

THE POSITION OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN CROATIA 1945 - 1970

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Irreconcilable standpoints

After the end of World War Two, it was difficult for the Catholic Church to accept the new Yugoslav government simply because of its communist and atheistic ideology, which alone was unacceptable according to Church teachings. Furthermore, the Church leadership was familiar with the position of the ruling Communist Party of Yugoslavia (KPJ - *Komunistička partija Jugoslavije*) on the role of the Church in society. The Church was also aware that the KPJ was under the direct influence of the communist regime in the USSR, which had mercilessly clashed with religious communities from the very moment it came to power. Therefore, there developed a fear for the future of the Catholic Church and other churches. Even before the end of the war, when it was already clear that the KPJ-led Partisan forces would take power in the country, a Bishops' conference was held in Zagreb on 24 March 1945, which issued a pastoral condemning the conduct of the Partisan movement. In the pastoral, the bishops strongly protested the killing of Catholic priests and believers, “whose lives were taken away in unlawful trials based upon false accusations by haters of the Catholic Church.”¹

Meanwhile, among the ranks of the new government, in addition to the atheistic worldview and the influence of communist ideology from the USSR, a negative attitude developed towards all religious communities, in particular towards the Catholic Church because of its alleged negative role during World War Two. Namely, the communist leadership was convinced that the Catholic Church, and especially its leaders headed by Archbishop Alojzije Stepinac, wholeheartedly supported the pro-Nazi Ustaše and their policies. It also bothered the new regime that the Catholic Church was the only organization outside of its control, and with time the only oppositional stronghold when multiparty politics ceased to exist, a situation the communists could in no way accept.

Archbishop Stepinac and the rest of the Church leadership were convinced that the principle reason for the tense relations between the Catholic Church and the state was Josip Broz Tito's desire to separate the Church in Croatia

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¹ *Katolički list*, no. 96/1945, pp. 12-13, 93-95

from the Vatican; in other words, to create an independent Catholic Church in Croatia based on the model of the Orthodox Church in Serbia, and then place it under state influence.

Tactics of repression and dialogue

In accordance with the general attitude in their ranks, the representatives of the new government began some moves which antagonized Church-state relations. Already on 15 May 1945 Archbishop Stepinac's car was confiscated, which was subsequently returned, and on 17 May he was arrested for the first time.² He was imprisoned in the headquarters of the State Security Administration (UDBa - *Uprave državne bezbjednosti*) on Mlinarska Street in Zagreb, where soon thereafter Msgr. Svetozar Ritig – the president of the Commission for Religious Affairs, a Partisan, and a big defender of the Yugoslav idea – paid him a visit. However, the Archbishop immediately made it clear that he did not want to discuss political issues with Ritig.³

During Tito's visit to Zagreb, he summoned the representatives of Zagreb's archbishopric for a talk on 2 June 1945. On that occasion, Tito stated that he was not pleased with the conduct of the Catholic clergy during the war, while pointing out that he did not condemn the clergy in general. Emphasizing that the relationship between the Church and the state cannot be resolved by decree, he asked the Church to prepare a report on how the question of the Catholic Church in Croatia should be resolved. Afterwards he criticized the Holy See because of its alleged favoritism towards Italy, believing that the Church needed to be more national, i.e., he wanted "the Catholic Church in Croatia, now that we have the proper conditions, to have more independence." Declaring it to be the fundamental issue, and that all other issues were of secondary importance, it was already clear that Tito's main goal was to create an independent Croatian Catholic Church based on model of the Serbian Orthodox Church. Finally, Tito spoke about the creation of a union of South Slavs, emphasizing that in the union there would be more Orthodox believers than Catholics, and that relations between these religions needed to be in accordance with the idea of drawing Slavic peoples closer.

After Tito's visit, the representatives of the Zagreb clergy stood in defense of the Holy See, emphasizing that they supported the Slavic idea, but that Catholics in Croatia did not seek more independence from the Holy See than they already had. The clerical representatives spoke of the character of Archbishop Stepinac at that time, as well as his role during the war, expressing their hope that Tito would release him. They also warned of the behavior of the representatives of the new government towards the clergy and believers, especially in schools and convents.⁴

² Giuseppe Masucci, *Misija u Hrvatskoj*, ed. by Marijan Mikac (Madrid: Editorial Drina, 1967), p. 200.

³ Aleksa Benigar, *Alojzije Stepinac, hrvatski kardinal*, 2nd edition (Zagreb: Glas Koncila and Hrvatska franjevačka provincija sv. Ćirila i Metoda, 1993), p. 460.

⁴ Josip Broz Tito, *Govori i članci* (Zagreb: Naprijed, 1959), pp. 281-283; *Službeni vjesnik Zagrebačke nadbiskupije* (SVZN), no. 2, 1945.

As a result of this conversation, Archbishop Stepinac was freed the following day. The same day, Tito met with the Papal envoy, Abbot Ramir Marcone, and his secretary Giuseppe Masucci in the presence of the president of the Croatian government, Vladimir Bakarić. Marcone warned Tito of the incorrectness of his communist politics, denounced the attacks against the Holy See in the press, and concluded that the people were not pleased with the current atheistic policies. Tito tried to convince Marcone that in forty days complete peace and order would be restored, and that there would be absolute freedom of conscience.⁵

On 4 June 1945, Tito held a meeting with Archbishop Stepinac. On that occasion, Archbishop Stepinac said that he considered the talks between the government and bishops to have been useful, but noted that only the Holy See could make decisions concerning the Church. He proposed the creation of a concordat, or at least a *modus vivendi*, as in the former Czechoslovakia. Additionally, he defended the role of the Holy See during the war, and suggested to Tito that he meet with the leadership of the Croatian Peasant Party (*Hrvatska seljačka stranka*) as well as some followers of the Ustaša movement untainted by war crimes. Furthermore, he requested that Tito respect human lives whenever possible. During the talks, Tito asked for the Catholic Church's support on the question of Istria and border demarcation with Italy, to which Archbishop Stepinac responded that the Catholic Church was most responsible for Istria still being Croatian. Finally, the archbishop concluded that through good will from both sides all difficulties could be overcome.⁶

From everything that happened at that time, it is not clear why Tito first had Archbishop Stepinac arrested, and only later spoke with him. It is possible to conclude that through the arrest of the archbishop, Tito wanted to see the extent of his influence among the people and the Church, or to see if he could soften him up and then get him to cooperate on the issue of creating an independent Catholic Church in Croatia. This was a period when Tito had numerous problems with the Allies over the issue of Carinthia and the Julian March, as well as an international situation which brought into question the survival and stability of the Yugoslav state. In the context of these conditions, it was not advisable to antagonize domestic issues, and the imprisonment of Archbishop Stepinac had been a risky move that could have additionally worsened the situation. However, future developments show that Tito's settling of accounts with Archbishop Stepinac were merely delayed until a more opportune moment.

Protests of the Catholic Church to state authorities

Despite the meetings which were intended to calm the situation, relations between the Catholic Church and the new government progressively worsened. Because of this, Church officials were forced to frequently send memoranda to the government authorities. In these memoranda, they protested

⁵ Masucci, *Misija u Hrvatskoj*, p. 203.

⁶ Benigar, *Alojzije Stepinac*, pp. 468-469.

atheistic propaganda among the youth, work on Sundays and holidays, the removal of crosses from schools, the assignment of commissars in purely religious institutes and orphanages, the arrest of bishops and priests, the slander of bishops and priests in public meetings, and the appropriation of Church property.⁷ Moreover, they demanded unhindered religious instruction in schools, and protested against the designation of religious teachings as an elective in the lower grades of high school, as well as its complete elimination in the upper grades. There were also complaints about the inhumane attitude towards soldiers and civilians in internment camps, and requests that priests should be permitted to visit the prisoners in these camps.⁸ There followed memoranda regarding the new laws on education and religious upbringing, agricultural reforms, devastated Catholic cemeteries, and similar issues.

The tension between the Catholic Church and the state culminated during the Bishops' conference held from 17 to 22 June 1945. Immediately at the beginning of the conference, the bishops directed a letter to President Tito, for the most part consisting of complaints about the government mentioned in the earlier memoranda.⁹ Since no official representative of the government responded to the letter, at the conclusion of the conference the bishops drafted a pastoral letter for Catholic believers, which evoked a strong response in public.

