

CROATIA 1941 - 1946

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BY

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INTRODUCTION

From April 1941 until May 1945, a Croatian state existed as part of Hitler's Europe. It was the 'Nezavisna` Drzava Hrvatska' (The Independent State of Croatia), and referred to as the NDH. The Catholic Bishops and priests of Croatia have been accused of welcoming the establishment of this state, and the coming to power of Ante Pavelic's Ustasha Movement. It is alleged that this was led by dedicated Catholics aiming to make Croatia completely Catholic, and that as its population included two million Orthodox Christians, they planned to kill or expel those who refused to convert.

It is further alleged that the State and Church both issued edicts and laws to promote this aim. It is asserted that Ustasha detachments, led by Catholic priests, slaughtered hundreds of thousands of Orthodox men, women and children. It is said that the complicity of the Church is confirmed by the absence of any condemnations by the Catholic hierarchy. Also, although aware of what was happening, the Pope welcomed Pavelic to Rome and considered him a "much maligned man".

Most people reject such allegations as the ravings of bigots. But others, faced with documented evidence of atrocities, of instructions issued by bishops and statements made by priests, can come to accept them as partly true. Some may be even tempted to wonder whether the bishops were so pleased to be gaining converts that they closed their eyes to what was occurring.

It is no possible to build-up a simple picture of wartime Yugoslavia. There were a multiplicity of ethnic, religious and political groupings, sub-divided into many factions led by local leaders and 'war lords'. Complex situations were continuously changing. In the southern and central areas, hundreds of villages and small towns were isolated from one another by mountains and gorges. Each community experienced its own distinctive history. We must not presume that events in one village, about which we have details, indicate the general pattern for the whole area.

Due to poor communications, reports of incidents easily became distorted by rumours, lies and propaganda. In many instances these allegations and falsehoods can not be challenged because evidence has been destroyed. Villages often changed hands with periods of Serbian, Moslem, Croat, Partisan, German and Italian control. Each group carried out revenge killings, so obliterating clues of what had happened previously. The village of Berane in Montenegro changed hands forty-one times ((VI 228)). An extreme case, but one which illustrates the problem faced by historians.

NOTE: For convenience, Bosnia-Herzegovina will be referred to as 'Bosnia'. The words 'Serbia' and 'Serbians' will include Montenegro and Montenegrins, 'Croatia' will include Dalmatia. The Austro-Hungarian Empire, frequently known as The Hapsburg Empire or The Austrian Empire, will sometimes be referred to as 'The Empire'. 'Ustasha' (Rebel)- and 'Ustashi' (Rebels) will be rendered as 'Ustasha'. Words which have been added by CIHIC within a quotation are indicated thus:- []. A reference such as ((NM 150)) means page 150 in the book by Noel Malcolm. (See Bibliography at end).

CHAPTER I

THE POLITICAL BACKGROUND

1). A long history

"Yugoslavia, the land of the south Slavs, is the despair of tidy minds. Its history is as dense as a closely-woven tapestry and echoes of what happened seven hundred years ago, to say nothing of fifty years, ring constantly in one's ears as one tries to trace the course of one thread or another, through the complexities of the whole pattern." ((RJW 31)).

For over a thousand years, Slovenes, Serbs, Croats, Montenegrins and Macedonians have lived in the area which became Yugoslavia. But they have not been united by a common history. The Slovenes and Croats were converted to Catholic Christianity by missionaries from the West.. By the 9th century they had been incorporated into the culture of Western Europe and eventually became part of the Austrian Hapsburg Empire.

The other peoples in the region (Serbs, Montenegrins and Macedonians) were Christianised from Constantinople and entered the culture of the Byzantium world. When the Patriarch of Constantinople (Byzantium) rejected. papal authority in 1054 and formed the Orthodox Church, these peoples followed his lead. After the fall of Constantinople in 1453 this mainly Orthodox region came under Turkish Moslem rule.

Hundreds of years passed before these Orthodox populations were able, with Russian aid, to free themselves from a weakening Turkish Empire. Montenegro gained its independence in 1799, northern Serbia in 1830, the south in 1878 and by 1913 Macedonia was under Serbian rule. Also in 1913 the Austrians and Italians forced the Turks to withdraw from Albania ((EC 375)).

Austria freed Bosnia in 1878 and the Congress of Berlin, convened by Russia, Germany and Austria, recognized Austria's right to its annexation ((NM 137)). This was carried out in 1908 ((NM 150)). The movement of refugees, following the many wars over the centuries, led to the Serbian, Croatian and Moslem peoples becoming intermingled, especially in Bosnia.

There was freedom of religion in the Empire, but Catholics were not permitted to practice their religion in Serbia ((MTA 101)).

In 1910 the Austrian Empire was 23% Austrian, 20% Hungarian, 13% Czech, 10% Polish, 8% Ruthenian, 6% Croat, 6% Romanian, 4% Slovak, 3% Slovene and 7% others including some Serbs. Hungarian demands for greater independence had led to a Dualist Constitution, by which Austria and Hungary were self-governing equal states under the Emperor, who was responsible for foreign affairs. The administration of the smaller ethnic groups was divided between these two states, with Croatia coming under Hungary and Bosnia under the Crown. (MAP 1).

The Hungarians forced their language and culture onto the Croats. Although the Austrians and the Emperor deplored the harshness of this policy, they would not intervene for fear of causing a break-up of the Empire. In reaction to the Hungarian policy, some Croats demanded complete independence, but most hoped for local autonomy or statehood under the Monarchy. A small number wished Croatia to leave the Empire and unite with Serbia.

Serbian nationalists demanded that those areas within the Empire with Serbian populations be incorporated within a 'Greater Serbia' (Map 2). But these communities were intermixed with non-Serbs who opposed this demand.

By 1914 the Austrian Emperor was ageing and his son, Archduke Ferdinand, was preparing to succeed him. Ferdinand, alarmed at the growing strength of Hungary within the Empire, was thought to favour Croatian autonomy. Many Serbs feared that if autonomy was granted it would bring stability to Croatia and thereby end their hope of achieving a 'Greater Serbia'.

On 28th June, 1914 Archduke Ferdinand and his wife were assassinated during a visit to Sarajevo in Bosnia. Evidence clearly pointed to Bosnian Serb terrorists as being guilty and also implicated Serbian military officers and government officials ((JT 9-10, NM 156)). In 1903 Serbian army officers had murdered the Serbian Royal family and the new king had rewarded the regicides with senior government positions. Britain and Holland severed diplomatic relations in protest ((EC 377)).

In 1907 sixty of these regicides were still serving in the army, including the Commander in Chief. Another had become the Minister of War ((SSJ 55:75)). Colonel Apis had personally taken part in the killings, which included mutilating the bodies and throwing the king half alive from a window ((CM 199-207)). He now led the largest terrorist organisation in Bosnia and was also Chief of Intelligence on the Serbian government's General Staff ((EC 379)).

The Serbian government assured the Austrians that it would control the terrorists who were using Serbia as a base. But most Austrians considered these assurances to be worthless. If assassins could kill the heir to the throne, and be protected from justice in Serbia, nobody in Bosnia could feel secure. When Serbia refused permission for Austrian detectives to visit Belgrade ((EC 399)), the Austrians invaded to depose the Serbian government. Russia went to Serbia's aid, and Germany to that of Austria. Europe was thereby plunged into 'The First World War'. Opponents of Austria asserted that Serbian sovereignty would be undermined if she agreed to Austria's demand and that Austria was using the assassinations as a pretext to expand her empire.

2). The end of the 1914-18 war

As the conflict came to an end, the Austrian Empire was collapsing. Serbia wanted Bosnia and southern Croatia so as to form 'Greater Serbia'. Italy wanted Dalmatia, parts of Slovenia and western Croatia. If the Serbian and Italian claims were granted, the remaining area of Croatia, being non-viable, would have had to remain part of Hungary. In such a three-way division, the Croatian nation would have lost its identity.

For many years Croatian intellectuals had been advocating a South Slav state. Slovenes, Serbs, Croats, Macedonians, Bulgarians and other peoples would express their cultural identities within a united federated Slavonic state. This idea gained the favour of the Great Powers (Britain, France and Italy). A revolutionary Croatian parliament declared independence and sent a delegation to Serbia. The delegation agreed to Croatia uniting with Serbia, Slovenia, Montenegro and Macedonia. Some Croats disputed the authority of the delegation to commit the Croats, without first referring back to their parliament. ((MTA 120)).

The Croatian intellectuals were enthusiastic for the new state, but amongst the peasants there was a fear of Serbian domination. For most, the new state was at least preferable to Croatia being divided into three parts ((FT 32)).

