

# PECOB'S VOLUMES

*Pro Aris et Focis:  
the Roman Catholic Church and the Independent  
State of Croatia*

*Haris Avdic Pejicic*

Master of Arts MIREES  
Interdisciplinary Research and Studies on Eastern Europe

AWARDED MASTER THESIS

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***Pro Aris et Focis:  
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Interdisciplinary Research and Studies on Eastern Europe

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## FOREWORD

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All members of the MIREES, MAiA and IECOB network congratulate the authors on their achievements.

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*Programme Director,  
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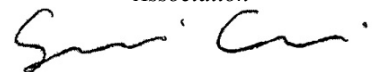
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## Abstract

This thesis examines the behaviour of the Catholic Church in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina during World War II. Political regimes will usually seek for internal legitimisation from religious institutions. From Franco's *nacionalcatolicismo* to the relation between radical Indian nationalism and Hinduism, examples can be found all over the world in any historical period. In the case of Christian denominations in Europe, World War II blatantly stands as *the* black spot. Christian churches were not able to prevent or stop the bloodshed when it started: few of them publicly condemned the Shoah, and even less took an active role in stopping the violation of the Sixth Commandment.

This legitimisation process becomes even more substantial when religious institutions are depicted as foremost representatives of national identity – as it is the case of the Catholic Church and the Croat national *ethos*. Catholicism had almost no relevance in Croatian identity politics in the first half the nineteenth century. It gained significance during the Yugoslav kingdom, when both national and religious struggles against Serb domination became entrenched. The Catholic Church granted legitimacy to Pavelić's *ustaša* regime until May 1945 in exchange for privileges. The level of collaboration varied from actual involvement to implicit acceptance of the regime's actions.

This project will analyse why the Catholic Church in Croatia acted the way it did during World War II. The main assumption is that the Catholic Church collaborated with Pavelić's regime in a form of double *repayment* process; i.e. the Catholic Church repaid the *ustaša* regime for the economic and social privileges granted, whilst the *ustaše* obtained a robust form of political legitimisation vis-à-vis the Croatian people in return. As the incarnation of Croatia, the Church had to collaborate with a regime that, despite everything, had given Croatia the independence it had pined for so long. Thus, it is necessary to understand how, in what ways, and to what extent the Catholic Church collaborated in Croatia to properly address the research question carried forward in this work.

This thesis will therefore attempt to give a thorough explanation of the way the Roman Catholic Church acted in the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) in the period between 1941 and 1945, trying to understand whether the behaviour of the Church did during World War II developed in the fashion it did in order to not to alienate itself from the Croatian government and from the Croatian people, or the Church's actions were the reflection of its own volition.

## Keywords

Catholic Church; ustaše; Croatia; Bosnia-Herzegovina; ethnic conflict; World War II

## Introduction

The trouble with Croats is they think they own the Catholic Church.

Stella Alexander, *The Triple Myth*, p. 2

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For the curia, an old goal was becoming reality here: to liquidate the Orthodox Church at least in a part of the Balkan [*sic*], the west, and to extend Catholicism up to the Drina.

Vladimir Dedijer, *The Yugoslav Auschwitz and the Vatican*, p. 326

For almost five hundred years, the Roman Catholic Church had no official relations of any kind with either the Patriarch of Constantinople (excommunicated in 1056) or either of the Patriarchs heading the several Orthodox autocephalous churches. After the Council of Ferrara-Florence (1438-45) and the subsequent conquest of Constantinople by the Ottomans in 1453, both Christian Churches went through parallel historical paths, never intersecting with each other. Whilst in the West Rome had to fight the challenges Protestantism posed to her political and religious hegemony, the Patriarch of Constantinople had to confront the fact that his multi-lingual (and later, multi-national) flock lived under Ottoman control, not to forget, in addition to the former, the threat that the Moscow Patriarchy began to pose upon his ecumenical primacy from the fifteenth century onwards. The closest action possibly comparable to an actual ‘contact’ did not happen until 1848, when Pius IX “called upon the Orthodox patriarchs to subordinate under his supremacy.”<sup>1</sup> Needless to say, the Patriarchs of the Eastern Church rejected Pius’s call for subordination. Silence between the two Churches lasted for another hundred years: it was only in the late 1950s, when Cardinal Roncalli became Peter’s successor in the Vatican Hill, that ecumenical dialogue was revived after its five-hundred-year long interruption between these two Churches, both claiming at the same time to be the true heir of Jesus Christ’s ἐκκλησία.<sup>2</sup>

But before this official rapprochement happened, Catholics and Orthodox had lived together under the same roof and more-or-less in the same demographic proportion in the

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1 Thomas Bremer, “The Official Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic and the Orthodox Churches” in Murzaku, Ines Angeli (ed.), *Quo Vadis Eastern Europe? Religion, State and Society after Communism*, Ravenna: Longo Editore, 2009, pp. 62-63.

2 Similarly, both Churches are in fact *Catholic* and *Orthodox*, since both claim to be Catholic [i.e. rather than ‘Universal’, Catholic should be read as ‘complete’ or ‘whole’], and it is undeniable that both are following the right set of *norms* (i.e. the first seven ecumenical councils, starting with Nicea I in 325 AD and ending with Nicea II in 787 AD) thus both must be regarded as Orthodox too.

Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes – later known as the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Understandably enough, this was not an easy cohabitation (although it was not as terrible as some have tried to depict it either). The interwar tensions gave way to a “war of nations” once the German-led Axis forces invaded Yugoslavia in April 1941.<sup>3</sup> The amount of violence and death unleashed in this region of Europe, particularly in the areas under control of the *ustaša*-led Independent State of Croatia, [*Nezavisna Država Hrvatska* (NDH) in Croatian and hereinafter in this essay] was so extreme that it was proportionally exceeded later only in a few places, such as the Khmer Rouge’s Kampuchea and in Africa’s most violent genocidal regimes.<sup>4</sup>

The main research question of this thesis is why did the Catholic Church act the way it did during World War II in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina? This question, however, unfolds several sub-questions that will also need to be addressed: first, why did support last so long – or better, why was opposition was so feeble, even when an *ustaša* and German defeat was the likeliest outcome and the regime had thus become a very uncomfortable ally? As for the former, did it happen because of the communist and partisan backlash – feared by the Croatian episcopacy and lower clergy to such an extent as to endorse the regime when the futility of such an action was obvious for everyone in the Catholic hierarchy? This presumably indicates, in any case, that the Church was aware of a degree of vengeance desires which may be very likely caused by its action between 1941 and 1945. Additional follow-up questions linked to the main research question address the issue on the separation between God (or Gods) and Nation, i.e. where do both coalesce and collide? Second, and equally relevant for the Croatian case and for this particular topic, is the extent to which nationalism can function as a secular religion – can it happen *motu proprio* or it has to rely on an ‘established’, ‘traditional’ religion to gain some vital backing, nonetheless.

Why should historiographical research deal with this specific topic, i.e. the Roman Catholic Church in World War II in the South Slav Lands? Firstly it may be done because it allows to tackle a series of ‘historiographical dogmas’ with regard to the Roman Catholic Church in Yugoslavia which have been interiorised so deeply by some sections of the society that we can actually speak of a ‘Black Legend’. A narrative in which evil Vatican forces, with the connivance of the local clergy, tried to destroy Yugoslavia from the moment of its (several) births and in any of the many forms this Balkan state had throughout its history (i.e., whether as the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, Democratic Federal Yugoslavia, the Federal People’s Republic of Yugoslavia or the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia). Throughout this thesis, it will be proven that the Holy See was not particularly interested in the disappearance of Yugoslavia at any stage of the first half of the 20th century, and that in fact the Vatican sometimes agreed with Belgrade’s government and it did clash with the Yugoslav Bishops’ Conference. Thus, for instance, when establishing unofficial contacts with the NDH the Holy See was just responding to a *fait accompli*, i.e. the de facto removal of the Yugoslav kingdom by Axis forces in April 1941 and its substitution by a myriad of puppet states or occupied territories (thus not

3 Paul Mojzes, *Balkan Genocides: Holocaust and Ethnic Cleansing in the Twentieth Century*, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011, p. 65.

4 Stanley Payne, “The NDH in Comparative Perspective”, *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 7:4 (2006), pp. 409-415.

just the NDH, but Nedić's Wehrmacht-controlled Serbia, or Italian-occupied central and southern Slovenia).<sup>5</sup>

This work will also like to prove that a 'one-way only' behaviour cannot be established for the entire Catholic hierarchy in the NDH. Collaboration with the ustaša thus ranged from active participation in massacres to tacit acceptance of the regime. Opposition did exist too. A rich combination of shades of grey did exist in between this black-and-white rigid Manichean division. Thus, bannally generalising and stigmatising the entire Catholic hierarchical structure (from laymen to Cardinals) in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina cannot be the accurate method (historiographically speaking) of approaching World War II in the Western Balkans. However, in no way whatsoever this is an apologetic pamphlet trying to defend the *ustaše* or the Catholic Church. This thesis is, on the contrary, an attempt of to bring some clarity to the scholar discussion on the issue, especially where historiographical flaws or discernible inconsistencies have been detected with more frequency.

Second, and more particularly with reference to Second World War events and the involvement of the Catholic Church in them, this thesis will try to divert from the mainstream historiographical discussion: that is, the role played by Archbishop Alojzije Stepinac. Whilst it should be acknowledged that, as Archbishop of Zagreb, his role in the Church was of primary importance, the large degree of the '*Stepinacisation*' of the scholarly discussion does not allow for an actual engagement with all the possible realities in the historical events discussed. Quoting Mark Biondich, "Stepinac was neither the war criminal and Ustaša supporter alleged by the Yugoslav authorities, nor the outspoken critic of that regime that many of his defenders claim."<sup>6</sup> By focusing on Stepinac, other equally interesting (historiographically speaking) figures, such as the openly ustaša or collaborationist Šarić, Garić and Rožman – respectively, bishops of Sarajevo, Banja Luka, and Ljubljana – have been and still are completely eclipsed by this obsession with Stepinac. This Manichean objectification of Stepinac as either 'the absolute evil' or 'good shepherd- martyr' does prevent a fruitful and objective dialogue with the past (for both his defenders and his opponents).

Third, this topic is to be chosen as a reaction to the lack of atonement and desire to actually engage with the past, and in particular with World War II, shown by all three major

5 This narrative was to be applied again in the 1990s during the dissolution of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia due to the Vatican's hasty recognition of Slovenia's and Croatia's independence in January 1992. The fact that the Vatican Secretariat of State recognised the independence of the new states before any other European government (apart from Germany) can of course be criticised, but pointing an accusing finger at the Vatican and the Church as one of the guilty parts of Yugoslavia's disappearance is a childish oversimplification of facts. First because Yugoslavia had ceased to exist as a functioning federal state months before that official recognition came and secondly because once relations with Yugoslavia significantly improved in the 1970s (Tito and Jovanka even visited Paul VI in March 1971), the Vatican did not see Yugoslavia as a socialist country oppressing its Catholic flock, or not as harshly as other socialist countries were. Moreover, even if the Church did incite Croat nationalist feelings among its believers, the Yugoslav high clergy never censured the actual existence of a common state for all South Slavs. The same cannot be said for the Serbian Orthodox Church, though: Svetozar Dušanić, an Orthodox high-rank theologian and trustee of the Museum of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Belgrade, wrote on 1 October 1987 in *Pravoslavlje* (the official journal of the Serbian Orthodox Church) that Yugoslavia should be divided as quickly as possible into two states due to cultural incompatibilities, a Western part for its Catholics and an Eastern part for the Orthodox. In Sabrina P. Ramet, *L'Europa centro-orientale tra religione e politica. Cattolici, Ortodossi e nuovi ordini missionari dopo il 1989*, Ravenna: Longo Editore, 2008, pp. 116-7 [Ramet's words are: "*Svetozar Dušanić, in un articolo pubblicato su Pravoslavlje il 1° ottobre 1987, fece esplicito riferimento ad aspetti di incompatibilità culturale in un modo che sembrava mettere in discussione il futuro della coabitazione serbo-croata.*"]

6 Mark Biondich, "Controversies surrounding the Catholic Church in Wartime Croatia, 1941-45", *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 7:4., p. 429.



religious communities in the region – Catholic, Muslim and Orthodox. All three sides have tried to trivialise the discussion, relativise it, or openly deny it. Equally, all three of them lack an actual *mea culpa* pronouncement with some degree of auto-criticism. This is very worrying because, as Paul Mojzes has pointed out, “[w]hen scholars and clergy misrepresent genocides (and for that matter other claims), it is particularly dangerous, even demonic, because people tend to trust them more than politicians, lawyers, the military and members of many other professions.”<sup>7</sup> Croat nationalist revisionists (and the Church’s most reactionary sectors) have been more prone to minimisation and relativisation rather than actual denial of what happened between 1941 and 1945.<sup>8</sup> Bosnia’s Islamic community, on the contrary, has avoided any type of engagement with the past hiding behind the atrocities suffered by the Bosniaks at the hands of the četniks. Finally, Serb nationalist circles (and with them, the Orthodox Church) were somehow backed by the official historiographical narrative of the Yugoslav ‘popular uprising’ discourse which depicted them as the Partisan nation *par excellence* and thus as deserving to be granted the *primus inter pares* position among Yugoslav nations and nationalities – an approach still alive nowadays.<sup>9</sup> This belief, profoundly rooted in the Serbian *ethos*, has hindered an actual engagement with Serbia’s darkest chapters in World War II – i.e. the extent of popular support that Nedić’s regime actually had, the degree of collaboration existent (including the support shown by the Serbian Orthodox Church) whether towards the Nedićite quisling regime or the German occupation forces, and the undeniable genocidal nature of the četnik movement.<sup>10</sup> As Marko Attila Hoare has (rightly) suggested

7 Paul Mojzes, *Balkan Genocides*, p. 50.

8 Mark Attila Hoare, “Genocide in Yugoslavia Before and After Communism”, *Europe-Asia Studies*, 62:7 (2010), p. 1024.

9 For instance, the public radio-television broadcaster of the Republika Srpska (Bosnia and Herzegovina’s Serb-controlled entity) reported the 72nd anniversary of the Sutjeska battle on June, 13th making no mention whatsoever of the Partisan movement, Tito and the socialist ‘brotherhood and unity’ ideal. Instead, Sutjeska was depicted as the struggle of the Serb nation for its freedom, causing the death of 16,000 fatherland-lovers [with both Partisans and četniks thus equally labelled as fatherland-lovers]. On the same TV programme, a group of četniks sentenced to death by the Partisans in 1945 in Banja Luka were presented as innocent ‘warriors for the fatherland’ misjudged by (a communist-written) history. In Gordana Katana, “RTRS: Osamdeset miliona Turaka glasat će u Bosni i Hercegovini”, *Analiziraj.ba*, available online on <<http://analiziraj.ba/2015/06/17/rtrs-osamdeset-miliona-turaka-glasat-ce-u-bosni-i-hercegovini/>> [First Accessed 27 June 2015] [Fragment of the article available below, with the most significant parts in bold font].

10. – 16. Juni/Lipanj 2015.

KO SE BORIO NA SUTJESCI? Friziranje povijesnih događaja jedna je od konstanti uređivačke politike centralne informativne emisije RTRS-a. Iako sve što se u tom segmentu dešava predstavlja samo varijacije na istu temu, u dnevniku 13. juna (urednik Momčilo Ostojić) ipak je pređena crta. U izvještaju posvećenom obilježavanju 72. godišnjice bitke na Sutjesci, novinar Radivoje Obradović pažljivo je izbjegao da niti jednom ne spomene Narodnooslobodilačku vojsku Jugoslavije, partizana, Tita.

Tek, pobjedu u toj bici “izvojevalo je 16 hiljada rodoljuba”, kaže novinar pa zaključuje: “Iz Doline heroja poruka – srpski narod uvijek je skupo plaćao slobodu.”

PA ONDA JOŠ MALO FRIZIRANJA: Iza ovog priloga uslijedio je i izvještaj o obilježavanju “stradanja pripadnika vojske u otadžbini, crnogorskih četnika, ubijenih od strane pobjednika bez suđenja u Lijevču polju kod Banjaluke”. Od novinara Vladimira Bekića tako smo saznali “da ti ljudi nisu krivi”, “da je istorija o njihovoj ulozi u Drugom svjetskom ratu nasilno napisana”. Bez komentara.

10 I fully agree with Tomislav Dulić in arguing that the *ustašas* and the četniks did share some ideological similarities (the genocidal nature of both movemets, and the creation of a homogeneous, monoethnic national unit as their common obsession and main political target being the most glimmering ones). The main difference in the full destructive power of these two extremist groups was the capacity of controlling of a state apparatus. The absence of this prerequisite in the case of the četniks “seriously hampered their ability to achieve and maintain a highly systematic level of destruction.” Tomislav Dulić, “Mass Killings in the Independent State of Croatia: 1941-1945: a case for comparative research”, *Journal for Genocide Research*, 8:3, p. 267.

[t]he official Titoist statements about World War II emphasised the Nazi-collaborationist character of the Četniks and the Nedić regime, but not their genocidal or fascist character. This made it easier for the Serb-nationalist propaganda in the 1980s and 1990s to claim that it had only been Croats, Muslims and Albanians, but not Serbs, who had been genocidal or pro-fascist in World War II, and to deny Serb collaborationist killings of Jews, Muslims and Croats.<sup>11</sup>

Finally, this particular topic should be taken into consideration because of the approach shown by many elements of the Croatian prelature and lower clergy with regard to World War II, ustaša crimes, and in particular, with Jasenovac's stigmatisation (and oblivion). It seems appropriate to underline that no high-ranking member of the Croatian clergy visited Jasenovac until Cardinal Bozanić, Archbishop of Zagreb, did so in September 2009.<sup>12</sup> This was, however, a quick and short visit in which Bozanić laid a wreath in remembrance of the camp's victims – but did not walk by Bogdan Bogdanović's monument – and finally gave a short speech. This behaviour not only leaves no room for auto-criticism or atonement in the Croatian Church for all World War II-related events, and in particular with regard to Jasenovac (let's not forget that Fra Filipović-Majstorović, a Franciscan who was later defrocked by his order, played an active role in the crimes committed at the camp). By the same token, this attitude condemns to obscurity the priests, nuns and Catholic laymen who were martyred – alongside with Serbs, Jews, Communists, Roma and other 'undesired elements' – in Jasenovac: starting from the anti-Fascist priests deported from German and Italian-occupied Slovenia and sent to Croatia, to priests of the NDH who opposed the ustaša rule, such as Father Franjo Richter.<sup>13</sup>

In order to collect a substantial enough secondary literature on the topic, a significant amount of books and articles written in English, Italian and Serbo-Croatian have been gathered. It should be admitted, though, that English-written sources have been favoured over others. First and foremost, because English literature was decisively more easily available (physically speaking) for me than academic writings in the local language. In addition, English-speaking authors or scholars writing in English have largely contributed to a new approach on the *ustašas* and the NDH, which has opened new research options, narrative lines and has tried to avoid some of the flaws in which some sections of previous historiography tended to incur.<sup>14</sup> Early scholarship on the NDH and the *ustaša* (particularly so in Yu-

11 Mark Attila Hoare, "Genocide in Yugoslavia Before and After Communism", p. 1024.

12 For a deeper insight on the precarious engagement of the Catholic Church in Croatia with the legacies of the past, and in particular World War II, I recommend Vjeran Pavlaković's working paper "Red Stars, Black Shirts: Symbols, Commemorations, and Contested Histories of World War Two in Croatia", *NCEEER*, September 2008.

13 Franjo Richter was a Croat parish priest, who refused to hold a ceremonial *Te Deum* for Pavelić on his name day. He was thus arrested by the ustaša militias, taken straight to Jasenovac and executed upon arrival. Ivo Goldstein, "Ante Pavelić, Charisma and National Mission in Wartime Croatia", *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 7:2, p. 232.

14 I should also add that, in general terms, scholars writing in English have usually tried to choose a more empirical, less biased, and (mostly) less nationalist [or more detached from national feelings] narrative path than their counterparts writing in the ex-Yugoslav states. This is in no way a neo-colonial statement, i.e. that only historiography in English can be valid in academia. Some authors from the region have also produced empirically well-sustained academic pieces, as well as some authors writing in English have made the same mistakes I have criticised before (see, for instance, the [very controversial] work of the Canadian writer Srđa Trifković). I just wanted to underline that in the ex-Yugoslav states some sections of the historiographical community willingly put their work at the service of ethno-national political goals (as frankly it has usually happened with historiography everywhere in the world before and now, indeed), thus sullying the work of the community as a whole.

goslavia), as Emily Greble noted, “focused almost exclusively on the numbers of war dead and the nature of Ustasha behaviours, themes presented through highly sensationalist narratives that offered little explanation of the development, process, or local motivations behind the mass killings.”<sup>15</sup> In the last decade (more-or-less) Mark Biondich, Tomislav Dulić and Marko Attila Hoare, and Paul Mojzes “have offered a vital corrective in several recent studies that explore the temporal shifts and regional variations in Ustasha policies.”<sup>16</sup> Emily Greble-Balić studied Sarajevo’s local dynamics whilst under NDH control, whilst Rory Yeomans published an excellent monograph on the cultural policies of the ustaše. All these authors have been used in order to provide a substantial enough secondary literature in English to this thesis. For the historiographical review of literature in Serbo-Croatian, some of the deemed ‘classical’ books on the subject have been utilised too: Bogdan Krizman’s *Ustaše i Treći Reich* and *Ante Pavelić i Ustaše*.<sup>17</sup>

When studying Church involvement in World War II atrocities and the extent of collaboration with the ustaša regime, the scholarly discussion has tended to develop into two very clear-cut, Manichean sides: for one (in which the majority of Serb investigators are to be included) the guilt and responsibility of the Roman Catholic Church – thus englobing both the Croatian local hierarchy and the Vatican – is clear; “[...] not only did the hierarchy tacitly accept the genocide and forced proselytism carried out under unstable wartime conditions but they were also the instigators and promoters, as they say this as a golden opportunity to “heal” the thousand-year-old schism.”<sup>18</sup> For this very same reason, Vladimir Dedijer’s *The Yugoslav Auschwitz and the Vatican* had to be a recurrent part of this thesis. This book, first published in Serbo-Croatian in 1987, set a precedent in this field of historiography, defending a hypothesis that had been widely accepted and nurtured by the socialist Yugoslav ‘official’ historiography: i.e., “an old goal became reality for the Roman curia when the NDH was established, that of liquidating the Orthodox Church (and with her, the Serb nation) in the Western Balkans and extending Catholicism up to Drina river.”<sup>19</sup>

Although Dedijer’s book is, without a hint of doubt, one of the most extensive and meticulous analyses about the topic ever published, he also tended to give some generalised and not well-supported conclusions. This theory of a premeditated Vatican intervention in the Southeastern Europe is not just shared by Serb historians, though. David Cymet, for in-

15 Emily Greble, “When Croatia needed Serbs: Nationalism and Genocide in Sarajevo, 1941-1942”, *Slavic Review*, Vol. 68, No. 1 (Spring, 2009), p. 118.

16 Ibid., p. 118.

17 I have used the term Serbo-Croatian, rather than the current [several] denominations of that language (i.e. Bosnian, Croatian, Montenegrin, and Serbian) because I have preferred to use a single denomination for the linguistic standard based on the Eastern Herzegovinian subdialect of Neo-Shtokavian (both *ekavian* and *ijekavian*) which sets the syntactical and morphological norm in all four contemporary standard variants. Although in other parts of the thesis I have used the terms ‘Croatian language’ (mainly when referring to the Mediaeval or Modern Ages, or the language spoken in the NDH), I deem it necessary to use Serbo-Croatian in this case because the books I mention were published in that language – or were catalogued before an actual ISO-standardised code was given to the Croatian language (or any other languages following the dissolution of Yugoslavia).

18 Paul Mojzes, *Balkan Genocides*, p. 64.

19 Dedijer’s exact words (or at least those of the book’s first translation into English) are: “For the curia, an old goal was becoming reality here: to liquidate the Orthodox Church at least in a part of the Balkan [*sic*], the west, and to extend Catholicism up to the Drina.” Vladimir Dedijer, *The Yugoslav Auschwitz and the Vatican*, Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1992, p. 326.



stance, also believes that in the eve of World War II the Holy See was “vitally interested in expanding Catholic power in the Balkans.” The Holy See therefore “saw in the Ustashi a guarantee of Catholic permanence and expansion [in the Balkans] and never dissociated itself from Croatian and its leaders.”<sup>20</sup> Similarly, the Italian scholar Marco Aurelio Rivelli goes much further and claims that the Vatican worked hand in hand with Nazi and Fascist authorities not only in the NDH, but all over Europe. With regard to Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, Rivelli argues that the Roman Catholic Church was the *mens rea* behind the majority of *ustaša* crimes, which were indeed encouraged and legitimised by the Church, when not actually perpetrated by members of the clergy.

