

## RELIGION AND CHURCH IN THE USTASHA IDEOLOGY (1941-1945)

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*The article deals with the problem regarding the position of religion and Church in the Ustasha ideological system, which is insufficiently explored in contemporary historiography. Between Catholicism and the Croatian nationalism existed a strong historical connection. It was explicitly expressed in the extreme forms of the Croatian nationalism, such as in the Ustasha movement. Nationalism and Catholicism were not only two basic, but also closely tied ideas incorporated in their ideological system. This topic is partially elaborated in historiography, but still there is no a single monograph dedicated to it. Particularly disputable problems in historical literature are also those about the role of the Catholic Church in the Independent State of Croatia (ISC) and its relationship towards Ustasha's nationalism, and those about relationship between Vatican and the Croatian authorities in the period between 1941 and 1945.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Ustasha ideology; Ustasha nationalism; Independent State of Croatia; religion; Catholicism, Catholic Church; Serbian Orthodox Church; Croatian Orthodox Church; Islam.*

### **The Role of Religion in the Croatian Nationalism – mid 19<sup>th</sup> – mid 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries**

The Croatian nationalism of the nineteenth century was civil (laic) by character. It determined the Croatian nation on the basis of ethnos, language, state territory, history, culture, etc. and it was similar to the classic European nationalism from the period<sup>1</sup>. The first Croatian national ideology, so-called *ilirizam* in the 1830s was a prototype of the Yugoslavism. Its task was to develop national consciousness not only among the Croats, but among all the South Slavs, who had to stand together against the Madjarization and Germanization policy of Budapest and Vienna. The *ilirizam* was a movement, which had a predominantly national-cultural program: unity of the language based on the presumed cultural unity, which in the future could lead to a political union. *Ilirizam* could not put an accent on religion of the South Slavs, since they were followers of both Catholicism and Orthodoxy. Thus religion could only separate the South Slav Peoples. The direct succe-

<sup>1</sup> **Lukas, Filip.** *Hrvatska narodna samobitnost* (edited by Mladen Švob), Zagreb, 1997.

ssor of the Ilirian movement in the middle of the nineteenth century was the Yugoslavist party of Strossmayer, and in the twentieth century it was the Croatian Peasant Party (CPP), which was the leading political organization in Croatia in the inter-war period. The CCP was a civil party and its leaders raised their political demands outside the framework of the religious doctrines<sup>2</sup>.

On the other hand, there was a strong religious element in the Ustashes' ideology, as well as it can be traced also in some other forms of the Croatian nationalism, which distinguishes it from the forms of the Western civil nationalism. Namely, Catholicism became important within the Croatian nationalistic ideology in the middle of the nineteenth century after the appearance of the other important political party – the Croatian Party of Rights (CPR), (so-called »*pravaši*«) under the guidance of Ante Starčević<sup>3</sup>. This party was quite radical and their supporters claimed complete national independence of the Croatian lands. *Pravaši* imposed central and leading role of the Croatian nation in the liberation movement of the South Slavs, and for first time openly maintained difference between Croats and Serbs. The Nationalists had already put an emphasis on religion, which was one of the main distinguishing marks between these two nations. Consequently, their religious beliefs and patriotic feelings became tightly interwoven, for they both served their political goals<sup>4</sup>.

After 1918, in the newly created Yugoslavia, when Croats-Catholics were forced to live together with Orthodox Serbs under Serbian dominance and ruling, Catholicism strengthened among Croat nationalists. For them situation became unbearable precisely after the imposition of the 6<sup>th</sup> January dictatorship of King Alexander. Consequently, Catholicism was accepted as a specific characteristic of Croatism. And obviously, even Hector Felici, Vatican ambassador in Belgrade, shared this idea, since on November 24<sup>th</sup>, 1940 he wrote that »national already is equal to faith«<sup>5</sup>. It has to be stressed that in Yugoslavia Croats distinguished themselves from Serbs primarily with their religion. Namely, since Serbs tried to assimilate them, to rupture Croatian connections with Rome, and to convert them to the Orthodox faith, the contra-reaction of the Croats was accentuation of their Catholicism<sup>6</sup>.

This strong connection between political ideology and religion is quite visible in the extreme forms of the Croatian nationalism. Namely, it seems that Ustashes directly copied ideology of the »*pravašestvo*«, which was imbued by the Catholic spirit. Moreover, according to Mario Spalatin, »Croatian Party of Rights, created by the former seminarist Ante

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<sup>2</sup> Stjepan Radić criticized the Catholic Church (but not religion) and especially its intervention in politics. He did not allow clergymen participation in his movement and accused the Church that it repelled 800000 Muslims from the Croatian national movement, identifying Catholicism with Croatism. Only after Vladimir Maček took the leadership of the CPP, the relationships between the peasant movement and the Catholic Church normalized. /See. **Schmidt, Amy**. The Croatian Peasant Party in Yugoslav Politics. Ph.D. Dissertation, Kent State University, 1984, p. 4, 11; **Banac, Ivo**. Katolička crkva i liberalizam u Hrvatskoj – In: Liberalizam i katolicizam u Hrvatskoj. Zagreb, 1998, p.92/.

<sup>3</sup> The name »Croatian Party of Rights« came from the word »pravo«, which means »right«.

<sup>4</sup> **Banac, Ivo**. National Question in Yugoslavia: Origins, History, Politics. Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1984, p.108.

<sup>5</sup> **Ramet, Pedro**. From Strossmayer to Stepinac: Croatian National Ideology and Catholicism. – In: Canadian Review of Studies in Nationalism, 1985, 12(1), p.124.

<sup>6</sup> **Razum, Stjepan**. Sveta Stolica, Nezavisna Država Hrvatska i Katolička crkva u Hrvatskoj 1941-1945. – In: Fontes, v. 2, p.347.

Starčević, is actually a Catholic movement, which worked for the political independence of the Catholic Croatia<sup>7</sup>. By the same token, one of the main Starčević's slogans was: »God and Croats«. He relied on the Christianity and was convinced that the belief in God preserved the Croatian nation during the centuries. According to him the Croatian spirit is indivisible because of the Catholicism<sup>8</sup>. Similarly, Starčević's coworker Eugen Kvaternik was also known for his Catholic mysticism<sup>9</sup>.

At the beginning of the twentieth century a fraction of the CPR had separated from the mainstream, and this fraction formed a Pure Party of Rights (PPR) with the leadership of Josip Frank. Later its followers were known as »*frankovci*«, after their leader's name. Although the name of the Starčević's party was changed, its anti-Yugoslav, anti-Serbian, separatist, Great Croatian and Catholic program was preserved. One of the main slogans of *frankovci* movement was: »Croatism and Catholicism«. This new political formation was the immediate predecessor of the Ustasha organization. It is important to stress that *frankovci* and the Ustasas considered Catholicism as an expression of the Croatian national identity and therefore Catholicism had a significant place in their ideological system.

Furthermore, triad religion-church-clergy was quite important in the Ustasas' ideology, as it is a case for almost all extreme nationalistic movements in Central and Eastern Europe in the interwar period and during the World War II. One of the main differences between the West European »classic fascism« and its East European »modifications« was presence of religious elements in the nationalistic ideologies. Similarly, it is necessary to stress that this symbiosis between nationalism, regional in definition, and Christianity, universal in character, was quite important for nationalisms in the Eastern Europe<sup>10</sup>.

Thesis that the East European extreme nationalistic movements were »fascist«, imposed for a long time in historiography, consequently leads to a deep contradiction, since the fascist programs are anti-religious and anti-clerical in their character. Furthermore, western totalitarian regimes denied religion and often replaced it with a new civil state ideology. These regimes were based on terror and repressions, which completely contradicted the Christian principles. Fascists did not identify themselves with churches and religion, because their adherents predominantly were not believers and national integration on religious basis was quite inconceivable in totalitarian systems<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in: **Ramet, Pedro**. Religion and Nationalism in Yugoslavia. – In: Religion and Nationalism in Soviet and East European Politics. Duke University Press, Durham and London, 1989, p.306.

<sup>8</sup> **Starčević, Ante**. Politički spisi. Zagreb, 1971, p.31; **Starčević, Ante**. Misli i pogledi (ur. Blaž Jurišić). Zagreb, 1971, p.70.

<sup>9</sup> Eugen Kvaternik was co-founder of the CPR together with A. Starčević. (See **Banac, Ivo**. National Question in Yugoslavia..., p.108).

<sup>10</sup> **Wolff, Richard**. The Catholic Church and the Dictatorships in Slovakia and Croatia, 1939-1945. – In: Records of the American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia, 1977, 88 (1-4), p. 15; **Rothschild, Joseph**. East Central Europe Between the Two World Wars (vol. IX of series »A History of East Central Europe«). 7th edn., 1992, p. 207.

<sup>11</sup> No Hitler, neither Mussolini showed an interest in religion. The Führer officially did not regulate relationship of his regime with the Church. On the other hand, the first fascist programs in Italy in one of its articles even included nationalization of the Church property. Similarly, regarding religion Mussolini wrote: »State does not have its religion«. /See **Hrvatski Državni Arhiv (HDA)**, f.1561, SDS, RSUP SRH, Kut.83, šifra 001.1 Crkveni problemi (Arhiva Hansa Helma), pp.1-3; **Nolte, Ernst**. Three Faces of Fascism. Action Francaise. Italian Fascism. National Socialism. New York, 1966, p.18/.

On the other hand, in Central and Eastern Europe the situation was different. There nationality was often identified with religion. The latter played a significant role in the ideologies of the nationalistic movements in the region in the interwar and the war period, which suggests that they wanted to create a »corporate Christian state«<sup>12</sup>. Most of the East European extreme nationalistic leaders like Shalazi in Hungary, Codreanu in Romania, Ljotić in Serbia, Pavelić in Croatia and Tiso in Slovakia openly proclaimed their Christian convictions, and some of them even were priests. They used religion to discredit their political opponents as enemies of God. Close connections with the Church, whose influence in the region was quite strong, helped nationalists to infiltrate easily among different social circles and to gain them over<sup>13</sup>. Extreme nationalistic movements in Slovakia and Romania even chose religious symbols for their organizations – the apostolic cross and Archangel Michael<sup>14</sup>. In these two countries relation between religion and nationalism was rather tight as well as it was in Croatia. Thus one could state that they would be the most prominent examples of such symbiosis. By the same token, these nationalistic movements had Christian postulates in their programs and thus raised various religious slogans. That is a typical »local distinguishing feature« of the East European extreme nationalism from its Western forms<sup>15</sup>.

Part of the regional clergy of the both faiths Catholic and Orthodox was committed to the extreme nationalism, which spread over the region. Consequently, The Church, even though its policy was to stay apart from the state affairs, became a serious political partner, and local governments had to take this into consideration. Nevertheless, the Church have never unconditionally supported the extreme Nationalists. Furthermore, everywhere in the region the Church tried to adapt to the new situation and to use it as best as possible, as well as not to compromise itself. Result of such an attitude was that Church's policy in the interwar and the war period frequently seemed hesitant and unstable<sup>16</sup>. On the other hand, the clergy openly expressed its political preferences. In Serbia part of the Church leaders supported Nedić's regime<sup>17</sup>, while others sustained the Chetniks<sup>18</sup>. In Slovenia the situation was not much different. After Ljubljana was included into the Italian occupational zone in 1941, bishop Rožman decided to cooperate with the occupying administration. However, it has to be said that there were also priests who played an important role in the resistant anti-Italian movement. In Croatia, similarly, there were some clergymen who supported the Ustashes, and there were others, who opposed official state regime<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> **Religion and Nationalism** in Soviet and East European Politics ..., pp.421-422.

<sup>13</sup> **Sugar, Peter**. Native Fascism in the Successor States, 1918-1945. Santa Barbara, 1971, pp.151-152; **Banac, Ivo**. Nationalism in Southeastern Europe. – In: Nationalism and Nationalities in the New Europe (ed. by Charles Kupchan), Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 1995, p.115.

<sup>14</sup> Romanian extreme nationalistic movement even called itself »The Legion of Archangel Michael«. (See **Laquer, Walter**. Fascism. A Reader's Guide. Analyses, Interpretation, Bibliography. California, 1978, p.18).

<sup>15</sup> **Seton-Watson, Hugh**. Fascism, Right and Left. – In: Journal of Contemporary History, 1966, 1, p.185; **Crampton, Richard**. Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century. London, New York, 1994, pp.163-164.

<sup>16</sup> **Sugar, Peter**. Op.cit., p.152; **Nolte, Ernst**. Op.cit., p.18.

<sup>17</sup> The »puppet« regime in Serbia, imposed by the German forces after the break up of Yugoslavia on April 6<sup>th</sup>, 1941.

<sup>18</sup> Chetniks were the equivalent of Ustashes – representatives of the extreme nationalism in the Serbian political life.

<sup>19</sup> **Singleton, Fred**. Twentieth Century Yugoslavia. New York, 1976, p.201.

One has to bare in mind that on the small territory of the Balkan peninsula three main world religions exist alongside – Christianity (Catholicism and Orthodoxy), Islam and Judaism. In the nineteenth century ecclesiastical institutions still preserved their strong position in society. Reasons for this situation were quite simple: namely, the century-long foreign rule destroyed all the other national institutions, so ecclesiastical institutions remained only ones that could preserve national identity in the struggle of the Balkan nations for freedom and independence. Thus, clergy took over the role of a leader of its people not only in religious, but also in civil life<sup>20</sup>. Regarding this, one cannot omit enormous importance of religion concerning the formation of nations in the area, especially in the case of Croats and Serbs. These both South Slav peoples are an example of ethno-religious identification. Religion (Catholicism or Orthodoxy) was one of the main distinctive marks between these two nationalities, otherwise very close in ethnic and linguistic aspect.

Moreover, during the World War II some of the ecclesiastical leaders, regardless of their political preferences, openly supported nationalism in the realm of former Yugoslavia. For example, the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) in Serbia supported Nedić's regime and the majority of the clergy (both in Serbia and the ISC) backed up the Chetniks. Moreover, some clergymen even participated in their paramilitary formations. Similarly, some of the Catholic priests in the ISC and a part of Muslim imams and members of the Ulema associated with the extremely nationalistic Ustasha regime<sup>21</sup>.

Bearing all this in mind, one cannot omit a kind of contradiction. Namely, the fascism, in general, was hostile to organizations and movements with international character (such as Communism, Jewry, the Catholic Church, etc.), while in Eastern Europe the extreme nationalism became very close to the Catholic Church. The Nationalists tried to use religion in the political purposes. Therefore, Catholicism helped them to attract the broad social strata, especially among the peasantry, since the influence of the Church was very strong in the region, and the strongest was in Slovakia, Hungary and Croatia<sup>22</sup>.

On the other hand, the official Catholic Church tried to separate itself from fascism and Nazism<sup>23</sup>. But in Eastern Europe the Church was a conservative institution, and it supported the traditional authoritarian doctrines, together with the forces of the Right wing in

<sup>20</sup> **Suttner, Ernst**. The Challenge for the Churches at the Collapse of Yugoslavia. – In: Studies (Ireland), 1994, 83 (329), p.48.

<sup>21</sup> **Perica, Vjekoslav**. Balkan Idols. Religion and Nationalism in Yugoslav States. New York, Oxford University Press, 2002, p.23.

