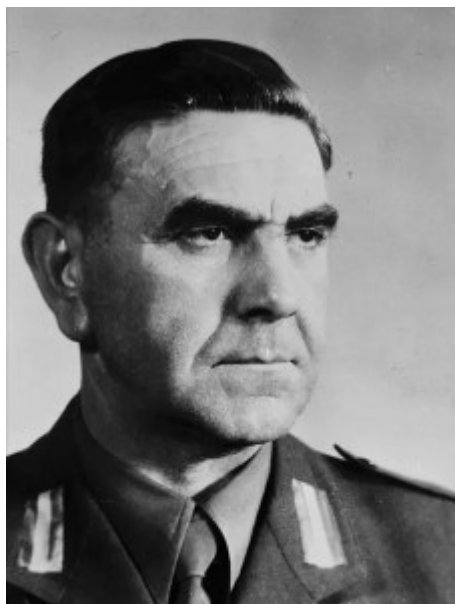


Genocide in Satellite Croatia Chapter VII. More Massacres and Forced Conversions Part 1.



Ante Pavelic, head of the fascist ultranationalist organization known as the Ustashi.

Continued from [Chapter VI. The Death Camps.](#)

THE CATHOLIC SLOVENES SEND A PROTEST TO THE VATICAN

Often violent protestations have been mentioned. Cries rose up from all parts of the world against the barbaric Ustashi and the scandalous support lent by the Catholic clergy. Below are a few excerpts from a letter written on January 20, 1942, by Prvislav Grisogono, now living in London, a Croat, Roman Catholic and former Yugoslav minister and at the time a refugee in Belgrade, to His Grace Stepinac:

The inhuman and anti-Christian attitude of a great number of Catholic Croatian priests has not only brought consternation to some of their colleagues, but also to some of the Croatian intellectuals, and as one of these, I am greatly affected and shocked by the absence of any public disapproval on the part of the Catholic hierarchy, which should have expressed Christian and human sympathy toward the victims of the massacres and the incredible inequality shown to the Serbian patriots of the Orthodox religion. I even wondered with dismay how and why the authorized Catholic Croatian groups had not felt it their duty to make a public disavowal concerning the forced conversions of the Serbian Orthodox and the confiscation of their possessions in the name of the Catholic Church.

All priests who have taken part, in any way whatsoever, in Ustashi misdemeanors should, without consideration for their rank in the

religious hierarchy, be rigorously condemned and without regard for their clerical robes or their priesthood. *Glas Kanadskih Srba* (Windsor, Ontario), April 5, 1951.

Veceslav Vilder, a Croat and member of the Yugoslav Government-in-exile at London, condemned the attitude of his Grace Stepinac in these terms, when he broadcast on February 16, 1942 over the BBC: "At the present time the most terrible atrocities are being committed around Stepinac's circle, and the blood of our brothers is running in the gutters, gouging an even deeper abyss. The Serbian Orthodox are being converted by force to Catholicism, and yet we have not heard one word of protest from the Archbishop. Instead, we read about his attendance at the Fascist and Nazi parades. . . ." *Le Monde* (Paris), May 27, 1953.

The most characteristic reaction came from the Catholic Slovenes who were deported to Serbia by the Germans. The members of their committee went before the Serbian Orthodox Patriarchate at Belgrade, where they were received by Josip, the Bishop of Skoplje. This was perhaps a case unique in history, for the Slovenes acquainted him with their desire to be converted to the Serbian Orthodox religion, as an act of indignation against all that had come to pass in Croatia and, above all, the forced conversions.

Bishop Josip, already informed of this trend among the Slovenes, made the following reply: "I have given the necessary instructions to the clergy to strongly advise those Slovenes who make a request for conversion to Orthodoxy to wait until the end of the war when they may become members of the Serbian Orthodox church of their choice. At the moment people are in a state of revolt and agitation. They must quiet down. They must stop and think. And then when they make their decision they will be sure of its being accepted. Having acquired them as brothers who know and understand us and who have shown us their friendly spirit, this in itself is sufficient reward. There is no need of our trying to resemble those, even in looks, who have undertaken converting our Serbs by force."

There is a striking contrast between this scrupulous discretion and the cynicism of the terrorist converters. The Slovenes of Serbia could but withdraw when faced with this honorable refusal, but on March 1, 1942, they sent a memorandum to His Grace Ujcic, the Catholic Bishop at Belgrade, which was destined to find its way to the Holy See. It reads as follows:

In the Independent State of Croatia all the bishops and Orthodox priests have either been killed or imprisoned or sent to concentration camps. Their churches and monasteries have been destroyed and their goods confiscated. The main and acknowledged objective of the politicians of Zagreb was to wipe out the Serbian population in Croatia. Conversion to Catholicism in Croatia had nothing to do with religious conviction and was a humiliating procedure for the Catholic Church, whose prestige and dignity has been greatly compromised. The impartial observer is obliged to admit that the conversions of the Serbian Orthodox to Catholicism took place under tremendous political pressure. It is certain that the number of Orthodox in Croatia who became converted by inner conviction

to Catholicism could be counted on one's fingers.

