

A USEFUL FORGERY: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF A LETTER ALLEGEDLY WRITTEN BY ARCHBISHOP STEPINAC TO THE POPE ON MAY 18, 1943

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Archbishop Stepinac resolutely denied in the court hearing that he was the author of the letter in question, and his attorney indicated some crucial elements proving that it was a forgery. In addition to explaining the purpose and the peculiarities of this letter for the first time, this paper shows that the letter is actually very useful for historiography, because the author or several authors behind it analysed the war situation in the second half of 1943 by referring to relevant historical sources.

Key words: Stepinac, forged letter, court hearing, Serbian Orthodox Church, religious conversions, Chetniks, war crimes

The letter as an integral part of the indictment

The fiery debate on October 2, 1946, which ensued after the public prosecutor, Jakov Blažević, showed a batch of papers to Alojzije Stepinac, Archbishop of Zagreb, in the court hearing with the question: "Is this your letter?" and after Stepinac, having inspected the papers at length, replied: "This is not mine", triggered an intensified persecution and denigration of Stepinac, the Catholic Church, and the Croatian people in Yugoslavia, which in various modalities persist until today.

That a prolonged discussion between the public prosecutor and the Archbishop followed was not known until many years later, when it became possi-

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ble to inspect the stenographic records of this legal farce,¹ since the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, as the actual prosecutor and organizer of the trial, kept silent about the Archbishop's resolute denial in the published minutes of the court hearing.²

The subject of this vigorous exchange of words was a letter supposedly dated May 18, 1943, which the public prosecutor claimed that Archbishop Stepinac had written to Pope Pius XII. The Letter was suspicious already for its unusual appearance: it was written on plain paper without a header, addressing the Pope in an unusual way ("Holy Father!") and ending with an even more extraordinary formula ("In the Sacred Heart of Jesus[,] Yours faithfully..." and, although indicating Stepinac as its author, unsigned; everything was pointing to an unskilful counterfeiter.

One of Stepinac's lawyers, Dr Ivo Politeo, drew the court's attention to these details when trying to prove that the Letter was, in fact, a forgery (he had no one to accuse, and was not allowed to, but the Ustaša regime).³ The American vice-consul in Zagreb, Peter Constan, who was present every day at the court sessions with his personal interpreter, claimed that the court had rejected the authenticity of that document.⁴ Perhaps the vice-consul was right to conclude that, since in the published final verdict the Letter is not mentioned.⁵ The Communists nevertheless thought that the Letter could serve as an excellent propaganda tool, and the Serbian Orthodox Church (SPC) thinks so to this day.

Owing to this letter, SPC was even more inclined to embrace the Communist regime, since it was now convinced that it would be an ally in proclaiming

¹ Hrvatski državni arhiv (HDA - Croatian State Archives), Fond (Record Group) 1561, Služba državne sigurnosti (State Security Service), Republički sekretarijat unutrašnjih poslova Socijalističke Republike Hrvatske (RSUP SRH - Republican Secretariat for Internal Affairs of the Socialist Republic of Croatia) (HR-HDA-1561), šifra (code) 6.3, Dosje (Dossier) A. Stepinac, Stenografski zapisnik suđenja (Stenographic Court Minutes), pp. 2306-2310.

² *Suđenje Lisaku, Stepincu, Šaliću i družini ustaško-križarskim zločincima i njihovim pomagačima* [The trials of Lisak, Stepinac, Šalić, and their company for the Ustaša-Križari crimes, and their helpers] (Zagreb, 1946), pp. 359-363; Robin Harris, *Stepinac: His Life and Times* (Leominster, 2016), pp. 11-12; 237-238.

³ Marina Štambuk-Škalić, ed., "Dokumenti obrane u sudskom procesu protiv nadbiskupa Alojzija Stepinca" [Documents of the defense in judicial trial against Archbishop Alojzije Stepinac], *Fontes* (1996), no. 2: 203-206.

⁴ Memorandum entitled "The Zagreb Trials: Trial of the Archbishop of Zagreb, Aloysius Stepinac", Enclosure no. 2 to Despatch no. 2 dated 14 October 1946 from Peter Constan, American Vice-Consul, the American Consulate, Zagreb, page 3, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Record Group (RG) 59, General Records of the Department of State, document 860h.00/10/1446.

⁵ Harris, *Stepinac*, p. 267.

Stepinac and the Catholic Church as haters of all Serbs and of Orthodoxy, and for the outspoken acknowledgment that around 240,000 Orthodox believers converted to Catholicism during the Independent State of Croatia (NDH).

The highest circles of SPC still like to mention the Letter, not only in order to prevent Stepinac's canonization, but also using the demonization of his person to condemn the Croats and the Croatian state – both the one that existed from 1941 to 1945, and the one in existence since 1991.

Despite the Letter's limitations, today it can serve as a catalyst for serious talks between Croatia and Serbia, and their peoples. Whoever its author was, he used historical arguments and documents that the Croatian historiography has known and used. Insofar the Letter offers an opportunity to juxtapose historical arguments and, above all, to openly voice the mutual objections of Serbs and Croats concerning the "historical guilt" caused by the crimes and injustices committed against one another.

The Italian and Croatian versions of the Letter

It should be said at once that there are variants of the Letter in Italian and Croatian,⁶ and therefore one should address the issue whether the Croatian version was a translation from Italian or vice versa.

Everything points to the fact that the Italian version is the original one, from which a Croatian translation was subsequently made. The Croatian text is in some places barely understandable owing to the poor translation. Thus, on page 818 of the Italian text, one reads: "Fra altri uccisero quale 'empio comunista' il vecchio Don Vide Putica di 83 anni, l'alunno della Propaganda e sacerdote santo (diocesi di Mostar)." The Croatian translation in p. 33 says: "Among others, they killed 'as a Communist example' the old Don Vide Putica, aged 83," which shows that the translator did not know that "empio" meant "godless" and mistook it for "esempio" = example. The translator referred to Don Vide Putica (translating the word "l'alunno") as "one from the Propaganda" instead of "a student of the Papal Institute of the Congregation for the Propagation of Faith". In page 820 of the Italian version, where some texts in Latin are quoted, the translator was at a complete loss. Speaking of the Orthodox immigrants "qui qua confinarii turcici contra christianos pugnabant, nel modo del vescovo Ogramić (1672): 'Schismatici qui nos acrius insectatur

⁶ A letter with identical features in Italian was indeed among the evidence presented at the trial. HR-HDA-1561, šifra (code) 6.3 Dossier A. Stepinac, Sudski stup (Court pile) 6/49, omot (folder) 65.88 Dokazni materijali (Evidence), pp. 808-823.

quam Turcae' o del collaboratore di Farlati, P. Filippo Laštrić O.F.M.: 'Hos infestiores hostes tolleramus quam ipsos Turcas'," the translation runs as follows: "who fought against the Christians as Turkish border troops, as Bishop Ogramić (1672): 'The schismatics, who attack us more fiercely than the Turks' or as Father Filip Laštrić, OFM, a collaborator of Farlati's: 'These we consider to be more dangerous enemies than the Turks.'" This translation makes no sense unless the expressions "nel modo del vescovo" and "del collaboratore di Farlati" are translated as "as written by Bishop Ogramić [...]" and "as written by Father Filip Laštrić OFM, a collaborator of Farlati's" and unless one retains the punctuation of the Italian version.

The Croatian translator's lack of skill is also evident from his erroneous spelling of some famous surnames. Thus, he did not know of Josip Stadler, the Archbishop of Vrhbosna, and used the spelling "Sospig Stagler" instead.