<sup>22</sup> **Catholics**, the State, and the European Radical Right, 1919-1945 (ed. by Richard J. Wolff and Jory K. Hoensch), Boulder, Colorado, 1987, p.13, 16, 18, 19, 37, 137, 153; **Laquer, Walter**. Op.cit., p.13, 16, 18-19.

<sup>23</sup> In the old historic literature it was maintained that the Vatican sympathized fascism and Nazism, and the proof was found in the conclusion of the Lateran Treaty with Mussolini in 1929 and the Concordat with Hitler in 1933. However, even though the Vatican reached some compromise with Mussolini (despite some difficulties), Hitler did not take in consideration interests of the Catholic Church. Thus, Vatican circles became worried with the anti-Christian manifestations of the new rulers in Germany. Especially because in the occupied territories the Church hierarchy was subordinated to the Nazis, and all the Catholic civil organizations were closed down. This deeply disappointed the Catholic circles. The German prelates, who run away from Germany and found shelter in the Vatican, expressed the idea that »The Catholic Church sees the danger from both sides« (having in mind bolshevism and fascism) and that »some Vatican circles... even consider the National Socialism more dangerous than bolshevism for the Catholic Church«. /See **Централен държавен архив (ЦДА) Centralen Darzhaven Arhiv (CDA)**, f.176, op.8, a.e.1119, s.1, 5; a.e. 1212, p.13/.

the society. Such development resulted that the success of the extreme Nationalists among youth and peasantry found a support among a part of the Catholic clergy. Namely, they saw Nationalists as allies in the struggle against Communism and Jewry<sup>24</sup>. Therefore, in the Eastern Europe during the interwar period the Catholic Church took a pro-nationalistic position. It supported the national culture, and sometimes was intolerant towards the other nations and religions, creating the myth of the »chosen people«<sup>25</sup>. As it was already mentioned, a part of the clergy in Croatia sympathized the Ustashes, while in Slovenia the Slovene Clerical Party (led by Tiso) led the opposition against the Serbian domination, and in Slovakia the extremely right Slovak People's Party (headed by father Hlinka) struggled against the Czech domination in the country. However, it is important to emphasize that these parties were not a product of Nazism nor fascism, but that they had local roots and were a reflection of the circumstances in Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia. Their »clero-fascism« was an internal-political phenomenon, comparable with the clerical right movements in Austria, Spain and Portugal<sup>26</sup>.

The best examples of collaboration between Catholicism and nationalism could be found in Croatia and Slovakia, where for the more than five decades the Second World War regimes were considered »clero-fascist«. However, nowadays the authors dealing with the topic are very careful in the usage of this term<sup>27</sup>. Undoubtedly, the regimes of Tiso and Pavelić were strongly influenced by Catholicism, which distinguished them from the German and Italian model. The extent sources prove the connection that existed between East European Nationalists and the Catholic Church. At the same time, these sources reveal clergy's and the Vatican's opposition to the fascists' and Nazis' ideology. Today there is no doubt that Tiso was trying to diminish the influence of the pro-Nazi radicals from the People's Party in Slovakia; Stepinac was in opposition to the Ustasha regime; and in Italy the newspapers *Civiltà Cattolica* and *Osservatore Romano* frequently criticized the racial policy and theory that was spreading all over the Old continent. However, in reality, the Catholic Church and the clergy felt comfortable with the authoritarian right regimes as far as these were not revolutionary, extremely radical and did not cause great excesses, but followed the local traditions. The fact that some Catholic priests supported the fascist or Nazis movements did not mean that the Church as an institution was on their side. Certain clergymen in the region gave shelter to the persecuted groups and openly talked against Nazis and fascist ideology. Many of them were persecuted and some were imprisoned or deported in camps in Germany<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>24</sup> **Seton-Watson, Hugh.** *Eastern Europe Between the Wars, 1918-1941.* Hamden, Connecticut, 1962, pp.66-67.

<sup>25</sup> For example, in 1936 the Archbishop of Bosnia and Herzegovina Ivan Šarić stated that: »God was on the side of the Croats«. (See **Ramet, Pedro.** *Cross and Commissar. The Politics of Religion in Eastern Europe and the USSR.* Indiana University Press, 1987, p.15).

<sup>26</sup> **Fischer-Galati, Stephen.** *Eastern Europe and the Cold War. Perceptions and Perspectives.* Boulder, Columbia University Press, 1994, pp.75-76; **Catholics, the State...**, pp. 225-226.

<sup>27</sup> In the Western literature there is no consensus about the term »clero-fascism«. If there is any accord among the authors, it is that all these issues are very difficult for interpretation and that there are many white spots in their elaboration that have to be fulfilled as quickly as possible. (For the dispute in historiography see **Jelinek, Yeshayahu.** *Bohemia-Moravia, Slovakia and the Third Reich During the Second World War-* In: *East European Quarterly*, №2, 1969, p.236; **Laquer, Walter.** *Op.cit.*, pp.4-5; **Wolff, Richard.** *Op.cit.*, pp.3-5).

<sup>28</sup> **HDA**, f.1561, SDS, RSUP SRH, Kut.83, šifra 001.1 Crkveni problemi (Arhiva Hansa Helma), pp.1-3; **Catholics, the State...**, p.XI-XII, 129,153.

### Catholicism and the Catholic Church in the Ustasha Ideology

The Ustashes paid great attention to religion, having in mind the strong religious feeling of Croatian people. The Croatian nationalism was more tightly connected to religion and Church than to the state, which did not independently exist for centuries. One has to stress that nationalism and Catholicism were not only two basic, but also closely tied ideas in the Ustasha ideology. Namely, one of the main leaders of the Ustasha movement – Mile Budak officially stated that the »the basis of the Ustasha movement is religion«<sup>29</sup>.

It has to be noted that the Ustashes cared about the religious issues even before 1941 as well as they cared for the faith after they came to power in Croatia. Great part of their propaganda was Catholic by character: they permanently spoke and wrote about God and religion, the Pope and the Church and raised slogans such as »with God and belief we always walk ahead«. Furthermore, in the Ustasha press there were many articles about the historical worth and contribution of religion for the Croats. Consequently, the connection between God and people was frequently emphasized<sup>30</sup>. Moreover, the Croatian Nationalists frequently maintained that, from the moment of the conversion to Christianity, Croats have always been a religious people. In the Ustasha oath from 1942<sup>31</sup>, which is a changed version of the »Statute« of the Ustasha organization from 1932, the Nationalists swore »in all-powerful God and everything that is sacred« that they will fight as the members of the Ustasha organization for the independence and freedom of Croats.

One has to admit that regarding the religious issue Ustashes borrowed idea from Illyrism<sup>32</sup> but their ideology and relation between politics and religion was mainly taken from *pravašestvo*. All the prominent Croatian Nationalists were Catholic believers, convinced that Christian moral should dominate in the Croatian society. *Pravašestvo* identified itself with the Church and it was basically Catholic in its spirit. Starčević was the »father« of the both slogans that became maxims of the Ustashes: »God and Croats« and »Croatia to the Croats«<sup>33</sup>.

For the Ustashes religious issue, was important as the national problem, especially regarding the relations between Croats and Serbs. Religion was an ethno-formatting factor in Yugoslavia, and that is why Catholicism was so important for the Nationalists. Of course, the important factors for the nation formation were also ethnos, language, territory, state, history, culture, etc. Still, the religion was one of the main distinctive marks between Croats and Serbs. Thus it can be traced that some forms of Serbian nationalism, especially the extreme ones, found a religious expression in Orthodoxy, and some of the Croatian nationalists were connected to the Catholic Church. For example, for the Ustashes their

<sup>29</sup> Quoted in **Paris, Edmond**. Genocide in Satellite Croatia, 1941-1945. A Record of Racial and Religious Persecutions and Massacres. Chicago, 1961, p.240.

<sup>30</sup> **Hrvatski glas**, br.165, 1.VIII.1941; **Nezavisna Država Hrvatska (NDH)**, God.28, 1941, br.1.

<sup>31</sup> It was recorded in »Propisnik o zadaći, ustrojstvu, radu i smjernicima »Ustaše« – hrvatskog oslobodilačkog pokreta«. (See **Narodne novine**, 13.VIII.1942; **Ustaša**. Dokumenti o ustaškom pokretu (prir. Petar Požar), Zagreb, 1995, p.46).

<sup>32</sup> Even Štrossmayer raised the slogan »Everything for the faith and the country«. Later Maček also stated: »Catholicism is a fundamental stone of the Croatian nation«. /See **CDA**, f.1931, op.1, a.e.197, p.16; **Ramet, Pedro**. Religion and Nationalism...p.308/.

<sup>33</sup> **Schopflin, George**. Croatian Nationalism. – In: Survey. A Journal of East and West, vol.19, 1, 1973, p.123.

religious affiliation was inseparable from the Croatian national identity. On the flag of the Nationalistic Youth already in 1929 was written »For God, Kin and Home«. The Ustashes frequently raised slogans as »God and Croatia« and represented themselves as »men of God and the people«<sup>34</sup>. They identified Catholicism with Croatian nation and nationalism, and that is the reason why they paid such an attention to religion in their ideological system<sup>35</sup>.

The Croatian extreme Nationalists understood very well the Universalism of the Christian teaching, which stayed above any national particularity. Simultaneously, they reminded that nationalism was typical for all peoples in the world. According to the Ustashes, the Croats have always fought for their faith and national freedom, and these two issues were tightly connected for them. That is why their patriotism was inseparable from religion, and love for their country was synonym for the Catholicism. The Ustashes disseminated notion that every sincere patriot should believe in God and consequently they assured that Nationalists were good Catholics<sup>36</sup>. They put a sign of equality between Catholicism and Croatism and between the Catholic Church and the Croatian people to the degree, in which they claimed that the one who was not a good Catholic, could not be a good Croat and vice versa. In their speeches and publications they connected terms »God« and »people« and propagandized that »God and people were one whole«<sup>37</sup>.

The Ustashes maintained that every Catholic in the Croatian lands was a part of the Croatian nation<sup>38</sup>. In this way Catholicism attained a specific national-political character, especially regarding the distinction between Catholic Croats and Orthodox Serbs. The aim of the new government was to create not just an independent, but also a Catholic state, in order to become a bastion against the Orthodox East. For Ustashes Catholicism was their bond to the Western civilization, which distinguished them mostly from the Serbs. They looked at the religious conflict between both neighboring peoples as a collision between East and West, between different cultures and civilizations. In Croatia religious difference between Catholics and Orthodox was underlined much more than between Christians and Muslims. That is why the Ustashes propagandized Catholicism as the national religion<sup>39</sup>.

The Nationalists frequently emphasized the historic contribution of the faith for the preservation of the Croatian people, their statehood, culture and national identity during the centuries. For the Ustashes faith was a powerful spiritual bulwark of the Croatian people,

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<sup>34</sup> *Hrvatske novine*, br.25, 22.VI.1929; *HN*, br.10, 14.IV.1939; *Nedelja*, br.14, 6.IV.1941.

<sup>35</sup> Of course, they also spoke of Croatian »racial« type, so they paid attention to Croatian ethnic specifics, historical state right and »language peculiarity« of the Croats. Consequently, they developed a racial theory, but mainly under German influence.

<sup>36</sup> *HN*, br.90, 13.V.1941; br.163, 27.VII.1941; *Hrvatski glas*, br.85, 13.V.1941; br.165, 1.VIII.1941.

<sup>37</sup> *Hrvatski glas*, br.20, 1941; br.165, 1.VIII.1941; *Katolički tjednik*, br.31, 3.VIII.1941.

<sup>38</sup> For them »Croat« was synonymous with »Catholic«. They even had the proverb: »Croat is his name, Catholic – his surname«. Even the Papal State Secretary told the ISC representative in the Vatican in February 1942: »The Holy See has Croatia constantly in mind, since Croat is synonymous with Catholic, and the Holy See can not imagine a Croat who is not a Catholic«. (See *Nedelja*, br.14, 6.IV.1941; *Alexander, Stella*. *The Triple Myth. The Life of Archbishop Alojzije Stepinac*. New York, Columbia University Press-Boulder, East European Monographs, 1987, p.20).

<sup>39</sup> *National Archives and Record Administration, Washington, D.C. (NARA)*, RG 165, 19 RAY Box, p.12; *HN*, br.163, 27.VII.1941; *NDH*, br.10, 5.III.1942.



one of the specific characteristics of the nation, and one the basis of the Croatian nationalism. They put a sign of equality between religion and nation, because they believed that the lost of faith could mean an extinction or assimilation of the nation that was constantly threatened from outer enemies<sup>40</sup>. Religion was made into a cult and its place was very special in this new Croatia. Pavelić already in 1926 has written in »Hrvatsko pravo«, that if »the Croatian people loses its faith, it signs its own death sentence«<sup>41</sup>.

The Ustasha ideology and propaganda also frequently used the issue of the centuries-old relationship and the loyalty of the Croats to the Vatican. The Croatian Nationalists constantly put an accent on the commitment of their people to the Holy See<sup>42</sup>. For example, in 1941 the 1300-anniversary of the conversion of the Croats was celebrated and this event was broadly advertised in the official press. The Ustashes considered it very important, since with the conversion to Catholicism Croats became a member of the European Christian community. By the same token, these actions could be seen in the perspective of self-confidence among Croats that they were one of the most ancient Catholic peoples in Europe<sup>43</sup>.

Living at the borderland between West and Orient, the Ustashes wanted to prove cultural and civilizational affiliation of Croats to the West. That was the reason why they were proud of their medieval rulers' actions, who connected the country to Rome. Namely, Croats became Catholics and »Western« people, while the Serbs were left under Constantinople's influence and became an Orthodox nation<sup>44</sup>. Consequently, the Ustashes stressed the tight historical connections of Croats to the Catholic capitals in Europe such as Vienna, Budapest and Rome. The idea was to maintain that Croatia was part of Europe, not the Balkans. For the Nationalists the dividing line between Western and Eastern Europe was on river Drina, which separated »civilized Croatia« from »wild Serbia«<sup>45</sup>.

The Ustashes frequently emphasized the historic mission of the Croats, who during the Turkish invasion in Europe pushed it away and thus saved the Western civilization. They presented their people as »the chosen one«, talking about it as the »strongest shield« of Catholicism and Papacy against the Eastern invasions of Byzantines, Turks, Serbs, etc.<sup>46</sup>. That was the reason why Croatia was occasionally called a »wall« or a »castle« of Catholicism and Christianity by the Popes (for first time by Leo X)<sup>47</sup>.

<sup>40</sup> **HN**, br.21, 30.VI.1939; br.66, 19.IV.1941; br.163, 27.VII.1941; **Nedelja**, br.14, 6.IV.1941; **Hrvatska straža**, br.153, 9.VII.1940; br.220, 27.IX.1940; **Katolički tjednik**, br.19, 11.V.1941; br.31, 3.VIII.1941; br. 47, 23.XI.1941.

<sup>41</sup> Mile Budak shares: »History teaches us that if we were not Catholics, we should stop existing« (Quoted in **Alexander, Stella**. Church and State in Yugoslavia since 1945. London, Cambridge University Press, 1979, p.22).