It has been asserted that the Catholic Church opposed the break-up of the Empire and the formation of Yugoslavia. It is true that some of the clergy admired the ethnic diversity of the Empire and its influence for peace. But Archbishop Strossmayer (1815-1905) of Djakovo had promoted the concept of a South Slav state ((SAB 20)), and had received Papal support ((CE 13:742)). Archbishop Bauer of Zagreb wrote articles supporting Strossmayer's ideals ((SAB 20)). After it was agreed to form a new state the newspaper 'Katolicki List', reflecting Bauer's views, wrote in November 1918:

"Today Croatia is a free country. Shortly we will join with our brothers in a union and create the powerful, rich sovereign state of the Slovenes, Croats and Serbs." ((SAB 60)).

Bauer received the Serbian Regent to Zagreb in 1919 ((RJW 34)) and the Conference of Bishops welcomed the new state ((SAB 60)). Ivan Saric, who became Archbishop of Sarajevo at this time, was a Croatian nationalist so did not share this enthusiasm ((RJW 34)).

Carlo Galli, Italian Minister in Belgrade, reported to his superior,

". . . the Vatican is using its enormous moral and religious influence to bolster up a state, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, which is engaged in an underhanded campaign against us and our Interests. . . . the Croatian higher clergy have come out openly in favour of the Belgrade Government, and against Croatian nationalism." ((JFP 99)).

3). The Serbian Orthodox Church

For centuries the Serbians were submerged in a Moslem world. As Islam makes little distinction between political and religious authority, and its life-style is so all embracing, its adherents tend to become a separate ethnic community. Under the Millet system, the Serbs were treated as an ethnic-religious community. The Serbian bishops were invested with semi-autonomous political authority and became the political and cultural leaders of the Serbs. So the Orthodox Church came to symbolize Serbian identity.

For hundreds of years the Moslems and Serbs lived side by side. Although sharing the same valleys and towns, they were separated by religion, political administration, culture, dress, language, legal system, taxation, alphabets and script. The bishops preserved all these aspects of life so that Serbian national identity might survive. This fusion of race, culture and religion is not easy for a western European to fully comprehend.

It is a phenomenon found along the periphery of the Islamic world. When the Catholic Spaniards emerged from Islamic rule in the 13th century, a similar fusion was present. Every Spaniard considered himself a Catholic and would die for 'his' Church even though he might be an atheist. It was the belief that Moslems would never be loyal to a Catholic royal family led to their expulsion from Spain in 1492.

Similar situations may be seen in Armenia/Azerbaijan and Turkish/Greek Cyprus. Divisions within Nigeria, Chad and the Sudan are developing in a similar direction. The Sikh racial-religion was formed as an armed Hindu force resisting Islamic conquest. This fusion of race and religion was illustrated by Metropolitan Josif in his 1942 Easter Message:

"We are all Serbs, parts of one body, united by one faith, Orthodoxy, by one language, by blood, by our celebrated past, that we are descendents of the celebrated saints, St. Sava, St. Simeon, . . . the two heroes Milos and Marko . . . and it is our obligation to preserve through the ages our motto; 'Only harmony saves the Serbs.'" ((SAA 15-16)).

In 1389 Milos Obilic had stabbed a Turkish army commander to death ((SSJ 45:47)). Prince Marko Kraljevitch was killed in a battle soon afterwards ((HWVT 98)). They both became legendary figures in Serbian history. In 1946 a new Serbian Patriarch pronounced:

"The Serbian Orthodox Church had always been a national church." And later: ". . . there was no people in the world whose past was so linked to the past of the Church". ((SAA 169 and 194)).

Knowledge of this racial-religious fusion is fundamental in understanding the conflicts. Serbian nationalists, however irreligious, saw the Serbian Orthodox Church as the symbol and essence of Serbian life. For them conversion to, or apostasy from, the Serbian Church was not a purely religious event, but the most distinctive symbol of attempts to 'serbianise' or 'deserbianise'. Following the expulsion of the Turks in the 19th century, this Serbian racial-religious nationalism came face to face with a growing Croatian political nationalism. For many Serbs, Catholicism was identified with the Croatian ethnic and cultural community. Croats were seen as 'lost Serbs' who, when converted to Orthodoxy, would become Serbian. In this manner the Serbian Church came to be viewed by Croats as the greatest threat to Croatian life, freedom and nationhood.

4). Eastern Rite Catholics

As the early Church spread from Palestine, two cities became centres for missionary endeavour — Rome in the West, and Constantinople in the East. Although the two centres were united in the one Faith, the manner in which the Mass and sacraments were celebrated, the languages used, the laws enacted and the forms of spirituality practised, differed greatly. These differences came to be known as the Western (Latin rite) and the Eastern (Greek or Slavonic rites). These differences are not important but, when in 1054 the Patriarch of Constantinople rejected the authority of the Holy See, the Eastern rite churches adhered to Constantinople.

From time to time some Eastern rite dioceses have returned to Rome's authority, while retaining their rite (liturgical language, customs, laws and spirituality). They are known as 'Catholics of the Eastern (Greek or Slavonic) rite', but are frequently referred to by the Orthodox Churches as 'Uniates'. On visiting a Catholic Eastern rite church one may easily think it is an Orthodox one, as culturally they are not easily distinguishable from the Orthodox. It is sometimes asserted that Eastern rite churches are a halfway house to Catholicism. This is false. Eastern rite Catholics are as Catholic as the Pope himself, even though their liturgy and customs differ from those used in Western Europe.

Over a period of 200 years, Ukrainian Eastern rite Catholics had fled from persecution by the Russian Tzars and the Communists. In 1941 there were about 22,000 living in the area which became the NDH ((BK 139-141)). The Eastern rite bishop of the eparchy (diocese) of Krizevic, located within the NDH, was responsible for all parishes of this rite in Yugoslavia ((CMA 450)).

There has always been a danger that the small Eastern rite Catholics communities living in the West could become absorbed by the more numerous Latin rite. So the Church has made laws to discourage this occurring. Converts from Orthodoxy to Catholicism are required, as far as possible, to maintain their traditions by worshipping in an Eastern rite parish.

5). The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes

It would be difficult to find a more variegated small state in the history of Europe. The new state formed in 1918 had a population of 12 million. It was 42% Serb, 25% Croat, 9% Slovene, 5% Macedonian, 4% German, 4% Hungarian, 4% Albanian and 2% Montenegrin. Fourteen languages were spoken and both the Cyrillic and Latin alphabets used.

By religion, 47% were Orthodox, 40% Catholic, 11% Moslem, 1.5% Protestant, and 0.5% Jewish. Most Croats and Slovenes were Catholics, as were some of the Hungarians and Germans. With such diversity, sensitivity was required to ensure equality and cultural freedom, while developing a central, administration able to govern with adequate authority.

The Serbs had long desired to bring all Serbs into a 'Greater Serbia', (Map 2) which would have been united in culture and religion. In such a kingdom small Croat, Moslem and other minorities would have had little effect on the Serbian ethos. But this new state, with its large numbers of Croats, Slovenes, Moslems and others, made it multi-ethnic. It was not the homogenous 'Greater Serbia' to which most Serbs aspired. Nikola Pasic, the Serbian leader, having lost the support of the Tzar in the 1917 Russian revolution, reluctantly agreed to the new larger state because of French and British pressure ((FT 32-33)).

Moderate Serbs accepted the situation and were willing to live under some form of federalism. But the nationalist ones came to dominate and they imposed a centralist constitution. Also, instead of acting impartially, the Serbian king promoted serbianisation. The Serbian national day, which honoured the founder of the Serbian church, was instituted as the national day for everyone. The Serbian capital became the new capital, Croatian cultural societies were restricted and Serbian teachers appointed to Croatian schools.

Although Catholics formed 40% of the population in 1921, she recieved only 7% of the government's subsidy for Churches ((SH 47)). In 1924 the government encouraged lapsed Catholics to make a final break with their church by morally and financially helping the 'Old Catholic Church' ((TB 29)). Privileges were offered to young Croats who joined the pro-Serbian Sokal youth association ((TB 11)). Of 670 senior officials in government departments 80% were Orthodox Serbs ((TB 14)). Of 117 Army generals, 115 were Orthodox and one a Catholic ((CF 268)). Croatian children were forced to write with Cyrillic charactors ((TB 11)). The aim was to make everyone Serbian.

The ethnic struggle became one between centralism and federalism, with the Croatian Peasant Party acting as the mouthpiece of the Croats. On 19th June 1928 a Serbian member of Parliament, Punisa Racic, with suspected government support, shot five Croatian members from the rostrum of Parliament ((TB 9)). The Croatian leader, Stjepan Radic, and three others died. The remaining Croats withdrew from Parliament. Many Serbs hailed the assassin as a hero ((TB 9-10)). He received a light sentence in an open prison ((CC 14)) and allegedly given financial aid ((MB 120)).

