

Genocide in Satellite Croatia Chapter VII. More Massacres and Forced Conversions Part 2.



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SREM—ARENA OF USTASHI AND VOLKSDEUTSCHER COLLABORATION AND RIVALRY

Srem, the rich province between the Danube and Sava rivers, in which the Serbs were in a majority and the Germans and Croats in a minority, represented a separate area at the beginning of the German occupation. According to the initial German plan, Srem was supposed to become a new state, built upon the ruins of Yugoslavia, and consisting of Serbian Vojvodina (Backa and Banat), as well as southern Hungary, intermingled, here and there, with German settlements (Volksdeutscher). This new state, in the heart of *Podunavlje* (Central Danubian Basin), was even to be given the name of "Donauschwabenland," which later was to become the richest part of the Third or even Fourth Reich.

But since Fascist Rome had annexed Dalmatia from their Croat allies, and since this monstrosity could not survive economically, the diplomatic game between Berlin and Rome tended to upset the German plans for Srem. Therefore, two influences were felt in Srem: the Ustashi and the German, equally bloodthirsty in their purpose, but nevertheless different in their intentions. Hitler had appointed Dr. Vladimir Altgajer as leader of the Yugoslav Volksdeutscher minority in Srem, and the murderous Ustashi bands had selected Victor Tomic and Juce Rukavina as their leaders. These two invaders, however, were not to achieve harmony in their work, because the ruthless Nazis were to be less heartless and less unmerciful toward the unfortunate people than the Croat Ustashi under the Catholic Church, which had forsaken God, Christ, law and morality.

We shall, therefore, follow the development of these fateful events in Srem, i.e., the destruction committed by these two insatiable beasts together with their wrangling over the plunder, until the final Nazi victory, which brought great relief to the people, who preferred the lesser of two evils, as is always the case when human beings are in danger. This saddening review of events in Srem will give us a full view of the activities of these two apocalyptic monsters, the only difference being that the crimes of the Ustashi far surpassed the unequalled Nazi frenzy.

While Yugoslavia was at war on the two fronts, with Germany and with Italy, the Croat Ustashi opened up a third internal front which was the worst of all, to the very gates of Belgrade, supported by the *Volksdeutscher* minority in Srem. On April 12, 1941, the very day when Belgrade fell, these two hordes, armed and united attacked the Yugoslav Cavalry Corps at Slankamen, which was withdrawing toward Belgrade, and the Yugoslav army in Ruma, which was withdrawing toward Serbia. On the next day, April 13, 1941, from Zagreb, German Gen. Stancer asked for full cooperation between the German minority (*Volksdeutscher*) and Macek's Militia, the so-called "Hrvatska Zastita" (Croatian Militia), in accord with Macek's proclamation of April 10, 1941, issued in the very middle of the war.

The so-called leader of the Croat Army and second in command after Pavelic, Slavko Kvaternik, in his Order of the Day of April 18, 1941, thanked Dr. Macek *Narodne Novine*, April 15, 1941. and his Croat Peasant Party and armed semi-military organization, *Hrvatsha Zastita*, *Ibid.*, April 21, 1941. for their collaboration in destroying Yugoslavia. This same proclamation named this organization the "Croat Defense Huntsmen," who are actually the same as the "Ustashi Huntsmen," of the innocent Serbian and Jewish populations in Croatia. Thereafter this Independent Croat Peasant organization combined with Ustashi elements under Ustashi command, following a policy of organized crime, which was also to be felt in Srem, due to the support of the *Volksdeutscher* people and their Nazi protectors.

A new law passed in Croatia, the so-called "Law of Defense of the People and the State," which introduced the "Special National Courts" for the extermination of Serbs and Jews, *Ibid.*, April 17, 1941. was also introduced in Srem, with Dr. Altgajer's consent and by an order issued by Hitler's Envoy in Zagreb, Dr. Kasche.

This law was in fact passed by Hitler in Nurnberg, then introduced in Croatia and supplemented by other laws passed during the same period, including the "Law on Confiscation of Property, *Ibid.*, April 18, 1941. the Law on Racial Origin, *Ibid.*, April 30, 1941. and the Law on the Protection of Arian Blood and Honor. *Ibid.*

The Croat and *Volksdeutscher* authorities agreed to pass these laws, but they disagreed on their application, as will be seen. Humiliating limitations were imposed on Serbs, Jews and Gypsies. These were accepted by the people who did not even suspect what was in store for them. They were excluded from parks, cinemas, theaters and even restaurants. They were not allowed to enter food stores or market places before 11 A.M., which meant that they would find only what was left over by the favored races. Conspicuous identifications were

worn by all three peoples, i.e., the Jews wore the Star of David on a yellow band around their arm, and the Serbs wore a band with the letter "P" (Pravoslavni or Orthodox).

All Serbs and Jews from 15 to 50 years of age were obligated to perform forced labor from 6 A.M. to 8 P.M., such as the clearing of rubble from the ruins, the cleaning of streets and railway stations, loading munitions (with which they were to be murdered not too long afterwards), and doing everything as ordered by the Croat and German authorities, and even by certain low officials. They were excluded not only from state and municipal employment, but from all the banks and establishments under state control as well. They were not only forbidden to buy new property, but all their movable and real property was confiscated as well. The profits derived therefrom did not always benefit the Croat State or German funds,⁴¹ but favored privileged establishments.⁴² If anyone refused to do an assigned job he was sure to be tortured to death.⁴³ The transfer of property to their persecutors was made and accepted by the Court without comment, until such time as the Ustashi and German beasts quarreled over the loot and its distribution in Srem. The Jews were not allowed to move out of town, but Serbs, having enough jewelry or money to buy their way out, could go to Serbia with empty pockets. But later, owing to the conflict over who was entitled to the plunder and to whose jurisdiction it belonged, individuals from whom property was taken were murdered in order to conceal the foul deeds.

⁴¹ Heading this policy of plunder of Serbian and Jewish property for the benefit of the Croat State, were the following individuals: Franjo Dugmešić, Dragutin Majcan, Stipe Dosen and Stjepan Cvjek; and high state officials, Victor Justić, professor; Čvrković, lawyer, Colonel Grgić, and Gustav Krklec, poet who became Pavelić's Ustasha, and later Tito's President of the Croat Writers.

⁴² The agreements were so worded as to represent free sale in regular payment or in the form of a gift for some previous obligation. Among those who became known as over-night millionaires and property owners, were the following: Luka Amdžić, Ante Omreenović, Boza Ponjević, Alexander Rig, Paul Tajs—all high Croat or German state officials.

⁴³ The most prominent among these criminals were: Stjepan Majurđić, Luka Puljas, Mato Gordanović, Ivan Kostenac, Jakov Hameder, Otto Stugenfon, Ferdinand Krizel—all high functionaries of this plunderous band in Srem.