As for primary sources, Pierre Blet’s *Actes et documents du Saint-Siège relatifs à la Seconde Guerre Mondiale* were primarily used for keeping track of any kind of high level communication between the NDH’s prelates and the Vatican. Also, Blet’s collection of notes is the only possible insight of the Vatican’s Secretariat of State internal reports regarding the NDH, Pavelić, and the *ustaša* if the possibility of visiting the Vatican *Archivio Segreto* is out of reach. Furthermore, every copy of *L’Osservatore romano* published between April 1941 and May 1945, trying to find all possible articles, notes or news related to the NDH in general or to any of its specific regions (i.e. Croatia, Bosnia, Herzegovina, Slavonia, Dalmatia, etc...), Pavelić, the *ustaša*, Yugoslavia or the region [Southeastern Europe, including Serbia, Bulgaria, Greece, Romania and Slovenia] in general has been read and meticulously analysed. The same applies to the 1941-1945 copies of *La Civiltà Cattolica*. By examining these two publications (undeniable the most important journals in the Catholic printing world and, if allowed, the Holy See’s main channels of communication with the general public) it will be possible to understand what did the Vatican actually think of the NDH and, *eo ipso*, what the Holy See wanted Catholics all over the world to think about it too. In addition to *L’Osservatore romano* and *La Civiltà Cattolica*, some local publications have also been used (yet to a lesser extent), particularly *Vrhbosna*, the journal of the archdiocese of Sarajevo, and *Hrvatska straža*, the official newspaper of the Catholic youth movement in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In this thesis it will thus be analysed the role of the Catholic Church in Croatia and Bosnia- Herzegovina during World War II. It is assumed that the *ustaša*-led regime established in April 1941 sought endorsement from the Roman Catholic Church in order to give an aura of legitimacy to the (otherwise practically illegitimate) Independent State of Croatia. The Church responded ecstatically. This initial backing became even more substantial because of the Church’s inalienable position in the whole Croat national *ethos*. The Catholic Church granted legitimacy to Pavelić’s regime (even when it was crystal-clear that the Axis would lose the war) in exchange for economic and social privileges, and because of the *ustaše* staunch anti-Communism – replicating the double-repayment process carried out by the *ustaša* vis-à-vis the Axis occupation forces that had brought the new state into existence, as suggested by Helen Fein.<sup>21</sup> This thesis will try to show that, however, there were different

20 David Cymet, *History vs. Apologetics: the Holocaust, the Third Reich, and the Catholic Church*, Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010, p. 340.

21 “[C]ollaboration in the younger nations [...] could be viewed as repayment for the opportunities offered to them (including their existence).” Helen Fein, *Accounting for Genocide*, London: Collier Macmillan Publishers, 1979, p. 95.

levels of collaboration with the regime and even some degree of opposition – yet not sufficient enough as to put an end or change ustaša genocidal policies.

This work will start by presenting the historical evolution of the relation between Croatian nationalism and Catholicism, showing how religious identification initially played no substantial role in the construction of Croatian national identity. The second chapter of this thesis will then examine the position of the Catholic Church in the first Yugoslav state, and how Croatian extreme nationalist views gained momentum within the Catholic movement (and the Catholic clergy) since an Orthodox state [the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes] (and not a Catholic empire [i.e. the Austro-Hungarian Empire]) was now ‘oppressing’ the Croat people.<sup>22</sup> In addition, Massimo Valente’s findings will be presented, which have shown the degree of concern in the Roman curia with regard to the intensified politicisation of religion in Yugoslavia in the 1930s and the Holy See’s discomfort with this politicisation as it directly affected the Vatican’s stance vis-à-vis the government in Belgrade.

In the third chapter of this thesis, the initial reaction of the Catholic Church to the unexpected establishment of an independent Croatian state led by an extreme-right organisation and the Church’s degree of participation in some ustaša policies (chiefly, the conversion of the Orthodox to Catholicism) will be examined. The extent to which the ustaša state can be labelled as clerical-fascist will be discussed, and the variables (e.g. geographical location, position in the hierarchy...) that were more likely to be the cause of more (or less) radicalisation in the Catholic clergy will be scrutinised. Finally, in this thesis’ last chapter, the role played by the Vatican in this historical period will be analysed, trying to determine how supportive the Vatican was with regard to the regime and whether the Catholic Church in Croatia was acting autonomously or it was following orders from the Holy See. In order to do so, a number of primary sources have been chosen: first, any kind of written communication between the Croatian prelatry and the Holy See, internal communication in the Vatican Secretariat of State regarding the NDH and the Croatian Church, or any contact between the Holy See and her representative in Zagreb, Abbot Marcone. Second, all possible articles or news connected to the NDH, Pavelić, the ustaša, the Serbian Orthodox Church, Nedić, Serbia, or Tito’s Partisans published in *L’Osservatore romano* and *La Civiltà Cattolica* between April 1941 and May 1945. This thesis will conclude by presenting my judgement on the historiographical findings done throughout this work and by posing several questions which have not been clarified throughout the thesis and that may be useful for any further investigation to be carried out on the topic in the future.

<sup>22</sup> Orthodox domination was a great opportunity to entrench Catholicism to Croatness, since religion can be a very useful element in constructing an anti-ethnic duality in relation to the group to oppose that thus reinforces the exclusivist definition of the own ethnic group.

## ***All Croats are Catholics! – are they? Roman Catholicism and Croatian national identity***

“The Church and the Croatian nation are inseparable, and nothing can sever that connection. Catholicism cannot be deleted from the people’s collective memory or the Croatian national identity.”

Tomislav Šagi-Bunić (theologian), in the Catholic journal *Glas Koncila* (1972), as quoted in Vjekoslav Perica, *Balkan Idols: Religion and Nationalism in Yugoslav States*, p. 62

For the general public, Serbs, Bosniaks, and Croats can be straightforwardly distinguished as a result of their *ethnoreligious* affiliation: Serbs are ‘essentially’ Orthodox southern Slavs, Bosniaks are Muslim, and Croats are ‘the Roman Catholics’ of the lot.<sup>23</sup> The embeddedness between Catholicism and Croatdom nowadays could be seen as a copy-paste image of the very same phenomenon existent, for example, between Catholicism and Poledom. The problem is that the relation between militant nationalism and Catholicism followed different historical paths in Croatia and Poland – or any other country where Catholicism was to become an inalienable part of the national cultural corpus. It is true that the Church had an enormous influence in the survival and development of some aspects of Croatian ‘national’ culture, particularly its vernacular language; codifying it and endorsing the publication of secular works written in it.<sup>24</sup> But unlike the Poles, Croats could not view the Roman Catholic Church as a tangible reminder of their previously existent statehood or as a symbol of national unity.<sup>25</sup>

Moreover, Croat nationalism could not be nurtured within the Church in its embryonic phase: Polish nationalism used Catholicism to resist Prussian (i.e. Protestant) and Russian (i.e. Orthodox) occupation. The Croat national movement, on the contrary, could not count on the Church’s immediate support. First, because given its universalist nature, the Catholic Church preferred not to promote national exclusivity.<sup>26</sup> But even more important-

23 I have purposely used Mojzes’s word here rather than ‘ethnic and religious’ or ‘ethno-religious’ to accentuate the role of religion in Bosnia, Croatia, and Serbia as the main tool of ethnic exclusion – and thus, of ethnic definition – since other objective criteria (language, racial identification) are substantially similar among all three communities.

24 In the aftermath of the Ottoman conquest, Catholic priests and friars became the most representative figures in Croatian literature and linguistics: Marko Marulić wrote in both Latin and the vernacular Slavic language in the 15th century, the Jesuit Bartol Kašić published the first Croatian morphology in 1604, and friar Andrija Kačić Miošić wrote poems in Croatian in the first half of the 18th century.

Vjekoslav Perica, *Balkan Idols: Religion and Nationalism in Yugoslav States*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, pp. 9-10

25 There were remarkable differences in the Habsburg Empire with regards to the Nation-Church link: in the Bohemian Lands, where a re-Catholicisation campaign took place after the Thirty Years’ War, the Catholic Church was regarded to be in full symbiosis with the Habsburg dynasty and was thus a symbol of the German and imperial yoke.

26 Unlike the Serbs, who had their common church organisation as a continuous reminder of their independent past, Croats had only two purely national institutions, the mediaeval parliament (*Sabor*) and the office of the Ban – governor –

ly, because the Catholic clergy could not back a movement whose ultimate goal was independence from the Austrian Habsburgs. After all, those very same Habsburg emperors ruling over the Croat Lands were *Catholicæ fidei defensores acerrimi*. Thus, Catholicism *per se* did not play “a significant role either in defining Croatian national identity or as a vehicle for its preservation.”<sup>27</sup>

When a modern Croat national identity began to be conceptualised in the late eighteenth century, its ideologists thus refused to identify the ‘religion and nation’ binomial as a monolithic entity. The ‘Croat Revival’ (born as a rebound of awakened Hungarian nationalism in order to avoid progressive Magyarisation in Croatia-Slavonia) was, as Ivo Banac noted, primarily historicist rather than religious: “the Croats expressed their objections [to Magyarisation] by restating their claims to ancient municipal autonomy within the common Hungarian constitution.”<sup>28</sup> The concept of historical rights – which claimed that *de jure* the Croatian kingdom never really lost its independence (notwithstanding its union with the kingdom of Hungary in 1102 and with the Habsburgs in 1527) – viewed Croatia’s aristocracy, its ‘political nation’, as the legal heir of Croatia’s statehood right. These historical rights could now be extrapolated from the ‘political nation’ to the Croat nation as a whole. But if so was to happen, who were the Croats?

Also in this case, a religion-based categorisation was rejected in favour of an ethno-racial and historicist definition. Therefore, all inhabitants of the Croat Lands – whether Catholic, Muslim or Orthodox – were indeed Croats *by race and history* whose national identity was to be re-awaken, particularly that of those communities which were more likely to still be *unconsciously* Croat – i.e. the Muslims, the Orthodox, and (to a lesser extent) Catholic Dalmatians.<sup>29</sup> On the whole, it is possible to argue that Catholicism in particular and religious affiliation in general did not play a relevant role whatsoever when the foundations of ‘Croatdom’ were laid:

Religious affiliation did not factor prominently in the thinking of Croat national ideologists, nor did they employ it as a criterion in defining the ‘nation’. This was true of Ljudevit Gaj’s Illyrianist movement [which proposed the spiritual unification of South Slavs] (1836-48), the first stage of the Croat national awakening. Ante Starčević and his Party of (Croatian State) Right (1861-95) adopted a political concept of nation; Croats were the inhabitants of Great Croatia (i.e., Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Slovenia), be they Catholic, Muslim or Orthodox Christian.<sup>30</sup>

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of Croatia. In contrast to the Catholic Church’s (initial) *super partes* stance on the nationality issue, “the Orthodox church in Eastern Europe was perceived as “the historic repository of nationhood, national values, and quite often as the savior of a nation’s very existence”” Vjekoslav Perica (citing Michael Radu), *Balkan Idols*, p. 6.

27 Alex J. Bellamy, “The Catholic Church and Croatia’s Two Transitions”, *Religion, State & Society*, Vol. 30, No. 1, 2002, p. 46 (citing Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984, pp. 66-67).

28 Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia*, p. 76.

29 Muslims were more likely than Serbs to reciprocate this ethnic categorisation: as Yeomans has noted, young Muslim intellectuals vehemently requested the inclusion of the whole of Bosnia in the Croatian Banovina (1939-41) and a more significant Croatisation campaign amongst Muslim peasants who were still largely unconscious of their Croat identity. Even Maček endorsed the Croatness of Muslims, proclaiming that “they carried in their soul Croatian national consciousness, imbibed with their mothers’ milk.” Rory Yeomans, “Of “Yugoslav Barbarians” and Croatian Gentlemen Scholars: National Ideology and Racial Anthropology in Interwar Yugoslavia”, in Turda, Marius & Weindling, Paul J. (eds.), *Blood and Homelands: Eugenics and Racial Nationalism in Central and Southeast Europe, 1900-1940*, New York, NY: Central European University Press, 2006, p. 113-5.

30 Mark Biondich, “Religion and Nation in Wartime Croatia: Reflections on the Ustaša Policy of Forced Religious Conversions, 1941-42”, *The Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 83, No. 1 (Jan., 2005), p. 75.



In the crossroads between Starčević's integral Croat nationalism and the idea of spiritual union of all South Slavs, with both ideologies tending to neglect religious differences, Catholics (mainly) opted for the latter.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, the most prominent proponents of *jugoslovenstvo* (Yugoslavism) in Croatia were a bishop and a priest: Juraj Strossmayer (1815-1905), Bishop of Đakovo, and his canon, Father Franjo Rački (1828-1894).<sup>32</sup> Strossmayer did not just sympathise with Pan-Slavism, he also put forward the idea of Catholic-Orthodox ecumenism as a crucial precondition for the realisation of South Slav unification, tailing after the writings of the Dominican theologian Juraj Križanić (1618-83).<sup>33</sup>

A 'proper' politically-motivated Catholic movement in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina appeared only in the late Habsburg period. Founded by the Bishop of Krk, the Slovene Antun Mahnič, the Catholic movement in Croatia and Bosnia was, as elsewhere in Europe, more anti-liberal than ethnocentric: Catholics were to be warned about the dangers of liberalism, particularly secularisation and individualism.<sup>34</sup> Like the Croatian nationalist movements, political Catholicism was not "organisationally [or] ideologically monolithic, especially on questions of nationality".<sup>35</sup> Moreover, in contrast to Catholic movements in countries where Catholics were an overwhelming majority, Mahnič's movement did not evolve quickly into a political party – first because of the religious heterogeneity of the lands where it appeared but more because Catholicism was seen "as a tradition, not as a political option."<sup>36</sup>

In the beginning of the twentieth century, the protagonists of the Croatian political arena still rejected to coalesce religion and nation. Stjepan Radić, who in 1904 founded the most significant Croatian political party until World War II, the Croat Peasant Party (*Hrvatska seljačka stranka*), "was anti-clerical by temperament and opposed the identification of re-

31 The example *par excellence* of the former faction is the clerical journalist Kerubin Šegvić (1867-1945), who "wrote books declaring that Croats were not Slavs but were instead people of Gothic and Nordic origin, destined to rule the world". Rory Yeomans, "Of 'Yugoslav Barbarians' and Croatian Gentlemen Scholars", p. 111.

The inherent Serbo/Slavo-phobia existent in some Catholic far right circles can be seen as the continuation of Ante Starčević's racial postulates. Starčević had indeed claimed that "if the levels of perfection among men were to be ranked in ascending order as: the level of animal, the level of reason, and the level of the spirit, the *Slavoserbs* [Serb-slaves] are those who had not yet completely reached the lowest level". In Mario Spalatin, "The Croatian nationalism of Ante Starčević, 1845-1871", *Journal of Croatian Studies*, 16 (1975), pp. 111-12.

32 Despite its Pan-Yugoslav inspiration, Strossmayer's National Party (1860-74) did recognize the Serbs's 'genetic' distinctiveness, but, by the same token, Serbs were not a separate political nation in Croatia. The Catholic movement would later use the same idea when dealing with the Serb issue: Serbs in Croatia were not Serbs, "[r]ather, they were 'Croats who had opted a Serb consciousness in the nineteenth century because of their religious affiliation and the assimilationist, 'nationalizing' work of the Serbian Orthodox Church".

Mark Biondich, "We Were Defending the State: Nationalism, Myth, and Memory in Twentieth Century Croatia", in Lampe, John and Mazower, Mark, *Ideologies and National Identities: The Case of Twentieth-Century Southeastern Europe*, Budapest: Central European University Press, 2002, p. 78.

33 Vjekoslav Perica, *Balkan Idols*, p. 16.

34 The only exception to this rule is to be found in Bosnia, where Archbishop Štadler "denied the primacy of national over religious sentiment and sought to build Croat nationhood on a firm Catholic basis. His dream of converting Bosnian Muslims merely succeeded in driving a fair number of them away from Croat organizations." Yet, as Ivo Banac explains, "this tendency should not be viewed as a form of inward looking Croat nationalism. On the contrary, Catholic clericalists wished to integrate Croats and Slovenes [and even Slavic Muslims], creating a Catholic South Slavic nation."

Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia*, p. 108.

35 Mark Biondich, "Controversies surrounding the Catholic Church in Wartime Croatia, 1941-45", *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 7:4., p. 432.

36 Sandra Prlenda, "Young, Religious, Radical: The Croat Youth Organizations, 1922-1945" in Lampe, John and Mazower, Mark, *Ideologies and National Identities: The Case of Twentieth-Century Southeastern Europe*, Budapest: Central European University Press, 2002, p. 83.

ligion and nation, just as he repeatedly denounced the role of Catholic and Orthodox clergy in Croatia's political life."<sup>37</sup> Even within Starčević's more integralist movement, fractured after 1895 under several denominations (Frankists, the Party of Right, the Young Croats...) the idea of a multi-religious Croatia was still widespread.<sup>38</sup>

Whilst the amalgamation of Catholicism and *Croatness* would gradually increase in the 1920s and 1930s, becoming more explicit in the Independent State of Croatia, – as this essay will show –, it is actually only in Tito's Yugoslavia (and particularly from the 1970s onwards) that "Catholic confessional and Croat national interests were deemed by many nationalists to be, if not the same, then at least closely related."<sup>39</sup> Following the Second Vatican Council and the Croatian Spring, "the Church was agile and outspoken as both the carrier of the national idea and fighter for greater religious liberty."<sup>40</sup> Independence and war in the 1990s helped boost this view of Catholicism as the incarnation of *Croatness*, trailing after the image of the Seventies' *Crkva u Hrvata* (Church in the Croat people).<sup>41</sup> The Catholic Church thus seemed to have shared everything with its people, the Croats, since Prince Branimir chose Rome over Byzantium in the 9th century: joys, sorrows (more sorrows than joys, indeed) and – most importantly – fate.<sup>42</sup>

The question of the degree of coalescence of Croatian-ness and Catholicism still remains open today – in particular when related to the classification of 'other' Catholic south Slavs communities (chiefly the Bunjevci in Vojvodina and the Šokci outside of Slavonia, but also Kosovo's *Janjevci*). Can the Catholic Roman rite (and by extension, belonging to a Universalist, non-national Church) be the [only] entrance ticket into the Croatian national corpus? Can religion thus substitute other more significant national factors missing – to a significant extent – in these communities (e.g. linguistic standardisation, common foundational myths and the idea of allegiance and inclusion into a larger community of fate)?<sup>43</sup> The entrenchment of *Croatness* and Catholicism – where Catholicism is

37 Mark Biondich, "Religion and Nation in Wartime Croatia", p. 75.

38 Ibid., p. 76.

39 Mark Biondich, "Controversies surrounding the Catholic Church in Wartime Croatia, 1941-45", p. 431.

40 Vjekoslav Perica, *Balkan Idols*, p. 16.

41 A great example of this process of commixture between militant Catholicism and Croat nationalism in the late 1980s and early 1990s can be seen in the conversion of Christian-inspired poetry into pop-songs with a marked nationalistic nuance. That is the case of *Rajska Djevo Kraljice Hrvata*, a Marian anthem written by Father Petar Perica in the first half of the 20th century (and already quite popular among practicing Catholics for its Marian nature, whilst at the same time it was regarded as a *quasi* political song [particularly after the Croatian Spring] by the most 'active' (nationalistically speaking) sectors of the Catholic flock due to its form of assertory nationalism – after all the Virgin is the Queen of Croats, not of any other nation), which was then pop-versioned by Ljerka Palatinuš and Tomislav Ivičić. The 1990s 'pop-ised' *Rajska Djevo Kraljice Hrvata* thus combined modernity, Catholicism, and *Croatness* – but simultaneously it proved helpful in asserting that aside the Mother Church, there was no fate for the new Croatia.

42 Concerning this Catholic-Croat embeddedness Kuharić, the archbishop of Zagreb, gave a very self-explanatory speech in 1983: "If anyone can speak of the history of the Croatian people it is the Church which lives in their midst and which has been present in all the centuries of this often painful history so that this Church simply becomes the soul of that history." Quoted in *Danas*, as cited in "Tanjug", 11 January 1983, in Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS), Daily Report, Eastern Europe, 12 January 1983, p. 17, in Ramet, Pedro "Religion and Nationalism in Yugoslavia", in Ramet, Pedro (ed.), *Religion and Nationalism in Soviet and East European Politics*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1989, p. 320.

43 The Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia has allowed since 1991 the inclusion of the Šokci and Bunjevci as separate (i.e. non-Croat) national groups in censuses, as the Romanian Statistical Office also accepts the Székelys and Csángós as non-Hungarian nationalities. Whilst Romania's Székelys and Csángós overwhelmingly declare themselves as Hungarians first, there is a significant (downward) difference in the percentage of Serbian citizens declaring themselves

not an additional socio-cultural element in the national milieu but one of the cornerstones of national consciousness, along with language, literature, and historical myths – poses a question of, if possible to say, ‘dishonest appropriation’ of a Universalist and proselyte Church to which national exclusiveness should not (and cannot) be applied. This phenomenon, however, is perfectly understandable if seen as a reaction to the nature of the Serbian Orthodox Church – which indeed is a national Church claiming a religio-national monopoly on Serbdom.<sup>44</sup> This paradox is not a Croat-only exception: as argued in the beginning of this chapter, the Poles found in Catholicism a national shield against Protestant and Orthodox occupiers; similarly, the Hungarian minority in Romania adds its Western Christian religious foundations (in opposition to Romanian Orthodoxy) to linguistic and cultural differences to accentuate even further its ‘national’ specificities.

as Croats in 1981 and 2011, which may indicate a possible activation of Bunjevci national consciousness separate from the Croat one [the percentages for Šokci are so low that they are usually added to the ‘other national groups’ section, yet 607 Serbian citizens declared Šokac as their ethnicity in 2011].

	1981	1991	2011
<b>Croats</b>	1.60	1.24	0.81
<b>Bunjevci</b>	N/A	0.27	0.23
<b>Others</b>	0.38	0.19	0.24

**Table 1:** percentage of citizens of Serbia stating their ethnic belonging as Croat, Bunjevci or ‘other’ in the 1981, 1991, and 2011 census.

Source: Попис становништва, домаћинства и станова 2011. у Републици Србији: Становништво и Национална Припадност, p. 14. Available online on <http://pod2.stat.gov.rs/ObjavljenePublikacije/Popis2011/Nacionalna%20priпадnost-Ethnicity.pdf> [First Accessed 14 June 2015] and for the data on Šokci within the ‘Other’ group Попис становништва, домаћинства и станова 2011. у Републици Србији: Становништво и Национална Припадност, “Остали” етничке заједнице са мање од 2,000 припадника и двојако изјашњени, available online on [http://webzrzs.stat.gov.rs/WebSite/userFiles/file/Aktuelnosti/Etnicke\\_zajednice\\_sa\\_manje\\_od\\_2000\\_priпадnika\\_i\\_dvojako\\_izjasnjeni.pdf](http://webzrzs.stat.gov.rs/WebSite/userFiles/file/Aktuelnosti/Etnicke_zajednice_sa_manje_od_2000_priпадnika_i_dvojako_izjasnjeni.pdf) [First Accessed 20 June 2011].

The case of the Kosovo Croats is particularly significant since a population exchange took place in the mid-1990s (i.e. Croats from Kosovo were sent as settlers to villages in Lika where Serbs had been the ethnic majority before the Homeland War). Return to the longed-for Homeland did not prove as pleasant as initially thought, however. Besides, this population exchange was fully supported by the Croatian episcopate: the Catholic Church in Kosovo encouraged Croats from Janjevo to move to Croatia, organised special meeting to “spiritually” prepare them for resettlement, and the bishop of Zadar even declared that moving out of Kosovo was “God’s will”. Yet, as Duijzings explains, once in Croatia it was not easy for the *Janjevci* to fully integrate in this new milieu in a short period of time: “[t]hough they [i.e. Kosovo’s Croats] are proud of having upheld a strong Croat and Catholic identity in a much more hostile environment than the Croats ever had in Croatia, they are now called and treated by the latter as Šiptari (a pejorative synonym for Albanians). Native Croats see them as primitive and dirty, as impulsive and unreliable, as ‘oriental’ Croats who are not and simply never will be part of the civilised world.” Ger Duijzings, *Religion and Politics of Identity in Kosovo*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2000, pp. 60-1.

44

“L’Ortodossia, tuttavia, non è interscambiabile con qualsiasi altra religione. Quello che distingue l’Ortodossia per esempio dal Cattolicesimo, dall’Islam o dal Buddismo è il suo eludere l’universalismo [...] Le Chiese Ortodosse, come nelle antiche religioni, sono le Chiese delle rispettive nazioni, i loro miti sono i miti delle loro nazioni. La battaglia di Kosovo, ad esempio, è consacrata come un evento di valore religioso ma è soltanto ed innanzitutto la Chiesa Serba ad essere interessata a questo mito. Per la Chiesa Ortodossa Russa, ad esempio, tale battaglia non è contemplata per nulla.”

*Orthodoxy, on the contrary, is not interchangeable with any other religion. What distinguishes Orthodoxy from, let’s say, Catholicism, Islam or Buddhism is its avoidance of universalism [...] The Orthodox churches, as in the ancient religions, are the churches of their respective nations. Their myths are those of their nations. The battle of Kosovo, for instance, is consecrated as an event of primary religious importance for the Serbian Orthodox Church. And that’s it: for the Russian Orthodox Church, the battle of Kosovo has no meaning (whether religious or historical) whatsoever.*

Sabrina P. Ramet, *L’Europa centro-orientale tra religione e politica. Cattolici, Ortodossi e nuovi ordini missionary dopo il 1989*, Ravenna: Longo Editore, 2008, p. 116.





## A bittersweet experience: the Catholic Church and the Yugoslav kingdom

La ragione della forza e della compattezza dell'Episcopato non è soltanto nella loro virtù e nella loro missione. Ha un fondamento anche di politica e di razza. L'opposizione dei croati e degli sloveni al predominio serbo, non potendosi sfogare per altra via, dopo che sono sopprese le libertà costituzionali [...] tende a polarizzarsi, se così mi è lecito di esprimermi, intorno agli istituti cattolici, enti non serbi, non amati dai serbi e non dominabili dai serbi. Così la resistenza dei Vescovi, pur essendo limitata al campo esclusivamente religioso, ha incontrato caldissime simpatie anche nei ceti nazionalistici croati che prima si distinguevano per il loro liberalismo od anticlericalismo. "Tutti i Croati guardano all'Episcopato", mi si riferisce da ogni parte.<sup>45</sup>

Letter from Cardinal Pellegrinetti (nuncio in Yugoslavia) to Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Gasparri, Belgrade 22 January 1930, in AA.EE.SS., IV, pos. 90 P.O., Fasc. 51, fol. 25r, as quoted in Massimiliano Valente, "Pio XI, la diplomazia pontificia", p. 724.

