

Genocide in Satellite Croatia Chapter III. The Fall of Yugoslavia and the Creation of the Satellite State of Croatia



Continued from [Chapter II. Regency, Concordat and the Tripartite Pact.](#)

THE TIME-TABLE of the Axis Powers called for the invasion of Russia in the spring of 1941. But Italy was having trouble subduing Greece. In order to provide the most effective help in Greece, Germany pressured the Yugoslav government to sign the Axis Pact. But Yugoslavia's adherence to the Pact was short-lived. A Serbian-led plot in the army overthrew the Regency Government and proclaimed Peter II king, although he was not yet of age. A united government was formed to cope with the crisis.

The *coup d'état* in Belgrade caused a violent reaction in the countries of the Axis. On Sunday April 6th, at dawn, operation "Punishment" was launched. For two whole days, Goering's airplanes crushed Belgrade beneath a shower of bombs, burying 25,000 bodies in the ruins. The administration services, which were concentrated in the capital, were entirely paralyzed. This was a fatal blow to the defensive potential of the country.

King Peter and his government went to Montenegro from whence they flew to Jerusalem, and then on to London. Dr. Vlatko Macek, however, did not accompany them. Peter II has noted in his Memoirs¹ that the leader of the Croatian Peasant party came to see him on April 8th, informing him of his intention to return to Zagreb in order "to revive" the morale of the Croatian troops that had given up the struggle and disbanded. Indeed, there was no time to lose if this politician wished to instill a spirit of resistance in his compatriots against foreigners, having heretofore done everything he could to undermine it. But, as will be seen, he had entirely different plans in his head.

¹ *A King's Heritage, the Memoirs of King Peter II of Yugoslavia* (London, 1985), p. 81.

The army, whose mobilization had been sabotaged by a defeatist campaign, fought the best it could, but was ineffective against a numerically stronger

and disproportionally armed enemy. The capitulation was signed on April 18, 1941. This rapid victory for the invading troops had been facilitated by the activities of two "fifth columns" which had been organized in the country: the Croatian Ustashi for Italy, and the Germanic minority of the Banat for Germany.

The *Volksdeutscher*, as the latter were called, had been settled in this province by the court of Vienna in the eighteenth century for the purpose of Germanizing it and crowding out the Serbian and Romanian inhabitants. This was done by vexatious methods, such as over-burdening them with taxes, and if they refused to pay, the imperial cavalry would set fire to the villages and massacre the leading citizens, while leaving the rest of the population to die in misery and in the cold.

The *Volksdeutscher*, who were more united, better organized and much richer than the Sudetan Germans of Czechoslovakia, welcomed the Hitlerian troops with enthusiasm and volunteered their services "en masse." They kept firearms hidden in their houses and one out of three had a machine gun. The German armored divisions found them excellent guides. They tracked down the Yugoslav patriots and submitted them to torture in the concentration camps.

It was they who formed the all too famous SS division, "Prince Eugen," and it was they who committed atrocities in the Serbian villages, totally exterminating the Jews of the Banat and the province of Srem, in collaboration with the Ustashi. However, they did not engage in mass persecution of the Serbs as did the Ustashi.

The latter, even before returning in "the foreigners' trucks," began their destructive activities. Already, on April 6th, while Belgrade was burning, Pavelic made the following proclamation from a clandestine broadcasting station: "Croatian soldiers, take up arms against the Serbian officers and soldiers! From now on we shall fight side by side with our new allies, the Germans and the Italians."

Then, on the 10th of April, while the German army was making its entry into Zagreb, which was all decked with flags, an old Austro-Hungarian Colonel, Slavko Kvaternik, a sworn Ustashi, having hastened back from Italy, announced over the radio the foundation of the "Independent State of Croatia." Prior to the announcement, Kvaternik had gone to Macek and asked him for a brief statement "so as to retain legal continuity of the leadership" and to preserve "peace and order."²

² Kvaternik's testimony at trial of Archbishop Stepinac, October 5, 1946.

