

Genocide in Satellite Croatia Chapter VI. The Death Camps



Children in the Stara Gradiska concentration camp.

Continued from [Genocide in Satellite Croatia Chapter V. Massacres and Forced Conversions](#).

AT THE TIME that the Italian paper printed this unflattering appreciation of Pavelic and his acolytes, the Independent State of Croatia had just finished the first semester of its existence, and this quasi-anniversary was officially celebrated at Zagreb. For this occasion the Croat press was even more eloquent in its daily praise of Pavelic and, of course, the Catholic publications were just as prompt in extolling the regime of bloodshed. In Archbishop Ivan Saric's *Nedelja* (October 12, 1941) there was a large picture of the national hero, accompanied by a dithyrambic (passionate) article. In the *Andjeo Cuvar* (October 1941) the virile face of Marshall Slavko Kvaternik was honored on the front page as if veiled with incense and benedictions.

However, there was another side to the story. These fatuous anniversaries coincided with the last raids on the Jews at Sarajevo. Caught in their homes or on the street, they were sent off to the concentration camps at Jasenovac. November 15th and 16th were, above all, dark days for the Jews in Bosnia. (Approximately 8,600 Jews from Bosnia were imprisoned in these camps as of August, 1942.) These camps, which had been officially set up by decree-law (No. 15282101-Z-1941, September 25, 1941), *Narodne Novine*, November 26, 1941. were destined to become as time went on, the Ustashi's principal instrument of extermination. As they began losing control of the mountainous regions, which the resistance forces had reconquered, Pavelic decreed that for any attack against an Ustashi ten people would be selected by the police and executed in reprisal, without any legal proceedings whatsoever. From that time on, each day witnessed the execution of hostages. At Ruma, for instance (August 14, 1942), ninety people were killed; sixty on August 19, 1942, at Sremska Mitrovica; 140 on August 25, 1942, at Vukovar—and so on without end. But soon the punishment-raids in the Serbian villages did not dare venture into certain regions without the support of the German army. And this army had quite enough to do for its own sake and could not spare the necessary units for helping the Poglavnik.

Instead of "liquidating" a sufficient number of Orthodox Serbs on the spot, according to a preconceived plan, the government concentrated all its effort on the concentration camps, which became veritable slaughterhouses for those who were interned there for the slightest motive. By orders of the Croatian Himmler, Andrija Artukovic, Minister of the Interior, a new regulation (CCIX-1779-Z-1942) affected the concentration camps and stipulated: "Members of the family of people who have interfered with public order and security, singly or in armed groups, and who have threatened the peace and calm of the Croatian people, or who have undertaken to perpetrate any infraction against the State with violence, or against individuals and their possessions, as well as members of the family of persons who have disappeared from their homes, will be sent for a forced residence to a concentration camp. The Minister of the Interior (Office of Public Order and Security) has been authorized to set up camps in various regions of the Independent State of Croatia."

As can be seen, practically anyone related to a guerrilla could be sent to one of these camps. No proof of wrong-doing was necessary.

Paragraph 2 emphasizes:

"The Minister of the Interior (Office of Public Order and Security) will decide on the forced confinement in a concentration camp of these family members, as well as on the length of their confinements in the camps."

Article 7 states that:

"All household and other possessions belonging to certain members of the family of persons defined by Article I, can be confiscated for the benefit of the Independent State of Croatia."

"The Minister of the Interior (Office of Public Order and Security) is authorized to decide on the confiscation of possessions belonging to any member of the family of such persons."

Article 13 stated:

"No appeal to an administrative court with the view to altering the decisions made by virtue of this actual decree-law, will be allowed." The above quotes are from *Narodne Novine*, July 22, 1942.

From this date, the camps began to multiply in satellite Croatia. They could be found at Jasenovac, Jadovno, Pag, Ogulin, Jastrebarsko, Koprivnica, Krapje, Zenica, Stara Gradiska, Djakovo, Lobograd, Tenje, Danica at Osijek, etc. They were directed by Vjekoslav Lubric, right hand man of Andrija Artukovic. This strange character, under the name of Max Luburic, is now living peacefully in Spain.

"The way it functioned was extremely simple. The prisoners were divided into three categories: those who were without papers were immediately liquidated (as the director of the Jasenovac camp has testified) ; those who had permits to remain three years were liquidated in several days; and then there were those who had special permits who were locked up for six years and liquidated

in more attenuated circumstances.” Jean-Marc Sabathier in the Magazine *Paris-Match*, May 25, 1957, p. 23.

In the autumn of 1941, frightful hecatombs (slaughter) took place in the camps Jadovno, Pag, Krapje and Danica. About 4,500 Serbs and 2,400 Jews had been interned on the Isle of Pag. Every morning the executioner called several dozens out in a neighboring field and chopped them down with an axe. When the Ustashi learned that the Italians were going to occupy the Isle, they massacred the prisoners “en masse,” about 4,500. The Italians found only mountains of bodies on their arrival.

Hunger, cold and epidemics decimated those who were still interned, thus completing the executioners’ job. These killers seemed to relish their work, and all their exploits rapidly gave these frightful infernos the renown that Pavelic needed to maintain his reign of terror.

At the Gracac camp a living Serbian surgeon, Dr. Veljko Torbica, was cut up, and salt poured over his open wounds, while his assassins kept inquiring: “Has the operation been successful, doctor?”

Dr. Novacan who had fled from Belgrade to Istanbul in June, 1942, gave the Yugoslav Royal Legation the following information regarding Ustashi crimes: “Since the ice melted on the Danube and Sava Rivers, the bodies of massacred Serbs have been reaching Belgrade, and each day 10 to 100 bodies were pulled out of the water for burial. The mutilated bodies looked dreadful: women and girls with breasts cut off. Most of the bodies were inscribed ‘Direction-Serbia’. In an empty mattress little children, tied up and thrown in the water, were found dead... .”

To give a little variety, noses and ears were cut off, and eyes were scratched out. The Italians photographed an Ustashi wearing two chains of human tongues and eyes around his neck.

Below is the testimony of the Italian writer, Curzio Malaparte, who interviewed Pavelic at Zagreb:

“While he talked,” wrote Malaparte, “I kept looking at a wicker basket placed to the right of the Poglavnik on his desk. The lid was raised and in the basket was a variety of seafood, or so it seemed.”

“Oysters from Dalmatia?” I inquired.

“Ante Pavelic raised the lid of the basket and showing me the seafood that looked like a mass of sticky, gelatinous oysters, he said with a tired, kindly smile: ‘A gift from my loyal Ustashi! Forty pounds of human eyes!’”
Curzio Malaparte: *Kaputt* (Paris Ed. Denoel), p. 322 (1946).

Madame Ruza Rupcic, a professor, has given this moving testimony of the camp at Bosanska Gradiska:

While I was in the camp, above all from the month of May to the end of 1942, the Ustashi admitted a large number of convoys filled with women and children. As the convoys came in, mothers were separated from their

children and sent to hard labor in Germany. Those who were not able to do the work were massacred immediately,

The food and treatment of the children was indescribable. Their meals consisted of corn mush and water which rapidly brought on dysentery. The children died in large numbers.

They had to sleep on the ground without mattresses or even straw and soon perished with the cold.

In the month of July the Ustashi assembled 2,000 children under the pretext that they were ill. They were closed, by turn, in a room and poisoned with cyanide. *Zlocini fasistickth ohupatora i njihovih pomagaca protiv Jevreja u Jugoslaviji* (The crimes of the Fascist occupying forces and their acolytes against the Jews of Yugoslavia), published by Jewish Community (Belgrade, 1952), p. 109.

In 1942, the Ustashi brought about 1,200 children from the provinces of Banija, Kordun and other regions to the concentration camp of Jastrebarsko. The Ustashi and the Sisters treated these children with indescribable brutality. Because of the lack of care and the famine, 486 children died shortly afterwards. Some of them were later rescued.

The concentration camp of Zemun was described as follows by a witness who managed to survive this inferno:

It was composed of eight huts built in a row. From the straw on the ground, where the victims slept, drifted a terrible stench of decomposition. Several hundred prisoners filled each hut. Many of the sick and dying cried out in pain and agony, and in despair. In a far corner a child could be heard crying for its mother.

In another corner there was an unforgettable scene. A mother who was hardly more than a skeleton kept holding her child to her breast. Dressed in rags, she was trembling with cold and fear. The light in her eyes was fading and she tried to say a few words, probably a prayer for herself and her baby.

To a German officer who visited the camp, an Ustashi explained: "These Serbs we picked up in the village of Kordun and in western Bosnia. We burned their houses and brought them here to spend their last days at the entrance to Belgrade and Serbia. There were about 70,000 but there are only 20,000 left. They are dying by the hundreds and we trust the camp will soon be empty, so there will be room for the others. Those who do not die quickly enough we'll finish off by bashing them over the head. We Ustashi are more practical than you Germans. You shoot, but we use hammers, clubs, rope, fire and quick lime. It's less expensive."

"But what do you feed them?" asked the German, "Tea made with herbs and two potatoes once a day. It's the regulation diet," said the Ustashi with a kindly smile." *Djordje Sarapa, Drugi Svetski rat i treca seoba naroda* (The second World War and the third emigration), American Srbobran, Pittsburgh, P., Vol.