Whilst a majority of scholars have tended to portray the Catholic Church as openly hostile towards the Yugoslav state from the very moment of its inception, I agree with Mark Biondich that this view is 'far too simplistic'. Undoubtedly, the Catholic hierarchy in Croatia, Bosnia and Slovenia did indeed bemoan the disappearance of the Catholic Dual Monarchy and its replacement by a multi-religious melting pot with an Orthodox King at its head. As Biondich has pointed out "[s]ome cleric, like Ivan Šarić of Sarajevo were hardly sympathetic to the new Yugoslav state [...] however, many Church leaders, like the Archbishop Ernest Bauer of Zagreb, Bishop Antun Akšamović of Đakovo and [...] Mahnič of Krk, openly and sincerely welcomed the new state."<sup>46</sup> The Catholic Church also realised that the new state was in fact necessary, since Catholic Croats and Slovenes would have ended up otherwise as minorities in several States (i.e. Austria, Serbia, Hungary and Italy). Some historians have argued that the Vatican was even 'enthusi-

<sup>45</sup> *The reasons behind the strength and the compactness of the [Yugoslav] episcopacy are not only due to its virtue and mission. They also have a political and racial compound. Since the suspension of all constitutional freedoms, the opposition of Croats and Slovenes to Serb dominance tends to spread around Catholic institutions, which are non-Serb entities, not beloved by them, and above all not controllable by the Serbs. In this way the Bishops' resistance, even if restrained to religion, has found many sympathies among Croat nationalist groups previously known for their marked liberalism or anti-clericalism. "All Croats look towards their Bishops", I have been told almost everywhere.*

<sup>46</sup> Mark Biondich, "Controversies surrounding the Catholic Church in Wartime Croatia, 1941-45", p. 434. Archbishop Ernest Bauer of Zagreb welcomed the Yugoslav state with these words on the diocesan journal *Katolički list* in November 7th, 1918: "Today Croatia is a free country. Shortly we will join with our brothers in a union and create the powerful, rich sovereign state of the Slovenes, Croats and Serbs" [It has to be noted that by this time the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs had already deliberated about the formation of a common state with Serbia and Montenegro, so Bauer's circular explicitly welcomes the idea of a united state with the Serbian kingdom] In Stella Alexander, *The Triple Myth*, New York, NY: East European Monographs [Columbia University Press], 1987, p. 60.

astic' about Yugoslavia, as it gave Catholicism the opportunity to expand eastwards and bring 'schismatic' Orthodox Slavs in communion with Rome.<sup>47</sup>

This initial support waned quickly in the 1920s and turned into open disenchantment in the 1930s: the last straw in Church-state relations was the missed ratification of the 1935 Concordat in 1937. But before that the Church and the Yugoslav state had already clashed about several issues, such as the Church's role in education and the land reform. With regard to the education reform, it is true that the Yugoslav government had tried throughout the 1920s to secularise education, removing the Catholic Church's (and also the Orthodox Church's) semi-monopoly in some areas of the country. Whilst it gained momentum throughout the decade, 1929 and 1930 were the pivotal years in the Vatican-Yugoslav rift on education. The establishment of the royal dictatorship in January 1929 and the subsequent banning of all associations and organisations based upon "tribal" (i.e. ethnic), religious or regional affiliations was the first blow on Catholic interests: in December 1929, it was ordered that all Catholic youth organisations (particularly the Croat Eagles, analysed with more detail later in this chapter) were to disappear and then be amalgamated into the (Pan-) Yugoslav [and non-religious] Falcons. Catholic elites and the Bishops' Conference were more than convinced that this first step was the beginning of a Yugoslav *kulturkampf* against Catholics and their interests. *La Civiltà Cattolica*, the Jesuit journal, was the first Vatican-linked medium to speak about the issue and criticize the Yugoslav government. With significantly harsh terms, *La Civiltà Cattolica* presented the banning as a step forward into the 'Sovietisation of Yugoslavia': as in Russia, children had ceased to be the property of their parents and families, and had now become another State asset. Thus, by secularising schools and creating a non-religion-based national youth movement, Yugoslavia was – for *La Civiltà Cattolica* – en route toward Bolshevism.<sup>48</sup>

On 31 December 1929, Pius XI promulgated the encyclical *Divini illius magistri* on the Christian upbringing of youth. For the Italian press, particularly for *Il Corriere della Sera*, the Holy See was explicitly making reference to the Yugoslav law on education.<sup>49</sup> Whilst the Vatican immediately denied any linkage of the encyclical with the current situation in Yugoslavia, Rome was at the same time pushing for an annulment of the law through its Nuncio in Belgrade, Monsignor Pellegrinetti. After several meetings with representatives of the Ministry of Education, Pellegrinetti began to advocate for more direct action. Bauer, Arch-

47 Or so has been argued by the Croatian historian Ivan Mužić. Vjekoslav Perica, *Balkan Idols*, p. 18.

48 "Nelle varie legislazioni scolastiche precedent si riconosceva per iscopo dell'istruzione popolare l'«educazione religiosa e morale»: la nuova legge, invece, non la propone se non per uno scopo politico e nell'istruzione cerca solo la cultura del popolo, non l'educazione [...]. Intanto il governo di Belgrado che trema di fronte al comunismo, già abbastanza diffuso in Jugoslavia, si contraddice con questa legge, la quale viene a ritenere come in Russia, che i figli siano proprietà dello Stato, e a tale scopo ha monopolizzato, con la scuola e con la società 'Sokol', l'educazione intellettuale e fisica della gioventù. Creando la scuola di Stato obbligatoria e proibendo la vita religiosa ai giovani si è messo sulla via del bolscevismo russo." "Le nuove leggi scolastiche e il monopolio educativo in Jugoslavia", in *La Civiltà Cattolica* (Vol. I (1930), pp. 328-337) as quoted in Massimiliano Valente, "Pio XI, la diplomazia pontificia e gli «interventi politico-religiosi» dei vescovi jugoslavi", in Pettinaroli, Laura, *Le Gouvernement pontifical sous Pie XI*, Rome: École Française de Rome, 2013, p. 719.

49 Massimiliano Valente, "Pio XI, la diplomazia pontificia e gli «interventi politico-religiosi» dei vescovi jugoslavi", p. 722.

Notes 23., 24., 25. and 53. could be easily seen (by the end of 1929) as a clear criticism of the Yugoslav government by the Holy See. It is also true, however, that such criticism could be extrapolated to many other states that had also started national youth organisations and thus were putting in risk the Church's monopoly on youth control and education – like, for instance, Italy's *gioventù fascista*.

bishop of Zagreb, did not hesitate and sent in May a pastoral letter to all parish priests in his archdiocese, and some others in Croatia, Slovenia and Bosnia, to be read during the Sunday sermons. This pastoral letter is of pivotal importance because, as Valente has pointed out, it is the first time that the Yugoslav prelature openly criticised the new law on education and accused the government of implicit anti-Catholic feelings.<sup>50</sup> Although Bauer acted unilaterally and it is likely that the Nuncio and the Vatican would have opted for a more diplomatic and open to dialogue way with the government of Belgrade, the circular had the effect the prelature wished. On 1 July 1930, king Alexander summoned the Nuncio to his palace to discuss the problems between State and Church in the kingdom. Five days later the Yugoslav parliament approved a new act on the modifications and additions regarding the law on education, which basically was a return to the *ex ante* standpoint. Similarly, the ban on Catholic youth groups was lifted.

There were other – more menial – reasons for the progressive embitterment of relations between the Church and the Belgrade government in the 1920s and 1930s, in addition to the land reform and the (attempted) reform on education. First, many Yugoslav unitarists saw the Catholic Church as an anti-Slav and alien element under foreign control, in contrast to more “native and ‘national’” Orthodoxy.<sup>51</sup> Second, the Catholic Church regarded the creation of a ‘Croatian Old Catholic Church’ [an ‘ersatz’ version of Roman Catholicism which refused to recognise the First Vatican Council and the dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and papal infallibility, following the tenets of the Declaration of Utrecht] as a direct attack against her very existence in Yugoslavia.<sup>52</sup> Above all, the Catholic Church began to dislike the Yugoslav kingdom because “accustomed to state protection in the Dual Monarchy, [the Catholic Church] now encountered indifference and even hostility from the state authorities” – having certainly lost its political-religious supremacy and prestige in favour of the Serbian Orthodox Church, not a ‘national’ Church *de jure* but the Church of the royal family and the Belgradian elites.<sup>53</sup>

As mentioned before, Church-State relations became explicitly tense (since the previous clashing points, particularly the education reform, were solved in a relative short period of time) only after the failed parliamentary ratification of the 1935 Concordat in 1937.<sup>54</sup> The negotiations for a Concordat with the Holy See and Belgrade had begun in July 1925, as a personal desire of king Alexander.<sup>55</sup> The final version of the Concordat was supposed to replace the myriad of previous agreements inherited by the Yugoslav kingdom, with a different legal framework applying to almost every region in the country. So, for instance,

50 Ibid., p. 723.

51 Mark Biondich, “Controversies surrounding the Catholic Church in Wartime Croatia, 1941-45”, p. 434.

52 The Catholic Church certainly exaggerated the threat of the Old Catholic Church. As Biondich has noted, “the Old Catholic Church never posed as serious a challenge to the faith as some believed at the time.” In the Old Catholic Church bishops and priests could marry, and the largest percentage of conversions was among those Catholics in situation of concubinage who wished to marry their present partners. Ibid., p. 434.

53 Ibid., p. 434.

54 All other religious communities (Muslims, Protestants, Jews) had already regulated their relations with the State in the late 1920s-early 1930s. As for the Serbian Orthodox Church, it obtained a special law in 1929 and a Statute in 1931 “by which it became the *de facto* state religion”. Vjekoslav Perica, *Balkan Idols*, p. 18.

55 Aleksa Benigar, *Alojzije Stepinac, Hrvatski Kardinal*, Zagreb: Glas Koncila, 1993, p. 186.

relations with the Catholic Church were regulated by the 1914 Concordat in Serbia (excluding Vojvodina) and Macedonia, by the 1886 Concordat in Montenegro, by the Austrian 1855 Concordat in Croatia-Slavonia, by the 1881 Concordat-Convention in Bosnia and Herzegovina, whilst in Dalmatia, Slovenia and Vojvodina Austrian and Hungarian jurisdiction on religious institutions was used for the Catholic Church.<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, by offering a Concordat to the Yugoslav kingdom, the Holy See was thus officially acknowledging the post-Versailles reality in this part of Europe and accepting the Yugoslav kingdom as an equal in diplomatic relations.<sup>57</sup>

The Serbian Orthodox Church, arguing that “the concordat provided a privileged status for the Catholic Church at the expense of other faiths” responded immoderately to the prospect of a quick parliamentary ratification of the Concordat.<sup>58</sup> The voting (which coincided with the death of Patriarch Varnava, thus adding even more emotional significance to the issue) took place among widespread riots throughout the whole country incited from Orthodox pulpits, and with all those MPs voting for and wishing to vote for the Concordat excommunicated.<sup>59</sup> With 166 votes against and 128 for, the Concordat was not ratified by the Parliament’s lower chamber, thus it passed immediately to the Senate for a second voting which never took place. Half the Parliament and all Orthodox members of the Cabinet were excommunicated until Stojadinović informed that the Concordat ratification was suspended *sine die*.

Equally harsh was the Catholic Church’s response. *L’Osservatore romano* published in December 1937 Pius XI’s first public (yet not direct) denunciation of the Yugoslav government, which had ungratefully rejected a gift offered by the Vicar of Christ.<sup>60</sup> The Yugoslav Bishops’ Conference followed Pius XI’s example and issued a Pastoral Letter in May 1938 “expressing their deep disappointment over the government’s failure to ratify the Concordat, as well as listing some of the alleged injustices suffered by the Church.”<sup>61</sup> Vatican press continued to publish articles criticising both the missed implementation of the Concordat and the Yugoslav government’s stance for almost a year.<sup>62</sup> It is clear, as Vjekoslav Perica has noted, that the Concordat crisis gave both Yugoslav Churches a precious pretext to carry out “ethnic nationalist mobilization of their respective ethnic and religious communities” since it closely preceded the historical commemorations of two events that significantly mark the ethnic, religious and historical ‘building process’ of Croats and Serbs as separate peoples:

56 Ibid., p. 186.

57 Besides, the Concordat gave a chance to the Yugoslav government –through the Holy See’s mediation- to protect the harassed Slav-speakers (mainly Slovenes, but also some Croats) in Italy’s north-eastern regions.

58 Vjekoslav Perica, *Balkan Idols*, p. 17.

59 The Orthodox Synod did not just excommunicate those Cabinet members who voted for the Concordat, it also forbade other Orthodox believers to let them enter or invite them to their households Aleksa Benigar, *Alojzije Stepinac, Hrvatski Kardinal*, p. 189.

60 See Appendix, Document 1.

61 Mark Biondich, “Radical Catholicism and Fascism in Croatia, 1918-1945”, *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 8:2, p. 388.

62 *La Civiltà Cattolica* (88 Vol. III Quaderno 2093 (1937)) also commented the issue in September 1937, moreover *L’Osservatore romano* (19 February 1938) expressed its distrust toward Stojadinović’s government and the affliction the whole Concordat issue had caused to the *Curia* and particularly to the Holy Father, Pius XI. *L’Osservatore romano* also worried about the fate of Catholics in Yugoslavia, portraying them as a religious minority with no legal protection whatsoever when facing the Orthodox majority.



the 550th anniversary of the Kosovo Battle in 1939 and the 1300th anniversary of the Catholicisation of the Croats and the establishment of relations with the Holy See in 1941.<sup>63</sup>

It is important to underline that, despite this façade of close rapports and mutual understanding between the Yugoslav bishops and the Holy See, these two institutions sometimes clashed too. As Massimo Valente has shown, the Vatican was worried by the marked national character all Church institutions (and especially the Yugoslav prelature) had acquired during the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>64</sup> Yet, above all, the main concern was by the high level of autonomy shown by the Yugoslav bishops (particularly Zagreb's archbishop Bauer) when dealing with political issues in Yugoslavia, usually taking important decisions without any prior consultation with the Nuncio or the Secretariat of State.<sup>65</sup> The Vatican's main fear was that of a Yugoslav 'Catholic Synod' which could replicate the Serbian Orthodox one.<sup>66</sup> The unsupervised political moves by the Yugoslav Episcopacy and the lower clergy alarmed Monsignor Pellegrinetti (Papal Nuncio in Belgrade in the 1930s) to such an extent as to request from the Secretariat of State an *exquiratur sententia Nuntii Apostolici*, a legal protocol which obliged Yugoslav bishops to request permission from the Nunciature in Belgrade whenever they were about to make a statement or move of any kind which may have had some degree of political significance. The *exquiratur* was first approved by the Holy See *ad triennium* in 1934, and then postponed *ad decennium* by Pellegrinetti himself in 1937.<sup>67</sup>

As for the political mobilisation of Catholics, in May 1919 the Croat People's Party was founded, in the hope of imitating the success of Anton Korošec's Slovene People's Party. Unlike its Slovenian counterpart, political Catholicism in Croatia did not manage to overtake Radić's Croatian Peasant Party electoral hegemony. The Catholic movement divides from this point onwards into two nationally-defined branches: Slovenian and Croat. The

63 It is true, however, that the Serbian Orthodox Church tried to reduce the level of conflict when the actual commemoration of the Kosovo Battle took place on 28 June 1939. Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović of Žiča presented the battle as a common Yugoslav effort, and "also appealed to the restless Croats to reunite with Serbs, because, in his words: 'Isn't it better to live together as brothers in our common and free homelands, instead of, divided and weakened, to succumb again to foreign imperial domination?'" Vjekoslav Perica, *Balkan Idols*, p. 20.

64 "L'Episcopato Jugoslavo sembra più proclive a lasciarsi trasportare dalla foga del combattimento che dirigere da consigli di moderazione e di prudente attesa." *The Yugoslav Episcopacy seems more inclined to be driven by the passion of fight than by our advices of moderation and cautious wait.*

"Istruzioni per sua Eccellenza Rev.ma Monsignor Ettore Felici, Arcivescovo Titolare di Corinto Nunzio Apostolico in Jugoslavia", 1938, in AA.EEE.SS., Jugoslavia pos. 125 fasc. 83 fol. 19r, in Massimiliano Valente, "Pio XI, la diplomazia pontificia e gli «interventi politico-religiosi» dei vescovi jugoslavi", pp. 725-6.

65 On 30 January 1930, Archbishop Bauer (at the time, President of the Yugoslav Bishops' Conference) sent a pastoral letter to be read in all parishes in Yugoslavia calling for a collective prayer during the festivity of Saint Joseph asking for the protection of allogene [i.e. non-Italian speaking] Catholics in the Venezia-Giulia (Croats and Slovenes). This pastoral letter (commonly known as the *Circolare Bauer*) provoked a serious diplomatic incident which involving Italy, Yugoslavia and the Holy See, and more than one headache to the Pope and the Secretary of State. In Massimiliano Valente, "Pio XI, la diplomazia pontificia e gli «interventi politico-religiosi» dei vescovi jugoslavi", p. 714, Note 24.

66 "In generale – osserva Pellegrinetti – 'pure essendo devotissimi alla S Sede' i vescovi 'ambiscono di trattare direttamente con il governo' composto in maggioranza da serbi, che riteneva la Conferenza episcopale il parrallelo del Sinodo del Patriarcato ortodosso, quindi la suprema istanza dei cattolici jugoslavi e bastava trattare con essa (pur lasciando da parte la Santa Sede) per affermare che aveva fatto il suo dovere verso la Chiesa e nessuno poteva ulteriormente oviettare; i vescovi, a loro volta, 'quasi per incoscio istinto, tendono a tutto risolvere nelle loro Conferenze, limitandosi spesso a darne notizia al Nunzio e al S. Padre.'" In Massimiliano Valente, "Pio XI, la diplomazia pontificia e gli «interventi politico-religiosi» dei vescovi jugoslavi", p. 712, Note 17.

67 See Appendix, Document 2.

idea of Slavic-Catholic unification and brotherhood was thus rejected for a more straightforwardly national exclusivist ideology. The Church, however, continued to play a mainly marginal role in Croatian political life and mass politics in this period (unlike in Slovenia), despite the role of some prominent Catholic intellectuals and the evident desire of the Church's upper hierarchy to play a more substantial role in them.<sup>68</sup>

Far more interesting (and successful) is the transformation of Mahnič's 'Catholic Movement' and particularly Catholic youth organisations into an openly pro-independence, anti-Yugoslav and ethnically exclusivist group. Pius XI's encyclical *Ubi arcano Dei consilio* (1922) called for more participation of laymen in the Church's structures and promoted the Jesuit *Catholic Action*: the Church in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina quickly answered the pope's demand, transforming Mahnič's philo-Slavic youth movement [there were Eagles' chapters in Slovenia, Slovakia and Bohemia too] into the 'Croat Eagles'. As Sandra Prlenda has noted, the Croat Eagles were the Catholic response to both the Serb and Yugoslav Falcons. Whilst the former promoted "a common nationalistic program for the unification of all Serbs" in the 19th century, the latter promoted liberalism and religious indifference, likely the Church's *most* sworn enemies.<sup>69</sup> The Croat Eagles were the spiritually healthy version of the liberal Falcons: instead of proclaiming individualism, the Eagles made a public confession of their faith; rather than hiding religion, the *Hrvatski orlovi* were to restore Catholicism to the place it deserved in public life.

The movement was harshly criticised, even by other Croatian organisations: particularly severe was Stjepan Radić, who denounced the Eagles as a clerical and political organisation.<sup>70</sup> It is therefore not surprising that the Eagles, along with the Croat People's Party and "all organizations, including gymnastic ones, based on "tribal" (ethnic), religious or regional affiliation", were banned in 1929 – when king Alexander established a personal dictatorship.<sup>71</sup> With the imposition of the royal dictatorship, the Catholic movement, more-or-less compact in the 1920s, "became more clouded and complex to unravel."<sup>72</sup> One thing is certain, though: in the choice between liberal democracy and federalism (as endorsed by the Maček's Croat Peasant Party) and authoritarianism and full independence (as proposed by more radical groups, like the ustaše), the previously implicitly anti-Yugoslav Catholic political movement was more prone to choosing the second.

The outlawed Croatian Eagles were reconstituted as the 'Crusaders' (*Križari*) in 1931. These new 'Eagles', although relatively small – counting 43,000 members in Bosnia, Croatia and the Bačka (western Vojvodina) by 1939 – were markedly more nationalistic, mil-

68 Mark Biondich, "Controversies surrounding the Catholic Church in Wartime Croatia, 1941-45", p. 439. Some scholars, Stella Alexander *in primis*, have gone so far as to suggest that, given the irrelevance of the political wing of Catholic organisations, there was no such thing as a 'Catholic political (or clericalist) movement' in interwar Croatia. In Mark Biondich, "Controversies surrounding the Catholic Church in Wartime Croatia, 1941-45", p. 435, quoting Stella Alexander, "Croatia: the Catholic Church and the clergy", in Richard J. Wolff, Jörg K. Hönsch, eds., *Catholics, the State, and the European Radical Right, 1919-1945*, Boulder: CO, Social Sciences Monographs, 1987, (note 10), pp. 31-66.

69 Sandra Prlenda, "Young, Religious, Radical: The Croat Youth Organizations, 1922-1945", pp. 87-8.

70 Ibid., p. 89.

71 Ibid., p. 85.

72 Mark Biondich, "Religion and Nation in Wartime Croatia", p. 81.

itaristic and 'Croat' than any other type of Catholic organisation before.<sup>73</sup> As Biondich has shown, the Crusaders's aim was [t]o reshape society by producing a new generation of Catholic youth through indoctrination in the liturgy and faith, in Croatian history and in Catholic social teaching [...] the crusaders adopted an integral Great Croatian ideology, which envisaged Croatia not just as pre-war Croatia-Slavonia (with Srijem) and Dalmatia but also as Bosnia-Herzegovina and Bačka.<sup>74</sup>

When the Catholic movement was banned and labelled as 'hard' opposition by the royal dictatorship, politically-engaged Catholics had to choose what 'hard' opposition to back: it was either the Croat Peasants Party programme or more 'radicalised' positions, including Croatian independence and filo-fascist approaches to the idea of state (as endorsed by the ustaše). Mark Biondich asserts that "by the late 1930s the Catholic political movement in Croatia [whilst still organisationally and politically divided] expressed growing sympathy for Croatian statehood."<sup>75</sup> I would also add corporatism, authoritarianism and staunch anti-Communism among the 'sympathies' political Catholicism began to smoulder in the 1930s, not only in Croatia, but all over Europe. Furthermore, these very same ideas were exactly what the ustaše had to offer for Croatia. Rather than the political conceptualisation of the Catholic movement, interwar Yugoslavia was a great opportunity to entrench the Croatian national-political struggle and Catholicism. (Orthodox) Belgrade had replaced (Catholic) Vienna and (equally Catholic) Budapest "as the main perceived threat to Croatom."<sup>76</sup> Once the independence/freedom struggle could be written along religious (exclusivist) lines (i.e. us Catholics against them Orthodox oppressors), political Catholicism and the whole Catholic hierarchy could easily embrace the Croatian cause.

73 The most radical factions of the Križari were given illegal military training by extreme-right groups (particularly the ustaše) in order to be able to join these groups in future actions. Stella Alexander, *The Triple Myth*, p. 151.

74 Mark Biondich, "Radical Catholicism and Fascism in Croatia, 1918-1945", p. 388.

75 Mark Biondich, "Controversies surrounding the Catholic Church in Wartime Croatia, 1941-45", p. 435. Biondich also argues that, in spite of this desire for independence, the Catholic movement "maintained certain reservations about Nazism and Fascism". [Biondich particularly refers to the words by don Ivo Guberina, an influential Catholic intellectual who strongly criticised Germany's invasion of Poland and the consequences this war may have for Catholics in Europe] Mark Biondich, "Radical Catholicism and Fascism in Croatia, 1918-1945", p. 392.

By the late 1930s, not only Catholic institutions, but nearly all Croat-inspired associations were bursting with nationalism and independentist ideas. As Yeomans has pointed out, "the leading cultural institution in Croatia, Matica Hrvatska, had become sufficiently nationalist by 1940 for the Ban of Croatia, Ivan Šubašić, to place it under the control of a commissariat." Rory Yeomans, *Visions of Annihilation: the Ustasha Regime and the Cultural Politics of Fascism*, Pittsburgh, PA: Pittsburgh University Press, 2013, p. 248.

76 Mark Biondich, "We Were Defending the State", p. 60.





## A Fight *pro aris et focis*: World War II and the Croatian Church

All in all, Croats and Serbs are two worlds that will never move closer to one another without an act of God [...] The schism is the greatest curse of Europe, almost greater than Protestantism. There is no morality, no principle, there is no truth, no justice, no honesty [in Orthodoxy].

Alojzije Stepinac's (Archbishop of Zagreb) diary entry note on 27 March 1941, as quoted in Mark Biondich, "Controversies surrounding the Catholic Church in Wartime Croatia, 1941-45", p. 439.