In spite of the recommendations and orders of the Bishops, the forced conversion of the Orthodox population continued. The conversions, which, according to the teachings of the Catholic Church, should have been considered void, were so numerous that the Croatian bishops, during their conference of November 17, 1941, formed two commissions to investigate the question.

The formation of these commissions incited the greatest discontent in all the Serbian circles. For if the Croatian bishops really had the intention of carrying out their plans they would not have set up commissions to examine the question of conversions, nor would they have accepted having anything to do with them. It would have been more normal and much simpler to have given strict orders to the subalterns of the Catholic clergy to accept in their church only those who had given up their religion, not because of fear or for personal advantages, but because of a deep inner conviction. These priests would have then acted contrary to order, continuing to accept conversions forbidden by the Canons and would have been punished by the bishops with all the severity of ecclesiastical law. Alone, such a procedure would have convinced the Serbs of the sincerity of the Croatian bishops.

The forced conversion of the Serbian masses, the tortures inflicted on their priests, the destruction of their churches and convents was done, so it is said, in the interest of the Catholic Church. Such proceedings naturally affected the interests of the highest Catholic circles. The Serbs could not understand the reasons which motivated the silence of the Holy See, face to face with the horrors committed in Croatia. The conversion which signified the "Croatization" of the Serbs was the common aim of the Croatian episcopacy and the Ustashi government. Now we understand, the Orthodox argued, why no bishop in Croatia raised his voice in defense of the Serbian Orthodox Christians even at the risk of compromising his position or himself. An apostolic heroism such as that would have been necessary, not only to save the honor of the Catholic Church, but also for its prestige in the Balkans.

The facts that are mentioned in the memoir have deeply affected us. What will be the future relationship of the Serbian Orthodox and the Roman Catholics in our country? We are convinced that precious time has been wasted, time which should have been used to attenuate the effects of the religious war of fratricide. A whole generation will bear the consequences.

We understand that the Holy See has delegated a special envoy to Zagreb to study the situation in Croatia. We are convinced that having knowledge of the report, the Vatican will raise its voice against the tragic fate that awaits the Serbs and will thus save the prestige of Yugoslav Catholicism.

Being well acquainted with the situation in our country we consider that it is necessary that:

1. The Holy See publicly condemns the bloody persecution of the Serbs and their church.
2. That the Holy See forbids all conversions to Catholicism under the existing reign of terror.
3. That if certain persons wish to be converted to Catholicism, in spite of the general prohibition, they may do so with the special permission of the Holy See which will examine each case.
4. That the Holy See advises the Croatian bishops to take the Serbian Orthodox Christians and their priests under their protection with an apostolic courage ready to meet any sacrifice.

We beg Your Eminence to be so kind as to transmit this letter to the Holy See. We remain, Yours most respectfully, the Slovene Catholic leaders now living in Serbia. *Tajni dokumenti o odnosima Vatikana i ustaske nezavisne- drzave Hroatske* (Zagreb, 1952), pp. 98:99. See also Viktor Novak, *op. cit.*, pp. 785-787.

The Slovene priests, respectful of canonic laws, were no longer looked upon kindly in Zagreb. This could be observed by the written request to hasten the conversions, sent to the Presidency of the government by Juricev, the notorious Franciscan who was Head of the Religious Department: "A large number of Roman Catholic parishes should be founded to provide for the estimated million convertees. This is a task that cannot be undertaken by the secular clergy. I am strongly against permitting foreigners, under any circumstance, to hold offices in these parishes, and above all, the Slovenes, because in our opinion, their co-operation would be a terrible blow to the Croatian national standing in these parishes." Horvat and Stambuk, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

This was a far cry from the humanistic and liberal Slovene priest to the converter with a machine gun who "cleaned up everything from baby chicks to old men."

STEPINAC WAS PAVELIC'S HEAD MILITARY CHAPLAIN

In the guise of a reply, or rather a challenge, to those who everywhere implored him to stop the scandalous aid which the Catholic clergy lent to Pavelic's blood-thirsty regime, the Vatican made a decision: It named His Grace Stepinac head military chaplain of the Croatian army.

It is true that this nomination was made "sine titulo," (Latin meaning "without title") the Independent State of Croatia not being officially recognized, nor its army considered as a belligerent instrument. On the other hand, the first prelate of Croatia was not obliged to exercise, effectively and personally, his new functions.

His Grace Stepinac announced his promotion to the Ordinariats by such letters as the following, addressed to the Ordinariat of the Archbishopric of Sarajevo (No. 22/BK/1942 om January 20, 1942):

"I have the honor of informing the honorable Ordinariat that I have been made Head Military Chaplain 'sine titulo' for the Croatian army. I have designated as my substitutes the Rev. Stjepo Vucetic, military priest of the Croatian Armed Forces, and Rev. Vilim Cecelja, superior military priest at the Ministry of the Croatian Armed Forces, and I have given them jurisdiction with the necessary authority endorsed by the Holy See.