Here also is the testimony of Madame Pauline Weiss, an English Jewess who was interned first at Jasenovac and then at Stara Gradiska:

During my captivity in the camp there were tortures every day and massive "liquidation." One day a wagon full of women and children from Sarajevo arrived. On opening the wagon, there were only dead bodies.

I even saw mounts of people who had been slaughtered and mutilated.

On December 22 I was sent to a women's camp at Stara Gradiska. There, I spent seven months in the "Kula." The wives of the executioners were Mara Budjon, a young woman called Milka 22 years old, a certain Bojane of 16, and Nada Luburic (sister of Vjekoslav-Maks Luburic). Every night they slaughtered and strangled the prisoners, and must have done away with at least 2,000 Serbian and Jewish women. *Zlocini fasistickih ohupatora i njthovih pomagaca protiv Jeureja u Jugoslaviji* p. 107.

In the camp at Jadovno approx. 10,000 people were killed. In speaking of this camp, a witness, Slavko Radaj said: "Prisoners were bound to each other by wire and taken to the edge of a crevice. The first one was given a push and his weight dragged the others down. Then the Ustashi threw hand grenades on top of them. The inhabitants said that for several days their cries of agony could still be heard." *Ibid.*, p. 60

George Bilainkin, an English writer who was visiting in Yugoslavia, was able to gather important testimonies and authentic documents on the terror that reigned in satellite Croatia:

I have seen irrefutable evidence of the reign of terror by Pavelic and his Nazi friends.... I have heard confessions in court, by simple peasants, of the infamous deeds that went on daily during the early terror. I have listened to the principal perpetrators describing in their cells the gruesome events that failed sufficiently to terrorize the land throughout 1941 and later. . . . As I listened, during a violent storm at night, to one of Croatia's self-confessed masters of wholesale murder, Ljubo Milos, one-time Governor of Jasenovac prison, I, too, shuddered. He explained, in his condemned cell in Zagreb, late in 1948, that the daily killing of three or four thousand arrivals was not a matter for arousing the conscience. Men, women, and children, as well as infants had to die because my senior officer ordered it. I showed the assistants the method. And after a time the destruction made no impression. I became used to it. If the reader be surprised at the date of the conversation with Milos—when he explained how special knives were invented in 1941, for the faster despatch of male Orthodox Greeks, how hammers were utilized for speedier murder of men and women, how people were shot more expeditiously, how his agents walked over babies to kill them by crushing their limbs—the reason is not easy to give. George Bilainkin, *Tito* (London, 1949), pp. 39-40.

The camp at Jasenovac was the most important and the one which leaves the

most terrifying memory of such infernos. Organized like infamous Belsen, this macabre camp, was composed of wooden huts, built on piles because of the dampness of the ground near the Sava River. Famine and massacres added to this unsanitary location, resulting in the rapid extermination of all the unfortunate victims who were interned there. It is estimated that a total of about 200,000 people met their death during 1941-1942. Crowds of Jewish children were burned alive in the old brick ovens, transformed into crematories.

Vjekoslav Luburic, commander-in-chief of all the Croatian camps, announced the great "efficacy" of this slaughterhouse at a ceremony on October 9, 1942, in which he distributed gold and silver medals, in the names of Pavelic and Artukovic, to the most efficient assassins. During the banquet which followed, he reported with pride: "We have slaughtered here at Jasenovac more people than the Ottoman Empire was able to do during its occupation of Europe." Luburic now lives in Spain and publishes an Ustashi paper called *Drina*, and writes under the name of "General Drinjanin."

It has already been mentioned that this hero's own sister, Nada Luburic, "operated" in the camp of Stara Gradiska. Such a profession seemed to run in the family. At Jasenovac, Ljubo Milos, whose cynical remarks have here been cited, was one of his assistants, along with Ivica Matkovic and Joso Matijevic.

In September 1942, rich Jews from Banja Luka, Poljokani, Sarafic and Herceg were brought to Jasenovac. A bargain was proposed. If they would reveal where they had hidden their fortune, fifty per cent of it would be given back. An agreement was reached. Three Jews were taken to Banja Luka by the Ustashi who searched their houses up and down. But on the return trip, these unfortunate men were tortured to such an extent that they died soon afterwards. Herve Lauriere, *op. cit.*, pp. 142-143.

"A Jew called Ungar Josip owned a stamp collection more valuable than Pavelic's. Every philatelist had to pay for such an insult. Ungar Josip was therefore hanged, which allowed Ante Pavelic, like any ordinary person, to exhibit his collection last year at Buenos Aires, as if it were the least of his treasures. All philatelists know of this theft," Jean-Marc Sabathier in the Magazine *Paris-Match*, May 25, 1957, p. 23.

Children were not spared, and special concentration camps were set up for them. Nine of these were at Lobor, Jablanac, Mlaka, Brocice, Ustici, Stara Gradiska, Sisak, Jastrebarsko and Gornja Rijeka. The destruction of infants in these places would seem incredible were it not vouched for by eye-witnesses, one of whom, Mrs. Gordana Friedlender, has testified:

At that time more women and children came daily to the Camp at Stara Gradiska. About fourteen days later, Vrban (commander of the camp) ordered all children to be separated from their mothers and put in one room. Ten of us were told to carry them there in blankets. The children crawled about the room, and one child put an arm and leg through the doorway, so that the door could not be closed. Vrban shouted: "Push it!" When I refused to obey, he banged the door and crushed the child's leg. Then he took the child by its

whole leg, and banged it against the wall until it was dead. After that we continued carrying the children in. When the room was full, Vrbani brought poison gas and killed them all. Statement made by witness Gordana Friedlander, from the shorthand notes of Ljubo Milos case (Belgrade judicial archives), pp. 292-293.

In 1942 there were some 24,000 children in the Jasenovac camp alone, 12,000 of whom were murdered. A very large portion of the remainder, having subsequently been released following pressure by the International Red Cross, perished wholesale from severe debilitation.

An influential South American, Mr. Boisardi, Minister from Chile in Belgrade, broadcast the following frightful testimony from one of the Belgrade networks on November 16, 1952:

The political attitude adopted during the last war by a small party of Croats who wished to dismantle Yugoslavia in the name of Catholicism, constituted one of the most shameful things for the Christian spirit. To dismantle a country is a big thing, but that is only one of the crimes committed by the Ustashi. The second of their crimes consisted of the cruel and inhuman persecution of the Orthodox population and it seems inconceivable that this could be carried out by Christians.

Americans do not usually believe in such things and they do not like to know about them. However, one fine day the truth will come out just the same. I have lived for a year and a half in Yugoslavia and I am able to know the truth and to hear the living witnesses who even now rise up to accuse the criminals.

There was a young girl belonging to the Serbian Orthodox population in Croatia. Her name is hardly important for the moment, but I would be able to cite it at any time to uphold this terrible story.

It happened in 1941. Her family lived in an old Croatian town and they decided to flee from the persecutions and the threats, and to take refuge in Belgrade. Before her family succeeded in escaping, she fell into the hands of the persecutors. She was then 11 years old. She was taken into the worst Ustashi camp, Jasenovac, in which thousands and thousands of Yugoslavs, accused of being Orthodox, were tortured and degraded, burned and exterminated.

The first days our heroine passed in the camp were terrifying. No water, no shelter, no bed, no roof. She was obliged to sleep in the rain on the snow. At first she still possessed her own clothes, but these, too, the Ustashi took. Without clothes and famished, she began her descent into the hell beyond Dante's dreams. The daily "Our Father" was replaced by the formula: give us our daily beating.

This child one day attended a cruel spectacle. Forty students were smothered and then burnt. Another time, the Ustashi drove a hot iron rod into a man's head. Sometimes women were quartered, and to vary the spectacle, arms instead of legs, were torn off.

There were, of course, other diversions for the Ustashi. The best of

these diversions consisted of gouging out the eyes of the dying so as to make a "beautiful" collection of how the dying look.

Our heroine passed two whole days bound to a tree. To be more certain that she did not escape, her hair was attached to the trunk. Another time she hung for four hours, head down. Then for two hours she was tied by the hair to a branch where she swung back and forth. Another time she was left head down where she was kept hanging for a whole day. Her hair was also tied to her feet and she was obliged to remain in this position for an entire night. Sometimes, for a change, the Ustashi made a sort of trestle with red hot iron, and forced the children to sit on it astride.

Other torments existed for the adults, befitting their age. Among many was the woman who was about to give birth to a child. The Ustashi played the role of mid-wife, as well as that of the executioner, raking the knife into the mother's womb, they extracted the child and put a cat in its place.

This profusion of tortures, briefly recounted, might still further fill up numerous pages and perhaps books. This river of pain which for a long time flooded the Yugoslavian soil is neither a fairy tale nor an invention for propaganda purposes. I have been able to check on everything myself. I am a South American who has seen with his own eyes the barbarous Ustashi who stem from the barbarous Fascists (Les Nouvelles Yougoslaves, December 8, 1952, Paris).

Aside from these cases of providing them with diversions which have been related by those who have escaped, the principal methods used was cutting the throat with a curved knife known as the "Graviso." Races were organized from time to time. The champion, the indisputable prize-winner of these competitions was Petar Brzica, who happened to be a scholarship student at the Franciscan college of Siroki Brijeg, and member of the "Great Brotherhood of Crusaders." During the night of August 29, 1942, he succeeded in slaughtering 1,360 people.