**Hrvatsko pravo**, br.5085, 11.XII.1926; **Poglavnikovi govori, izjave i članci prije odlaska u tuđini** (ed. Mijo Bzik). Zagreb, 1942, p.22.

<sup>42</sup> **Katolički tjednik**, br.11, 16.III.1941; **HN**, br.398, 11.IV.1942; br.677, 10.III.1943.

<sup>43</sup> **Hrvatska straža**, br.153, 9.VII.1940; **Nedelja**, br.14, 6.IV.1941; **NDH**, br.10, 5.III.1942.

<sup>44</sup> **Hrvatski glas**, br.68, 22.IV.1941; **Katolički tjednik**, br.31, 3.VIII.1941.

<sup>45</sup> **HN**, br.21, 30.VI.1939; br.1187, 15.XI.1944; **Budak, Mile**. Hrvatski narod u borbi za samostalnu i nezavisnu Hrvatsku državu. USA, 1934, p.147, 183-184.

<sup>46</sup> **Budak, Mile**. Jugoslavija. Srpska podvala. Madrid, 1969, p.12; **Bzik, Mijo**. Ustaška borba. Od prvih dana ustaškog rada do poglavnikova odlaska u emigracije. Počeci i bit Ustaškoga pokreta. Zagreb, 1942, p.42.

<sup>47</sup> The used term was »Antemurale Christianitatis«. (See **HN**, br.21, 30.VI.1939).

That is how the Nationalists »mythologized« their people in their ideology, developing its significance in the ancient past, its »particularity« (to distinguish it from the neighboring peoples – mostly from those, speaking similar languages), and stressing its importance in a broader civilization-cultural context. The Croats were presented as defenders and a »first line« at the battle-field against the »enemies« of Europe, ready to risk their lives in the name of prosperity of the Christian world<sup>48</sup>.

In the Croatian predominately agrarian society particular attention was paid to the Church. Religion and tradition were part of the peasants' way of life and greatly influenced formation of the Croatian national identity. According to the Nationalists, the role of the Church (even as an international institution) was primarily national. Namely, because of the lack of the statehood the Church came to position to become a pillar of the Croatian national consciousness and defender of the Croatian national interests<sup>49</sup>.

The Ustashes proudly considered that the Catholic Church had fulfilled its national function, supporting the struggle of the Croats for autonomy in the framework of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and organized their defense against the Magyarization and Germanization policy. The Church gave the Croats an educated clergy, who was a kind of a »pre-national« *intelligencia* and played the leading role in the Croatian national revival during the first half of the nineteenth century. In the new civil era the clergy has accepted that the survival of the Church depended on its ability to identify with the nation. Therefore, priests took an active part in the national struggle of the Croatian people, acting in the name of the salvation of faith and nation. And that is how the Church played an important role in the formation and appearance of the modern Croatian nationalism<sup>50</sup>.

According to the Nationalists, the very existence of the Croatian nation and its religion was threatened after the union of 1918. Since in Yugoslavia everything was done to »Sebicise« Croats and convert them to Orthodoxy, Croatism and Catholicism again became equally important in the struggle for the survival. The Ustashes thought that one of the aims of the creation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was destruction of the »castle of Catholicism, Croatism« and thus considered it as opening the doors to Europe for Orthodoxy<sup>51</sup>. The Nationalists accused the Serbs as destroyers of the Croatian Catholicism, and in the Orthodox Church they saw Serbian spiritual leader. Since religious autonomy in Yugoslavia was denied to Croats, Ivo Guberina saw the only possibility: »Croatia must separate from Serbia if it wants not to be Byzantinezed and to sunk into the Great-Serbian abyss of Orthodoxy«<sup>52</sup>.

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<sup>48</sup> **Hosking, Geoffrey, George Schopflin (eds.)**. *Myths and Nationhood*, London, Hurst, 1997, p.9, 33-36; **Perica, Vjekoslav**. *Uloga crkva u konstrukcije državnostvornih mitova Hrvatske i Srbije* – In: *Historijski mitovi na Balkanu: zbornik radova*, Sarajevo, 2003, pp.207-208.

<sup>49</sup> *Hrvatska straža*, br.220,27.IX.1940; *Hrvatski glas*, br.68, 22.IV.1941; **Pavelić, Ante**. *Poglavnikovi govori...*, p.22.

<sup>50</sup> **Religion and Nationalism** in *Soviet and East European Politics...*, p.306, 308, 311, 318-319; **Bukowski, James**. *The Catholic Church and Croatian National Identity: From the Counter-Reformation to the Early Nineteenth Century* – In: *East European Quarterly*, vol.13, 3, Fall 1979, pp.327-330.

<sup>51</sup> *Hrvatska straža*, br.11, 14.I.1940; *Hrvatska smotra*, br.7-10, 1943, p.436, 437.

<sup>52</sup> *Hrvatska straža*, br.220, 27.IX.1940.

The Ustashas explained their reaction to Yugoslavism with the Serbian animosity to Catholicism. According to them, the resistance of the Croatian people should be based on two foundations – Croatism and Catholicism. In his book, »Deadly Sins« (1937), the Ustasha leader Ante Pavelić explained the aim of his liberation movement with the difficult position of Catholicism in Yugoslavia. He claimed repeatedly that the Croats could not remain within a state, which tried »to change the thousand years old orientation of Croats-Catholics and to interrupt the existing relationship between them and the Holy See«<sup>53</sup>. The Ustashas considered the interwar period as the most difficult time for the Catholic Church. At the same time, Serbian authorities accused the Pope and the clergy as »traitors« of Yugoslavia and »foreign servants«<sup>54</sup>. Besides, the unsuccessful attempt of a Concordat with Rome in 1935 hurt the national feelings of the Croats. Therefore, the Ustashas insisted on its ratification. For them attacks against the Concordat were a blow on Croatism and against the authority of the Catholic Church. They maintained and asked that, as Catholics did not interfere in the affairs of the other religions in Yugoslavia, they did not want »foreign elements«, like Serbs, to involve in the Croatian arrangement with Rome<sup>55</sup>.

The Croatian Nationalists declared the Serbian rule in Yugoslavia as »illegal«, and that was why the struggle of the Croatian people against the Serbian dictatorship did not contradict the Catholic principles. Moreover, By the same token, Ustashas presented their revolutionary activity in harmony with the Catholic morality<sup>56</sup>. The Ustashas were convinced that the faith of the Croatian people could not be crushed with force, because it was »sincere« and »deep«. According to them, the Croats would be loyal to Rome and the ideas of Ante Starčević in spite of the outer oppression. Consequently, they believed that their Catholicism and nationalism would lead them to victory<sup>57</sup>.

Yet in the interwar period the Ustasha movement started to embrace young intellectuals and students, as well as Catholic priests. Moreover, as a pro-Catholic movement, it propagated that Croats had to be »sincere« Catholics<sup>58</sup>. The circle around M. Budak, V. Gutić, I. Bogdan, E. Kvaternik and some others already in emigration maintained connections with the nationalistic youth's group around the newspaper »Hrvatska smotra«. The Ustasha especially sympathized patriotic Church youth organizations. After the creation of »Križari«<sup>59</sup> Ustashas considered it as a »defensive national organization«, and they saw its role quite important for the maintenance and preservation of the national consciousness of the Croats after 1929<sup>60</sup>. On the other hand, Ustashas called Zagreb's Archbishop Ante Bauer an »old Serbian servant« and accused him for not anathematizing King Alexander's dictatorship, while they praised Archbishop of Bosnia and Herzegovina Ivan Šarić for his stiff opposition to the regime<sup>61</sup>.

<sup>53</sup> Quoted in **Dedijer, Vladimir**. Vatikan i Jasenovac. Dokumenti. Beograd, 1987, New York, 1992, p.71.

<sup>54</sup> **HN**, br.21, 30.VI.1939.

<sup>55</sup> **Hrvatska straža**, br.11, 14.I.1940; **Hrvatska smotra**, br.7-10, 1943, p.436.

<sup>56</sup> **Hrvatska smotra**, br.7-10, 1943, pp.438-439.

<sup>57</sup> **HN**, br.36, 13.X.1939.

<sup>58</sup> **Mužić, Ivan**. Hrvatska politika i jugoslavenska ideja. Split, 1969, p.232.

<sup>59</sup> In translation »Križari« means »Crusaders«.

<sup>60</sup> **HDA**, f.1561, SDS, RSUP SRH, Kut.83, šifra 001.1 Crkveni problemi (Arhiva Hansa Helma), p.8, 88; **Nedelja**, br.23, 15.VI.1941; br.5, 1.II.1942.

<sup>61</sup> **Poglavnik Saboru i narodu**. Govor na završnoj saborskoj sjednici, 28.II.1942. Zagreb, 1942, pp.33-39; **Sad-**

After the collapse of Yugoslavia, which was a result of the German aggression, on April 10th, 1941 the aim of the new Croatian government was to create not just an independent, but also a Catholic state, in which religion and Church were meant to take a significant place. Religion, as it was interpreted by Pavelić, had to be one of the pillars of the »new order« in Europe, and thus also in Croatia. The Ustashas had no doubt that God would take his dignitary place in the »new Europe« that was created by the Axis forces. According to them, Franco, Pete, Antonescu, Pavelić, Tiso and their movements were fighting for a creation of a new social order, which would respect religion and would be created on the Christian foundations<sup>62</sup>.

Therefore, religion was raised in cult because of its strong national role. Furthermore, in the solemn proclamation of the new state, read by Slavko Kvaternik on April 10<sup>th</sup> 1941, this act was explained as the »God's providence« because it happened exactly on Easter. This coincidence of the dates was used in the propaganda to impose the idea that the ISC had been revived with the »resurrection of the God's son«, and thanks to the »agony« and »suffering«, which the Croatian people lived throughout the history<sup>63</sup>.

The Ustashas repeatedly raised slogan of *pravaši*: »God and Croats«, and Pavelić used it as 11<sup>th</sup> principle of the Ustasha movement<sup>64</sup>. Moreover, they frequently transformed this slogan into: »Christ and the Ustashas«. By the same token, the Poglavnik claimed that in the Croatian lands »the Master was nobody else, except God and the Croatian people«<sup>65</sup>. The Nationalists saw the ultimate aim of their struggle in the resurrection of the »great and holy Catholic Croatia«. They believed that God would bless their state and would turn it into a land of peace, progress and welfare, or to say in a kind of a »God's Kingdom on Earth«. According to them, faith would preserve the ISC, and it would make the state stronger, as well as would guarantee its spiritual vitality in future. Religion was seen as a bearer of moral and culture of the Croatian people<sup>66</sup>. Thus, all Ustashas, and civil servants, swore an oath of allegiance – in the name of God, Poglavnik and the ISC<sup>67</sup>.

The establishment of the new Croatian state meant a free practice of Catholicism for the Ustashas. Moreover, the ISC could guarantee all civil and political rights and freedoms of the Catholics. With great satisfaction the Nationalists claimed that Croatia was the only Catholic state in South Eastern Europe with a predominantly Catholic population. Regarding this fact Croatia appeared to be a »bastion of Catholicism« and the only »door« for its penetration and imposition on the Balkans<sup>68</sup>. The press was full of articles with titles

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**kovich, James.** Italian Support for Croatian Separatism, 1927-1937. New York, 1987, p.151.

<sup>62</sup> **Hrvatska smotra**, br.7-10, 1943, p.445.

<sup>63</sup> **Katolički list (KL)**, br.17, 29.IV.1941, p.196; **Krišto, Jure.** Katolička crkva u Nezavisnoj Državi Hrvatskoj. – In: Časopis za suvremenu povijest, br.3, 1995, p.461.

<sup>64</sup> **Crljen, Daniel.** Načela hrvatskog ustaškog pokreta. Zagreb, 1942, pp.66-67.

<sup>65</sup> **Poglavnik govori.** Zagreb, 1941, p.91; **Katolički tjednik**, br. 31, 3.VIII.1941; 47, 23.XI.1941.

<sup>66</sup> **Hrvatski glas**, br.165, 1.VIII.1941; **Krišto, Jure.** Hrvatsko katoličanstvo i ideološko formiranje Stjepana Radića (1893-1914). – Časopis za suvremenu povijest, 1991, knj.1-3, pp.129-132, 146-149, 158-160, 164-165.

<sup>67</sup> The oath to the Poglavnik started with the words »I swear in the name of the powerful God and all that is holy to me« and ended with »God help me! Amin!«. (See **CDA**, f.176, op.8, a.e.1034, p.34; **Spomen-knjiga** prve obljetnice Nezavisne Države Hrvatske 10.IV.1941 – 10.IV.1942. Zagreb, 1942, p.6).

<sup>68</sup> **Nedelja**, br.20, 25.V.1941; br.21, 1.VI.1941; **Djilas, Aleksa.** The Foundations of Croatian Identity. – In: South Slav Journal, vol.8, 1985, 1-2 (27-28), p.9.

such as »Nationalism and Catholicism«, »The Catholic State« etc.<sup>69</sup>. Concerning this Catholicism, the Ustashas even agreed to accept the Italian prince for the Croatian king – as a Catholic Italian could be closer to them than the former Orthodox king of Karađorđević dynasty<sup>70</sup>.

The Ustashas understanding of Catholicism and the role of the Catholic Church was well presented in Ivo Guberina's articles »Ustashism and Catholicism«, published in »Hrvatska smotra« in 1943<sup>71</sup>, as well as in »Ustashism and Croatism«, published in 1945 in »Hrvatski narod«<sup>72</sup>. According to the author, the Croatian Catholicism was obliged to Ustasha movement in many aspects, because the latter one created all conditions for broad and free dissemination of Catholic faith. The Ustashas claimed that for first time after 1918 Catholicism became tolerated and supported by the state in the Croatian lands. Exactly because of this Catholicism was imposed as one of the main components of the Ustasha ideology and propaganda in the ISC<sup>73</sup>.

The Ustashas put a Catholic label to their ideology and activities. They propagandized that their policy was in advantage to the Church and the nation. Most of the Croatian Nationalists were »devoted Catholics«, who were not tolerant to the other religions. According to them, Croatia could not be a »non-Catholic« or »anti-Catholic« state<sup>74</sup>. Namely, the Ustashas used religion as an agent for a national policy. By the same token, they identified religion with the nation, anathematizing their political opponents as God's enemies. Minister Budak already in July 1941 did not hide authorities' intention to take all the necessary measures to »cleanse« the ISC from all the Serbs, Jews, and Gypsies in order to become »one hundred percent Catholic«<sup>75</sup>.

For the Ustashas Catholicism was not only a religious doctrine, but also included anti-Serbism, anti-Semitism, and anti-Communism. To be more precise, they used Catholicism as an instrument for advertising their ideology and making it popular. The Nationalists used such a traditional factor as religion to attract a part of the religious population in Croatia. And that was the reason why they vigorously tried to openly advertise their Catholicism and to propagandize it among people.

Moreover, for the Ustashas Catholicism had a great importance, not only in the past, but also in the present, because even as a free and independent state, the ISC was threatened from its enemies. Furthermore, they considered that this clash with Serbs could be strengthened with their Catholicism, and therefore in their propaganda they put a sign of equality between Serbism and Orthodoxy. On June 6<sup>th</sup>, 1941, at a meeting in Križevci,

<sup>69</sup> HN, br.21, 30.VI.1939; br.398, 11.IV.1942; **Hrvatska straža**, br.14, 18.I.1940; **Katolički tjednik**, br.26, 29.VI.1941; br.27, 6.VII.1941; br.30, 27.VII.1941.