"You will eventually be given the names of the military chaplains in the territory of your Ordinariat by the office of the military vicarage at the Ministry of the Croatian Armed Forces." *Yrhbosna* (Sarajevo), No. 2, 1942.

There is one savory detail connected with this affair. Vilim Cecelja, replacing His Grace Stepinac as leading chaplain, with the grade of a Lt. Colonel, was at the same time Pavelic's confessor.

As soon as the new promotion of the Archbishop of Zagreb was made known, approximately 150 priests applied for voluntary service as chaplains in the Ustashi army, and even His Grace Stepinac's own secretary, Stjepan (Stephen) Lackovic (now in Los Angeles), was sworn in to one of the units. The official organ, *Ustasa*, reported in its 47th issue of November 22, 1942, as it did in previous issues, some of the salient acts of these bellicose ecclesiastics who went against the United Nations and were decorated not only by Pavelic, but also by the Germans.

His Grace Stepinac, from time to time, honored the leave-taking of the legionnaires for the front by his presence. He was accompanied by His Grace Ramiro Marcone, the "apostolic visitor," flanked by officers and Nazi diplomats. As can be seen, this prelate had a great conception of his functions and duties as military chaplain, even "sine titulo." Pavelic had every reason to be satisfied, and he proclaimed far and wide: "I am convinced that posterity will be grateful to you Croatian priests for having inculcated our first soldiers of the Independent State of Croatia with a wholesome spirit, a high morality and respect for God, as well as with fearlessness and courage in facing the enemy both within and without." *Nova Hrvatska*, Nov. 26, 1941.

His Grace Stepinac not only showed his warlike attitude when he was with the military Ustashi in the barracks, but also when he was with the intellectuals taking charge of the mobilization of the Croats for the cause of the Croatian satellite state, where he helped to encourage and boost their drooping morale. It was, above all, among the members of the Catholic organization, "Domagoj," that he was the most active. On July 7, 1944, he made a speech in which he said: "Croatia today is passing through a difficult period and it is likely that more difficult times are yet to come. But we must remain optimistic and confidently believe that Croatia will survive and that no one can destroy it... The people of Croatia are bleeding for the state and they will succeed in saving and maintaining it. Any action taken against the people and against Croatian independence should be discouraged. On the contrary each individual should sacrifice himself for the defense and the forming of the state." *Vjesnik* (Zagreb), October 1, 1946, and Viktor Novak, *op. cit.*, p. 1033.

His Holiness Pius XII remained, as always, cordially paternal toward Pavelic's collaborators: "The Ustashi youth of the crusades, numbering 206, all dressed up in Ustashi uniforms, had a private audience with the Pope on February 6, 1942, in one of the most sacred halls of the Vatican. The reporter wrote that 'the most touching moment was when the youthful Ustashi begged the Pope to bless their Poglavnik, the Independent State of Croatia, and the Croatian people. Each member received a medal as a souvenir.'"

Katolicki Tjednik, February 15, 1942.

CROATIAN CATHOLIC PRELATES SIT IN USTASHI PARLIAMENT; PAVELIC CREATES THE CROATIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

On January 24, 1942, Pavelic issued a decree concerning the establishment of a Croatian Council of State. Among its provisions were the following:

I. On the basis of a Croatian historical constitutional law, I hereby order the organization and composition of a Croatian Council of State.

II. Until a new composition of the Council of State is ordered, it shall consist of the following persons:

1. Surviving representatives-Croats of the last Croatian Diet of 1918;
2. Surviving representatives-Croats of the Skupstina elected in 1938, and the founders and life members of the Central Committee of the former Croatian Peasant party;
3. Surviving members of the council of the former party for the acquisition of Rights for Croats elected in 1919;
4. Chairman, their deputies, and commissioners in the national headquarters of the Ustashi liberation movement;
5. Representatives of the German national minority.
6. Those who have been elected as senators, as well as those who have belonged to the government of General Simovic, who launched the former state in a war against the axis powers, may not be members of the Council. *Narodne Novine*, January 27, 1942.

In accordance with the regulations concerning the functioning of Parliament (No. LVI-459-Z-1942), each deputy must take the following oath: "I swear by the all-powerful God to be loyal to the Poglavnik, leader of the Independent State of Croatia, that as a member of the Croatian parliament I shall work for the prosperity of the people and the State, and that I will acquit myself conscientiously of my duties according to parliamentary law.—Amen." *Ibid.*, February 21, 1941.