With such a record, it is easy to understand why His Grace Stepinac, a few months later, welcomed the large Catholic delegation in honor of the annual assembly, by saying: "I am well acquainted with the history of the Crusaders. May our meeting today be an inspiration for our work, and at the same time a proof of the active and extensive character of your organization." *Nedelja* (October 19, 1942).

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He could hardly have said more. The collaboration of these pious men with the Ustashi was as "alive" and as "extensive" as it could possibly be, and the "work" left nothing to be desired.

Some of these worthy ecclesiastics were even present at the extermination camps (and standing right beside the executioners, of course) —men such as Martin Cecina, curate of Recica, Lt. commander at the Zepce camp, or the Franciscan, Zvonko Brekalo, an officer in the death camp of Jasenovac. But

incontestably, it was another Franciscan, Miroslav Filipovic-Majstorovic of the monastery near Banja Luka, who carried off the honors, for he was promoted to the rank of Commander at Jasenovac in the autumn of 1942. He deserved this great distinction, for he had tended personally to the massacres in the Serbian Orthodox villages of Motika, Rakovac and Drakulici (on 7 February 1941), with the help of his comrades in the Brotherhood of St. Francis: Zvonko Brekalo, already mentioned, Zvonko Lipovac and the priest, Culina. A detachment of Pavelic's personal guardsmen was sent from Zagreb, commanded by Lt. Josip Mislov, to assure the success of the undertaking. Twelve hundred men, women and children were massacred.

Filipovic-Majstorovic, entrusted with the commandment of this earthly hell, was called "Brother Devil" (Fra Sotona) by the poor victims who played the parts of the damned. A Dr. Nikolic, a Croatian doctor who was his prisoner, tells in the following paragraph of his first meeting with "Brother Devil":

His voice had an almost feminine quality which was in contrast with his physical stature and the coarseness of his face. Large shoulders, a strong neck, medium build, drooping ears, small treacherous gray eyes . . . the eyes of a neurasthenic bachelor; his lower lip, thick and heavy.

I was hardly seated, and as I sank into my sad thoughts, I heard the orders: "Fall in! Fall in!"

An old Ilija, an Ustashi, appeared on the threshold of the hut, a revolver in one hand and in the other a lash. All the prisoners ran into the courtyard.

Excitement reigned in the huts, Everyone gathered in the only open place, between the kitchens and the barracks.

I was in the second row. Several Ustashi officers, armed with revolvers, ran through all the huts to see if anyone had hidden.

Before us passed six men, their hands tied behind their backs with chains. The Ustashi had their revolvers loaded and aimed. "Fra Sotona" (Filipovic-Majstorovic) walked over and approached our group.

"Where is our new doctor?"

I knew he meant me.

"He is here," someone replied.

He came a little nearer, looking at me in an insolent ironic, bizarre manner.

Come here, doctor, to the front row, so that you will be able to see our surgery being performed without anesthetic. All our patients are quite satisfied. No sighs, nor groans can be heard. Over there are the head and neck specialists and we have need of no more than two instruments for our operations.

And Fra Sotona caressed his revolver with one hand and his knife with the other.

Looking at these victims, who, in a few moments would be in another world, fear written on each face, no one could penetrate the depth of their moral abyss. They silently watched the gathering crowd of more pitiful people, more condemned people like themselves.

Fra Filipovic approached a group of them. Two shots rang out, two victims collapsed, who began to twitch with pain, blood surging from their heads intermingling with the brain of one or the eyes of the other.

"Finish off the rest!" cried Filipovic to the executioner as he put his revolver away. Dr. Nikola Nikolic, *Jasenovacki Logor* (The Concentration Camp of Jasenovac), Zagreb 1948, pp. 285-289.

Another witness, Riboli, also describes this terrible man:

It is simply incredible to think that a Franciscan could be so blood-thirsty. Though Matkovic and Milos, just by the expression on their faces, revealed the baseness of their inner natures, Filipovic-Majstorovic seemed kind and gentle, except when the massacring was going on. Then he was incomparable. He was the leader of all the mass killings in Gradina. He went off to conduct the slaughtering every night and came back in the morning, his shirt covered with blood. None of the executioners of the collective massacres in Gradina ever held out as long as the Franciscan, Miroslav Filipovic-Majstorovic.

One day while at lunch I saw an Ustashi go to him and whisper a few words in his ear. Then the Ustashi went to the main door of the camp and brought back a prisoner. Filipovic got up and fired. The prisoner fell to the floor. And then Filipovic sat down to the table again and calmly finished his lunch while shouting the order: "Call in the grave-digger." *Zlocini fasistickih okupatora i njihovih pomagaca protiv Jevreja u Jugoslaviji*, p. 60.

The period during which "Fra Sotona" commanded the camp at Jasenovac did not exceed four months, but during that lapse of time about 40,000 people were "liquidated." Filipovic-Majstorovic testified to this later on, during his trial, after which he was hung wearing his clerical robes. Of twenty-two concentration camps in Croatia, nearly half of them had ecclesiastics as commanders.

Friar Sotona was not the only priest in the concentration camp. He was assisted in his work of extermination by other brothers in Christ, among whom were: Brkljanic, Matkovic, Matijevic, Brekalo, Celina and Lipovac.

Note: I'm sure the author is being sarcastic to call them "brothers in Christ." No man who is a sadistic murderer is a brother in Christ! 1 John 3:15 Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.

Vladimir Loncar, an engineer from Pakrac, made the following statement on June 8, 1942:

Together with 74 other Serbs, I was transported from Lipik to Pakrac on the Catholic Christmas Day of 1941, and placed in the Jasenovac Camp. As soon as we entered we were met by the infamous Camp Commander Ljubo Milos who, gesticulating, yelled: "Why should I be the one to have to kill all the Serbs?" "There are other camps on Croat territory." After having pried the machine guns around us our luggage was plundered and then Ustashi Lieutenant Ljubo shouted if there was a jurist among us. Vlado Ilic, who was the Chief of the District Court in Pakrac, stepped out of the line. The lieutenant approached and asked Ilic: "How many Croats did you sentence to death?" Ilic replied that as a judge of the District Court he could not sentence anyone to such a high punishment, and the lieutenant then said: "What would you say, if I were to sentence you now to death?" "That is your business," the judge said and stepped back into the line. After a while the lieutenant remembered the judge and said: "Where is that jurist?" The judge came out of the line again, and the lieutenant ordered him to take off his overcoat and jacket. Then he took him to a pile of bricks not far off and took a machine gun from one of the Ustashi and shot three times, The judge fell. After a few minutes Ilic showed signs of life, whereupon the lieutenant returned and shot at him three times again. Then he opened his chest and took out his heart, and turned the judge face down to the earth.

After having finished with him, he ordered those who were from Lika to step forward. Twenty to thirty among them said that they were from Lika, and he took them to the pile of bricks and butchered them one by one, Then the Ustashi flag-bearer, Matkovic, came up to him and asked him to allow him to kill one of the Serbs for Christmas. After the lieutenant granted him this privilege, Matkovic picked out Joca Divljak, manager of a Lipik Social Center, and took him to the pile of bricks where all the rest of the Serbs were slaughtered, and turned him on his back and plucked out his heart while the man was still alive, and then showed it to all of us. However, this was not enough for him. Having just felt the taste of blood, he asked the lieutenant's permission to slaughter ten more Serbs, which was granted. The rest of us were standing and were ordered not to show the slightest sign of disapproval. However, a certain man called Sakic manifested his disgust and the lieutenant came up and shot him three times. *Psunjski, Hrvati u svetlosti istoriske istine* (Croats in the Light of Historical Truth), Belgrade, 1944, pp. 193-194,

Sima Curkovic, an engineer from Donja Trnava near Bijeljina, made the following statement in the records of June 12, 1942: "In November or December of 1941, a tall and good looking man was brought into the camp together with a group of other Serbs. Two Ustashi, while looking him over, began talking to each other, naturally in order for the man to hear: 'This one must have two hearts.' The other Ustashi answered that this could not be so. 'Well, you will have to convince yourself that he has two hearts.' He pulled out his knife, with which he pried at the man's breast for some time, until the man fell dead, his heart struck by the point of the knife."

Stevo Popovic, a cosmetician from Osijek, had been put first in the Jasenovac camp and then transferred to Stara Gradiska, from where he was able to escape. He gave the following statement on July 12, 1949:

The Jasenovac Camp liquidated Serbs, in another unheard of manner, Performances of the so-called "Gladiator Fights" (as they were called by the Ustashi) were staged. These "Gladiator Fights" occurred when important persons from the Ustashi General Headquarters at Zagreb came to the Camp. The Serbian prisoners would then be placed in a line around the area where the "fight" was to be staged. The administration of the camp picked out two persons from among us, preferably two brothers if they happened to be on hand. Then put them in the middle of the arena and gave each of them a wooden stick. They were instructed to hit each other until one of them fell dead—one of them would be killed anyway—thus they were to determine which one was to remain alive. At the given sign, the fight began and ended with the death of one of them, The "Gladiator Fights" usually lasted around two hours. . . .
.Psunjski, *op. cit.*, pp. 196-197.

Beside the "Gladiator Fights," there was also the following attraction. A cage about one meter high made out of barbed wire would be half submerged in water. The condemned were enclosed in it in a sitting position, since they were unable to stand. The cage quickly finished off its victims in the winter.