Although the Letter was originally written in Italian, there are nevertheless indications that its author was a "local man". The surname of Draža Mihailović, leader of the Chetniks, is always written as "Mihajlović", which was a common Croatian practice. On page 810 of the Italian version, under Nr. 2, his instructions are quoted as P. 4 and P. 5, which means "punto" and the next paragraph is marked as T. 8, which probably betrays a Croatian author who replaced "punto" automatically as "točka" ("item"). In addition, the Italian version is formulated according to the rules that were usual in diplomatic correspondence (for example, at the bottom of the page there are one or two words to the right, with which the next page then starts), which is not the case with the Croatian translation.

There are also strong indications that the Italian version of the Letter was produced in a Croatian office. It is typed on a machine that had letters with diacritical signs (č, ć, ž). It should also be noted that, at least judging by the simple visual impression, both versions were written on the same typewriter.

Finally, the Letter was written by someone who was informed about the activities of Archbishop Stepinac at the time of writing. He knew, for example, that the Archbishop had written a letter handed over to the State Secretary of the Holy See late in May 1943, speaking about the denigrations against him and the Catholic Church coming from the Orthodox-Serbian propaganda, or the fact that Bishop Bonefačić had sent him a leaflet "To the Yugoslav nationalists," which attacked the Catholic clergy for having given its blessing to various murders.⁷

⁷ The exact title of the leaflet was "Word of Yugoslav nationalists from the Littoral" [Riječ primorskih Jugoslavena nacionalista, br. I] from May 1942. Bishop Bonefačić sent it to Archbishop Stepinac on June 6, 1942. The text of the leaflet, with a brief letter of Bishop Bonefačić, has been published in: Jure Krišto, ed., *Katolička Crkva i Nezavisna Država Hrvatska 1941.-*

So far, thus, we have established that the Letter was written by a person fluent in Italian, whose mother tongue was Croatian (or he knew it well) and who knew what diplomatic correspondence should look like. The author was also well acquainted with the subject on which he was writing, including the historical sources, which, of course, does not rule out the possibility that there were more collaborators working on the Letter.

We have also established that the Croatian translation of the Letter was done by someone who was not particularly fluent either in Italian or in Croatian, or even Latin, and who did not know the subject matter of the Letter. From this, it may be concluded that the Croatian translation was done subsequently, probably for the purpose of the court trial against Archbishop Stepinac, i.e. in the arrangement of the State Security Administration (Uprava državne bezbednosti - UDBA). Thus, the original Italian letter is a forgery produced probably in or around the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of NDH,⁸ and the Croatian translation was arranged by the Communists for the purposes of Archbishop Stepinac's trial.

Judicial and historiographical debates concerning the Letter's authenticity

One should, of course, say a few words about Archbishop Stepinac's relationship with the Letter to the Pope. It can be proved beyond doubt that the Archbishop did not write what the public prosecutor, Jakov Blažević, showed to him at the show trial. As we have seen, Stepinac took a good look at the document and firmly stated that it was not his. A certain amount of ambiguity regarding the connection of Archbishop Stepinac with this letter to the Pope was caused by the Vatican newspaper *L'Osservatore Romano*, which on the day of Stepinac's verdict, October 11, 1946, published a statement regarding the supposed letter of 18 May, 1943:

1945., knjiga II: Dokumenti [The Catholic Church and the Independent State of Croatia, vol. 2: Documents] (Zagreb, 1998), pp. 182-186.

⁸ Viktor Novak, *Magnum crimen: Pola vijeka klerikalizma u Hrvatskoj* [Magnum crimen: Half a Century of Clericalism in Croatia] (Zagreb, 1948), p. 789, claims that the copy of Stepinac's supposed letter to the Pope was sent to the Pope "by Duke Erwein Lobkowitz, Pavelić's deputy in the Vatican, from Rome to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs" and thereby refers to *Suđenje Lisaku, Stepincu, Šaliću i družini ustaško-križarskim zločinima i njihovim pomagačima*, p. 325. However, there is no such information on the said page, which is quite common with Novak.

“During a discussion at the Zagreb trial held on October 2 [1946], the public prosecutor presented the Croatian translation of the letter that Archbishop Stepinac had allegedly sent to the Holy See on 18 May, 1943. We have been authorized to state that, after the research conducted in the State Secretariat’s Archives, some sheets dated May 18, 1943 have been found, but their content corresponds only partly to the summary read out by the public prosecutor. In addition, unlike other letters that the Archbishop had written to the Holy See, this document – which passed completely unnoticed – is all typewritten without a header, in a form which is uncommon in correspondence with the Holy See, without a seal and, most importantly, unsigned.”⁹

Those who wanted to associate Archbishop Stepinac with the Letter believed that they had found a firm confirmation of their charges in the sentence communicated by the State Secretariat: “[I]n the State Secretariat’s Archives, some sheets dated May 18, 1943 have been found, but their content corresponds only partly to the summary read out by the public prosecutor.”

The debate acquired new elements and additional vigour through Jozo Tomasevich (1908-1994), an American publicist of Croatian origin. Even though he was not a historian, but an economist, some of his books made him an authority for certain circles on the history of conflicts during World War II in the territory of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.¹⁰ In 2010, the second book of Tomasevich’s planned trilogy was posthumously published and his daughter had it translated into Croatian (not always of the best quality) shortly afterwards.¹¹ In an Appendix to the chapter “The Churches”, titled “Was the Archbishop’s May 1943 Report to the Pope Genuine?”¹² Tomasevich claimed that he had found documents at the Public Record Office in London “showing con-

⁹ The Italian original reads as follows: “In una seduta del 2 ottobre [1946.] al processo di Zagabria, il Pubblico Ministero ha prodotto, a carico dell’Ecc.mo Monsignor Stepinac, la traduzione in croato di una lettera che l’Arcivescovo avrebbe indirizzato alla Santa Sede il 18 maggio 1943. Siamo autorizzati a dichiarare che, eseguite ricerche negli archivi della Segreteria di Stato, non si sono trovati che alcuni fogli, recanti la data del 18 maggio 1943, il cui contenuto corrisponde solo in parte al riassunto fattone dal Pubblico Ministero. Peraltro, diversamente da tutte le lettere inviate dall’Arcivescovo alla Santa Sede, tale documento - al quale non fu dato alcun seguito - è scritto tutto a macchina su carta non intestata, e redatto in forma inusitata nella corrispondenza con la Santa Sede, e senza sigillo e, quel che è più significativo, senza firma.” *L’Osservatore Romano*, 11 October 1946, p. 1, col. 3, untitled notice.

¹⁰ The first volume was *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia, 1941-1945: The Chetniks* (Stanford, CA, 1975) and the second *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia, 1941-1945: Occupation and Collaboration* (Stanford, CA, 2010).

¹¹ Croatian edition: *Rat i revolucija u Jugoslaviji, 1941-1945.: Okupacija i kolaboracija* (Zagreb, 2010).

¹² English edition: pp. 576-579; Croatian edition: pp. 629-644.

clusively that Archbishop Stepinac's report to the Vatican in May 1943, which he reportedly disavowed at his trial and which his counsel characterized as forgery, was in fact genuine" (pp. 577-578). Tomasevich therefore concluded that the arguments of the Archbishop's lawyer, I. Politeo, were ungrounded and that Archbishop Stepinac did not speak the truth when he denied his authorship of the letter shown to him by the public prosecutor.