Thirty-six deputies of the Croatian Peasant party, more than half of those elected in the general election of 1938, entered the Ustashi Parliament. Those who were acquainted with the situation in this party were not in the least astonished, for, as Elizabeth Wiskemann so aptly said: "The right wing of the Croatian Peasant Party had often flirted with the Ustashis." Elizabeth

On February 23, 1942, a Te Deum was sung in the Church of St. Mark at Zagreb. Surrounded by all the ecclesiastical dignitaries, His Grace Stepinac waited for Pavelic at the portal of the church, with a microphone held before his lips: "The reinauguration of the Croatian Parliament," he cried, "is proof of the deep and all-abiding consciousness of your responsibilities, a burden which you will wish to share with your co-citizens. This re-inauguration is accompanied by the prayers of the church and the prayers within our own hearts. May the Eternal Judge who governs the destiny of the peoples with his powerful right hand lay the foundation and carve in the hearts of our co-citizens a deep and lasting awareness that they may successfully help you in the reconstruction and the resurrection of our beloved land, founded on eternal evangelical principles." *Katolicki Tjednik*, February 26, 1942.

But a weekly magazine, called the *New Review*, published an article at that same time, under the title "Personalities Talked About in 1941," and in a column, "The Criminals," wrote of Pavelic: "He is unanimously voted the supreme criminal for the year 1941," *New Review* (London), February 1, 1942

The atmosphere that reigned at the Croatian Diet can be imagined by the following reportage from the Nazi agency DNB: "The first session of the Sabor (Diet) reached its pitch Friday during the speech of Marshall Kvaternik who replaced the Poglavnik and the Minister of the Army. Among those present were the Ministers of Germany and Italy, representatives from the Italian and German forces, military attaches, and Croatian headquarters, etc. In his speech, the orator rendered homage and expressed the gratitude of his people to Germany, the first state of Europe in favor of the founding of Croatian independence. And when Marshall Kvaternik proclaimed that the Croatian soldiers were inseparably bound as brothers in arms with the soldiers of the Fuhrer and the Duce all the deputies rose and applauded wildly." Agency DNB, February 28, 1942.

His Grace, Ramiro Marcone, could be seen in the diplomatic box as representative of the Pope. A picture taken on this occasion appeared in the directory of the Independent State of Croatia. Another shows His Grace Stepinac in his parliamentary seat. It was he, who after the Marshal's discourse, spoke in the name of the Church.

So as to emphasize mutual authority and responsibility, the Ustashi government granted 11 seats in Parliament to the representatives of the Catholic Church in Croatia, two of which were occupied by Archbishop Stepinac and Bishop Autun Aksamovic. The other priests and religious members were: Irgolic, Ante Loncaric, Stjepan Pavunc, Jurajl Mikan, Matija Polic, Toma Severovic, Boniface Sipic, Franjo Skrinjar and Stipe Vucetic. The latter as has been mentioned, replaced His Grace Stepinac as leading chaplain. Horvat and Stambuk, *op. cit.*, p. 217.

Thus it was officially revealed that the Croatian Catholic Church, so forgetful of the spiritual nature of religion, lent its political support to the Ustashi government.

On February 24, 1942, during one of the very first sessions of Parliament, Andrija Artukovic, Minister of the Interior, gave a résumé of the Jewish situation: "The Croatian State considers that the Croatian people should, alone, govern Croatia, and not let it be governed by the Jews. There is no time for sentimentality when the destiny of a whole people is at stake." Official Gazette, *Narodne Novine*, n°46, February 25, 1942.

Then, during the session of February 25th, the Minister of Justice, Mirko Puk, defined the policy of the government in regard to the churches:

Concerning the problem of recognition and tolerance of religions, the government of the State of Croatia has adopted the principles that we have taken to heart, inspired by the founder of the party of Right and the father of our country, Ante Starcevic. Faithful to its principles, the government of the State of Croatia actually recognizes three religious denominations in our State; the Roman Catholic of Latin and oriental ritual, the Muslim Church, and the Swiss Evangelical Church.

The government refuses legality to the sect of the so-called Old Catholic religion, and as a religious group this sect will not be recognized.

I wish also to mention the so-called Serbian Orthodox Church, that is, the Greek religion of oriental ritual. I firmly declare that the Independent State of Croatia cannot and will not recognize the Serbian Orthodox Church.

If certain persons, for different reasons, are opposed to these decisions and in disagreement with this irrevocable law, they will be free to leave the territory of the State! *Narodne Novine*, no. 47, February 26, 1942.

This text was unanimously approved by the Diet including the eleven members representing the Roman Catholic Church. Once again the test was met, publicly and officially, that by affecting to respect the beliefs and the rights of the Serbian Orthodox Church, in the declaration at the Plenary Conference, the Croatian Episcopacy simply went through a mere form, hoping to exonerate itself in world public opinion, while not in the least revealing the real aim of the Roman Catholic hierarchy.

Archbishop Stepinac also took part in the Ustashi "Parliament," and according to one of his biographers, spoke on April 23, 1942, saying the following: "I, as the representative of the Lord's Church, cannot do otherwise but also speak my word... not because I desire to give any advice in purely political matters, for which the Church has no authority from its Lordly founder to speak, but in order to turn the eyes of the legislative body, such as the Parliament, toward God who is the foundation and source of all legislatures . . . in order that it may pass honest, just and possible laws." (His secretary told me personally that he was honored for having been asked to speak on that occasion. Zagrebiensis, *Nedovrsena eroika nadbiskupa Stepinca*. ("The Unfinished Eroica of Archbishop Stepinac"), Rome, 1953, p. 16.