"SPIRITUS QUIDEM PROMPTUS EST CARO AUTEM INFIRMA"  
[Matthew 26:41]

And, suddenly, it arrived: less than a week after the Axis forces invaded Yugoslavia Croatia was an independent state after a millennium of foreign domination. On Maundy Thursday (10 April 1941) Slavko Kvaternik, a high-ranking ustaša, proclaimed the creation of the Independent State of Croatia (*Nezavisna Država Hrvatska*).<sup>77</sup> After the Yugoslav Golgotha, Easter Sunday had arrived for the Croat nation – needless to say that the Church was overjoyed at the creation of a Croatian independent state.<sup>78</sup> Yet, as Alexander has shown, "this was especially true of Croatia proper, Zagreb and the surrounding districts, and of Bosnia-Herzegovina; along the Dalmatian coast feelings were rather less intense and more mixed" – the Dalmatian clergy (and Dalmatians in general) were well aware that the Italian army was likely to stay for a long period.<sup>79</sup> Stepinac, archbishop of Zagreb and (unofficially) Primate of Croatia, compared in a circular the NDH to Zvonimir's Croatia [i.e. Demetrius Zvonimir, remembered as one of

77 During the speech, Kvaternik thanks the Divine Providence, and compares Christ's resurrection to the resurrection of the Croatian state.

Ustaša and pro-regime press presented Ante Pavelić's (the movement's *Poglavnik*, i. e. Leader or more accurately 'Duce') as "on the ruins of the Yugoslav Babylon on Easter Sunday the very day of the resurrection of the Saviour" – Pavelić had actually arrived in Zagreb on Thursday, April 15 and not on Easter Sunday, April 13.

Rory Yeomans, *Visions of Annihilation: the Ustasha Regime and the Cultural Politics of Fascism*, Pittsburgh, PA: Pittsburgh University Press, 2013, p. 302.

A very similar analogy was used forty-nine years later in a HDZ (Croatian Democratic Union) meeting, on Easter Sunday in 1990: "Today Christ made his triumphal entrance in Jerusalem, and He was awaited as the Messiah. Today Croatia's capital city looks like Jerusalem. Franjo Tuđman has come to meet his people". Video available on the BBC documentary *The Death of Yugoslavia* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JVthH4bexTw> [First Accessed 8 February 2015].

78 In April 1941, the Catholic upper clergy comprised two archbishops (Stepinac of Zagreb and Šarić of Sarajevo) and ten bishops (Akšamović of Đakovo, Burić of Senj, Garić of Banja Luka, Šimrak of Križevci [appointed in May 1942], Mišić of Mostar [†1942, replaced by Čule], Srebrenić of Krk, Pušić of Hvar, Mileta of Šibenik, Bonefačić of Split and – even if not in the NDH – I would also include Bishop Ujčić of Belgrade].

79 Stella Alexander, *The Triple Myth*, p. 88.

Croatia's most successful kings of the Middle Ages], and invited all bishops and priests in the NDH territory to celebrate a mass and sing a *Te Deum* in honour of the young Croatian state.<sup>80</sup>

Who were the ustaše now in charge of governing independent Croatia? Whilst scholars have not been able to provide a single definition, the concepts proposed are pretty much similar: Stella Alexander, Jonathan Steinberg, and Paul Mojzes have defined them as an extreme right-wing, ultra-Catholic, anti-Semite, anti-Serb and rabidly nationalist movement, influenced above all by Mussolini's Fascism rather than German Nazism – for Alexander, however, the ustaše's devotion to the Catholic faith was just “a declaration of Croatian cultural identity rather than a real religious commitment.”<sup>81 82</sup> Aleksa Djilas has given a very detailed interpretation of the continuous ideological dichotomy present in the ustaša movement: “they were at once a modern totalitarian and terrorist organization, conservative traditionalists, Roman Catholic clericalists [...] and primitive, peasant-populist rebels.”<sup>83</sup> They were, after all, a small in-exile movement, with little or no real possibilities of governing Croatia, had Maček (leader of the Croatian Peasant Party) accepted the Germans' proposal to rule an independent Croatia.

But Maček refused the Germans' offer, and in April 1941 the (relatively unknown) ustaše came to power – the actual reason being, as Ivo Goldstein has noted, “fantastic blind luck.”<sup>84</sup> Moreover, the movement's leader, Ante Pavelić, was a marginal political figure in much of the territories he now had to rule over, and as a consequence he did not enjoy ever the “popularity or moral standing of Jozef Tiso in Slovakia or King Boris in Bulgaria.”<sup>85</sup> Ustaša Croatia is – nonetheless – a unique case in Hitler's European New Order because, as Marrus has shown, “the overall level of violence [in all of Nazi satellite/puppet states] was highest in Croatia, where Pavelić's Ustasha movement devised the most thoroughly totalitarian state of any satellite and pursued a merciless, bloody assault on the country's 2 million Serbs.”<sup>86</sup>

For Emily Greble it is crystal-clear that the NDH “was forged through an ideological agenda of genocide from the moment of its inception.”<sup>87</sup> The aim of the ustaše was that of homogenising the Croatian nation into a single ‘identifiable ethnic unit’ (*samosvojna etnička jedinica*) thus reinforcing the Croatian nation's historical right to a sovereign state.<sup>88</sup> Thus, in this ‘pure’

80 Ibid., p. 90.

81 For GERALD REITLINGER the anti-Semitism of the ustaše (and specifically Pavelić's) was little more than a bait for the Germans: “since he (Pavelić) was himself married to a daughter of the Jew LORENČEVIĆ, while Marshal KVATERNIK, the organizer of the Ustashe military terrorism, was in the same position, having married the daughter of the former nationalist leader of the days of the Hapsburg [sic] Empire, the Jew JOSIP FRANK [Frank converted to Roman Catholicism, however]” GERALD REITLINGER, *The Final Solution*, New York, NY: Perpetua, 1961, p. 365.

82 Stella Alexander, *The Triple Myth*, p. 1.

83 Aleksa Djilas, *The Contested Country: Yugoslav Unity and Communist Revolution 1919-1953*, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1991, p. 114.

84 Ivo Goldstein, “Ante Pavelić, Charisma and National Mission in Wartime Croatia”, *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 7:2, p. 229.

85 Emily Greble, “When Croatia needed Serbs: Nationalism and Genocide in Sarajevo, 1941-1942”, *Slavic Review*, Vol. 68, No. 1 (Spring, 2009), p. 137.

86 Michael R. Marrus, *The Holocaust in History*, London, Penguin Group, 1987, p. 76.

Steinberg has also noted how the NDH was in fact “the only Axis satellite to have murdered more non-Jewish than Jewish civilians” Jonathan Steinberg, “Croatians, Serbs and Jews, 1941-5”, in Cesarani, David (ed.), *The Final Solution: Origins and Implementation*, London: Routledge, 1994, p. 176.

87 Emily Greble, “When Croatia needed Serbs”, pp. 117-8.

88 Even if that ‘sovereign’ state was, as Biondich has put it, no more than “an Italo-German condominium and brutal ad

Croatia only Catholic and Muslim Croats were to be granted full citizenship rights [The different Protestant minorities living in the NDH (mainly Lutheran, but also some groups of Calvinists) were equally given full citizenship status].<sup>89</sup> Creating an ethnically homogeneous national entity was (to say the least) a particularly difficult task for a country like the NDH: the ustaše were committed to an extremist and exclusivist nation-state ideology but they were ruling over a multi-national territory, nonetheless.<sup>90</sup> As Mark Attila Hoare has rightly pointed out, this tension between the megalomaniacal aims of the ustaše and the actual capability of carrying them out was partially responsible for the extreme levels of violence witnessed in the NDH: “[t]he abnormality of an extreme-nationalist but militarily weak regime attempting to establish its rule over a disparate collection of territories populated by a nationally mixed and generally hostile population was one that was bound to generate massive violence and bloodshed.”<sup>91</sup> In addition to the former, another characteristic of the NDH was, as Cingolani has put it, its anachronistically excessive puritanism at all State levels, undoubtedly deriving from the volatile mixture between social Darwinism, biology and social ethics with State confessionality.<sup>92</sup>

To achieve the homogeneity they so strongly longed for, the ustaše had to (physically) get rid of ‘undesired’ elements (*nepoćudni elementi*): Serbs, Jews, Communists, and other enemies of the nation. Since the Serbs – unlike the Jews – were objectively too many to be directly ‘liquidated’ (more-or-less a third of the NDH’s total population) ustaša ‘social engineers’ opted for a triple policy of ethnic homogenisation: mass killing, deportation of the upper classes and the intelligentsia to Serbia, and forced conversions to Roman Catholicism of the peasantry.<sup>93</sup> Defining these *nepoćudni elementi* also became a difficult task, particularly with regard to the status of Serbs – the anti-Jewish law of 30 April 1941 gave, on the contrary, a meticulous and explicit set of characteristics to help authorities in the identification process of Jews in the NDH, practically doubling Lösener’s initial classification enacted in the Nuremberg Laws.<sup>94</sup>

As for the Serbs, the issue was definitely more open. Although they were targeted as a group from the very first day of the NDH’s existence, Serbs could not be separated from the Croatian national as corpus as quickly as Jews had been since the actual ‘racial’ (and to a certain extent, cultural – if religion and national allegiance are not taken into account) differentiation was practically non-existent. Indeed, “the persecution of Serbs was based on cultural and religious

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hoc creation”. Mark Biondich, “We Were Defending the State”, p. 60.

89 Yet – as noted by Greble – “[b]eing Muslim did not automatically qualify for Croatian status”. In April and May 1941, ustaša volunteers and the police began to detain and seize the properties of those Muslims considered to be Serb-oriented [i.e. particularly – but not only – members of the Yugoslav Muslim Organisation who did not side with Džafer Kulenović in supporting the ustaša regime]. Emily Greble, “When Croatia needed Serbs”, p. 126.

90 Jonathan E. Gumz, “Wehrmacht Perception of Mass Violence in Croatia, 1941-1942”, *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 44, No. 4 (Dec., 2001), p. 1019.

91 Mark Attila Hoare, “Genocide in Yugoslavia Before and After Communism”, *Europe-Asia Studies*, 62:7 (2010), p. 21.

92 “La religione si contaminava con la biologia e l’etica sociale con il confessionalismo, conferendo allo Stato una connotazione anacronisticamente puritana.” Giorgio Cingolani & Adriano Pino, *La Via dei Conventi*, Milan: Mursia, 2011, p. 228.

93 Tomislav Dulić, “Mass Killings in the Independent State of Croatia: 1941-1945: a case for comparative research”, *Journal for Genocide Research*, 8:3, p. 261.

94 As Hilberg has shown, the Croats quickly outperformed the Germans when enacting anti-Jewish legislation. Not only did they improve and extend Lösener’s definition of ‘Jew’ (below), but the NDH government managed to legislate on measures which German bureaucrats had strived for more than eight years. Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of European Jews*, New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2003, Vol. II, pp. 757-8.

See Appendix, Document 3.

criteria, and they were not subjected to the racial laws.”<sup>95</sup> Furthermore, anti-Serbianism [or, rather, anti-Orthodoxism] was not a constant tenet in *ustaša* ideology: as Biondich has shown, “as late as 1939, Mirko Puk, who would serve during the war as Ustasa Minister of Justice and Religion, claimed that religion was not a criterion for establishing nationality in Great Croatia”, hence the Orthodox (i.e. de-nationalised and de-politicised Serbs) could enter the ranks of the tripartite Croat nation hand in hand with their Muslim and Catholic brothers.<sup>96</sup> After April 1941, identification as such was directly decided by the relevant local *ustaša* authorities: ““Serbian” meant different things to different people in different parts of the country. For some local officials it was a political identity, for others it referred to members of the Serbian Orthodox faith; and for many it was simply the “other” in Croatia’s racial laws.”<sup>97</sup> As Emily Greble has proved, even if racially and legally labelled as Serbs, local *ustaša* authorities could apply another classificatory stage [i.e. the distinction between *domaći* (domestic, native) and ‘foreign’ (whether from Serbia or from other regions of the NDH) Serbs] in order to avoid the dismissal of those “non-Croat citizens” deemed necessary for the correct functioning of local administration.<sup>98</sup>

The nature and dynamics of the *ustaša* ethnic cleansing policies are, in fact, one of the most contentious points in the scholarly discussion due to the persistent inconsistencies in implementation, systematics, and realisation.<sup>99</sup> <sup>100</sup> Whilst for some scholars the German-led Axis invasion of Yugoslavia and the subsequent loss of social order that it caused were the spark that triggered a ‘war of nations’ (somehow instigated by the German and Italian occupiers), and for others *ustaša* elites had in mind a genocidal campaign against Serbs, Jews and the Roma years before their rise to political power; Marko Attila Hoare sees the

95 Tomislav Dulić, “Mass Killings in the Independent State of Croatia: 1941-1945”, p. 261.

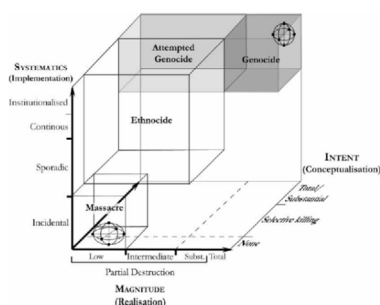
96 Mark Biondich, “Religion and Nation in Wartime Croatia”, p. 77.

97 Emily Greble, “When Croatia needed Serbs”, p. 124.

98 “[O]n 7 May 1941, local Ustasha authorities authorized exemptions for Serbs who were *domaći* – a word meaning domestic or native, although in this context it would be best translated as “our local Serbs.” *Domaći* Serbs was a loosely defined category that generally applied to Sarajevans of Orthodox background who posed no discernible threat to the political goals of the Croatian nation-state. The group primarily consisted of lower-level bureaucrats, women, children, and the elderly. There was no formal means of differentiating “local Serbs” from those other Serbs who were considered racially inferior and potentially criminal.” Ibid., pp. 125-6.

99 This applies only the ‘Serb element’ because – as Dulić has noted – the actual genocide on the NDH’s Jews can be corroborated “by the perpetrators’ intent, by the level of high of systematics due to which almost all Jews were deported and killed in camps, and because of the equally high magnitude of destruction.” Tomislav Dulić, “Mass Killings in the Independent State of Croatia: 1941-1945”, p. 274.

100 Dulić’s three variables [i.e. magnitude (realisation), intent (conceptualisation), and systematics (implementation)] have to be carried out simultaneously and at its maximum level to consider a series of uninterrupted mass killings as genocide. If one (or two) of the variables are not brought to this maximum, we can speak either of an ‘attempted genocide’, an ‘ethnocide’, or a ‘massacre’. Thruth be told, Dulić’s model leaves many blank spaces or ‘no men’s land’ zones which do not qualify to be defined as any of the above.



**Figure 1.** The three dimensions of mass killing.

Source: Tomislav Dulić, “Mass Killings in the Independent State of Croatia: 1941-1945”, p. 257.



ustaša ethnic cleansing campaign against the NDH's Serbs as "the product of a genuine power struggle between two nationalities competing for the control of the same space."<sup>101</sup> Therefore,

[t]he Ustasha genocide of the Serbs was not the ideologically predetermined outcome of Croat national aspirations, nor the accidental by-product of Axis rule; rather, the increasingly bitter political conflicts of interwar Yugoslavia, both at the national and at the local level and particularly in its final years, created the conditions that made genocide possible in the exceptional circumstances created by the Axis invasion.<sup>102</sup>

Hoare, by claiming this, does not argue that the Serbs actually "provoked" the ustaša ferocious bloodshed because of their armed resistance to the NDH.<sup>103</sup> Instead, and in opposition to Jonathan Steinberg's definition of the ustaša campaign of mass killings as a Balkan Holocaust differing from the original one only in its "emotional motivation", Hoare maintains that, in addition to the 'emotional motivation', there was much *realpolitik* going on too: thus two extremely violent forms of nationalism clashed simultaneously in the NDH, which became (particularly Bosnia, Herzegovina, the Kordun, and Lika) the battlefield where territorial aspirations were to be settled once and forever.<sup>104</sup> The četniks (and not the Partisans) were the ustaša's main threat in 1941-2 because of the support the former obtained from both the Italians and Nedić's Serbia, which gave them enough military power as to actually dismember the NDH.<sup>105</sup> The četnik issue became so serious that – as argued by Hoare – the ustaša were forced to reach an agreement in Eastern Bosnia with their evil Communist arch-enemies, the Partisans, by the end of 1941: both ceased fighting each other in order to concentrate (separately, though) their efforts against the četniks.<sup>106</sup> For Hoare, the fact the weight of ustaša crimes happened in Croatia proper and in western Bosnia, whilst the četnik massacres were largely carried out in eastern Bosnia and the Sandžak region (the first only nominally ustaša control but never effectively controlled, while the second one was under ustaša rule or touched by the ustaša genocide at no time) proves that the genocidal dynamics in the region during the Second World War were, more than a copy-paste phenomenon of the Holocaust, "an extreme solution to a territorial conflict between rival nationalisms."<sup>107</sup>

101 Marko Attila Hoare, *Genocide and resistance in Hitler's Bosnia: the Partisans and the Chetniks, 1941-1943*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006, p. 27.

102 Ibid., p. 21.

103 When ustaša indiscriminated violence became generalised Serbs began to join in large number different armed groups (i.e. either Tito's Partisans or the četnik bands led by Draža Mihailović and his *Jugoslovenska Vojska u Otadžbini* – 'Yugoslav Army in the Fatherland') in order to counter-attack the ustašas.

104 "Steinberg claims that the 'sole distinction' between the Ustasha genocide and the Holocaust was that 'Croats hated Serbs and so they killed them'." Marko Attila Hoare, *Genocide and resistance in Hitler's Bosnia*, p. 25.

105 As Greble has pointed out, even the ustaša elites considered a possible dismembering of the NDH if that could have appeased the četniks: "[s]ome [ustaša] officials even contemplated turning Sarajevo and eastern Bosnia over to the Chetniks in exchanges for a ceasefire and help fighting the communists." Emily Greble, "When Croatia needed Serbs", p. 133.

106 "At this point [autumn 1941 – winter 1942] it was the Chetniks rather than the Partisans whom the Ustasha considered the principal threat, for the Chetniks had the support of the Italians and Nedić's Serbia and alone threatened the dismemberment of the NDH. Already in January, according to one source, the Partisans and Ustashes had reached an agreement on a local basis in East Bosnia to cease fighting each other while both concentrated their efforts against the Chetniks." Marko Attila Hoare, *Genocide and resistance in Hitler's Bosnia*, p. 210 [The source Hoare makes reference to is Stevan Pavlowitch's book *Yugoslavia*, New York & Washington: Praeger, 1971, pp. 134-5].

107 Marko Attila Hoare, *Genocide and resistance in Hitler's Bosnia*, p., p. 27.

How did the Catholic Church react to this completely unexpected new socio-political situation in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina? Did a religious-political symbiosis exist in the NDH to such an extent as to speak of a clerical-fascist state, and if so, what role did the Church play in the ustaša social engineering campaign? What was the Vatican's role in the NDH – was the Catholic Church in Croatia acting autonomously or was it following orders from Rome? As noted before, it is doubtless that the Catholic Church was 'ecstatic' over the creation of the NDH, seeing it - first of all - as a legitimate Croatian nation-state.<sup>108</sup> Moreover, the Catholic hierarchy initially favoured an alliance with the ustaše, particularly because of the movement's staunch anti-Communism and its promise of a Catholic state.<sup>109</sup>

The ustaše quickly repaid the Church for this initial favour (which allowed for a strong legitimization of the practically unknown movement and reinforced the new state in the eyes of the Croatian people in the crucial transitional period in the first months after April 1941) by quickly enacting laws that were in line with Catholic moral doctrine: "[a]bortion was a crime in some cases punishable by death [...] pornography, blasphemy, cursing in public, and disrespect for the diet on Friday and work on Sunday were serious offenses."<sup>110</sup> Catholic puritanism became so excessive in some towns and villages as to forbid dancing in public.<sup>111</sup> Besides, the Catholic Church received a very generous financial backing from the ustaša government. Thanks to the ustaše, the Catholic Church was to recover the privileges lost in 1918 and heal from the mistreatments suffered in the Yugoslav kingdom.<sup>112</sup>

The Church's *active* support for the NDH is also well documented: as Perica has noted, "thousand of clerics and laymen became members of the Ustasha movement [...] concerning state-building, tens of thousands of members of Catholic lay organizations served the NDH" – for instance, Ivan Oršanić, a prominent member of the Croatian Eagles' administration in the 1920s (and later of the *Križari*), became the leader of the ustaša youth; Jesuit Dragutin Kamber (secretary of Sarajevo archbishop Šarić) was head of the police station in Dobož [north-eastern Bosnia], Franciscans Glavaš and Juričev worked as head of the Religious Department at the Ministry of Justice and as head of the Religious Section (*Vjerski odsjek*) in charge of forced conversions, respectively.<sup>113</sup> <sup>114</sup> But even more shockingly, Cath-

108 Archbishop Stepinac wrote in a circular on 28 April 1941 that behind the creation of the young Croat state, the hand of God at work was discernible. Stella Alexander, *Church and State in Yugoslavia since 1945*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979, p. 20.

Similarly, the Crusader's newspaper *Hrvatska straža* ('Croatian sentinel') "cheered the "resurrection of the Croatian state" as the most beautiful Easter in all Croat history". Sandra Prlenda, "Young, Religious, Radical: The Croat Youth Organizations, 1922-1945", p. 95.

109 Michael Phayer, *The Catholic Church and the Holocaust*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2000, p. 32.

110 Vjekoslav Perica, *Balkan Idols*, p. 24.

111 Rory Yeomans, *Visions of Annihilation*, p. 307.

112 Whilst 'elevating' the Catholic Church, the ustaše simultaneously began an assault on the Serbian Orthodox Church: "on April 25 [1941] the use of the Cyrillic script was forbidden; all kindergartens and primary and secondary schools run by the Orthodox Church were closed; the special 10 per cent tax paid by the Orthodox to the Patriarchate [...] was abolished and Serbs were ordered to wear coloured armbands; the use of the term 'Serbian Orthodox religion' was forbidden and the term 'Greek Orthodox religion' substituted". Stella Alexander, *Church and State in Yugoslavia since 1945*, p. 22.

113 Vjekoslav Perica, *Balkan Idols*, pp. 24-5.

114 The same Kamber that wrote on 10 April 1942 in the archdiocesan journal *Vrhbosna* "[w]e can affirm, without any doubt, that us, Croats and Catholic priests, have sided with this State from the very beginning. This State is our creation". In Marco Aurelio Rivelli, *Dio è con noi. La Chiesa di Pio XII complice del nazifascismo*, Milano: Kaos, 2002, p. 279.

olic clerics also took part in massacres of civilian population.<sup>115</sup> As Cymet has pointed out “it is almost impossible to imagine an Ustaša punitive expedition without a priest in its head or spurring it on, and usually a Franciscan.”<sup>116</sup>

It is equally true that from the classrooms of Zagreb’s theological faculty a significant percentage of zealous *ustaša* priests (or as the journal *Ustaša* preferred to call them ‘our new generation of ustaša warriors’) was fabricated and sent to minister in parishes around the NDH.<sup>117</sup> As for the Crusaders, the warm and ecstatic relations of April 1941 turned, surprisingly enough, into an open schism with the regime – in spite of the many members of the *Križari*’s higher ranks who directly entered the NDH’s state apparatus, as the aforementioned Oršanić. As soon as ecclesiastical authorities realised that youth organisations in the NDH would not be exclusive patrimony of the Roman Catholic Church, and that the *ustaša* indeed planned to overtake Catholic control over them and trespass it onto the State (pretty much as Yugoslav authorities tried to do with the Yugoslav Falcons), relations worsened by the month. Sarajevo archdiocese’s canon, and leader of the city’s chapter, Čedomil Čekada, was the first member of the upper clergy to denounce the participation of Crusaders in the ustaša movement as “intolerable politicization.”<sup>118</sup> This was followed, as Prlenda has shown, by an actual relations breakdown between the two organisations:

By the end of 1941, internal discussions prompted another effort to depoliticize the Crusaders’ organization. It was proclaimed in an official resolution of December 1941 that members who had already entered the Ustaša movement or the state administration must leave the Crusaders. Consequently, the president of the Great Crusader Brotherhood, Felix Niedzielsky, left the Crusaders in 1942. The Crusaders’ newspaper *Nedjelja* stopped panegyrics to Ante Pavelić on its front page. Favourable news about the Ustaša movement, plus anti-Semitic and anti-Communist articles that had appeared during the first six months after the proclamation of the new state, now vanished.<sup>119</sup>

Support for the ustaše was not uniform throughout the NDH’s clergy, however. As Biondich has shown, it “was strong in Bosnia and Herzegovina (more so the latter province), where national identity developed late, religious sentiment was still relatively strong and the Croat Catholic element felt weak vis-à-vis Serbs.” In Italian-occupied Dalmatia, on the contrary, support was weaker, whilst in Croatia proper it was divided.<sup>120</sup> Other variables, apart from geographical location, also affected the level of collaboration with the regime by the

115 Perica notes that it has been proved that (at least) 11 clerics took an active role in the massacres. Among these, the most infamously known are the Jesuit Božidar Bralo, who joined the Black Legion volunteers and later became a police prefect, and Fra Miroslav Filipović-Majstorović (also known as ‘Fra Satan’), who was in charge of running the death and concentration camp in Jasenovac.

Priests and friars who took part in ustaša-led massacres were usually military chaplains and thus not under the direct jurisdiction of their ecclesiastical superiors (be it bishops or provincials) but under the jurisdiction of the Apostolic Military Vicar of Croatia, archbishop Štepinac, who seemingly did nothing more about this position than acknowledging it. Also, priests and friars with proved participation in ustaša carnages were (belatedly, it must be said) defrocked, mostly in 1942 and 1943.