In the letter the bishops generally enumerated facts which Archbishop Stepinac had already mentioned in his memoranda. In particular they noted the murder and arrest of the clergy, claiming that 243 priests had been killed, 169 were in prison, and eighty-nine were listed as missing, while an additional nineteen seminary students, three monks, and four nuns were also known to have been murdered. They highlighted the case of twenty-eight murdered Franciscans in the Široki Brijeg monastery. Returning to the questions of youth education, the requisitioning of Church property, the destruction of graves, the confiscation of the Catholic press and print shops, and the other problems previously mentioned, the bishops concluded: "When we present all of this, our dear believers, we do not wish to foster a conflict with the new state authorities. We do not look for this conflict, nor did we in the past. Our thoughts were always directed towards peace and the organization of social and public life." At the end of the letter, noting that they would not back down from these requests under any condition, they demanded "full freedom of the Catholic press, full freedom for Catholic schools, full freedom for religious education in all grades of elementary and high school, full freedom for Catholic associations, full freedom for Catholic Caritas activities, full freedom for human indi-

⁷ Nadbiskupski arhiv Zagreb (NAZ), fond Nadbiskupskog duhovnog stola (NDS), no. 4122/45.

⁸ NAZ, NDS, no. 4442/45, Predstavka Nadbiskupskog duhovnog stola predsjedniku vlade Federalne Hrvatske Vladimiru Bakariću od 25. lipnja 1945 (Petition of Archbishopric spiritual table to the president of the Croatian Federal government Vladimir Bakarić from 25 June 1945).

⁹ Benigar, *Alojzije Stepinac*, p. 498.

viduality and its inalienable rights, full respect for Christian marriages, and the return of all confiscated institutes and organizations.”¹⁰ The letter was read on 30 September 1945 in churches across the country. Afterwards the government and the media reported examples of priests who did not, for various reasons, read the letter, in order to show the public disunity within the Church regarding the text of the letter. That in itself was not important, as the letter had a strong resonance in the country and abroad.¹¹

The pastoral letter came at an inopportune time for the government, as they were preparing elections for the Constitutional Parliament, and the international situation was likewise not favorable. In the report of the “agitation-propaganda work of the KPJ” from early 1946, it was noted that the pastoral letter was “the most significant among a number of enemy actions in the recent past,” and was considered to be directed towards mobilizing Catholics against the new Yugoslavia.¹²

Archbishop Stepinac, certain that he would be arrested, planned in advance who would represent the archbishopric in case of his absence. If arrested, the diocese would be overseen by two vicars, auxiliary bishop Franjo Salis-Seewis and Josip Lach.

The communist authorities were caught off guard, and did not immediately react. Even the newspapers remained silent on the issue, awaiting a reaction from the politicians. Vladimir Bakarić first spoke of the letter in an interview with *Vjesnik* on 6 October 1945, in which, among other things, he regretted that certain bishops unexpectedly signed the letter. He concluded that within the letter existed words which could result in criminal proceedings according to the law.¹³ That was in itself the announcement for arrest which Archbishop Stepinac had predicted. The political persecution of the Catholic Church and the pastoral letter itself began during the time of the pre-election campaign for the Constitutional Parliament.

In the meantime, on 18 October 1945, the Vatican officially protested to the Yugoslav government about religious persecution, noting that never in the history of the Balkans had there existed so much hatred towards the Catholic Church.¹⁴ With this protest, the Holy See made it clear to the Yugoslav authorities that it supported the conclusions of the Bishop’s conference, which was extremely important for Archbishop Stepinac in those conditions.

¹⁰ *Pastirsko pismo katoličkih biskupa Jugoslavije, izdano s općih Biskupskih konferencija u Zagrebu, dne 20. rujna 1945. Predragi u Kristu vjernici! Mi, katolički biskupi, sakupljeni na plenarnim konferencijama u Zagrebu* - one copy on 9 mimeo graphical pages, as well as one typed copy on 12 pages, are kept in the archives of Croatian bishops’ conference, files 1945, no. 114 BK/1945. Mimeo graphical copy has been sent to parochial offices as well as to the state offices, and has the value of an original.

¹¹ Benigar, *Alojzije Stepinac*, p. 501.

¹² Radmila Radić, *Država i verske zajednice: 1945-1970.*, Vol. 1, 1945-1953 (Belgrade: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 2002), p. 272

¹³ *Vjesnik*, 6 October 1945, p. 2.

¹⁴ M. Landrecy, *Kardinal Alojzije Stepinac* (Đakovečki Selci: 1989), p.132.

Finally, on 25 October 1945, Tito himself responded to the pastoral letter, with his main criticism questioning why the bishops did not issue a similar letter during the Ustaša regime, or why they did not take a stand against the killing of Serbs in Croatia. Furthermore, he argued that the bishops were now ready to sacrifice themselves, but during the time of the Ustaše they were silent, not because of fear but because they supported them. In conclusion, he denied that the Catholic Church in Yugoslavia was persecuted, adding that only those who were guilty were punished.¹⁵

Vladimir Bakarić, in a meeting with the secretaries of local committees from northern Croatia on 15 December 1945, announced the beginning of “a campaign against priests.” At another meeting for the secretaries of local committees from southern Croatia, held on 20 December, he mentioned the start of a campaign “to unmask priests as Ustaše nests.”¹⁶

The Vatican named the American bishop Joseph P. Hurley as the director of the papal nunciature in Belgrade, where he arrived on 30 January 1946. Tito held a meeting with him and asked of him to deliver a request to the Holy See to recall Stepinac and replace him with another archbishop, or otherwise they would be forced to arrest him.¹⁷ The Vatican determined that the reasons given by the Yugoslav authorities were not sufficient to justify such an action.¹⁸ Tito’s comment, cited above, served as the official announcement for Archbishop Stepinac’s arrest.

The Constitutional Parliament of the Federated Peoples’ Republic of Yugoslavia (FNRJ - *Federativna Narodna Republika Jugoslavija*) enacted the first constitution of the new state on 30 January 1946, while the government continued its media campaign against Archbishop Stepinac and the Catholic Church. In the meantime, the authorities were systematically preparing an indictment against the archbishop, waiting for the most convenient moment for a trial.

Even though Church-state relations were unmistakably bad even prior to the pastoral letter, following its release tensions culminated, and all further contacts and attempts at normalization were broken for a considerable time. After the pastoral letter the communist regime began an even stronger fight with the Catholic Church. Through the media the state authorities paved the way for the archbishop’s arrest, creating a public image of Archbishop Stepinac as a criminal and the Catholic Church as a fascist collaborator and enemy of the people and state. Thus the media, day in and day out up until the beginning of Archbishop Stepinac’s trial, carried accusatory articles, preparing the public for his arrest when it became politically convenient in both the domestic and international sense. Media announcements of Archbishop Stepinac’s arrest continued in the beginning of September 1946, especially during the

¹⁵ *Vjesnik*, 25 October 1945, p. 1.

¹⁶ Zdenko Radelić, *Križari: gerila u Hrvatskoj 1945.-1950.* (Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest and Dom i svijet, 2002), p. 217.

¹⁷ Josip BROZ – TITO, *Govori i članci*, p. 79.

¹⁸ Stella Alexander, *Trostruki mit: život zagrebačkog nadbiskupa Alojzija Stepinca* (Zagreb : Golia, 1990), p. 98.

course of reporting on the trials of Erih Lisak, Ivan Šalić, and others in Zagreb. Even though the preparations for Archbishop Stepinac's trial took a long time and were extensive, the procedure was not started until Tito made the final decision. Tito summoned the head prosecutor, Jakov Blažević, and his team for consultations in order to provide a political foundation for the criminal procedure. Tito had concluded that all attempts to influence Archbishop Stepinac were in vain, and that the situation was extremely hostile and irreconcilable.¹⁹ Blažević, in his book *Historijsko pamćenje (Historical Remembrance)*, wrote that Tito "cut him off" at the meeting in Bled, and said to "prosecute him."²⁰ Tito's position on this issue was that the Church could not be above the state.²¹ However, another possible reason for Tito's decision to prosecute Archbishop Stepinac was very likely the fact that in July of the same year, the Četnik leader Draža Mihailović was tried and executed, so it was important for the authorities to create a balance in order to not provoke a Serb revolt.

The trial was brief, and already by 11 October 1946 the judicial committee of the Supreme Court reached a verdict sentencing Archbishop Stepinac to sixteen years of prison with forced labor and a loss of political and civil rights for a period lasting five years.²² Even though the representatives of the government believed that imprisoning Archbishop Stepinac would make it easier to deal with the other bishops, this was not the case. Apart from a temporary lull in tensions, relations between the Catholic Church and the state did not improve. In fact, by the early 1950s these relations became increasingly strained.