Then Dr. Vlatko Macek, vice-president of the former Yugoslav government, invested the new regime in the following terms:

People of Croatia! Colonel Slavko Kvaternik, the leader of the National movement in the country, has today proclaimed the free and independent State of Croatia.

I appeal to the whole Croatian people to submit to the new Government; I

appeal to all the members of the Croatian Peasant Party who hold positions in the Government, to collaborate sincerely with the new Government.³

³ *Hrvatski Narod*, April 10, 1941.

Since Yugoslavia did not capitulate until 18 April, this action of its Vice-Premier on 10 April was pure treason.

The American historian, L. S. Stavrianos, has written about the role of Dr. Macek:

Yugoslavia's future appeared hopeless indeed, Not only was the country mutilated and the people driven to wholesale massacres, but the prewar leaders had failed in their responsibility to provide guidance. This was especially true of Vladimir Macek, whose Peasant party still commanded the support of most of the Croatian peasants. Yet Macek withdrew from politics after advising his followers to obey the regime of the Ustashi. Yugoslavia thus became a hell of blood and torment and destructive hatreds.⁴

⁴ *The Balkans Since 1453* (New York, 1959), p. 772.

This appeal, coming as it did from a caitiff (despicable coward) minister, although treacherous, hit the target. Many of the Croats, blinded by chauvinism, followed his instructions literally and enlisted in the service of the enemy. Lorkovic, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the puppet state made this declaration in February, 1942: "It was, above all, the contribution of the Croatian people and their revolution which shortened the duration of the war in Yugoslavia, reducing the total sum of German and Italian losses, and making possible the break-through on the eastern frontier of Serbia for the fatal blow to Yugoslavia." ⁵

⁵ W. D, Isla, *Commentaires sur les problemes yougoslaves* (Geneve, 1944), p. 45.

While the loyal troops were putting up a desperate resistance in spite of the crushing superiority of the enemy, the municipal militia and the peasant militia, instruments of the Croatian Peasant party, joined the Ustashi for the attack on the isolated units, after which they disarmed the Serbian officers and soldiers and handed them over to the Germans.

* * *

The capitulation of April 18, 1941 was immediately followed by the slicing up of the Yugoslav state, and it would seem that the vanquishers took a special savagery in tearing apart what the Treaty of Versailles had united into a single nation. "Of all the countries occupied in this war Yugoslavia has been the most dismembered and has been divided into the greatest number of administrative units. This dismemberment of Yugoslavia serves not only the immediate political purposes of the occupant but also the purpose of disintegrating and dividing the political forces in the occupied areas so far as to make difficult in the future the unification of all the political elements within the framework of one state." ⁶

⁶ Raphael Lemkin, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe* (Washington, 1944), p. 241.

Serbia, reduced almost to its pre-1912 boundaries, was governed by Germany, although in the latter part of 1941 a civil administration was established under General Milan Nedic. Among leading Serbs arrested during the first days of the occupation were the Serbian Orthodox patriarch, Dr. Gavriilo Dozic and Bishop Nikolaj Velimirovic, both of whom had sought refuge in the monastery of Ostrog in Montenegro. They were taken to Dachau where they were interned until the end of the war. In November 1941, the Italians arrested the Serbian Orthodox bishop of Dalmatia, Dr. Irinej Djordjevic, who was also interned in a concentration camp until the end of the war.

Southern Serbia (Macedonia) was given to Bulgaria, and the Northern provinces (Vojvodina) were occupied partly by Hungary. Albania, a subprotectorate of Italy, was given Western Metohia and the Kosovo region, which is to say, the very heart of the Serbian states of the middle ages.

The provinces of Slavonia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Srem, went to Croatia. The greater part of Dalmatia Pavelic gave to Italy.⁷

⁷ After the census of the population in 1921, there was in each province belonging to satellite Croatia:

	Catholics	Serbian Orthodox	Muslims
Croatia-Slavonia	1,992,519	658,076	2,589
Dalmatia	513,268	106,132	479
Bosnia-Herzegovina	444,309	829,360	588,173
	2,950,096	1,598,568	591,190

In 1941, there were about 2,200,000 Serbian Orthodox in satellite Croatia, The German general Guderian, in his memoirs, concludes that the civil war in Croatia was also largely caused by this annexation of territories which did not correspond to the ethnical frontier of the Croatian people.