He delivered this speech in April, 1942, while we know very well what Parliament had legalized up until then, and what new crimes the Croat Government had committed by that time.

* * *

Needless to say, the atrocities continued at the same rhythm. Below are a few examples of what took place in 1942, before and after the reunion of Parliament, which, according to His Grace Stepinac, would help the Poglavnik reconstruct Croatia "on an everlasting foundation of evangelical principles."

On Saint Sava day, January 28, 1942, an inhabitant from Kozibrod passed to see one of his friends at Segestin and told him about the great excitement that reigned at Golubovac. A unit of massacrers was advancing towards the villages of Golubovac, Draskovac, Maskarevac, Segestin, Nevina Polja, Osredak-Zrinj. Everyone had to flee.

In a half hour the whole village was roused. Those who had sleds loaded them with children, provisions and blankets, while the others took their horses or carried what was strictly necessary on their backs. Cattle and poultry were left behind. People thought, "Oh, the storm will soon pass over and we'll soon be back to our daily household duties."

When the cracking of guns was heard at Loncar, not far from the village of Draskovac, the people who were escaping with their sleds took a round about way through Zilici-Kepecija-Djurici and Sveta Petka, on the fringe of the forests. This group fortunately escaped. But those who were ill and obliged to stay at home, and a certain number of others who did not want to leave, hid in their cellars or climbed up in the fruit trees. The new fallen snow was up to their knees, making walking very difficult. But the traces of their foot-prints was an even more serious handicap.

In an hour, a unit of killers reached the village, and dividing themselves in groups, they managed to surround it. The order was given to kill all those who tried to escape. All kinds of arms were used and even clubs. In a single cellar, which belonged to a peasant named Trivun, they killed sixty men, women and children with bombs. Here, every family was wiped out. A woman of sixty-five, the mother of two Yugoslav officers in active service, was killed, her body mutilated with knives and bayonets.

After the massacre of the population, the Ustashi set fire to the village. They used explosives to destroy the schools, the churches and the largest houses. In one single day, Segestin was completely destroyed. The village of Rogulje met the same fate. Petar M. Stojin in the paper *Voice of Canadian Serbs*, April 4, 1957.

Milka Majkic, a Serbian peasant from the township of Lusci Palanka, in the district of Sanski Most, made another deposition: Interned by the Ustashi at the camp of Zemun, yet having been recognized as "incapable to work" she was sent back by the Germans to the refugee commissariat of Belgrade at the

expense of Serbia. She gave a poignant description of all she had lived through in western Bosnia: "In 1942, on the same day as Saint Sava, an Ustashi punishment raid took place in the villages located along Grmec mountain. The pursuers managed to cut through the woods and captured many adults and children. Some of the prisoners were sent to concentration camps where the temperature was 25 below zero. Every prisoner who was unable to follow the convoy was shot down by a bullet at the nape of his neck." Herve Lauriere, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

In the village of Ruma, the Ustashi arrested about sixty Serbs, among whom was Doctor Stepan Suvajdzic, and also Nedeljko and Bosiljkovic. All were brought before a special court where two lawyers, Georg Miler and Ivan Dvornik, were members of the bar. They were all condemned and shot, in a place called "Rupcage," near Ruma.

In 1942, the Ustashi arrested a group of twenty Serbs at Sid. They were tortured and then thrown into the brick oven. Among the victims were: Stevo Stanojevic and his wife Ljubica, Radomir and his wife, Mr. Rankovic's wife and daughter, the wife of Sumanovic, the priest, and the two Trubic sisters.

In the autumn of 1942 and the winter of 1948, about 6,000 people were killed by the Ustashi in the province of Srem alone.

No less than 2,600 Serb bodies sank for eight days in a gigantic muddy ditch at Sremska Mitrovica.

So as to make more room, quick lime was thrown over them to dissolve their remains more rapidly.

Among the victims of Sremska Mitrovica were members of a Serbian family of the Nazarene religion (this sect somewhat resembles the American Quakers). All the believers lived together in perfect harmony of brotherhood and love. Originally from the region of Srem, the family was composed of five brothers, one of whom was living in Belgrade and was spared. But the other four—Jefta, Milivoj, Dusan and Mladen—only simple peasants from Banostar, in the district of Ilok, were not able to escape:

Jefta was killed first by the blow of a mallet over his head. Then came Mila and Katica, the wives of those two brothers and their children, Gaja, Ilija, Jova, Pera, Miodrag, Dusan, Nikola, Borka, Lenka and Mara (a little girl of six). The three younger brothers and the two brothers-in-law were the last to be finished off in the following order: Mica and Veselin, the great uncle Jovan and his wife Mila, uncle Zarko and his son Pavle.