In 1929 king Alexander established a personal dictatorship, with General Zivkovic, veteran of the 1903 regicide, as Prime Minister ((FCL 111)). The name 'Yugoslavia' was adopted in October 1929 ((CC 13)). Political and cultural groups were banned and, following killings, the Serbian police came to be hated in the Croat areas. ((SH 120-122)). As the Orthodox Church was seen as a sign of Serbdom, the pressures on Catholics to convert were intensified.

- a. On 4th December 1929 Catholic and other independent youth groups were dissolved. Only the state controlled non-Catholic 'Sokols' were permitted ((SCB 179 and SSJ 53:29)).
- b. New Catholic schools were not allowed and efforts were made to close those already existing ((CF 268)).
- c. Falsifications and insults regarding the Catholic Church were incorporated into school textbooks ((CF 268)).
- d. Ukrainian refugees of the Catholic Eastern rite, from the Soviet Union, had their churches, at Prnjavor, Lisnja and Hrvacani, taken and Serbian Orthodox priests appointed ((CF 267)).
- e. Orthodox army officers were stationed in Croatian towns so as to encourage mixed marriages. These officers were bound by a confidential circular to marry in an Orthodox church and bring up all children as Serbian Orthodox ((CF 268)). Young Catholic women teachers were posted to Serbian villages with a similar aim ((CF 267, AHO 10)).
- f. Catholic settlers In Macedonia and Dalmatia were favoured by the state if they became Serbian Orthodox ((CF 267)). Areas were systematically colonised. As a result of one agrarian reform In a Catholic area, land was allocated to 6,394 Orthodox families and 286 Catholic ones ((CF 268)).
- h. Large imposing Byzantine style Orthodox churches were constructed in areas entirely Catholic so as to stress that the Serbian Church was the leading religion of the state ((CF 267)).
- i. Catholics, including children, were expected to honour St. Sava as the symbol of national unity ((RJW 37)). The Serbians claimed he had founded their Serbian church in the 13th century ((RJW 32)).

Some authors have said that the expansion of the Catholic Church between the wars is a sign that She was free. It is true that churches were not closed, and that despite the discrimination new ones were opened. Also that there were flourishing Catholic organisations. But this was due to an expanding population leading to emigration from the countryside to the towns. Zagreb's population trebled between the wars, so eight new parishes had to be formed between 1935 and 1939 ((AHO 9)). Catholics were also becoming firmer in their Faith and therefore more willing to join church organisations.

Orthodoxy is normally organised on a national basis and takes the name of the country into its title. Yet in June 1920 when the Orthodox peoples within Yugoslavia (Serbs, Macedonians, Montenegrins, Bulgarians and Romanians) were brought under one authority, the new church did not call itself the 'Yugoslav Orthodox Church'. It became the: '**Serbian** Orthodox Church'. ((CF 273)). It was this central role of the Serbian Church in the campaign to serbianise all citizens of the new state, which made religion a major visible focus of conflict between the ethnic groups.

6. The Ustasha

Following the 1928 assassination of Stjepan Radic, there were calls for complete Croatian Independence. But Vladko Macek, the new Croatian Peasant Party leader, continued to advocate autonomy and peaceful resistance to serbianisation ((VM 16)).

Antun Starcevic founded the 'Party of Right' in 1861 and led it until his death in 1896 ((SH 31 and 106)). Josip Frank then became its leader and members became known as 'Frankovi' (Frankists). One of its few members of Parliament, Ante Pavelic, fled abroad to reconstitute the 'Party of Right' on 9th January 1929 ((FLC 4)). This was the day following the abolition of the Constitution and the establishment royal dictatorship ((SH 55)). He also formed a military organisation called the 'Ustasha' with himself as its Poglavnik (Leader).

Mussolini, the dictator of Italy, aimed to annex Dalmatia, so welcomed an opportunity to destabilise Yugoslavia. He provided the Ustasha with money and a training camp near Bologna ((EP 22)) for 500-600 recruits ((SCA 3)). Unlike the Serbs, the Croats lacked a tradition of terrorism. So Pavelic visited Bulgaria and made common cause with the 'Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation' (IMRO), which agreed to provide the Ustasha with instructors in insurgency techniques ((SCA 3)). On the basis of this, and a speech made in Bulgaria, a Yugoslav Court sentenced Pavelic to death 'in absentia' ((SH 67)).

The government depicted the Ustasha as fanatical terrorists who took bloodcurdling oaths. They saw themselves as 'freedom fighters', with their oath as the swearing of obedience to higher officers and of adherence to Ustasha principles. These principles, issued on 1st January 1933, asserted that Croats alone had the right to decide the future of their homeland, and their right to wage war for it. Many Ustasha were motivated by a patriotic love of Croatian history and culture, but for others it was one of hatred of the Serbs. Eugen Kvaternik, son of the man who would proclaim Croatian independence in 1941, gave voice to this when he said, "Anti-Serbian feeling was the essence of Ustasha doctrine, its 'raison d'etre' [reason for existence] and 'ceterum censeo' [central belief] ((MO 29)).

The Movement didn't have a philosophical, political or economic programme beyond attaining Croatian independence. Religion was not mentioned. It was not fascist ((FCL 9)), but welcomed democrats, fascists, socialists, liberals, Catholics, Orthodox, Jews, Protestants and atheists as members or supporters. Some were of Serbian parentage and Orthodox by religion, but considered themselves Croatian by nationality ((MO 35-37)). Much support was received from the large Croatian emigrant populations in North and South America, who were aroused by reports of Serb oppression and terrorism in their homeland ((SH 55-105)). In Southwest Bosnia and the Serbian districts of Croatia, local Serb officials and police drove many Croats to emigrate. Ustasha members and supporters came mainly from these areas ((CBA 43)).

The Ustasha were not without sympathy from democrats in the West. In its issue of 10th January 1931, following the Ustasha bombing of Serbian targets in Yugoslavia, the British liberal, 'Manchester Guardian' wrote:

"The Croats took the methods of the Serbs and Macedonians. But if dictatorship makes impossible all other methods and uses violence, then what other course can one expect from an opposition?" ((SH 113)).

In 1931 professor Albert Einstein and Dr. Heinrich Mann condemned the murder, with police connivance, of a world famous Croatian scientist by government terrorists. The 'International University Federation' called scholars to protest at the suppression of freedom in Yugoslavia ((SH 71-76)).

On the 9th October 1934 Vlado Tchernozemski, a Macedonian desiring the independence of Macedonia, and working with the Ustasha, assassinated king Alexander during a state visit to France ((SCA 4)). Many Macedonians, Albanians and Croats saw Tchernozemski as a hero fighting tyranny((SG 224)).

A French court sentenced the assassin to prison and Pavelic to death in his absence. But Italy refused to extradite Pavelic to Yugoslavia or France ((KK 4)). Eventually, due to international pressure and his growing friendship with Yugoslavia ((KK 4)), Mussolini detained Pavelic and closed the training camps. But groups continued to train in other parts of Europe and in South America ((MTA 126)).

7). **The Concordat**

When king Alexander was assassinated in 1934, Archbishop Bauer was ill, so bishop Stepinac represented Catholics at the funeral ((SAB 28)). Masses were offered for the late king in all Catholic churches ((RJW 48)).

As King Alexander's son Peter was a child, his uncle Prince Paul became Regent. Realising that Yugoslavia was tearing itself apart, he dismissed the Zivkovac government ((FCL 111)), appointed a moderate Serbian Prime Minister and released Vladco Mecek the Croatian leader from prison.

A 1929 law had confirmed the position of the Serbian Orthodox church in Yugoslav life. Moslem rights were recognised in 1936 ((SAB 29)) and there was an agreement with the Jews ((RJW 36)). By 1937 Prince Paul's administration had negotiated a Concordat with the Holy See based on the Serbian one of 1914.

Most of its articles were similar to those in Concordats agreed with other states, but one had a special relevance to Yugoslavia. Catholics would be permitted by Rome to use Glagolitic (Old Slavonic) in place of Latin in the liturgy ((CE 14:1089)). Catholic bishops including Archbishop Bauer had originally proposed this. ((RJW 34)). They hoped to bring Catholic and Orthodox worship closer and so promote Slavic and church unity.

The Concordat was ratified in Rome and, during July 1937, passed by 168 votes to 128 in the Yugoslav parliament ((SAB 35)). But extremist Serbian nationalists saw it as an opportunity to inflame public opinion and overthrow the Regent's moderate ministers. The Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church proclaimed:

" . . . your most sacred feelings, your name, your faith are at stake. At this fatal moment, we expect a word from you, a unanimous and thundery word which will make it known once and for all that you are ready for anything, when that which makes you what you are, your name of Serbian and Serbian Orthodoxy, is in danger". ((TB 12)).