116 David Cymet, *History vs. Apologetics: the Holocaust, the Third Reich, and the Catholic Church*, p. 355.

117 Rory Yeomans, *Visions of Annihilation*, p. 296.

118 Sandra Prlenda, “Young, Religious, Radical: The Croat Youth Organizations, 1922-1945”, p. 95.

119 Ibid., pp. 95-6.

120 Mark Biondich, “Radical Catholicism and Fascism in Croatia, 1918-1945”, p. 393-4.

Catholic clergy in the NDH.<sup>121</sup> First of all, age was an important factor in determining the extent of adherence to ustaša ideological tenets: younger clergy members (usually under the age of 35) who had been therefore very much influenced by the Crusaders and understood Catholicism as an appendix of Croatness, were more likely to openly support and collaborate with the ustaše than those above the age of 35, who had grown up within a more moderate Austro-Hungarian multi-religious milieu.

Second, hierarchical position – the lower clergy were more prone to radicalisation than high members of the clerical hierarchy (the most blatant exception being the archbishop of Sarajevo, Šarić, and to a lesser extent, the bishop of Banja Luka, Garić and of Đakovo, Akšamović).<sup>122</sup> Augustin Juretić's report, for instance, explicitly classifies Stepinac, Mišić, Butorac [apostolic administrator of Dubrovnik], Burić, and Bonefačić as passively critical or anti-Ustaša, whereas Šarić and Akšamović were deemed pro-Ustaša. Šarić is, without a hint of doubt, the most interesting character among the NDH's upper clergy. Being such a fascinating character (from a historian's point of view), I feel the need to expand with more detail the prominent role he played in World War II dynamics in the NDH in general and Sarajevo in particular. Not only was he an early ustaša supporter *della primissima ora* [to use some very pertinent Fascist terminology] but he openly incited anti-Jewish and anti-Serb hatred and violence after April 1941 from the diocesan journals *Katolički Tjednik* and *Vrhbosna*.

Šarić came in contact with the *ustaša* much earlier than any of his diocesan colleagues, in fact he met them first at an Eucharistic Congress in Argentina in the early 1930s, and immediately defined them as “good and self-sacrificing believers, men of God and the Nation”, who saw in their [Catholic] priests “a reflection of the nation and themselves.”<sup>123</sup> Once the NDH was established, as noted before, he openly incited anti-Jewish and anti-Serb hatred – his infamous article on *Katolički Tjednik* defining the movement of liberation of the world from the Jews as a renewal of human dignity behind which God omniscient and omnipotent stood is a very clear proof.<sup>124</sup> He also used to demand the ownership of Jewish property in Sarajevo, a fact for which he was publicly reprimanded by the papal legate in Zagreb – this is particularly striking since most of those Jewish owners could not claim their assets back, having been sent to concentration and extermination camps.<sup>125</sup> His idolatry and veneration for the figure of the *Poglavnik* was usually canalised through his passion for poetry (kitsch, romanticist poetry). His poems honouring Pavelić and the ustaša were duly published in the archdiocesan journals *Katolički Tjednik* and *Vrhbosna*: “When the Sun shines – dedicated to our Poglavnik Ante Pavelić” (*Vrhbosna*, April-May 1941, No. 4-5) and “Ode to the Poglavnik” (*Katolički Tjednik*, No. 51, p. 13) are perhaps the most significant (and literarily-speaking distasteful and tedious) of the many – alas – poems the archbishop wrote:<sup>126</sup>

121 This information has been taken from a report sent in June 1942 to the Croat members in the Yugoslav government-in-exile by the Croat People's Party activist Augustin Juretić.

Mark Biondich, “Controversies surrounding the Catholic Church in Wartime Croatia, 1941-45”, p. 445-6.

122 Ibid., p. 446.

123 Rory Yeomans, *Visions of Annihilation*, p. 295.

124 Michael Phayer, *The Catholic Church and the Holocaust*, p. 35.

125 See Carlo Falconi, *Il Silenzio di Pio XII*, Milan: Sugar, pp. 379-380. This letter will be discussed in the next chapter in more depth, however.

126 For a transcript of the poem's English translation published on Vladimir Dedijer's *The Yugoslav Auschwitz and the*



**Kad sunce sja/When the Sun Shines**  
Dedicated to Our Poglavnik, Dr Ante Pavelić

Ja ne znam zašto mi duša  
sretna i radosna sva.  
Kao da slavu je sluša,  
kad sunce sja.

I do not know why so happy and joyful  
is this soul of mine.  
As if it were listening to a nightingale  
now that the sun does shine.

Ja ne znam zašto me volja  
odvraća od svakog zla.  
Jako mi i puno bolja,  
kad sunce sja.

I do not know why it diverts me from all  
evil  
this will of mine.  
It is much better  
now that the sun does shine.

I zašto mis'o mi često  
K nebu se vratiti zna  
Ko da joj kod Boga mjesto  
Kad sunce sja.

And why towards Heaven  
go usually these thoughts of mine.  
As if next to God their place is  
now that the sun does shine.

U meni nešto se budi  
Ko zvuci [*sic*] iz zlatnog sna  
I pjesmom dršću mi grudi.  
Kad sunce sja

Like the melody of a golden dream  
something wakes up in this body of mine.  
And with a poem my breast trembles  
now that the sun does shine.

Zemlja tad ne diše jadom,  
Već miriše mi sva  
Ljubavlju, vjerom i nadom  
Kad sunce sja

This land does not smell of misery anymore,  
it now scents of  
Love, faith and hope  
now that the sun does shine.

Third, the secular/regular clergy divide: diocesan clergy members were more likely to behave properly since they were regularly controlled by a higher authority, i.e. that of the local bishop (unless that authority was archbishop Šarić, I presume). Regular clergy, particularly the Franciscans and the Jesuits, were more loosely supervised and, in the first place, under their provincials' authority (and only in exceptional cases bishops were to intervene).<sup>127</sup> But even within the orders different shades of collaboration can be discerned, so, for instance Franciscans in the Zagreb and Bosnia provinces were not as pro-ustaša as their

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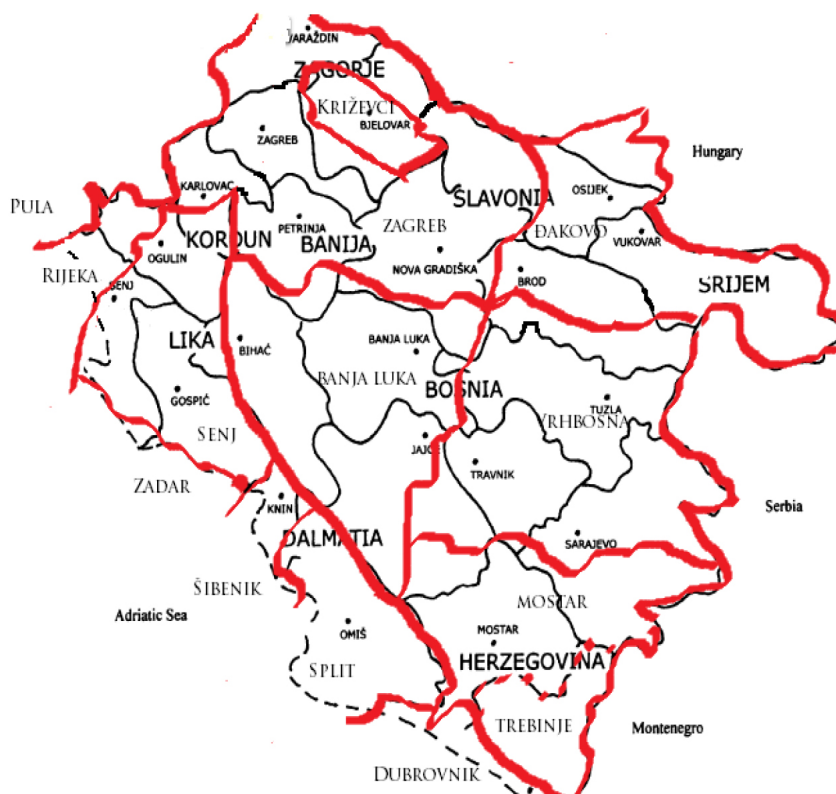
*Vatican*, pp. 97-100, see Appendix, Document 4. I have changed some words (in italics) when syntax or meaning seemed blurry. Furthermore, I have put on a bold front the tenth, eleventh and seventeenth stanzas because of their particularly aggressive language against Jews, Communists and Serbs, respectively.

127 The diocesan-regular relation was not necessarily a cordial one, particularly in Herzegovina. There, the Franciscans "devoted and zealous, had laboured for five hundred years in [...] the arid *karst* of Hercegovina, they had secured for themselves the right to serve as parish priests (and frequently as bishops) in these regions and defended this right jealously against the diocesan clergy; their provincial was as powerful as the bishop and always ready to assert his independence from episcopal control". Stella Alexander, *Church and State in Yugoslavia since 1945*, p. 31.

This fight between the bishop of Mostar and the Franciscans in Herzegovina continued well after World War II and it is still very much alive – actually some scholars see the whole Međugorje Marian appearances controversy as a Franciscan *tour de force* at a time when the diocese of Mostar was trying to reassert its authority in the ecclesiastical province. As a matter of fact, the Bosnian episcopacy retaliated in the 1990s promoting another Marian pilgrimage site in the village of Olovo (Eastern Bosnia), as a counterbalance to Međugorje – yet not as successful as the Herzegovinian one. See Bellamy "The Catholic Church and Croatia's Two Transitions" and Aleksov "Marian Apparitions and the Yugoslav Crisis".

counterparts in southern Dalmatia and, above all, in Herzegovina.<sup>128</sup> In addition to the previous factors, I would also suggest an administrative one. That is, the fact that the boundaries of the ecclesiastical provinces supervised by the relevant archbishops and bishops did not coincide with those of the NDH's *velike župe* (i.e. counties). Therefore, the extent of (control) of the lower clergy's radicalisation was not so much in the hands of the local bishops as it was in the hands of the *ustaša* 'stožars' in each county.

In fact, it is possible to observe an inverse correlation between the degree of radicalisation of the prelature of a region and the magnitude of massacres that happened in the territory – which may therefore prove that local *ustaša* forces and not the regional clergy were the catalysts of radicalisation. For instance, whilst most of the atrocities against Serbs happened in Lika and Western Herzegovina, the bishops in charge of those ecclesiastical provinces (i.e. Senj and Mostar-Trebinje) were not particularly filo-*ustaša*. *Ceteris paribus*, Šarić's open support to the most extremist sections of the regime was not matched by an equally high level of violence in the province of Vrhbosna, since much of Eastern Bosnia never came under actual control of the regime. It is equally important to bear in mind that in some cases the episcopal see of a certain province was in a different state (i.e. the Kingdom of Italy) thus hindering even further the possibilities of the local bishop to control the lower clergy and neutralise it when undesirable conducts had been observed – this is particularly applicable to the dioceses of Split and Šibenik, both controlling areas where a high level of violence could be observed.



**Map 1.** The ecclesiastical provinces of Croatia, Bosnia, and Herzegovina juxtaposed to the boundaries of the NDH's *velike župe* and the territories of the Kingdom of Italy in Dalmatia and Istria.

128 Good relations between Herzegovian Franciscans and the *ustaša* were not something new: "[t]he Franciscan friary and school at Široki Brijeg in western Herzegovina in particular had produced a number of leading *ustaše*, including Artukovic and Djumandzic, ministers in the Ustasa government, Glavas, the head of the Religious Section, and several other high functionaries". Stella Alexander, *Church and State in Yugoslavia since 1945*, p. 29.

So, was this a clerical-fascist state? While the crystal-clear comparison to make in the case of the NDH seems to be that of father Tiso's Slovak Republic, Slovakia was, first of all, a satellite not a puppet state under the direct supervision of occupation forces.<sup>129</sup> Besides, the Croatian state was not actually run by priests and bishops (despite the examples described before), as it was the Slovak case. In contrast to right-radical-Catholic regimes (Franco's, Salazar's, or again the Slovak Republic), the NDH did not "evidence genuine respect for the Church, its autonomy and even its political and spiritual recommendations."<sup>130</sup> I would also suggest that it is complex to label the NDH as a clerical-fascist state since Roman Catholicism did not enjoy complete religious hegemony (unlike in Franco's Spain or Salazar's Portugal) and had to share its privileged position – surprisingly enough – with Islam.<sup>131</sup>

Whereas the NDH tried to "achieve a genuine politico-religious symbiosis", in the long term it failed to do so.<sup>132</sup> The Vatican never recognized Croatia as an independent state (unlike Slovakia), nor Croatia managed to start negotiations on a future Concordat or any kind of special agreement.<sup>133</sup> Pavelić was not depicted on the Vatican press as a saviour, winner of a Crusade and redeemer of past sins, as Franco was. In fact, several authors – particularly Stella Alexander – argue that relations between Pavelić and the Holy See progressively worsened and embittered to such an extent as to push the Vatican to send excommunication threats to Zagreb's authorities (Pavelić *in primis*).<sup>134</sup> It is thus possible to argue that even if a close *de facto* relationship existed in some areas, it was usually too partial and incomplete as to forthrightly define ustaša Croatia 'a clerical-fascist state' without falling for historiographical flaws.<sup>135</sup>

129 "The NDH was a puppet regime in the sense that it received power a pure gift from a foreign conqueror, and throughout its life was under foreign occupation, first by German and Italian troops, and later, after the collapse of Fascism, by German forces alone." In contrast to the NDH, Nedić's Serbia "was also placed in power by Hitler, but enjoyed less autonomy and developed less of a state profile." Stanley Payne, "The NDH in Comparative Perspective", *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 7:4, p. 409.

130 Ibid., p. 412.

131 Truth be told, this is surprising only from a Western-centric point of view. In Croatian nationalist circles, the wish of inclusion (and even admiration for) Muslim Slavs developed hand in hand with Croatian nationalism itself. As Ivo Banac has noted, "[Ante] Starčević was one of the first Christian thinkers anywhere to express admiration for Islam, describing the Bosnian Muslim elite as Croat by nationality and as the oldest and purest nobility in Europe." Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia*, p. 108.

In a similar manner, Pavelić named gave the *ustaša* movement [i.e. those who arise] its very name in honour of the uprising (*ustanak*) of the Bosnian Muslim nobility against the Austro-Hungarian troops after the administration of the province passed from Constantinople to Vienna in 1878.

132 Ibid., p. 412.

133 The nearest that the Vatican had come to recognising the legality of the NDH was the appointment of the bishops of Mostar and Križevci, in contravention of its usual practice of appointing apostolic administrators, not bishops, in territories under disputed rule. The assent of the NDH was not sought, much to Pavelić's anger. Carlo Falconi, *Il Silenzio di Pio XII*, p. 415.

As Alexander has noted, apostolic administrators were not sent to these two dioceses because of a series of special circumstances in these ecclesiastical provinces: "[...] in both cases, both needed full authority. Bishop Čule [in Mostar] to deal with the difficult Franciscans [in the Herzegovinian province] and Bishop Šimrak to help him to resist the persecution of Greek Catholics."

Stella Alexander, *The Triple Myth*, p. 96.

134 "Both appointments [of Čule and Šimrak] were made without prior consultation with the government, and since Stepinac was in Rome at the time, almost certainly with his knowledge. Pavelić at first refused to give his assent to the appointments but the Vatican threatened to excommunicate him and he backed down."

Ibid., pp. 95-6.

135 Stanley Payne, "The NDH in Comparative Perspective", p. 412.

Rather, the Catholic compound in the ustaša ideological tenets is more similar to that of Hungarian Fascism and, above all, Vichy's France.<sup>136</sup> As in Pétain's France, the Church played a crucial role in the everyday legitimisation process of the regime, particularly thanks to its cheerful welcome of the NDH in the delicate transitional period following the ustaše's rise to power. However, it remains unanswered why the Church continued to support the regime (perhaps more covertly) even when an Axis defeat was the likeliest outcome of the war. Whilst it is true that in a series of sermons starting in May 1942, Stepinac seemed to mildly condemn the ustaša regime, a public break never came. Alexander argues that "[f]rom 1942 onwards Stepinac denounced the injustices and false ideology of the NDH in public sermons in increasingly precise terms."<sup>137</sup> These denunciations were made in five sermons; ranging from May 1942 to October 1943. The most significant sermon was given on 31 October 1943, when Stepinac, at the end of a procession of penance, said: "The Catholic Church knows nothing of races born to rule and races doomed to slavery. The Catholic Church knows races and nations only as creatures of God [...] [f]or it the king in a royal palace is, as a man, exactly the same as the poorest pauper or gypsy in his tent."<sup>138</sup> In fact, as Bellamy has noted, "Stepinac never made a public statement disavowing the NDH, even when he was put on trial by Tito in 1946."<sup>139</sup> Indeed, in a very puzzling move Stepinac sent to the Vatican in May 1943 (thus meanwhile these anti-ustaša sermons were pronounced) a report praising the NDH and the ustaša regime for all the good work they had done for the Church and the Croat people. Whilst he did acknowledge some excesses (particularly during 'the national revolution' – as Stepinac himself calls it), he blames 'rascals and criminals' for carrying them out.<sup>140</sup>

Instead, the Church gave its backing to Pavelić and his acolytes even with the war literally lost. In March 1945 Stepinac (at the urging of the government) called a bishops' conference which issued a pastoral letter denouncing partisan atrocities and praising the achievements of the NDH.<sup>141</sup> Whilst the scholar community agrees on the fact that only the Catholic Church answered the ustaša call and wrote a supportive statement (Zagreb had invited the Evangelical Church, the 'Croatian Orthodox Church', and the Islamic community to do the same), Krizman has proved that the hierarchy of the NDH's 'other religion', Islam, was

136 "For the Ustase, Catholicism was really neither a goal in itself nor even a particularly effective mobilizing ideology in most of Croatia; rather it was an instrument designed to strengthen the nascent Croatian state through the elimination of the Serb Question. In this respect, Croatian Fascism differed from the Hlinka movement in Slovakia, which was genuinely Catholic and led by priests, and the Legion of the Archangel Michael in Romania, which employed religious mysticism and elaborate ritual in its ideology. Ustasa integral nationalism and ideology were closer to Hungarian Fascism." Mark Biondich, "Religion and Nation in Wartime Croatia, p. 113.

137 Notwithstanding this series of sermons, in May 1943 Stepinac presented to the Vatican Secretariat of State a very well detailed report of all good actions done by the NDH to the Catholic Church and the Croat people. Pierre Blet SJ et al., *ADSS*, Vol. IX, Note 130. Appendix II (24 May 1943).

138 Stella Alexander, *Church and State in Yugoslavia since 1945*, pp. 34-5.

139 Alex J. Bellamy, "The Catholic Church and Croatia's Two Transitions", p. 49.

140 See Appendix, Document 5.

141 Equally significant is the apocalyptic sermon preached not by Stepinac but by one dean of the Cathedral for the fourth (and last) thanksgiving mass on April 10th, 1945: "Four years ago the Croatian people created their state and fulfilled the dreams of centuries... delight seized everyone. The Croatian state was founded by the sacrifice of thousands of the best Croats and largely by the efforts of the Poglavnik and the Ustaša movement [...] this movement [communism] is not only the greatest enemy of the church in all centuries but the greatest enemy of human freedom. We pray God to help the Croatian people in today's fateful hours to save our state". Ibid., p. 40.



about to issue a very similar statement. Also in March 1945, Ibrahim Riđanović – a member of Sarajevo's *Ulema medžlisa* ('Assembly of Ulemas') – arrived in Zagreb and agreed to publish a very similar statement to that signed by the bishops' conference. Authorities in Zagreb preferred to publish it in Sarajevo, but the city had already been liberated by the partisans when Riđanović arrived.<sup>142</sup>

With regard to ustaša 'social engineering', it is clear that the Church welcomed the possibility of a massive conversion campaign: as noted by Stella Alexander, there was a very Westphalian echo of *cuius regio eius religio* in the Church's initial enthusiasm.<sup>143 144</sup> After centuries of schism, the Orthodox in Croatia and Bosnia were to be in communion with Rome, their bodies and souls saved from eternal suffering as heretics. The conversions policy ended up being 'unsuccessful' and chaotic – to say the least.<sup>145</sup> It is also a very interesting topic in the development of historiography on the issue: whilst some historians in the past, particularly Vladimir Dedijer, argued that the conversions were a Holy See's old goal becoming true (that of erasing Orthodoxy from the Western Balkans and extending Catholicism up to the Drina river).<sup>146</sup> Croatian Catholic representatives and scholars nowadays argue, on the contrary, that conversions were a matter of embittered disagreement between the new state and the Catholic hierarchy.<sup>147</sup>

Whilst it is impossible to deny that the Catholic Church gladly accepted the idea of a mass conversion process of Orthodox Serbs, it is equally true that the Catholic hierarchy abhorred the idea of ustaša meddling in such a delicate issue.<sup>148</sup> Conversions usually take a long time and have to be driven by a clear proof of voluntary decision (and not by fear of annihilation, as was the case in the NDH) and according to the Church's doctrine.<sup>149</sup> As for

142 Bogdan Krizman, *Ustaše i Treći Reich*, Zagreb: Globus, 1986, p. 267.

143 "Seeing that they could not numerically kill all Serbs, the Ustase settled on two additional modes of ethnic cleansing – deportation and assimilation through conversion – both likewise of genocidal nature. The Croatization of Serbs was attempted mostly through Catholic proselytism and unsuccessful attempts to create a Croatian Orthodox Church". Paul Mojzes, *Balkan Genocides*, p. 62.

144 Stella Alexander, *The Triple Myth*, p. 88.

145 As Biondich has noted, "[i]n Yugoslav and Western historiography alike it is argued that 240,000 Orthodox Serbs converted to Catholicism in the NDH. To be sure, this is a significant figure but even if it were accepted as accurate, the policy would still have to be considered a failure, [...] the aim of the central authorities was to catholicize the remaining Serb population" [so at least 1,000,000 people should have converted]. Mark Biondich, "Religion and Nation in Wartime Croatia", p. 111.

As for the total figure of conversions, I reckon 240,000 is an accurate figure: Biondich showed how the *Vjerski odsjek* handled around 100,000 conversions from September 1941 onward [Mark Biondich, *Religion and Nation in Wartime Croatia*]. Before that a very similar amount of conversions could have happened: in a note sent in August 1941 from Mons. Borogini Duca (nuncio in Italy) to Cardinal Maglione (Vatican Secretary of State), Duca speaks of a Franciscan staying at the Croatian embassy in Rome (Fra Antun Nizeteo [sic]) who told him that 100,000 Serbs have converted in the last months. Pierre Blet SJ et al., *Actes et documents du Saint-Siège relatifs à la Seconde Guerre Mondiale*, Vol. VIII, Note 138. (30 August 1941), Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1981.

146 Vladimir Dedijer, *The Yugoslav Auschwitz and the Vatican*, Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1992, p. 326.

147 Paul Mojzes, *Balkan Genocides: Holocaust and Ethnic Cleansing in the Twentieth Century*, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011, p. 64.

148 The clergy worried that the ustaše may have used this first intromission in religious affairs to "create a cesaro-papist church, a Catholic Croat byzantinism". Stella Alexander, *The Triple Myth*, p. 76.

149 This would have invalidated practically all conversions that took place in these first months because they were practically 'automatic' conversions from Orthodoxy to Catholicism, whilst the Statute for Catechumenate explicitly indicates that "those who have already been baptized in another church or ecclesial community should not be treated as catechumens or so designated. Their doctrinal and spiritual preparation for reception into full Catholic communion should

Dedijer's *j'accuse*, it is mainly based on a very blurred declaration given by Radoslav Glavaš (head of the Religious Department at the Ministry of Justice) during his trial for collaboration with the fascist occupiers before Partisan authorities once Zagreb had been liberated. In his testimony, he rejected any responsibility whatsoever with relation to the forced conversions. Instead, he claimed that he was following directives from the Vatican, which were allegedly sent in a letter to Papal Legate Marcone [thus by the end of 1941 or beginning of 1942] and then passed to the *ustaša* Directorate for Renewal (first to Fra Juričev and then to him) and to the NDH's bishops.<sup>150</sup> Glavaš could not provide such "Vatican letters" at the trial, nor were they found at a later stage of the Partisan inquiry. Needless to say, the Vatican never found them either.

Furthermore, it is similarly complex to discern the causality of the conversions, i.e. whether they were purposely triggered by the *ustaše* or Serbs began to convert in order to avoid harassment and persecution, and then the *ustaše* realised it could be an effective way of 'Croatising' Orthodox Serbs. I am inclined to opt for the second: whilst the *ustaša* state apparatus passed already in May 1941 several decrees on how to proceed with conversions, changing the intricate Austro-Hungarian legislation on the issue, an official state agency (the *Vjerski odsjek*) was not set up until September 1941 – when in fact the majority of conversion requests were submitted between May and September 1941.<sup>151</sup> The aforementioned decrees, and a later letter in June written by Fra Glavaš from the Ministry of Justice, forbade the conversion of the Serb intelligentsia and upper class, and similarly impeded all those who wanted to convert to do so in Uniate (Catholic of Eastern rite) churches – they could choose other religious denominations, instead i.e. Lutheranism, Calvinism and Islam.

This was completely unacceptable for the Catholic hierarchy and went against the teachings of the Church: first, anyone who wished to convert had to be allowed to do so. Second,

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be determined according to the individual case [...]" (NSC 30, 1986) *I have not been able to find earlier guidelines on how to accept 'heretics' into full Catholic communion, but I assume a very similar stance was applied in the 1940s.*

150 Glavaš's actual declaration (as transcribed in Dedijer's book) is as follows, with its most significant lines in bold font:

Of course the bishops knew of these conversions and approved them. Šimrak, the bishop of Križevci, tried with all his power to convert as many Orthodox as possible. He accepted them without any order and method. With some bishops, suspicion may have been aroused that these conversions could be invalid and inadmissible, because they happened out of fear. They presented this question to the papal legate Marcone, for him to inquire in Rome.