We shall see, further on, how in revenge, Ante Pavelic, who had become the leader of the "Independent State," hastened, by a rectification of the boundaries, to give to Italy a territory twice the size of that which had been promised by the Secret Treaty of London (1915). (The earlier grant of the Duce to the Ustashi was far from being lost capital). In addition, Montenegro, which had also been declared an "independent" state, was ruled by an Italian governor, once Prince Mihailo Petrovic-Njegos had refused the crown.

Germany occupied lower Styria, Carinthia and Carniola, and immediately started germanizing these provinces. German became the only recognized official language. All the sign-posts and door signs were consequently changed, and even Slovene Christian names and surnames were changed. German teachers and administrators replaced the natives and introduced the doctrine of national socialism. Furthermore, in order to facilitate germanization, part of the population was deported to Serbia and Croatia to make room for

the German columns. Therefore, in just that one year of 1941, 30,000 Slovenes were deported to Serbia.

In their haste to wipe out all trace of national culture, the occupying forces ordered the destruction of Slovene books, including even the prayer book.⁸

⁸ See Boris Furlan, *Fighting Yugoslavia* (New York: Yugoslav Information Center, 1948), pp. 4, 19, 20, 21.

Such brutal methods could not help provoking strong popular resistance. Therefore, in that part of Slovenia which had become German, just as in the Italian zone, baptized "Province of Ljubljana," foreign occupation went to all sorts of extremes— pillage, rape, and burning of villages during "punishment" raids. The prisons were filled, and guerrilla warfare surged throughout the territory.

So while the Croats celebrated their illusory "Independence," and while the Germans settled in Serbia under the guise of a civil government, resistance organizations were forming in Yugoslavia. The Serbs, during their entire history, have never accepted defeat, and realizing the intentions of the Ustashi government to exterminate their own people in Croatia, their courage and resolution was redoubled.

Colonel Draza Mihailovic reached Ravna Gora on the 11th of May, 1941, where he called for resistance against the invader. The Yugoslav units which had escaped the enemy rallied to his call. These were the first effectives of an army (which could scarcely be called secret) whose soldiers were known as Chetniks, although they were the regular troops that had gone underground. This kind of war was an old tradition of the Serbs, who had practiced it for five centuries as Hayduks (outlaws) during the Turkish domination.

The ranks of the Chetniks, and soon after, the ranks of the Communist-led Partisans (chiefly Serbs from satellite Croatia who were fleeing from Ustashi terrorism) continued to grow, with the result that large areas of Yugoslav territory were liberated.

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE CROATIAN USTASHI

Needless to say, the Catholic Church of Croatia did not remain inactive during the tragic days when events were marked by bloodshed. Great numbers of priests and their congregations inaugurated the collaboration, or, as one might say, the complicity that bound them for the next four years to the Ustashi. Among "these early workers" there were those who had been, for sometime, affiliated with the terrorist organization of Pavelic.

The official Croatian Catholic press welcomed the new regime: *Nedelja* (Zagreb) April 27, 1941 wrote: "God, who directs the destiny of nations and controls the hearts of Kings, has given us Ante Pavelic and moved the leader of friendly and allied people, Adolf Hitler, to use his victorious troops to disperse our oppressors and enable us to create an Independent State of Croatia. Glory be to God, our gratitude to Adolf Hitler, and infinite loyalty to our Poglavnik, Ante Pavelic."

And the *Kat. Tjednik* (8-31, 41) organ of the Sarajevo archbishopric, echoed similar sentiments: "Until now, God spoke through papal encyclicals. And? They closed their ears . . . Now God has decided to use other methods. He will prepare missions. European missions. World missions. They will be upheld, not by priests, but by army commanders. The sermons will be heard, with the help of cannons, machine guns, tanks, and bombers."