That the issue of Archbishop Stepinac's imprisonment compromised the Yugoslav government, particularly internationally, was evident from the fact that in 1950 a group of American senators sought to allow American aid to Yugoslavia only on the condition of Archbishop Stepinac's release. Realizing the need for better relations with the West after the split with the USSR, in 1951 Tito expressed a willingness to release Archbishop Stepinac from prison if he would leave Yugoslavia for the Vatican or elsewhere. However, both the Holy See and the archbishop refused this offer. Shortly thereafter, on 5 December 1951, Archbishop Stepinac was transferred from Lepoglava Prison to house arrest in his birthplace of Krašić. Referring to Archbishop Stepinac's move to Krašić, in March 1952 Tito told a delegation from the First Congress of the Association of Yugoslav Students that "We released Stepinac so that we could knock a propagandistic weapon out of the Vatican's hands, the weapon that Stepinac is a 'martyr'. Now they have problems because Stepinac is out."²³

¹⁹ Jakov Blažević, *Povijest i falsifikati* (Zagreb [Samobor]: "Zagreb", 1983), p. 189 (from an interview in Sarajevo's *Svijet*, 27 October 1982), Josip Hrnčević, *Svjedočanstva*, 2nd edition (Zagreb: Globus, 1986), p. 196, claims that that conversation was kept on Bled, and that before they were received by Aleksandar Ranković they did not discuss the trial of Stepinac.

Josip Hrnčević, *Svjedočanstva*, 2nd edition (Zagreb : Globus, 1986).

²⁰ Jakov Blažević, *Historijsko pamćenje* (Zagreb [Samobor]: "Zagreb", 1982), p. 155.

²¹ Milovan Đilas, *Druženje s Titom* (Zemun: Goran, 1990), p. 88.

²² Hrnčević, *Svjedočanstva*, p. 232.

²³ *Vjesnik*, 16 March 1952, p. 1.

Archbishop Stepinac, still under house arrest, died on 10 February 1960 of a blood disease, which provoked considerable public debate because of the suspicion that he was systematically poisoned during his imprisonment in Lepoglava. After independence, on 14 February 1992, the parliament of the Republic of Croatia drafted a declaration condemning the political process and verdict against Cardinal Alojzije Stepinac.²⁴ The trial of Archbishop Stepinac, despite the fact that there still exist different opinions on the archbishop himself, was without a doubt politically staged by the communist regime.

In addition to Archbishop Stepinac, a number of bishops, priests, nuns, and other officials of the Catholic Church were tried in the years immediately after World War Two. There were also several trials against the leaders and officials of other religious groups in Croatia. Considering that the legal system was an extension of the ruling party, the trials were quick, effective, and merciless, without any objectivity. The trials had little semblance of legality, and were accompanied by media witch hunts, with the intention of justifying both domestically and internationally the accusations of war crimes, treason, and collaboration with the enemies of Yugoslavia. According to the Commission for Religious Affairs, on the territory of the Peoples' Republic (NR -*Narodna republika*) of Croatia from 1944 until 1951 a total of 256 individuals from the Roman Catholic Church were sentenced to prison.²⁵ Since this list does not include the name of Archbishop Stepinac, it cannot be claimed that this list is completely accurate.

Confiscation of Church property

The change of ownership rights through the implementation of various laws was carried out after World War Two across Yugoslavia, including Croatia, with the goal of socializing private property in accordance with the communist program. Those moves hit the Catholic Church particularly hard, since it had been one of the largest property owners, and the confiscation of its property was carried out very thoroughly.

The political relations between the Catholic Church and the state, which were incredibly tense, had an important influence on the procedure for the confiscation of the Church's property in Yugoslavia. During these difficult circumstances, the government carried out agricultural reforms, as well as the confiscation, expropriation, and nationalization of the Catholic Church's possessions. The agrarian reforms were particularly damaging for the Catholic Church, since farmland was one of its most important sources of income. The thorough implementation of agrarian reforms on Church property brought it into a difficult material position, and forced believers to take on financial responsibility for the Church's continued activity during the already try-

²⁴ *Narodne novine*, no. 9/92, Zagreb 1992.

²⁵ HDA, KOVZ, box 341, Pregled osuđenih svećenika, časnih sestara i crkvenih funkcionara svih vjeroispovjesti na teritoriju NR Hrvatske od 1944. do 1951. (List of convicted priests, nuns and church officials of all religions on the territory of NR Croatia from 1944 to 1951).

ing postwar conditions. On the territory of the Zagreb Archbishopric alone, between 1945 and 1948 over 70% of the Catholic Church's agricultural land was taken away in the scope of the agrarian reforms.²⁶ Apart from land, these reforms also resulted in the confiscation of the Church's buildings, agricultural reserves, livestock, farming machinery, and tools.²⁷ The bad Church-state relations had a critical influence upon the implementation of the reforms, thus the government interpreted the law on agrarian reforms and colonization very one-sidedly, and carried it out restrictively. While the agrarian reforms severely hurt the Catholic Church, they were not the main factors in its relations with the state, because other forms of destroying religious freedom were considerably more threatening to the survival of the Catholic Church in Yugoslavia. However, the communist regime attempted to convince the public through its media that the main reason for the Catholic Church's unhappiness with the new rulers was that they took away the Church's land and distributed it to the peasantry, counting on the sensitivity of the people towards material problems in the difficult social circumstances after the war. Despite this propaganda, which probably had a short-term success, time showed that the confiscation of Church property, as well as other actions that stifled religious freedoms, resulted in undesirable – as far as the communist regime was concerned – reactions from Catholic believers, who increasingly sympathized with the Church, not only for religious reasons, but in order to show resistance to the communist regime.

Since even after the agrarian reforms were carried out numerous taxes were imposed on the Catholic Church and the land remaining under its control, many parishes, unable to pay the taxes, were forced to give away that land to peasants, agricultural cooperatives, and various other social organizations which they later had problems recovering.²⁸

The property which was not taken from the Church during the agrarian reforms was confiscated to a lesser degree through seizures and the nationalization of private firms, and a greater degree through expropriation. In addition to the laws which confiscated Church property, other possessions were temporarily occupied by means of various residential laws and decisions by National Committees, as well as illegal occupations by the army, police, and others. Subsequently, the Catholic Church spent years trying to evict illegal occupants from its buildings and apartments.

The remaining property of the Catholic Church was for the most part confiscated by means of the Law on the Nationalization of Rental Buildings and Construction Sites in 1958. This law left the Church without its most valuable real estate, especially buildings and construction sites in the center of big cities. Even though the nationalization of property took place during the

²⁶ Miroslav Akmadža, *Oduzimanje imovine Katoličkoj crkvi i crkveno-državni odnosi od 1945. do 1966. godine : primjer Zagrebačke nadbiskupije* (Zagreb: Društvo za povjesnicu Zagrebačke nadbiskupije Tkalčić, 2003), p. 119.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 122–124.

²⁸ More in: M. Akmadža, "Otuđenja nadarbinskoga zemljišta zbog poreznih opterećenja u Zagrebačkoj nadbiskupiji 1948.-1955.," *Tkalčić*, 9./2005., Zagreb 2005, 123-272.

gradual improvement of Church-state relations, and the state had given up on nationalizing a number of objects it had initially nationalized or had intended to nationalize, it did not diminish the consequences of the nationalization of Church property. On the territory of the Zagreb Archbishopric alone, according to data from December 1963, eighty-six buildings were nationalized, while in all of Croatia a total of 328 buildings and businesses in nine buildings were taken by the communist authorities.²⁹

Despite the large material losses resulting from the confiscation of Church property, not only did the Catholic Church survive, but its respect among the people continuously rose. This was not only evident by the growing number of believers attending Mass services, but also because of the selfless material donations to the Church, which enabled it to solidly organize its financial situation by the mid-1960s. The weakening of the Church's economic position forced it to dedicate more energy to its spiritual mission, and pressure from the regime only improved its image and influence among the faithful. In addition to its strengthening in a religious sense, in time the Catholic Church, with the help of believers in the country as well as abroad, recovered materially, which disconcerted the state authorities.

The confiscation of Church property was not the main issue in resolving Church-state problems. Negotiations on normalizing relations between the Vatican and Yugoslavia in the 1960s clearly show that the question of confiscated property was not the key concern of the Catholic Church, and the issue was not even mentioned in the *protocol* drafted in 1966.

The attempts by the communist regime to materially weaken the Catholic Church in order to prevent it from functioning were falsely based on the assumption that the strength of the Church was its material wealth. This effort could not succeed, because the Church became spiritually stronger and more accessible to the people the more it was persecuted by the authorities.

Religious education

The upbringing of the youth was one of the key questions in the relations between the Catholic Church and the state under the communist regime in Yugoslavia. Under all previous regimes the Catholic Church had freedom in teaching religious studies in state schools. With the arrival of the communists to power things changed dramatically, and religious education was incrementally removed from schools, until 1952 when it was completely banned from all schools. However, even when they were allowed in state schools as an elective during the first few years of communist rule, religious studies were systematically obstructed by the educational authorities. Under that kind of pressure, religious education was increasingly shifted from schools to churches, but even that was banned by the authorities, who cited a law they themselves did not obey, which stated religious studies could only be taught in schools. Priests were not given approval to teach courses on religion, or else the approv-

²⁹ M. Akmadža, *Oduzimanje imovine*, pp. 212 – 213.

al came at the end of the school year, while children and parents were systematically frightened so as to discourage them from attending religious classes.