When the allied countries began to hear about the atrocities committed in the concentration camps in the Independent State of Croatia, i.e, of the endless cemeteries of people shot, slaughtered and killed with sticks and of people thrown into furnaces and burned to death, the allied press began writing about it and radio broadcasts were made about this new Hitler-like regime. In order to deny these writings and broadcasts, the Croat Fascists had the idea of inviting a so-called international Commission, which was objectively to ascertain the situation in the Jasenovac Camp. The camp was informed of the arrival of the commission, and the administration undertook to camouflage everything so that all would be seen at its best, ie. the camp was to be turned into an educational institution and this would refute the "false" propaganda. In order to understand better the parody of investigation which the commission was to undertake, we will mention only a few paragraphs of a statement made by one of the prisoners, Vojislav Prnjatovic, former clerk in the Sarajevo Chamber of Commerce, who was in the camp at the time when the commission came and saw all the preparations that were made. The commission was formed by members of the Ustashi Organization, as well as German, Italian, Hungarian and Romanian delegates from the Swiss Red Cross, and representatives from the Vatican.

Already at the end of January, 1942, news had filtered somehow among us that a special commission was to visit the camp, and very soon after we saw that this was true, because an order was issued at once to erect six barracks, similar to the German type of barracks for prisoners, as well as two barracks for the nursery and hospital. Everything was ready by the beginning of February and all the prisoners were transferred from the old extremely unhygienic barracks into these new barracks with bunks. A thorough cleansing of the barracks and surrounding areas was undertaken, as well as tidying up

storage rooms and stocks. All the prisoners were also scrubbed and emits There was not much time left and everyone was working day and night. Finally on February 6th, the commission arrived, formed by German, Italian, Hungarian, Croat and Serbian members of the Red Cross, as well as by two Catholic priests on behalf of the Vatican. Beside these members, there were also ten Ustashi, chosen from the leadership of the Ustashi Movement, and one of them was young Kvaternik in person. Naturally, the commission found a wonderfully clean and suitable camp. In order to show the commission how well things went in the chain factory, in which the prisoners usually worked, and how well the workers looked, the management brought in a group of fifteen skilled, healthy-looking workers from the outside, dressed them in green working clothes and placed a white band with a number on their arm, to look like the rest of the prisoners. They made a good impression, and it made the rest of the prisoners look better. Before the arrival of the commission, we were told that we were not to speak to any of its members. If any member of the commission should ask anyone what his name was, he was to answer: "I am prisoner No. 453." If the member of commission wanted any further information, he was to be referred to the administration. We were also told that if anyone should dare to do otherwise than instructed, he would be shot. The day before the arrival of the commission, the nursery and hospital were put in perfect shape, all the sick were taken out—about one hundred of them—and were all killed in front of the hospital itself with sticks and knives. Many of us saw this massacre while passing nearby. After all the sick were murdered, the nursery and hospital were thoroughly cleaned and tidied up, new beds and linen were installed and everything was arranged as in any other hospital. Some of the beds were filled with healthy men from among the prisoners who worked as nurses and even by the doctors themselves. These men looked quite well because of the light work they were doing. The signs above the sick beds, which were also placed there for this occasion, identified the illness—generally some minor ailment—and gave the temperature, although the people lying in bed were perfectly healthy. The commission saw the camp in excellent condition, that the hospital was in order and the sick well cared for. The Ustashi had not missed a single trick to deceive the commission. The prisoners behaved according to orders, and it is important to state that Pavelic's Secretary Luburic, had told the prisoners that conditions in the camp after the departure of the commission would improve, i.e. "if the commission was satisfied." The commission naturally had found everything to be fine. The prisoners had not transgressed in any way, which they could not have done even if they had wanted to, and the conditions in the camp returned to what they were before, as soon as the administration made sure that the commission had gone far enough away from Jasenovac. Viktor Novak, *op. cit.*, p. 783.

The newspaper called *Nasa Sloga* which is published in Argentina by the Croat emigrants, characterized the Independent State of Croatia as follows:

Who is organizing and leading this "Independent State"? Criminals and prisoners who are sentenced to hard labor have become leaders. Having no ideals, they have invented the tale that the Serbs are the greatest enemies of the Croats, and that therefore, they should be exterminated on their territories, which unfortunately are in their hands. This is why all

Pavelic's efforts begin and end with the persecution and annihilation of Serbs. In his bestial hatred against the Serbs, "the leader" aroused everyone he could, i.e. all those who were willing to become tools in his bloody hands. Blood flowed to an extent unremembered in modern history. What is St. Bartholomew's Night in comparison to Ustashi crimes? What are the terrible massacres of the Armenians and genocide of the Jews in comparison to what is going on in Croatia? They do not even look to see who is guilty and who is not guilty. To be a Serb was a crime, and if anyone wanted to practice shooting, they took out a bunch of Serbs and practiced shooting at their breasts. Those who loved to butcher could do so unhampered by anyone, by butchering the Serbs. There were 2,000,000 Serbs on the territory of the present "Independent State." In order to exterminate them, as was done, an organization had to be formed, and this was accomplished. *Nasa Sloga*, No. 28, May, 1942.

DOGMATIC PRINCIPLES AND THE PLENARY CONFERENCE OF THE CROATIAN CATHOLIC EPISCOPACY

In spite of the efforts of a thousand priests and monk converters, in spite of the massacres, and in spite of the terror in the concentration camps, the results obtained by such pressure seemed very slim, and far from realizing that "harvest of souls" which the Catholic Church had so counted on.

The Jesuit, Dragutin Kamber, Chief of Police in Bosnia and one of the pillars of the regime, in writing to Pavelic in September 1941, came to this unhappy conclusion: "We were in too much of a hurry in deporting their priests in order to wipe out their religion. We have confiscated their vast estates and massacred them in large numbers, whereas with the others we simply told them that they could not remain here as Serbs and Orthodox." Viktor Novak, *op. cit*, p. 746.

And the good Jesuit seemed sad to think that all the extreme measures which had been taken had borne so little fruit.

In revenge, cries of violent indignation rose up in the free countries because of the visits, speeches and banquets which continually brought the Catholic hierarchy and the Ustashi authorities together, while the Croatian press publicized their articles and photographs. All this clearly revealed that the activities of the Croatian Catholic Church were identified with the government in the execution of its political and national program in the application of atrocious pressure.

It seemed, therefore, opportune to disguise this too visible collaboration by giving the manifestation a character of independence, in order to reassure world public opinion abroad.

In this report to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Zagreb (February 8, 1942), Nikola Rusinovic spoke about his visit to Monsignor Pietro Sigismondi, Chief of the Croat Section in the Vatican, as follows: "During our conversation we began talking about the conversions which were taking place in Croatia. He said that the Holy See was pleased about this, but that the American and British press were condemning us, because the conversion was

made under great pressure by the authorities, in which, of course, the Holy See does not believe. It would be advisable to do this more gradually, in order that the Holy See may be spared those reproaches, accusations and difficulties. He mentioned that even the Italian press was publishing, from time to time, news about the mass conversion of the Orthodox people to Catholicism. . . ." See supplement of *Tajni Dokumenti* for photocopy.

These remarks and fears on the part of Monsignor Sigismondi illustrate that the Vatican was aware that one day somebody might start asking who was responsible for those conversions.

It was for this purpose that the plenary conference of the Croatian Episcopacy was organized November 17, 1941, in order to re-examine the question of converting the Serbian Orthodox to Catholicism. It was hoped that by so doing the episcopacy might deny the brutal methods heretofore employed, if only for the sole purpose of "explaining" the "Crusade." But the insincerity of this pretext was eventually proved by subsequent events.

It was evident that the bishops who had come to the gathering, in order to drug public opinion, would criticize, yet with moderation, the methods that had been used. But it was futile to count on the slightest change in procedure after this plenary conference meeting. Below are the articles which were adopted:

1. We consider, on dogmatic principle, that all questions pertaining to the conversion of the Greek-Easterners The Serbs of Orthodox religion were officially referred to by the Croatians as *grcko-istocnjaci* (literally translated, Greek-Easterners). to Catholicism should be decided exclusively by the Catholic Church, which by divine right and canonic prescription, is alone able to give the necessary instructions for conversions, and settle on the regulations. Thus was excluded any influence outside the authority of the church.
2. Therefore, no one outside the hierarchy of the Catholic Church will have the right to choose the missionaries for these conversions of Greek-Easterners to the Catholic religion. Each missionary shall be authorized by his local Ordinariat to conduct a mission with jurisdiction for its spiritual accomplishment. Consequently it is contradictory to the dogma and canonic procedure that missions be organized by representatives of their districts, by Ustashi authorities, or by the State Religious Department, or by any other temporal power.
3. Each missionary depends exclusively on his local Ordinariat, and directly or indirectly on the local curate, for all of his activities.
4. The Catholic Church will recognize only the conversions that have already been made or those that will be made in the future according to dogmatic principles.
5. The temporal administration has no right to cancel conversions which have already been accepted by the church, not only according to canonical laws but also according to civic regulations.

6, With this end in view the Croatian Catholic Episcopacy demands the nomination of a committee of three members selected from within its core: the president of the episcopal conferences, His Grace A. Stepinac, Rev. Viktor Buric, bishop of Senj and Rev. Janko Simrak, apostolic administrator of the bishopric of Krizevci. This committee will be obliged to discuss and solve all questions concerning conversions from Greek-Easterners to the Catholic religion. The committee will act simultaneously with the Minister of Justice and Cults in all that concerns civil prescriptions of the conversions.