There were illegal demonstrations and in August the Synod excommunicated the nine ministers, including the Premier, who had promoted the Concordat ((KCA 2694)). The ministers considered the matter to be one of politics, not of faith or morals. They said the Synod had no power to condemn them unheard. Also to be valid the authorization of the Patriarch was required. He had just died and the office was vacant. The chief agitator was liable to excommunication himself because he was a priest who had contracted a civil marriage ((CMA 448)).

The Concordat recognized the right of the Catholic Church to exercise her spiritual mission freely and publicly. The opposition claimed this would give her the right to convert Orthodox people to Catholicism. But the Orthodox were free to make converts amongst Catholics, so this was not a special privilege for the Catholic Church ((COMA 450)).

Diocesan boundaries would be revised to accord with the state division of the country ((CE 14:1089)). The bishops would swear loyalty to the king and endeavour to maintain the loyalty of their priests ((SAB 32)). The Holy See would provide the name of proposed bishops to the government and, failing a reply within thirty days, would proceed with their appointment. The opposition said this gave the Holy See too much freedom of action ((CMA 450)).

Articles guaranteed the freedom of Catholic bishops, priests and laity to communicate with the Holy See. Priests would be protected when exercising their functions; the confessional seal would be respected; it would be illegal for a lay person to dress as a priest, and a priest would not be arrested on a criminal charge without a previous report to his ecclesiastical superiors.

Opponents claimed that intercourse by the Orthodox clergy with churches abroad was confined to the Supreme Head of the Orthodox Church and none of the other privileges were available to the Orthodox. But the reason was that they had never been requested. To meet these objections, the government said it was willing to grant similar rights to the Orthodox ((SAA 5, CMA 451-2)).

Critics claimed the article regarding promises made before a mixed marriage interfered in home life. But the background needs explaining. The Patriarch had prohibited, except in very rare cases, mixed marriages in the Orthodox Church. The Catholic partner and any future children had to become Orthodox. The Catholic Church perform mixed marriages, with the non-Catholic left free to retain his or her own religion, providing a promise was made to have any children brought up as Catholics. Some Orthodox men had failed to honour this promise. This article strengthened the wife's position in law ((COMA 451-2)).

Regarding education, teachers would be appointed in proportion to the religious affiliation at each school. Catholic children would not be forced to participate in Orthodox services, and Catholic schools would receive their fair proportion of government funding. It was also specified that school textbooks should not contain anything offensive to the religious sentiments of the scholars. History and other books had often shown grievous bias against the Catholic Church ((CMA 451)).

Another article said that matters not included previously should be solved in accordance with Canon Law. Opponents claimed this constituted a relinquishment of the country's sovereign rights. But the final paragraph of this article stated that if any difficulties arose, the Holy See and the government would meet in a friendly spirit to reach a satisfactory solution ((CMA 452)).

The opposition also protested against compensation being paid for Catholic church lands taken for agrarian reform. Yet the government was already paying compensation for Orthodox church lands ((SAA 171)).

The diocese of Zagreb had excluded priests from party politics for many years ((SAB 29)). The Holy See now agreed to the government's request to extend this ban to the whole country ((CMA 451)). The government said it would keep Orthodox priests out of party politics. This caused frantic opposition as such a law would affect personally many of those involved in the agitation.

None of the thirty-eight articles encroached on the rights of the Orthodox Church or on those of any other religion ((CMA 452)). But on the 12th December the government bowed to the opposition and agreed not to ratify the Concordat ((CF 269)). The excommunications were lifted in February 1938 ((SCB 195)). Prince Paul exclaimed:

"Woe to the country ruled by army officers and priests". ((VM 197)).

Some authors have asserted that the Pope then made a threat against Yugoslavia. But his words to a group of Cardinals on the 15th December were a lament not a threat:

"The day will come when many will regret not having accepted such a great opportunity that the Vicar of Christ was offering to their country, not merely for the ecclesiastical and religious organisation of the nation, but also for its social and political organisation, no matter how 'abhorrent he was'". ((OR 17 Dec. 1937)).

Others have asserted that the Holy See made the signing of the Concordat a condition for the recognition of Yugoslavia. Yet recognition had been given and diplomatic relations established in 1919 ((SAA 5)). Most Croatian politicians were relieved when the Concordat was defeated. The Croatian Peasant Party was not based on Catholic social principles, but on nationalist and economic ones. In its early days most Catholic priests had opposed it and in 1911 the bishop of Zagreb had to ban pulpit attacks on it ((VM 51)). Its founder and its leader from 1905-1928, Stjepan Radic, claimed to support family life and often used the slogan: 'Faith in God and unity of the peasants' ((VM 47, 112-116)). Although, when dying, Stjepan Radic accepted the last rites of the Church, he had not been religious. In 1923 he had opposed the idea of a Concordat ((EP 31-32)), and the following year he allied the party with the Communist 'Peasants International'. While in Moscow he proclaimed, "We will march with Russia" ((SCA 20)).

Vladko Macek, who succeeded him as party leader, was also not a practising Catholic having left his wife to marry another ((SAB 54-55)). These political leaders knew that if religious discrimination came to an end, demands for Croatian autonomy would receive less support. Also, the use of Glagolitic in the liturgy and the envisaged co-operation with the state in the selection of bishops, would strengthen the trend to a unitary Yugoslavia. Moderate Serbs, Croats and Slovenes would have a basis upon which to build a multi-ethnic and multi-religious united state. Croatian and Serbian nationalists could find themselves left on the sidelines of politics.

Many of the Catholic bishops had also been worried ((RJW 49-50)). Archbishop Saric showed his opposition openly. He and others did not trust the Serbian leadership and feared the Concordat would lead to the Church supporting a Serb dominated state ((SAB 36)).

8). Croatian autonomy and the coup

Hitler wanted a neutral and stable Yugoslavia on his southern border, when he invaded the Soviet Union ((JCS 8)). In 1939 half of Yugoslavia's trade was with Germany ((FCL 59)), so it was important for Hitler that these supplies were secure. So he opposed Ustasha activity aimed to destabilize Yugoslavia ((JCS 8-9)). Although protecting the Ustasha camps in Italy, Mussolini came to a secret understanding with Stojadinovic, the Yugoslav Prime Minister.

They agreed that in the case of an armed conflict, Yugoslavia would allow Italy to occupy the Croatian areas of Dalmatia and Gorski Kotor, while Italy would assist in the creation of a 'Greater Serbia', which would include the Greek port of Salonika and part of Albania. When in 1940 this plan came to the knowledge of Prince Paul he dismissed Stojadinovic ((JCS 9-10)).

In May 1940, Italy invaded Greece from her colony of Albania but, with British aid, the Greeks stopped their advance. Hitler saw the danger of British troops moving through Greece and Yugoslavia to attack him while the bulk of his army was in Russia. Also many of his factories were within bombing range of Yugoslavia.

The need for unity, so as to avoid being drawn into a European war, made a Serb-Croat agreement urgent. In February 1939 Dragisa Cvetkovic became Prime Minister and Mecek his deputy. The Serbs agreed to a Croatian autonomous Banovina. Although smaller than that claimed, the Croats accepted this compromise providing that the remainder of Bosnia was not absorbed into a Serbian Banovina ((FCL 91)). This 'Sporsiam' (understanding) was implemented on 25th August 1939. (Map 1). So Prince Paul, Cvetkovic and Mecek had laid the basis for national harmony. The Frankists (including the Ustasha), the Serbian extremists and the Communists opposed the Sporsiam ((VIM 196)).

In 1941 the government signed a pact with Germany, promising to continue supplying her with raw materials and to prohibit British troops entering the country. In return, Hitler guaranteed Yugoslav neutrality. In the early spring of that year, Romania and Bulgaria had become Germany's allies, so Hitler would be able to send troops to fight the British in Greece without having to pass through Yugoslavia.

The achievement of Croatian autonomy, and the German guarantee of the boundaries of Yugoslavia, appeared to doom the Ustasha cause. The treaty with Germany was signed on March 25th with the terms published the following day ((VM 213-6)). But on the 27th, Serbian extremists encouraged by Britain, carried out a coup. They proclaimed the seventeen year old prince as king. The motives are disputed, also how far British agents and money were involved ((JCS 13-15)). It appears the coup leaders feared there may have been secret clauses in the treaty and were opposed to the Croats gaining autonomy.

Yet on April 4th the coup leaders promised to honour the treaty with Germany and respect the Croatian Banovina. If they were to be believed there seemed to be no reason for the coup, so few trusted the new rulers.