<sup>70</sup> CDA, f.176, op.8, a.e.1154, pp.53-54.

<sup>71</sup> Guberina, Ivo. Ustaštvo i katolicizam. – In: Hrvatska smotra, 1943, br.7-10, pp.435-446.

<sup>72</sup> HDA, f.1561, SDS, RSUP, Kut.8, 001.1.6, pp.11-13; HN, br.1258, 11.II.1945.

<sup>73</sup> Hrvatski glas, br.68, 22.IV.1941.

<sup>74</sup> Pavelić himself was a devoted Catholic. In his house in Zagreb he had a small chapel and two personal confessors. Even the teacher of his children was a priest. (See NARA, M 1203, doc.860H.00/1389, p.5; Pavlowitch, Stevan. The Improbable Survivor. Yugoslavia and It's Problems, 1918-1988. Columbus, Ohio State University Press, 1988, p.100).

<sup>75</sup> Quoted in Maclean, Fitzroy. Disputed Barricade. The Life and Times of Tito. London, 1957, p.162; Paris, Edmond. Op.cit., p.240.

Budak spoke about Orthodox Christians as enemies of the Croatian people, who tried to push the boundary of Orthodoxy to the West to the detriment of Catholicism<sup>76</sup>. On the other hand, the Ustashas were sure that with the creation of the ISC, on April 10th, 1941, the »Byzantine-Orthodox« pressure on Croats did not disappear. Therefore, Pavelić could see his state in the historical role of a defender of the Western civilization in its struggle against the »Eastern barbarism«. In this context the ISC was called upon to be a »wall« and »shield« against penetration of the Orthodoxy and to stop the propaganda of the Serbian Orthodox church. That is why faith henceforth remained one of the main pillars of new and free Croatia<sup>77</sup>.

However, there was also another reason (regarding only the interwar period) for the strong »publicly presented« Catholicism of the Ustashas, and it was their hope to achieve the Croatian national ideal with the help of the Italian authorities. Simultaneously, as far as Italy was closely connected to the Vatican, the Catholicism of the Croatian Nationalists was logical, and so was their desire to reactivate the relationship between their country and the Holy See<sup>78</sup>. Still, another reason for the Ustashas to devote attention to the religious issue was the fact that Catholicism was also a strong weapon against Marxist materialism and atheism. Thus, during the World War II the Ustashas wrote frequently about the persecution of the Catholic Church from Partisans and Chetniks. In the press blared forth the »martyr's death« of Catholic priests, as well as it was written about the persecution of the whole Catholic population in different villages and regions of the state, especially in Bosnia<sup>79</sup>.

The Ustasha propaganda saw the Catholic Church as an important institution in the cultural and political life of the country. In their ideological works the Nationalists emphasized Church's great role in the ISC and authorities' positive attitude towards religion. This situation was a result of Church's traditional commitment to the Croatian state idea, remained from the times of the medieval kings Tomislav, Krešimir and Zvonimir. Thus, in the ISC the Ustashas had a real opportunity to revive previous strong connection between the Croatian state and the Catholic Church. Moreover, because of Church's enormous influence and authority in the country; the national role it played in the Croatian history; its traditional confrontation with Orthodoxy; as well as because its anti-Communism, the Ustasha government could see in Catholic Church a natural and powerful ally that could be relied on in the struggle for the creation of the Croatian Catholic state<sup>80</sup>.

The Catholics were the majority of the population in Croatia (i.e. half of it) and it seems that Catholics were more religious than the Orthodox, with whom they lived together in the ISC. At the same time, the Church was one of the strongest and authoritative institutions in the country, and the new government could not ignore its opinion and preferences; especially because civil servants could use it in the nationalistic propaganda. By the same

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<sup>76</sup> Quoted in **Dedijer, Vladimir**. Op.cit., p.129.

<sup>77</sup> **Katolički tjednik**, br.23, 8.VI.1941; br.31, 3.VIII.1941; br. 47, 23.XI.1941; **HN**, br.163, 27.VII.1941; **Hrvatski glas**, br.68, 22.IV.1941; **NDH**, br.10, 5.III.1942.

<sup>78</sup> **Nedelja**, br.20, 25.V.1941.

<sup>79</sup> **Katolički tjednik**, br.26, 29.VI.1941; br.36, 7.IX.1941; **HN**, br.887, 17.XI.1943.

<sup>80</sup> **Hrvatska straža**, 9.VI.1936; 11.IX.1936; **Katolički tjednik**, br.27, 6.VII.1941; **HN**, br.104, 27.V.1941; br.637, 22.I.1943; **Perić, Ivan**. *Suvremeni hrvatski nacionalizam*. Zagreb, 1976, p.192

token, Catholic Church could convert many indefinite South Slavs into »Croats«, and could be mobilized to »wake up« those who »forgot« their identity, as it had been case with the Orthodox Church and Serbs<sup>81</sup>.

The Nationalists took into consideration the fact that the Church did not reject the Croatian nationalism. As a rule it contradicted Orthodoxy, i.e. Serbism. Since the Ustashas justified the persecution of the Serbs mainly with the religious differences between them and the Croats, the ruling circles made serious efforts to talk over the Catholic Church on their side<sup>82</sup>. Even the foreign observers stated that the cause of the clash between Croats and Serbs greatly depended on the struggle between Catholic and Orthodox Churches. By the same token, even though the contradiction Croats-Serbs was basically national, not religious, it also had a confessional side; and it was because of the fact that the Orthodox Church was a national institution, while at the same time some of the petty Croatian clergymen had a lot of hatred for the Serbs. Furthermore, the Ustashas incited the population against the Serbs, frequently describing liquidations of Croatian priest, whom they considered as »sincere patriots«<sup>83</sup>. Bearing in mind this national struggle it becomes obvious why the government was so eager to gain official support of the Catholic Church for its national policy. Similarly, viewing circumstances in this shed, it is clear why they did everything possible to win the amity of the clergy. The Nationalists constantly asked for a support in the clerical circles who had a big influence in Croatia, and they managed to obtain it in the clerical institutions such as Catholic high schools and societies like »Domogoj«, »Križari«, »Catholic Action«, »Croatian Hero«, etc.<sup>84</sup>.

By the same token, in order to win over the Catholic Church the Ustashas propagandized that they were its »good sons«, who fought for the Croatian state and protected interests of the Church. Furthermore, the Nationalists declared that the even the »resurrection« of the Croatian people and state in 1941 were based on the moral Christian codex<sup>85</sup>. They even claimed that the main ideas from the Papal epistles were used as the foundations of their social program. Moreover, these ideas were a core of the »Ustasha Rules«, which stated: »Ustashism is a moral movement, which wants and insists... that the basis of the well-appointed, healthy and happy life to be faith and family«<sup>86</sup>. Every Catholic, according to the Ustashas, had to make these principles part of his life, because they maintained that religion and tradition had helped in the preservation of the Croatian national identity. It is interesting to note that this opinion was shared also by the Bulgarian ambassador in Zagreb Yordan Mechkarov, who wrote that »Church and morality in the Ustasha state were pillars of the state and people's life, and that is why a great attention was paid to them«<sup>87</sup>.

<sup>81</sup> HDA, f.1561, SDS, RSUP, Kut.5, 001.5, p.27; Djilas, Aleksa. The Foundations of Croatian Identity..., pp.8-9.

<sup>82</sup> NARA, RG 165, 19 RAY Box, p.12; Hrvatski glas, br.68, 22.IV.1941; Hrvatska smotra, br.7-10, 1943, pp.444-446.

<sup>83</sup> In the press was spoken about the »martyrdom« of the Catholic priests. The victims were individually presented – where, how many of them and how they were tortured and killed (See HDA, f.1561, SDS, RSUP SRH, Kut.83, šifra 001.1 Crkveni problemi (Arhiva Hansa Helma), p.52; HN, br.887, 17.XI.1943).

<sup>84</sup> Jelić-Butić, Fikreta. Prilog proučavanju djelatnosti ustaša do 1941. – In: Časopis za suvremenu povijest, 1969, br.1-2, p.77.

<sup>85</sup> Hrvatski glas, br.68, 22.IV.1941; HN, br.879, 7.XI.1943.

<sup>86</sup> Hrvatska smotra, br.7-10, 1943, pp.442-443.

<sup>87</sup> CDA, f.1931, op.1, a.e.32, p.6.

The Nationalists presented the Ustasha movement as a »constructive« Croatian national movement with particular religious character, as a »pious« movement (fighting against the enemies of God and Church – Jewry, freemasonry and Communism)<sup>88</sup>. In that respect the Ustashes made popular the idea that their actions did not contradict the Catholic principles and were »in full harmony with the Catholic morality«<sup>89</sup>. Mile Budak in his speech in Karlovac on June 13<sup>th</sup>, 1941 defined that in the following way: »Pavelić fulfills the God's will. The actions of the Ustasha movement are in the interest of the Catholic Church ... Our entire activity is subordinated to the Church and the Catholic faith«<sup>90</sup>. On this basis the Ustashes concluded that the Church did not have reasons to reject the cooperation and support in their struggle<sup>91</sup>.

But the Nationalists thought the relation with the Church should be a »two-way street« – their movement had to conduct the education of the Ustashes as believers and devoted Catholics; and a »religious obligation« of the Church was to raise its members to support the Croatian nationalistic movement and to openly get involved in the Ustashes' organization<sup>92</sup>. The new regime promised to provide such social and political preconditions in the country, in which the Church would be able to freely fulfill its spiritual mission. Therefore, religious devotion was presented as a sign of Croatian national identity, and as such was considered as a part of the personal ethics of the Ustashes<sup>93</sup>.

Furthermore, the Nationalists elaborated the issue of the Church-state relationship theoretically. They thought that the state should guarantee the Church freedom, but the initiative in the spiritual sphere should be in the realm of the Church. In the ISC the Church should have a regulated legal status, in order to establish tight relationship between the state and the Church on the basis of mutual respect and support. The Ustashes broadly propagandized that the state cooperated with the Church in the religious and cultural education of the Catholics in the country. They claimed that the Catholic spirit in the ISC was imposed through the schools, the army, and the other state institutions, and that the Catholic Church had a freedom of action in the spirit of the Catholic cultural traditions<sup>94</sup>.

However, in their relationship to the Catholic Church the Ustashes were not extreme and even they proclaimed their movement for a national, not a religious nor a Catholic one. Ivo Guberina explained explicitly: »The Ustasha movement is not pro-Catholic ... , it is not a religious movement, neither it is called upon in this direction to educate the Croats«<sup>95</sup>. It was a civil nationalistic movement. Therefore, the role of Catholicism in the Ustasha ideology should not be overestimated. In fact, it was not extreme because of two reasons: firstly, the Nationalists needed the support of the Muslims in the country<sup>96</sup>, and secondly

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<sup>88</sup> *Hrvatska straža*, br.14, 18.I.1940.

<sup>89</sup> *Hrvatska smotra*, br.7-10, 1943, pp.439-440.

<sup>90</sup> Quoted in *Dedijer, Vladimir*. Op.cit., p.129.

<sup>91</sup> *Mužić, Ivan*. *Hrvatska politika...*, p.232.

<sup>92</sup> *Hrvatska straža*, br.14, 18.I.1940; *Hrvatska smotra*, br.7-10, 1943, p.437,444, 446.

<sup>93</sup> *Jelinek, Yeshayahu*. *Bosnia-Herzegovina at War: Relations between Moslems and Non-Moslems*. – In: *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, Vol.5, 3, 1990, p.285

<sup>94</sup> *Hrvatska straža*, 9.VI.1936; 11.IX.1936; *Katolički tjednik*, br.27, 6.VII.1941; br.28, 13.VII.1941.

<sup>95</sup> Quoted in *Mužić, Ivan*. *Hrvatska politika ...*, p.232.

<sup>96</sup> In religious matters the Ustashes followed the teaching of A. Starčević, who openly spoke for a Croatian-Muslim union. *Pravašas* showed friendly attitude towards Islam and were not exclusively pro-Catholic. (See



Pavelić was not in »excellent« relationship with the Catholic Church, since Church was his only opposition in the ISC, and he could not handle this easily<sup>97</sup>. Namely, the core of the Ustasha ideological system was not religion but nationalism, or to be more precise anti-Serbism as its chief element. Catholicism was only one dimension of this ideology, used in the aspect of the religious difference between Croats and Serbs.

However, the new rulers used religion to attract people to their movement, but not because their own religiosity. They, as Ivo Banac (the historian from Croatian descent) summed up, »used«, i.e. »skillfully manipulated« their Catholicism<sup>98</sup>. The Nationalists proclaimed their devotion to the Catholic faith, but that was more a declaration for a Croatian cultural identity and a main distinctive mark regarding the Orthodox Christianity, than a real religious commitment. The Ustashes claimed that their struggle against the Serbs was not religious in its character, as the latter tried to present it, but a national one<sup>99</sup>.

The Croatian Nationalists respected the Church as far as it represented traditional, national, social and family values. However, they rejected the Universalism of Christian teaching and internationalism, which was the foundation of the Catholic Church doctrine. Namely, they could not recognize a Church, which could not share their nationalistic view of Croatia<sup>100</sup>. Ustashes had confidence in some of the Church leaders, but only if they were pro-Nationalistic orientated. That is why they maintained the best relationship with archbishop Šarić, as he was in opposition to Belgrade authorities already in the interwar period<sup>101</sup>.

At the same time, the ruling circles in the ISC insisted on the separation between the Church and the state, and that was a modern policy for the time being. In that relation the new authorities relied not only on *pravašas* ideology, but also on ideology of the Croatian Peasant Party. Namely, both Starčević and brothers Radić desired separation of Church from state, as well as they insisted that the civil power must not interfere in the spiritual matters, and that the clergy had to stay apart from politics. Such ideology basically was anti-cleric and aimed that the Church become more democratic. One also has to note that Starčević and brothers Radić criticized some of the Church actions, which did not respond to the Croatian national interests, because of Church's loyalty to Vatican<sup>102</sup>.

Even if we can call the ISC a »Catholic« state, it definitely can not be qualified as a »cleric« one. The difference was precisely explained in propaganda. Namely, for the Ustashes

HDA, f.249, kut.11, p.1; **Begić, Miron**. Ustaški pokret 1929-1941. Pregled njegove povijesti. Buenos Aires, 1986, p.78).

<sup>97</sup> **Alexander, Stella**. The Triple Myth..., p.1; **Pavlowitch, Steven**. The Improbable Survivor..., pp.100-101.

<sup>98</sup> **Banac, Ivo**. Katolička crkva i liberalizam..., p.93.

<sup>99</sup> **Rojnica, Ivo**. Susreti i doživljaji. Razdoblje od 1938 do 1975 u mojim sjećanjima. Vol.1 (1938-1945). München, 1969; Zagreb, 1994, p.112.

<sup>100</sup> **Djilas, Aleksa**. The Contested Country: Yugoslav Unity and Communist Revolution, 1919-1953. Harvard University Press, 1991, p.114, 117, 209.