The conflict which arose between the Ustashi and *Volksdeutscher*, or between the Croats and the Germans in Srem, began to attract the attention of the Croat leaders in Zagreb in August, 1941. Dr. Milovan Zanic, a member of Pavelić's Government, harangued the pro-Nazis masses *Novi List* of June 3, 1941. in Srem, saying that Srem was Croatian and that the cities and villages would soon be filled with Ustashi. When he stopped his harangue, Dr. Mirko Puk, Minister of Justice, took over, followed by Dr. Andrija Artuković, Minister of Interior and hence Chief of Police. Next came Mile Budak, who was Minister of Education and a Croat ideologist, who thundered: "Take up axes and guns in your hands, instead of legal clauses. . . ."⁴⁵ Pavelić also arrived in Srem and during a meeting held in Vukovar threatened: "This is now the Ustashi and Independent State of Croatia, it must be cleansed of Serbs and Jews. There is no room for any of them here. Not a stone upon a stone will remain of what once belonged to them." ⁴⁶

⁴⁵ This speech was published as Government policy in the Official Ustashi NewsPaper of August 4, 1941, No. 171, p. 2, and in the *Katolicki Tjednik* of August 17, 1941, which approved

Budak's speech and suggestions.

⁴⁶ Pavelic's speech and the law pasted in Srem correspond to August 14, 1941, and were published in the newspaper *Hrvatski Narod* of August 15 and 16, 1941.

These statements, preparatory acts and laws formulated by the Croat leader and his aides, were followed by Victor Tomic's arrival in Srem, where he came to organize and supervise the Emergency Courts. This heartless and vicious inquisitor began his work with a proclamation which read as follows: "I have come to destroy all those who oppose the new order in our dear Croatia." Together with himself, Tomic brought these new laws to Srem: Law on Investigation; *Narodne Novine* of May 5, 1941 Law on Special Extermination Courts; *Ibid.*, April 7, 1941. and Law on the Ustashi State Authority. *Ibid.*, April 30, 1941. All these laws were actually related to each other, since a person considered by the first law to be unworthy of membership in the Croat Catholic Church was sentenced to death by the Courts without appeal as if it were the normal course. Unworthy people were all the Jews, and, among the Serbs, all business people, priests and intellectuals, with certain rare exceptions. The Law said this literally, as well as the interpretation and circular No. 48468/41, passed by the Pavelic Government and transmitted to the entire Croat Catholic community by the Catholic newspaper. *Katolicki Tjednik* of June 80, 1941. The Catholic Church newspaper in Croatia, *Katolicki Tjednik*, published articles on May 25, 1941, written by its shepherds of the soul, who are today scattered throughout the free world. They incited the religiously blind masses of Croatia to persecute and Kill all the Jews, outlawed in Croatia by the State decree passed on April 30, 1941. *Narodne Novine*, April 80, 1941 and *Katolicki Tjednik*, May 25, 1941. These tracts and falsehoods advocating a pogrom, too debased even for the African jungle, and all the more so for central Europe, were propagated by the same ecclesiastical paper, stating that ". . . the Serbs are the greatest enemies of the Croats, while the Jews and Masons are the greatest enemies of all Europe." *Katolicki Tjednik*, June 15, 1941.

While Jewish heads were rolling and Jewish temples falling, while Serbs were undergoing forced conversion, tortures unheard of in the days of Torquemadas during the Spanish Inquisition, took place in Srem. Those very tortures shocked the Bishop of Djakovo, Dr. Antun Aksamovic, to implore the Serbs by saying: "As Catholics you may remain in your homes. You will be able to improve your properties and unhindered educate your young to believe in God and the State of Croatia. If you join the Catholic Church you will secure for yourselves the salvation of eternal souls." Viktor Novak, *Magnum Crimen*, p. 618. But this was forbidden to the best among them, i.e. all merchants, priests and intellectuals. It was legally impossible for them, and this shows clearly that the policy of conversion was not meant to save souls but was motivated by chauvinism and a desire for extermination in a totalitarian way toward purely Croatophile ends.*

* An entire book would be necessary to tell of the harangues and plundering, that went on simultaneously, as well as persecutions, murder, conversions, an extermination where they often tried to outdo each other, and were constantly being supplemented by new laws published in the *Narodne Novine*, the official newspaper, and in church publications *Katolicki Dneunik*, and *Glasilo Hrvatske* from April 17, 1941, until the end of 1948, and in part even after that.

In only one administrative district in Srem, namely Ilok, fifty Orthodox

priests were arrested on August 21, 1941, and massacred one night at the prison, while only two among them saved themselves by escaping to Serbia. The tragedy in other districts was somewhat less, because the alarm was given for the people to escape, in which they were helped by the Germans from Srem, often in exchange for large sums of money. But in spite of this, the Ustashi-Nazi collaboration in Srem succeeded in eliminating 90% of the Serbian clergy, reducing it to a few Russian priests, who had fled the Russian Empire after the outbreak of the Revolution and who found asylum in Serbia. All sixteen Orthodox monasteries in Fruska Gora, which for three hundred years had been the Orthodox Athos on the Danube, were left occupied only by Russian monks,* before the majority were finally plundered, burned down and destroyed.

* In 1942, the priests and even the Head of the new Croat Orthodox Church, founded with the blessing of the new Croat State and Croat Catholic Church on April 3, 1941 (see *Narodne Novine*, April 7, 1942), were selected from among these Russian monks, who had found asylum in Stem.

Four of the Orthodox saints, who had slept there for centuries and among whom two were Serbian Emperors, killed while defending Christianity from Asia in the salvation of both Serbs and Croats, were doomed to destruction. Ironically enough they were saved by the Germans, i.e., by the enemy himself from the so-called Independent State of Croatia, which was part of the same nation, of the same blood, and of the same language, but inflamed by inhuman religious hatred, much worse than the former hatred of Islam against the Christians.

With the conversion of the Serbs in Srem, the Catholic Church of Croatia lost popularity with the people of Srem. Therefore, the state which imposed the pogrom decided to take direct action. The same methods applied in Bania, Lika, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Dalmatia, Croatia and Slavonia, could not be applied in Srem because of the existing partnership between the Ustashi and the Nazis. These methods were: mass pogroms and genocide without trial, by gun fire, firing squad, axes, tanks, fire and sword, in peaceful villages, cities, fields, homes and in prison and camps. A certain form, however, had to be observed because of the Germans. Therefore three types of special courts were established,* with identical abbreviated procedures and the same murderous results.

* Special Court, Emergency Court, and Circuit Court—According to the Law on Defense of the State and the People, published in *Narodne Novine*, No. 58/1/-1941.

Many Croat intellectuals, even those who had once supported Dr. Macek in his politics, headed these pogrom courts. Among the criminal acts considered to be punishable by death were: high treason and any offense against national honor. These two laws did not specify the crimes in detail, and they were misused by the authorities and applied to minor infractions common to everyday life, and which in other countries would be punishable by reprimand or minor fines.