If Jefta and a few others were knocked unconscious before being thrown into the quick lime, Milivoj, Dusan, Milan, Katica and Pere were bound together with the other peasants around a hay stack, which was set on fire and they all died completely carbonized. Adam Pribicevic, *Krapinci*, article published in *Voice of Canadian Serbs* (Windsor, Ont.), August 17, 1950.

Forced conversions, persecutions and massacres still continued even after the Serbs took to the underground. The Chetniks and partisans, becoming more and more numerous, were able to lend a hand and they even succeeded in threatening the very existence of the satellite state. Therefore, the movement had to be wiped out with urgency. It was thought that a way had been discovered by offering apparent satisfaction to the religious Orthodox. By a decree issued on April 8, 1942 (No. XC-817-Z), the government proclaimed the foundation of an autocephalic Croatian Orthodox Church (Having a head bishop who is not responsible to any higher-ranking ecclesiastical authority).

Narodne Novine, April 7, 1942. The decree (No. CLXIV-1386-Z1942) on the 5th of the following June set up the constitution. This "satellite" church, in the minds of the founders, was to draw the rebel Serbs to conversion under the influence of the docile priests, for since it had not been possible to "catholicize" them, at least they would be "croatized." It was thought that by the indirect method, they would eventually belong to the Union, equally desired by the Croatian nationalists and the Holy See. This became quite clear in the report addressed to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs by Nikola Rusinovic, who represented Pavelic at the Vatican.

The President of the Croatian Peasant party, Macek, who is now in the United States and now also a member of the Knights of Columbus, perhaps the most powerful Catholic organization in America, has the following to say in his autobiography: "After the towns had been pacified to some extent (i.e. after most of the Serbs were exterminated or had fled), the Ustase turned with terrible vehemence to the systematic extermination of Serbian villages in Upper Croatia and northwest Bosnia. In June 1941 a frightening number of Serbs were slaughtered in the village of Gudovac near Bjelovar. At the same time several hundred Serbs, who had gathered within the sanctuary of a church at Glina, were pitilessly murdered. But the notion that the Ustasa forced mass 'conversions' of Serbs to Catholicism is entirely false." *In the Struggle For Freedom* (New York, 1957), p. 234.

This last sentence of Dr. Macek's simply does not correspond to the truth. The welter of information gathered together in this book is more than ample proof of the mass forced conversions under the guidance of Ustashi priests and Ustashi storm troopers. Even Pope Pius XII admitted to certain Americans in private audience that these forced conversions took place.

Macek is very eager to prove that the Ustashi did not persecute the Serbs for religious reasons, and says: "The best proof that the Ustashi did not persecute the Serbs for religious reasons is that later on, in 1942, they themselves founded a Croatian Orthodox Church, headed by a Russian emigre bishop (Georgije Maksimovic-Ivanovic). Soon afterward, the planned mass killings of the Orthodox population subsided." *Ibid.*, p. 236.

It seems to this writer that Macek is contradicting himself, for in the next paragraph (the very next sentence in fact) he writes: "Meanwhile, the general slaughter of men, women and children went on."

The Vatican viewed the role of the Croatian Orthodox Church quite differently than Dr. Macek. Witness the report of Pavelic's minister at the Vatican, Rusinovic, of 9 May 1942, which he sent to the Croatian minister of foreign

affairs, Lorkovic, in which he says, among other things:

3. Croatian Catholic Church and Greek Catholics. Recognition of the Orthodox (They mean Croatian Orthodox Church) church, as I have already reported to you, has been well-received. In that the Holy See looks for the way to religious unity and the ending of the schism in Croatia. That would be the "greatest gift" which Croatia could bestow upon the Holy See. In order to speed up the process, it is thought that it is necessary to establish Greek-Catholic centers in areas where the Orthodox live, and that Dr. Simrak, who is regarded here as the best informed man in the Balkans on religious questions, should undertake this work. Some Catholic representatives look with a jaundiced eye upon the conversions to the Eastern Catholic ritual (they would like to go directly to Catholic rites), but the Vatican believes, and Stepinac agrees, that this is the easiest and speediest road toward union, which doubtless will be of political importance for the Independent State of Croatia. I have heard that Dr. Simrak has already talked with the Poglavnik about that, so I hope that it will soon be realized. I would beg you that you too help in this matter, which will certainly be of general benefit. Dr. Draganovic will certainly be opposed to that, but I could show him the correctness of this approach." See supplement of *Tajni Dokumenti* for photocopy of Rusinovic letter.

Dr. Draganovic was against such a slow way. He urged the rapid catholicization of Orthodox Serbs, if necessary by fire and sword. He is now an emigre, and since 1945 at the Vatican.