Macek, fearing Hitler was being provoked into invading, agreed to become Vice President in the new government on condition everything would be done to avoid war. ((RP 31)).

The slogan of the coup leaders had been "Better war than the pact" ((VM 230)) and the British radio celebrated the coup as an anti-German victory. Winston Churchill exclaimed in a broadcast: "Yugoslavia has found her soul". ((FCL 123)). In these circumstances Hitler felt the need to destroy the Yugoslav army in order to secure his supplies of raw materials, and protect his southern flank ((KK 13-15)), when he invaded the Soviet Union.

9). The Invasion and the NDH

On 6th April 1941 the Germans invaded. The king and the coup leaders fled to Jerusalem ((RP 31)) then to London ((VM 230)). Cincar-Markovic, the former foreign minister and a victim of the coup, negotiated with the invaders. He signed the army surrender on the 17th ((FS 175)). In conquering twelve million people, the Germans lost 151 killed and 407 wounded or missing ((JT 74)). They took 200,000 prisoners ((FCL 130)).

As soon as the Ministers reached London, they blamed the collapse on the Croats, accusing them of treachery and mutiny. At the same time, the Ustasha boasted that they had played a major part in driving the Serbs from Croatia. These politically motivated claims supported each other, but were not in accord with the military facts.

On the 1st of March, Bulgaria had permitted a large German army to pass through and mass along the Greek frontier ((CB 25)). When Hitler decided to destroy Yugoslavia, this army turned to face west (MAP 1) and on April 6th twenty two divisions drove across southern Yugoslavia to link up with the Italians in Albania on the 11th ((SKP 107)).

The Yugoslavs had not prepared this frontier for defence ((CB 31-32)) and the mainly Serbian troops, not wishing to fight ((JT 81)), offered little resistance ((JCS 16)). British troops landed at Salonika in Greece on the 7th ((CB 20)) but were too late to assist Yugoslavia. The Germans raced northwards to Belgrade which, after minimum resistance, fell on the 13th. ((CB 39, SKP 107)). Croatian troops were not involved in this collapse.

Meanwhile, a smaller force of ten divisions had advanced across the northern border from Austria. As 161 generals out of 165 were Serbs ((FCL 71)), the Croats viewed the army as being Serbian.

Although some Croatian units did delay the German advance ((VM 228)), most of the conscripted Croats were not willing to die for Yugoslavia. A regiment at Bjelovar refused to leave barracks ((JT 79)) and another disarmed its Serbian officers ((VM 228)). A Croat colonel moved troops out of Zagreb to enable Slavko Kvaternik, on behalf of Pavelic, to proclaim Croatian independence over the radio. This occurred on April 10th, a few hours before the unopposed arrival of German troops. ((JT 70)). The proclamation produced a Croatian uprising, with most of those spontaneously taking part not being Ustasha members or sympathizers.

Although German broadcasts had urged the minorities not to fight for their Serbian masters, they had not promised independence for Croatia ((JCS 18-19)). Hitler proposed that Croatia be administered by Hungary. But Hungary refused and gave speedy recognition to the new Croatian state. Italy also gave recognition ((JCS 27-30)). Seeing the attitude of his allies and the Croatian enthusiasm for independence, Hitler recognised Croatia on April 12th, but was not concerned as to whether Kvaternik or Pavelic became head of the state ((JCS 21-25)).

During the night of 14/15th, Ante Pavelic with a few hundred Ustasha supporters arrived in Zagreb from Italy and, with Hitler's permission, took over control from Kvaternik.

So two aspects of these events are clear:

- A. Ustasha actions had minimal effect on the military collapse of Yugoslavia, but did lead to Hitler recognising Croatia as a separate state.
- B. The Croats had gained a form of independence but had not chosen their government.

Hitler left details of the extent of the new state to be decided by Mussolini. This was set out on May 18th ((SH 174)) and came into effect two days later. It was to be known as `Nezavisna Drzava Hrvataka`, or as abbreviated: NDH. It was formed from Croatia and Bosnia. Italy took small areas along the Dalmation coast although inhabited by Croats. In Bosnia the Serbs were 44%. to 31% Moslems and 22% Croats ((BK 174)). The Moslem attitude was therefore crucial. During the 1914-18 war the Moslems had supported the Empire against the Serbs ((NM 159)) and afterwards co-operated with the Croats to fight Serbian pressures for centralisation ((NM 164)).

In 1924 all but one of the 24 Moslem members of parliament identified themselves as Croat of the Moslem religion, although their leader considered himself to be a Yugoslav ((NM 165-6)). Svetozar Pribicevic, a Serbian leader, accepted that the Bosnian Moslems identified themselves with the Croats ((FT 114)). But this identification was political and national rather than ethnic.

The new Ustasha government didn't consider the NDH to be a Catholic state. From the earliest days it was seen as a nation of two religions: Catholic and Moslem, with the recognition of Protestantism. Pavelic declared the NDH to be a country of Catholics and Moslems. The Moslems had seats in the Sabor (Parliament), when established in 1942. In general they accepted the NDH ((SKP 111)) and aligned themselves with the Croats in the wartime fighting. Moslems were not represented in the exiled Yugoslav government in London ((NM 187)).

As a whole, the NDH had about 3,360,000 Catholic Croats (51%), 870,000 Moslems (13%), 1,970,000 Orthodox Serbs (30%), 120,000 Germans (2%) and 290,000 others who were mainly Catholic ((BK 173-4)). Books frequently give the Moslem population as 750,000 but this appears to be too low.

When the Germans invaded, Macek urged the Croats to resist ((VM 227)), but soon realised that Croatia's future would depend on world events. If Germany became the master of Europe, the NDH could be the means of preserving some degree of Croatian Independence. If Germany was defeated and Yugoslavia restored, the Croats would have to insist on the re-establishment of the Croatian Banovina. In pursuit of this view he appealed over the radio for the people to accept the new state ((VM 229)). At the same time he expected the Yugoslav government in London to guarantee the future autonomy of Croatia ((RP 31)). As Macek considered the real master of the NDH to be the German ambassador Von Kasche ((VM 240)), he withdrew from politics ((SCA 5)).

- KEY**
- a Salonika
 - b Belgrade
 - z Zagreb
 - s Sarajavo
 - m. Mostar
 - ⇒ British army
 - ➔ German army
 - ××× Italian/Greek fighting
 - - - The aim of 'Greater Serbia'
 - ⋯⋯ The border of the Austrian Empire in 1914
 - /// Croatian Banovina 1939-1941
 - ⋈ mountainous areas
 - Serb areas within the NDH



MAP 1 YUGOSLAVIA 1939



MAP 2 NDH 1941-45



MAP 3 NDH 1941-45

10). Descent into chaos

Shortly after the Germans invaded, and before their troops had reached southwestern Bosnia, Croatian refugees were arriving in Mostar. On 13th, 14th and 15th of April, Serbians had attacked the villages surrounding Capljina. Eightyfive houses in the villages of Illici and Cim, two kilometres from Mostar, had been burnt down and many of their inhabitants killed ((TB 34-35)).

In the north, the lightly armed Civil Guard of the Peasant Party, which was permitted by the Banovina agreement ((JT 25)), toured Serbian areas without incident ((VM 231)). But soon afterwards, Croatian refugees were arriving in Zagreb reporting Serbian attacks in the Glina area. Some of these refugees eager to defend their homes, or to wreak revenge, joined the Ustasha militia units being formed ((VM 231)).

As the Germans would not permit a Croatian army, order had to be maintained by these hastily recruited, untrained, indisciplined Ustasha units. They included terrorists recently returned from abroad and young recruits lusting for revenge.

On 1st May Communist symbols appeared throughout Glina to the south of Zagreb. On 11th May a group of Ustasha arrived and killed 373 Serbian men. On 29th August they returned and, by using the ruse that the Serbs were to be converted to Catholicism, persuaded 700 Serbian men from nearby villages to enter Glina's Orthodox church. The Serbs were made to shout: "Long live the Leader". [Pavelic] before all were slaughtered ((SSJ 63: 78-80)).

Second Lieutenant Rolf, commander of these Ustasha, also arrested the women of Glina most of whom had outwardly become Catholics. When Fr. Zuzek, the Catholic village priest, realised Rolf intended to kill them he phoned Archbishop Stepinac. He used the phone of the moderate Ustasha officer in charge of the district and spoke in Latin so Rolf's man in the Post Office would not be able to understand him. Three hours later Rolf, under orders from Pavelic and in an angry mood, said Fr. Zuzek could release the Catholic women. A pupil of Zuzek released the Orthodox women and the priest hid them until he could send them from the village ((RP 404-7)).