Since religion could not be legally banned, the communist authorities sought to distance the new generation of youth from the Church through their upbringing and education, and raise them in the spirit of socialism. The Catholic Church refused to allow the children to be raised without religion, and stubbornly fought for the right for religious upbringing, which was formally guaranteed in the constitution. The communist regime's repressive methods failed to prevent both the Church and parents from raising children in a religious manner, but the authorities did not give up on in the struggle to imbue the youth with a socialist worldview. The Catholic Church successfully resisted these endeavors by the authorities, but failed to secure the full legalization of religious upbringing of the youth through the educational system. The Church leaders had counted on the agreement between the Vatican and Yugoslavia, signed in June 1966, to resolve this question, and its exclusion from the text greatly disappointed the bishops in Yugoslavia. Nevertheless, they used every means possible to address the religious upbringing of the youth, even though the right to a religious education in state schools was not secured until the fall of the communist regime in 1990.³⁰

Religious schools

In 1945, the Catholic Church operated a number of private schools in Croatia. These included the archbishopric and bishopric high schools, a Franciscan high school, a Dominican high school on the island of Brač, high schools and a teachers' school for nuns in Zagreb, seminaries, and various other theological institutions.³¹

Responding to the announcement in the state-controlled press about the closure of all private schools in the 1945/46³² school year, Archbishop Stepinac protested to Vladimir Bakarić on 11 August 1945.³³ The majority of seminaries for boys were occupied by the army, which the bishops had noted in the pastoral letter of September 1945, in addition to the requisitioning of a number of other seminaries.

On 2 October 1945, all private schools were closed with the passing of a new law, which had the provision that the Ministry of Education could allow certain private schools with historical traditions or those that provided necessary theological training to continue operating.³⁴ Thus, in Croatia only the boys'

³⁰ More in M. Akmadža, "Ometanja i zabrane vjeronauka od strane komunističkog režima u Zagrebačkoj nadbiskupiji od 1945. do 1966. godine", *Tkalčić*, 8./2004., Zagreb 2004, pp 347-443; Marin Srakić, *Zabrana školskog vjeronauka u doba komunizma : kratki prikaz na temelju povijesnih izvora s posebnim osvrtom na Republiku Hrvatsku i na područje Đakovačke i Srijemske biskupije* (Zagreb : Katehetski salezijanski centar, 2000).

³¹ Benigar, *Alojzije Stepinac*, p. 480.

³² *Vjesnik*, 4 August 1945, p. 5.

³³ N. Kisić - Kolanović, *Pisma zagrebačkog nadbiskupa Alojzija Stepinca predsjedniku narodne vlade Hrvatske Vladimiru Bakariću 1945.*, *Croatica Cristiana Periodica*, no. 29, vol. XVI, Zagreb 1992, p. 161.

³⁴ *Narodne novine*, no. 35, Zagreb, 4 October 1945.

seminaries with public high schools in Zagreb and Pazin remained open, while the committee in Belgrade felt that the archbishopric high school in Zagreb it had supervised should also be shut down in 1947, which was opposed by Msgr. Ritig.³⁵ As a result of Msgr. Ritig's intervention, on 15 June 1947 Bakarić directed the Ministry of Education to reject the federal government's decision to shut down the archbishopric high school, claiming that their opinions were "stupid and formalistic."³⁶ In their memorandum to the Presidency of the FNRJ, sent from a meeting in Ljubljana at the end of July 1947, the Catholic bishops commented on the problem of religious schools and the fact that all the technical and high schools operated by the Church (the result of centuries of cultural efforts) were banned or closed. Along with the seminaries, high schools, and boarding schools, the Church lost control over all of its orphanages.³⁷

Despite the protests of the Church leadership and Msgr. Ritig, the state continued to obstruct the functioning of religious schools. For example, on 20 June 1948, the Ministry of Education decided to shut down the public high school that had been attached to the archbishopric high school on Šalata in Zagreb.

The situation with religious schools continued to worsen, as children from the seminaries were required to obtain their basic education in state schools. The Interdiocesan committee for religious affairs in Zagreb fought against this move, and requested from the Croatian government that students from the first through third grades of the Interdiocesan high school did not have to attend seven year schools.³⁸ Reacting to the announcement that students from religious schools who did not finish a state elementary school would not be permitted to enroll in the Theological College, the Interdiocesan committee sent the Presidency of NR Croatia a letter which stated, among other things: "Prohibiting graduates of the Interdiocesan high school from enrolling in the Roman Catholic Theological College in Zagreb would mean the liquidation of that college, as the main source of students come precisely from the Interdiocesan high school, which is why it exists."³⁹ Related to the abovementioned events, the Business Committee of the Bishops' Conference sent a memorandum to the Presidency of NR Croatia's government on 5 August 1951.⁴⁰

However, shortly thereafter, the Catholic Church was shocked by a new attack on religious schools. Namely, the Council for Education, Science, and

³⁵ HDA, KOVZ, box. 130.

³⁶ Dušan Bilandžić, *Hrvatska moderna povijest* (Zagreb: Golden marketing, 1999), p. 257.

³⁷ HDA, Osobni fond Svetozara Ritiga (OF Ritig) (Personal fond of Svetozar Ritig), (later OF Ritig), box 7, Predstavka katoličkih biskupa Jugoslavije Predsjedništvu vlade FNRJ, od 29. srpnja 1947. (Petition of Catholic bishops of Yugoslavia to the presidency of the FNRJ government, 29 July 1947).

³⁸ NAZ, NDS, no. 4668 – 1949.

³⁹ NAZ, NDS, no. 4666 – 1949.

⁴⁰ HDA, OF Ritig, box 4.

Culture of NR Croatia distributed a circular letter on 31 January 1952, which stated that students younger than fifteen could only attend state schools.⁴¹

After receiving a request from several bishops, in February 1952 Minister of Education Žanko distributed a circular letter to city and county boards of education that explained how to enforce the new law, stating that children do not have to leave the seminaries as the decision was left up to their parents.⁴²

On 31 February 1952, Minister Žanko sent all the Committees for Education and Culture instructions on eliminating religious education as well as private, that is, religious schools, concluding that “Since no private or religious schools of general educational character have been approved by the law, as stated by the constitution, no general educational schools are recognized or accepted.”⁴³

Subsequently this issue was addressed in the Law on Religious Associations from 1953, on which the Executive Council of the parliament of NR Croatia enacted instructions for enforcing the law in relation to religious schools. Therefore, the Council for Education, Science, and Culture of NR Croatia would supervise those schools, which accepted only students who completed eight years of schooling, while seminaries accepted only students from religious schools.⁴⁴

The state did not forget about the Roman Catholic Theological College in Zagreb, which was a part of the University of Zagreb. The college was closed down on 29 January 1952, when the authorities of NR Croatia decreed that it was no longer part of the leading institution of higher education in Croatia.⁴⁵

Several days later, Msgr. Ritig sent Tito a letter regarding this issue, emphasizing that the decision was widely considered to be a hostile act against the Catholic Church, and reminding him of his words that the question of the Church cannot be resolved by decrees.⁴⁶

Responding to the exclusion of the Theological College from the University of Zagreb, a delegation of Catholic bishops and theology professors traveled to Belgrade to deliver a memorandum to the responsible authorities.⁴⁷ Meanwhile, in March 1952 Tito told American journalists asking about the issue of the Theological College that “Our constitution does not allow us to finance those colleges with the state budget, because the Church is separate from the state.”⁴⁸

Regardless of the difficulties, the leadership of the Bishops’ conference informed the Presidency of NR Croatia that the Roman Catholic Theological

⁴¹ NAZ, NDS, no. 1971/1952.

⁴² HDA, KOVZ, box 139.

⁴³ Srakić, *Zabrana školskog vjeronauka*, p. 70.

⁴⁴ *Vjesnik*, 31 August 1954, p. 2.

⁴⁵ HDA, KOVZ, box 139.

⁴⁶ HDA, OF Ritig, box 4.

⁴⁷ Radić, *Država i verske zajednice*, vol. I, p. 224.

⁴⁸ *Vjesnik*, 13 March 1952, p. 1.