Despite Tomasevich's assurance of having found the final answer and resolved this historical enigma he jumped too quickly to the conclusion about the authenticity of the alleged Letter, i.e. about Stepinac's authorship. We shall come back later to the documents he received at the Public Record Office. It should be noted here that Tomasevich did not act reasonably when ignoring the extensive and plausible argument of the Archbishop's lawyer, I. Politeo, or not showing why he believed it was unfounded. Moreover, even a person who was only superficially acquainted with the Archbishop's style and language, or with the historical facts and names mentioned in the Letter, must conclude that the Letter could not be his. Had Tomasevich devoted sufficient attention to the document in question, he may have noticed some details about the Letter that further complicate the question of authorship.

Thus, the Letter contains these, supposedly Stepinac's words: "In a separate letter to the Holy See, I have answered the false and hateful denunciations inspired by the Serbian side and especially by the Chetniks, directed against the Catholic hierarchy and Catholic clergy in Croatia." ("In un speciale scritto alla Santa Sede, ho risposto alle denunce false e dall'odio ispirate, dalla parte serba e specialmente da parte dei četnici, dirette alla gerarchia cattolica e al clero cattolico in Croazia.")¹³ Had Stepinac been the actual author of the Letter, he would not have referred to another letter so ambiguously, but would have identified it by date and by the register number, and would not say vaguely that he had written it "to the Holy See." In addition, the Archbishop had indeed written to the State Secretary, Cardinal Maglione, namely on May 24, 1943, and that letter was an answer to the Serbian-Orthodox accusations. It is illogical, however, that the Archbishop, if he were the author of the letter of May 18, would say that he had "[i]n a separate letter to the Holy See [...] answered to the false and hateful denunciations inspired by the Serbian side" when *this* letter was dated May 24, 1943, and the Archbishop personally took it to Rome and handed it over to the State Secretariat.

This is not the end of ambiguities. The letter to Cardinal Maglione dated May 24, 1943 also contains the following sentence: "Very soon, I hope, I will be able to present Your Eminence with other documents that show the atrocities that the Chetniks had committed against the Croatian Catholic

¹³ The alleged Letter of Archbishop Stepinac to the Pope, beginning of Point 8.

people.”¹⁴ These documents must be identical with those that the Archbishop had collected and sent to Msgr. Augustin Juretić to Switzerland, to which I will come back later. It is quite clear that the Archbishop *had not yet sent them* to the Holy See (the State Secretariat), and the letter in which he mentioned these documents was dated May 24, 1943. It is not logical that the Archbishop would have sent a letter and the documents to the Pope dated May 18, 1943 if he planned to pay a personal visit to the Pope and the State Secretariat late in May in order to submit the documentation on the engagement of the Catholic Church in NDH on behalf of the Jews and the Orthodox, which he also did and mentioned it in the abovementioned letter of May 24, 1943.

And what about the documents that Tomasevich found in London? The problem gets even more complicated when some new protagonists are introduced. Tomasevich made his conclusion based on a report by the British delegate in the Vatican, Sir Francis d’Arcy Osborne, dated February 17, 1944.¹⁵ However, Osborne relied on a member of the British delegation in the Vatican, Mr Hugh E.L. Montgomery, and the records of his conversation with the Croatian priest Krunoslav Draganović, who came to the Delegation with special recommendations by the Holy See.

At the end of August 1943, Draganović, professor of Church history at the Catholic Theological Faculty, University of Zagreb, was assigned to the informal Croatian representation at the Holy See and entrusted with the task of assisting the return of Croatian detainees from the Italian camps on behalf of Caritas at the Zagreb Archdiocese and the Croatian Red Cross.¹⁶

Draganović arrived in Rome “early in September 1943.”¹⁷ However, Dr Dominik Mandić, a Franciscan from Herzegovina who was at that time high-

¹⁴ Blet, Pierre, Graham, Robert A., Martini, Angelo, Schneider, Burkhardt, eds., *Actes et documents du Saint Siège relatifs à la Seconde Guerre Mondiale* [Acts and documents of the Holy See relating to the Second World War], vol. 9, *La Saint Siège et les victimes de la guerre*, Janvier – Décembre 1943 (Vatican City, 1975), doc. no. 130, Annex II, pp. 221-224.

¹⁵ Foreign Office (F. O.), Coll. 371/44325, document R 5331/850/92.

¹⁶ As for his tasks and the related authority, see Petar Vrankić, “Okviri djelovanja prof. Krunoslava Draganovića u Italiji (1943.-1963.) u svjetlu dostupnih arhivskih izvora i najnovijih publikacija” [The scope of activities of Prof. Krunoslav Draganović in Italy (1943-1963) in the light of available archival sources and recent publications], *Krunoslav Stjepan Draganović – svećenik, povjesničar i rodoljub: Zbornik radova s međunarodnoga znanstvenog simpozija o Krunoslavu Stjepanu Draganoviću povodom 110. obljetnice rođenja i 30. obljetnice smrti održanom na Katoličkom bogoslovnom fakultetu u Sarajevu od 8.-10. 11. 2013. godine* (Sarajevo-Zagreb, 2014), pp. 85-87.

¹⁷ P. Vrankić, *ibid.*, p. 85, writes on Draganović’s journey to Rome that it took place “late in August 1943”; cf. Draganović’s statement to the Yugoslav investigators on September 26, 1967 in: Miroslav Akmađža, *Krunoslav Draganović: Iskazi komunističkim istražiteljima* [Kruno-

ly positioned in his order, stated very precisely that Draganović arrived in Rome on January 16, 1944.¹⁸ Both notices are accurate, but one should keep in mind that Italy capitulated in the meantime (September 8, 1943), the Germans occupied Rome (September 10, 1943), and the Allies entered the Italian territories in the south. This prompted the need to change the Croatian allies and prevent Croatia and the Croatian people from becoming a part of some new Yugoslavia. In any case, Draganović was thinking in this direction and that is why in December 1943 he went to Zagreb, where he wanted to examine such possibilities. He talked about that with various prominent people in politics, culture, and the Church – undoubtedly also Archbishop Stepinac – because it had become the current topic among the influential circles of the Croatian society. Therefore, it is possible to accept Mandić's information that Draganović returned to Rome on January 16, 1944, but this time with the mission to hand over a special memorandum to the Western Allies.

Such a memorandum he indeed handed over to the representative of the British Embassy at the Holy See, Francis D'Arcy Godolphin Osborne, on February 14, 1944, attempting to explain the Croatian situation in that political moment. The 15-point memorandum was in German, and the British Ambassador at the Holy See sent the English translation to the Minister of Foreign Affairs.¹⁹ He also sent a summary of the conversation that took place between Montgomery and Draganović.

But Draganović gave to Montgomery (and Osborne?) some papers that he claimed to be a copy of Archbishop Stepinac's report to the Pope, and Montgomery had included nearly two pages of citations and paraphrases from that report. Since these passages of Montgomery's correspond to the contents of the letter that the public prosecutor presented to Stepinac, Tomasevich concluded triumphantly: "We can argue that the latter document [the alleged letter of Stepinac to the Pope dated May 18, 1943] was authentic.

In his memorandum, Draganović provides similar arguments as cited in the alleged Letter to the Pope, arguing that "the several hundred thousand

slav Draganović: Statements before the Communist investigators] (Zagreb, 2010), p. 94; Milan Simčić, "Prof. Krunoslav Stjepan Draganović (1903-1983)", *Papinski hrvatski zavod sv. Jeronima (1901-2001): Zbornik u prigodi stoljetnice* (Rome and Zagreb, 2001), pp. 843-854.