7. For the committee of action concerning conversions of the Greek-Easterners, to the Catholic religion, the Croatian Catholic Episcopacy has elected the following: Franjo Hermann, professor at the theological faculty in Zagreb, Augustin Juretic, episcopal conference advisor, Janko Kalaj, catechism professor, Krunoslav Draganovic, professor at the theological faculty in Zagreb and Nikola Boric, administrative director at the Archbishopric of Zagreb. This committee will be obliged to take over, in addition, all work concerning the process of conversion of Greek-Easterners to the Catholic religion. It will be under the control of the Bishop's Committee for conversion and will act according to the spirit of the instructions given them.

8. The Catholic Church will accept only persons who, of their own free choice and without any violent persuasion, are urged on by a deep conviction of Catholic faith and truth, and who are in complete agreement with the canonic conditions upon which the conversions are based.

9. In all that concerns the ritual for those converted, the Croatian Catholic Episcopacy accepts absolutely all instructions given by the Holy Congregation for the Eastern Church and sent on July 17, 1941 (No. 2116/86) to the president of the episcopal conferences.

The Catholic Croatian Episcopacy also accepts in its entirety the orders of the Apostolic Holy See of October 18, 1941, concerning the Greek oriental ritual.

10. The committee of Catholic Croatian bishops for the conversion of Greek-Easterners oriental ritual will organize classes for the priests who take charge of the conversions. They will receive theoretical and practical instruction for all the activities in these classes.

11. It is necessary to create a psychological background for that part of the population following the Greek oriental ritual. These people must, therefore, not only have a sworn guarantee but be given all civic rights pertaining to judicial freedom and the ownership of property, so that those of Greek oriental ritual shall feel energetically defended. Condemnation against those of Greek oriental ritual should be pronounced in the same manner as for other citizens, that is after inquiry. First and foremost, all action taken 'to destroy the churches must be forcefully prohibited as well as Greek Orthodox chapels or alienation from their property. Viktor Novak, *op. cit.*, pp. 628, 629, 630.

These decisions were sent with the file No. 253/1941, to the Ordinariats of every diocese. These directions were agreeable and humane in form, but in days when men were being killed without trial, when massive conversions were taking place, when villages were burning and when unheard of pogroms were being conducted, they were sheer hypocrisy.

The Royal Legation of Yugoslavia at the Holy See, by order of the government in exile, replied by a note of protestation No. 1/42, on January 9, 1942, against the foundation of committees for converting the Serbian Orthodox to Catholicism. The Vatican replied, January 25, 1942, by a memorandum in which it said:

"Referring to the Note of the Royal Yugoslav Legation to the Holy See, Number 1/42, of January 9th, 1942, the Secretariat of State of His Holiness has the Honour to inform the said Legation as follows:

According to the principles of Christian doctrine, conversion must be the result not of exterior constraint but of the adherence of the soul to the truth taught by the Catholic Church. For this reason the Catholic Church does not accept into the Church those who request to enter or return to the Church, except on the condition that they are fully conscious of the meaning and consequences of the action that they desire to take.

Consequently, the fact that, all at once a large number of Dissidents in Croatia request to be received into the Catholic Church fails to give lively concern to the Croat Episcopate, to whom it falls to defend and protect Catholic interests in Croatia.

Far from taking official cognizance, whether explicitly or implicitly, of this fact, it becomes a duty to recall formally to the lawful authorities the requirements that the return of the Dissidents should allow for complete liberty on their part, and at the same time, to insist on the exclusive competence of the ecclesiastical authorities to give orders and directives in regard to conversion.

If an Episcopal Committee has been so promptly constituted, with the charge of considering and deciding on all questions concerning this matter of conversions, this has been done precisely for the purpose of seeing to it that the conversions were—in conformity with the principles of Christian doctrine—the results of convictions and not of constraint.

The Holy See on its part, has not failed to recommend and to inculcate the exact observance of the canonical prescriptions and of the directives given in this matter.

This answer given by the Holy See shows how deeply it was interested in this process of conversion to Catholicism. By justifying its correctness, it took the clerical Ustashi under its protection. It is important to emphasize the fact that this official Vatican document was proclaiming all the Serbs on the territory of the "Independent State of Croatia" to be "Croat Dissidents."

In the instructions given to the Croat Bishops by Cardinal Maglione, State Secretary of the Holy See, of February 21, 1942, they were explicitly asked to hasten the process of conversion, i.e., their return to Catholicism.

Ramiro Marcone, the Pope's Legate, informed all the Bishops in the Independent State of Croatia by circular No. 256/42 of March 27, 1942, of a letter which was sent to him on February 21, 1942, by Cardinal Maglione, State Secretary, in answer to the report on the "Episcopal Conference," in which it was said:

I am informing your Excellency of the contents of the letter sent to me on February 21, of this year, by the Cardinal and State Secretary, in answer to the report on the Episcopal Conference, held in a Zagreb from November 17 to 20, 1941... . The basis on which the questions were selected for discussion by the Bishops and the speed with which the practical solutions were reached prove how deep is implanted the feeling of responsibility, which lies upon them under the present delicate circumstances. . . . Special recognition was given to the Bishops for their determined attitude in requesting that the Hierarchy be given back the right to issue orders and directives concerning all matters of conversion; as well as their endeavors to protect this principle, by which the conversion must be made in accordance with personal convictions and not outside pressure.

In connection with this last question, I feel sure that they will not relent in their further endeavors and will intervene with success when necessary, in order that this principle may be faithfully followed out, and to avoid with this same zeal, anything which may prevent or make more difficult the sincere return of the Dissidents to the Church; as well as to avoid anything which may be imposed upon anyone's conscience, with the intention of hastening this return. I would also like to point out to your Holiness that the name "Orthodox," by which the Dissidents are called regardless of the meaning of that word, should be replaced with another name such as for instance "Dissidents" or "Schismatics."

The Holy Father, having become acquainted with the report, deigned to express his satisfaction for the efficiency with which the honorable Croat Bishops had acted. As a reward for this pleasure and in sign of his fatherly feelings toward Monsignor Stepinac for having transmitted his filial devotion and that of his brethren, his Holiness is sending to him and to the Bishops in his care, his Apostolic Blessing. Sima Simic, *Prekrstavanje Srba za vreme Drugog Svetskog Rata*, p. 136.

Being aware that their missionary work on the conversion of Orthodox Serbs by armed force had provoked a strong reaction, Cardinal Maglione informed the Croat Bishops to adhere to the thesis that there was no question of conversion here, but only of the "return of the Dissidents." In denying the Serbs the right to Orthodoxy as a religious feeling and conviction, Cardinal Maglione issued the instructions which are repeated here: "I would also like to point out to your Holiness that the name 'Orthodox,' by which the Dissidents are called regardless of the meaning of that word, should be

replaced with another name, such as for instance 'Dissidents' or 'Schismatics.'"

By such twisting of historical facts, Cardinal Maglione wanted to eliminate any responsibility which may be attributed to the Roman Catholic Church in connection with its proselytism; that all trace of Orthodoxy should be eliminated; and, that even the name "Orthodox" should be wiped out in the "Independent State of Croatia."

However, Cardinal Maglione's directives on "hastening the return of the flock" were not in conformity and in the spirit of ecclesiastical Canon 1351. Because by such instructions regarding conversion, the Croat Bishops were being incited. Whereas these directives were in complete harmony with the order issued on September 16, 1941, in which, "owing to political conditions" the civilian and ecclesiastical authorities were to "perform all matters in connection with legal religious conversions, as fast as possible and without delay." The way in which the General Vicar of the Zagreb Archbishopric, Dr. Josip Lach, who had instructed by his circular of September 26, 1941, the soul-saving clergy to perform the religious conversions "'as fast as possible and without delay" has already been mentioned. *Katolicki List*, No. 89, January, 1941, p. 462.

By such means, i.e., through the intermediary of Cardinal Maglione, the Vatican was influencing the Croat Bishops to make these conversions of the Orthodox people, which was a form of denationalization of Serbs, in other words, they were promoting genocide.

The Zagreb Archbishopric newspaper, *Katolicki List*, immediately adopted the thesis on "Dissidents." In hailing the Ustashi measures which were being undertaken "for the internal rehabilitation," this newspaper gave special publicity to such "rehabilitation," and with the excuse of protecting Catholicism, praised the measures as follows:

As the ecclesiastical pastoral newspaper, we cannot avoid mentioning the way in which the Minister of Religion and Education has simplified the regulations in connection with religious conversions, These regulations, as well as other measures, have in a very short time enabled the correction of those painful losses in former Yugoslavia, when so many of our sons and daughters, for the sake of marriage, had left the religion of their forefathers. They are now coming back to the fold of their Church. We are not mentioning this with any proselytic aim or intention, but out of pure feelings for justice. In this case too, we feel what it means to have one's own State." *Katolicki List*, June 3, 1941, p. 246.

There is no doubt that the intention of the *Katolicki List* was to mystify the public by such means, i.e., by pretending that "those people were coming back to the fold of their Church," while this was only a means for camouflaging the mass conversions. It is known that only 9,000 Catholics, mostly girls, had changed religion and become Orthodox at the time when they were married. Probably just as many Orthodox, if not more, had passed to the Catholic religion for the same reasons.