College would continue to function as an institution of the Croatian bishopric. It also requested the government to settle all the issues that emerged from returning the college under the control of the Church. Moreover, the leadership asked for state subsidies from the state budget and permits to collect contributions from believers for the needs of the college, as well as the recognition of student status regarding eligibility for army service.⁴⁹

The Committee of Education, Science, and Culture sent a memorandum about the letter on 30 November 1952, in which it only notes the reception of the bishops' decision, but does not respond to any of the questions.⁵⁰ Not even after all of the requests, due to the very tense relations between the Catholic Church and the state (which had broken off relations with Vatican), did the situation for the Theological College in Zagreb significantly improve, although it remained outside of the University of Zagreb for the remainder of the communist era.

Religious press

Prior to World War Two, the Catholic Church published 137 newspapers on the territory of Yugoslavia in the Croatian and Slovenian languages, as well as in the languages of national minorities.⁵¹ For the most part the situation remained the same during the time of the Ustaša regime. After the new government came to power in 1945, the situation dramatically worsened for the Church press, which the authorities blamed on the lack of paper. Archbishop Stepinac rejected this explanation, citing the fact that soldiers had carted away wagonloads of paper from the State print shop and the archbishop's court for use in the KPJ's print shop "Naprijed".⁵² In a petition to Bakarić sent on 21 July 1945, Archbishop Stepinac commented on the seizure of the State print shop, which had been mostly owned by the Church, concluding that "We have come to the point where the press attacks us daily, while we are not allowed to print a single Catholic publication. This all happens in an era of war under the slogan of freedom."⁵³

In the beginning of the postwar period, the only Catholic newspaper was the weekly *Dobri Pastir* (*The Good Shepard*), which was eventually banned, and several official papers and bulletins⁵⁴ of bishoprics and various orders (such as *Službeni vjesnik Nadbiskupije zagrebačke*, *Glasnik sv. Josipa*, *Vjesnik salezijanskog suradništva* and others), in which the texts could contain exclusively religious content. Later, first in Istria and then Zagreb, the religious

⁴⁹ HDA, KOVZ, box 140.

⁵⁰ HDA, KOVZ, box 141, From the letter of the Rect. of the Faculty of Theology in Zagreb to the Commission for religious affairs, no. 90/1953, from 20 February 1953.

⁵¹ HDA, OF Ritig, box 7.

⁵² Kisić - Kolanović, *Pisma*, p. 147.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 148.

⁵⁴ HDA, KOVZ, box 126, List of the magazine printed in the National printing-house to the beginning of 1946.

magazine *Gore Srca* (*Raise Your Hearts*) was published, while the Association of Catholic Priests of Croatia began to issue the monthly magazine *Danica* (*Morning Star*).⁵⁵

In their circular letter on the Christian upbringing of youth distributed to the faithful in August 1946, the bishops lamented the fact that they could not publish Catholic papers which could help with the raising of children.⁵⁶ As the situation with the Catholic press worsened, particularly in those areas where the population was mostly Croat, the Catholic bishops of Yugoslavia drew attention to these problems in their memorandum to the leadership of the FNRJ sent from their meeting in Ljubljana at the end of July 1947.⁵⁷

One of the rare legal Catholic weeklies was *Gore Srca*, initially published in Istria by Božo Milanović, an Istrian priest with close ties to the regime. Because of technical problems with the printing of this magazine, the Croatian Literary Association of Cyril and Methodius in Zagreb took over its publication, and Canon Pavao Lončar became its editor. This weekly began appearing in Zagreb on 30 November 1947, but the authorities did not tolerate even this publication for long, and constantly sought a reason to ban it. It continued to be published, but new problems quickly developed after the authorities began to limit the amount of paper allocated for this and other papers. After a short period when *Gore Srca* was published without too much obstruction, in early 1949 individual issues were banned. For example, on 22 January 1949 the district court in Zagreb banned issue number three, and several days later banned the subsequent issue as well. The weekly continued to be published with minor difficulties until 1951, when it was periodically banned again. Finally, on 19 October 1952, because of the article "Can a laic school make up for religion," the current editor, Franjo Grundler, was taken to court for subverting the government of the working people, i.e., for propaganda against the state and social system.⁵⁸ Shortly thereafter, in late 1952, *Gore Srca* published its last issue.⁵⁹ In the subsequent years, the Catholic Church was prohibited from publishing any newspapers other than official bulletins, until the launching of *Glas Koncila* (*Voice of the Council*) in the 1960s, thanks to the amenability of the regime during the time of negotiations with the Vatican.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ M. J. Mataušić, *Katolički tisak u Zagrebačkoj nadbiskupiji, Zbornik u čast kardinala Franje Kuharića*, (Zagreb: 1995).

⁵⁶ SVZN, no. 2, 1946.

⁵⁷ HDA, OF Ritig, box 7.

⁵⁸ K. Spehnbjak, *Uloga novina u oblikovanju javnog mnijenja u Hrvatskoj 1945.-1952.*, *Časopis za suvremenu povijest*, vol. 25., nos. 2-3, Zagreb 1993, p.180.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

⁶⁰ Miroslav Akmadža, *Katolička crkva u Hrvatskoj i komunistički režim 1945.-1966.* (Rijeka: "Otokar Keršovani" d.o.o., 2004), pp. 78-80.

Priest associations

The state authorities encouraged the founding of priest associations (*Staleška svećenička udruženja*) with the goal of breaking Church unity, which were supposed to weaken the Church's power and separate it from the Vatican. In forming these associations, the government began with communities where the Church authorities were already predisposed to cooperate with the state, such as in Istria, Slovenia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Initially, the bishops of Yugoslavia did not have a unified position on the creation of class-based priest associations; some of them quietly approved, while others immediately and vehemently opposed it. The Bishops' conference decided on 26 April 1950 that membership in such associations was "redundant" and "not recommended" (*Non expedit*), but the position of the bishops in applying the decision were different. Some tolerated the associations and some threatened the members with sanctions.⁶¹ But the clergy understood this decision differently and still joined the associations.⁶² There were even some cases where priests asked to be forbidden to join them in order to justify to the authorities reasons for not being members.⁶³

The communist regime fully supported these associations. The authorities promised priests who joined them social security, pensions, and other benefits, but also used the worse possible methods to pressure those priests who refused to join. They especially took advantage of priests who were imprisoned; some of them were not only persuaded to join these associations, but they were actually given leadership positions upon their release.⁶⁴

The Bishops' conference sent a memorandum to the government of the FNRJ on 26 September 1952 in which the bishops stated that "these associations have no characteristics which are required to achieve the goals that they have set. First of all because they are strongly influenced by a political party, and also because of the instructions that note the breakings of church discipline and weaken religious life, through which the goals of resolving Church-state relations will not be met." Moreover, the bishops emphasized that they would accept the associations only if they conformed to Church laws and were under the supervision of the Episcopate.⁶⁵ They also unanimously declared "Non licet" (it is forbidden) regarding the class-based priest associations, which was a sharp condemnation and banned their further development.⁶⁶

The reaction of the state authorities and the press was quite severe. The district attorney of NR Croatia immediately summoned bishops Franjo Salis-Seewis, Dragutin Nežić, Smiljan Čekada, Stjepan Bauerlein, and Archbishop

⁶¹ HDA, OF Ritig, box 136.

⁶² Benigar, *Alojzije Stepinac*, p. 643.

⁶³ Alexander, *Trostruki mit*, page 137

⁶⁴ Benigar, *Alojzije Stepinac*, p. 643.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 644

⁶⁶ *Declaratio de associationibus cleri*, published on the conference of Yugoslavian bishops in Zagreb, 22-25 September 1952. HDA, KOVZ, box 141.

Josip Ujčić for questioning. He accused them of misusing the Church for political purposes, obstructing the freedom of association of citizens, and raising an alarm by encouraging the violation of the constitution. The decision by the bishops to ban the class-based priest associations upset the communist regime so greatly that the Yugoslav government sent the Vatican a letter on 1 November 1952, accusing the Holy See of meddling in the internal affairs of the FNRJ.⁶⁷ In the meantime, the Yugoslav government learned that Archbishop Stepinac would be named a cardinal, which was deemed by the authorities to be an additional “slap in the face,” prompting them to break off diplomatic relations with the Vatican. In their reaction to the break in relations, the representatives of the Yugoslav government cited the issue of class-based priest associations as one of the key reasons for the government’s decision. In spite of the numerous difficult issues which hampered the relations between the Vatican and Yugoslavia, the break came primarily because of the Vatican’s recommendation to Yugoslav bishops to forbid the class-based associations. Since this came at the same time as the crisis over Trieste, during which the Yugoslav government accused the Vatican of siding with Italy, the time was ripe for a final break in diplomatic relations, and the promotion of Archbishop Stepinac to cardinal served the Yugoslav authorities as justification for that decision.