Other criminal acts were also punishable by death, such as: any kind of disapproval of or opposition to the state, by word, deed or mimicry, which cannot be found even in Hitler's or Stalin's murderous decrees. Furthermore,

any dislike expressed about Croatia or its wartime allies (Germany, Italy or Japan); failure to report changes of address within three days; concealment or withholding of foodstuffs; failure to report the possession of gold or silver coins, foreign currency or certificates of value; any offense against a representative of public authority; listening to the BBC in London and having any kind of ties with Serbia. This meant that the Law on Criminal Acts comprised any minor infraction which any citizen was apt to commit any day, even the most obedient among them, and for which he was liable to a death sentence. But even if a person did not commit any of the infractions mentioned above, but was reported to have done so by any of the officials of the state or by religious dignitaries, he was nevertheless considered to be guilty. This meant that the law was a mere facade and that the Serbs and Jews were condemned to destruction in any event without hope of help from the Church of Archbishop Stepinac, which had identified itself with the State and because of which the shepherds of the soul were swimming in blood and besmirching their church robes.

The only salvation lay in the Protestant-Evangelical Church, which had 70,000 members among the local Germans in Croatia. But any Serb who joined that church to save his head, and Jews were forbidden even to do that, were later killed by the officials of the state, without intervention by the Croat Catholic Church. Moreover, this same Church obtained a decree from the State, forbidding other religions to accept Serbs as members, naturally exempting the Catholic Church. This caused the head of the Protestant-Evangelical Church of Croatia, Dr. Filip Popa (Popp), to protest most energetically "against this law which forbade the Serbs of Orthodox religion to convert voluntarily to Protestantism."*

* This protest, published in No. 1640/41 on November 1941, brought these two churches into conflict.

This protest on the part of the Protestant Church against the non-Christian activities of the Croat Catholic Church was followed by a protest against the State and against the Church by the Governor of the Vukovar District, a German by the name of Dr. Jacob Elikier. But Hitler's Envoy to Zagreb, Dr. Sigfried Kasche, intervened and informed the Yugoslav Germans (Volksdeutscher) "not to protest, because the Nazis knew what they were doing." "What the Nazis knew" was: let the Croats carry out the pogrom, i.e., let this vicious minority destroy the Serbs as well as the Jews in Srem, and we will then be able to move in more easily, destroy them, and the rich province of Srem will be open for German colonists, because this way would conform better to international law and the Hague Conventions.*

* While the Croats believed that they were purging Srem of Serbs and Jews and were preparing it to become their own granary, the local Germans (Volksdeutscher) did not hide the fact that this was their promised land and that it belonged to no one else.

This is how even the last hope was eliminated for preventing the destruction and murderous crimes by the Ustashi in Srem, and from November 1941 to November 1942, the Volksdeutscher dropped their interference. The three different Courts, therefore, took over this peaceful and rich Serbian region. They rode over it like the horses of the Apocalypse, leaving destruction and death in their wake. Among the members of the Ustashi police, who accused all

the prominent Serbs and those who refused to be converted (after taking away all their possessions), were people such as: Juca Rukavina, Branimir Djikovica, Otmar Silda, Eugene Djurica, Stjepan Blazekovic, Nikola Baranovic, Antun Odjenovic, Bozo Ponjevic, Marko-Mesic, Antun Sumevic, Nikola Grubisic, Josip Balezic, Antun Bauer, William Hodina, etc. ... The prominent judges were the infamous terrorists: Victor Tomic, Dr. Ivan Vidnevic,* Ante Vikeria, Dr. Djura Vujica, Petar Gvozdic, Antun Matkovic, Dr. Branko Susic, Gustav Eerber, father and son, Anton Ilika, Andrija Krzmanovic, Ivekovic, Tomljenovic, Ferda Knez, Zdravko Jezic, Franja Brandl, Karl Helbih, Mata Ciprijanovic, Antun Bauer, etc. The public prosecutors and judges of the pogrom were Croats and Nazis in Srem, but the Croat terrorists were in the majority, while the Nazi Volksdeutscher were in the minority. There were also state officials, and the shepherds of the soul of the Croat Catholic Church, together with former Yugoslav judges, lawyers—one-time human beings who had become dreaded murderers.

* A decree according to which this former Yugoslav Judge was appointed in, that office exists. The decree was passed by Dr. Puk, Minister of Justice, No. 3663/41 of June 24, 1941.

This terrorist juridical minority in Srem began its work in Ruma, Stara Pazova, Vukovar, Mitrovica, Irig, ravaging all the towns and villages and spreading distress and terror throughout Srem, which had lost its rights. Trials before the Circuit Courts and the Emergency Courts lasted approximately two hours with fifty people being tried at the one time, without previous written accusation; and without counsel with the execution taking effect immediately after the trial. The first trial held in this manner was in Ruma on August 10, 1941, it prosecuted 109 persons and lasted only three hours. Of these 101 were sentenced to death and 8 condemned to imprisonment in camps, where death was even worse. These trial procedures set the example for all the rest of the trials which were held at that time and determined the fate of the miserable tortured people, among whom 21,597 were sent to death by the Croat-Nazi Emergency Court in Srem.*

* Among the bones dug up in Srem, which were buried in common graves, there were 22,000 skeletons, of which: 14,500 men, 3,200 women, 1,200 old men and 1,100 children, mostly from two to three years old.

After each execution taking place directly after the trial, public notices were posted, listing the names of those who were killed, thus inspiring fear in the very bones of those who still remained and forcing them to resort to the un-Christian act of forced conversion. These lists always carried the names of from 50 to 100 people, but in the common graves, dug by the sentenced individuals themselves, the number of people thrown into them exceeded the number of the people listed, since all those who died without trial and under torture in the camps were also included.*

*In the book called *Statements on Crimes committed by the invaders and their aides in Vojvodina*, Vol. 2, Srem. Pam. I, Novi Sad, 1946, from 1941-1944, it is said that there were always about 10% more skeletons found in the open graves than shown on the lists.

Apart from the extermination by means of pogrom courts, murders were also committed in homes and in prisons. Five thousand Jews and about 15,000 Serbs shared this fate and were thrown into mass graves or into the Sava and Drava

rivers, and sometimes in the Danube. In a single grave in Mitrovica, once called Sirmium, 2,800 victims, Serbs and Jews, were cast in as slaughtered hostages. The percentage of the people murdered at the beginning was ten Serbs or Jews for one Croat, according to Mussolini's method, but later this was changed to one hundred to one, according to Hitler's vindictive method. See Law of October 2, 1941, published in *Narodne Novine*. This, however, was not the end of it, and a decree was passed on Concentration Camps, affecting all the members of families of those who were absent, because the latter might be hiding in the woods, and according to this law members of the family were killed as substitutes, or because they had refused to be converted when asked to do so.