Also interesting in this connection is Rusinovic's report of 28 May 1942, also to Lorkovic. In it, among other things, he says:

On Wednesday I visited Cardinal Tisserant for the third and last time. You have certainly heard from past reports who this gentleman is and how he looks at things. . . . I will not bother you with a detailed report of our talk, but will tell you a few things, which will be enough. He says that the Germans recognized the Croatian Orthodox Church when together we killed 350,000 Serbs. What do we have to complain about the Serbs, he says, when we are behaving toward them much worse than they did toward us, even though we are supposedly more cultured and Catholic. In one camp alone there are over twenty thousand Serbs. In their struggles against the Turks, the Serbs gave at least that many, and perhaps more, lives for the West and for Catholicism. The Croats received the title "Antemurale Christianitatis" because they were Catholics. He knows who the Croats are by that which they did in Lorraine, etc., etc. *Ibid.*

Rusinovic's successor, Lobkowicz, on 20 December, 1942, also reported to Lorkovic about a visit to Cardinal Tisserant:

... in it [the talk] it came not only to the Cardinal's negative views not only about the Croatian state and the present regime, but also about the Croatian people as such. He says that as early as the Thirty Years' War the Croats were known as barbarians. In his region [Lorraine] they burned several Places, so that they are generally known as bad men. . .

. Concerning the Croatian Orthodox Church, he said that it signifies nothing, because it originated by the will of the Poglavnik and through his will can again cease to exist. *Ibid.* Note Lorkovic's hand-written notation: "After such insults Croatia cannot maintain any connections with T."

There were some in the Holy Father's intimate circle who showed a certain skepticism, such as was reported by Erwein Lobkowicz.

As a proof that conversions to Catholicism went on regardless of the formation of the so-called "Croat Orthodox Church," we give the following authorization made by the Ministry of Justice and Religion, issued on June 1, 1942:

"The Ministry of Justice and Religion may authorize, according to its own judgment, the formation of a new parish or parish station regardless of the number of converts and settlers."

Here is an official admission that the Croat Orthodox Church was really a kind of facade to fool the West. Moreover, killings and conversions continued.

The *International Christian Press* in Geneva, Switzerland, bulletin No. II, March, 1942, wrote, as follows, concerning the persecution of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Croatia:

This information describing the situation of the Orthodox Church in Croatia has reached us from a Bulgarian source:

In the present Croatian territory, the Orthodox Serbs are now being persecuted in a most cruel manner. Of the Eastern Orthodox bishops some have been killed, several have been imprisoned, the others have been forced to leave the country. Of the Orthodox priests a considerable number have been assassinated, many have been imprisoned, the others have been thrown out of the country. Thus this large body of Eastern Orthodoxy is now without any pastoral guidance, and there are no longer any Orthodox religious services. It is counted that several hundred thousand Orthodox have become victims of the systematic persecution through imprisonment, maltreatment, plunder, and that several tens of thousands have been killed. One of the officials of the Croatian State has formulated the purpose of this policy as the elimination of the Orthodox leadership, so that the rest without leaders can be catholicized, and so within ten years Croatia will become a Catholic State.

Many Orthodox churches have been destroyed, many Orthodox institutions have been confiscated, others again have been transformed into Catholic churches. The monasteries, several of which have a great tradition behind them, have been transferred to Roman Catholic orders. Even the patriarchal center at Sremski-Karlovci has not-been spared. The patriarchal church there was sealed after the most valuable treasures had been taken away, the patriarchal library has been plundered, and the patriarchal palace has been occupied by Catholics.

Orthodox officials are being notified that in the Croatian State only those can remain in state service who belong to the Roman Catholic Church.

Certain Roman Catholic periodicals in Croatia approved this persecution, Thus the organ of the Archbishop of Sarajevo defends the use of "revolutionary methods" in "the service of truth, justice, and of Christ, that the struggle against evil should not be carried on in a noble manner and with gloves."

Just as the French prelate Tisserant showed what little confidence he had in the "autocephalic" Orthodox Church, he also showed that he was not afraid of expressing his personal reactions concerning the horrors that were being committed in Croatia. He spoke to Pavelic's legate at Vatican: "If you only knew how the Italian officers stationed along the Adriatic coast speak of you! It is indeed frightful. From their reports, just to imagine that such terrible brutality exists is unthinkable. Murders, fires, crimes of every kind, and pillages are the order of the day in these regions. I know for sure that even the Franciscans of Bosnia-Herzegovina took an active part in the attacks against the Orthodox population and the destruction of the churches, I learned from an infallible source that the Franciscans from Bosnia-Herzegovina behaved atrociously. How such acts could be perpetrated by civilized and cultured men, let alone the priests, is inconceivable." *Ibid.* Also see p. 115.

Unfortunately this was only one personal reaction and not that of the Roman Curia or of Pope Pius XII, who graciously replied a few days later to the "sincere and humble" congratulations which Pavelic had sent to him for the anniversary of his enthroning. See *Hrvatski Narod*, March 21, 1942.

The fact that His Holiness wanted to "ignore" the atrocities committed by the Ustashi, just as he had "ignored" those committed by the Germans during and after the war. Moreover, the Poglavnik had the best of lawyers, the Archbishop of Zagreb, chaplain "sine titulo" of Croatia's "glorious army."