The newspaper, *Hrvatski Narod* (August 26, 1941), wrote the following regarding the role of the Croat Catholic clergy: "Franciscans not only spread the Ustashi idea outside the church in various villages, but enabled Croat fighters to meet with Ustashi leaders in the Monastery of Cuntic during the most difficult period of struggle. They met secretly, under the leadership of their Commander, Slavko Kvaternik, with Minister D. Mirko Puk and other Ustashi from Zagreb."

Novi List (June 16, 1941) gave the following details regarding the role of the Croat clergy in their disloyal activities: "Things that you probably did not realize were then taking place. Ustashi disguised as monks came to villages, carrying all sorts of things under their robes, and prepared the people. They incited Ustashi hatred throughout Croatia in such a manner that when our friends the Germans and Italians came, they found us ready."

The idea of "The Sworn Ustashi" came out of the Catholic churches in Croatia. These sworn Ustashi were divided into two categories. Although they were adherents of a single idea, sworn to either before or after, they nevertheless differed according to whether they were sworn in illegally at Catholic churches before April 10, 1941, or publicly before improvised altars in numerous towns in the presence of the Ustashi emblem of knife, gun and bomb. The title of "The Sworn Ustashi" was bestowed upon those who had been sworn in illegally in prewar Yugoslavia and who had pledged to overthrow Yugoslavia and to assist in the extermination of Serbiandom and Orthodoxy. The newspaper, *Nova Hrvatska*, wrote the following regarding one such "Sworn Ustashi" on May 4, 1941: "The Mass was conducted in the municipal church of the holy Nicola Tavelic in Kustosija, by Rev. Cecelja, a Sworn Ustashi."

The Ustashi emigration established connections with the country through the clergy: "The movement looked for and found adherents among all classes of people, even among the clergy" (*Independent State of Croatia*, No. 33, p. 42, Year 1, Zagreb, 1941).

The Christmas issue of the newspaper, *Independent State of Croatia*, under the heading "The role of the Clergy in the Organization of the Independent State of Croatia," wrote the following: "The Franciscan High Schools in Sinj, Siroki Brijeg, Visoko; the Seminaries in Makarska, Mostar and Split; as well as the Theological Faculty of the Zagreb University were the true focal centers of national consciousness, and breeding grounds from which every year not only groups of levites and workers flocked out into the garden of God, but national fighters, who were to spread the national and Ustashi convictions, as well." (No. 33, p. 42, Year I, Zagreb, 1941).

During an Ustashi meeting held in Nova Gradiska, on June 2, 1941, Milovan Zanic, one of the prominent collaborators of Ante Pavelic, said the

following: "The numerous little churches in this district, too, were witness and could testify to the pledging of Ustashi at the light of little church candles." ⁹

⁹ Hrvatski Narod, June 8, 1941.

The unity of the prewar Ustashi and the clergy is illustrated by the following article which appeared in the Novi List (September 20, 1941): "Already in the Summer and Fall of 1940, Dr. Victor Gutic, travelled throughout these regions, and, going from place to place, appointed and swore in Ustashi trustees everywhere, giving them various ranks of "Tabornik," "Rojnik" and "Ustasha." He toured all the monasteries and municipalities, swearing in monks, vicars and priests to loyalty to the Leader of the Independent State of Croatia."

The best known of those who organized the Ustashi Militia and led attacks against the troops that remained loyal were the Franciscans:

Alojzije Cosic from Kotor Varos, Miroslav Petrivic from Prozor, Karlo Grbovac from Duvno, Stjepan Naletelic, Vidak Coric from Brod, Mladen Barbaric from Mostar, Nikola Ivankovic from Nevesinje, Mirko Rafos from Bile, Mladen Lutic from Monastery Scita, Marijan Buric, parish priest from Scita, Julijo Kozul from Mostar, Andrija Jelcic Capljina, Berto Dragicevic, Vlado Bilobrk, parish priest from Metkovic, Ivan Hrstic, parish priest from Sinj, M. Juric, parish priest from Plivnice, Pio Karadzole, S. Kukolj, Josip Mikulic, Ivan Nikolic, Bonifacije Petrovic from Crkveni Bok, Vilim Primorac, Bro Raspudic, Rafael Romac from Metkovic, Skoko, pete priest from Capljina, Marko Zovko, parish priest from ,Stolac, Bono Rendulic, Ambroz Matonicki, Pavao Simovic, Pavao Silov. Then Tlija Majic from Duvno, Petar Grgic, parish priest from G. Tramosnjica, Nikola Bosnjak, Ante Buconic, Bosiljko Vukojevic, parish priest from Medjugorje, Niko Daresic, parish "priest from Trsten, Ante Mikulic, parish priest Prosolac, Josip Galestic, priest, Vilim Cecelja, parish priest from Kustosija, Oton Knezovic, Dionisije Lasic, Grujo Balokovic, Stjepan Bogutovac, Anton Weiss, Ivo Guberina, Josip Bujanovic, Mijo Jagodar, Franjo Matzenauer, Zvonko Lipovac, Vjekoslav Simic, Ivan Prlic, and many others.¹⁰

¹⁰ Viktor Novak, *Magnum Crimen*, See index.

Or the parish priest Ivan Miletic who upon his death rightly deserved the high praise bestowed on him by his colleague Eugen Beluhan at the funeral service: "As a priest he fought against the Yugoslav army." ¹¹

¹¹ Hrvatski Narod, July 25, 1944.

The Ustashi paper, *Hrvatski Narod*, of July 4, 1941, hailed the Franciscan priest, Dr. Radoslav Glavas, as a great organizer of the Ustashi. The article said, in part: "A young and energetic Franciscan, Dr. Radoslav Glavas, came to Siroki Brijeg and placed himself at the head of the struggle. A plan was even drawn to prevent the mobilization of the Yugoslav army. Thus the historic day of April 10th was welcomed, and in the night between April 10th and 11th, the Ustashi disarmed the local gendarmerie and captured the post-office." ¹²

¹² *Hrvatski Narod*, July 4, 1941.

The same *Hrvatski Narod* of July 25, 1941, in the necrology (account of the death) about priest Don Ilija Tomas, said in part:

He accepted with joy in his heart the Ustashi ideas, and as far back as 1937 we see him as a sworn Ustashi in the din of work, exertion and struggle.

The war started, but the Croats did not want to wage war against their old allies, the Germans; they are throwing down arms. Don Illija collects them. He works together with his neighbor from the other side of the Neretva, the priest Don jure Vrdoljak-Biscevic, and the two of them, like two giants, rise to their people against the Serbian plundering bands. It seems that it is not known that as early as April 8 1941, they proclaimed the Independent State of Croatia!

Transport is interrupted, because the transport center, Capljina, is held by two Ustashi, two Catholic priests, Don Illija Tomas, priest in Klepci, and Don Juraj Vrdoljak-Biscevic, priest in Studenac. They disarmed whatever army units tried to escape through Capljina. They even captured a cannon, while Croatian soldiers came voluntarily to serve as reinforcements. Thus, two of them were cut off from the world and surrounded by the Serbian army, but held on amid increasing dangers and battles until April 20th, when the Germans came to their assistance. Shortly after that, Don Ilija was appointed Ustashi commissioner for the entire region.¹³

¹³ *Hrvatski Narod*, July 25, 1944.

Immediately after his proclamation of the "Independent State of Croatia," on April 10, 1941, Kvaternik received His Grace Alois Stepinac, Archbishop of Zagreb, who came to welcome him in the name of the Church and to offer his congratulations, and at the same time to express his sympathy for the death of his brother, Peter Kvaternik, killed at Crikvenica during an engagement against units of the Yugoslav army.

Furthermore, His Grace Stepinac duly conducted the funeral services of this hero, of whom the *Katolicki List* (No. 16-1941) wrote: "He fell just as he was about to achieve the loftiest task of his whole life."