During these spring months, Colonel Draza Mihailovic of the Yugoslav army began to build small mobile units with which to prevent the Germans and Croats controlling the mountainous areas. They became known as 'Chetniks', the traditional name for Serbian armed bands of nationalists. Throughout Bosnia and parts of Croatia, Moslems, Croats and Serbs established units to protect their villages.

In many places these groups proclaimed themselves as Croatian 'Ustasha' or Serbian 'Chetniks'. Not being satisfied with a defensive role, some launched attacks on neighbouring villages.

The more responsible Ustasha and Chetniks called the violent ones: 'Natasha' — Wild Ustasha, or 'Divlji Celnici' — Wild Chetniks ((HT April 1992:7-8)). In many areas responsible Ustasha and Chetnik leaders had little or no control. So many fanatical and criminal gangs, calling themselves 'Ustasha' or 'Chetnik', were not under the authority of Pavelic or Mihajlovic.

At Hrvatski Blagaj two Ustasha tribunals decided not to execute some local Serbs, but fanatics still killed 400 in one night ((SSJ 51: 99)). Criminal elements took advantage of the breakdown in law and order and often used the Ustasha and Chetnik labels to cover their crimes ((HT April 1992:7-8)). The situation also provided the mentally disturbed with opportunities to act without restraint. Reports tell of people being killed with knives and thrown over cliffs. Exaggerated rumours spread by the Serbs, and harangues by high-ranking Ustasha leaders in May and June, made things worse ((MO 30)).

On May 20th, the Italian army handed administration of the western areas of Bosnia to the Croats. This was in accord with the agreement of 18th May fixing the borders of the NDH. When local Serbian officials refused to serve under the NDH authorities, Moslems were frequently appointed as village administrators ((JT 132-133)). This led to further incidents and these escalated in intensity.

On 3rd June there was a widespread but unorganised Serbian uprising. This was quelled in most areas by the middle of July ((JT 133)). In Krajina and Lika the Serbs took up arms, 'as a people' ((MD 206)), and were suppressed as a people. The systematic killing of Serbs was reported from this area of Croatia and from northwestern Bosnia ((VM 234)). In the south, at Surmasci, close to the Croat villages destroyed in April, 559 Serbian women and children were thrown into a pit on 6th August ((EP 103)). In the village of Krnjeusa the Serbs massacred 800 Croats ((SAA 29-30)).

Milovan Dijak, a Communist leader, travelling from Belgrade to Montenegro in the middle of July, later wrote that there were no Croatian border guards when his train entered the NDH from Serbia and none when it left to enter Montenegro. Even in the main Bosnian town of Sarajevo, he saw two young Ustasha only ((MD 10)). This report confirms that the whole region was out of the control of the national leaders.

Serbs boarding the train at Mostar told Dijas of the Turks [i.e. Moslems] driving men, women, young and old to a ravine and striking them down with clubs ((MD 9-11)). They also said many Ustasha had been killed in a nearby village. Serbs tended to call all Croats and Moslems 'Ustasha', so the killed could have been unarmed women and children. Similarly, the 'Chetniks' claimed to have been killed by the Croats and Moslems, could have been Serb women and children.

We read of Catholic Fr. John Kranjac's barbecued body being delivered to his village of Nunich ((MR 75)), and of an Orthodox bishop and priest being blinded and having their noses and ears cut off before a fire was lit on their chests ((EP 73)). We hear of Catholic Fr. Barisisch having his ears, arms and legs amputated before being thrown into his burning church at Krnjeusa ((MR 75)). We hear of Serbs at Stikade being buried alive ((AM 84)).

It is said that Catholic curate Mladina was crucified and left to hang for three days at Gospodnetic impaled on a picket while still alive and roasted by fire ((SH 185)). We read, "The last group of Serbs were burned together with the church and its priest, Bogdan Opacic". ((EP 105)).

The Italians recruited Chetnik bands to fight the Ustasha who had been attacking the Italians. When at Prozor a band of these Chetniks killed over 1,000 Croat women, children and old men, the Italians discharged those who were guilty ((TB 36, JT 233)). Pages could be written of these true or alleged atrocities committed by both sides. It is difficult for a person in the West to judge which stories are true, false or exaggerated.

Chaos was not confined to NDH territory. In Montenegro there was fierce fighting between Albanians and the Montenegrin Serbs as well as between Moslems and Serbs ((MD 22, 40-41)). In Kosavo the Albanians attacked the Serbs in revenge for pre-war brutality ((HT April 1992: 7-8)). There were spontaneous expressions of hatred throughout much of former Yugoslavia, which escalated into acts of savagery and revenge on all sides by roving bands of thugs.

The great majority of Serbs, Croats and Moslems were not responsible for the acts of these mainly young killers. Nor should religious motivations be ascribed to such hate filled bestialities. In the absence of local administrators, village priests came to be seen as leaders and symbols of their ethnic communities and so suffered the full hatred of these blood-crazed gangs.

11). Ustasha rule

The popularity of Croatia gaining its independence led most Croats to continue their civic duties and others to offer their services. Many had been Peasant Party members, others non-political. Those Peasant Party leaders who opposed the new government were arrested ((VM 233)). The Ustasha, as the armed expression of the Party of Right, was a military organisation rather than a political party ((MD 199)). It had about 40,000 supporters, almost exclusively from the South Western area of Bosnia known as Herzegovina ((CBA 43)). Being a poorly educated area, few had administrative abilities.

The Germans were not pleased with the chaos during the summer of 1941, as they had hoped to secure a peaceful flow of raw materials to Germany. But spontaneous fighting between the communities was not the only cause of chaos. The NDH government was determined to extinguish all Serbian power and influence within the new state.

Cyrillic lettering was forbidden and Serbian schools closed ((SAA 22)). Two thirds of the Serbian clergy were deported to Serbia. On 4th June the NDH and Germans agreed to establish the 'Panovu' organisation to deport the anti-NDH Serbs. This was formed on the 24th of June and deportations commenced in July ((SAB 70-71)). The fear, engendered by the speeches of Ustasha leaders, the terror gangs and the lack of condemnations by the government, caused a great exodus.

Those staying had to show their loyalty to Croatia by leaving the Serbian Church. This would ensure that their children would not be brought up with Serbian loyalties. Serbs could transfer to Catholicism (Eastern or Western rite), Protestantism or Islam ((EP 121)). Serbia became so flooded with refugees that the Germans in late September ordered the deportations to cease. By then 120,000 had arrived in Serbia ((JT 106)).

It was in these first months, when the government was without an army, that the 'Wild Ustasha' bands operated. In July the Germans permitted a conscripted army known as the Domobran (GAO 39)), but as many were employed guarding German supply lines, the government still had few troops with which to maintain law and order. But before the summer was over most of the wild 'Natasha' bands (The wild ones or 'Upstarts'), had been disbanded ((JT 107)). On 30th August 1941 Pavelic ordered the execution of Croats guilty of atrocities ((HMO 58)).

Croatian resentment at the Italian acquisition of parts of the Dalmatian coast continued to provoke clashes. By August 1941 the Italians were planning the Chetnik attacks on the Croats and Communists ((JT 213)). The Italians encouraged the Chetniks in the ethnic cleansing of Croats from areas near the new Italian possessions ((FM 177)). In return they provided safe shelter for the Chetniks when the Croats fought back ((SH 177-8)). In September the Italians reoccupied large areas of Bosnia, claiming they were protecting the Serbs from Croat attacks ((SKP 112)).

Pavelic came under great pressure to establish law, order and justice. This came from the Germans ((MTA 157)), the Italians, Stepinac in many letters, and Croat public opinion. Condemnations came from the Franciscans in June 1941 ((OFM Doc.1)), the Moslems on 13th November ((CF 287-8)), the conference of Catholic bishops in mid-November ((SSJ 5:38-47)) and the Protestants on 19th November ((CF 286)). In September the Germans asked Malek to replace Pavelic. Although he refused, Pavelic saw the danger and, imprisoned Malek in Jasenovac camp ((VM 240)). Pavelic's need to gain wider Croat support and to conciliate the Serbs, enabled the liberal and Catholic elements within the Ustasha to gain greater influence.

In October 1941, Milan Budek, a vocal extremist, lost his government position when appointed as minister to Berlin ((FO 48919)). In February 1942 a Sabor (parliament) was opened, composed of non-Ustasha elected prior to the war as well as of Ustasha appointees. The formation of a Croatian Orthodox Church was announced and attempts to expel or 'convert' Serbs came to an end. It was some time, however, before all Ustasha bands conformed to the new policy.

By 1942, the Partisans and Chetniks were fighting one another. Both expected Germany to lose the war, and knew that whichever was then superior would either impose Communism or re-establish the monarchy.