In contrast to Bosnia and Herzegovina and Slovenia, establishing the class-based priest associations in Croatia did not go smoothly, and the initial committee was established only at the end of 1952. The bishops in Croatia energetically resisted the founding of these associations, and Archbishop Stepinac, in spite of his isolation, used every opportunity to warn the clergy of their dangers.

The preparatory committee for the priest associations in its bulletin of 14 February 1953 explained the goals of the organization and asked its members to fully support the national authorities. Furthermore, the committee stated that it did not want to create divisions within the Church, nor establish a national Church separated from the Vatican. It also emphasized that it recognized the spiritual authority of the Holy See, and that its work followed Church law and the rules of the Holy Church.⁶⁸

Shortly after the establishment of the first preparatory committees for the regime’s Catholic associations in Croatia, the bishops used various means to pressure priests to not join the associations, and disciplined those who did join. These moves by the bishops were regularly reported in the press in order to vilify them as persecutors of those priests who wanted to work with the state authorities. Since the associations were so important to the communist regime, the authorities punished those bishops who were disciplining clergy in the associations. Thus, bishops Salis-Seewis and Lach, as well as Mijo Pišonić, the secretary of the Zagreb archbishop, were taken to court and found guilty,

⁶⁷ Vinko Nikolić (ed.), *Stepinac mu je ime*, Vol. 1 (Munich-Barcelona: Knjižnica hrvatske revije, 1978), p. 391

⁶⁸ HDA, KOVZ, box 141.

with the explanation that the priest associations were secular and not Church organizations, and therefore the Church leadership had no business meddling in their activities.⁶⁹

In spite of the bishops' resistance, the founding assembly of the Class-based Catholic Priest Association of NR Croatia was held in Zagreb on 12 November 1953. The representatives of the state authorities ensured that the assembly was well-attended and as successful as possible. The president of the Istrian association, Božo Milanović, testified that the director of UDBa compelled the Istrian members to attend, threatening to confiscate buildings belonging to seminaries and ban the publication of *Istarska Danica* (*Istrian Morning Star*) and prayer-books in Pula. Since the priests in Istria abided by the 1952 decision of the bishops to ban the regime's associations, they decided not to attend the founding assembly in Zagreb. However, due to the good relations between Milanović and the authorities, the threats by UDBa were not carried out, although bishops Nežić and Pavlišić were summoned for military service.⁷⁰

Archbishop Stepinac had no doubts about his position on the question of the associations. He instructed his deputies to immediately suspend any priest who joined the associations, and called on everyone to reflect upon the words of Jesus: "The student is not above the teacher."⁷¹ In spite of the harshness of the archbishop's words, he understood the position of the priests who had joined the associations, and was ready to forgive them if they left. In a letter to Stjepan Bakšić, the general vicar of the Zagreb Archbishopric, he emphasized that he only wanted the priests in the associations to return to the true path, and that he was ready to forgive them from the bottom of his heart for their errors and mistakes. He pointed out that he was hurt the most by the "persistence and hardness in evil," in which case it was necessary "to cut off the bad limb in order to preserve the body."⁷²

After he took over the Zagreb Archbishopric, Archbishop Franjo Šeper visited the president of the Croatian government, Vladimir Bakarić, on 7 December 1954. Archbishop Šeper stated that the question of the regime's associations for priests was problematic because they were organized without the cooperation of the bishops. He claimed that the government organized the associations with the help of UDBa, which was forcing corrupt priests (alcoholics, womanizers, tax evaders, etc.) to enter into them. The archbishop once again made it clear that the Vatican had forbidden the associations, to which Bakarić responded that the Holy See had left it up to the Croatian bishops to decide on the issue.⁷³ This meeting did nothing to change the ongoing con-

⁶⁹ *Vjesnik*, 17 September 1953, p. 2.

⁷⁰ Božo Milanović, *Moje uspomene : 1900-1976* (Pazin and Zagreb: Istarsko književno društvo sv. Ćirila i Metoda and Kršćanska sadašnjost, 1976). p. 193

⁷¹ Juraj Batelja, *Živjeti iz vjere : duhovni lik i pastirska skrb kardinala Alojzija Stepinca* (Zagreb: Nadbiskupski Duhovni stol, 1990), p. 271.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 273.

⁷³ J. Kolarić, Kardinal Franjo Šeper kao nadbiskup koadjutor i nadbiskup zagrebački, Šeper 3, *Veritatem facientes in caritate*, in: Željko Tanjić (ed.) *Zbornik radova Međunarodnoga simpozija o kardinalu Franji Šeperu povodom 20. obljetnice smrti, Zagreb, 7. - 8. studenoga 2001., Rim, 29. - 30. studenoga 2001.*, (Zagreb: Glas Koncila and Kršćanska sadašnjost, 2003), pp. 119-120.

flict between the Church and state authorities on the issue of the associations; in fact, the conflict became even more intense.

The actual associations had practically no independence in their activities. All of their moves, including the smallest details, were decided during meetings of the Commission for Religious Affairs of NR Croatia. The fact that the average age of the members of the associations was high (sixty-one years) worried the Religious Commission, and it was apparent that they were not getting any younger nor were they expanding the membership. Additionally, there was an increase in alcoholism among the members, as well as the loss of clerical appearance and reputation.⁷⁴ The secretary of the Religious Commission, Zlatko Frid, concluded in one report that certain members of the associations had legalized their ties with operatives from internal affairs, and that special attention should be paid to this as it could seriously harm the associations.⁷⁵ In early November 1959, the Croatian Religious Commission reported that the members of the associations were for the most part inactive and pessimistic, and that meetings and various conferences were generally initiated by the Secretariat for Internal Affairs and the Religious Commission.⁷⁶ It was also mentioned that it seemed as if UDBa was responsible for the development of the associations, so many priests refused to join. The increasing contacts between the bishops and the state authorities worried the members of the associations, who feared that a normalization of Church-state relations could lead to their abolition. The Religious Commission increasingly realized that there were many individuals in the governing board that were damaging the reputations of the associations and that a change was necessary, namely a younger leadership composed of active and decent priests.⁷⁷

In the annual report of the Commission for Religious Affairs of Croatia, issued in February 1962, it was admitted for the first time that priests were offered a number of incentives to join the associations (health and social insurance, amnesty from criminal prosecution, financial aid, etc.), and that many of those who had joined had been released from prison. In fact, the report noted that that source of new members was practically exhausted (in 1961, 46% of the members in the associations had been released from prison, where they were serving sentences primarily for political violations or for “collaborating with the Ustaša regime”).⁷⁸

After the normalization of relations between the Vatican and Yugoslavia in 1966, the members of the associations began to question the continued existence of the organizations, and whether or not they lost their purpose.⁷⁹ The

⁷⁴ HDA, KOVZ - records, book 1.

⁷⁵ HDA, KOVZ, box 38, Pov. 90/1 – 1958.

⁷⁶ HDA, KOVZ - records, book 1.

⁷⁷ HDA, KOVZ - records, book 2.

⁷⁸ HDA, KOVZ - records, book 4, appendix no.10.

⁷⁹ Letter of Filip Prpić to the Main committee of associations, from 23 March 1967, HDA, Fond Društva katoličkih svećenika SR Hrvatske (Društvo), box 1.

Religious Commission attempted to revive the activities of the associations and increase their membership, with little success. By the end of 1969, the Commission stated that the associations proved to be unprepared, inadequately staffed, and too conservative to adjust to the new changes in Church and its relations with the state.⁸⁰

Negotiations and a renewal of diplomatic relations between the Vatican and Yugoslavia

After the deaths of Pope Pius XII in 1958 and Cardinal Alojzije Stepinac in 1960, the state authorities in Yugoslavia attempted to show that these two individuals were the main culprits for the bad relations between the Church and state, and publicly announced that they were ready to improve the relationship with the Catholic Church. Furthermore, they sought to portray the cardinal's successor, Archbishop Franjo Šeper, as an individual ready for a dialogue with the state authorities, even though he did nothing to indicate this willingness. In fact, he was of a similar mindset as Archbishop Stepinac, and avoided meeting with government representatives unless it was absolutely necessary.