Hatred and sadism in the form of various tortures were prevalent and cannot be compared with atrocities committed even in the darkest medieval times. The means of torture were the following: red hot needles forced under the finger nails; red hot irons placed between the fingers and the toes; whipping by chains; plucking out eyes, mutilating various parts of the body; placing salt in open wounds; tightening chains around the forehead until the eyes popped out and the skull was fractured; The well-known Serb, Dr. Nikola Tomic, died in this manner. placing a person into a wire enclosure, called hedgehog;* confinement to rooms filled by blood to the ankles, etc.

The well-known Croat, Dr. Oton Gavranic died in one of those satanical contraptions. He was a lawyer who had dared raise his voice against the PavelicStepinac slavery. This took place in the summer of 1941, at the same time when the last descendant of the Croat Ban and Poet, Dr. Zelimir Mazuranic, committed suicide, because he could "not live to see this shame."

All these dreadful means of destroying people made it very difficult and almost impossible to escape from any of these camps, except by sheer miracle or cunning ruse.* The number of those who escaped reached a few hundred among the 350,000 who were mercilessly butchered in Croatian camps alone.

Soviet statistics show that about 5% of the people placed in Stalin's camps were able to save themselves, which means more than from the Catholic Ustashi camps.

Many thousands of innocent people, mostly members of families of those who were accused and absent, were killed on the way from their homes to the camps. Thus, about 200 women suspects, together with their children, were sent from Gradina in Srem to the camp in Jasenovac. However, they never reached the camp as they were murdered on the way, and the graves were ploughed over so that the burial place could not be found. A second instance was a group of 319 women and children who were taken from Jamena and never reached the camp; they were also butchered on the way, but about eleven escaped. The heir to the old Croat aristocratic house, Baron Turkovic, Major of the Croat Domobran Guard, arrested 335 women and children in Divos and Calmanci, because their men were absent or had escaped from their homes. These women were sent to Jasenovac, but were all murdered before they reached the camp, where they would have been killed anyway. From this group fourteen women are still alive, who saved themselves miraculously by running into the woods. Cases like this could be enumerated indefinitely, although Srem was limited before the pogrom to 465,000 souls of which there were 250,000 Serbs, 110,000 Germans and Hungarians, and about 100,000 Croats and 5,000 Jews. All those, who however had reached Jasenovac, found at its head a Catholic

priest—Frankovite monk, and Colonel of the Ustashi State, Fra, Vjekoslav Filipovic-Majstorovic, or Fra-Demon,* who with many of his colleagues had blood up to their elbows. This picture of slavery illustrated by these criminal acts committed by the Independent State of Croatia and the insane Catholic Ustashi and their church, cannot be found in any other system in the world, be it Nazi, Fascist, Bolshevik or savage.

See V, Novak, *op. cit.* pp. 645-651, 718, 777, 682, 861, 871 for information on gs Archbishop Stepinac's priest and other priests' with him, as well as the camp of jasenovac.

While the Yugoslav Nazis of German descent (Volksdeutscher) were afraid of uncertainties and of the future, the Croat Ustashi and Catholic clergy were not thinking of the future, because their hatred was stronger than fear or reason. They destroyed anything that was Serb or Jewish without mercy, i.e. if they could not lay hands on it for themselves. After destroying property, they destroyed lives, and with them churches and temples, and all cultural and educational institutions and monuments, * even Christian monasteries and Saints, They threw bombs into homes killing everyone in them. They threw bombs into churches and temples destroying everything. They butchered civilians, women and children, which was not always done even by the Nazis or Communists. This finally provoked another wave of revolt among the Nazis themselves. The point was reached, where the Germans had to give an ultimatum to the Croats under threat of armed force.

* The Hague Conventions passed articles 46, 50, 52, 56 just for those very crimes mentioned above, which proceeded according to a planned program during the entire time of the Ustashi Government. The Germans were the first to think about the violation of those articles and, afraid for themselves, tried to shake off the blame, but unfortunately for them too late.

Thus the Ustashi-Nazi condominium in Srem ended in September 1942, and the Germans took over the administration of this Serbian region from the Croats.* They kept the Emergency Courts and all other Nazi laws, but without forced conversion, without extermination by pogrom, without bombs and axes, without murdering women and children, as if they all of a sudden began thinking of the consequences of genocide and the Hague Conventions. Serbs were tried (there were no more Jews left) in cases where they had any connection with the underground, but the Germans also cut off the heads of many Ustashi murderers and leaders of the pogrom, and among them the chief of the Ustashi shepherds of the soul and Stepinac's priest, Mata Gavranovic. They were too much even for the German-Nazis, and were killed because of the crimes they had committed.

When the Croat management ceased in Srem in September 1941, and the Germans came instead, there was not a single Serbian Church or Jewish temple, not a single cemetery that had not been destroyed or demolished, not a single home that had not been burned, there remained not a single family which was not in mourning.

The rivalry in the performance of crimes between the true German Nazis and their Croat bastards, in that flat and fertile region of Srem, came to an end after 16 months with the result that the bastards were fiercer and more bloodthirsty than their parents and teachers.

"CARITAS" AND THE CATHOLICIZATION OF THE SERBIAN ORTHODOX AND MOSLEM CHILDREN

The Ustashi, in the fury of their extermination program, were at first ignorant of the fact that there existed in the Serbian Orthodox population an element easily capable of being converted to Catholicism—the Serbian children whose parents had been killed during the punishment raids or in the concentration camps. These were the "chicks" to whom Brother Dionis Juricev, the Head of the Religious Department, had referred to while boasting of machine-gunning them along with the adults, and whose frail bodies were used to feed the fires of the crematory ovens of Jasenovac: At length, however, Pavelic's government, in agreement with the ecclesiastical authorities, felt that it would be more advantageous to stop the "massacre of the innocent" and incorporate them in the Catholic Croatian population, after indoctrinating them with an appropriate education. A benevolent society, called "Caritas," with His Grace Stepinac as President, took charge of this affair, which turned out to be at the same time, both edifying and patriotic, and the Sisters themselves took part in rounding them up.

"This was a very astute calculation, for the war being finished, many children had been unable to find the members of the family who had escaped, and also because many of them had been too young when taken into 'Caritas' to remember either their origin, their village, or even their names." Herve Lauriere, *op. cit.*, p. 157.

Even today one can read notices, such as the following, which appeared in the Yugoslav paper, *Politika*, under the heading, "Searching for relatives":

"My whole family was imprisoned in camp at Stara Gradiska. We were separated from our parents and sent off on a transport train. Before leaving, a man told me to bring my little sister, who was only three, to the office. She was taken away by two nuns and I never saw her again. If anyone can give me information please write to Vaso Radovanovic, architect, Gaglin." (*Politika*, April 16, 1957).

A farmer, Stojan Marjanovic (6 Narodne Revolucije, at Curug) wrote:

"During the war I was a prisoner, I left my wife and little boy in the village of Rogolji, district of Bosanska Gradiska. Both were taken to a concentration camp, first at Sisak, and then Jasenovac. At the time my son was four and was separated from his mother in the camp. I learned that someone from Sremska Mitrovica adopted him. The child probably does not remember his name. The only way he can be recognized is by a scar from a burn on his neck... ." (*Politika*, December 8, 1956).