Quite aware of the Archbishop's mission to Colonel Kvaternik, the newspapers of the new government could justifiably print: "This move established a close collaboration between the Ustashi and the supreme representative of the Roman Catholic Church in the State of Croatia."¹⁴ But shortly beforehand, at the time of the Anschluss, another "supreme" representative of the Catholic Church, Cardinal Innitzer, primate of Austria, had also hastened, with his clergy, to be at Hitler's disposal.

¹⁴ *Katolicki List* (Zagreb), No. 16, 1941.

Exactly as in days gone by at Vienna, the following day (April 11, 1941),

Radio-Zagreb asked the population to give the German troops a warm welcome and to receive from the *Catholic parish offices the necessary directives for the future.*

But Ante Pavelic, the Head Chief, or Poglavnik, was still missing. He made his "entree" into Zagreb on April 13, sporting a fascist black shirt, with a bodyguard of Italian tanks. "His Croatian dream materialized. ... The inexhaustible orator, finally reaching his goal, became a master of conciseness. . . . 'Blood will be shed and heads will fall.'" ¹⁵ And this was to be the dominant theme in his policy for a country established by order of Germany army headquarters (A.B.T. No. 0630/41, April 12, 1941), signed by Marshal Keitel "by order of the Fuhrer." ¹⁶

¹⁵ Jean-Mare Sabathier, *Parie-Match*, May 2, 1957, p. 21.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

The day after the arrival of Pavelic, His Grace Stepinac rushed to offer the congratulations of the Church to this assassin of King Alexander and Louis Barthou, who had been twice condemned to death in absentia, in Yugoslavia and in Aix-en-Provence. This great man had come, the prelate explained, "to realize the greatest task of his existence." ¹⁷ That same evening, during the banquet at the Archbishopric, black shirts and ecclesiastical robes fraternally mingled. They, each in turn, gave toasts brimming with cordiality, and during the dessert, flash bulbs photographed the edifying picture of His Grace reigning among the terrorists, which should be of interest to the historians of the future.

¹⁷ Refer to Croatian newspapers of this period especially *Nedjelja* (Sunday) organ of Crusaders (Zagreb), April 27, 1941 concerning the meetings of His Grace Stepinac with Slavko Kvaternik and Ante Pavelic.

On Easter Day, 1941, Archbishop Stepinac announced from the pulpit in the Cathedral of Zagreb, the establishment of the Independent State of Croatia. Thus in the church itself, he celebrated high treason against Yugoslavia. The Archbishop ended his sermon with these words: "Jesus our resurrected Saviour! . . . I pray thee tell the Croatian people who are now facing a new era of life, what you told the Apostles after the Resurrection: Peace be with you!"

The foregoing quotation is from the official organ of the Archbishopric of Zagreb, *Katolicki List*, No. 16, 1941. In the same issue of this newspaper is a detailed review of the events that transpired from April 10th up to the first speech delivered by Ante Pavelic on April 15, 1941. The official journal of the Archbishop of Zagreb reported in detail the rapid events leading to the collapse of Yugoslavia, the role of the Ustashi and their supporters.

In Archbishop Stepinac's Diary (book 4, April 27, 1941) appears a notice written by Cvetan, the master of ceremonies at the Archbishopric, stating that Stepinac had done everything possible so that the Vatican would grant diplomatic recognition to Pavelic's Croatia. The words read:

The auditor of the nunciature came from Belgrade to Zagreb on his way to Rome. He profited, while passing through, of a visit to the Archbishop, who

informed him of the situation and begged him, since communication by mail had become so difficult, to ask for an audience with the Pope and explain the situation verbally. The Archbishop warmly recommended the establishment of relations, or in other words, recognition of the Croatian State by the Holy See, as soon as possible."¹⁸

¹⁸ *Tajni dokumenti o odnosima Vatikana i Nezavisne drzave Hrvatshe* (Secret documents of the relationship between the Vatican and the Independent State of Croatia), Zagreb, 1952, pp. 31-32.