On January 16, 1940, Archbishop Stepinac wrote in his "Diary," Vol. II, on p. 413, the following: "The most ideal thing would be if the Serbs were to return to the religion of their forefathers, i.e. to bend their heads before Christ's Emissary, their Holy Father. . . ." Sima Simic, *Prekrstavanje Srba 2a Vreme Drugog Svetskog Rata*, p. 24.

In accordance with the above statement, Archbishop Stepinac had accepted the thesis that the Orthodox Serbs living on the territory of the Independent State of Croatia were "Dissidents of the Catholic Church," by means of which he, too, has revived the old ultramontane thesis against the Serbs. This in turn has contributed to the thesis, that by destroying Orthodoxy in the Balkans, an ultramontane Catholic State could be established in its place. Therefore, based on the principle of "institutiones juris ecclesiastici publici," heretics who had belonged to the Church before could be forced to return to the true religion by means of physical force, and even by death.

As additional proof of the conversion of Orthodox Serbs to Catholicism by force, we will mention the two following documents:

The Ustashi authorities in Metkovic sent to the Presidium of the Conference of Bishops in Zagreb a telegram 354-436-31-27-20, with the following contents: "A great number of Orthodox Serbs, by their own will and without constraint, wish to be converted to the Catholic Religion. Urgent answer necessary, please issue instructions. Ustashi Camp in Metkovic."

The other document, in connection with the above telegram and in answer to it, was sent by Bishop Bonifacic to Dean Bilobrk in Metkovic, under No. K.1685/41 which said in Latin: "*Examinates singulis casibus ad normam codicis. Observatque observendis de catechumenis nihil obstat reversionem schismaticorum ad Ecclesiam.*" (Examine each case according to the norm of the code. And nothing shall hinder the return of schismatics to the Church, as regards the observance of catechumens.) Quoted by Sima Simic, *op. cit.*, p. 133.

What those free-will conversions were, for which the Ustashi were asking permission and behind which stood Bishop Bilobrk, was proved by the fact that Vlado Bilobrk and Don Martin Gudelj from the Metkovic district were the intellectual leaders of the massacres and conversions to Catholicism in the Metkovic district. The greatest massacres were committed on Vidovdan, an important Serbian holiday.

It is also interesting to note that many Croatian Catholics living in the United States are aware of the fact that forced conversions took place. One of these, Bogdan Radica, a professor in an American university, writing in the Catholic magazine, *The Commonweal* (March 1953, pp. 618-621), said: "Some of the friars put their Franciscan garb aside and exchanged the preaching of brotherly love for the sword. . . . The Franciscan friars in Herzegovina felt it their duty physically to defend Catholicism and Croatian nationalism. . . . These friars paid dearly for their mistakes. All of those who were directly involved in the forced conversions to the Catholic Church and in the killings were excommunicated by ecclesiastical authorities."

Radica's contention that these friars were punished by excommunication was

immediately denied by Dominik Mandic, the head of Croatian Franciscans in the United States. "Not one of the Herzegovinian Franciscans was excommunicated during the war or otherwise punished by church authorities for acts unbecoming a priest... ." Danica (Chicago), April 8, 1953.

Under such circumstances, how could there be a question of "conviction" among the poor victims led to the apostasy by terror? It was a strange kind of hypocrisy that dared deny there was any constraint. By what miracle had these "Truths of Catholic faith" become suddenly so clear that they alone sufficed in enlightening the "schismatics." And if no pressure was supposed to be exerted on their consciences, how did it happen that in the letter addressed by the Croatian Episcopacy to Pavelic these words were used:

"We must examine the reasons why, up until now, the policy we adopted, in view of the conversions, has not been satisfactory, and avoid the errors of our previous unsuccessful attempts, by adopting another procedure which would give results relative to carefully laid plans."

In order that certain priests would not observe all restrictions which the Episcopacy affected to uphold, to the letter of the law, the Vicar-general of His Grace Alois Stepinac sent a circular to the clergy to point out how it was to conceive the preparatory instruction for the conversions. The clergy was supposed to grant every facility to the converted, and except for the registered stamp on the request, exact no other tax nor expense for instruction or conversion. The instruction in itself should be considered sufficient, but there again it seemed wise to examine and judge cautiously just what could be demanded of each person. Elderly people, whose memory was failing were to be treated with very special consideration. *Katolicki List*, Ne 14, 1942.

Below is an order which His Grace Janko Simrak, member of the committee of bishops for conversions, sent to his clergy. It is dated 1942 and therefore came after the plenary conference held on November 17, 1941. We shall see from it how the conversions to Catholicism were "absolutely spontaneous and of free choice":

Directive regarding the conversion of members of the Eastern Orthodox Church in Slavonia, Srijem and Bosnia

Special offices and church committees must be created immediately for those to be converted. These committees will help the curates in their work, not only in organizing the conversions but in creating parishes of these convertees. Let every curate remember that these are historic days for our missions, and we must under no circumstances let this opportunity pass, but must work with all our strength to attain our goals. Now we must show with our work what we have been talking about for centuries in theory. Up until now we have not obtained appreciable results with conversions, simply because we were undetermined and afraid of small obstacles as well as complaints from the people. Every great work meets with some Opposition, but we must not allow our spirits to be lowered. Our universal mission, the salvation of souls, and the greatest glory for our Lord Jesus Christ, is involved in this issue. *Eparhijshi Vjesnik Krizevacke Bishupije* (Bishopric News) Krizevei, n*2, 1942.

That short phrase, "Up until now we have not obtained appreciable results with conversions," is revealing. This worthy prelate, no longer restrained by Pavelic, showed a certain lightheartedness when he mentioned "small obstacles" and "complaints from the people." From that time on, he was to act without hesitancy.

His Grace Simrak was finally rewarded for his zeal. The "apostolic visitor," Marcone, told him on June 2, 1942, that Pope Pius XII had named him Bishop of Krizevci, whereas, up until then, he had been only the apostolic administrator.

There is scarcely need to point out that if the Catholic Church had only waited to take to its bosom the neophytes who had been converted in all sincerity and of their own free will, it would have refused, on general principles, all conversions undertaken in an atmosphere of terror, and waited until the end of the war to begin its program of proselytism.

MORE "SAVING OF SOULS"

By continuing investigation, it can be seen how the canonic prescriptions were, in reality, respected by those who had so solemnly brought them once more to light. On December 27, 1941, hardly more than a month after the episcopal plenary conference, His Grace Antun Aksamovic, who has previously been mentioned, referred to the priest from Vukovar in the following terms: "Massive conversions are being organized following the decisions of the competent authorities of the district. These administrations are gathering together large numbers of people for conversion. They come from the various counties of the region and are sometimes composed of the entire population of a village. Every name has been registered on a list and submitted for authorization to undertake a collective conversion, with a single certificate of honesty." Viktor Novak, *op. cit.*, p. 689.

This was the usual procedure. Vjceslav Montani, Chief of Police at Brcko, arranged the dates for the conversion of the Serbian Orthodox in the different localities. So December 10, 1941, was the date set for the people of Loncari, "without constraint," to show their "true faith." Donji Zabari was scheduled for the 11th and 12th, Gudovac for the 15th and 16th, Covic Polje also for the 16th, Gornji Zabari for the 17th and 19th, and so forth. As can be seen, the miracle of divine Grace was generated according to the most modern techniques. In other words, a veritable assembly line.

On January 13, 1942, the newspaper *Nova Hrvatska* described one of these edifying ceremonies in the diocese of His Grace A. Stepinac:

Yesterday morning, at Kamensko, near Karlovac, the inhabitants of the Greek-Easterners ritual from Popovic-brdo were converted. The curate of Kamensko, Kucmanic, presided. Four hundred people attended this conversion ceremony. Among those present were Ante Niksic, the veliki Zupan (prefect of the county) of Pokupje, Ivan Bethlehem, chief of police, Drusak, representing the "Ustaski Stozer" (Ustashi county organization), Rudolf Paviek, representing the Ustashi youth of Zagreb, Franco Miksic, the head of propaganda, and other noted personalities.

The conversion ceremony was preceded by a few cordial words of welcome spoken by the Curate Kucmanic. He appealed to the convertees, begging them to observe the laws of God's Gospel and to be faithful to the Lord, to the Independent State and to its Poglavnik.

After which the prefect, Ante Niksic, took over. In his discourse he said: "Today you have become free citizens of the Independent State of Croatia." After mass, a group of local musicians played the Ustashi state hymn, while everyone stood with right hand uplifted. *Nova Hrvatska*, January 18, 1942.

This information raised such a Protest and such harsh press notices in the neutral, as well as the allied, countries that Radio-Vatican hastened to broadcast a communication in English, meant for Great Britain and the United States, and which is worth repeating: "It is true that the majority of the population in the village of Popovic, which is in the Karlovac region, has swung over to Catholicism, but this conversion was entirely spontaneous. And in spite of what people say, it was undertaken without any pressure from the civil or ecclesiastical authorities. Statements such as these, concerning the Catholic clergy, should be considered erroneous unless it has been proven that they came from well informed sources."

Thus, according to the speaker representing His Holiness, the four hundred neophytes, suddenly enlightened by divine grace, went forth "spontaneously" to join the Roman Catholic Church. As to the "veliki zupan," the chief of police, and the representatives of the Ustashi organizations and the head of propaganda— they probably just happened to be passing by and hastened, as onlookers, to attend such a spectacle. The evidence is clear: "Honni soit qui mal y pense." (French meaning, "Shame on him who thinks evil of it.")