"A mother, Stana Dzakula, is searching for her son, born August 8, 1930, in the village of Derezi. In 1942 he was taken with a group of children to the Ustashi concentration camp at Stara Gradiska. Since that time all trace of him has been lost. The child has a birth mark under his left eye." (*Politika*, February 24, 1958).

"The Ustashi took Madame Stana Kukavica, district of Bosanska Dubica, of Skljucani to the concentration camp at Stara Gradiska with her sons Milan,

age 14, and Bosko, age 12. The children were separated from their mother and since then she has lost all trace of them. Milan had six toes on one of his feet." (*Politika*, December 19, 1957).

From Milan Kevic (42 Nemanjina, Belgrade) was this notice:

"In June, 1942, the Ustashi took my mother (born at Milosevo Brdo, district of Bosanska Gradiska) to the concentration camp at Jasenovac with my four sisters: Milka (22), Jovanka (18), Stanojka (5), and Draginja (114). My brother Dusan and I were sent to the concentration camp at Jastrabarsko, where we were liberated—. We have never had news of our mother and sisters." (*Politika*, April 16, 1957).

From Milka Letic of Glina: "In July, 1942, the Ustashi imprisoned me with my small daughter of eight and my son, Miodrag, of four, in the camp of Velika Gradiska. A few days afterward an Ustashi took away my son with Marko Badric's daughter from Glina, saying that he was adopting them. Soon after, I was sent to hard labor in Germany and my daughter remained in the camp. After the war I joined my daughter but my son is nowhere to be found." (*Politika*, April 16, 1957).

Countless young boys and girls are now living as good Catholics in total ignorance of their past and their origin. If, as the Croatian episcopacy has testified, the "Caritas" had no other aim but to save children, why were these led away under such conditions without any care taken of their identity so that they could not find their families later on? This question was raised by Omer Kajmakovic, the former Muslim deputy from Bosnia: "We Muslims also have to settle accounts with His Grace Stepinac. May I ask: what became of the hundreds of Muslim children whose parents perished in western Bosnia? The Catholic Sisters picked up about 350 Muslim children and put them in the convents. I therefore ask His Grace Stepinac, who has been blessed by Pope Pius XII, where at present, are the young boys who belong to the Islamic religion and who used to turn toward Mecca and Medina while saying the prayers of the Koran? In what seminaries, what convents or congregations can these boys be found, some of whom are now wearing the robes of theological students?" Omer Kajmakovic, "Vatican," *Voice of Canadian Serbs*, January 29, 1958.

It was quite true. Numbers of the Serbian Orthodox and Muslim children were taken abroad by the Ustashi and the Croatian clergy. The greater part were registered in the theological faculties in Italy, Argentina, Australia and the United States. The Croatian Franciscans, after the debacle, took fourteen boys with them to the U.S.A., and they can now be found in St. Joseph's seminary, Westmont, Illinois. Nearly all these youths bear their Serbian baptismal names, and Serbian circles in the U.S.A. think that these children were kidnapped by the Ustashi and by Croatian priests.

Mrs. Manda Mrksic, of Aliquippa, Pennsylvania, sent a letter to the Croatian Franciscans (4851 Drexell Blvd., Chicago, Ill.) asking them to give her detailed information concerning the seminarists for which material aid is requested, and also the names of the parents and dates of birth. However, she has never received any reply to these specific questions.

A printed propaganda brochure in Rome (1951), entitled, "*His Grace Aloysius Stepinac*", maintains the same silence on this subject. It pays tribute to the activities of the "Caritas" while attempting the incredible feat of concealing its collaboration with the Ustashi. If it were praiseworthy to save the Serbian children (even for the purpose of converting them), the first duty would have been to refuse any moral help to those who made orphans of them.

THE COLLABORATION OF HIS GRACE STEPINAC

With rare impudence, an effort was made to prove that the Archbishop of Zagreb rose up against the crimes committed under the Pavelic regime. But it suffices to check the dates in order to establish the facts.

It was only at the end of 1943, when Cardinal Spellman informed the Holy See that the Nazi's were losing the war, that His Grace Stepinac tried, in certain ways, to guarantee a future which had already been compromised by the Ustashi hunting slate that had listed thousands of Serbian Orthodox and Jewish martyrs; thousands of Muslims, and even a few thousand Catholics who had dared rise up in protest against the terror and the crimes.

His Grace Stepinac formulated his first criticism, in the Cathedral of Zagreb in 1943, against the German practice of collective punishment in reprisal for acts of sabotage by the resistance forces after Italy's capitulation, when the debacle of the Axis powers was already foreseen. He was criticized for his discourse by the Nazi paper, *Volkischer Beobachter*, and by the Ustashi, *Hrvatski Narod*.

At this time, His Grace Stepinac was also influenced by an event which affected his family. His own brother, accused of having helped the partisans of Tito, was shot down by the Ustashi. Although the Archbishop was not on good terms with the deceased, His Grace was profoundly shocked and protested violently against what his Ustashi friends had done. Moreover, it is possible that the radio of the partisans jumped at the occasion to spread their propaganda to the best advantage, in rallying the Croatian Catholics to the cause of the resistance.

The above-mentioned apologetic brochure published the text of a letter that His Grace Stepinac had written in 1943 to someone whose name is not known, and in which he exposed the pretended appeals to Pavelic and the Ustashi authorities in favor of certain "individuals" or "communities." Such references are indeed vague.

Therefore, on reading this letter, one is bewildered on coming across such a paragraph as: "No sensible person could possibly say that the Archbishop of Zagreb, representing the Church, went back on his principles, or failed to say publicly, or not to say, all that was on his mind." *Mgr. Aloysius Stepinac* (Rome: Societa Graphica Romana, 1951), p. 6.

To us, it seems that "no sensible person" could ever forget all the praises sung, all the Te Deums and superlative words of approval, all the boundless promises of loyalty to the bloodthirsty Poglavnik.

It is true that further on in this letter, which one would prefer to consider apocryphal, was the following corrective phrase which saves the honor of the pretended signer of this missive: "Whosoever understands the significance of all the events and circumstances also knows that it meant risking one's life to acknowledge them openly." *Op. cit.*, p. 6.

The person who wrote these lines, whoever it was, attempted to convince his readers that His Grace Stepinac had risked his life trying to defend the Serbs and Jews in other ways than by the tactful "interventions," which he prided himself on or which are credited to him. His excuse was already very slim. But who would have dared defy the first prelate of Croatia, President of the Catholic Action with all of its affiliations, and who controlled a powerful press, and was also a noted member of the Diet, surrounded during the sessions by the Bishop and nine other ecclesiastics? Such an eventuality was absurdly impossible.

Moreover, His Grace Stepinac was not in the least intimidated in March 1945 when he addressed Casertano, the Italian Minister at Zagreb, in the following terms:

"I protest, from the bottom of my heart, against the ignominious acts committed by the Italian troops to the populations in the districts of Krasic, Vivodina and Vrhovac, where several villages were destroyed by fire."