As the number of contacts between the representatives of the Catholic Church and the state authorities increased, the tense atmosphere gradually improved. The state authorities also warned the local authorities that administrative measures towards the clergy should be replaced with political measures whenever possible.⁸¹

The first concrete efforts to begin negotiations about normalizing relations between the Vatican and Yugoslavia were initiated in the first half of 1960 by Msgr. Aloisi Masella, a close associate of Cardinal Alfredo Ottaviani, with the advisor to the Yugoslav ambassador in Rome, Miroslav Majer.⁸²

On 12 March 1960, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the FNRJ sent instructions to Yugoslav embassies on how to conduct possible talks with the Catholic Church, i.e., the Vatican. It emphasized that the Vatican seemed ready for a new policy towards Yugoslavia, noting that the Holy See was less tolerant towards anti-Yugoslav émigrés, softened its tone in the press and on the radio, and allowed for greater contact between bishops and Yugoslav authorities, among other things. The fact that the death of Cardinal Stepinac could facilitate a more tolerant relationship between the state and the Catholic Church was emphasized. In order to present a unified position on possible negotiations, the instructions warned that it was not necessary to show any initiative or interest in renewing diplomatic relations, but rather use the situation to obtain as much information on the Vatican's position and reject any suggestion that Yugoslavia was to blame for the break in relations.⁸³

⁸⁰ HDA, KOVZ - records, book 12.

⁸¹ HDA, KOVZ, box 40, Pov. 8/1-60.

⁸² HDA, KOVZ, box 41, Pov. 131/1-60, Elaborat iz srpnja 1960., "Odnosi Vatikan-Jugoslavija", p. 62.

⁸³ Radić, *Država i verske zajednice*, vol. II, p. 454.

In late July 1960, a meeting of the Cardinal's Commission for Foreign Affairs determined that it was necessary to normalize relations with Yugoslavia, first of all in order to allow a *modus vivendi* between the bishops in Yugoslavia and the state authorities, and secondly to restore the severed diplomatic relationship. Pope John XXIII allegedly announced that he was personally interested in normalizing relations with Yugoslavia, and instructed Cardinal Dominik Tardini and the president of the Bishops' conference, Belgrade's Archbishop Josip Ujčić, to pursue that goal.⁸⁴

The first real reaction from the Catholic Church in Yugoslavia to the improvement in Church-state relations came out of the annual Bishops' conference held in Zagreb from 20–23 September 1960, when the bishops announced their unanimous agreement with the efforts of the Yugoslav government to normalize its ties with the Vatican. In a letter to the Federal Executive Council (SIV - *Savezno izvršno vijeće*), the bishops stated that they believed normalizing relations would be a great benefit for both the Church and the state, which would consolidate the situation inside Yugoslavia and bolster Yugoslavia's image internationally. The bishops expressed their readiness to fully support any serious endeavors to find a truly healthy and long-term *modus vivendi* between the Church and Yugoslav state. However, they warned that ultimately sovereign power in the Catholic Church was held by the Vatican, i.e., the Pope, and neither individual bishops nor an association of bishops could negotiate with state representatives on this issue, let alone reach a final agreement.

In order to create a favorable atmosphere for improved Church-state relations, the bishops indicated that the Yugoslav government had to resolve some issues, such as problems concerning catechism, religious rights of soldiers and prisoners, the celebration of religious holidays, the obstruction of religious schools, the return of confiscated Church property, the repair and construction of churches, the return of church registry books, freedom of the Church press, and the question of priest associations.⁸⁵

The reaction of the authorities towards this memorandum was generally positive. At a meeting of the Commission for Religious Affairs of NR Croatia held on 13 October 1960, it was concluded that the Bishops' conference had been peaceful, and that the bishops' letter indicated their encouragement for the reinstatement of diplomatic relations. Concerning the bishops' demands in the letter, the Commission noted that these were issues that had been constantly repeated, but were presented in a modest tone.⁸⁶

According to Msgr. Agostin Casaroli, later the Vatican's chief negotiator, Archbishop Ujčić raced to the Vatican greatly encouraged by the reaction of the Yugoslav government. However, Archbishop Ujčić encountered much less optimism at the Vatican than he had expected. The question of beginning talks on a *modus vivendi* still needed to be fully studied, and regardless of the

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* (author does not show the source of the mentioned data).

⁸⁵ HDA, KOVZ, box 41.

⁸⁶ HDA, KOVZ - records, book 2.

signals from the state authorities that they would be willing to improve the situation of the Catholic Church in Yugoslavia, too many contentious issues remained to facilitate immediate negotiations.⁸⁷

During 1962 there were no serious moves from either side regarding negotiations between the Vatican and Yugoslavia. The state authorities believed that further progress on negotiations was delayed because the bishops were awaiting the conclusions of the Second Vatican Council, in particular regarding the work of the Church in communist societies.⁸⁸

The Second Vatican Council was held in the Vatican from 11 October 1962 until 8 December 1965. During that time Pope John XXIII was especially engaged in peacefully resolving the Cuban Missile Crisis and issued a general call for peace in the world. The Yugoslav government reacted positively to the Pope's politics, and decided to give greater support to those bishops who thought along similar lines as the Pope.⁸⁹

The first indications of possible negotiations between the Yugoslavia and the Vatican appeared in early 1963, when, according to Casaroli, the Yugoslav ambassador in Rome, Ivo Vejvoda, expressed the Yugoslav government's interest in contacts with the Holy See.⁹⁰

The Federal Commission for Religious Affairs prepared a number of positions to be taken by Vejvoda in further negotiations, such as the need for the Vatican to influence Yugoslav bishops in resolving their relations with the state. Vejvoda was advised to not show a great interest in contacts with the Church, but if the Vatican suggested them, he was to hear what the Vatican's representatives had to say and to indicate the issues important to the Yugoslav side. He was also instructed to make it clear that all specific questions of interest to the Church could and should be resolved between the bishops and the authorities in Yugoslavia.⁹¹

Shortly thereafter, in May 1963, the first informal encounters between the Yugoslav government – represented by the minister-advisor of the embassy in Rome, Nikola Mandić – and the Vatican took place. The new pope, Paul VI, who succeeded Pope John XXIII in June 1963, authorized his associates to continue the contacts in an informal manner.⁹²

The main goals of the Vatican in the negotiations, according to the analyses of the Yugoslav authorities, were to strengthen the position of the Church in Yugoslavia, prepare the terrain for resolving relations with other socialist countries, and ease the difficulties in which the Catholic Church found itself around the world, as well as the pursuit of Italian national interests.

⁸⁷ Agostino Casaroli, *Mučeništvo strpljivosti, Sveta Stolica i komunističke zemlje 1963.-1989.* (Zagreb: Kršćanska sadašnjost, 2001), p. 315.

⁸⁸ HDA, KOVZ, box 46, Pov. 113/1-1962.

⁸⁹ HDA, KOVZ, box 47, Pov.147/1-1962.

⁹⁰ CASAROLI, *Mučeništvo strpljivosti*, p. 318.

⁹¹ HDA, KOVZ, box 49, Pov. 2471-1963.

⁹² Agostino Casaroli, *Mučeništvo strpljivosti: Sveta Stolica i komunističke zemlje 1963. - 1989.*, p. 318.

Regarding the benefits to Yugoslavia, it was noted that improved relations would give support to positive trends in the Catholic Church and in the world, and would encourage moderate forces and tendencies in the policies of the Vatican. Furthermore, to some degree it would neutralize reactionary circles in the Vatican, anticommunist propaganda, and the anti-Yugoslav activities of émigrés.⁹³

In late November 1963, bishops from Yugoslavia met with Pope Paul VI, who expressed satisfaction at the improvement of Church-state relations. He also authorized the bishops to notify the Yugoslav authorities that the Catholic Church sought nothing more than elementary religious freedoms, and encouraged them to cooperate with the authorities in advancing negotiations on relations between the Church and state.⁹⁴

The negotiations between the Vatican and Yugoslavia became official in June 1964 with the exchange of memoranda with a stated list of the issues the two sides wished to discuss in the course of the negotiations.⁹⁵ Before the exchange of the memoranda, talks were held in Rome between Mandić and V. Dobrila on the Yugoslav side, and Casaroli and Luigi Bongianin representing the Vatican. They exchanged lists of questions each side wished to see resolved. The Vatican listed its priorities as: applying the principles of freedom of conscience and religion for all categories of citizens and respecting those principles; the neutrality of the state in relations between antireligious and atheistic organizations on one side, and religious associations on the other; the issue of religious education and military service for priests; the freedom of religious ceremonies and the giving of the sacraments; the freedom of the Catholic press and priest associations; the issue of Church buildings and temples; the equality of priests under the law; and the freedom of communication with the Vatican. Issues of lesser importance to the Vatican included: the fate of the Church's register books, religious schools, and Catholic laic organizations; taxes on churches and priests; changing the law on the nationalization of buildings and construction sites; and considering the decrees on the legal position of religious communities. The Yugoslav side, in addition to the issues mentioned above, wished to resolve problems with the role of the authorities in naming bishops, the borders of the bishoprics, the condemnation of the political activities of the clergy (especially those in emigration), and the question of priest associations (such as the Institute of Saint Jeronim and others).⁹⁶

The Catholic bishops, despite their reservations as to the final outcome of the talks, advised the Vatican to not break off negotiations, calculating that it would ultimately be beneficial for the Church to restore the relations broken off in 1952. On the other side, the Yugoslav government insisted on reaching some kind of agreement, although excluding the possibility of changing

⁹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 496-499.