<sup>101</sup> **Poglavnik Saboru i narodu...**, pp.33-39; **Sadkovich, James**. Italian Support for Croatian Separatism, 1927-1937. New York, 1987, p.151

<sup>102</sup> Starčević, even as seminarist, made statements against »priesthood«, who took advantage of their position and more often followed the orders from Rome, than to protect the Croatian national interests (See **Starčević, Ante**. Politički spisi..., pp.29-30; **Starčević, Ante**. Djela, knj.3, p.216; **Starčević, Ante**. Izabrani spisi. Zagreb, 1943, p.489).

clericalism meant »government of the clergy«, as well as it included involvement of the Church in the civil affairs and in the policy of the state. They clearly declared, that »the clerical state is not an ideal for a Catholic state, but its caricature«. The Nationalists stated that the Church and clergy were not called upon to organize the new Croatian state, not even to strive for a civil power in it, but to deal with the spiritual issues in the country. By the same token, they reminded that even the Church forbade the participation of the clergy into politics<sup>103</sup>.

### **The Ustashes and Orthodoxy**

The Ustashes were not seriously interested in the religious dogmas and theological issues. They propagandized Catholicism not because it was »the only true and genuine religion« in the world, but because it helped them regarding the national differentiation in the ethnically and religiously mixed Croatian lands. They considered Catholicism as a part of the Croatian national tradition and *differentia specifica* from the Orthodox Christianity. On the other hand, the new rulers of Croatia did not undertake a »crusade« against Islam, but quite opposite – they tolerated that creed in the ISC because of their tactical alliance with the Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Thus, their main blow was directed against Orthodoxy which was also a Christian religion. For the Ustashes the Orthodoxy was hostile because it was Serbian. They accepted Catholicism not merely as a religious doctrine but as a weapon against Orthodoxy and thus – against Serbism<sup>104</sup>.

There is no doubt that the attack against the Orthodox Christianity was directed towards the Serbs, so one could say that the blow was against the ethnos, not the creed. Namely, this explains that the Croatian separatists were not worried about the »deviation« of Orthodox theological dogmas and religious rituals in comparison towards Catholicism, but they fought against the strong connection between the Orthodox Church and the Serbian national consciousness. Consequently, on territories declared Croatian, the Ustashes recognized only the Croatian national consciousness. For them Orthodoxy was hostile, because it was »Serbian«. The members of the Ustasha movement declared the religious difference between Catholics and Orthodox as very important, because in the Croatian lands it was identical with the national belonging of Croats and Serbs<sup>105</sup>.

The Ustashes used the fact that from the eleventh century onwards there existed the struggle for domination between the Orthodox and Catholic Churches. Thus, they used the intolerance of the Catholic Church towards »the schismatics« to deal with their century-old enemies. In that way Catholicism became just a slogan in their encounter with the Serbs in the ISC. And that is why the struggle for domination between Catholicism and Orthodoxy did not have a character of a religious war in the Croatian lands, but more of a

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<sup>103</sup> *Katolički tjednik*, br.26, 29.VI.1941; **Cesarich, George**. *Croatia and Serbia. Why is Their Peaceful Separation a European Necessity*. Chicago, 1954, pp.88-89.

<sup>104</sup> NARA, Office of Strategic Services (OSS). *State Department Intelligence and Research Reports, Part IV, Germany and Its Occupied Territories during World War II*, pp.26-27; *Religion and Nationalism in Soviet and East European Politics...*, p.47.

<sup>105</sup> *HN*, br.163, 27.VII.1941.

national struggle between Croats and Serbs<sup>106</sup>. That gave grounds to historians to conclude that the Ustashas used religion for their political merits. Namely, even before the WW2 as well as after they did not persecute Bulgarians, Romanians, Ukrainians, and Russians on the territory of Croatia, which was a proof the attack was not against the Orthodoxy, but against the Serbs<sup>107</sup>. Since for the Nationalists the national issue was essential they waged a war against the Serbian political identity in the ISC, not against the Orthodoxy and its religious implications.

The Ustashas underlined that in historical perspective Orthodoxy was accepted from Serbian peasantry as an expression of its nationality, and Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) was recognized as a national institution. Therefore, they were worried because of two facts – firstly, in Eastern Europe the Orthodox Church had always been a state church (»caesaro-papism«), transforming itself into a national one in the nineteenth century; and secondly – in the Ottoman period the SOC had played an enormous role regarding the preservation of the Serbian national spirit<sup>108</sup>. The Ustashas were aware of the role of the SOC in the formation and development of the Serbian nationalism, as well as the participation of the Orthodox clergy in politics. After the creation of the Serbian state in the nineteenth century, some of the Church leaders became promulgators of the national expansionism and many Orthodox priests joined the Chetniks during the Second World War<sup>109</sup>.

Pavelić's statement at the final session of the Sabor on February 28<sup>th</sup>, 1942 was very indicative regarding the Ustasha attitude towards Orthodoxy<sup>110</sup>. He claimed that the issue of the Orthodox Church (which the Ustashas called »Greek-Eastern«)<sup>111</sup> was the most complicated one for solving in the ISC, but not because of the Orthodox religion, which as Catholicism was a Christian faith. The problem was about the jurisdiction of the Serbian Patriarchate<sup>112</sup>. As far as the Croats did not create their separate Croatian Orthodox Church (COC) during the Revival<sup>113</sup>, the SOC undertook that role and made serious efforts to Serbise the whole Orthodox population in the Croatian territories. The Poglavnik<sup>114</sup> stated that »nobody is tackling Orthodoxy«, though the state could not allow the existence of the

<sup>106</sup> **Rojnica, Ivo**. Op.cit., p.112; **Kazimirović, Vasa**. NDH u svjetlu nemačkih dokumenata i dnevnika Gleza fon Horstenau 1941-1944. Beograd, 1987, p.109.

<sup>107</sup> If there were actions against Montenegrins, they were against their Serbian national consciousness, not because of their faith. (see **Obrknežević, Miloš**. Razvoj pravoslavlja u Hrvatskoj i Hrvatska pravoslavna crkva. Hrvatska revija, Barcelona-Munchen, 1979, p.34; **Mužić, Ivan**. Pavelić i Stepinac. Split, 1991, p.47).

<sup>108</sup> **HDA**, f. 211, kut.39 Zapisnik IV sjednice Sabora 25.II.1942, pp.167; **Spomen-knjiga...**, p.78.

<sup>109</sup> **NARA**, M 1203 – 28, doc.860H.9111/91, p.2; Survey of Yugoslavia, 1.XII.1942, p.26; **Pavelić, Ante**. Hrvatska pravoslavna crkva. Madrid, 1984, pp.129-138.

<sup>110</sup> This speech was published in »Independent State of Croatia« on March 5<sup>th</sup>, 1942 under the title »Nobody is Tackling Orthodoxy, but in the Croatian state There Could not be a Serbian Orthodox Church«. (See **NDH**, br.10, 5.III.1942).

<sup>111</sup> They called it Greek-Eastern, since for centuries all Orthodox Christians were subordinated to the Greek patriarch (See **Pavelić, Ante**. Hrvatska pravoslavna crkva..., p.10).

<sup>112</sup> The tradition was imposed yet from the Hungarians in the framework of Austro-Hungary, who issued a law, which subordinated the Orthodox population in Hungary to the Serbian patriarch (See **HDA**, f.211, kut.6 Br-zopisni zapisnik Hrvatskog državnog sabora Nezavisne države Hrvatske, IX sjednica, 28.02.1942, p.1125).

<sup>113</sup> Nevertheless in 1861 E. Kvaternik appealed to ban Šokčević to create COC, the idea has never been realized (See **Obrknežević, Miloš**. Op.cit., p.28).

<sup>114</sup> »Poglavnik« means leader of the ISC and the Ustasha movement, relevant to German »Furer« and Italian »Duce«.

SOC on its territory. He considered Church as a political organization whose activity was directed against the very existence of the ISC<sup>115</sup>.

The Ustashes tried to explain their uncompromising position towards the Orthodox Church in Croatia with the fact that this Church was an »inseparable part of the Serbian state«, and they did not want that any foreign authorities have control on Croatian territory. Namely, Serbian state institutions (more precisely the King) were those who elected the patriarch, or at least approved his election, and in this way the Orthodox Church was used as a weapon in the hands of the King and the Serbian government<sup>116</sup>. The Ustashes warned that if the existence of the SOC was allowed in the ISC, that would mean the Serbian state authorities could interfere in the internal affairs of the ISC, which was unacceptable for a sovereign country.

Pavelić's views on that matter were well presented in his speech to the new converts in the Great district Baranja on November 18th, 1941<sup>117</sup>. In it he opposed the usage of the faith in politics and the transformation of the Church into a political organization. Moreover, the Poglavnik explained that in Croatia could be allowed the existence only of a Croatian national Orthodox Church or international Church organization, which could not be subordinated to any foreign state power. If there should be an Orthodox Church in the ISC that could be only a Croatian Orthodox Church, under the direct control of the Croatian state<sup>118</sup>.

In their ideology the Ustashes investigated the issue of the historical role of the Orthodox Church. Thus, they pointed that the SOC followed the migration of the Serbs, who settled in the Croatian lands yet in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, And that was how the first Orthodox Churches and monasteries appeared in their lands. The Serbs identified their Church with the nation, and therefore each Orthodox Christian, who was under the jurisdiction of the SOC was considered as a member of their nation. From the second half of the nineteenth century Serbization of the non-Serbian Orthodox Christians was a rather quick process, since the Croatian people did not have its own state, while – on the other hand – the Serbs had such one. From that moment term »Serbian« became synonymous of »Orthodox«<sup>119</sup>.

After 1918 the SOC had a specific political task – to cooperate in the unification of all the Serbs in one national state. When in 1920 it became a Patriarchate, all the Orthodox Christians in Yugoslavia, including non-Serbs (i.e. Macedonians, Montenegrins, Bulgarians, Ukraines, Rumanians, Albanians, Greeks, etc.) were subordinated to the Patriarch in Belgrade. Thus, the Orthodoxy became a basis of the Great-Serbism<sup>120</sup>. The Orthodox Church in Yugoslavia had a freedom of action. It became so strong, that began to impose

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<sup>115</sup> **Ustaška misao**. Poglavnikovi govori 12.X.1941 – 12.IV.1942. Zagreb, 1942, p.65, 67; **Poglavnik** Nezavisne države Hrvatske Dr Ante Pavelić svome narodu. Govori. Karlovac, sv.2, 1942, pp.5-8.

<sup>116</sup> **HDA**, f.211, kut.6 Brzopisni zapisnik Hrvatskog državnog sabora Nezavisne države Hrvatske, IX sjednica, 28.02.1942, p.1125; **Budak, Mile**. Jugoslavija..., p.145.

<sup>117</sup> **HDA**, f. 211, kut.39 Zapisnik IV sjednice Sabora 25.II.1942, pp.161-162, 167; **Hrvatska straža**, br.47, 23.XI.1941.

<sup>118</sup> **HDA**, f.211, kut.6 Brzopisni zapisnik Hrvatskog državnog sabora Nezavisne države Hrvatske, IX sjednica, 28.02.1942, pp.1125-1126; **Богдан, Иво**. Д-р Анте Павелич разреши хърватския въпрос. София, 1943, с.68. (**Bogdan, Ivo**. D-г Ante Pavelic razreshi harvatskija vapros. Sofia, 1943, p.68)

<sup>119</sup> **Obrknežević, Miloš**. Op.cit., pp.9-13.

<sup>120</sup> **HN**, br.163, 27.VII.1941; **Katolički tjednik**, br.31, 3.VIII.1941.

its influence even above the government and the Parliament<sup>121</sup>. The Ustashas were especially against the practice of the Serbian elements (agitators, clerks, priests, etc.) to cross the frontier and to »flood« the Croatian lands with a purpose to assimilate the »Orthodox Croats«. Therefore, Croatian Nationalists were not against Orthodoxy in general, but against the fact that the Serbian politicians used it in their national policy<sup>122</sup>.

According to the Croatian leading circles the Serbian Nationalists in Croatia activated especially after 1941, trying to use the Orthodox Christians in the ISC for the inflammation of an inner national conflict. The problem with the Serbian minority was not its Orthodoxy, but in the fact that religion was used by the SOC and the Serbian government for an anti-Croatian activity<sup>123</sup>. In »Hrvatski narod« from July 30<sup>th</sup>, 1941 it was stated that in the ISC the existence of the SOC as an institution could not be allowed, since it was tightly identified with the Serbian nationalism. Namely, accusation was that SOC has always shared the aim of the Serbian Nationalists – to turn Croatia into a zone of Serbian political, economic, and cultural expansion. Moreover, the Ustashas stigmatized the support that the SOC gave to the Chetniks, the King and Yugoslav government in exile. Thus the Ustashas' propaganda defined activities of the Orthodox church in the ISC as »ominous«, »fatal« and »sinister«, because this Church »became a weapon for Serbization in the hands of the King and the government in such a degree that it stopped to be a Church«<sup>124</sup>.

In the press the Ustashas directed their attacks mainly against the Orthodox clergy because this clergy supported the Belgrade government's Great-Serbian policy. In order to prove their statements, the Nationalists cited many documents and materials, which showed that the Orthodox clergy was nationalistic and worked for the Serbian national interests. In the propaganda was stated that Orthodox priests killed Catholics, did crimes, did not respect Catholic and Muslim relics and traditions, and that they supported the struggle of Chetniks and Partisans<sup>125</sup>.

### Conversions

Since they could not coup with the rebellious sentiment of two million Serbs on their territory<sup>126</sup>, neither could terminate influence of the SOC, the Croatian extreme Nationalists decided to tear them away from the Serbian control, converting a part of them to Catholicism. On May 15<sup>th</sup>, 1941 in Gospić Mile Budak formulated the Ustasha program for the so-

<sup>121</sup> That became obvious especially during the Concordat crisis. In 1939 Patriarch Gavriilo declared he was against Sporazum and »separation« of Croatia. He played a great role in the coup d'état of March 27<sup>th</sup>, 1941. When the Germans took over Belgrade, he refused to leave Serbia, which was the reason to be sent to concentration camp in Austria. He came back in 1946 as a head of the Orthodox Church again (See **Mužić, Ivan**. Pavelić..., pp.16-21).

<sup>122</sup> **Krizman, Bogdan**. NDH između Hitlera i Mussolinija. Zagreb, 1986, p.110; **Jelić-Butić, Fikreta**. Ustaše i Nezavisna Država Hrvatska 1941-1945. 2nd edn., Zagreb, 1978, p.173.

<sup>123</sup> **HN**, br.80, 3.V.1941; br.639, 24.II.1943; **NDH**, br.20, 25.IX.1941.

<sup>124</sup> **Hrvatska straža**, br.10, 13.I.1940; br.47, 23.XI.1941; **Katolički tjednik**, br.21, 25.V.1941; **HN**, 30.VII.1941; br.1079, 9.VII.1944.

<sup>125</sup> **CDA**, f.176, op.8, a.e.1250, pp.84-87; **Spomen-knjiga**..., p.31; **Budak, Mile**. Jugoslavija. ..., pp.145-146.