It can be seen that the Archbishop of Zagreb was not lacking in apostolic courage on this occasion, to defend the Catholic populations, but they were the only ones, and he was not afraid of taking it out on Fascist Italy, paramount to Pavelic's puppet state. Furthermore, if His Grace Stepinac had had the slightest intention of making known, abroad at least, "what was on his mind" in regard to the crimes of the executioners before which his episcopacy had bowed, as has been shown, there were many ways for him to do so. He made use of one way, however, but with an entirely different intention, when he sent a member of his intimate circle, Rev. Augustin Juretic, councillor of the episcopal conferences and member of the commission for the conversion of the Serbian Orthodox, on a special mission to Fribourg, in Switzerland. His Grace Stepinac sent a report on the Ustashi atrocities by his emissary. These were copious reports (the subject matter was far from limited), illustrated with frightful pictures, in which the two chums ascribed to the Chetniks and Partisans all the atrocities committed by the Ustashi against the Serbian people and representing them as the crimes against the "Croatian people." All this macabre documentation was communicated by Juretic to the foreign press and even sent to Roosevelt and Churchill. It would be superfluous to add that the sojourn of the special envoy was made at the expense of the Zagreb government.

Stepinac, not being satisfied only with his visits to Rome *a limine*, in order to uphold Pavelic's regime, sent a memorandum, on May 18, 1943, to Pope Pius XII in which he stressed the merits of the Ustashi government concerning the plan of the massive conversions of the Orthodox to Catholicism in an effort to strengthen the foundations of the Catholic Church. Furthermore, he emphasized the fact that the loss of the Croatian satellite state would also mean the loss of new members, that is, the newly converted Catholics,

"improvised Catholics," as the French author, Jean Hussard, calls them.

In this memorandum he wrote:

The schism in the Orient, while swelling the ranks of the Catholics, might mean aiming toward an obscure goal. The victory of pan-Serb ideology would mean the destruction of Catholicism in the northwest region of the Balkans, that is in the Croatian state. Of this there is not the slightest doubt. Moreover, it is evident that such a fatal event would have consequences beyond the Croatian frontier. The waves of an Orthodox and Byzantine offensive would spread to the Italian coastline, whereas, for the time being, they break only against the advanced fortress of Croatia (antemurale christianitatis) . Thanks to the mission of the Croatian clergy, and above all, the Franciscans, foundations for a renovated Catholicism in Bulgaria have been laid, the remainder of those faithful to our cult in Albania of Skenderbeg have been saved. The destruction of a Catholic nation in the Balkans would affect various settlements dispersed in the agitated Orthodox and Islamic Balkans.

Holy Father, all humanity, among which are thousands with bleeding wounds, is turning to Thee, whose very name signifies the celestial peace so needed by the suffering of mankind. In bringing peace to the world, Holy Father, turn toward the Croatian people who have always remained loyal to Christ and to Thee. The young Croatian state, born under more difficult and terrible conditions than any state for the past centuries, and struggling desperately for its own survival, has given proof on every occasion of its will to remain loyal to its Catholic traditions and to assure a brighter and better future for the Catholic Church in this part of the world. On the other hand, thousands of followers and Croatian priests would willingly sacrifice their own lives rather than risk the loss or weakening of the state. The 240,000 of those converted from Serbian Orthodox to Catholicism would not be the only loss, but also the entire Catholic population of this region, with all the churches and monasteries.

If the Lord does not decide otherwise, the progress of Catholicism will remain closely and naturally bound to the prosperity of the Croatian state. Their salvation is mutual. Holy Father, we sincerely believe in mercy and in the divine justice of which you are the instrument. I commend our Independent Croatian state to thy paternal care and to thy prayers, confident that in so doing I am, at the same time upholding the holy religion in my state and in the Balkans."Novak, *Magnum Crimen*, pp. 788-789.

It is unnecessary to make any analysis of this letter, which speaks for itself. However, it should be pointed out that Stepinac confesses that 240,000 Serbs had been converted to Catholicism and that he considered the Ustashi state a springboard for an offensive and for the expansion of Catholicism and Croatianism in the Balkans.

Concerning this letter the *Osservatore Romano* published the following

statement on October 10, 1946:

In a session of the Zagreb trial on October 2nd the Public Prosecutor produced against Archbishop Stepinac the Croat translation of a letter that the Archbishop is alleged to have sent to the Holy See under the date of May 18th, 1943.

We are authorized to declare that, after an investigation in the archives of the Papal Secretariate of state, only a few papers were discovered bearing the date of May 18th, 1943, the contents of which correspond only in part to the summary given out by the Public a Prosecutor.

Moreover, in contrast with all the letters sent by the Archbishop to the Holy See, the alleged document—to which no reference was ever made thereafter—is typewritten on paper without a printed letter-head; it is written in a form not employed in correspondence with the Holy See; it is without the Archbishop's seal; and, what is a more significant, it is without signature."Michael Derrick, *Tito and the Catholic Church* (London, 1953), p. 27.

This clarification from the Vatican, or rather its denial that a letter with such contents existed, did not escape criticism, for the representative of the Ustashi government at Rome, Erwein Lobkowicz, in his report to the Minister of Foreign Affairs on June 10th, 1948, had referred to His Grace Stepinac's letter. In this report he recalled, at the same time, that Stepinac's visited Mgr. Marcone, legate of the Pope at Zagreb, and had also made a a visit to Rome. And it was Marcone who had confided that "His Grace Stepinac had emphatically informed the Vatican about Croatia." According to Stepinac it appears that the Vatican looked more and more favorably on Croatia and that Stepinac had been advised to maintain a cordial relationship with Croatian officials.

Lobkowicz emphasized in his report that:

The Vatican had been delighted with the visit of His Grace Stepinac, who also had been most satisfied with the welcome he had received. According to his own statement, and also from various sources, it seems that the Archbishop had given the Vatican a clear account of the situation in Croatia. He had hinted that he did not entirely approve of all that was going on, but had remained reticent in order to give a more favorable impression of Croatia. The Archbishop had put great stress on the laws regulating abortions, which had been favorably recognized by the Vatican. Thus it was that the Archbishop, on the basis of these laws, partially justified the treatment of the Jews who, in our country, had been the most fervent partisans and who had practiced, very frequently, crimes of this sort, which meant, of course, abortions. *

Erwein Lobkowicz: Report to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Zagreb, June 10, 1948. See photocopy supplement of *Tajni Dohumenti*. It is eaay to understand. why, under these conditions, His Grace Stepinac, at the time of his trial in 1945, preferred not to mention his behavior during the bloody years of the Ustashi regime. How could he have possibly

defended himself against so many overwhelming proofs? He therefore considered it more convenient to say: "I can answer to all accusations heaped upon me that I have a perfectly clear conscience."