¹⁸ Dominik Mandić, "Moje uspomene na kardinala Stepinca" [My memories of Cardinal Stepinac], *Stepinac mu je ime: Zbornik uspomena, svjedočanstava i dokumenata*, vol. 1 (München – Barcelona, 1978), p. 139.

¹⁹ Osborne to Eden (Rome, February 17, 1944), Conf. Nr. 11. Appendix to the Memorandum of Dr. Draganović and the note of Hugh Montgomery, F.O. 371/44325/5331/850/92. PRO, cf. Dragoljub R. Živojinović, *Vatikan, Katolička crkva i jugoslovenska vlast 1941-1958* [Vatican, the Catholic Church, and the Yugoslav authorities] (Belgrade, 2007), pp. 70-72.

graves lying between the Croats and the Serbs will always remain a reason for blood revenge.”²⁰ In this way, Draganović wanted to strengthen his main argument, namely that “if Croatia cannot continue to be completely independent, then it certainly should not be part of the Balkan alliance, either on a Communist or on a nationalist basis, but part of a Western, Central European, Danube federation.”²¹ He enhanced the impression with the statement that all his points were “a true expression of the firm conviction of all positive agents in today’s Croatia, especially the ecclesiastical circles headed by Zagreb’s Archbishop Stepinac.”²²

Tomasevich did not even consider Draganović’s motives in all this, but rather believed that what the latter said to the British diplomat was true. Tomasevich did not ask himself where Draganović obtained a “copy” of the letter Stepinac had written to the Pope. It is almost certain that Draganović could not have had a real copy of Archbishop Stepinac’s report to the Pope, because neither the ecclesiastical practice nor the Archbishop’s personal habits were such that he would have shared his reports, confidential as they were, either with a layman or with a priest, even if these persons had important functions in the society or in state administration. In other cases, the Archbishop may have disclosed the content of his address to the Pope or the State Secretary to a representative of the Croatian state authorities, but he never showed the document, let alone gave a copy of what he had submitted to the Pope to his interlocutors.²³ But of course, Draganović may have had a copy of the material produced in state organizations, including the alleged Letter of the Archbishop.

Tomasevich did not even try to answer the question of the origin of the “sheets” dated May 18, 1943, and how and why they came to the State Secretariat in such an unusual form. His conclusion actually means that he believed the public prosecutor’s allegation that there were segments with a similar content at the Vatican State Secretariat as the Letter, and also Draganović’s claim that what he had given to Montgomery was a copy of Stepinac’s letter to the Pope. It is possible that what was found at the State Secretariat of the Holy See was a part or all of the letter that Archbishop Stepinac claimed not to be his. It is also possible that this had come to the State Secretariat through the same or similar channels as it had come to the representative of the British Embassy,

²⁰ Draganović’s memorandum to the Allies, Point 14.

²¹ Ibid., Point 15.

²² Ibid.

²³ Thus, Stepinac “retold” the content of his note to the State Secretary to Nikola Rušinović, the unofficial representative of NDH at the Holy See; cf. Jure Krišto, *Sukob simbola: Politika, vjere i ideologije u Nezavisnoj Državi Hrvatskoj* [The Conflict of Symbols: Politics, religions, and ideologies in the Independent State of Croatia] (Zagreb, 2001), pp. 49, 50, 59-64, 78-80.

Montgomery. Nevertheless, this cannot be a proof that the Letter is “authentic”, as Tomasevich claimed, i.e. that Stepinac wrote it. What Stepinac’s lawyer pointed out is far more important for the authenticity of the letter: namely, that the form of the letter and its other features, as well as the illogical aspects that we have indicated earlier, cannot be associated with Stepinac’s authorship.

The importance of the alleged letter to the Pope

It is pointless to seek for answers to the question of the actual authorship, since none of the persons who could have known all the details presented in the Letter cannot be identified as its author with absolute certainty.²⁴

²⁴ There were several persons in touch with the materials used for the Letter: Father Radoslav Glavaš as a state official in charge of political issues that also affected the Church (Ivo Politeo, defence speech at the court); cf. Stella Alexander, *The Triple Myth: a Life of Archbishop Alojzije Stepinac* (Boulder, New York, 1987), n. on p. 161; Duke Erwein Lobkowitz, delegate to the Vatican; Giuseppe Masucci, secretary of the Apostolic Visitor, Abbot Marcone. General Vjekoslav Maks Luburić confirmed this in the epilogue to the Croatian edition of Masucci’s diary *Misija u Hrvatskoj 1941.-1945.* [Mission in Croatia], ed. by Marijan Mikac (Madrid, 1967). Luburić wrote that Colonel Šime Cvitanović was in charge of collecting materials on Chetnik crimes and of handing them out to Masucci. On one occasion, he had met Masucci at Cvitanović’s, who allegedly promised to send the materials to the Vatican. Luburić’s addition to Masucci’s diary was published as the note 4 titled “Pro domo sua,” pp. 289-298, quote on p. 293. Mons. Augustin Juretić must have also had something to do with some of the documentation in the Letter, because Archbishop Stepinac had personally sent him the materials about Chetnik crimes in NDH. Prof. Draganović may have also been familiar with the materials, given the nature of his mission in Rome and his contacts in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It is reasonable to assume that there were more associates or participants in the preparation of the Letter. In an earlier version of this paper, I indicated several reasons why I considered Draganović as one of the main participants in the preparation, perhaps even writing of the Letter. First of all, given his desire to convince the Western Allies that it would be tragic for the Croats to become part of the new Yugoslavia, “Stepinac’s letter” may have seemed to him as an extremely powerful instrument. But also the content of this allegedly Stepinac’s letter to the Pope points to Draganović. Knowledge of specific historical problems – conversions of Catholics to Orthodoxy at the time of the Ottoman Empire (on which subject Draganović had published a scholarly paper, but Politeo probably did not know it) – and the systematic way of addressing the issues indicates Draganović’s hand. For example, there were not many who could have been interested in the fate of Don Vido Putica, a priest from Herzegovina, or that of Zvonimir Bralo, a priest from Sarajevo who joined the Ustasha, except Draganović, who was a member of the same Archdiocese. As stated above, the purpose of the Letter was to inform the Holy See – and through it the Western Allies – about the actual events in NDH and the dangers threatening the Croatian people if it were forced to live again with the Serbs, i.e. in the Serbian state after the war. The author or authors of the Letter, apparently, believed that this purpose justifies even the implication of the Archbishop’s authorship and even used the Archbishop’s materials, personal reflections, and political opinions. There are, of course,

The Letter, however, is extremely important because of its content, which has been neglected for the fact that the Communist court used it and that it was thus abused for political purposes, which has remained the case until today. The Letter is, in fact, an expert analysis of Serbian Orthodoxy from the Great Schism to World War II, and a prediction of the further destiny of the Croats if the Greater Serbian and Chetnik idea won. Insofar the Letter also clarifies the Greater Serbian genocide idea of creating a Serbian territory without the presence of other nations, as well as the Chetnik activities aimed at eradicating the Croatian Catholic and Muslim populations in the imagined Serbian area. The need for such clarification and interpretation was even greater because the Western Allies firmly believed from the outbreak of the war that the Chetniks were their allies in struggle against the Germans. That is why the Letter explicitly stated that it was not concerned with the future of Catholic Croats should the Bolshevik idea win, because “[...] the Communist terror has nowhere been carried out with such atrocities, and [...] never with such massacres of weak women and innocent children, as the Serbian Chetniks have done it. Whereas the partisans kill individual persons, who belong to the ruling circles, the Chetniks will kill everyone who is a Catholic.” “Mentre i partigiani uccidono le singole persone, appartenenti ai circoli dirigenti, i četnici uccidono tutti quegli che sono cattolici.”²⁵ The Chetniks are, therefore, the executors of the genocide idea of Greater Serbia and Serbian Orthodoxy. The author (or authors) guarantees that his arguments are backed by reliable sources, from photographs to quotes from official documents. The Italian version consists of 16 typewritten pages, single-spaced, while the Croatian one has 11 typewritten pages even though it contains everything that the Italian one does.