During the year 1942 miracles of this kind were repeated, and did not, of course, interfere in the least with the massacres. And one could often read in the Ustashi and Catholic press information such as this: "A religious conversion of the peasants from the villages of Polog and Lijesce was held at Bosanski Brod the 13th of this month. About six hundred persons attended mass and afterwards, Mr. Zec, high official of the local authority of Posavje, delivered a speech." *Hrvatski List* (Osijek), October 16, 1942.

This Mr. Zec was also probably right on the spot as a casual onlooker, and the armed Ustashi led the convertees to mass. These poor victims were apparently so overjoyed on joining the Catholic Church they could not wait before sending telegrams to His Grace Stepinac expressing all their enthusiasm and "spontaneity." Many were printed in the *Nova Hrvatska* and in the diocese periodical of His Grace Stepinac, the *Katolicki List*. If the Archbishop of Zagreb had only kept these touching documents they would have acted as a balm to his spirit when he was reminded of the tact with which he treated those "delicate questions of the human soul," during those fruitful years of propagating the faith.

If great leniency was shown concerning the sincerity of the neophytes, the same was not true in regard to their attendance at the services. It did not

make much difference what they thought just so long as they made a show of their Catholic affiliation. As the *Katolicki Tjednik* wrote: "At Bjelovar: All converttees are obliged to perform their religious rites."

Under this title the Roman Catholic parish of Saint-Theresa at Bjelovar printed the following in its local weekly paper, the *Nezavisna Hrvatska*:

All those who have made a request to be converted to Catholicism will be obliged, beginning on the day the request was made, to be present at every Holy Mass and, above all, during the sermon. Masses, with sermons, are held from 6 to 11.

Converttees are asked to bring small note books every Sunday and on holidays, which will be stamped with the date of their attendance at religious services. *Katolicki Tjednik*, August 8, 1941.

The question of "inner conviction," which the proselytors pretended to exact, became of small importance, since individual and collective conversions took place with the use of printed formulas. The following is from one of the leaflets used in the parish of Banja Luka:

Rules Horvat and Stambuk, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

. . . issued on in the Roman Catholic Parish Office concerning the transfer of those from the Greek Orthodox religion to the Roman Catholic:

The signer declares and requests the following:

"Born on —— baptized in the Greek Oriental Church and brought up in the Greek Orthodox ritual. By sworn oath I now solemnly declare, before the witnesses whose signatures are appended here below, to accept of my own free will and choice, with no outside pressure, the Catholic religion, convinced as I am that it is only in the Roman Catholic Church that my soul will meet salvation and become immortal. It is for this reason that I desire to be taken within the pale of the Roman Catholic Church.

"At the same time I promise to acquit myself of all obligations practiced by the other members and conscientious believers of the Catholic Church.

"The above rules have been read to me and I acknowledge to abide by them as testified by my signature.

Signature of the priest
Signature of the witnesses."

His Grace Jozo Garic, Bishop of Banja Luka, simplified the question. He distributed printed permits to his curates. The following is a copy of one of them straight from the Bishopric's press: "On your request we give you permission to cease at once 'ab excommunicatione pro foro externo' and be taken to the bosom of the Catholic Church and be given the rights to Holy communion..... these persons being sufficiently instructed in the truthful knowledge of our Holy religion. (As to those who have not been brought to

reason they can be listed purely and simply in the register of the conversions) ." *Dokumenti*, Zagreb 1946, facsimile on p. 105.

This last phrase which seems to arrange everything so "purely" and "simply" needs no commentary. The episcopacy and also the *Sancti Sedis Legatus* understood the conditions and would accept within the pale of the Roman Church only the true convertees, but the fact was that only quantity counted.

That the Croatian Catholics acted contrary to the canons of the church can be seen from the following citation from a Catholic brochure published in London. "Archbishop (Stepinac) was faced with a terrible dilemma. The state was massacring wholesale those Orthodox who would not accept Catholicism. Either the Archbishop had to relax the canonical rules concerning reception into the Catholic Church, or he had to leave these many victims to their fate. He chose the former course." Michael Derrick, *Tito and the Catholic Church* (London, 1958).

The problem was to "catholicize" as many Serbian Orthodox as possible while the war lasted. The number of missionaries increased; conversions were carried on day and night; it was a race with time.

The methods, however, remained exactly the same as before the plenary conference of the episcopacy. All the fine declarations about principles served their purpose—that of reassuring foreign opinion, or at least that part of it so susceptible to eloquent phrases. But there was never any question of realizing these principles. A communique appeared in the *Nova Hrvatska* (February 25, 1942) with a marvelous résumé, of only a few lines, about what was going on here and there: "Re-christianization" (sic) is taking place at Petrinja with great solemnity, organized by the curate, Mihajlo Razum. An Ustashi detachment attended the ceremony." *Nova Hrvatska*, February 25, 1942.

The Franciscan monk, Sidonije Scholz of Nasice, was a ferocious converter. He carried on in the Nasice and Slavonska Pozega districts, threatening the Serbs with death or the concentration camp. A photograph shows him during the massive conversion of several hundreds of people. To his left can be seen a crowd of men, young for the most part, and at his right there are women both young and old. The curate of Kutjevo, Mirko Mezner, stands beside Scholz. The youth is waving small Croatian flags bearing the motto "In hoc signo vinces" (By this sign you will conquer) . The little flags were the symbol of Croat nationalism and Catholicism.

Jovo Radosavljevic, a merchant from Suhomlaka and Dusan Bogojevic, a farmer from Gornje Pistane, have reported on the wonderful results obtained by the methods which were adopted: "The Franciscan, Scholz, promised all those who had been imprisoned or interned in concentration camps that they would be released if they became converted to Catholicism. Scholz, the prefect (Zupan) and the Chief of Police from the town of Osijek one day attended a conversion ceremony which took place in their presence." *Archives of the Refugee Commissariat*, B.XXXVI, 716 and BX XXVII n°957.

Still more overwhelming was the deposition of Peter Kovacevic, a teacher from Balenice: "All those who transferred to Catholicism did so under frightful

terror. Sidonije Scholz was at the head of the Catholic missionary priests who overtook us in the district of Nasice. He ordered the death of our priest, Djordje Babic, whom they arrested during the night and horribly tortured. The Ustashi cut off his nose, ears and tongue and literally tore off his beard before stabbing him in the stomach." *Op. cit.*, XXXVI, n°3971.

In the village of Maklosevac, district of Nasice, this same Scholz converted in a single day the following persons: Mile Ciganovic, Smiljana_Ciganovic, Zarija Ciganovic, Gospava Miljus, Eva Dragic, Rajko Dragic, Blagoje Rajic, Milutin Rajic, Sremka Rajic, Milena Rajic, with her three children, Nikola Dragic, Milan Vukadinovic, Andja Vukadinovic.

And in the village of Crmosnjak, also converted in a single day: Zivko Rajic, with his wife and two children, Vlade Rajic, Mile Vukojevic, Hija Matosevic, Hija Dejanovic, Pero Dokic, with his family, Milan Dejanovic, Pero Dejanovic and his family, Nikola Dokic and his family, Milan Dokic, Stanko Katanic and his family, Dusan Katanic, et al.

This veritable "record-maker" carried on massive conversions equally in the following localities: Zoljan, Moticina, Lisine, Orahovica, Budimci, Londzica, Gradac, Granice, Bracevci, Poelici, Pod, Martinci, Cepin, Preslatinci, Podgorje, Cenkovo, Dobrogost, Kucanci, Razbojiste, Caglin, Nasice, Miholjac, Pod. Slatina, Belo Brdo, Sarvas, Vukovar, Osijek, Vuckovac, Borovo, et al.

A poor woman, Ljubica Zivanovic from Borovo, described the methods that were usually practiced: "When I appealed to the Chief of Police, Nemet, at the Town Hall of Borovo, in 1941, to spare the lives of my two daughters who had been imprisoned and then deported to Vinkovci, he referred me to the Catholic priest, Andjelko Gregic, at Borovo. The priest replied that he could do nothing for my children because they had not accepted conversion to the Roman Catholic religion. At the same time he informed me that we, too, would follow in the same path as our daughters if we did not accept the Catholic religion." *Op. cit* B.XXXV n°659.

Such, in reality, was the so-called "psychological preparation" which the bishops preconized. Such as it was, it doubtless suited them, for after Scholz' funeral (he was killed by the Serbs who put up a fight against the conversions) the *Katolicki List*, the organ of the Archbishopric at Zagreb, wrote: "Building a free country, so fervently desired, meant the bloodshed of this new martyr who died in the name of religion and for Catholic Croatia." *Katolicki List*, n928, 1942.

The following testimonies reveal still further how the priests and the monks, controlled by the two episcopal committees, fulfilled their Holy mission "without exerting the slightest pressure on human minds."

Stevo and Jovo Danilovic, Luka Smoljanac and Mile Misan all peasants from Croatia—recorded the following conversions undertaken by the priest, Franjo Pepinic: "Toward the end of 1941, the priest, Franjo Pepinic of Slavenska Pozega, came to our town and said: 'According to the law you must be converted, otherwise you will be sent to concentration camps.'