One might conclude that his attitude toward the Ustashi could be naturally explained by the respect he felt he owed to the established government, according to the adage of "giving unto Caesar what belongs to Caesar." He therefore refused the judges' right to demand that he give an account of himself. And thus he got off with a bow. These proceedings were played up in the Catholic press almost everywhere, but, above all, far away from the scene where the drama had been enacted during a period of four years, and far from the witnesses who had closely followed all the various phases. The greater the distance, the more easily public opinion could be misled. Thus could be read, among many others, an article by P. Alessandrini, editor of *Osservatore Romano*, the official organ of the Holy See, which emphasized the fact that the Metropolitan of Croatia, His Grace Stepinac, had had only "protocol contacts" with the authorities, "in order to defend the Catholic faith and all his flock during the tragic hours." Quoted in *Le Monde*, July 8, 1953.

To the editor of this copious paper, all the speeches overflowing with praise for the Poglavnik, all the sermons where he was seen veiled in incense like a saint, all the delirious articles published by the clerical press, all the banquets where the Ustashi and the ecclesiastics gathered together like brothers and all the participation by priests in the administration and in the police force, while preaching in favor of the massacre of the Serbs or marching at the head of the slaughterers—all these acts were considered "protocol contacts." And what was the motive for these "contacts"? Simply "to defend the Catholic faith," which no one ever thought of attacking? Far from it! This faith had been imposed by force, torture, terror and the assassination of hundreds of thousands of unfortunate victims. These victims were the ones, and for them alone were the "hours" really "tragic."

However, if the Archbishop of Zagreb, at the moment of his trial, realized that he was criticized for his cautious silence concerning all that went on, he had not previously been conscious of this fact. In the autumn of 1948, for instance, he had not disdained pleading *pro domo suo* (for his house), before a docile audience. According to instructions from Rome, public prayers for peace were being said at Zagreb, and on October 31, the day consecrated to Christ-the-King, His Grace Stepinac, after having led the procession, gave a sermon containing the following passages:

This procession gives me the opportunity of speaking publicly to the innumerable councillors that they may advise the representatives of the Catholic Church to take the necessary steps so that the responsibility for the evils that have been or are still being committed, are not blamed upon the Church.

There are people who accuse us of not rising up in time, or not have taken efficacious action against the crimes committed in the different regions of our country. Our reply is that we are not, and do not wish to be the political instrument of anyone, no matter who, an instrument that adjusts itself to all momentary demands and needs of political persons

or political parties. In public life we have always emphasized the principles of the eternal and divine law. We cannot sound the alarm or physically force any person, whoever he may be, to respect the divine laws, for every man is endowed with his own free will, and alone is responsible for his acts. It is for this reason that we cannot be held responsible for some of the daredevil fanatics in the ecclesiastical ranks." Viktor Novak, *op. cit*, p. 1028.

It is not known whether the "innumerable councillors," here and there, were convinced by this casuistry, but we find it completely absurd. Condemning atrocious crimes which took place before his very eyes, and under a religious pretext, seemed to the Archbishop like serving as a "political instrument." From his standpoint, eternal justice, Christian charity, moral and humanistic feelings were not involved. Consequently, he was unable to sound the alarm. And yet "everyone is responsible for his own acts." Like Pontius Pilate, in the days of old, he refused to do anything about it.

But the most incredible of all was his allusion to the priests and the Franciscan slaughterers who preached in favor of the massacres, and whom he called "dare-devil fanatics." This was the expression His Grace had used in alluding to them, and he considered that their acts did not, in the least, involve the responsibility of the first prelate of Croatia.

It was quite clear that the Archbishop of Zagreb, while trying to justify his attitude, acknowledged the fact that he had never "sounded the alarm" and that he never openly condemned the crimes.

The speech of October 31, 1943, was the first and last, actually the only one, which had ever mentioned the tragedy of the Serbs and Jews in his Independent State of Croatia. He states in it "that the church does not agree with the injustices committed against the Jews and the Serbs," regardless of the fact that those were not just "mere injustices," but acts of genocide, plunder, torture, extermination by means of sword and fire, and in a single word, a pogrom organized by the state and perpetrated by the state and by the Church. While there is not a single word more about the Jews, he spoke further about the Serbs, giving some sort of a story in connection with them, by means of which he actually proved his anti-Christian hatred and incomprehensible lethargy toward the dreadful bloodshed which took place before his eyes, in which children and women, the most innocent among them, suffered most. He went on looking at those terrors of bloodshed for over two years, without a word of reproof, and only in 1943, thirty-one months later, he explained that the reason he did not do anything about it was because he did not want to become "anybody's political instrument." What cynicism from a High Ecclesiastic Prelate! Whose "political" instrument would he have been if he had raised his voice against the slaughter of the innocent?

The story referred to above, undignified for the highest ranking Prelate of Croatia and future Cardinal, and which could be only applied to an Ustashi lord and protector, which name was actually given him in the Croat Newspapers, i.e., the First Lord of the Kingdom (of Ante Pavelic, Hitler and Mussolini) , goes on like this:

A certain writer tells that some peasant was bringing every day to the baker in town five pounds of butter for five pounds of bread. On a certain day the baker found out that the peasant had brought him only four and a half pounds of butter, and asked him for an explanation the next time he came. The peasant answered him in a dignified manner: "It is not my fault, dear friend. At home I have only the scales but not the weights. Therefore, each time I weigh the butter, I place your bread on one side and my butter on the other side, and bring as much butter as the bread weighs." After finishing his story, Stepinac said: "The story of the peasant and the baker applies to you." The motto or the gist of the story should be that Stepinac was accusing the Serbs for being murdered, because according to his reasoning the peasant represents Croatia and the baker represents Serbia. The story implies that the Croats were only defending themselves and that this "defense," blessed by Stepinac and the Ustashi, will last as long as they do not stifle the last breath out of the schismatic Serb living on Pavelic's criminal territory of Croatia—this monstrous creation of Hitler and Mussolini—and blessed by Pope Pius XII, to the profound regret of the great French Catholic prelate, Cardinal Tisserant.

This provocative story which Stepinac has told us differs only in form from the stories of his priests, according to whom the sins of all those who have killed the Serbs and Jews are absolved. Stepinac's story inspired one of the priests and Croat writer, Dr. Milan Dobrovoljac, who left the Catholic Church and became converted to the Old Catholic religion, to write a tragic and sad poem about Stepinac and his story, about the Holy Altar, his benedictions of the Ustashi pogrom, and his protection of all kinds of crimes, committed by his shepherds of the soul in homes, villages, cities, camps. This poem is long but very appropriate, and the crimes in it are depicted in their full macabre terror, which are proved to be true, because the author, former national deputy of Croatia, and Kingdom of Yugoslavia, Stepinac's once-upon-a-time personal friend and Catholic priest,* was their witness.

Dr. Milan Dobrovoljac Psunjski, *Croats in the Light of Historical Truth* (Belgrade, 1944), pp. 288-235. The above-mentioned poem was written by Dobrovoljac after Stepinac's speech in 1948, and thus unmasked Stepinac for the first time and showed him to the people for what he was.