Nikola Rusinovic again confirmed the report sent by him May 9, 1942 to his superior and friend, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mladen Lorkovic, at Zagreb:

As you must know, His Grace Stepinac has now returned to Zagreb after a twelve day visit in Rome. He was in fine form and had a pugnacious attitude toward all the enemies of the State. He submitted to the Holy Father a nine page type-written report. He showed it to me and I can assure you it stands for our point of view. In attacking the Serbs, Chetniks and communists, he has found things to say which even I had not thought of. I shall not go into detail but I assure you that it is a precious contribution to the policy I have followed until now. He believes the situation in the country is secure and is unsparing in his praise of the efforts and projects of the government. He says that he is now surer than ever of the destiny of the people and the Croatian State, for the authorities and the people have shown a sufficient amount of

will power and comprehension permitting us to hold our ground. No one will be allowed to attack the Independent State of Croatia and show the Croatian people in a bad light. This was precisely the reason why he went to Rome in order to stigmatize the lies that have spread in regard to the Holy See.

These "lies" unfortunately were the frightful realities which have been listed in the previous pages.

The Catholic Church in Croatia made use of every occasion to manifest its attachment to the Ustashi Government, the bloodiest of all Nazi regimes, as will be seen from the following:

"Today, at 10 o'clock in the morning a reception was held in the Archbishopric, up on the 'Capitol,' for ecclesiastical representatives, who were received in audience by his Excellency the Croat Metropolitan and Archbishop, Dr. Alojsije Stepinac, before the beginning of the New Year."

The Archbishop was greeted by the General Vicar, Bishop Dr. Franjo Sallis Sewis, who in a lengthy speech wished his Excellency much happiness in the following year. "We entered into the last year with fear that our country might be carried into the whirlwind of war. Our premonition was correct. However, in all that confusion, historical events took place, and through the merits of our Leader, we have acquired our free and independent state."

The Honorable Archbishop first thanked him for his warm wishes, and then gave thanks to God for having bestowed upon them the gift of their own homeland. He thanked the clergy for having fulfilled such exemplary work as shepherd of their flock.

The Archbishop spoke further about the war, and having in mind the struggle of United Europe in the East, said: "God was merciful to us. He was merciful to all humanity, when he permitted the big operation to be performed against the poisonous ulcer, which would have certainly opened and would have destroyed the world. We are, therefore, ready to bear all the sacrifices, which may be asked from us, for the final glorious victory of justice."

The Honorable Archbishop again praised his clergy and wished that God may grant them health and strength in order that they may "persevere in their great and responsible work." This report is from *Nova Hrvatska*, January 1, 1942.

Truly one could not have said more in less words. The Croat Episcopacy and clergy were without reserve for the Ustashi state. For them victory of Nazism against the United Nations was a victory of justice; and the slaughter and conversion by force to Catholicism, which was undertaken by one part of the Croat Catholic Clergy, as well as monk-commanders of the concentration camps, are given the greatest recognition and praise from Archbishop Stepinac. One more proof of this is that not a single priest or monk who had collaborated with the Ustashi Government has ever been prosecuted by the Church or unfrocked.

The collaboration continued. On St. Anthony's day in 1942, His Grace Stepinac

launched the following circular: "June 18th is the name day of our glorious leader of the Independent State of Croatia, the Poglavnik, Ante Pavelic. I invite all the clergy to celebrate this occasion the Sunday following this day on June 14th, this date being more convenient for the people. There will be the Te Deum and prayers read for this occasion. All the people are asked to pray with humility for the good of the Independent State of Croatia and for the Poglavnik." Hrvatski Narod, July 16, 1944.

The "apostolic visitor" himself came to the rescue, and was not afraid of showing his Ustashi loyalty. At the ceremony consecrating Bishop Petar Cule at Mostar, His Grace Marcone, in his discourse, begged the population to remain faithful to the Holy See which for centuries had lent aid against oriental barbarism, and he expressed the wish that Croatia surmount the actual difficulties and begin flourishing under the leadership of Ante Pavelic. *Katolicki Tjednik*, October 25, 1942.

It is necessary to recall a revealing document of 31 June, 1942, which contains a mixture of the macabre and the comic. It was sent by the Franciscan Ivo Brkan of Koraca (Bosnia) to the Ustashi commander at Derventa. It states that approximately 500 Serbs in the parish had been deported to concentration camps. Useless to say that the religious officials made no reference as to their fate. That was why, considerate of their wives, he wrote: "There are 500 widows in the five villages who could marry Catholics, for there are no more Serbian Orthodox. This would be an excellent chance to indoctrinate them, and they in turn would indoctrinate their families with Catholicism and Croatism. This could be done in a relatively short space of time and would demand very little effort from the church and the authorities. Our people are already coveting the land and the beautiful women. We are conscious of the difficulties that the State feels in acknowledging the decease of these people, and it is for this reason that we are asking for instructions that we may know how to legalize their decease while safeguarding the reputation of the State." Viktor Novak, *op. cit*, pp. 677-678.

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