The main thesis is presented in eleven points, with Pt. 9 missing (meaning 10 points), and in the Croatian version there are no signs for Pt. 10 and Pt. 11, or they are not visible. Apparently, from Pt. 1 to Pt. 11 (actually Pt. 10) the Chetnik activities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Dalmatia are analysed, and from p. 820 in the Italian version, i.e. p. 34 in the Croatian one, i.e. from remembering the thirteen hundred years old ties between the Croats and the Holy See, the Chetnik activities are considered in relation to the history of Orthodoxy in the Croatian ethnic territories.

reasons why Draganović's connection to the entire content of the Letter could also be refuted. It is hard to believe, for example, that in order to corroborate his arguments he would have even reached for the “saving” of Catholics created by the forced conversions from Orthodoxy. And that is why I believe that the Letter is not a single person's work. Nevertheless, there are strong indications of Draganović's participation in its preparation, but as they cannot be proven beyond doubt, I have “relegated” them here to a footnote.

²⁵ Report of Archbishop Stepinac to the Vatican (May 18, 1943), HR-HDA-1561, code 6.3, Dossier A. Stepinac, Stenographic Court Minutes, p. 26.

The points clarifying the Chetnik goals and the Greater Serbian idea are the following:

1. The aim of the Chetnik activities is to establish Greater Serbia, be it as a part of Yugoslavia or not. Within the borders of the new Serbia, only the Serb-Orthodox population can remain, since in the Serbian Orthodox system only an Orthodox Christian can be a true and reliable Serb.²⁶ That is why the Chetnik programme is “to expel the Croats and the Muslims from Lika, northern Dalmatia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and to establish a single state, completely Serbian-Orthodox, with Serbia and Montenegro as its core territories” (p. 27).²⁷

²⁶ The essence of Serbian Orthodoxy, and its role in the national shaping of Serbhood and the development of the ideology of Greater Serbia, has long intrigued Croatian scholars and writers. What both older and contemporary authors agree upon is that the medieval dynasty of Nemanjić played a decisive role in this, but so did the centuries-long presence of Ottoman rule in the Balkans. The main point concerning the Nemanjić was that he created not only a strong Serbian state, but also the Serbian Church (1219), specific in the veneration of its own saints and family patrons, so that it is possible to speak of a peculiar Serbian Christian tradition, which this Church calls and celebrates as “Svetosavlje” according to its founder, St Sava (Sabas), brother of the dynasty’s founder. I will mention only some of the authors who have made a significant contribution to this research: L. v. Südland [Ivo Pilar], *Južnoslavensko pitanje: Prikaz cjelokupnog pitanja* [The South Slavic question: An overview of the subject] (Zagreb, 1943), reprint: (Varaždin, 1990); László Hadrovics, *Srpski narod i njegova Crkva pod turskom vlašću* [The Serbian people and its Church under the Ottoman rule] (Zagreb, 2000); Srećko M. Džaja, *Konfesionalnost i nacionalnost Bosne i Hercegovine: Predemancipacijski period 1463. - 1804.* [Confession and nationality in Bosnia and Herzegovina] (Sarajevo, 1992); Matijević, Zlatko, “Političko djelovanje dr. Ive Pilara i pokušaj rješavanja ‘južnoslavenskog pitanja’ u Austro-Ugarskoj Monarhiji (ožujak-listopad 1918.)” [Political activity of Dr Ivo Pilar and an attempt at solving the ‘South Slavic’ question in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy (March-October 1918)], *Godišnjak Pilar* 1 (2001), no. 1: 133-170; idem, “Državno-pravne koncepcije dr. Ive Pilara i vrhbosanskoga nadbiskupa dr. Josipa Stadlera. Od Promemorije do Izjave klerikalne grupe bosansko-hercegovačkih katolika (kolovoz-prosinac 1917. godine)” [Political and legal ideas of Dr Ivo Pilar and Dr Josip Stadler, Archbishop of Vrhbosna: From the Pro memoria to the Statement of the Clerical Group of Bosnian and Herzegovinian Catholics (August-December 1917)], *Godišnjak Pilar* 1 (2001), no. 1: 117-131; Jure Krišto, “Izvori identiteta Hrvata u Bosni i Hercegovini” [Sources of Croatian identity in Bosnia and Herzegovina], *Status* 13 (Fall-Winter, 2008): 226-234; Nenad Lemajić, “Rani kontakti Srba i Habsburgovaca (do Mohačke bitke)” [Early contacts between the Serbs and the Habsburgs (before the Battle of Mohács)], *Istraživanja* 25 (2014): 73-87.

²⁷ Recently, the following scholars have written on the Chetnik movement and its activities: Fikreta Jelić-Butić, *Četnici u Hrvatskoj 1941-1945* [Chetniks in Croatia, 1941-1945] (Zagreb, 1979); Jozo Tomasevich, *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia, 1941-1945: The Chetniks* (Stanford, CA, 1975); Zdravko Dizdar – Mihael Sobolevski, *Prešućivani četnički zločini u Hrvatskoj i u Bosni i Hercegovini 1941.-1945.* [Hidden Chetnik crimes in Croatia, and in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1941-1945] (Zagreb, 1999); Zdravko Dizdar, “Politički i vojni oblici četništva u Hrvatskoj 1945. godine” [Political and military forms of Chetnikhood in Croatia, 1945], in:

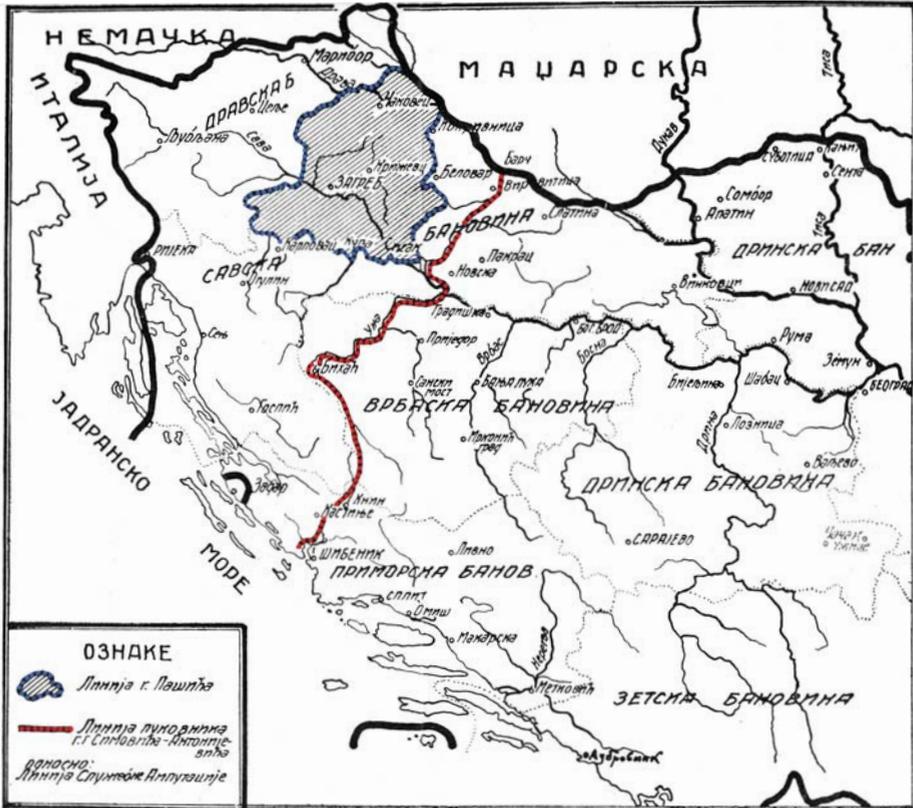
2. “The creation of a homogeneous Orthodox state should be achieved through the liquidation of all those who are not Orthodox, and above all by cleansing all Catholics from the Croatian regions annexed to this state” (p. 27).²⁸
3. Cartographic representation of Greater Serbia (see some attached maps) covering parts of the Hungarian, Bulgarian, Albanian, and Italian territories, as well as most of the Croatian regions. Croatia should be reduced to about 10% of today’s Croatian territory, i.e. to the area that can be “seen from the belfry of the Zagreb cathedral” (p. 29).²⁹
4. Cleansing the territory of all Catholics and Muslims should be done in three ways:
 - a. Massive slaughter of the Croatian people
 - b. Radical plunder that will cause hunger, death, and expulsion from homes (pp. 29-30)
 - c. Forcible conversions to Serbian Orthodoxy, which should occur especially in Dalmatia (p. 30)
5. The Greater Serbs feel great hatred towards Catholicism and the Catholic Church, and they identify Catholics with the Communists, clericalists, Ustashas, etc. (pp. 30-31).³⁰a. In Vol. 8 (pp. 31-32), examples of this hatred

1945. – *razdjelnica hrvatske povijesti: [zbornik radova sa znanstvenog skupa održanog u Hrvatskom institutu za povijest u Zagrebu, 5. i 6. svibnja 2006.]* (Zagreb, 2006), pp. 357-381; idem, *Četnički zločini u Bosni i Hercegovini 1941.-1945.* [Chetnik crimes in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1941-1945] (Zagreb, 2002).

²⁸ There was indeed such a programme, which bore a corresponding name – “Homogeneous Serbia” – elaborated on June 30, 1941 by the Bosnian Serb Stevan Moljević, a lawyer by profession. The most recent study on this issue is: Stjepan Lozo, *Ideologija i propaganda srpskog genocida nad Hrvatima – projekt “Homogena Srbija” 1941.* [Ideology and propaganda of Serbian genocide against the Croats: The “Homogeneous Serbia” project, 1941], (Split: Podstrana, 2018).

²⁹ On Greater Serbian projects throughout history see: Bože Čović, ed., *Izvori velikosrpske agresije. Rasprave, dokumenti, kartografski prikazi* [Sources of Greater Serbian aggression: Debates, documents, maps], (Zagreb, [1991]). In the 1990s, the Virovitica-Karlovac-Karlobag line was considered as ideal; cf. Mihailo Stanišić, *Projekti Velika Srbija* [Projects of Greater Serbia] (Belgrade, 2000).

³⁰ Hate is not a static category; it persists in constant kindling, in two stages: the object of hatred is presented as worthless, miserable, criminal, so worth of contempt, by means of various propaganda instruments: lies, forgeries, defamation, and exaggeration concerning one’s own victims, accusing the nation in the focus of hatred. The aim of such kindling of hatred is to trigger revenge instincts: the second stage is to destroy the object of hatred thus depicted. Such dynamics can be easily identified in the anti-Croatian hysteria during the 1980s, which ended in a military action against the Croats and an attempt to destroy



Marks

-  The line of Mr. Pašić
-  The line of colonels Mr. Simović and Mr. Antonijević, the official line of amputation

1. Blue dotted line - Crippled Croatia according to the plan of the president of Yugoslav government and leading Serbian politician Nikola Pašić from the 1920s
2. Red dotted line – The plan of Serbian military occupation in Croatia and in Bosnia-Herzegovina by Serbian colonels Simović and Antonijević from November 1918

Ideas of Greater Serbia in recent history. Map published by Ž. Milosavljević, *Srpsko-hrvatski spor i neimari Jugoslavije* [Serbo-Croatian Dispute and the Architects of Yugoslavia], second edition (Belgrade, 1938-1939).

are listed, from both further und recent past. Josip Stadler, Archbishop of Vrhbosna, is presented as a “moral monster, a picture invented by the

them by means of crime and persecution in the early 1990s. Cf. Mirko Grmek, Marc Gjidara, and Neven Šimac, *Etničko čišćenje: Povijesni dokumenti o jednoj srpskoj ideologiji* [Ethnical cleansing: Historical documents on a Serbian ideology] (Zagreb, 1993).

Greater Serbian propaganda.”³¹ That same propaganda accused the priest Zvonimir Bralo that, at the time of NDH, he killed some Serbs with his own hands in the village of Alipašin Most near Sarajevo. Such libels continued even after the Croatian government sentenced the perpetrator of that terrible deed to death (p. 31). A Chetnik newspaper denigrated the papacy and Catholicism by comparing them to a poison that “drop by drop infests the Croatian people over the centuries, penetrating the most hidden cells of its moral being.” For everything that was not good either in the former Yugoslavia or in NDH, the Greater Serbs accuse “the papacy and Roman Catholicism, that strange tree on the Serbian soil that needs to be cut and destroyed if the Serbian people wants to be happy and free.”³² Here is also the source of the Greater Serbian accusations that the Catholic clergy was directly responsible for crimes against Serbs in NDH and that it directly participated in them (p. 32).³³

- b. This hatred towards Catholicism and the Catholic Church results in the demolition of Catholic churches, desecration of hosts and chalices, and massacre of Catholic believers, priests, and nuns, whereby the perpetrators often “carry the Chetnik insignia, that is a skull, on their caps by day, and a red star in their pocket, and vice versa by night” (pp. 32-33).³⁴

³¹ A recent study on Archbishop Stadler is: Zoran Grijak, *Politička djelatnost vrhbosanskog nadbiskupa Josipa Stadlera* [Political activity of Josip Stadler, Archbishop of Vrhbosna] (Zagreb, 2001). Cf. Pavo Jurišić, ed., *Josip Stadler: Život i djelo: Zbornik radova međunarodnih znanstvenih skupova o dr. Josipu Stadleru, održanih od 21. do 24. rujna 1998. u Sarajevu i 12. studenoga 1998. u Zagrebu* [Josip Stadler: Life and work: Proceedings from international conferences held from 21st to 24th September 1998 in Sarajevo and 12 November 1998 in Zagreb] (Sarajevo, 1999).

³² In the Serbian Church, there were many such claims, even in official documents issued by its leadership: see, among others, Ljubica Štefan, *Srpska pravoslavna Crkva i fašizam* [Serbian Orthodox Church and fascism] (Zagreb, 1996); eadem, *Mitovi i zatajena povijest* [Myths and hidden history] (Zagreb, 1999).

³³ The same accusation was repeated in a letter sent by the Serbian Patriarch Irenej with his Synod to Pope Francis on April 30, 2014. The text of this letter is circulating in the Serbian media, mostly online, e.g. at the portal *Srbija danas* (*Serbia Today*), <https://www.srbijadanas.com/vesti/srbija/ekskluzivno-pismo-patrijarha-irineja-papi-stepinac-je-cutao-kada-su-ustase-ubijale-pravoslavne-2016-10-16> (last accessed on May 24, 2017). Even though it cannot be proved that SPC gave the text to the media, it has never denied that it was indeed the text of the Letter, on which basis I consider it as authentic.