As far as I remember, the answer came from Rome that conversion caused by fear of armed violence was allowed. I know this from the stories from Juricev. I myself never saw the document [...] I believe that Juricev and Medic had that letter or those instructions from the Vatican ... Now that they were covered by the Vatican's instructions, the conversion work progressed at a hastening speed and was not stopped or stemmed until 1942, when the partisan movement strengthened. I presume that Rome again sent a prescription regarding the Orthodox churches in which religious services were to be held – this, too, was the object of discussion – because suddenly they began to use Orthodox churches; they removed from them only the Orthodox altars [i.e., the *iconostasis*] and blessed them then. This prescription was presumably in the same letter from Rome that was already mentioned above...

As I already said, it would be of the greatest urgency to ding the letters from Rome concerning the religious conversions. I am sure that they exist. [...] The guidelines came from the Vatican through the papal legate.

Source: Vladimir Dedijer, *The Yugoslav Auschwitz and the Vatican*, pp. 322-3

151 Mark Biondich, "Religion and Nation in Wartime Croatia", p. 84.



the Catholic Church accepted (and still accepts) both the Latin and Eastern rites as completely equal – Uniate churches could not be considered less ‘Catholic’. These directives caused the first open (yet very mild) crisis between the Church and the ustaša regime: auxiliary bishop Lach of Zagreb replied (quite likely after receiving instructions from Stepinac) to Glavaš that “the terms of order are unacceptable.” Once the regime partially lost the Church hierarchy’s support for conversions, it began “to enlist parish priests, without permission of their bishops, to carry out this work.”<sup>152</sup> As Mojzes has pointed out, it is clear that the Catholic hierarchy “was not in complete control of every priest” – especially on conversions –, so even if Stepinac or other member of the high clergy gave instructions on how to act ‘correctly’, parish priests and the regular clergy could to a large extent proceed *motu proprio*.<sup>153</sup>

It seems obvious that the conversions posed a significant moral dilemma for the Catholic hierarchy in the NDH, particularly with regard to their very validity: it is undeniable that frightened Serbs flooded Catholic churches in the early months of ustaša rule hoping that, once Catholicised, they would escape persecution. In these first months, the Church welcomed the new converts “enticed by the prospect of receiving many new followers but seemingly not concerned about the context within which such conversions occurred.”<sup>154</sup> But ‘unfaithful’ conversions were strongly discouraged in two papal encyclicals, Leo XIII’s *Immortale Dei* (1885) and more importantly, Pius XII’s *Mystici Corporis Christi* (June 1943).<sup>155</sup> Similarly, by accepting converts who had unwillingly entered in communion with Rome, priests who were aware of the context of fear surrounding the conversion requests could be seen as breaching canon 1380 on simony [i.e. the act of selling church offices and roles].<sup>156</sup>

The Church was bitterly split on how to deal with the conversions. Alexander notes that bishop Akšamović of Đakovo “frankly told Serbs to come into the Catholic Church if

152 Stella Alexander, *Church and State in Yugoslavia since 1945*, p. 27.

153 Paul Mojzes, *Balkan Genocides*, p. 64.

The lack of control on the lower clergy seems a very plausible explanation for the initial behaviour of parish priests and friars. Similarly, this can be supported by the fact that the Croatian prelature was paralysed and unable to actually give a set of guidelines to the Catholic clergy *in toto*. As Alexander has shown, the first Bishops’ Conference in the NDH was able to meet only in June 1941, two and a half months after the establishment of the State – and not all of the NDH’s bishops were able to attend it (Stella Alexander, *Church and State in Yugoslavia since 1945*, p. 19). There were other two Conferences until 1945. In both cases, a significant amount of bishops were not present.

154 Mark Biondich, “Religion and Nation in Wartime Croatia”, p. 84.

155 Though We desire this unceasing prayer to rise to God from the whole Mystical Body in common, that all the straying sheep may hasten to enter the one fold of Jesus Christ, yet We recognize that this must be done of their own free will; for no one believes unless he wills to believe. Hence they are most certainly not genuine Christians who against their belief are forced to go into a church, to approach the altar and to receive the Sacraments; for the “faith without which it is impossible to please God” is an entirely free “submission of intellect and will.” Therefore, whenever it happens, despite the constant teaching of this Apostolic See, that anyone is compelled to embrace the Catholic faith against his will, Our sense of duty demands that We condemn the act. For men must be effectively drawn to the truth by the Father of light through the spirit of His beloved Son, because, endowed as they are with free will, they can misuse their freedom under the impulse of mental agitation and base desires. Unfortunately many are still wandering far from the Catholic truth, being unwilling to follow the inspirations of divine grace, because neither they nor the faithful pray to God with sufficient fervour for this intention. Again and again We beg all we ardently love the Church to follow the example of the Divine Redeemer and to give themselves constantly to such prayer.

*Mystici Corporis Christi*, Note 104 (29 June 1943), available online on [http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-xii\\_enc\\_29061943\\_mystici-corporis-christi.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_29061943_mystici-corporis-christi.html) [First Accessed 8 March 2015].

156 In fact also the ‘converted’ was committing simony. Canon § 1380 states “[a] person who celebrates or receives a sacrament through simony is to be punished with an interdict or suspension.”

it would save their lives, after the war they could always return to the Orthodox Church.”<sup>157</sup> Similarly, Phayer notes how Stepinac instructed the clergy (fearing that those who did not convert were sentenced to death) to baptize or convert people without the usual period of catechumenal instruction since “Orthodox are Christians like us and the Jewish faith is the one from which Christianity originated.”<sup>158</sup> Moreover, some sections of the upper ecclesiastical hierarchy – particularly Mišić and Stepinac – realised that the combination of massacres and forceful conversions “were driving people into the Partisans, and doing great harm to the Church.”<sup>159</sup> Indeed, Serbs were slaughtered even if Catholicised – and sometimes obliged to convert and then immediately killed (as it was the case in the infamous Glina massacre) – since particularly sadistic priests and ustaše saw the conversions “as a salvation of the soul”; with the Serbs’ souls saved, their bodies were thus ‘disposable’. Once Serbs in the NDH realised that conversion did not mean immediate protection, “conversion essentially became meaningless.”<sup>160</sup> Whilst there were some sporadic conversions up to 1943, by early 1942 “it seemed clear to the ustaša authorities that their Serb policy had arrived “at a blind alley”” thus abandoning the policy of conversions and setting up a new project of ‘Croatisation’ of the Serbs: the Croat Orthodox Church, a Croatian ‘national’ Orthodox Church.<sup>161</sup>

157 I am somehow reticent to believe that the same Akšamović, who would describe Ante Pavelić as “the great Son of the Croatian People, the Hero of our blood, the Liberator and Creator of the Free State of Croatia, the Head of State and Poglavnik” and Hitler as “the Great Leader of the German Reich” (*Glasnik biskupije bosanske i srijemske*, 1941, No. 18, pp. 154-5), was so lenient toward the conversions of ‘heretic’ Orthodox. Stella Alexander, *The Triple Myth*, p. 93.

158 Phayer, *The Catholic Church and the Holocaust*, p. 35.

159 Stella Alexander, *Church and State in Yugoslavia since 1945*, p. 23.

160 Mark Biondich, “Religion and Nation in Wartime Croatia”, p. 102.

161 Mark Biondich, “We Were Defending the State”, p. 63.

## Thorny relations: the Vatican and the NDH

Il Principe Lobkowicz riferisce che è previsto prossimamente un incontro in Italia di Ante Pavelic con Mussolini, per invito di questo ultimo.

Il Principe ha riferito ad Ante Pavelic che il Santo Padre gli aveva detto in udienza di evitare che il Poglavnik venisse a Roma per questo incontro; [...] bisogna che la Santa Sede chieda anch'essa a Mussolini di fissare per l'incontro un'altra località.

Altrimenti, se cioè il Poglavnik venisse a Roma, bisogna fin da ora prevedere ch'egli chiederà udienza al Santo Padre e desidera d'essere ricevuto [...] 18-5-43 [Note by Monsignor Grano] Se Ante Pavelic venisse in Roma, sarebbe ricevuto dal Santo Padre in forma privatissima. L'E.mo Superiore ha detto a Sua Santità che egli però non lo riceverà.<sup>162</sup>

Note of the Vatican Secretariat of State, 14 May 1943. In Pierre Blet SJ et al., *Actes et Documents du Saint Siège relatifs à la deuxième guerre mondiale*, Vol. VII, Note 193, (14 May 1943)

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Questa mattina si è fatto osservare al M.se d'Ajeta, Consigliere della R. Ambasciata d'Italia, se non convenga, nel caso d'una visita del Sig. Ante Pavelic al Governo Italiano, di evitare che l'incontro si verificchi a Roma. Conviene sull'opportunità di evitare tale incontro a Roma: ne farà parola al Ministro degli Esteri.<sup>163</sup>

Note of the Vatican Secretariat of State, 5 June 1943. In Pierre Blet SJ et al., *Actes et Documents du Saint Siège relatifs à la deuxième guerre mondiale*, Vol. VII, Note 231, (5 June 1943)

As for the role played by the Vatican, I have mainly relied on articles and news published by the Holy See's official newspaper, *L'Osservatore romano*, on the extensive collection of notes from the Secretariat of State compiled by Pierre Blet in his book *Actes et Documents relatifs à la deuxième guerre mondiale* and, to a lesser extent, on articles published by *La Civiltà Cattolica*. Yet, I am fully aware of the enormous amount of information missing. As Biondich has rightly pointed out "we do not know [...] to what extent Stepinac's own

162 Prince Lobkowicz refers that a meeting between Mussolini and Pavelić may soon take place in Italy. Pavelić has been invited by Mussolini. Lobkowicz informed Pavelić that the Holy Father himself told him [Lobkowicz] during an audience that Pavelić should not visit Rome. [...] The Holy See must thus inform Mussolini too as to avoid this meeting from taking place in Rome. If this were to happen, we have to prepare now for Pavelić's very likely request of another audience with the Pope. [...] 18-5-43 [Note by Monsignor Grano, Secretary-Substitute for Ordinary Affairs, Secretariat of State] In the case of Pavelić's visit to Rome, he would be received in a highly private fashion by the Holy Father. His Superior Eminence [Cardinal Maglione] informed His Holiness that he would not receive Pavelić under any circumstance.

163 This morning we have referred to Monsignor D'Ajeta, Counsellor of the Royal Embassy of Italy that, in the case of a possible visit to Rome by Mr Ante Pavelic, it may be preferable that the aforementioned visit does not take place in Rome. [D'Ajeta] agreed on this issue, he will point it out directly to the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

policies were guided, or even dictated by Pius XII and the Vatican [...] we do not know [...] what precise instructions or policy directions he was given by the Vatican [...] we simply do not know how much direction he received from the Vatican about the policy he should pursue vis-à-vis the Ustaša regime.”<sup>164</sup> I would add that we do not know what Pius XII told Pavelić in his private audience in May 1941 or how he was actually received by Vatican authorities (i.e. the extent of State ceremonial displayed when Pavelić or other ustaša visited the Vatican palaces), nor what did the Pope actually think about the NDH.

We know, however, that the Vatican was well aware of the difficult political situation in Yugoslavia in the 1930s and early 1940s: Felici, nuncio in Belgrade, informed Cardinal Maglione (Secretary of State) about the continuous clashing between Serbs and Croats and the role played by the Church in this battle. Whilst Felici advised for a stand as neutral as possible, he also told the Vatican that it was almost impossible for the Church to remain noncommittal in this fight *pro aris et focis* [‘for God and country’] – because by doing so the Church risked to be seen as a traitor by its own people.<sup>165</sup> When the NDH was proclaimed, the Holy See reacted very cautiously.<sup>166</sup> Despite Stepinac’s and Pavelić’s recurrent requests for formal recognition already in April 1941, the Vatican decided to maintain diplomatic relations with the Yugoslav government-in-exile throughout the war, keeping Felici as nuncio.<sup>167</sup> Only in May 1941 did the Vatican give some loose instructions to the Croatian clergy on how to behave with the new regime: in a very short note, Maglione recommends Stepinac, all prelates and the lower clergy to “be prudent and stay away from politics” – yet when doing so, they should always bear in mind the interests of the Church.<sup>168</sup>

Pavelić visited Rome just a month after the ustaše rose to power, a move clearly motivated by his desire to gain some international visibility for the new state. In Rome, not only did he visit the Pope but he also offered Croatia’s newly-established crown to the Duke of Spoleto, Aimone di Savoia. This private audience in the Vatican, mainly brokered by the Italian ambassador to the Holy See, did cause some concern in the Secretariat of State: Maglione and Tardini (undersecretary of state) discussed for several days whether Pavelić should be granted an audience or not – but apparently it was Pius XII himself who finally decided to receive Pavelić alone (without the rest of the ustaša delegation) and not as the NDH’s head of state but as a simple Catholic believer.<sup>169</sup> Pavelić therefore met the Pope in his private library at 6 pm on May, 18th. Montini (undersecretary of state, later Paul VI) not-

164 Mark Biondich, “Controversies surrounding the Catholic Church in Wartime Croatia, 1941-45”, pp. 451-2.

165 See Appendix, Document 6.

166 *L’Osservatore romano* published very short news on the proclamation of the NDH, and usually integrated in the broader news about the war in Yugoslavia and Greece throughout April 1941.

167 Independent Croatia simply could not be recognised because it is the Vatican’s practice to recognise new states only when post-war treaties had been signed. Stella Alexander, *The Triple Myth*, p. 64

In fact, when Niko Mirošević-Sorgo (plenipotentiary minister of the Yugoslav kingdom to the Holy See) was expelled from Italy in July 1941, his secretary, Kosta Cukić took shelter in the Vatican City and there he stayed with his wife until the Allied forces freed Rome in 1944. Bogan Krizman, *NDH između Hitlera i Mussolinija*, Zagreb: Globus, 1986, pp. 142-3.

168 See Appendix, Document 7.

169 See Appendix, Documents 8. & 9.

Similarly, *L’Osservatore romano* published a very short note on May, 20th saying “Sua Santità ha ricevuto il Dottor Ante Pavelic [sic] – che ne aveva fatto dovuta richiesta – in udienza strettamente private ieri sera alle ore 18.” [*The Holy Father received Dr. Ante Pavelić – who had personally requested so – in a strictly private audience yesterday evening at 6 pm*]. *L’Osservatore romano* (No. 117, 19-20 May 1941).

ed how Pavelić asked for formal recognition – this time to the Pope himself – and declared his intention to govern Croatia following the Catholic doctrine, and to apply it to the country's laws as well. Pius XII thanked and then blessed Pavelić. As for the recognition, the answer remained unchanged: the Vatican would not recognise the NDH until the end of the war, when a peace treaty would have established the NDH's status and its borders according to the international *acquis*. The *Pontifex Maximus* reminded Pavelić that, in this war, there were Catholics on both sides and therefore the Holy See should exhibit a deferential attitude to all of them (see Appendix, Documents 9 and 10).<sup>170</sup>

As for the delicate issue of the nuncio and the extent of recognition – Stepinac also requested *de facto* diplomatic relations when he visited Rome in June<sup>171</sup> – the Secretariat of State decided, in August 1941, to send an “apostolic legate, one degree higher than a visitor, one degree lower than a delegate, but still a temporary posting.”<sup>172</sup> Above all, this was not a diplomatic posting: apostolic legates are sent to an archdiocese or diocese to work with the local bishop, not with the local government.<sup>173</sup> In addition, Abbot Marcone, the Benedictine Pius XII sent to Zagreb, “was not a member of the Vatican diplomatic service and not fluent in Croatian [either].”<sup>174</sup> He did not receive much information from the Secretariat of State on what to do while in the NDH. Likewise, when he requested advice from the Vatican, Maglione's, Tardini's and Montini's replies were substantially vague and broad, lacking any kind of specific orders or indications.

Similarly, the Catholic hierarchy received little or no orders from the Vatican (except Maglione's recommendation to be prudent and stay away from politics). Marcone was, however, treated as a full member of the (reduced) diplomatic corps present in Zagreb and even given priority treatment – this is definitely true at least until September 1943.<sup>175</sup> Despite his non-recognised diplomatic office, it is undeniable that Abbot Marcone – by power of his position – was the NDH's *ersatz* Nuncio. His role was equally ambiguous. Whilst he was sent to Zagreb by the Secretariat of State to mainly write reports and corroborate whether the information that the Vat-

170 This visit did not pass unnoticed by the international community, particularly for the Allies. Lord Eden immediately asked Monsignor Godfrey, Papal Nuncio in London, why the Holy Father had granted an audience to a regicide (Rivelli, Marco Aurelio, *Dio è con noi. La Chiesa di Pio XII complice del nazifascismo*, Milano: Kaos, 2002, p. 275). The subject arose again in late 1942, when it was rumoured that Pavelić planned to visit the Vatican again. This time it was Osborne, British Ambassador in the Vatican, who wrote a complaint note to the Secretariat of State [included in the paragraph below].

171 Vatican reports in July 1941 that Pavelić was ‘furious’ with the Holy See because a nuncio had not been sent, not it looked like one was going to be sent in the near future, and a Papal Visitor [Legate] had been sent instead. Even more surprisingly Maglione, Cardinal-Secretary of State, advised Pavelić “to calm down” because the appointment of a Papal Legate was the Vatican's standard procedure in these situations and that no nuncio could be sent until the state was recognised by the Holy See, and for that to happen, the war had to end.

See Appendix, Document 11.

172 Stella Alexander, *The Triple Myth*, p. 66.

173 In fact, the Vatican insisted on Marcone and his secretary's use of the Archbishop's Palace as their residence in Zagreb to underline the primarily religious purpose of their mission in the NDH.

174 He did not learn it whilst in Zagreb, either. By contrast, his secretary, father Masucci did. Ibid., *The Triple Myth*, p. 66.

175 The NDH Army turned against all Italian citizens after Badoglio's signature of the Armistice of Cassibile on 9 September 1943. As Alexander narrates, that very same night “[t]wo plain-clothes police arrived at the archbishop's palace to arrest Marcone. Stepinac immediately telephoned Andrija Artuković, the minister of the interior and told him as long as he, Stepinac, was in the palace, Marcone would remain with him, and if he was removed by force Stepinac would remain with him, and if he was removed by force Stepinac would immediately order all the church bells to sound the alarm. “You are not dealing here with an Italian but with the envoy of the Holy See” he said. The authorities immediately apologized.” Stella Alexander, *The Triple Myth*, p. 67.



ican received through Allied channels about the NDH was true or war propaganda, his personal attitude towards the regime, the Croatian clergy, and the prelature is more difficult to dissect. On the one hand, he sometimes did criticise the bad behaviour of some members of the prelature (particularly Šarić) and the lower clergy, duly informing the Vatican – or the NDH government – about their wrongdoings.<sup>176</sup> On the other, he wholeheartedly defended the NDH and the *ustaša* regime in a letter sent to the Vatican in early May 1943, when the Holy See began to be genuinely concerned about the rumours of massacres against Serbs in Croatia and Bosnia.<sup>177</sup> Marcone's political significance, nonetheless, significantly dwindled after September 1943 and he somehow became a (more-or-less) irrelevant piece in the NDH's diplomatic game.

Although Vatican knowledge on the atrocities committed in the NDH was not limited or sketchy – not only was the Vatican informed through Allied sources, bishop Ujčić of Belgrade denounced the outrageous behaviour of the *ustaše* and the sometimes excessive connivance of the Church – the Holy See did not publicly admonish the *ustaša* regime.<sup>178</sup> It seems likely that the Vatican applied to the Croatian issue the same diplomatic strategy it put into use throughout the whole conflict, i.e. it gave absolute priority to diplomatic negotiations with all involved parties in the conflict, rather than risking open confrontation with one side; Pius XII probably wanted to emulate Benedict XV's attitude in World War I. Finally, I would also take into consideration Phayer's suggestion that the Pope “may have feared that communicating throughout the church word of the murders perpetrated by the Catholic Ustasha, the complicity in genocide of Catholic Slovak priest Tiso, and the crimes of Catholic Austrians and Germans committed against Catholics in Poland would deeply divide the church.”<sup>179</sup>

As for the ways the NDH was depicted by Vatican media, *L'Osservatore romano* (the Holy See's official newspaper) does not seem particularly interested in reporting news on the NDH during the first months of its existence, apart from some short reports on international meetings members of the *ustaša* government have with their German, Bulgarian, Hungarian or Italian counterparts – these reports, notwithstanding, were usually copied from international agencies (e.g. such as ‘Stefani’) and not produced by the Vatican typographic agency.<sup>180</sup> Even more striking is the fact that *L'Osservatore* published an extract of king Peter II's speech from El Cairo stressing the unity and indissolubleness of the Yugoslav kingdom ten days before Pavelić's visit to the Vatican hill.<sup>181</sup>

Between April 1941 and September 1944, Pavelić is nominated six times in *L'Osservatore romano* – whether due to news related to individual actions or news about meetings

176 His letter to the Croatian Ministry of the Treasury informing about Šarić's unlawful appropriation of buildings and other assets which used to belong to a Hungarian Jew of Sarajevo sent to a detention camp, and requesting the removal of his ownership on the aforementioned belongings is particularly illuminating. See Appendix, Document 12.

177 See Appendix, Document 13.

178 In a letter sent to the Secretariat of State on 24 July 1941, Ujčić denounced *ustaša* massacres on Serbs and the little opposition shown by his colleagues in the NDH. Similarly, he asked the Vatican to intercede because *ustaša* atrocities were also affecting the way Catholics were regarded in Serbia. See Appendix, Document 14.

179 Phayer, *The Catholic Church and the Holocaust*, p. 35.

180 See Appendix, Tables 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5.

This lack of interest can be contrasted with *L'Osservatore*'s boundless enthusiasm for Franco's government: no day passes without a congratulating piece of news on Spain and its government.

181 “Un appello jugoslavo”, *L'Osservatore romano* (No. 107, 8 May 1941).



he had with Hilter, other German or Italian high rank officials, or with members of the NDH government. By contrast, Serbia's head of government, Milan Nedić, is also mentioned six times in the same time span. The relative insignificance of Pavelić's role for *L'Osservatore romano* can be more decisively proven in a long article published for a special issue in occasion of Pius XII's crowning anniversary (March 1942), in which *L'Osservatore* writes on the Pope's relations with foreign dignitaries, monarchs, and heads of state: there is no mention whatsoever of Pavelić or the NDH, whereas equally controversial figures, such as Franco or Pétain, are praised and their governments put as an example of good Catholic governance.<sup>182</sup>

Whilst it is true that *L'Osservatore* steadily reports on everyday life issues in the NDH until May 1944 – and some more controversial ones too, like the news note on the criminal charges given to Jewish and Communist saboteurs in the NDH in September 1941 – the amount of information cannot be compared in anyway to that offered about Italy (of course) but also Franco's Spain. Even İnönü's Turkey seems to get more coverage than the NDH. Similarly, *L'Osservatore* sometimes even writes on current issues in Nedić's Serbia (e.g. the agricultural harvests, state bonds and loans, etc...). From 1943 onwards, *L'Osservatore* informs more regularly on the activity of the Yugoslav government in London. In December 1943 the AVNOJ [the Partisan Anti-Fascist Council for the National Liberation of Yugoslavia, i.e. the provisional government of the liberated territories] is mentioned for the first time.<sup>183</sup> From that point forth, news on the NDH are drastically reduced and the information available on both the Yugoslav royalist government and Tito's AVNOJ increases exponentially. The only non-political Croatia-related articles were published on 8 June and 19 August 1944, respectively.<sup>184</sup> On June, 8th *L'Osservatore* wrote on 'The Sacred Writings of the Croats' and informed about the significance of the Church in keeping the Croatian language alive – linking this process to the writing foundations put by Saint Jerome in the 4th Century when translating the Bible. On August, 19th *L'Osservatore* published a large article on the rich publishing activity of Catholic editing houses in the NDH – and how this had blossomed under the protection and support of the current government.

As for *La Civiltà Cattolica*, from 1941 to 1945 it reported only four times on issues related to the NDH, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina or Southeastern Europe in general. In January 1941, *La Civiltà Cattolica* published a long article on the Croatian Banovina, the situation of the Catholic Church and its social organisations in it, political (and ethnic) issues in the Yugoslav kingdom and the (bad) relations existent with the Serbian Orthodox Church.<sup>185</sup> In June 1941, a short note on Pavelić's visit to Rome and the nomination of the Duke of Spoleto as new King of Croatia is added to a more general section on current foreign affairs.<sup>186</sup> In January 1942, *La Civiltà Cattolica* produced a long study on the Serbian Orthodox Church, presenting its history (before and after the Ottoman occupation), explaining the reasons behind its embittered relations with the Catholic Church, and its position in

182 "Rapporti con Sovrani Capi di Stato e Uomini di Governo, *L'Osservatore romano* (No. 59, 12 March 1942).

183 "Fra i Partigiani Jugoslavi", *L'Osservatore Romano* (No. 287, 9-10 December 1943).

184 "La Scrittura Sacra dei Croati", *L'Osservatore Romano* (No. 135, 8 June 1944) & "Attività Editoriale in Croazia", *L'Osservatore Romano* (No. 194, 19 August 1944).

185 *La Civiltà Cattolica* (92 Vol. I Quaderno 2173 (January 1941)).

186 *La Civiltà Cattolica* (92 Vol. II Quaderno 2183 (June 1941)).

the Anglican-led ecumenical council.<sup>187</sup> Finally, in January 1945 *La Civiltà* shortly informs about the most recent developments in Yugoslav politics, particularly Tito-Šubašić's agreement on the nature of the new Yugoslav state and the King's refusal of the establishment of a Regency Council.<sup>188</sup> In a more blatant manner than with *L'Osservatore romano*, the Vatican did not seem particularly interested in promote any kind of view (let alone be it positive) on the NDH through its second most important printed journal. Rather, a kind of 'broadcasting silence' seems to have been imposed until the end of the war, when *La Civiltà Cattolica* began to openly condemn Tito's regime and the sufferings of the Church in Slovenia, Bosnia and Croatia in this new milieu.