<sup>126</sup> Serbs represented around one-third of the whole population of the ISC after the incorporation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in its boundaries.

lution of the Serbian issue in the ISC in the following way: »Part of the Serbs we will kill, others we will deport, and the rest we will convert to the Catholic faith, and thus we will assimilate them«<sup>127</sup>. Similarly, answering the question of the Bulgarian ambassador Jordan Mechkarov how the Croats will deal with the Serbian danger in the ISC, minister Andrija Artuković explained: »Very easy. Half of the Serbs we will convert to Catholicism«<sup>128</sup>. So, that is how the Ustashas hoped to reach a »constructive solution« of the Serbian problem and to »pacify the country«<sup>129</sup>.

Undoubtedly, in their intention to Catholicize many Serbs, the Ustashas were led by nationalistic motives. Namely, the »Croatization« of the new state meant its transformation into an ethnically and religiously homogeneous country. According to the Croatian rulers, the Serbs in the ISC had a national consciousness, tightly connected to their religion, and therefore they would easily forget their Serbian identity if they were forced to abandon their religion<sup>130</sup>. This concept was revealed by Victor Gutić on June 24<sup>th</sup>, 1941, who stated that the first step of the denationalization and assimilation of the Serbian ethnos in the ISC was to drift them away from the influence of the SOC. The Ustashas believed the conversion to Catholicism will make Serbs »Croats«, and consequently lead to the desired national unity in the country<sup>131</sup>. That is how this conversion turned into national, and not a religious issue, in the ISC. Therefore, Pavelić dedicated a special brochure to this question, and called it »The Truth about so-called Conversion of the Orthodox Christians«<sup>132</sup>.

The Croatian Nationalists wanted the Orthodox population to accept the new Croatian state and to live peacefully in it, and that is why in the summer of 1941 they still considered the Serbs living in the ISC for a part of the Croatian nation. Henceforth this topic took an important place in the Ustasha propaganda, and its the most explicit formulation was Pavelić's statement, published in »Neue Ordnung« on August 24<sup>th</sup>, 1941: »As the Serbs are concerned, here we have confusion of terms. There are very few real Serbs in Croatia. Most of them are Croats, who have accepted the Orthodox faith in the past«<sup>133</sup>. Budak also participated actively in this campaign. He imposed the idea that the Serbs living in Croatia were in fact »Orthodox Croats«, who were Serbicised by the long-lasting Great Serbian propaganda<sup>134</sup>. In his book: »The Croatian People in Its Struggle for a Separate and Independent Croatian State«, Budak explicitly wrote: »Nine-tenths of those who call themselves Serbs in the Croatian lands, have no single drop of Serbian blood in their bloodstream«<sup>135</sup>. Such Ustashas' postulates turned out to be quite convenient for the presentation of the Serbian question in the ISC as in fact »Croatian« one. Thus, this question

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<sup>127</sup> Quoted in: Čulinović, Ferdo. Okupatorska podjela Jugoslavije. Beograd, 1970, p.348.

<sup>128</sup> CDA, f.176, op.8, a.e.1034, p.15.

<sup>129</sup> Krišto, Jure. Katolička crkva u totalitarizmu 1945-1990. Razmatranja o Crkvi u Hrvatskoj pod komunizmom. Zagreb, 1997, p.370.

<sup>130</sup> Djilas, Aleksa. The Contested Country..., p. 122; Mužić, Ivan. Pavelić i Stepinac..., p.42.

<sup>131</sup> HN, br.1108, 13.VIII.1944; Jelinek, Yeshayahu. Nationalities and Minorities..., p.198.

<sup>132</sup> Pavelić, Ante. Istina o tobožnjem prekrštavanju pravoslavnih. – Hrvatska misao, br.2, 1953. This brochure is a part of the Pavelić's book »Doživljaji«. Vol.2, Madrid, 1968; Zagreb, 1996.

<sup>133</sup> Katalinić, Kazimir. Rađanje drđave: NDH, Tito, »hrvatsko proljeće« i 1991. Zagreb, 1994, p.71

<sup>134</sup> Budak, Mile. Pjesnik i mučenik Hrvatske. Spomen-zbornik o stotnoj godišnjici rođenja (1889-1989), (ed. Vinko Nikolić). Barcelona-Munchen, 1990, p. 23.

<sup>135</sup> Budak, Mile. Hrvatski narod u borbi..., pp.175-176.

became an inner issue.. Therefore, at his meeting with Hitler and Ribentrop on June 6<sup>th</sup>, 1941 in Berghof, Pavelić stated, that the question for the Serbian minority has not been posed before in Croatia, because it did not exist<sup>136</sup>. Later on, the Poglavnik explained to Horstenau, that not only Muslims, but also the bulk of the Serbs, in the ISC were a part of the Croatian nation. However, while among the Muslims the Croatian national consciousness was rather well preserved, for Orthodox Christians the situation was quite different, because under the influence of the Serbian propaganda they were Serbicised and started to call themselves »Serbs«<sup>137</sup>.

Still, one of the paradoxes in the Ustasha ideology is that the Nationalists considered Serbs an »inferior« and »harmful« race, but simultaneously considered them as an inseparable part of the Croatian nation. The contradiction is obvious – it was claimed there were no Serbs in the ISC (they were presented as »Orthodox Croats«), but simultaneously they were prosecuted and killed in mass scale because they were Serbs. From one side, Serbs were presented as a separate people, hostile to the Croats, and thus the most extreme precautions against them should be applied. Still, from other side, they were proclaimed for Croats, who were converted to Orthodoxy during the Ottoman period<sup>138</sup>.

The idea that the Orthodox Christians were »Croats by the language and Fatherland«, who differed from their countrymen only by the religion, was not an original Ustasha's idea, since it was borrowed directly from the ideology of *pravašas*<sup>139</sup>. Namely, as Vuk Karadžić claimed that Croats were actually Serbs, Ante Starčević opposed and saw Croats in Serbs. Thus, according to the »father« of the modern Croatian nationalism, the Croatian nation embraced not only Catholics-Croats, but also all those who lived in the Croatian lands and in the course of the historical development were »turned« to Orthodoxy or Islam. By the same token, for Starčević only Orthodox people, living in Serbia were real Serbs, and all those living among the Croats were »Croats of the Orthodox belief«. Consequently, those, who insisted to be called Serbs in Croatia, Starčević considered as enemies of his people<sup>140</sup>.

The idea that Serbs in Croatia in fact are »Orthodox Croats« was elaborated by several Ustasha ideologists (M. Budak, M. Puk, M. Lorković, at al.), who shared the opinion that in the Croatian lands there were no Orthodox people until the arrival of the Turks. They claimed during the Ottoman period (i.e during sixteenth and seventeenth centuries) a part of the Catholic Croatian population, under the pressure of the Serbian Orthodox clergy, was converted to Orthodoxy<sup>141</sup>.

<sup>136</sup> **Vrančić, Vjekoslav.** Branili smo državu. Uspomene, osvrti, doživljaji. Barcelona-Munchen, 1985, v.2, p.30.

<sup>137</sup> **Perić, Ivan.** Op.cit., p.185.

<sup>138</sup> **Tomasevich, Jozo.** War and Revolution in Yugoslavia, 1941-1945. The Chetniks. Stanford University Press, California, 1975, p.257, 259; **Trifković, Srdjan.** The Ustaša Movement and European Politics, 1929-1945. Ph.D. Thesis, University of Southampton, 1990, pp.218-219.

<sup>139</sup> **Hrvatska straža**, br.47, 23.XI.1941; **Lorković, Mladen.** Op.cit., pp.69-71.

<sup>140</sup> **Starčević, Ante.** Politički spisi..., p.44.

<sup>141</sup> The Ottoman authorities tolerated the Orthodox religion, while the attitude towards the Catholics, fighting against Islam, was negative. (See **HDA**, f. 211, kut.39, Zapisnik IV sjednice Sabora 25.II.1942, p.118, 167-168; **HN**, br.859, 14.X.1943; br.1122, 30.VIII.1944; **Spomen-knjiga**..., p.77).

The Ustashes used the historical researches of some Croatian nationalistic historians as dr. Dominik Mandić, Milan Šufflaj, Ivo Pilar, Krunoslav Draganović et al., who gave them many proofs that the Orthodox Christians in Croatia predominantly had a Croatian origin and only a small part of them originated from Serbia. On January 14<sup>th</sup>, 1945 in newspapers »Hrvatski narod« program article with a title »Croatian Orthodox Christians are not from Serbian origin« was published<sup>142</sup>. There was stated that the adherents of the Eastern Church rite, who lived on the Croatian territory, attempted to define themselves as Serbs in national terms with the help of the Orthodox church. Moreover, according to the Ustashes many Catholics converted to Orthodoxy in the interwar period because of different kinds pressure. Some of the reasons were also mixed marriages or desire for prosperity that could give them a chance for a social promotion. By the same token, the Croatian Nationalists maintained that in Yugoslavia around 200-250 thousand Catholics were forced to accept Orthodoxy<sup>143</sup>.

All these »facts« became an explanation for the conversion of the Orthodox to Catholicism in the ISC, since this was officially proclaimed for »re-Croatization«, i.e. returning of »Serbicised Croats« to the »faith of their ancestors«, or »father's faith«; and thus these conversions became an instrument of the Croatian national unity restoration.<sup>144</sup> The minister of justice and religion M. Puk at the sixth plenary session of the Sabor tried to excuse this policy of conversion in the ISC with the argument that Orthodox Christians were actually Catholics in the past, and that after the collapse of Yugoslavia they were able »in a free way« to express their desire to return to their »old faith«<sup>145</sup>.

Namely, with the statement that in Croatia there were no real Serbs, the Croatian Nationalists pointed out the »essential« difference between the Serbs in Croatia (so-called *pre-čanski Srbi*) and those in Serbia. They claimed that both entities had common religion and language, but they were separated by the centuries of a different historical development and cultural influences. According to the Ustashes, the Orthodox population in the ISC had two possibilities: to be assimilated, or to be misused by the Greater Serbian propaganda. The first option could guarantee them »equal rights like the rest of the citizens of the Croatian state«, but the second could transform them into »tools of Belgrade«<sup>146</sup>. By the same token, the Ustashes argued that since the fatherland of the Croats-Catholics was not Italy, neither the Vatican, and for the Croats-Muslims their homeland was not Turkey, neither Meka, then for Croats-Orthodox it could not be Serbia. Consequently, the Nationalists propagandized that the common fatherland for all ethnic groups living in the Croatian lands could be only Croatia<sup>147</sup>.

Pavelić claimed it was a »tragedy«, when a nation is divided by several religions, and the idea was that the situation should be changed, i.e the Orthodox Christians had to convert to Catholicism. The Poglavnik assured that the Croatian government would guarantee a

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<sup>142</sup> HN, br.1234, 14.I.1945

<sup>143</sup> HN, br.80, 3.V.1941; br.639, 24.II.1943; br.1079, 9.VII.1944; br.1234, 14.I.1945; NDH, br.20, 25.IX.1941.

<sup>144</sup> HN, br.859, 14.X.1943; br.1122, 30.VIII.1944; *Spomen-knjiga*..., p.77.

<sup>145</sup> HDA, f. 211, Brzopisni zapisnici..., p.118.

<sup>146</sup> HN, br.1079, 9.VII.1944.

<sup>147</sup> *Hrvatska straža*, br.47, 23.XI.1941; HN, br.1108, 13.VIII.1944.



»peaceful life« to all the Serbs, who change their religion, and would recognize them for »full rights members of the Croatian nation«. Thus, from subjects of the state (together with the Jews) they could transform into citizens, with all the rights and obligations. The Serbs who rejected to accept Catholicism had to leave the territory of the ISC<sup>148</sup>.

### The Creation of the Croatian Orthodox Church

Religious issue was discussed also in the Croatian Sabor on the sessions that began on February 23<sup>th</sup>, 1942. These sessions marked the beginning of a new attitude of the Ustashas towards Orthodoxy in the country. The reason for this change was their failure to liquidate Orthodoxy, even after the outlawing of the SOC and the attempt for the Catholicization of its adherents. The changed position of the government on the issue of the rights of different religious communities in the ISC could be seen in the statement of minister M. Puk at the sixth meeting of the Sabor on February 25<sup>th</sup>, 1942. At the ninth meeting on February 28<sup>th</sup>, 1942. Pavelić also referred in detail to the religious issue<sup>149</sup>. All these revealed the change in the Ustashas' religious ideology and policy.

Minister Puk elaborated the issue of the freedom of the religious communities in the authoritarian and totalitarian states in a theoretical aspect. He tried to deny accusations of foreign propaganda that such states were enemies of religion and that their authorities restrict the religious freedom of their subjects<sup>150</sup>. In the Sabor the Ustashas openly declared that they had »guaranteed« the freedom of belief and a »full equality« of all denominations in the country. They promised that every citizen could choose freely his religion and enjoy all political rights in the ISC. Similarly, the Nationalists denied that in Croatia existed a discrimination on religious basis. The Poglavnik openly proclaimed the official renunciation of the forced conversion. He even claimed that government did not support the »spiritual« terror against the Orthodox Christians in the country, neither was inspired by it<sup>151</sup>.

M. Puk reminded that the Ustashas' government was led by Starčević's principles regarding the religious issue, according to which »faith is a spiritual issue«, and thus it was not in the competence of the state, and should not »divide a nation« but it should be result of a free choice of each person<sup>152</sup>. The Poglavnik also defined that the religious issues should be solved within the churches, not by the state, and that the faith should not be used in the

<sup>148</sup> CDA, f.176, op.8, a.e.1153, s.65; HDA, f. 211, Brzopisni zapisnici..., p.118; KL, br.47, 27.XI.1941.

<sup>149</sup> His speech was published in »Hrvatski narod«, br. 365 from March 1<sup>st</sup>, 1942.

<sup>150</sup> His argument was that so-called »democratic states« in military terms were bounded with the greatest enemy of religion – Bolshevik Russia, and the religious issues were left to the mercy of the »Jewish-Mason« representatives in the Parliaments. (See HDA, f.211, kut.39, Zapisnik IV sjednice Sabora 25.II.1942, pp.161-162; f.1561, SDS RSUP, Kut.5, 001.1–Katolička crkva kao ideološki i politički protivnik FNRJ, p.206).

<sup>151</sup> Obrknežević, Miloš. Op.cit., p.23-24; Mužić, Ivan. Hrvatska politika..., p.236.

<sup>152</sup> The Ustashas borrowed directly from Starčević, who shared some liberal ideas about Catholicism. Already in the nineteenth century he believed in the Croatian state there will be place for everybody, notwithstanding the religion – Catholicism, Islam, Protestantism or Orthodoxy. In that way he defined the Croatian nation not on religious basis. For him it was not a problem if Muslims and Serbs had their own religion as far as they declared themselves as Croats. In its program from March 1<sup>st</sup>, 1919 the Party of Right also declared it will insist the »free expression of religion to be secured for all recognized creeds in the Croatian state«. (See Hrvatska misao, br.48, 29.XI.1922; Hrvatska straža, br.26, 29.VI.1941; HN, br.362, 26.II.1942).

political struggles. Moreover, he promised that in the ISC the Church would be separated from the state, i.e. civil and spiritual power would be independent<sup>153</sup>.