³⁴ Identical behaviour could be seen in the Serbian army and paramilitary formations that arrived from Serbia during the recent war against Croatia and the Croats in the early 1990s. See the book by a Serbian author: Milorad Tomanić, *Srpska crkva u ratu i ratovi u njoj* [Serbian Church at war and wars within it] (Belgrade, 2001).

- c. This hatred dates back to the Turkish times. Catholic authors complained as early as the 14th century that the Catholics were persecuted in Serbia, that schismatic dioceses and monasteries were founded in the hitherto Catholic lands, and that the Serbs “tore down and devastated the churches of the Latins, attacked and imprisoned their priests, and did great evil” (p. 34), while those from the 17th century claimed that the Orthodox schismatics were “worse than the Turks.” Their political domination resulted in the conversion of “entire Catholic regions to the Oriental schism” (p. 35).³⁵
- d. In former Yugoslavia, the Serbian Church invested extraordinary efforts in money and human resources to have as many Catholics as possible converted to Orthodoxy. The future metropolitan of Zagreb, Dositej, even travelled to sub-Carpathian Russia and the Republic of Czechoslovakia, where he “converted more than 100,000 Greek Catholics to the schism” (str. 35).³⁶ Others invested similar efforts in Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Croatia, so that these and other activities resulted in a loss of 200,000 believers in Catholics from mixed marriages” (p. 35).³⁷
- e. The conclusion of considering these processes is as follows: “Advancement of the Eastern schism among the Catholics is today threatening with utmost seriousness to attain its dark goals. The victory of the Greater Serbian idea would mean the destruction of Catholicism in the north-western Balkans, in the State of Croatia. The mentioned documents do not leave any doubts. Moreover, there is no doubt that such a fatal event would have further consequences, far beyond the borders of Croatia. Waves of Orthodox and offensive Byzantinism would strike at the borders of Italy, while now they are clashing against the Croatian bulwark” (p. 36).

³⁵ Cf. Krunoslav Draganović, *Massenübertritte von Katholiken zur “Orthodoxie” im kroatischen Sprachgebiet zur Zeit der Türkenherrschaft* [Mass transfers of Catholics to “Orthodoxy” in the Croatian language area during the period of Turkish rule] (Rome, 1937).

³⁶ Of course, he is celebrated in the Serbian Church as following the injunction “Go... and baptize them...,” as evident in some Serbian online portals. On the level of historiography, see more extensively: Kamilo Dočkal, “Udio Srbske crkve u češkom reformnom pokretu” [Serbian Church and its role in the Czech reform movement]: Part 1, in: *Život* 23 (1942), no. 2: 260-293; Part 2, in: *Život* 24 (1943), no. 1: pp. 46-65; Part 3, in: *Život* 24 (1943), no. 2: 134-143..

³⁷ Janko Šimrak, “Dokumenta o martiriju grkokatolika u Bosni” [Documents on the martyrdom of Greek Catholics in Bosnia], *Katolički list* 13 (1926), pp. 173-179; idem, *Arsenije Crnojević i unija: Na osnovu arhivskih izvora u Zagrebu i Rimu* [Arsenije Crnojević and the union: Based on archival documents in Zagreb and Rome] (Zagreb, 1935).

Finally, the role of the Croatian state is revealed here: “According to the natural order of things, [...] the progress of Catholicism is closely linked to the progress of the Croatian State, its survival to the latter’s survival, its salvation to the latter’s salvation.” The author is convinced that the collapse of the Croatian state would be devastating: “[...] its decline or fatal reduction [...] would not only destroy those ca. 240,000 converts from Serbian Orthodoxy, but also the entire Catholic population of so many territories with all their churches and monasteries” (p. 36).

Archbishop Stepinac and the issues discussed in the letter to the Pope from May 18, 1943

We have seen why Stepinac could not be the author of that letter and why it is most certainly a forgery. Stepinac would have, however, agreed with most of what is stated in it, as it would also have been the case with many ecclesiastical and lay personalities in Croatia at the time, at least those who were interested in politics. Moreover, the Archbishop had written on some of the aspects contained in his supposed Letter to Msgr. Augustin Juretić (1890-1954), who was at that time, and following Stepinac’s advice, staying in Switzerland.³⁸ The letter to Juretić bears no date, but from the context (a new wave of arrests of Zagreb’s Jews by the Gestapo) it can be concluded that it was written in May 1943. Along with the letter, Stepinac sent to Juretić “by confidential route” “many things that you will need in order to inform correctly the Catholic circles there and internationally.”³⁹ These must have been photographs of Chetniks, maps, and written documents that illustrated what he wrote to him. We do not know what his “confidential route” was, but we know that in his international correspondence the Archbishop used the services of the Swiss consulate in Zagreb.

Undoubtedly, the Archbishop wrote to Msgr. Juretić on the Chetnik crimes against the Croats and their collaboration with the Italians in this criminal activity:

“The collaboration between the Italians and the Chetniks in annihilating our people is a fact known to everyone. They have asked an Italian officer for clarification, why are they destroying the Croats and not the Serbs? The

³⁸ Batelja, Juraj, ed., *Blaženi Alojzije Stepinac - svjedok Evanđelja ljubavi: Životopis, dokumenti i svjedočanstva – prije, za vrijeme i nakon Drugoga svjetskoga rata* [Blessed Alojzije Stepinac - Witness of the Gospel of Love: Biography, documents, and testimony - Before, during, and after the Second World War], Knjiga (book) 2: Dokumenti I, br. 1.-399. (1933.-1943.) (Zagreb, 2010), document 312, pp. 481-484.

³⁹ Ibidem.

answer was that the Serbs were not dangerous because they did not know anything about the sea, whereas the Croats were dangerous as seafarers. I am attaching some documents, which clearly show what this Chetnik movement of the notorious “legendary hero Draža” actually is. Nothing but an ally of Italy, because it is known that “Dražā” is the Chetnik commander, and the Chetniks are Italian allies in the extermination of our suffering people. These photographs will show you how nicely Italian officers and Serbian bearded priests in Chetnik uniforms march together. The partisans are *hinc et nunc* indeed less dangerous for the Croats, and thus for the Catholics, than the Chetniks. For the partisans only take revenge against those who were prominent Ustashas, but the Chetniks slaughter everyone they can, and aim for the total extermination of Croats and for establishing Greater Serbia. Of course, one should not have any illusions about the future concerning the partisans either, or the Russian Bolshevism. All that brings annihilation of religion and nationality.⁴⁰

So, the Chetniks – both civilians and clerics – led by Draža Mihailović, are “Italian allies in the extermination of our suffering people” and pose a greater danger to the Croats than the partisans, because they “aim for the total extermination of Croats and for establishing Greater Serbia,” although “one should not have any illusions about the future concerning the partisans either.” To confirm these allegations, Stepinac supplied photographs, maps, and written documents to Juretić.

But where did he get these materials? It is known that Kvirin Klement Bonefačić, Bishop of Split and Makarska, noted down the crimes of Chetnik accomplices against the Catholic clergy and laymen, in which the Italians directly participated,⁴¹ and that he also sent a detailed report on the political situation in Dalmatia, including the Chetnik crimes, to the Pope.⁴² It is not to be excluded that the bishop had formerly sent the same materials to the Archbishop of Zagreb and the president of the Episcopal Conferences, as he had previously sent other materials to the bishops.⁴³ Bonefačić’s report to the Pope was also complemented with documents.