This was a flagrant betrayal of his incense-bearers, such as Mr. Alessandrini, who wrote in his article cited above: "His Grace Stepinac spoke lucidly and firmly against all the arbitrary activities, all the violence, and Ustashi abuses." *Le Monde*, July 3, 1953.

In reality, when this pretended "martyr of calumny" spoke "lucidly and firmly," it was only to give all the support he could to his precious regime. And the turn of events, from day to day, foretold the end of this regime, which only strengthened his ardor. In June 1944, during a religious ceremony at Marija Bistrica (the Croatian Lourdes), he declared that the Ustashi state would be saved by the intercession of the Holy Virgin. Shortly afterward, on July 7th, he said in his sermon: "The Croatian people are shedding their blood for the state and they will preserve and save the state. Any act directed against the people and Croatian independence should never wipe out individual courage. On the contrary, we should each contribute an ever-

increasing strength in building and defending the state." Fiorello Cavalli, II processo dell' arcivescovo di Zagabria, Roma. *La Civiltà Cattolica*, p. 77.

Hrvatski Narod, the Ustashi Headquarters' official organ, published this sermon on the first page, accompanied by a picture of the Archbishop standing beside the Poglavnik. (It was taken when the Te Deum was being sung at the opening session of the Diet). His Grace Stepinaac was honored by the title of "First Lord of the Kingdom." He was compared with the prelates who led the procession of Croatian kings during the middle ages. On this occasion it was none other than Pavelic who was the king.

There were enthusiastic commentaries such as the following: "Thus the Catholic Church, in Croatia, through the words of its prelate, in the name of human and divine rights, has taken a new place in the heroic and tragic struggle of the Croatian people for independent statehood. . . . Although this was not the first time that His Grace Stepinac, as well as the Archbishop of Sarajevo, the Bishop of Split and other bishops had taken the same position, this attitude of His Grace Stepinac was of special significance, because it was adopted at a time when the war was entering on its final and critical phase." *Hrvatski Narod* (Zagreb), July 28, 1944.

The sermon was broadcast over the radio, carried by the Catholic and Ustashi press and by the Nazi agency, DNB.

The BBC, in London, replied in these terms:

The Germans, alone, and their servants maintain that the Allies committed atrocities. Only the Ustashi can affirm that the Croatian people, under their regime, defended liberty and independence. The agency of the Hitlerian press ascribed to Archbishop Stepinac such a violent declaration that it was hoped that he would eventually contradict it. By refusing to do so, it will be obvious that Archbishop Stepinac had quite publicly added his name to the list of German and Ustashi protectors. ... But, of course, there was no contradiction and today, in reading over the papers of the Vatican, asserting that the "First Lord of the Kingdom" had never been pro-Ustashi, one can hardly restrain a smile of irony.

THE CASE OF STEPINAC

The Archbishop of Zagreb must have been the prey of a deep inner struggle. This we should not underestimate, even while recalling to memory the protestation he made before the court: "My conscience is clear. I never betrayed my country."

Just what did His Grace Stepinac consider his country? Certainly not Yugoslavia! But exclusively Croatia. And why? Simply because the Croatians stem from the Roman Catholic faith, while Serbia, on the contrary, follows the Eastern Orthodox religion.

Yet the two peoples, federated now for thirty-five years, form only one state. To try and break its unity was, from a national Yugoslav point of view, like committing an act of high treason.

That was the unpardonable crime. If there is anyone who doubts he need only refer to the following data:

Even before the war the Archbishop of Zagreb had turned his palace into a refuge for the Separatists and the Ustashi.

As the newspaper *Hrvatski Narod* specified, he had upheld the terrorist, Zupancic, and violated the canonical texts and penal law.

On April 28, 1941, he had, by a pastoral letter to the clergy of his diocese, appealed to all the priests to rally around the Independent State of Croatia.

In the month of December of this same year he sent the Yugoslav workers, in Germany, a Christmas message exhorting them to continue work, persuading them that it was their duty.

He upheld the sinister Ante Pavelic who ordered the assassination of King Alexander and Louis Barthou.

On February 23, 1942, he bestowed his blessing on the Ustashi parliament, founded by this culprit.

It is also true that he made no effort to stop the atrocities his dear Croats were committing, by the massacre of hundreds of thousands of Serbs, causing them to perish in the concentration camps of Jasenovac, Jaski, Gradiska and other places of torture.

He had also approved the procedure of forcing conversions on the unfortunate Orthodox, who had no other alternative but abjure their faith.

Even after Germany had fallen, on March 24th, 1945, he issued a manifesto in favor of the Ustashi state.

At this period he offered refuge, in the Archbishopric, to the numerous political murderers hounded by the police.

A large part of the gold which had been shorn from the victims was found in the cellars of the churches and even cached beneath the altar of a Franciscan monastery.

The above facts suffice. Further details of the evidence of his guilt would be superfluous. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that in 1946, His Grace Stepinac found himself sentenced to sixteen years of hard labor. From article by Henry Benazet in *L'Aurore* (Paris), March 12, 1953.

Note: In spite of all the evils Sepinac was responsible for, a Croatian lady in Australia writes an article about him entitled, [Life And Actions of Blessed Aloysius Stepinac – As Clean As A Whistle.](#) I hope she finds this article.

In writing about the Stepinac trial, Mathew Spinka concludes:

It is still impossible to feel wholly confident in passing judgment on the merits of the trial. But the available information is sufficient to show clearly that the archbishop did collaborate with the Pavelic regime, although the procedure adopted by the court was not fair according to democratic standards. That, however, does not prove that Stepinac or his fellow defendants were not guilty, either wholly or in part, of the charges. In Robert J. Kerner, Ed., *Yugoslavia*, Berkeley, California, 1949, p. 259.

Catholic propaganda has insisted that Stepinac was put in prison for his anti-Communist activities. Without in any way defending Communist justice, the writer is obliged to state for the record and emphasize that Stepinac was really tried for his collaboration with Ustashi and Nazis during the war. It is also interesting to note that several high Orthodox churchmen were tried in Yugoslavia precisely for anti-Communist activities, and little or no protest has been heard from the West, and least of all from Catholic circles. Among high Orthodox churchmen who were so imprisoned are Josip (Bishop of Skoplje) , Nastic (Bishop of Sarajevo) , Irinej Ciric (Bishop of Novi Sad) Arsenije (Bishop of Montenegro) and Nekratije Krulj (Metropolitan of Sarajevo).

Referring to the independence and liberty that Pavelic brought to the Croatian people, French Cardinal Tisserant, during an interview with Nikola Rusinovic, the Ustashi representative at the Vatican, stated: "Your Fascist friends are not in the least interested in your independence and your liberty, nor in the existence of the Croatian state. I often listen to what their most important political leaders have to say." Official report (March 6, 1948) cited in *Tajni Dokumenti*, p. 135.

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