

August 11. 1995

His Eminence
Angelo Cardinal Sodano
Secretary of State
Palazzo Apostolico Vaticano
FAX 69.88.52.55 -- first of 3 pages

Dear Cardinal Sodano,
Your Eminence,

Christ's Peace!

Please excuse my presumption in writing to you so directly. My long experience of dealing with Cardinal Laghi, while he represented the Holy See in the United States and I was mediating very directly in Middle Eastern and Northern Irish conflict situations, emboldens me to do so.

As the Croatian military forces regain control of the Krajina area, it seems to me that a critical moment occurs in the whole conflict in the former Yugoslavia, and one that creates an opportunity for the Catholic community, both the Catholics of Croatia and their fellows in other parts of the world, to make a significant contribution to the peace.

This war has been characterized by the expulsion of civilian populations from their ancestral homelands, with much brutality and frequent outright massacres. Bosnians, especially Muslims but also Catholics of Croatian ethnicity, have been the principal victims, but in the Krajina, previously a mixed area where roughly equal numbers of Croatian Catholics and Serbian Orthodox lived side by side for centuries, practically the whole Croatian population suffered this fate

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in 1991. Now they are returning, and the Serbian population native to the area is in terrified flight.

What can break the cycle of violence and retribution? If at this point the Croats were to act with great generosity toward the Serbs who have, for centuries, been their neighbors, inviting and welcoming this civilian population back to their homes and, by carefully planned policy, making it practically feasible for them to return, the entire character of this war could be changed decisively. To do this would be strikingly in keeping with their profession of Catholic faith, a response in the loving forgiveness of Christ to the terrible suffering even of those who have most offended them.

I know how much this asks of the Croatian Catholic people. It would call for great resolve and resources of faith. The gravity of the times requires greatness in faith from these afflicted people. I address this to you because I think the Croats could be helped definitively to see this as their right course, and to follow it, by exhortation from the Holy See, and by such clear leadership from their own hierarchy and clergy, with the support of Catholics elsewhere in the world, as could best be organized from the Holy See.

Would this, at a practical level, be tilting at windmills? I think not, despite the many difficulties that would stand in the way of persuading Croatian leadership to adopt such a policy, or the Serbs to respond to it.

The Serbs of Croatia have been severely shocked by the bombing and shelling of their cities, and the harassment of refugee columns as they fled the land. The immediate fear of their military joining with the Bosnian Serbs in the ravaging of Muslims and Catholics in that area seems to have passed, as the refugees have moved on into Serbia, their military mostly disarmed.

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But these people now face relocation in Kosovo: settlement in another situation of disputing the land with, this time, an Albanian population, thereby spreading the conflict still more widely and themselves living with further tragedy. They are already disillusioned with the actions of Serbian government, even though for the bad reason that they wanted Serbian military help to defeat the Croatian advance. They can be expected to understand the new dangers they face.

It would take great effort by the Croatian people and government to convince them that they could safely return to their ancestral homes, to live in peace with their old Croatian neighbors. But this is the one development that would really transform the situation, not only for themselves but for the other peoples of the former Yugoslavia, and make their eventual reconciliation a credible possibility.

This is the Catholic moment of this terrible war. I believe that, with a response worthy of Catholic faith, it could be made a moment of healing and hope, and of great spiritual growth for all these peoples, Catholic, Orthodox Christian and Muslim alike.

I write this with much deference, and prayerful good wishes,

in Christ,

Raymond G. Helmick, S.J.

Cc: His Eminence, Pio Cardinal Laghi
Very Rev. Fr. General Peter Hans Kolvenbach, S.J.
His Eminence, Bernard Cardinal Law

August 11, 1995

Very Reverend Fr. General
Peter Hans Kolvenbach, S.J.
Curia Generalizia S.J.
Borgo S. Spirito, 4, 00193 Roma
FAX 011-39-6-686-8214 -- first of 4 pages

Dear Father General,

Christ's Peace!

Having just sent the accompanying FAX message to Cardinal Sodano, in the matter of Croatia, I thought I should put it before you for your information.

After all the mediating intervention I have done, and still do, in the Middle East, Northern Ireland and elsewhere, as you will likely recall from my several stays with you in 1986, and mindful of the generous help I always had from then Archbishop Pio Laghi when he was Pro-nuncio in the U.S., I have sent a copy of this to him also.

Hoping for your approval of the line I have taken, I would be grateful if you could help see that this message gets through to the right quarters.

With prayerful best wishes in Christ,

Raymond G. Helmick, S.J.

August 11, 1995

His Eminence,
Pio Cardinal Laghi
Congregation for Catholic Education
Palazzo delle Congregazioni
00193 Roma, Piazza Pio XII
FAX 011-39-6-69-88-41-72 -- first of 4 pages

Dear Cardinal Laghi,
Your Eminence,

Christ's Peace!

I have just sent the attached message to Cardinal Sodano, hoping it might be of some use in what I see as a very fleeting moment in which Catholic intervention could be truly helpful in healing the catastrophe of what was once Yugoslavia.

Once I had drawn the conclusions I spell out there, I gave much thought to how I could best communicate them. I decided, with some helpful advice from my brother, on writing directly to Cardinal Sodano. Because I don't expect him to have any idea who I am, I took the liberty of referring to you, remembering the most generous way you always helped me with Middle Eastern and other peace efforts when you were here in the United States. I would be grateful if you would confirm to Cardinal Sodano that I'm not just some nut.

Best wishes, in Christ,

Raymond G. Helmick, S.J.

August 11, 1995

His Eminence
Bernard Cardinal Law
Archbishop of Boston
2101 Commonwealth Avenue
Brighton, MA 02165

Dear Cardinal Law,

Christ's Peace!

Enclosed is a copy of a letter I just sent by FAX to Cardinal Sodano about the new situation created in what used to be Yugoslavia by the Croats. With it are the covering letters with which I FAXed copies to Cardinal Laghi and Father Kolvenbach.

I was anxious to get this idea through to the right level quickly, because I think it is only for a very brief moment that there will be the opportunity for a really significant move by Church leadership to make a definitive healing difference in this war. I thought of trying to put it into some sort of media appeal, Opened or whatever, but didn't think public exhortations to the Holy See or Croatian Catholics and their hierarchy were a very proper way to go about it, or that I could even get through in any serious way to Croatian opinion. Writing to Cardinal Sodano was Bill's suggestion, for which I was grateful, as were also the copies to Cardinal Laghi and Father Kolvenbach. I have to suppose that, for Cardinal Sodano, I'm someone he's never heard of. Especially in August, when everyone's away from Rome, I thought I needed some help in seeing that the message got through. If you can help in any way yourself, assuming you agree with what I've written, I'd be very grateful.

All my best wishes for you,

in Christ,

Ray Helmick, S.J.