⁴⁰ Ibidem.

⁴¹ Mile Vidović, *Kvirin Klement Bonefačić, biskup splitski i makarski za vrijeme komunističkog režima 1944.-1954.* [Kvirin Klement Bonefačić, Bishop of Split and Makarska during the Communist regime, 1944-1954] (Split and Metković, 2015), pp. 358-365.

⁴² HR-HDA-1561, šifra (code) 6.3 Dossier A. Stepinac, Sudski stup (Court pile) 6/49, omot (folder) 65.88, Letter of Msgr. Bonefačić to the Pope, January 25, 1944. This is the Croatian version. The Bishop’s style is rather heavy and vague, with lots of inserted clauses, even within other inserted clauses.

⁴³ On June 4, 1942, Bishop Bonefačić sent a copy of the leaflet “Riječ primorskih Jugoslavena nacionalista, br. 1” [Word of Yugoslav nationalists from the Littoral, Nr. 1] to Burić, Bishop of

It is also known that the NDH state services collected information about the crimes of military and paramilitary units hostile to Croatia, and that before the capitulation of Italy they were ready to share this information with non-governmental institutions, which may have included Archbishop Stepinac.

Regardless of where and how Archbishop Stepinac obtained the information on the Chetnik crimes and the Italian assistance, he shared them with Msgr. Juretić with the remark that he should be cautious and not mention his name, and that he should judge whom these materials can be shown and delivered; in fact, he advised him to destroy his letter. It should be kept in mind that the materials sent by Stepinac to Juretić were also accompanied by visual and written documentation.

Obviously, the alleged Letter of Archbishop Stepinac to the Pope speaks of the Chetnik crimes against the Croatian people, with attached documentation that confirms such reports. It is therefore possible to speak of the similarity of descriptions in the letter that was definitely written by the Archbishop and the anonymous one, of which the public prosecutor wanted by all means to have the Archbishop acknowledge his authorship. Nevertheless, this by no means implies, as Tomasevich would want it, that the letter shown to Archbishop Stepinac by the public prosecutor was authentic.

Conclusion

Thus we have obtained the answers to the most important questions related to Archbishop Stepinac's alleged Letter to the Pope, dated May 18, 1943. Although the Archbishop could have easily agreed with the general tone of the Letter, since those were his opinions as well, he could not acknowledge his authorship and the Letter did not meet some of the basic criteria that would indicate it. Insofar the claim of scholars who have considered the Letter as authentic remains erroneous and also reveals their superficial treatment of documents and the complex historical circumstances.

The Communist authorities misused the Letter by drawing from it whatever served them to accuse Stepinac, particularly the claim in the Letter that the downfall of the threatened Croatian state would have also endangered the Catholic Church and result in the loss of those 240,000 converts from Orthodoxy to Catholicism.

Senj. The text with the attached letter has been published in: Jure Krišto, ed., *Katolička Crkva i Nezavisna Država Hrvatska 1941.-1945.*, knjiga (book) II, doc. 169, pp. 182-186.

We have also come to the insight that the main message of the Letter was not what politics has determined it to be. It has turned out important because it offers a serious analysis of political and war circumstances, as well as suggestions for a better future. A particularly important analysis is that of Serbian Orthodoxy and the Greater Serbian idea, which caused problems at the time of writing the Letter and threatened the Catholics with annihilation.

We have also made it clear that Stepinac was not opposed to the political analysis of war circumstances and the prospects for the future as articulated in the Letter, which is not evident from the Letter itself – since he did not authorize it – but from the one sent to Msgr. Juretić.

Finally, we have identified some individuals who may have been acquainted with specific parts or the entire content of the Letter. We have also seen why Dr Draganović seems to have been well acquainted with the entire content of the Letter and why he seems to be the best candidate, although not necessarily the only one, to be considered as its author.

At this point, however, there is no conclusive evidence and therefore this paper, although solving some crucial dilemmas related to the Letter, may be seen as actually inviting scholars to engage in further research based on new documents.

Nützliche Fälschung: über die Wichtigkeit des angeblichen Briefes des Erzbischofs Stepinac an den Papst vom 18. Mai 1943

Zusammenfassung

In dieser Arbeit wird die Schlussfolgerung von Jozo Tomasevich über die Authentizität des angeblichen Briefes des Erzbischofs Stepinac an den Papst vom 18. Mai 1943, trotz der Tomasevichs Berufung auf relevante archivalische Quellen, als falsch beurteilt. Schicksal dieses angeblichen Briefes wurde von kommunistischen Behörden bestimmt, indem sie den Brief für politische Zwecke der Beschuldigung des Erzbischofs Stepinac missbrauchten. Das machten sie vor allem durch die Angabe im Brief, dass Untergang des kroatischen Staates für die Katholische Kirche auch einen möglichen Verlust von 240.000 Konvertiten vom orthodoxen zum katholischen Glauben verursachen würde. Die Serbische Orthodoxe Kirche beruft sich auch heutzutage auf den genannten angeblichen Brief von Stepinac nur deswegen, weil sie betonen will, dass Stepinac gestanden hat, dass solche Zahl von Orthodoxen

zum Katholizismus in der Zeit des Unabhängigen Staates Kroatien übergetreten war. Nach einer gründlichen Untersuchung des wirklichen Inhaltes dieses Briefes, der in italienischer Sprache geschrieben wurde, zeigte sich, es sei ein Dokument von außerordentlicher historiografischer Bedeutung. Das ist eigentlich eine seriöse Analyse politischer und Kriegsumstände, besonders aber die Analyse der Folgen von Ideen des Svetosavlje und des Großserbentums. Es wird nur nebenbei bemerkt, wer am qualifiziertesten war, um die im Briefe befindlichen Inhalte zu formulieren. Es ist wichtig zu betonen, dass der Brief eigentlich die fachliche Analyse der Orthodoxie und der politischen Rolle des serbischen Svetosavlje von der Kirchenspaltung bis zu Geschehnissen im Zweiten Weltkrieg sowie des Voraussehens des künftigen Schicksals von Kroaten, falls die großserbische tschetnische Idee in die Tat umgesetzt würde. Wesen der großserbischen Idee liegt in ihrer völkermörderischen Prägung, denn die Verwirklichung dieser Idee schließt physische und geistige Zerstörung anderer Religionen und Nationen in den von dieser Idee als serbisch beanspruchten Territorien ein. Verfasser oder Verfasserin dieses Briefes wollten den westlichen Alliierten sowie der Vatikan-Diplomatie erläutern, dass eine Nötigung der Kroaten, noch einmal in einer Staatsgemeinschaft mit Serben, Befürwortern dieser völkermörderisch geprägten Ideen, zu leben, zur Vernichtung eines Volkes (Kroaten) und der Katholischen Kirche auf diesen Gebieten führen würde. Die Notwendigkeit einer solchen Erläuterung und Deutung war umso größer, weil die westlichen Alliierten seit dem Beginn des Krieges davon streng überzeugt waren, dass die Tschetniks ihre Verbündeten im Kampf gegen Deutsche in Jugoslawien waren. Deswegen wird im Briefe ausdrücklich gesagt, dass die Zukunft der Kroaten, falls bolschewistische Idee siegte, überhaupt nicht erwägt wird, weil „[...] kommunistisches Terror nirgendwo mit solchem Gräueltat durchgeführt wurde und [...] niemals solche Massaker an schwachen Frauen und unschuldigen Kindern verübt wurden, wie es jene von serbischen Tschetniks angerichteten Massaker waren.“

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