"In January 1942, the municipality posted a warning whereby any person who did not accept being converted to Catholicism would be deported to a concentration camp. Therefore, we were obliged to appear before the priest, and 150 people in our town were converted. After the collective conversion before the Church of St. Theresa at Pozega, the Ustashi Commander, Petranovic, asked us to join the ranks of the Ustashi." *Dokumenti* (Zagreb, 1946), p. 66.

The peasants, Desanka Radunkovic, Milena Radunkovic, Radojka Radunkovic, Leposava Radunkovic and Petar Marovic, all from the village of Brezek in the district of Podravska Slatina, accused Josip Selak, the priest of Nove Bukovice, of having practiced forced conversions in collaboration with Franciscans and supported by the Ustashi authorities of Nove Bukovice. *op. cit.*, p. 67.

Marija Misljenovic from Podravska Slatina gave the following details: "The priest, Julije Birger, informed me that my husband, who had been sent to the concentration camp at Jasenovac, would be liberated on the condition that his whole family became Catholic." *op. cit.*, p. 70.

The peasants from the region of Virovitica: Mile Plackovic, Milenko Varvaric, Djoko Vracaric, Cedo Brisevac, Djoko Vukomanovic, Danica Solar and Ilinko Covic have testified to the atrocities of the monk, Srecko Majstorovic, guardian of the convent at *Captol*: "The Ustashi commanders Pcelic and Misko Uglarik, informed us that if we did not wish to be expelled from our homes we should accept conversion to Catholicism. After being menaced by Uglarik, and in order to spare our families persecution and torture in the concentration camps, we were obliged, with the utmost regret, to accept Catholicism." *op. cit.*, p. 74.

Djuro Kangrga, employed in the postal service at Nova Gradiska, also described the clerical offensive that was being carried out everywhere: "In 1942, we Serbs were warned by the priest, Franjo Matica from Nova Gradiska, that if we did not give up Serbian Orthodoxy and transfer to Catholicism we would be sent to the concentration camp at Jasenovac. During a conversion ceremony, Matica preached against the Serbian religion, saying that only the Roman Catholic religion was the right one. He praised the magnificent Ustashi State and told us that we should accept and obey it and that all those who had not been married in the Catholic Church should separate or be re-married in this church. He promised that Pavelic would succeed in annihilating all those who had joined the underground." *op. cit.*, p. 77.

The inhabitants of Slobostina: Nikola Pavlovic, Djuro Lazic, Nikola Pavlovic, Jovo Lazic and Teso Milanovic reported that in February 1942 the priest, Bozidar Santic (sent from Zagreb), told the inhabitants of the town who had gathered in the primary school: "I have been sent to your town and its surroundings to take charge of the conversions of the Serbs. All those who accept being converted will have their future assured. Consequently, you should all accept this solution because it is the only way you will find salvation. If you decide to the contrary you risk death or the concentration camp or any other kind of misfortune." *op. cit.*, p. 78.

A railroad employee, Jovo Milinkovic, testified to an apologetic explanation made by the priest, Josip Orlic from Sunja: "On Orlic's orders, the Serbs were summoned and forced to gather in the primary school. The Franciscan, Orlic, told us that the Catholic religion was the oldest and consequently the truest. Since the Serbian Orthodox religion was forbidden in Croatia, the Serbs should be converted to the Catholic religion, and thus become real Croats." *Archives of the Refugee Commissariat*, A-XII n°408, August 8, 1942.

A group of Serbs at Tenj reported: "On December 12, 1941 we were converted by force to the Catholic religion, during a ceremony which the following Catholic priests attended: Josip Seper, priest at Osijek, Franjo Jungvirt from Petrijevci, the Franciscans, Ambrozije Miletic and Kolb from the Franciscan monastery at Osijek." *Dokumenti*, Zagreb, 1946, p. 87.

Milan Ljustina, Head of the Income Tax Administration, at Donji Lapac, denounced the activities of Dragutin Kukolj, priest at Gospic: "I was forced by Kukolj to transfer to Catholicism, for I was told that it was the only way to escape death." *Archives of the Refugee Commissariat*, A.II, n°3823.

The inhabitants at Dalj—Nikola Mitrovic, Ljubomir Berkovic, Marko Popovic, Lazar Bojakovic, Savo Ristic, Persa Ljubujevic, Nikola Marinkovic, Sava Vasic, Vojin Ajdukovic, et al—referring to the forced conversions in their locality, stated: "The Franciscan, Peter Berkovic, an Ustashi Colonel, organized on November 6, 1941 with the curate of Dalj, Josip Astalos, the conversion ceremony which Hefer, the governor attended." *Dokumenti* (Zagreb, 1946), p. 60.

Vida Zarkovic, Milica Zarkovic, Milan Blagojevic, Stanko Miskovic, Nenad Dokic, Zarko Vucovic, and Stevo Kovacevic from Erdut made the following deposition against the curate: "The forced conversion of the Serbs was organized on October 26, 1941 in our region. The priests from Osijek and the curate, Josip Astalos from Dalj, attended. First it was the Ustashi who forced us to the conversion, and then the priests." *Op. cit.*, p. 61.

Milka Dobrijevic reported on the proceedings of the missionary curate of Vocin: "From the very beginning of the occupation the curate, Martinec, took sides with the Ustashi from Vocin and Podravska Slatina. Accompanied by a few Franciscans, he organized the forced conversion in our region." *Op. cit.*, p. 63.

Jovo Tihomir, from Jaksic, told about the curate, Ambrozije from Jaksic: "Ambrozije Sirc told us that our lives would be saved only on one condition, that we adopt Catholicism. The day of the conversion, police agents guarded the church doors. Once the ceremony ended they invited us to leave the church and go to the primary school where Josip Starcevic, head of the Ustashi of this region and a noted criminal, made a speech. A few days after the conversion, the curate, Ambrozije Sirc, ordered that those who had contracted a mixed marriage would have to be remarried in the Catholic Church." *Op. cit.*, p. 74.

The inhabitants of Duvno and Eminovoselo, Luka Savic, Sefko Loknic, Ljube Zdilar, Nezir Loknic, Bosa Zelen, Vebija Djulic, Vojo Zelen and Vlajko Kovacevic, accused the Franciscan, Mijo Cujic, curate of Duvno, of ordering

the widespread massacre and forced conversion of the Serbian Orthodox in the district of Duyno. *Op. cit.*, p. 82.

The inhabitants of Jasenak, in the county of Ogulin, who were refugees in Serbia, also testified against Ivan Mikan, curate of Ogulin, who has already been mentioned: "Action for conversion to Catholicism was undertaken at Jasenak by the guardian of the hunt, Ivkovic, and Josip Abramovic, the director of the saw mill, who were helped along by the police agents. They told us that our only salvation was to be converted to Catholicism. Then the curate, Ivan Mikan, made his appearance at Jasenak at least twice. Each time he made out a list of Serbs who should be converted, Each person had to pay him 170 kuna, thus permitting him to collect about 80,000 kuna. Once back at Ogulin, he wrote, inviting us to come there. Fearing lest we be thrown in jail we replied that our conversion would take place when he returned."

Archives of the Refugee Commissariat, n°355, 352, 3649, 1941.

The secretary of the Catholic Bishop at Banja Luka, the Franciscan Kruno Saric, proved to be an eloquent preacher, and the Ustashi always attended his conversions. They were the surest guarantee of success.

After every collective conversion it was the custom to send telegrams of "thanks and loyalty" to His Grace Stepinac.

For instance, the following wire was printed in *Nova Hrvatska*: "2,300 persons assembled in Slatinski Drenovac from the villages of Drenovac, Pusina, Kraskovic, Prekorecan, Miljani, and Gjurisic today accepted the protection of the Roman Catholic Church, and send their profound greetings to their spiritual Head." *Nova Hrvatska*, April 9, 1942.

The Serbian Orthodox "convertes" from the villages of Cacinci, Kutjevo, Vocin, Pozega and others did likewise with the same spontaneity.

In the regions where anyone dared put up a resistance to Catholic proselytism, the punishment was not long in coming and was just as "collective" as for the conversions, for death and the concentration camp awaited all recalcitrants.

If the instructions given by the Church, concerning the conversion of the Orthodox Serbs and Jews to Catholicism, are compared with the decrees of Ustashi authorities concerning the concentration camps, it would seem that the two orders had been synchronized. As soon as the Serbs refused to abandon their faith and their church, heads began to roll, villages were destroyed, and the death camps were full to overflowing. After the punishment raids on the Serbian villages, missionaries made their appearance "in order to save the souls of those who survived."

But it often happened that the Ustashi and the missionaries go to their destination together, and thus the mass conversions continued. It is a known fact that many of those who through terror finally accepted the Catholic religion were eventually liquidated.

And while some of the priests thought that Catholicism signified the salvation of human lives, the majority of the missionaries were more

interested in the Ustashi state than in the Christian Catholic Church.

That the conversions to Catholicism and the exterminations took place simultaneously, after a well-defined plan, is shown not only by the words and behavior of the priests and the members of Croatian religious orders, but by the promotions and grades which they accumulated: priest, officer and police agent, and there were large numbers of them from the very first day that the satellite Croatian State was founded.

One detail should be emphasized which, although of a "temporal" character, is very significant. It has already been explained that each new convert had to give the sum of 170 kuna to the priest who took her or him within the pale of the Roman Church. Thus, in addition to the merit of having saved so many souls, many of the saintly men were justly rewarded by the accumulation of appreciable fortunes.

Continued in [Chapter VII. More Massacres and Forced Conversions Part 1.](#)

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