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187 *La Civiltà Cattolica* (93 Vol. I Quaderno 2198 (January 1942)).

188 *La Civiltà Cattolica* (96 Vol. I Quaderno 2093 (December 1944-March 1945), pp. 207-8).

## Conclusion

It seems undeniable that, between 1941 and 1945, the Catholic Church was certainly co-opted to a large extent by the *ustašas*. The regime used – tantamount – this religious institution in order to legitimise its own existence or as a surrogate to put in practice some of its genocidal policies. This, however, does not fully explain the Church's behaviour. The Church was undoubtedly mesmerised by the allure of Croatian statehood, and it is equally true that the episcopacy favoured the idea of a homogenously Croat (and, if possible, 'Catholic-only') state and disliked the idea of another Yugoslav national 'melting pot' after the war – this time (even worse) *also* a socialist one. While it could be possible to argue that the Church abstained from criticising the NDH because doing so would have been seen as an implicit criticism of Croatia's first experience with self-government in almost a millennium, and therefore it would have been like admitting that Croatian statehood should be given to more 'expert' hands (be it Hungarian, Serbian or Italian), the Church's tactic of diplomatic dialogue and cordial relations had become very harmful by 1943 and cannot be rationally explained – especially when even some sections of the clergy began to be regarded as 'enemies of the NDH' by the *ustaša*.

Whereas the NDH was 'another problem' in the long list of troubles the Vatican had to deal with in World War II and the Holy See did not profess any kind of special sympathy towards the *ustaša* regime – or at least, it was less appreciative if compared to the open admiration it professed for other far-right, hyper-conservative regimes – the Croatian Church continued to write congratulatory sermons and notes on the *ustaše*, and offered thanksgiving masses to the NDH in April 1945.<sup>189</sup> It is very plausible that the Croatian episcopate and lower clergy feared communist and partisan backlash as to defend the NDH to its very last consequences. This, however, does not explain the lack of will in showing some kind of atonement or internal reflexion in the posterior years. The 1990s conflicts gave the Roman Catholic Church in Croatia an additional 'grace period' with regard to its behaviour in this particular historical period. However, I do believe (and I do hope) that more sooner than later the Catholic Church in Croatia (and in Bosnia and Herzegovina) will have to come to terms with its distant and recent pasts.

In addition, through this thesis I have also tried to clarify (to the maximum extent possible) the relationship between Roman Catholicism and militant Croatian nationalism. In fact, many of the findings of this work can be extrapolated to the intricate placement that religion may find in other forms of nationalism. The Croatian case, as it was been shown, can be very enlightening indeed: whilst in its primitive and early phases it tried to construct a na-

189 I believe the exchange of notes in the Secretariat of State on how to avoid another papal audience with Pavelić in May-June 1943 is self-explanatory. Pierre Blet SJ et al., *ADSS*, Vol. VII, Notes 193. & 231. (May-June 1943).

tional *ethos* based on historicist claims (and therefore, built on the idea of a common foundational myth, and the standard triad of a shared past, present – and more importantly – future), with time passing – and more crucially, with the need of further delimiting who was ‘in’ and who was ‘out’ the national corpus – Roman Catholicism became, somehow, a *condition sine qua non* for entering into the Croatian nation. More interestingly, this was the consequence of a two-fold process: first, the need of restricting entry into the ‘in’ group (as written before). Second, because of the lack of other discernible differences with other South Slav groups [as I said, *discernible, tangible and quickly recognisable* differences, such as language or racial characteristics] religion ended up becoming *the* key to ethno-national inclusion or exclusion – pretty much like in Northern Ireland.<sup>190</sup>

Throughout this thesis, the possible reasons behind the Croatian Church’s behaviour during World War II have been analysed and studied. However, there is still a large degree of blurriness related to this historiographical issue. It is sure and certain that the scholarly discussion on the controversies surrounding the Catholic Church during World War II, particularly in Central, Eastern and South-eastern Europe (but not only), is still very much alive and it will certainly not dwindle in the near future. As a final remark of this conclusion, I want to add that I wholeheartedly look for a new chapter in the scholarly discussion of this topic, based on a crystal-clear empirical, objective approach on the events. A dogmatic, nationalist and emotion-driven study of World War II in the Western Balkans will inevitably lead (once more) towards unnecessary generalisations and the reciprocal application of ‘general guilt clauses’ to ethno-national groups, and religious communities – because, as it has been shown throughout this thesis, grey zones of collaboration were more common than previously thought, for the whole political and religious spectrum. Needless to say, these generalisations help reconciliation in no possible way whatsoever. Moreover, a public display of atonement (and by the same token, of reconciliation) by the religious hierarchies is of equal paramount importance. Until these two preconditions are not met, it will be almost impossible to close this dark chapter of our recent history and, above all, to show some actual engagement with the legacies of the past.

190 Emir Kusturica’s biography can be particularly helpful in understanding this phenomenon. The Sarajevo-born film-maker declared several times his allegiance to the Serbian nation and his personal choice to be a Serb. This would have more than enough in order for him to enter Serbian-hood in the 1920s or 1930s. Nowadays, however, this process could not be completed without an actual conversion to Serbian Orthodoxy – which Kusturica did carry out indeed and changed his name to the (definitely) less Muslim-sounding Nemanja.

## Appendix

**Document 1.** “La mirabile elevata parola di Sua Santità”, *L’Osservatore romano*, 17 December 1937, No. 293

“Verrà un giorno nel quale non saranno poche le anime che deploreranno di non avere largamente, generosamente, operosamente accolto un bene così grande come quello che il Vicario di Gesù Cristo offriva al loro Paese, e non soltanto per la compagine ecclesiastica, religiosa della nazione, ma anche per la sua compagine sociale e politica, per quanto decisamente aborrente Egli fosse, da fare cosa sua e opera sua la politica”

*A day will come in which many souls will regret not having generously and industriously accepted such a big present as the one offered to their country by the Vicar of Jesus Christ. And this contrition will happen not just because the ecclesiastical and religious compactness of the nation will suffer, but also the society and politics of the country will be affected – despite His [i.e. the Holy Father’s] dislike for meddling in politics or making politics an issue of his own.*

**Document 2.** Request for a “exquiratur sentential Nuntii Apostolici” sent by Monsignor Pellegrinetti (Nuncio in Belgrade) to Monsignor Pacelli (Under-Secretary of State), 11 September 1933

Si tractandae sint causa gravioris momenti quae cum auctoritate civili rationem habent de iisdem ne agatur nisi sententia accesserit Nuntii Apostolici.

[...]

§ 1. De conventuum Episcoporum fine. Episcopi in conventibus ad quos congressi alterutrum malius cogonscere mutuaque caritas et unitatis vinculum arctis queunt adstringere, de commnubis Ecclesiarum suarum necessitatibus necnon de rebus publicis deque gerendis cum potestate civili coniunctim intra limites suae potestatis salvissimaeque irubis Sanctae Sedis consilia capiunt.

[...] § 5. De rebus ordine modoque tractationis [...] Inter res tractandas assumi intra fines canonum potest quaevis causa religionem, culturam, rem sociale spectans, speciatim directio vitae publicae catholicae, questionis Actionis Catholicae, manifestationes et peregrinationes intre et extra fines Regni, tandem et omnia, quae a catholicies typis eduntur etc., quantum hae res ad dioceses omnes communitates pertinet. Si tractandae sint causae gravioris momenti quae cum auctoritate politica rationem habeant, de iisdem agatur nisi sententia accesserit Nuntii Apostolici

*Whenever [Yugoslav Bishops] have to deal with the civil authorities about any issue of relative importance, the Apostolic Nuncio should be informed beforehand and no action should be taken before his approval is given.*

**§ 1. On the purpose of the meetings of the Yugoslav Conference of Bishops.** *These meetings should be used as a vehicle of better understanding and fraternity between Bishops. Bishops are invited to expose their problems and those issues of common interest for the Church, as well as disputes with the civil authorities as long as the aforementioned are within the limits of their position and in accordance with the advice they have received from the Holy See.* [...] **§ 5. On the topics that can be discussed and the order of discussion.** *any questions related to the Canons and to religion, culture, and society – particularly those issues regarding Catholic public life, the Catholic Action, public acts and pilgrimages within (or outside) the borders of the [Yugoslav] kingdom; as well as topics related to published material by Catholic editing houses etc..., as long as these issues concern a particular diocese. Whenever any kind of important matter with the civil authorities is to be discussed, such should not be treated until the Nuncio Apostolic has been consulted and given his opinion on the issue.*

Source: AA.EE.SS., IV, Jugoslavia, pos. 106, fasc. 73, allegato, fol. 53r, 54rv. in Massimiliano Valente, “Pio XI, la diplomazia pontificia e gli «interventi politico-religiosi» dei vescovi jugoslavi”, pp. 716-7



**Document 3.** The Racial Laws of Nazi Germany and the NDH

<b>Germany</b>	<b>Independent State of Croatia</b>
A person who had at least three Jewish grandparents	A person who had at least three Jewish grandparents
A person who had two Jewish grandparents and who	A person who had two Jewish grandparents and who
(a) Belonged to the Jewish community in September 15, 1935, or joined it on a subsequent date, or	(a) Belonged to the Jewish community on April 10, 1941, or joined it on a subsequent date
(b) Was married to a three-quarter or full Jew on September 15, 1935, or married one on a subsequent date, or	(b) Was married to a Jewish person on April 30, 1940, or married a Jewish or half-Jewish person on a subsequent date, or
(c) Was the offspring of an extra-marital relationship with a three-quarter or full Jew, and was born out of wedlock after July 31, 1936	(c) Was the offspring of an extra-marital relationship with a Jew, and was born after January 31, 1942, or (d) Was classified as a Jew by decision of the Croatian Interior Minister acting upon a recommendation of a “race-political_ commission, or (e) Was born of parents not resident in Croatia
	Any child of an unmarried Jewish mother Any person (including one-quarter Jews and full Aryans) entering into marriage with a Jew after April 30, 1941

Source: Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of European Jews*, New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2003, Vol. II, pp. 757-8

**Document 4.** Archbishop Šarić's poem *Ode to the Poglavnik*, published on the archdiocesan journal *Vrhbosna*

<b>Ode to the Poglavnik</b>	
	Dedicated to the Poglavnik The Leader: “For the Motherland” All Croats: “Ready!”
The poet saw you in the Holy City In Saint Peter's Basilica. His presence was as dear to him As is our Homeland.	You call us Croats for our homeland: “Be like the rock, Be prepared!” The flame of fame will light our way, Holy Croatian Homeland!] Like the sun, you warm us, You lead Zagreb to the heart of the Croatian king, You love Bosnia, you call it the jewel Of the Crown of Croatia. Day and night tirelessly for the people, A true Croat is so dear to you, Your heart warms him like the sun, Oh hero of the Ustashe!
God himself, the Almighty, be with you So that you accomplish the sublime deed; May Ante Starčević illumine you May he be your model! You are both the idol of the Croats You defend the ancient sacred rights. The sun beams with you, our noble ones Eternal fame to you!	

You are totally dedicated to the Homeland,  
 You live from the Faith, you hero, bold warrior.  
 You stand up for the freedom of the Homeland,  
 Divine Ustaša.

Our good spirit, our deep myth,  
 The wolves cry in vain from all around,  
 Your call, Prophet, resounds through mountain  
 and Valley:]

God be with the Croats!"

"God the Lord, our only God,  
 Our protector, our resurrection."  
 With these words you went into  
 The Easter morning dawn

He has heart this man, and honour,  
 He who does not reign, but works without thought  
 to himself,]

And never bends, he who  
 Is a guiding star to us

Every day is a sacrifice and noble work,  
 Your pure light guides us, our star!  
 Your strength vanquishes all the dwarves,  
 You new Zrinjski.

Truth and justice are elevated by your speeches,  
 More dear than even your mother is freedom to  
 you;  
 You stand up them against all the thieves,  
 Like a giant.

**Against the greedy Jews with all their money,  
 Who wanted to sell our souls,  
 Betray our names,  
 Those miserable ones**

**You are the rock on which rests  
 Homeland and freedom in one.  
 Protect our lives from hell,  
 From Marxism and Bolshevism.**

A cry from the heart flies to Heaven:  
 "Protect our Homeland, the beautiful one, oh  
 Lord!"

It is the only concern for you forever,  
 For it alone you pray.

Thus you call us all united to the dance  
 Of work, of progress, of honour.  
 In this dance it is alive,  
 Our beloved Croatia

**Tolerating the worst travails for the movement,  
 Surrounded by soul-robbing thieves,  
 You strode like David into foreign lands,  
 Protected by God.**

The lord sent you solace abroad;  
 Adorned your faith with laurel,  
 Never will it wither,  
 Happy hero!

Today our banner waves under the sky,  
 Our eyes cry tears of joy,  
 Your cheerful brow  
 Adorn the city and the land like a kiss.

Who could move our hearts until today!  
 Raise our hearts to the heaven of the Lord,  
 Oh leader, the Croatian people needs you  
 like bread.

For the Homeland we will always be prepared,  
 For it we will work, strive for it, always prepared;  
 For the homeland ever with burning zeal, with  
 God,  
 For the beloved Homeland!

Dr. Ante Pavelić. Dear name.

Croatia has in him

A treasure in Heaven.

Mar the heavenly king accompany you forever,  
 Our beloved Leader!]

Source: Katolički Tjednik, No. 51, p. 13 in Vladimir Dedijer's The Yugoslav Auschwitz and the Vatican, pp. 97-100

**Document 5.** The report Stepinac sent to the Vatican in May 1943 when the Secretariat of State asked him and Abbot Marcone whether the information about ustaša cruelty and crimes was actually true or anti-Axis propaganda. Stepinac answered with a four-page report specifying all the good deeds the ustaša government had done for the Croats and the Catholic Church.

A.E.S. 3773/43, orig.

Zagreb, 24 maggio 1943

Mi prego di comunicare all'Eminenza Vostra quanto segue:

rev.mo abbate Marcone, rappresentante della S. Sede in Croazia mi fece sapere che siano pervenute certe accuse alla S. Sede, come se la Chiesa cattolica in Croazia non avesse fatto il suo dovere verso gli ortodossi, i quali si sentono perseguitati, anzi, che la Chiesa, secondo le medesime calunnie, avrebbe approvato e inscenato le misure contro gli scismatici.

Affinché dia la prova documentata dai fatti che la Chiesa cattolica in Croazia ha conservato sempre intatto il suo carattere di essere protettrice di tutti i sofferenti, oso presentare all'Eminenza Vostra:

1. Alcuni documenti, i quali provano, quanto abbiamo fatto per i Serbi, malgrado tutti i mali, che i Serbi ci hanno inflitto durante i 20 anni della vita comune;
2. Alcuni documenti, dai quali si vede, quanto abbiamo fatto a pro dei Giudei."

Mi sento obbligato di avvertire l'Eminenza Vostra che il material inviato dalla propaganda serba alla S. Sede non serve, che per far cadere negli occhi della S. Sede il prestigio del Regime attuale in Croazia. Nonostante tutta la propaganda nemica contro la Chiesa in Croazia resta il fatto storico che la Chiesa cattolica in Croazia ha sempre fatto sentire la sua voce anche davanti ai più alti personaggi dello Stato, anche quando questo non era senza il pericolo per gli altri interessi della Chiesa. Questo ci hanno confermato e riconosciuto anche non pochi Serbi, guidati non dall'odio ma dalla verità e gratitudine. Per aver un'idea esatta dei fatti bisogna sapere che le crudeltà, delle quali si lamentano i Serbi, si sono avverate nel periodo della rivoluzione nazionale, quando il tempo ha portato con sé degli individui irresponsabili, i quali hanno commesso dei delitti a nome del Governo ma di fatti senza il sapere delle autorità dello Stato, o anche spesso contro i decreti del Governo. Il che si vede dal fatto che molti di questi irresponsabili sono stati fucilati per ordine del Governo. Gli accusatori serbi dovrebbero rammentarsi che il serbo Punisa Racic, dopo aver ucciso nel Parlamento di Belgrado alcuni deputati croati," è stato messo, sì, in carcere ma nello stesso tempo era quasi libero ottenendo dal Governo di Belgrado un sussidio mensile di 2.000 dinari.

**Cardinal Stepinac to the Vatican Secretariat of State**

Zagreb, 24 May 1943

*It is my honour to inform His Eminence of the following:*

*Rev. Abbot Marcone, representative of the Holy See in Croatia, informed me of the different accusations made against the Catholic Church in Croatia, which claim the the Church herself has carried out criminal acts against Croatia's schismatics.*

*As to prove to falseness of this information, I will show His Eminence:*

- 1. Some documents which can prove how much the Church has done for the Serbs, despite all the evil that the Serbs inflicted on us Croats during the last 20 years.*

- 2. Some documents which prove all our good actions regarding the Jews.*

*I am equally obliged to inform His Eminence that the material sent by the Serbian propaganda to the Holy See has not other purpose than undermining the reputation of Croatia's current regime.*

*Despite this malicious propaganda, it is undeniable that the Church in Croatia has spoken out loudly against the State even if the interests of the Church were at stake. Many Serbs, not guided by hatred but by the wish of truth and gratitude, have thanked the Church for this work.*

*In order to have a better idea of the alleged crimes committed against the Serbs, it is necessary to clarify that the majority of them happened during the "national revolution", when irresponsible individuals committed crimes as representatives of the government. These rascals, however, were no true representatives of the State and usually they acted against the will of the government. Indeed, many of these individuals have been executed by governmental order. Those Serbs who accuse us should remember the Serb Punisa Racic, who, after killing several Croatian MPs in Belgrade, was sent to prison but at the same time he was given a 2,000 dinars monthly pension by the state. This is a well-known fact, even if secret.*

*Furthermore, it is indispensable to list the many good things that the Croatian government has done so far, despite the accusations of wrongdoings started by the Serbs. There are some of these good actions, His Eminence:*

Questo è fatto sicuro, seppure segreto.

Si deve poi notare che il Governo croato, dato non concesso d'aver commesso tanti mali, come dicono i Serbi, ha fatto anche molto del bene. Eccone alcuni fatti per l'informazione dell'Eminenza Vostra:

1. Il Governo croato lotta energicamente contro l'aborto, che minacciava la rovina non solamente alla Croazia ma anche alla Chiesa in Croazia. [...] Il Governo però scismatico di Belgrado non ha fatto quasi niente per ostacolare il progresso di questo male in Croazia essendo ispirato in prima linea dai medici giudei e ortodossi.

2. Il Governo croato attuale proibisce severamente tutte le pubblicazioni pornografiche, che erano dirette anche queste in prima linea dai giudei e Serbi. [...]

3. Il Regime attuale in Croazia abolisce la massoneria e fa Guerra accanita contro il comunismo, che cominciò a fiorire sotto il Governo di Belgrado.

4. Il Governo ha emanato i decreti contro la blasfemia.

5. Vuole inoltre che i soldati siano educati cristianamente, che nell'esercito già jugoslavo era tanto ostacolato.

6. Il Governo insiste sull'educazione religiosa della gioventù nelle scuole. Non è contrario alle scuole confessionali, le quali il Governo serbo voleva sopprimere a qualunque costo.

7. Ai seminari come anche agli altri istituti ecclesiastici il Governo ha aumentato le dotazioni.

8. Ugualmente ha aumentato la dotazione mensile ai sacerdoti.

9. L'attività caritatevole della Chiesa se ne gode pure dei soccorsi del Governo.

10. Il Governo aiuta le costruzioni e riparazioni delle chiese.

Potrebbero aggiungersi parecchie altre cose buone, che il Governo croato ha fatto o è disposto a farle. Dal detto segue che il Regime attuale in Croazia pare almeno di essere di buona volontà, la quale non può essere negata dalla Chiesa. Del resto devo assicurare l'Eminenza Vostra che i Serbi non cesseranno di

accusare e di odiare la Chiesa cattolica, qualunque sarà l'atteggiamento della Chiesa verso essi. Ciò non ostante faremo anche nell'avvenire il nostro dovere dettato dalla carità cristiana anche verso i nemici. Dall'altra parte però devo esprimere di nuovo la mia persuasione che la Chiesa cattolica avrebbe da subire un periodo di martirio crudele nel caso, se la Croazia dovesse un sol giorno essere soggiogata di nuovo dalla Serbia. Questo risulta dalle voci, che corrono come pure dall'ultimo foglio volante emesso dai Cetnici (truppe serbe), che qui allego per informarne l'Eminenza Vostra. [...] Fra poco come spero potrò

1. *The Croatian government vigorously fights against abortion, which threatened the very existence of Croatia and of the Church in Croatia. [...] The schismatic government in Belgrade did nothing to stop this evil, being controlled as it was by Jewish and Orthodox doctors.*

2. *The Croatian government has outlawed all pornographical publications, which were usually managed by Jews and Serbs. [...]*

3. *The Croatian government has abolished masonry and ferociously fights against Communism, which started blossoming during Belgrade's rule.*

4. *The Croatian government has enacted laws against blasphemy.*

5. *The Croatian state wants all soldiers to be given a proper Christian instruction, something that was almost impossible in the Yugoslav army.*

6. *The Government insists on the need of religious educations in schools. The Government is not against confessional schools, which the Serbian government wanted to close down at any cost.*

7. *More funding has been provided to seminaries and other ecclesiastical institutes.*

8. *Similarly, the wages of priests have been increased.*

9. *The Church's charitable activity is now also supported by the government.*

10. *The government also finances the construction of new churches and the reconstruction of those damaged.*

*Many other good actions that the Government has done or would like to do could be added. This said, it is undeniable that the current regime has shown an interest in having good relations with the Church. The Catholic Church has replied accordingly. In addition, I would like to inform His Eminence that no matter what behaviour the Church will have towards the Serbs, they will never stop from accusing and hating the Catholic Church. Notwithstanding this, the Catholic Church in Croatia will follow the charity principles of the Church at any cost, and even against our enemies.*

*Nonetheless, I also have to admit that I am more than convinced that, in the case in which may fall again under the Serb yoke, the Catholic Church will certainly suffer a period of cruel martyrdom. This belief is based on rumours and on this pamphlet published by the Četniks (Serb troops) which I have attached to this letter. [...] I will soon send more documents on then atrocities committed by the Serbian četniks against the Catholic Croat population. Eminence! If the Croats have acted with cruelty in the past years, we deplore and condemn that behaviour. But it is out of question that this reaction has been*



presentare all'Eminenza Vostra l'altro materiale, dal quale risultano le crudeltà commesse dai Cetnici contro la popolazione cattolica croata. Eminenza! Se la reazione da parte dei Croati è stata talvolta crudele, noi lo deploriamo e condanniamo. Ma è fuor di ogni dubbio che questa reazione è stata provocata dai Serbi, i quali hanno violato tutti i diritti del popolo croato nei 20 anni della vita comune in Jugoslavia. Questo ammettono e deplorano del resto parecchi uomini serbi seri, non guidati dall'odio e dalla vendetta.

*caused by the Serbs themselves, who have violated every possible right of the Croatian people during the 20 years of common life in the Yugoslav kingdom. Goodwill Serbs, not driven by feelings of hatred and revenge, have admitted themselves the truth in these words.*

Source: Pierre Blet SJ et al., ADSS, Vol. IX, Note 130., (2 April 1943), Annex II (24 May 1943)

**Document 6.** Monsignor Felici's (Papal Nuncio in Belgrade) letter to Cardinal Maglione (Vatican Secretary of State)

Rap. Nr. 3184/234 (A.E.S. 446/41, orig.)

***Monsignor Felici (Papal Nuncio in Belgrade) to Cardinal Maglione (Vatican Secretary of State)***

Belgrado, 24 novembre 1940

*Belgrade, 24 November 1940*

[...] In questa lotta *pro aris et focus* è pressoché impossibile al Clero rimanere indifferente o neutrale, senza esporsi al pericolo di perdere il contatto col popolo e di essere riguardato come traditore della Chiesa e della patria.

*In this fight 'pro aris et focus' [i.e., for God and Fatherland] it is almost impossible for the clergy to remain indifferent or neutral. By doing so, priests would immediately lose contact with their flock and they would be seen as traitors of their Church and their Homeland.*

Source: Pierre Blet SJ et al., ADSS, Vol. IV, Note 178., (24 November 1940)

**Document 7.** Monsignor Felici's (Papal Nuncio in Belgrade) letter to Cardinal Maglione (Vatican Secretary of State)

A.E.S. sans nr., Jugoslavia 144, autogr.

***Maglione's Notes to Stepinac and the Croatian Clergy***

Città del Vaticano, 15 maggio 1941

*Vatican City, 15 May 1941*

Si manifestano in Croazia due tendenze, delle quali una favorevole all'influenza tedesca, l'altra a quella italiana.

*Two different political leanings can be currently observed in Croatia nowadays, one towards the German sphere of influence, the other one towards the Italian.*

Mgr arcivescovo [i.e., Stepinac], i prelati, il clero siano prudenti e non si compromettano.