By April many Chetnik units had made truces with the Germans and the NDH ((FM 177)). Later that year they started to co-operate with NDH troops to fight the Communists ((JT 216)). The Communists wished to concentrate on destroying the Chetniks so, in late 1942 and early 1943, they also asked the Germans for a truce, but Hitler refused ((JT 244-5)).

As Germany's main interest in the NDH was as a source of raw materials, they pressed for peace ((MTA 160)). In October 1942 two Ustasha hard-liners, opponents of reconciliation with the Serbs and the formation of the Croatian Orthodox Church, were dismissed from the government. General Slavko Kvaternik, Commander of the armed forces went abroad.

Eugen, his son, was dismissed as head of the Security Services, which were then placed under the Ministry of the Interior ((IO 21-22)). By 1943 some Chetniks had recognised the NDH and were being supplied with weapons and their pay sent to their relatives ((JT 227)).

On 3rd January 1943, German, Italian, Chetnik and Ustasha officers met in Rome ((MD 215)) and seventeen days later they co-operated in a big offensive to destroy the Communists ((MD 227, FM 203)). These Chetniks were still loyal to the Yugoslav London government, so this illustrates how complicated events could become. Regardless of agreements and truces, violence between the communities and political factions continued throughout the war because each valley and village had its own war-lord and local history.

The move towards NDH moderation had commenced with Budek's dismissal in October 1941, and had continued with the dismissal of the two Kvaterniks in October 1942 ((IO 21-22)). In September 1943 Nikola Mandic, not an Ustasha, became Prime Minister, and he brought other non-Ustasha into his cabinet ((IO 23-24)). In the early part of the war, Hitler had permitted a degree of independence to Vichy France, Denmark, Slovakia and Serbia. But as the war progressed Neo-Nazi politicians gained greater power that led to more extreme and brutal policies. In Croatia, extremism was exhibited at the beginning with the resulting chaos leading to more moderate policies.

12). The Serbian Bishops

Gavrilo Dozitch, Patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church, was arrested on 23rd April 1941. It is sometimes implied that this was an act of Croatian Catholic religious persecution. But the facts tell a different story.

The pact with Germany to assure Yugoslav neutrality was signed on 25th March 1941. The Patriarch, in letters to Prince Paul and government ministers, had vigorously warned them with all the authority of the Church not to sign. On the 25th he broadcast an impassioned radio appeal on behalf of the Serbian Church. He called on all Serbs to remain true to the ideals and traditions of their church and nation ((SAA 7)). Within two days army officers had overthrown the government in what was seen as an anti-German coup. So when the German army found the Patriarch in the Montenegrin monastery of Ostrog, they arrested him as a political enemy.

Following rough handling he was kept in monasteries till near the end of the war, when he was taken to Germany, being freed there in 1945 ((SAA 10-18)).

Neither the Croats, the NDH government, the Ustasha nor the Catholic Church had anything to do with these German actions. Montenegro was not even part of the NDH.

In May 1941 the eight Serbian bishops (one diocese was vacant) and their priests were ordered to leave as part of the government's policy of ending all Serbian influence in the NDH. In Croatian eyes these clergy had led the twenty-year war on Croatian culture and identity and had urged the coup that had brought to power men opposed to Croatian autonomy. These bishops could now be expected to lead resistance to the new Croatian state. While the government didn't order maltreatment, the 'Wild Ustasha' took brutish action. Four bishops fled to Serbia, three were murdered and one died of natural causes in June ((SAA 10-15)).

The Catholic Church was not involved in any way with the issuing of the expulsion order or in the violent actions of the Ustasha thugs. It is sometimes asserted that the bishops of Banja Luka and Zagreb were especially badly treated because they had opposed the 1937 Concordat. There is not the slightest evidence for this. The assertion is made so as to portray the thugs as acting from a religious motive. All the Serbian bishops had opposed the Concordat, as had the Ustasha. The Italians arrested the Serbian bishops in their zone, and in Albania, because they were considered to be political enemies ((SAA 24)).

13). The Croatian Eastern Orthodox Church

On arriving in Serbia, following his expulsion from Macedonia, Metropolitan Josif of Skopje was elected by the Serbian Church Synod to deputise for Patriarch Gavril. He made contact with Gavril and was instructed by him to normalize Orthodox matters in the new Croatian state ((MO 40)).

A NDH Ministerial decree of 18th July 1941 ruled that the title 'Serbian Orthodox Church', was at discord with the new state. It was to be replaced by the 'Greek-Eastern Faith' as it had been prior to 1918 ((MO 20)). This appears to have been the first time the government officially drew a distinction between the Orthodox religion and the Serbian Orthodox Church. In a decree of the 4th December the 'Greek-Eastern Faith' and the Catholic Eastern Rite, were ordered to change from using the Julian to the Gregorian calendar ((MO 20)).

On 23rd February 1942 Marko Puk, Minister for Justice and Religion, spoke to the Sabor. He said that Ante Starcevic, founder of 'The Party of Right', had enshrined in clause 136 of its constitution, that religion must be free and not imposed by force. The Minister then announced:

“The Croatian Government recognizes three religions in Croatia, i.e. the Catholic (Western and Eastern rites), Muslim, and the Evangelical of the Augsburg Helvetian Confession". He continued: "The NDH is not persecuting the Greek-Eastern religion, but it can not recognize the Serbian Orthodox Church. It is a known fact that the Eastern Churches belong to the so-called Caesarean Church, i.e. The Churches where religious matters are influenced by the establishment, as in the nomination of Church hierarchies, so that in reality these Churches have no freedom in their structure or organisation, neither do they function freely but remain organs of the establishment.

The head of state is also head of the Church and it is a known fact that the laity plays a predominant role. Therefore, to allow the formation and existence of the Serbian Orthodox Church on the territory of the NDH would mean allowing the government of the Serbian State partly to govern in the territory of the NDH, using the Serbian Orthodox Church. Thus no country in the world would or could allow and the NDH will not allow it either. Those who for any reason do not wish to recognize this historic condition are free to leave the territory of this state". ((MO 20-21)).

Five days later Pavelic, in an address to the Sabor, again drew a distinction between the Orthodox religion and the Serbian Church. He explained that the Orthodox used to be known as the: 'Greek-Eastern Church', because its bishops were anointed by the Greek Patriarch. He continued:

" . . . the Orthodox came under the rule of the Serbian Patriarch and the name 'Serbian Orthodox Church' was coined. There is no one in Croatia who has anything against the Orthodox faith.. It is not true that the Croatian State aims to convert the Orthodox to the Catholic faith. That is not political. That is left to the individual conscience. I personally wrote a circular . . . to the authorities responsible . . . to keep a record of the conversions, . . . and to give permission only when satisfied that the convert is honest and doing it out of conviction. I stressed in the circular that all means must be employed to prevent any kind of force being used by anybody. Despite this, violence was used in some cases but this was not done by the State, or with the approval of the State, but by individuals who acted illegally or, if by officials, then they have overstepped their authority".

The circular mentioned was apparently that of 30th August ((MO 58)), the one referred to by Stepinac in November 1941 (See Chapter III, D, final words of Cardinal Stepinac's letter).

Pavelic continued:

"Gentlemen. No one is touching the Orthodox but there is no room for, " a Serbian Orthodox Church in the State of Croatia. I repeat: there can be no Serbian, can be no Greek Orthodox Church. Why? Because everywhere in the world Orthodox Churches are national Churches.

The Serbian Orthodox Church is part and parcel of the Serbian State. The hierarchy of the Serbian Orthodox Church is led by the Serbian State. Its state representatives appoint the Patriarch, or at least participate in his appointment, and all the hierarchy depends on him, from bishop to chaplain. All this is dependent on the Serbian establishment. This is so in Serbia, and has been so in the past in unfortunate Yugoslavia, but it may not and will not be in the Croatian State.

World Churches which do not depend on a state could exist in Croatia, and there are such churches. But if a church is not a world church, then it can only be a Croatian national Church, it can only be a Church which has full freedom in the spiritual domain and in freedom of conscience, but in all matters it must be under the control of the Croatian State. We will never permit any church to become a political tool, particularly not one aimed against the existence of the Croatian nation and the Croatian State. Therefore, sensible men who care for spiritual things will get together to analyse this question and to find a satisfactory solution for the Orthodox faith, for the welfare of the people, and for the good of the Croatian State". ((MO 22-23)).

Afterwards, some Orthodox contacted A.R.Glavas, Secretary of the Department of Religion in the ministry of Justice and Religion ((MO 40)). He was a Franciscan who had deserted his parish. On March 23rd 1942 a legal notice was issued to establish the Croatian Orthodox Church ((MO 42)) becoming law on April 3rd ((RL 617)). Milos Obrknezevic, an Orthodox layman born in Belgrade but now living in Croatia, conducted negotiations ((MO 41)). Having spent his life employed in the legal department of the Serbian Orthodox Church, he was in an ideal position to undertake talks with Glavas.