By the same token, the Ustashes declared that Croatia was not exclusively a Catholic state, since there except Catholics lived also Muslims, Orthodox Christians, and Protestants. Thus, for first time Croatian nationalists acknowledged the ISC as a multi-religious state, and soon after notion of »Croats of three faiths« appeared, not as it was before – of two (i.e. Catholicism and Islam)<sup>154</sup>. This also meant acknowledgment of the Orthodoxy in the Croatian lands, which was a big concession to the Serbs. Consequently, Ustashes' idea of the »unity of the Croatian people«, which included also Orthodox population, was imposed<sup>155</sup>. On June 7<sup>th</sup>, 1942 the secretary of the Ministry of Justice and Religion Jozo Dumanđić proclaimed all people living in the ISC for »brothers«, regardless of their creed. He reminded that the Croats were religiously tolerant people, and he also mentioned the moments when Catholics and Muslims were living in harmony with the Orthodox Christians in the Croatian lands<sup>156</sup>.

M. Puk and A. Pavelić stated in the Parliament that in the interest of the state was to have no inner conflicts, especially regarding the religious issues. They reminded that the religious division was typical for the Balkans in the past and should be finally overcome. Both of them pleaded for a modern, national state, in which all citizens will have Croatian national consciousness, and their faith will be put aside, just not to cause any conflicts. The Ustashes developed a concept of the state-nation unity, i.e. all, who lived in the ISC was regarded as a member of the Croatian nation, regardless of the religion (not only Croats-Catholics, but also Orthodox Christians and Muslims)<sup>157</sup>. This was a modern concept for the nation – based on ethnos, language, territory, state, and not obligatory religion. From now on nation and creed were not equalized by the Ustashes' ideologists. In that respect it is obvious that they borrowed this concept mostly from Filip Lukas, Milan Šufflaj, Ivo Pilar, et al.

After 1942 Budak already made statements that among Orthodox people there were many who »had nothing to do with the Serbdom«; he proclaimed Partisans' action as a »Bolshevik«, not a »Serbian«, and even spoke about the »peaceful« Orthodox population, living in the ISC<sup>158</sup>. In the state propaganda from 1942 onwards one can notice very clearly a difference between the Serbdom and Orthodoxy, i.e. the Ustashes already separated national from religious issues. All this proves that after 1942 the religious intolerance in the country was softened.

Therefore, instead against Serbs and Orthodoxy, the Ustasha regime directed aggression against the SOC. The Croatian Nationalists refused to recognize it as a Serbian national institution in the Croatian lands. As far as they could not leave one third of the population

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<sup>153</sup> HN, br.1108, 13.VIII.1944; Pavelić, Ante. Hrvatska pravoslavna crkva..., p.6.

<sup>154</sup> CDA, f. 176, op.15, a.e.32, p.42; HDA, f. 211, kut.39 Zapisnik IV sjednice Sabora 25.II.1942, p.168.

<sup>155</sup> Pavelić, Ante. Hrvatska pravoslavna crkva..., p.89; Spomen-knjiga..., pp.77-78.

<sup>156</sup> Obrknežević, Miloš. Op.cit., p.45.

<sup>157</sup> HDA, f.211, kut.6 Brzopisni zapisnik Hrvatskog državnog sabora Nezavisne države Hrvatske, IX sjednica, 28.02.1942, p.1124; kut.39 Zapisnik IV sjednice Sabora 25.II.1942, pp.163-164; f.249, kut.11, p.11; Pavelić, Ante. Hrvatska pravoslavna crkva..., p.8, 10, 13-14.

<sup>158</sup> CDA, f.176, op.8, a.e.1034, p.49.

in Croatia without a Church organization, they accepted the idea of creation a separate Croatian Orthodox Church /COC/, and Pavelić later dedicated a book to this issue. It was published in emigration under the title »The Croatian Orthodox Church«<sup>159</sup>.

The idea for such Church was not new one. Already in the nineteenth century E. Kvaternik spoke about its creation. Namely, Kvaternik believed that the Orthodox Croats could be driven away from the influence of Belgrade, only if they would have their independent Orthodox church<sup>□</sup>. Pavelić shared the same idea. He tried to reject the concept, imposed by the Serbian politicians, that Orthodox Christians and Serbs were equivalent terms on the territory of the ISC. On the contrary, Pavelić thought that the Orthodox Christians in the ISC were under the jurisdiction of the SOC only because of the lack of Croatian Orthodox Church, while the SOC he regarded as an instrument of the Serbian national politics. The Poglavnik was convinced that if Croatian Orthodox Church would be created in the ISC, all the Orthodox Christians will join it and consequently will discontinue their connection with Belgrade<sup>160</sup>.

There is no accord in historiography about the issue whose influence was predominant for the establishment of the COC. There are several opinions – Germans; foreign Catholic circles; representatives of the Yugoslav government in exile at Vatican; archbishop Stepinac<sup>161</sup>, etc. Most probably the ruling circles in Zagreb were forced to hurry up with the formation of the independent Church organization for Serbs in Croatia under the German pressure<sup>162</sup>. Namely, in one message from June 14<sup>th</sup>, 1941 Arthur Hefner wrote that the Orthodox Church in the ISC »has to receive a recognition, which has been denied to it until now, to stop to be a Serbian national Church and to reform in accordance with the national character of the Croatian state«. German ambassador in the ISC, S. Kashe also delivered declarations in the same direction<sup>163</sup>.

The first official statement of the Croatian government on the issue of the COC was delivered by M. Puk and A. Pavelić at the final session of the Sabor on February 28<sup>th</sup>, 1942. The Poglavnik stated that nobody had nothing against Orthodoxy in Croatia and the Orthodox church can continue to exist and work, but not as a Serbian Orthodox church. Further he explained: »Nobody is attacking Orthodoxy, but in the Croatian state there can not be a Serbian Orthodox church.... Why? Because everywhere in the world the Orthodox churches are national ones. The Serbian Orthodox church is a part of the Serbian state. It is guided in hierarchical terms from the state authorities in Serbia... This can be a case in Serbia, or in former Yugoslavia, but it cannot be allowed in the Croatian state«<sup>164</sup>. According to the Croatian Nationalists, with the collapse of Yugoslavia, the SOC should be limited

<sup>159</sup> **Pavelić, Ante.** Hrvatska pravoslavna crkva. Madrid, 1984.

<sup>160</sup> **Hrvatska straža**, br.47, 23.XI.1941; **HN**, br.1079, 9.VII.1944.

<sup>161</sup> **Ramet, Pedro.** Religion and Nationalism..., p.6.

<sup>162</sup> Interesting was the opinion of Vilim Cecelija, who gave information that Stepinac, speaking against the policy of Catholicization, offered Pavelić to establish a Croatian Orthodox Church, because only in that way the Orthodox Christians in the country would become loyal citizens, as they were during the time of Austro-Hungary. (See. **Hrvatska revija**, br.3, 1953, p.242; **Mužić, Ivan.** Pavelić..., pp.47-48).

<sup>163</sup> Germans did the same in Byelorussia and Ukraine after they occupied them – in 1941 they allowed the independent Orthodox churches to be set up in both countries as a reaction against the Russian nationalism. (See **Ramet, Pedro.** Religion and Nationalism..., p.6).

<sup>164</sup> **Jelić-Butić, Fikreta.** Ustaše i Nezavisna Drzava Hrvatska..., p.176.

within the boundaries of Serbia, and as long as their activities were allowed in the ISC, this would give a chance to Serbia to interfere in the inner political matters of Croatia, and this could not be permitted<sup>165</sup>. So, Poglavnik in this way had explained Ustashes' determination to liquidate the SOC on the territory of the ISC, as well as their desire to create a »national Croatian Church organization«, which »having a freedom in the spiritual sphere, regarding the other issues should be under control of the Croatian state«<sup>166</sup>.

With the establishment of the ISC the Ustashes saw a possibility for foundation of the Croatian Orthodox Church. When it was instituted COC became ecclesiastical organization of all Orthodox, who lived on Croatian state territory, regardless of their ethnicity – Serbs, Romanians, Bulgarians, Albanians, Greeks or Montenegrins. It was explicitly stated in the state propaganda that COC should deal only with the »religious education and spiritual well-being« of believers, and not to interfere in the political and national issues in the country, as it was case with the SOC<sup>167</sup>. The Ustashes claimed that with the set up of the COC, the Orthodox population in the ISC became a part of the Croatian political nation and thus participated in the formation of the new state. Nationalists previously presented the Croatian nation as a modern and religiously heterogeneous, which was in contradiction with their old definition that had identified the nation with religion<sup>168</sup>.

In the creation of the COC Pavelić was not conducted so much by canonic, but political motives, especially as far as the majority of the Orthodox Christians on the territory of Croatia were Serbs. In practice, he did the same thing as the Serbian ruling circles had done in former Yugoslavia – he used the Church in his political plans. Consequently, the Nationalists imposed the notion that since they were living in the Croatian state, the Serbs had to accept the creation of the COC. Nationalists' aim was to interrupt the connection of the local Serbs with Belgrade and to make them inseparable part of the Croatian political nation<sup>169</sup>. Namely, the Ustashes tried to create governmentally controlled national Orthodox Church in their lands. Even though they officially tried to deny that their aim was to make from all the Orthodox Christians in the ISC Croats, their real and long-lasting strategy was exactly this.

The establishment of the COC was accompanied with an active Ustasha propaganda. The creation of the new Church organization was explained in the press with higher state interests. Soon after, the COC got its official newspaper »Glas pravoslavija« [Voice of Orthodoxy], which was published bimonthly<sup>170</sup>. In this magazine lot of articles against the Chetniks and Partisans were published and the aim of such articles was to drive away the Orthodox Christians from the Greater-Serbian propaganda, and to make them »loyal citizens« of the ISC. The Ustashes' statement about Orthodoxy and its adherents could be seen also in the calendars of the COC, which were published from 1943 onwards. There was openly stated that these editions had purpose »to politically educate readers«<sup>171</sup>. By

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<sup>165</sup> CDA, f. 176, op.8, a.e. 1153, p.70; Pavelić, Ante. Hrvatska pravoslavna crkva..., p.11.

<sup>166</sup> HN, br.1079, 9.VII.1944; Spomen-knjiga..., p.78.

<sup>167</sup> Pavelić, Ante. Hrvatska pravoslavna crkva ..., p.11.

<sup>168</sup> CDA, f.176, op.20, a.e.365, p.33; HN, br.1079, 9.VII.1944.

<sup>169</sup> HN, br.1051, 4.VI.1944; Pavelić, Ante. Hrvatska pravoslavna crkva..., p.74, 89.

<sup>170</sup> CDA, f.176, op.8, a.e.1153, pp.69-70; HN, br.1079, 9.VII.1944.

<sup>171</sup> It was edited by the popular Montenegrin publicist Savić Marković-Šedimlja /naturalized Croat/, who was one

the same token, »Glas pravoslavija« presented creation of the COC as a sign of the »loyalty« and »devotion« of the Orthodox people to the Croatian state. It was stated that COC enabled them to freely profess their religion, enjoy a »resurrected« religious-spiritual life, and to participate in the constitution of the ISC together with Croats. The COC was advertised as equal in rights with the other denominations in the country<sup>172</sup>.

The press was full of praises and thankfulness on behalf of the new Church. Many interviews with its leader metropolitan Germogen<sup>173</sup> were published, in which he talked about the »satisfaction« and »happiness« of the Orthodox people. Many eulogies were addressed to the ruling circles, who were proclaimed as »religiously tolerant« and imposing a religious equality in the ISC. The press praised also the Poglavnik as »defender of the Croatian Orthodoxy«, whose actions were estimated as »pious« and »wise«. The creation of the COC was proclaimed as a factor of the »pacification« of the country and a pledge of a »happy and peaceful life for all the citizens of the ISC«<sup>174</sup>. But all that was actually concealing of the real attitude of the Ustashas towards the Orthodox Christians, which was not substantially changed until the very end of the war.

#### »Greek-Catholicism«, Old-Catholic Church, and Judaism in the Ustashas' propaganda

The Ustashas' attitude towards Uniate or »Greek-Catholicism« was similar like it was towards Orthodoxy. The Uniats accepted the Catholic faith but with the Greek-Catholic ritual, not the Latin one. Since Uniats had very similar ritual to the Orthodox one, Ustashas' attitude towards the Uniats was quite negative. The Nationalists were also against the Old-Catholics in the country, because the autocephalous Croatian Old-Catholic Church was created in 1921-1923 on the initiative of the Belgrade authorities, and thus it became a device of the Serbian lobbies trying to divide the »religious and national unity« of the Croatian people. So that was the reason why the Ustashas sharply criticized the Old-Catholic Church in their propaganda<sup>175</sup>.

Judaism was also stigmatized in the Ustasha ideology. Jews and Gypsies were not simply labeled as »non-Aryans« in the ISC, but were accused for the murder of Jesus and persecution of his pupils. They were stigmatized as enemies of the Catholic Church and disseminators of the communist atheistic ideology in the world. Basically, anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism of the Ustashas were manifestations of their religious intolerance. Frequently in the contemporary official propaganda all ideologies, shared by the Jews (like freemasonry, social-democracy, Socialism, Communism, et al.) were criticized<sup>176</sup>.

of the strongest opponents of the Greater-Serbian idea in the ISC. (See CDA, f.176, op.20, a.e.365, p.33).

<sup>172</sup> *Nova Hrvatska*, br.3, 3.I.1943; br.2, 4.I.1944.

<sup>173</sup> *Nova Hrvatska*, br.130, 6.VI.1944; *HN*, br.1051, 4.VI.1944; br.1079, 9.VII.1944.

<sup>174</sup> Being afraid to give the leadership of the COC into the hands of a Serbian Orthodox priest, Pavelić chose a Russian emigrant, as Germogen, to become a head of it.

<sup>175</sup> *Za Dom*, br.31, 21.VI.1942; *HN*, br.705, 11.IV.1943; *Pavelić, Ante*. *Hrvatska pravoslavna crkva...*, pp.47-48, 52-53, 62-66, 72, 75.

<sup>176</sup> *HDA*, f.1561, SDS, RSUP, kut.7, 001.44, p.5; *Jelić-Butić, Fikreta*. *Ustaše...*, p.174.

### **The Place of Islam and Protestantism in the Ustashes' Ideology**

Although they were not tolerant towards some denominations, the Ustashes demonstrated a positive attitude towards a non-Christian religion in the world as Islam. This idea was also borrowed from the *pravašas*, as it is mentioned above. Already in the nineteenth century Starčević was the first Croatian politician who spoke about the religious tolerance towards Islam. Having in mind the necessity of a Muslim-Croatian union, he underestimated the religious differences between both nations<sup>177</sup>. Starčević was the author of the concept: »Faith is a spiritual issue, it can not divide a nation, it should be free, and nobody can impose it forcibly to somebody else«, and this was later broadly propagandized by the Ustashes<sup>178</sup>.