*I summon Monsignor the Archbishop, the prelates, and the clergy to be cautious and to not to implicate themselves.*

Tengano però presente l'interesse della religione

*They must, however, bear in mind the interests of our religion.*

Source: Pierre Blet SJ et al., ADSS, Vol. IV, Note 347. (15 May 1941)

**Document 8.** Monsignor Tardini's notes (Under-Secretary of State) on Pavelić's imminent visit.

<p>A.E.S. 4189/41, autogr.</p> <p>Città del Vaticano, 17 maggio 1941</p> <p>Ieri S.E. l'ambasciatore d'Italia ha insistentemente chiesto all'Eminentissimo Superiore se il Santo Padre avrebbe ricevuto in udienza il sig. Pavelić. La questione è delicata. [...]</p> <p>C) Come conciliare questo duplice ordine di cozzanti considerazioni?</p> <p>Su una maniera sola, cioè:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- accordare a l'udienza - non rifiutarla;</li> <li>- eliminare dall'udienza stessa tutto ciò che potrebbe darle un carattere politico e compromettere la S. Sede. Quindi senza solennità (udienza privata) e senza reclame (esigere ciò specialmente dal Governo italiano) ed inoltre preavvisare i più importante rappresentanti pontifici perché sappiano o perché, nel caso, possano rettificare false interpretazioni.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Monsignor Tardini's Notes</b></p> <p><i>Vatican City, 17 May 1941</i></p> <p><i>His Excellency the Ambassador of Italy persistently asked His Superior Eminence [i.e. Maglione, the Secretary of State] if the Holy Father would have received Mr Pavelić.</i></p> <p><i>The issue is delicate. [...]</i></p> <p><i>C) How to combine this two clashing considerations?</i></p> <p><i>With a one-way solution, that is:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>- to agree on an audience – do not oppose it</i></li> <li><i>- to eliminate from the audience anything that may give it a political meaning and thus compromise the Holy See. Thus, no regalia or solemnity (it is a private meeting) and without special requests (particularly from the Italian government). In addition, inform all pontifical representatives on this meeting so that they know how it proceeded and, when necessary, they can rectify spurious interpretations.</i></li> </ul>
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Source: Pierre Blet SJ et al., ADSS, Vol. IV, Notes 351. (17 May 1941)

**Document 9.** Monsignor Tardini's notes (Under-Secretary of State) on the events of May 17th, 1941.

<p>A.E.S. 4189/41, autogr.</p> <p>Città del Vaticano, 17 maggio 1941</p> <p>Ore 10,50–Sua Santità–presentel'Eminentissimo Cardinale Segretario di Stato – mi dice le sue auguste decisioni circa l'udienza del sig. Pavelić e del duca di Spoleto. Mi vien dato l'ordine di comunicare tutto all'ambasciata d'Italia.</p> <p>Ore 11,15 - Viene – in assenza dell'ambasciatore – il comm. Babuscio. Gli dico che il Santo Padre riceverà il sig. Pavelić, ma solo – senza la delegazione –</p> <p>in forma privata, cioè come una personalità cattolica, non come una personalità politica;</p> <p>senza sbandieramenti o reclame, cioè che la stampa italiana non snaturi il carattere di questa udienza.</p> <p>[...]</p>	<p><b>Monsignor Tardini's Notes</b></p> <p><i>Vatican City, 17 May 1941</i></p> <p><i>10:50 am – His Holiness – accompanied by His Eminence the Cardinal-Secretary of State – told me about his august decision on the meetings with Mr Pavelić and the Duke of Spoleto. I am ordered to subsequently inform the Italian Embassy.</i></p> <p><i>11:15 am – Commandant Babuscio arrives (not accompanied by the Ambassador, though). I tell him that the Holy Father will receive Mr Pavelić alone – that is, without the rest of the Croat delegation</i></p> <p><i>that this will be a private meeting, thus the Pope will receive him as a Catholic believer and not as a political character.</i></p> <p><i>there will be no ostentatious behaviour or requests of any kind. This will be done to avoid any misinterpretations by the press, particularly the Italian one.</i></p>
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Source: Pierre Blet SJ et al., ADSS, Vol. IV, Note 352. (17 May 1941)



**Document 10.** Monsignor Montini's notes on Pavelić's private audience with the Pius XII

A.E.S. 4189/41, orig.	<b><i>Monsignor Montini's Notes</i></b>
Città del Vaticano, 18 Maggio 1941	<i>Vatican City, 18 May 1941</i>
<p>Questa sera, come stabilito, il Santo Padre riceveva il signor Ante Pavelić, alle ore 18 nella sua biblioteca, in forma privata.</p> <p>Il Santo Padre diceva subito del suo amore per il popolo croato, di cui conosce la fedeltà ed i sentimenti così sinceramente cattolici. Più volte insisteva che lo riceveva come privato, come figlio della Chiesa.</p> <p>Il signor Pavelić assicurava ripetutamente ed apertamente che il popolo croato desidera ispirare tutta la sua condotta e la sua legislazione al cattolicesimo.</p> <p>Circa il riconoscimnto del nuovo Stato, Sua Santità faceva osservare come la cosa sia tuttora molto delicata. La prassi della Santa Sede non consente di pronunciarsi in merito finché un trattato di pace non abbia definito le questioni relative ad un territorio. Essa deve essere imparziale, deve avere riguardi per tutti, da tutte le parti sono cattolici, per i quali la Santa Sede deve mostrarsi deferente [...]</p>	<p><i>This evening, as planned, the Holy Father received Mr Pavelić. The private audience took place at 6 pm at His library.</i></p> <p><i>The Holy Father immediately spoke about his love for the Croatian people, of whom He knows his loyalty and the sincere Catholic feelings it professes. He also insisted on the fact that Pavelić was received as an individual, as a son of the Church.</i></p> <p><i>Mr Pavelić openly admitted several times that the Croat people wished to inspire its behaviour and its legislation to Catholic teachings and morality. With regard to the recognition of the new state, His Holiness remindend Mr Pavelić of the particularities of the situation. The Holy See's acquis does not permit for an official recognition until peace treaties had defined all international law-binding issues concerning a territory. The Holy See must remain impartial, She must take into considerations all sides, for there are Catholics in all parties of the war.</i></p>

Source: Pierre Blet SJ et al., ADSS, Vol. IV, Note 358. (18 May 1941)

**Document 11.** Vatican internal reports after Pavelić's Private Audience with the Holy Father

A.E.S. 5776/41, autogr.

***Monsignor Tardini's Notes***

Città del Vaticano, 22 luglio 1941

Vatican City, 22 July 1941

Ieri il principe Lobkowicz [sic] croato, cameriere di spada e cappa di Sua Santità ha detto all'Em.o: 1) che il sig. Ante Pavelic è furibondo perché gli si invia un Visitatore Apostolico; 2) che egli vuole il riconoscimento da parte della S. Sede (quale Stato cattolico) e vuole un vero e proprio rappresentante pontificio.

Sua Eminenza [i.e. Cardinal Maglione, Secretary of State] ha risposto:

1) che il sig. Ante Pavelic deve calmarsi, perché l'invio di un Visitatore Apostolico è secondo le norme e le tradizioni sempre seguite dalla S. Sede; 2) che lo stesso S. Padre spiegò, a suo tempo, al sig. Pavelic quale era la situazione e quali le tradizioni della S. Sede. Il Pavelic, quindi, che allora annuì, deve ora quietarsi.

[...]

22-7-41. Ex audientia Em.i (Ex aud. SS.mi)

Si scriva una lettera all'arcivescovo di Zagabria dicendo che l'Abbate di Montevergine va in Croazia per vedere come stanno le cose per riferire alla Santa Sede (ma non si parli di Visitatore Apostolico).

*Yesterday evening, Prince Lobkowicz (a Croat), Papal chamberlain, said to His Eminence [the Secretary of State, Maglione]:*

*1) that Mr Ante Pavelić was furious because an Apostolic Visitor was to be sent to Croatia; 2) that he wants the actual recognition of the NDH by the Holy See (as a Catholic state) and thus the establishment of a proper nunciatura.*

*His Eminence replied:*

*1) that Mr Ante Pavelić should calm himself down, because the appointment of an Apostolic Visitor follows the Holy See's norms and customs; 2) that the Holy Father Himself had explained to Mr Pavelić last May what the situation was and how the Holy See would proceed. Mr Pavelić, who then nodded, should now calm down.*

*[...]*

*22-7-41. Ex audientia Em.i (Es aud. SS.mi)*

*Write a letter to the Archbishop of Zagabria stating that the Abbot of Montevergine is going to Croatia to see how the current situation is and to therefore report the Holy See (do not mention anything about Apostolic Visitors).*

Source: Pierre Blet SJ et al., ADSS, Vol. V, Note 17. (22 July 1941)

**Document 12.** Abbot Marcone's letter to Nikola Mandić, Prime Minister of the NDH, regarding some buildings and other assets belonging to a Jew sent to a death camp and then given to the archdiocese of Sarajevo

<p>Zagabriae, die 21 decembris 1943</p> <p>[...]</p> <p>Dr. Joannes Saric archiepiscopus serajensis quaesivit et tandem a Gubernio croatico dono accepit bona quaedam immobilia, quae olim Judaei cijusdam origine hungarici erant. Quidam ex clero et etiam ex civibus Archidioecesis serajensis, hoc donum aegre ferentes, me certiore reddiderunt et rogaverunt ut rem melius componerem.</p> <p>Doctori Antonio Filipanovic tunc temporis thesauri publici Ministro poposui, ut pro bonis immobilibus ad Judaeum quondam pertinentibus Archiepiscopo Saric vel pecuniae summam, vel alia bona immobilia tribuere dignatur. Praedictus Doctor consilium meum benigne excepit, attamen Paulo post gravi morbo correptus, munus suum deponere coactus est.</p> <p>Enixe Excellentiam Vestram rogo, ut si fieri potest praedictum negotium secundum votum meum perficiatur.</p> <p>Joseph Ramirus Marcone S. Sedis Legatus</p>	<p><b><i>Abbot Marcone's letter to Nikola Mandić, Prime Minister of the NDH Government</i></b></p> <p>Zagreb, 21 December 1943</p> <p>[...]</p> <p><i>Dr Ivan Šarić, archbishop of Sarajevo, requested and finally obtained from the Croatian government buildings and other real estate assets which used to belong to a Jew of Hungarian origin. Some clergy members and laymen of the archdiocese could not accept those assets on moral grounds, and informed me about the current situation. I then wrote to Dr Ante Filipanović [sic, I presume Marcone actually speaks of Ante Filipančić], Minister of the Treasury at that time I gently asked him to offer archbishop Šarić money or other properties in exchange for those buildings which used to belong to a Jew [to be given to his relatives, I reckon]. Dr Filipanović willingly accepted my request. He fell ill shortly after, alas, and subsequently he had to resign from his position. I ask His Excellency to finalise this procedure as previously agreed with the Minister of the Treasury.</i></p> <p>Joseph Ramirus Marcone Legate of the Holy See</p>
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Source: Carlo Falconi, *Il silenzio di Pio XII*, Sugar: Milano, 1965, pp. 379-380

**Document 13.** Abbot Marcone's letter to Cardinal Maglione, Secretary of State, regarding the current situation in the NDH in which he gives his account on the accusations of genocide against the Croatia's Serb population made by the Yugoslav government in London and the Allies, concerning the Croatian state and the Catholic Church

<p>Prot. 809/43 (A.E.S. 3189/43, orig.)</p> <p>Zagabria, 8 maggio 1943</p> <p>[...]</p> <p>E noto a tutti l'odio profondo della Chiesa scismatica iugoslava contro i cattolici e l'aperto favore che la monarchia di Belgrado mostrava per i dissidenti.</p> <p>La gerarchia scismatica si trove, apertamente coinvolta nel colpo di Stato, che portò all'invasione</p>	<p><b><i>Abbot Marcone to Cardinal Maglione, Secretary of State</i></b></p> <p>Zagreb, 8 May 1943</p> <p>[...]</p> <p><i>It is widely known by everyone the deep hatred expressed by the Yugoslav schismatic church against Catholics and the patronage offered by Belgrade's Monarchy to the schismatics. In addition, the schismatic hierarchy planned and</i></p>
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della Jugoslavia da parte delle truppe italo-tedesche. Si spiega perciò come gli invasori in un primo tempo perseguitassero il clero scismatico ad essi molto ostile e come, per parlare della sola Croazia, i sacerdoti ortodossi in gran parte fuggissero, in parte fossero anche uccisi e pochi rimanessero al loro posto.

Costituitosi il nuovo Governo croato il 10 aprile 1941, passarono alcuni mesi senza che la situazione si normalizzasse. Si deve ammettere che gli Ustasci, squadristi del Governo croato, abbiano più per privata

iniziativa che per ordine superiore qua e là infierito contro la popolazione scismatica, le quali non facilmente si adattavano né si adattano alla nuova situazione. Si deve anche ammettere che il Capo

del Governo Ante Pavelić durante tutto il 1941 nutrisse l'idea di un rapido passaggio alla Fede cattolica di tutti gli scismatici viventi nei confini croati.

Contro gli eccessi degli ustasci e le intromissioni del Governo nella conversione degli scismatici protestò l'Episcopato croato nella Conferenza tenutasi a Zagabria nel novembre 1941. Non pago di ciò

l'episcopato, nel rivendicare a sé il divino mandato di evangelizzare i popoli, nominò un'apposita Commissione di ecclesiastici, la quale, tutelando la più rigorosa libertà di coscienza, avrebbe dovuto inviare

missionari ove fossero stati richiesti dalle popolazioni scismatiche e dirigere il movimento di conversione. Le persistenti guerriglie interne ostacolarono assai l'opera dei missionari. Intanto io stesso, giunto in quel periodo di tempo in Croazia, cercai di far comprendere al Poglavnik la necessità di procedere lentamente e cautamente nella conversione dei dissidenti e lo trattenni anche dalla totale distruzione delle loro chiese.

[...]

Non vi fu mai da parte del Governo croato una persecuzione religiosa contro gli scismatici, anzi da più di un anno essi sono favoriti ed aiutati dalle autorità civili.

[...]

Siccome la maggior parte dei ribelli appartiene alla chiesa scismatica serbo-croata, è chiaro che il Governo croato, o meglio le truppe occupanti reagiscono contro le bande armate. Di qui l'equivoco sfruttato dalla propaganda straniera. In queste condizioni di cose l'episcopato nostro croato non aveva e non ha motivi speciali per protestare pubblicamente

*carried out the coup d'état that caused the invasion of Yugoslavia by Axis troops. That fact easily explains why the invaders persecuted the schismatic clergy more actively, given the open hostility the latter showed to the occupation forces. In the case of Croatia, members of the schismatic clergy left the country, were actually assassinated, and few of them remained in the parishes.*

*With the establishment of the new Croatian government, on 10 April 1941, several months passed by and the situation remained equally convulsive and uncontrollable. It is significant to remark that many members of the ustaša paramilitary troops acted (usually unilaterally rather than following orders from above) against the schismatic population, which did not adapt (and has not yet adapted) to the new regime. Similarly, Croatia's Head of State, Ante Pavelić, gave for granted that throughout 1941 a quick conversion of schismatics to Catholicism would be possible. In November 1941, the Croatian Conference of Bishops openly protested against the excesses of the ustaša and the government's meddling in conversion issues. The Conference, indeed, reminded the government of the privilege of the Church when evangelising peoples, and an appropriate Commission was appointed to supervise the conversions. Besides, the Conference decided to send missionaries to the areas where conversion would take place as to smooth the catechism process. Serb guerrilla groups, however, made the missionaries' work extremely difficult. I myself tried (already in Croatia by the time) tried to explain to the Poglavnik [Pavelić] the need to act slowly and cautiously when dealing with conversions, and I also tried to warn him on the implications of the destruction of schismatic churches and other estates.*

[...]

*The Croatian government never launched a campaign of religious persecution against the schismatic Serbs. On the contrary, for more than a year they have been favoured by the civil authorities.*

[...]

*Since the majority of guerrilla fighters belong to the 'Serbo-Croatian' schismatic church [sic], it is crystal clear that the Croatian government, or even better, the occupier forces, will retaliate against the guerrillas with more frequency. And this is the misunderstanding that the foreign propaganda has used to attack the NDH. In the*



contro il Governo a favore degli scismatici. Ciò non toglie che i vescovi e particolarmente l'arcivescovo di Zagabria abbiano sempre deplorato la violenza da qualunque parte essa venga. Egli dovendo recarsi a Roma verso la fine del corrente mese "porterà con sé alcuni documenti relative alla questione. Intanto conviene notare che la gerarchia scismatica serba e quella

croata in embrione mai ha alzato la voce contro gli eccessi dei cetnici tutti scismatici e dei ribelli quasi tutti scismatici. Sembra accertato che le agenzie estere, ispirate dal clero scismatico serbo, capovolgendo la situazione ed accusando il clero cattolico d'inerzia, vogliano scagionare i cetnici ed i ribelli dalla responsabilità dei delitti commessi in Croazia.

*current situation, our Croatian Bishops' Conference did not have any particular interest in openly protesting against the ustaša government and protect the schismatics. Nonetheless, the Croatian bishops (and particularly Zagreb's archbishop) have always deplored violence of any kind and directed against any group. I would also like to add that both the Serb schismatic hierarchy nor the Croat one (i.e. the hierarchy of the recently-created Croat Orthodox Church) have ever protested against the violent acts carried out by the četniks, all of them members of the schismatic faith. Undoubtedly, foreign press agencies have been instilled by the Serb schismatic clergy in making these accusation, turning upside-down the situation and accusing the Catholic clergy of crimes, whilst at the same time exonerating the četniks and other rebel groups of the crimes committed in Croatia.*

Source: Pierre Blet SJ et al., ADSS, Vol. IX, Note 130., (2 April 1943), Annex I (8 May 1943)

**Document 14.** Ujčić, Archbishop of Belgrade, letter to the Vatican Secretariat of State in July 1941 informing about the crimes committed against Serbs in the NDH.

A.E.S. 6039/41, orig.

Belgrado, 24 luglio 1941

Ebbi già occasione di inviare alcuni scritti a codesto sacro Dicastero concernenti la penosa situazione, in cui veniamo a trovarci noi cattolici della Serbia, in seguito alle violente persecuzioni praticate nel Regno di Croazia contro i Serbo-ortodossi.

Non voglio esporre, che certi atti, purtroppo verificati, significano direttamente un oltraggio al buon senso e al diritto civile..., senza parlare della carità cristiana.

[...]

A Belgrado, e in Serbia gli ortodossi cominciano a guardare di cattivo occhio i cattolici, per il semplice motivo, perché i Croati, i quali sono di religione cattolica, perseguitano i Serbi a motivo della loro religione.

Un nuovo malanno in questa penosa questione si manifesta nella diceria, se non creduta da tutti: ma da molti divulgata, che la Chiesa cattolica approvi le vessazioni praticate contro i Serbi.

***Ujčić, Archbishop of Belgrade, to the Vatican Secretariat of State***

Belgrade, 24 July 1941

*I have already had the opportunity to send some reports to this Sacred Secretariat regarding the miserable situation in which us, Catholics of Serbia, currently are due to the violent persecutions suffered by the Orthodox Serbs in the Kingdom of Croatia.*

*I would prefer not to display how some actions carried out in Croatia (confirmed, alas) represent an offence to common sense and the rule of Law..., let alone Christian 'charitas'.*

[...]

*In Belgrade, and in the whole of Serbia, the Orthodox have begun to openly show a negative attitude against Catholics just because Croats, being also Catholics, are currently persecuting Serbs because of their religion.*

*Another misfortune should be added to this sorrowful situation, and that is the (very extended) belief that the Catholic Church approves and incites the mistreatments suffered against Serbs.*

Source: Pierre Blet SJ et al., ADSS, Vol. V, Note 20. (24 July 1941)



**Tables 1., 2., 3., 4., and 5.** Coverage of all articles or news notes published on *L'Osservatore romano* dealing with the NDH, Pavelić, Nedić, the Yugoslav Government-in-Exile or Tito's Partisan movement.

*Note:* for a clearer understanding of these tables, I have coloured every article in a different hue. All news that mention or speak directly about Pavelić are coloured in **red**. Those related to King Peter or the Yugoslav Government-in-Exile are **blue**. Any reference to Nedić or Serbia is marked in **pink**. Similarly, any news pertaining to Tito himself, the Partisan movement, the AVNOJ or a future socialist-led Yugoslav federation are featured in **green**. Finally, all news informing about the NDH (whether its government or everyday life issues) are signified in **orange**.

1941		
Month	Day	Topic Covered in Article/Note
March	8	Speech by Franco
April	17	Happenings in Zagreb
April	19	Happenings in the Balkans
May	6	Council in Serbia
May	8	King Peter's Appeal to the Yugoslav People
May	18	Croatian Crown
May	20	Pavelić's Visit to the Vatican
June	8	Pavelic meets Hitler
July	13	Constituional Reforms in Vichy France
July	15	Independence of Montenegro
July	23	Kvaternik meets Hitler
August	7	Anti-Axis Revolts in Serbia
August	8	Croatian Ambassador in Sofia
August	12	Croatian Politics
August	13	Resistance movements in Bosnia
August	20	Vichy-Yugoslav Kingdom Relations
August	22	Anniversary of Hlinka's Death
August	29	Public Works in Croatia
September	2	New Government in Belgrade
September	3	Edict by Nedić
September	7	Public Works in Herzegovina
September	10	Italo-Croatian Agreement
September	17	Terrorist Attacks in Zagreb
September	23	Kvaternik meets Hitler
September	25	Jews and Communists condemned in the NDH
September	27	Communist armed bands in Serbia
October	8	Nedić's Appeal to the Serb people
October	10	Tactical changes in the Serbian Government
October	19	Edict by Nedić on National Security

1942		
Month	Day	Topic Covered in Article/Note
January	14	Reception of the Diplomatic Corps in Zagreb
January	30	First Session of the Croatian Sabor
February	12	Deputies of the Croatian Sabor

March	12	Sovereigns and Heads of State *(Pavelić not mentioned)
April	11	Amnistry in Croatia – First Anniversary of the NDH
April	12	Celebrations in Zagreb
April	15	Celebrations in Zagreb
June	20	Horthy's Birthday
July	5	Declarations by Nedić
August	12	Work Corporativism in Croatia
August	21	French Catholic Youth – Visit by Pétain
September	12	Finnish Ambassador in Croatia
September	17	Work Corporativism in Croatia
September	25	Croatian Public Debt/Pavelić meets Hitler
October	10	New Croatian Ministers
November	11	New Coins in the NDH
November	15	Fight against illiteracy in Croatia
November	26	New Under-Secretary of Foreign Affairs in the NDH
December	2	Croatian Bond Sell-Off
December	12	Deputies of the Sabor
December	20	Charitable Activities of the Archdioces of Zagreb

## 1943

Month	Day	Topic Covered in Article/Note
January	8	New Yugoslav Government in London
January	9	Quaternik [sic] left his Office
January	16	New Radio Station in Zagreb
February	21	Croatian-Bulgarian Agreement
February	24	The Cost of Life in Croatia
March	16	Celebrations in Slovakia
March	19	Agriculture in Serbia
March	30	Insurance Activities in Croatia
April	9	John Maynerd Keynes proposes a new Monetary System
April	11	Celebrations in Croatia (2nd Anniversary of the NDH)
April	15	Serbian Loan
April	25	New Minister of Foreign Affairs in the NDH
May	2	New Ministers in Croatia
May	12	Pavelić Prime Minister
May	16	Changes in the NDH Government
May	25	New Croatian Loan
June	2	New Croatian Ambassador in Rome
July	4	Papal Encyclical De Mystico Christi Corpore
July	23	New Consitution in Croatia

August	8	German Provisions to Croatia
August	18	Yugoslav Ambassador Visited Eden in London
August	21	Compulsory Works in Croatia
August	28	Land Reclamation in Mostar
September	3	Population Exchange in Slovenia and Croatia
September	4	Changes in the Croatian Government
September	4	New Prime Minister in the NDH
September	5	New Serbian Loan
September	10	Armistice in Italy
September	11	Badoglio's Declarations
September	22	Nedić's meeting with Hitler
October	1	King Peter in El Cairo
October	10	Economic Measures in Serbia
November	11	For the After-War (L'Osservatore accepts the possibility of an Allied Victory)
December	12	Current Situation of the Croatian Government
December	12	Comments on the AVNOJ
December	14	Yugoslav Liberation Committee led by Marshall Tito

## 1944

Month	Day	Topic Covered in Article/Note
January	13	Croatian Budget
January	25	Japanese Ambassador in Zagreb
February	4	Total Population of Zagreb
February	9	Unemployment in Croatia – no unemployed people in the NDH
February	16	Government Changes in Zagreb
February	17	Meeting of the Yugoslav Democratic Union in El Cairo
March	4	Mandić meets Hitler
March	5	All Croatian Ministers meet Pavelić
March	9	Yugoslav Ambassador in Ottawa Resigns
March	11	Terrorist Attacks in Belgrade
March	22	Wedding of King Peter
April	6	Pope's Birthday Celebrations in Zagreb
April	22	Interview to King Peter
May	5	Muslim Ministers in Croatia
May	20	Current Situation in Yugoslavia
May	21	Crisis in the Yugoslav Government
June	8	The Sacred Writings of the Croats
June	11	The AVNOH and its Activities
June	20	Šubašić meets Tito
June	23	Politics in Yugoslavia: Mihailović not an Ally anymore
July	11	Federal Solution for Yugoslavia

July	12	Plebiscite on Monarchy and Balkan Federation
July	13	Agreement reached in the Yugoslav Government
July	30	Meeting of the Yugoslav Government
August	19	Catholic Publishing Activity in Croatia
August	23	Maglione Dies
September	14	King Peter Calls All Yugoslavs to join AVNOJ
September	22	Pavelić meets Hitler
October	7	Allied Support to Tito's Yugoslavia
October	29	Full Agreement between Šubašić and Tito
November	14	Serbia in the Yugoslav Federation
November	26	Russo-Yugoslav Talks
December	14	Agreement between Tito and Šubašić

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### 1945

Month	Day	Topic Covered in Article/Note
January	4	Tito's New Year's Message
January	5	Issues on Yugoslav Regency
January	14	Meeting of Yugoslav Ministers in London
January	18	Šubašić meets King Peter
February	11	The Yugoslav Regency Question
February	14	Yalta on Yugoslavia
March	4	Meeting of the Council of Regency
March	9	New Yugoslav Government
April	13	Russian-Yugoslav Friendship
April	20	Establishment of the Yugoslav Federal Governments
May	9	Victory Day

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