Two weeks later came the reply of Pope Pius XII. The Diary of the Archbishopric noted (Book 5, p. 216): "The auditor of the nunciature of Belgrade returned from Rome and called on the Archbishop to tell him about his audience with the Pope. He stated that the Holy Father had listened attentively and suggested that the Archbishop send a written report as soon as possible. On his occasion the Holy Father declared that the initiative for establishing diplomatic relations should come from the government and that the Holy See had not received any word until then." ¹⁹

¹⁹ *Ibid.* p. 32. It should be noted that during this exchange of suggestions between the Archbishop of Zagreb and Pope Pius XII through a spokesman of the nunciature, diplomatic relations between the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and the Vatican still existed and that a Royal Legation was actively functioning at the Holy See.

Finally, there came great contributions of Mussolini and Hitler. Pavelic's, Hitler's and Mussolini's telegrams and the names of the members of the first Ustashi government were published. There was also a leading article entitled "The Independent State of Croatia." This article could not have been published without the authorization of Archbishop Stepinac. The article concludes that the Independent State of Croatia was created by All-Powerful Providence in the year of their national jubilee. The Catholic Church prays the Lord to enable the Croatian people to find in it the fulfillment of their justified aspirations, "convinced that all conditions are present for the fulfillment of the word of God: Blessed are the people whose Master is God. With desires and prayers we inaugurate the Independent State of Croatia."

Encouraged by such a suggestion, Pavelic requested the Pope to recognize his State. In his letter are the following lines:

Holy Father! Divine Providence, having allowed me to take the government of my people and my country in hand, I firmly decide and wholeheartedly desire that the Croatian people, loyal to their glorious tradition remain, in the future, attached to the apostle Saint Peter and his successors, and that our country, imbued with the law of the gospel, becomes the Kingdom of Christ. In this great enterprise I beg for the help of your Holiness. I consider that such help would mean recognition by the apostolic supreme authority of Your Holiness, of our State, and kindly send me your representative that he may help me with his paternal advice. I pray that you may grant me and my people thy apostolic blessing. In kneeling at the feet of Thy Holiness as the most obedient son of Thy Holiness I kiss thy sacred right hand.²⁰

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

After such a beginning, it is not surprising that the declarations of His Grace Stepinac, in the days that followed, seemed overflowing with blissful holiness and fervent ardor for the new regime. As he wrote in a pastoral letter on April 28th:

Who could ever reproach us, for, as spiritual guardians we have contributed to popular enthusiasm and joy, by offering up prayers of profound gratitude to the divine majesty?

Domino factum est istud et est mirabile in oculis nostris (This is God's work and our eyes are filled with wonder Psalm 117, verse 38). I beg of you and pray you to make every effort so that our Croatia becomes God's own country, for it is only in this way that the essential duties of the State for the good of the people can be accomplished. ...

This is the reason why you should respond to our appeal, that you may consecrate yourselves to the safeguard and development of the Independent State of Croatia. Knowing the men who today hold the fate of the Croatian people in their hands, we are absolutely convinced that our effort is understood and wholeheartedly supported.

I appeal to you, my venerated brothers of the priesthood! Never cease to call the believers in God to prayers! And you, who stand at the altar of God, raise your arms to the "Father of the starry heavens," for He is the source of every perfect gift, and pray to him to inspire the leader of our Independent State of Croatia that he may have the wisdom which will allow him to accomplish his Duty in honor of God, and for the salvation of the people, in justice and in truth.

I therefore order the Te Deum to be sung in all the Churches next Sunday on the 4th of May, and I invite all the local authorities and our loyal people to attend.²¹

²¹ *Katolicki List*, No. 17, 1941, pp. 197-198.

Doubtless the venerated priests obeyed these touching adjurations, for the reactions were soon obvious. The "men" whom His Grace Stepinac flattered himself in knowing seemed to have "understood" his "effort" quite clearly. It was not in vain that he asked for their "help"; they had already been accomplishing their "duty" which had been mapped out for them "in all justice and truth." They were certain of being even more successful later on, after their visit to the Holy Father, but the first signs of their activity were not negligible.

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