⁹⁴ HDA, KOVZ, box 52, Pov. 22/1-1964.

⁹⁵ Casaroli, *Mučeništvo strpljivosti*, p. 318.

⁹⁶ Radić, *Država i verske zajednice*, vol. II, pp. 505-506.

the general and one-sided decrees which determined the legal status of the Catholic Church. This agreement was seen as a necessary condition for reinstating official relations with the Vatican.⁹⁷

On 15 January 1965, Pope Paul VI met with Vejvoda, the Yugoslav ambassador in Rome, at his request. In the name of the Yugoslav government, Vejvoda thanked the Pope for the aid sent to help the victims of natural disasters which had struck Skoplje and Zagreb. However, the real reason for the meeting was to outline the Yugoslav position on Church-state relations, and to determine the Pope's opinion on these matters. The Pope responded by saying the Church had no interest in meddling in the political affairs of Yugoslavia, or to seek special privileges, adding that he thought the Yugoslav bishops were competent individuals. He expressed hope that the negotiations would end successfully, and repeated several times the necessity of allowing the Catholic Church to be involved in the upbringing of the youth. Because this was the first time a representative of the Yugoslav government had an audience with the Pope since the break in diplomatic relations, it attracted the attention of journalists and the international public.⁹⁸

The bishops were relatively reserved about the agreement, fearing that the Vatican would be deceived by the Yugoslav regime. Cardinal Šeper and the other bishops did not see any use in an agreement which in fact changed nothing, since the authorities insisted on keeping the general legal framework under which the Catholic Church had already been functioning in communist Yugoslavia. The bishops favored the idea to first exchange emissaries between the Vatican and Yugoslavia, and only then sign the agreement, once the Vatican's delegates had an opportunity to observe the situation on the ground. The Cardinal and bishops were also not pleased with some of the statements which were to be issued by the Vatican, regarding priest associations and the clergy in emigration, but they in no way wished to break off the negotiations.⁹⁹

The bishops from Yugoslavia held several meetings in Rome, where, on the request of the Vatican, they discussed the *protocol* of the negotiations. In their reply to the Vatican, the bishops opposed the points in the agreement about émigré priests, as this would give the Yugoslav authorities too much freedom to interfere in the work of foreign clergy and enable them to put pressure on priests for their activities. A similar view was held on the issue of the Institute of Saint Jeronim, i.e., regarding the education of priests abroad. The bishops paid particular attention to the question of the Vatican's representative in Yugoslavia, whose arrival they insisted upon, believing that this would be the only gain of negotiating with Yugoslavia. The Vatican was pleased with the positions of the bishops.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Casaroli, *Mučeništvo strpljivosti*, p. 322.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 511.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 322.

¹⁰⁰ Radić, *Država i verske zajednice*, vol. II, p. 521.

On 1 May 1966, the Pope announced the beginning of the last phase of negotiations, and on 26 May he received Cardinal Šeper, who gave him a memorandum from the bishops against the signing of the *protocol* and calling for a reevaluation of the entire issue. Ultimately, Cardinal Šeper, respecting the Pope's decision, accepted the signing of the *protocol* but suggested that it should not be published. He also asked that the bishops be allowed to announce that the same documents were not formulated in accordance with the suggestions and agreement of the Yugoslav bishops. However, it was impossible to not publish the documents, since the Yugoslav authorities could easily release them to the public. The decision to sign the *protocol* was reached after all, since it was evident that not signing it could put the Catholic Church in Yugoslavia into an even more difficult position than before.¹⁰¹

In Belgrade, on 25 June 1966, the Yugoslav authorities and the representatives of the Vatican signed the *protocol*, which confirmed that the two sides agreed on the exchange of semi-official emissaries. According to the agreement, the Vatican needed to appoint an apostolic delegate based in Belgrade who would also act as an envoy to the Yugoslav government, while Yugoslavia likewise had to send an envoy to the Holy See; both would enjoy the privileges and immunities of true diplomatic representatives. The *protocol* was signed by A. Casaroli in the name of the Vatican, while M. Morača signed on behalf of the Yugoslav government.¹⁰²

The text of the *protocol*, among other things, guaranteed the Catholic Church in Yugoslavia the freedom to conduct religious work and ceremonies. The appropriate organs of social-political associations would provide all citizens with legal guarantees protecting their freedom of conscience and freedom of religion. The government expressed a readiness to take into consideration cases which the Vatican found problematic. The government also accepted the competencies of the Vatican in its jurisdiction over the Catholic Church in Yugoslavia, and the issue of Church character, unless it opposed the internal order of Yugoslavia. The bishops of the Catholic Church in Yugoslavia were permitted to maintain contacts with the Vatican, considering that those contacts had an exclusively religious character.

On the other hand, the Vatican confirmed that the activity of Catholic priests should be held within religious and church frameworks, and therefore they could not misuse their religious and church duties for any political purposes. It was also ready to consider cases the Yugoslav government found necessary to have an opinion on from the Vatican, such as those concerning political terrorism or other criminal forms of violence. If the Yugoslav government judged that some priests participated in those kinds of acts harmful to Yugoslavia, the Vatican was prepared to consider such events, take over the procedure, and apply possible measures that canonic law prescribes for such cases.

¹⁰¹ Casaroli, *Mučeništvo strpljivosti*, pp. 358-361.

¹⁰² HDA, KOVZ - records, book 8, appendix to clause 1.

Finally, the protocol confirmed the readiness of the Vatican and the Yugoslav government to exchange their emissaries.¹⁰³

Cardinal Šeper, in talks with the president of the Federal Religious Commission, Vjekoslav Cvrlje, held after signing the *protocol*, stated that he supported the agreement but had serious reservations with it, which he also mentioned in Rome, i.e., that the biggest flaw of the agreement was that it did not solve the basic issue of religious education in schools. But he added that he hoped it would be adequately solved in the process of improving relations between the Church and the state.¹⁰⁴

The exchange of emissaries took place in the middle of November 1966, when first the emissary of Yugoslav government, Vjekoslav Cvrlje, arrived in the Vatican, followed by the arrival of the Vatican's apostolic emissary, Mario Cagna, in Belgrade.¹⁰⁵ Full diplomatic relations between the Vatican and Yugoslavia were reinstated in 1970.

Translated by Denis Pavić

¹⁰³ SVZN, no. 6/1966.

¹⁰⁴ HDA, KOVZ - records, book 8, Zapisnik sa sjednice Komisije za vjerska pitanja SRH, od 5. VII. 1966. (Protocol from the conference of the Commission of religious questions of SR Croatia, 5 July 1966).

¹⁰⁵ *Glas koncila*, 4 December 1966.

Die Lage der Katholischen Kirche in Kroatien zwischen 1945 und 1970

Zusammenfassung

Was die Beziehungen zwischen der Katholischen Kirche und dem kommunistischen Regime in Jugoslawien anbelangt, kann man feststellen, dass der Zeitraum zwischen 1945 und 1970 der stürmischste von allen anderen während der Existenz vom sozialistischen Jugoslawien war. Diesen Zeitraum kann man in drei Teile einteilen. Den ersten Teil vom Mai 1945 bis Ende 1952 kennzeichnet der Gegensatz zwischen der Katholischen Kirche und dem kommunistischen Regime und er endet mit der Unterbrechung der diplomatischen Beziehungen zwischen Jugoslawien und Vatikan. Den zweiten Teil charakterisiert die Beruhigung der Beziehungen zwischen Kirche und Staat zwischen 1953 und 1960, das ist eine Periode, in der das repräsentative Verhältniss des kommunistischen Regimes gegenüber der Katholischen Kirche allmählich nachlässt, aber das Regime versucht ebenfalls ihre Einheit und ihren Einfluss auf die Gläubigen abzuschwächen. Die dritte Periode beginnt mit dem Tod von Kardinal Stepinac, 1960, als das kommunistische Regime die Initiative für den Beginn der Gespräche zwecks Normalisierung der Beziehungen mit der Katholischen Kirche ergriff, und die Verhandlungen mit ihr fanden gleichzeitig mit dem Zweiten Konzil von Vatikan statt, was ein entscheidender Wendepunkt in der Politik der Katholischen Kirche gegenüber Atheismus und der atheistischen Gesellschaft darstellte. Das erleichterte die Arbeit am Abkommen über Normalisierung der Beziehungen zwischen Vatikan und Jugoslawien. Resultat dieser Normalisierungsbemühungen waren die Unterzeichnung des Protokolls im Jahre 1966 und die Wiederherstellung der diplomatischen Beziehungen vier Jahre später.