thought that I can answer this question worthily. I only think that each of us should give his own reply. Are we ready for this?

There are really, so many questions, yet so few answers. But, that is life. We cannot change its order. We can only adjust ourselves to it in the right way.

One of the ways to adjust is to go the way of Easter. Jesus Christ went this way 2000 years ago. Now it is our turn, if we really want to be his disciples.

Easter does not mean to have a nicely decorated home, harmonious family, money a renown bank. Easter is that, but it also something else. It is to be able to endure, to be able to carry your own cross until the end. How many of us are ready to do that? We would rather stop at material outside wealth, at external happiness.

Our life's crosses are not the same and they will never be the same. It seems so, looking from the outside. From a personal point of view, each person finds his own cross to be the heaviest. He would like to change it for someone else's cross, This is not possible though.

It is possible to fill with the strength of our life's crosses. Then, we will resemble Jesus on Calvary who knew the strength of his cross. He consciously gave up glory and a safe life to show us the real and only way. He did not resist, but consciously did what he had to do.

There is truly no need to feel desperate because of something that has happened to you. It will only make our position in life more difficult. It is wiser to accept yourself

with your complete history and take a full part in everyday events as they are. We will suddenly discover that the world is not as black, as it seemed to us at first sight. Efforts will not be defeats, but challenges that we will be able to overcome.

Whether we want to or not, today there are many challenges before us. They say that the war is behind us. I have nothing against it. But, now, "a war" has been waged at the spiritual level. Many people want to take us under their protection. Even various cowards who did not have enough strength to act like real people in difficult times. Will we let them. Will we doubt our own intentions, which we can clearly see?

First, let us start with a prayer. Our Lady spoke about it when she said that prayer could even stop wars. Unfortunately, not enough of us prayed and that is why we have not succeeded. Will there never be enough of us to pray for a better present and future?

Spiritual renewal does not only mean to go to church to be seen. It is also our attitude towards our work, our attitude towards the society we live in. If we only take from that society and do not give anything in return, are we truly renewing it spiritually? Let us forget the times when other rules applied. Today, we have to create a better atmosphere.

Lets get carried away with Easter yet at the same time remain people, believers and members of our own nation. Let us not be ashamed of anything. Let us not listen to any lost personalities. It does not matter if perhaps they suffered once. The only thing that matters is what they are doing now.


Easter has always woken new strength in our people. It has nothing to do with spring. It has to do with the faith that is present in us as members of our nation. Winters used to be long and too long, but our interior Easter light did not go out. It brought us to the present time. Let us remember this while we wash our faces with flowers, in keeping with our old custom, and celebrate Jesus' holy entrance to Jerusalem. Then, everything was solemn, and later sad. However, Jesus won.

This essay on Easter and us did not really have to be read at the end. Life should have, should be and will have to be lived worthily, to be able to feel the Easter in us. Everything is in our hands, no matter how fragile they seem to be.

CONTENTS

PREFACE	7
IN GOD'S LIGHT	7
THE NEW ORDER.....	11
SPIRITUAL RENEWAL	14
TO PRAY FOR PEACE.....	17
FOOTPRINTS.....	21
OUR LADY'S LOOK.....	24
VISITING OUR LADY	26
SEDIMENT.....	28
A LETTER TO AN UNKNOWN PILGRIM	31
THE WAY.....	34
TO KNOW HOW TO ENDURE.....	37
GOD'S IMAGE	40
HUMAN SPEECH	45
I BELIEVE IN EUROPE	45
THE STREET OF PROTEST	48
A GAME WITH THE WRONG LIGHTS.....	51
CROSSING, BUT WHERE TO	54
THE LOST ONES.....	57
ALIENATION.....	60
THE OPINION.....	63
WHERE ARE WE GOING	65
FINDING OUR BEARINGS	53
THOSE TIMES.....	71
THE DEAD ZONE	74
A FRAME FOR THE PICTURE, A PICTURE FOR THE FRAME	76
ANA.....	79
THE "SHOT PLACE".....	82

ALL SOUL'S DAY 1993	85
THE CHOSEN PEOPLE.....	86
DESPITE EVERYTHING	89
THAT INTOXICATING SCENT	92
ON THE BRINK OF IT ALL.....	94
A POEM TO CLOSENESS	97
THE JOURNEY "THERE"	99
TO RESURRECT.....	103
THE UNFINISHED TEXT	106
THE RETURN TO THE ROOTS	109
A LETTER ABOUT SPIRITUALITY	112
THE RAINS AND US.....	115
OUR CHRISTMAS.....	117
THE WIND AND THE FLAG.....	120
FOGS AND A LIGHT.....	123
EASTER WITHIN US	126



Published by
K. Krešimir
HR - 10000 Zagreb, Vatrogasna 15

For the publisher
MARICA KORDIĆ, M.A.

Tisak: A. ŠENOVA d.d., Zagreb

Works in Croatian:

- "With St. Claire" (Translation, 1993)
- "Despite Everything" (Poems, 1994)
- "Those Times" (Essays, 1995)
- "A Poem to Closeness" (Poems, 1995)
- "A Drop" (Poems, 1997)
- "Miraculous Days" (A picture-book, in print)
- "My Prayerbook" (A picture-book, in print)
- "A Tale of Susan" (A picture-book, in print)
- "The Queen of Peace" (A picture-book, in print)

From the start he attracted the attention of literary critics and readers and his works have been translated in various languages.

With a philosophical reliance on the Bible, with concrete impulses coming from the reality of life and actual everyday political events, this author expresses his reflections in a dense form, with intense sentences and impressive expressions.

Simple and direct, thoughtfully clear and emotionally condensed, with sentences full of enthusiasm and wisdom, this book will certainly perform the grand task in the spiritual life of readers to whom it was dedicated to.

Dubravko Jelčić, a writer and an academic

In the form of short records, which can be taken in the form of an essay - a poem in prose, the author considers certain impulses, with clearly defined messages for readers. These messages are always consciously optimistic, with open possibilities for good. Our active participation, decisions, choices, attitude - depend on us only.

Krešimir Šego, a writer

Fr. Miljenko reacts quickly, but cautiously to the everyday political events, as a constant landmark, a compass through the wasteland of a destroyed reality using Biblical-philosophical guidelines, which help us to understand, and to accept, to conquer the time of evil by the strength of the spirit.

Vesna Zovko, a writer

ISBN 953626457-9



9 789536 264575