The government in Croatia in 1941-1945 in relation to Islam borrowed all the basic ideas from Starčević and used them as the core of their ideology. To oppose the Orthodoxy, especially in the mixed regions of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Ustashes imposed concept that the Croatian nation was religiously heterogeneous and consisted of mainly two religions: Catholicism and Islam. The common thing between these denominations was that they both were universal religions, and as such were not related to any specific people. The suggestion was that Catholics and Muslims were actually one nation – the Croatian one. Namely, already from the Starčević's time existed idea that different faiths and cultures cannot prevent the rapprochement of Muslims and Croats, who were »brothers by blood and language« and lived in a common state. The Ustashes' idea was that the »religious difference could not be an obstacle to national harmony«<sup>179</sup>. Thus, when it was politically convenient, the Nationalists made a clear distinction between nation and religion.

According to the Ustashes the differentiation of Croats to Muslims and Christians and the struggle between them were the »biggest tragedy of the Croatian past«, and only the enemies of the Croatian people benefited from such circumstances. Therefore, the ruling circles opposed the statements about the existence of a »Muslim issue« in the ISC, i.e. an issue about the Muslim population and its religion. Regarding this, at the sixth session of the Sabor on February 29<sup>th</sup>, 1942 Pavelić stated: »We do not have a Muslim issue... The Muslim blood is a Croatian blood. The Muslim faith is a Croatian faith, because its adherents in our lands are Croatian sons«<sup>180</sup>. By the same token, the Ustashes pointed out that Bosnian Croats from both religions created their »*modus vivendi*« long time ago and have lived in harmony and religious tolerance for centuries<sup>181</sup>.

Still, the Croatian Nationalists acknowledged that there were some differences (mainly in religion and culture) between Muslims and Catholics, but they maintained that these differences were not essential. Furthermore, they elaborated that because the both com-

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<sup>177</sup> HDA, f.252, sv.1, p.45, 49, 53, 58, 60; Shelah, Menachem. The Catholic Church in Croatia, the Vatican and the Murder of the Croatian Jews. – In: Holocaust and Genocide Studies, 1989, vol.4, br.3, p.325; Antisemitizam, holokaust, antifašizam. Židovska općina Zagreb. Zagreb, 1996, pp.56-59.

<sup>178</sup> Starčević, Ante. Misli i pogledi..., p.90; Korsky, Ivo Hrvatski nacionalizam..., p.260.

<sup>179</sup> Ante Starčević. Zagreb, 1942, pp.21-22; Starčević, Ante. Politički spisi..., p.28.

<sup>180</sup> HDA, f.211, kut.6 Brzopisni zapisnik Hrvatskog državnog sabora Nezavisne države Hrvatske, IX sjednica, 28.02.1942, p.1125; Pavelić, Ante. Džamija..., p.15, 95.

<sup>181</sup> HN, br.113, 7.VI.1941; br.407, 22.IV.1942; Lorković, Mladen. Op.cit., pp.46-47.

munities have not lived in the framework of one state these differences were deepened by the Austro-Hungarian, and later the Serbian authorities in purpose imposed by the principle »divide and rule«. By the same token, in a historical context the Ustashas underlined that many Catholics (especially Bogomils) converted to Islam during the centuries of the Ottoman rule. On the other hand, the Nationalists did not deny that Muslims were exposed to »Eastern« political, economical and cultural influence because of their religion and therefore they accepted some »Oriental« (Turkish and Arabic) rituals, traditions and particularities in their way of life. Nevertheless, according to the Ustasha ideology, they did not stop to declare themselves as Croats<sup>182</sup>. On the occasion of celebration of Bayram in the ISC, the newspaper »Ustaša« talked about the »contribution« of Islam to the preservation of Croatism. The Nationalists claimed that with the acceptance of Islam, the Muslims detached themselves from the rest of the population of Bosnia and Herzegovina, they closed themselves in their communities, and in this isolation kept alive their Croatian language, names, traditions, etc. So, according to the Ustashas' ideology that was how the Muslims in Bosnia preserved their Croatian national consciousness during the centuries<sup>183</sup>.

It is important to note that already with the coming to power the Ustashas guaranteed that the confession of Islam would be unbound in the ISC. Moreover, they presented themselves as promoters of the idea of religious freedom and tolerance in the country. The minister of justice and religion M. Budak declared that the ISC was a »state of two religions – Islam and Catholicism«. He cleared up the doubts of the Muslims, who lived in a Christian state, such as the ISC, about religious discrimination, and assured them their faith was fully protected by the new authorities and that they would have equal rights just like Catholics<sup>184</sup>. In state propaganda a respect towards Islam was showed in all possible ways. By the same token, when the delegates of the Islamic Religious Community led by Dogačnik Ademaga Mešić came in an audience, Pavelić promised »to settle the spiritual life of the Muslims according to their moral and religious convictions«<sup>185</sup>. In real life, all these meant a promise for a broad religious-educational autonomy for the Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The opening of a big mosque in the center of Zagreb (August 18<sup>th</sup>, 1944) gave the Pogačnik a chance to call it »a temple of the Croatian people and Islam« and »eternal memory of the brotherhood of Croatian Catholics and Muslims«<sup>186</sup>. At occasion of the opening of the mosque a »Memory-book« was published under the title »Mosque in Zagreb«, and it was divided into two parts. It is interesting to note that there

<sup>182</sup> CDA, f.176, op.8, a.e.1034, p.43; NDH, br.20, 25.IX.1941; HN, br.848, 1.X.1943; **Parlamentarni govori...**, p.6, 43.

<sup>183</sup> HN, br.76, 29.IV.1941; br.94, 7.V.1941; br.309, 24.XII.1941; »**Krv je progovorila**«... Rasprave i članci o podrijetlu i životu Hrvata islamske vjere. Sarajevo, 1942, pp.41-45.

<sup>184</sup> HN, br.175, 8.VIII.1941; **Matković, Hrvoje**. Povijest Nezavisne Države Hrvatske..., pp.119-120.

In »Novi List« from May 29<sup>th</sup>, 1941 it was said: »In the ISC the Catholic and Islamic faith will enjoy protection and will have possibility to develop freely, in harmony with the main interests of the Croatian nation, who, defending itself, defends the interests of Catholicism and Islam from their most dangerous enemy – the Orthodoxy«. (See **Katolički tjednik**, br.23, 8.VI.1941; HN, br.734, 18.V.1943).

<sup>185</sup> HN, br.175, 8.VIII.1941; **Pavelić, Ante**. Džamija..., pp. 95-96.

<sup>186</sup> The »Museum of the fine arts« (so-called »Cultural Pavilion« of the famous Croatian sculptor and architect Ivan Meštrović), was turned in a mosque, which caused the resentment of many Catholics (See HN, br.1113, 19.VIII.1944; **Pavelić, Ante**. Džamija..., p.15).

one can find all postulates of the Ustasha ideologists regarding the Muslims and Islam in the ISC<sup>187</sup>.

However, despite the Muslims' cooperation with the Ustashes, they were worried because of the certain statements of higher Ustashes magistrates. This included even Pavelić, who claimed that it would be »better, if there is only one faith in the state«<sup>188</sup>. The new rulers perceived the ISC mostly as a Catholic state and that, naturally worried the Muslims, who were afraid not to become the next victim of the religious discrimination – after the finalizing of the encounter with the Orthodox Christians and Jews in the country. On the other hand, such Muslims' worries provoked Ustashes to propagandize their religious »tolerance«, respect for the »religious freedom« in the ISC and the equal attitude of the government towards all Croats, nevertheless of their religion so intensively<sup>189</sup>.

Similarly, the Ustashes did not have positive attitude only towards Islam but also towards Protestantism in Croatia<sup>190</sup>. The reason was again national – as far as the new Croatian rulers tried to keep a good relationship with Muslims and Germans in the ISC.

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And to conclude: the attitude of the Ustasha authorities towards any religious community was a reflection of their attitude towards ethnos in the ISC that confessed it. This is why the religious issue in the Ustasha ideology and policy was national in its essence. Therefore, their war against Orthodoxy and Judaism was not a religious war. When they destroyed Orthodox churches and synagogues, the Ustashes not only demolished religious temples, but stroke a blow against Serbism and Jewry. By the same token, their sympathies towards Islam were not initiated by the sincere attitude of Croats-Christians towards Muslims, but from their particular political interests in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Thus, the religious policy of the new rulers in Croatia in the period between 1941 and 1945 were directed by their tight nationalist and political aims in the country.

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<sup>187</sup> **Jelić-Butić, Fikreta.** Ustaše i Nezavisna Država Hrvatska..., p.199.

<sup>188</sup> **Zbornik** dokumenta i podatka o narodnooslobodilačkom ratu naroda Jugoslavije. Vol.IV, knj.2, 1951, p.542.

<sup>189</sup> **HN**, br.247, 19.X.1941; br.574, 6.XI.1942; br.1112, 18.VIII.1944; **Pavelić, Ante.** Džamija..., pp.5-19, 39-40, 45-50, 101.

<sup>190</sup> The number of the Protestants in the ISC was around 70,000, and they were mainly Germans /See **HDA**, f.1561, SDS, RSUP SRH, Kut.83, šifra 001.1 Crkveni problemi (Arhiva Hansa Helma), pp.136-143; **Alexander, Stella.** Church and State..., p.22/.



## SAŽETAK

## VJERA I CRKVA U USTAŠKOJ IDEOLOGIJI 1941-1945

*Vjersko je pitanje za ustaše bilo jednako važno kao i nacionalni problemi u Nezavisnoj Državi Hrvatskoj. Vjera je bila jedna od glavnih različitosti između Hrvata i Srba. Stoga su ustaše često poistovjećivali katolicizam s hrvatskom nacijom i nacionalizmom, te je razumljivo da je vjera bila vrlo važna u njihovoj ideologiji. Nakon raspada Jugoslavije u travnju 1941., glavni cilj nove vlade bio je stvoriti jednu ne samo samostalnu nego i katoličku državu, u kojoj bi Crkva i vjera dobile svoje pravo mjesto. Naime, po prvi put nakon 1918. katolicizam je u hrvatskim zemljama postao tolerirana, tj. institucionalna, vjera.*

*U svojim ideološkim djelima nacionalisti su stavljali naglasak na veliku ulogu Crkve u NDH te se redom pozitivno izjašnjavali glede takvog stanja. Razlog tomu bila je tradicionalna privrženost Crkve hrvatskoj državotvornoj ideji, kao i izniman utjecaj crkvenih institucija u hrvatskom puku, uloga koju su te institucije imale tijekom hrvatske povijesti, kao i tradicionalna opozicija pravoslavlju i javno proklamirani antikomunizam. Stoga su ustaše u Crkvi vidjeli svoga prirodnog saveznika, dovoljno moćnoga da se oslone na njegovu pomoć u svojim težnjama za stvaranjem hrvatske katoličke države.*

*Ipak, u svojim odnosima prema Katoličkoj crkvi ustaše nisu bili ekstremni te je njihov pokret u osnovi ostao građanski i nacionalistički. Iako su ustaše promovirali vlastitu opredijeljenost katoličkoj vjeri, to je ipak u većoj mjeri bilo samo izjašnjavanje o njihovoj hrvatskom kulturnom identitetu i glavni razlikovni čimbenik prema pravoslavlju, a ne istinsko vjersko izjašnjavanje. Naprotiv, ustaše uglavnom nisu bili zainteresirani za pitanja vjerskih dogmi i teoloških raspr. Propagirali su katolicizam ne zbog toga što su ga smatrali »jedinom pravom i iskonskom vjerom« na svijetu, nego jer im je katolicizam mogao pomoći u vlastitom nacionalnom samoodređenju u etnički i vjerski izmiješanim hrvatskim zemljama. Upravo stoga nove hrvatske vlasti nisu pokrenule »križarski rat« protiv islama, nego su ga, naprotiv, tolerirale jer se vjerovalo da savez s muslimanima Bosne i Hercegovine može biti od taktičke važnosti. S druge strane, pravoslavlje se našlo na udaru vlasti NDH, upravo zbog svoje nacionalne pozadine – tako da je glavni udar novih vlasti bio usmjeren protiv srbizma.*

*Budući je u NDH živjelo blizu dva milijuna Srba, pitanje pravoslavlja i Pravoslavne crkve imalo je vrlo važnu ulogu u ustaškome ideološkom sustavu. Hrvatski su se nacionalisti trudili braniti svoj »tvrđi« stav i beskompromisnost prema Pravoslavnoj crkvi u Hrvatskoj, ističući da je tu riječ o »nacionalnoj« Crkvi (instituciji) koja je igrala važnu ulogu u formiranju tadašnjega srpskog nacionalizma. A budući da nisu mogli tolerirati buntovne aktivnosti srpske manjine, niti osporiti utjecaj njihovih crkvenih institucija, ustaše su odlučili jednostavno ih otrgnuti od službenoga srpskog utjecaja na način da dio srpske manjine prevede na katoličanstvo. Tako su Srbe koji su živjeli u Hrvatskoj jednostavno proglasili »pravoslavnim Hrvatima« koje je velikosrpska propaganda stoljećima srbizirala. Tako posložene činjenice uvjetovale su da su ustaše na prisilne konverzije Srba na katoličanstvo gledali kao na nacionalno, a ne vjersko pitanje u NDH. U osnovi vlasti NDH svoje su napade usmjeravali uglavnom protiv Srpske pravoslavne crkve i njezinih*

aktivnosti na teritoriju NDH. Stoga je razumljivo da su ustaške vlasti, glede pitanja pravoslavlja, mogle tolerirati postojanje samo Hrvatske pravoslavne Crkve na teritoriju NDH, te je HPC iza 1942. postala jedina crkvena organizacija za vjernike pravoslavne vjere u NDH, bez obzira na njihovu etničku pripadnost.

No ustaše nisu imali negativan stav samo prema pravoslavlju nego i prema unijatima (tj. grkokatolicima), kao i prema starokatolicima na teritoriju NDH. Osim toga i židovstvo je bilo službeno stigmatizirano u onodobnoj ustaškoj ideologiji. Židovi i Romi bili su optuženi za ubojstvo Isusa Krista i stoga okarakterizirani kao neprijatelji Katoličke crkve i širitelji komunističke ateističke ideologije u čitavom svijetu.

No hrvatski nacionalisti zadržali su pozitivan stav prema islamu. Kako bi se što učinkovitije suprotstavili pravoslavlju u Bosni i Hercegovini, ustaše su promovirali ideju da su Hrvati i muslimani pripadnici jedne nacije – i to hrvatske. Nadalje, tvrdili su da je tu riječ o »braći po krvi i jeziku«. Iako su među muslimanima postojale dvojbe glede ustaškoga proklamiranog katolicizma i odnosa prema islamu, ustaše su javno zagovarali vjersku i građansku jednakost katolika i muslimana u NDH. Ipak valja napomenuti da te simpatije prema islamu nisu bile rezultat iskrenih osjećaja Hrvata katolika prema muslimanima, nego je tu bila riječ o specifičnim političkim interesima NDH u Bosni i Hercegovini. Stoga je za razumijevanje vjerske politike novih vlasti u Hrvatskoj u razdoblju od 1941. do 1945. nužno poznavati njihove nacionalističke i političke ciljeve s kojima je vjerska politika bila u uskoj vezi.

**KLJUČNE RIJEČI:** *Nezavisna Država Hrvatska, ustaše, Katolička crkva, Srpska pravoslavna crkva, Hrvatska pravoslavna crkva, islam, Drugi svjetski rat, suvremena povijest.*