A constitution, based on the Serbian Church's one of 1931, was prepared. Obrknezevic had three meetings with Pavelic, who was mainly interested in linguistic and symbolic things to do with the Croatian language, and in the candidate for the highest position. Pavelic did not intervene in religious and canonical matters ((MO 41)).

The Church's teachings were exactly the same as those in other Orthodox churches, but the church had to use the Croatian alphabet, language and the red, white and blue Croatian colours in her flag ((RL 255)). The legal title was: 'The Croatian Eastern Orthodox Church' ((RL 617)), but the word 'Eastern' tended to be dropped in normal conversation. The government would have the final decision regarding the appointment of bishops ((RL 255)). The former Metropolitan Germogen of Kiev ((TB 28)), an elderly Russian monk who had been living in Yugoslavia since 1922, agreed to lead the new church. The Patriarch of Constantinople gave his approval for it to be led by a Patriarch ((MO 43)). According to Obrknezevic, the interned Serbian Patriarch Gavriilo Donzic and his deputy, Metropolitan Josif Cvijovic, were both unofficially informed of the negotiations and the proposal to elect Germogen as Patriarch.

According to this source, Donzic agreed with the plans for the new Church, except that Germogen should be a metropolitan not a patriarch, with the status of his successor to be decided at a later date. So a metropolitan was appointed ((MO 43)), with legal provision made for a future patriarch ((RL 618)).

The constitution of the church came into force on the 5th of June 1942. Two days later Germogen was enthroned in the Orthodox church of The Holy Transfiguration in Zagreb. The President of the Croatian Sabor, Marko Dosen, together with several ministers was present to pay respects ((MO 44)). Joso Dumandzic, a government minister, read the decree appointing Germogen. He said that the Croatian Orthodox Church was based on the national proverb: 'The brother is dear whatever his faith' ((MO 45)).

Priests were released from internment to return to their flocks, and churches were reopened. Young student priests and clerics, still studying in the seminaries, were sent to administer parishes lacking pastors ((MO 46)). Others were sent to Bulgaria to complete their training. Eparchies were established at Brod, Sarajevo and Bosanski Petrovac ((MO 46)). The Romanian and Bulgarian Orthodox Churches approved of the new church ((TB 28)), but the Serbian Church in Belgrade condemned it ((SAA 25)). Metropolitan Germogen had a meeting with Archbishop Stepinac and Moslem leaders so as to establish friendly relations ((MO 46)). New prayer books were published with the only change being the use of the Latin alphabet in place of the Cyrillic ((MO 47)).

The new church was given state financial assistance ((RL 618-9)), as were the Catholic, Moslem and Protestant religions ((TB 28)). The number of priests involved is disputed, but it appears there were seventy clergy by the end of 1942 ((MTA 158)). Obrknezevic names thirty senior priests decorated at Christmas 1942 and added that there were many younger clergy ((MO 47-8)). This church was strongest in peaceful and flat countryside of north-eastern Bosnia, ((MTA 158)) and carried out its spiritual work until the NDH was overrun by the Communist Partisans in 1945.

Many Serbs saw its priests as traitors ((MTA 158)). Tiso executed eighty-five year old Metropolitan Germogen, another bishop ((SAA 179)) and many senior priests ((MO 49, SAB 122, SAA 26)). Obrknezevic was arrested but, as several prominent Communists owed their lives to the formation of this church, he was permitted to emigrate ((MO 49)).

The Macedonians had also wished for independence or to be part of Bulgaria. Many teachers and priests had been deported or intimidated because they resisted serbianisation ((SG 302)). In April 1941 Macedonia was placed under Bulgarian administration. Metropolitan Josif of Skopje, a fellow Serbian bishop, 200-300 Serbian clergy, Macedonian priests married to Serbian wives and Serbian colonists were expelled ((SAA 11-13)). They were considered to be, 'the foremost carriers of Serbdom and Serbian Orthodoxy in Macedonia' ((JT 177, SAA 11)). The Macedonians and Bulgarians were Orthodox by religion but not Serbian Orthodox.

After the war the Serbs reimposed their authority, but in 1967 the Macedonian Orthodox Church broke away from Serbian control ((SAA 286)). In 1993 Macedonia achieved political independence ((CBA 221)). The events in Macedonia with its Orthodox population, is a further indication that the motivation for the expulsion of Serbian clergy and their supporters by the non-Serb minorities was not religious but cultural, political and national.

It is debatable whether the recognition of the Croatian Orthodox Church was an implementation of Ustasha principles or a reluctant move made under the pressure of events. Starcevic (1823-1896), founder of the Party of Right, had an Orthodox mother ((MO 37)) and the Ustasha considered themselves to be the continuation of his Party. While the whole tradition was of anti-Serbdom, which included the Serbian Church, this antagonism was not shown towards Orthodoxy as such. Eugen Kvaternik (1825-1871), granduncle of Slavko who had proclaimed Croatian Independence, had urged during the early days of the party that there should be an Orthodox Patriarch in Croatia ((MO 37)).

The Ustasha had good relation with the Romanian and Bulgarian Orthodox Churches. It was Macedonian Orthodox nationalists, based in Bulgaria, who had trained the Ustasha prior to the war ((SCA 1)). An Orthodox Macedonian militant had assassinated King Alexander on behalf of the Ustasha in 1934. It was the Serbian Orthodox Church, not Orthodoxy as such, which the Ustasha opposed.

From the beginning of the NDH, Orthodox personalities were welcomed in Ustasha circles provided they favoured Croatian Independence. Orthodox Ustasha officers included Lt. Markovic ((MO 59)). Generals Fedor Dragojlov and Duro Grujic, chiefs of staff in the Croatian army fighting the Chetniks and the Partisans, were Orthodox. General Lavoslav Milic, chief of military supplies, Colonel Jova Stajic and Major Vladimir Graovac were Orthodox. Graovac commanded a volunteer force ((SH 156)) of Croatian air force bombers in Russia ((MO 36-37)).

Savo Besarovic and Uros Doder had seats in the 1942 Croatian Sabor, with Besarovic becoming a Minister in October 1943 ((MO 37, 10 18)). Many Orthodox financiers, scientists and lawyers had been loyal Croats and members of the Party of Right ((MO 36-38)). Josip Runjanin Composed the Croatian national anthem ((MO 36)). When in July 1941 the government replaced the, 'Serbian Orthodox' title by the 'Greek-Eastern Faith' ((SKP 112)), It was implicitly acknowledging an Orthodox religion free of Serbian control. The recognition of a Croatian Orthodox Church was a natural development of this and consistent with Ustasha principles, traditions and practice.

On the other hand, the inflammatory remarks of Ustasha leaders like Milo Budek, the hard-line taken by General Slavko Kvaternik and the introduction of regulations regarding 'conversions', point to Ustasha policy during the spring and summer of 1941, as having been dominated by its violent wing. It was not until the autumn of 1941 and early 1942 that the more responsible and wiser elements in the Ustasha gained control.

CHAPTER II **HOW MANY DIED?**

i). In the Whole of Yugoslavia. For forty years the Communist government asserted that 1,700,000 Yugoslavs had been killed by the Germans and Ustasha, during the war. It was also widely disseminated that 750-900,000 Serbs were killed in massacres or at the concentration camp at Jasenovac. These figures gained Tito's regime sympathy when extracting war reparations from Germany, and provided an excuse when repressing non-Communists. Anyone questioning these figures was accused of having sympathy with 'Fascist Ustasha murderers'. Extremists have claimed that up to 3 million were killed by their opponents.

Details of the 1948 census were kept secret but, in negotiations with Germany, it became apparent that the real figure of the dead was about one million ((VZ 19)). An American study in 1954 calculated 1,067,000 ((VZ 23)). Following Tito's death in 1980, the 1948 census results became available for comparison with those of 1931. Allowances had to be made for the birth rates of the different communities and for emigration. Research was pioneered by Professor Kocovic, a Serb living in the West, whose findings were published in January 1985. He assessed the number of dead as 1,014,000 ((BK 125)). Later that year a Serbian Academy of Science Conference heard that the figure was 1,100,000 ((VZ 23)). In 1989 Vladimir Zerjavic, a Croatian living in Zagreb published, with the aid of the Zagreb Jewish community, his calculation of 1,027,000 ((VZ 26)). B.Covic calculated 947,000 ((MTA 152)). So a figure of about one million for all Yugoslavia is now generally accepted.

ii). In the NDH. Franjo Tudjman, who in his youth as a Communist had to flee from the Ustasha, rose to be a leader in Tito's Yugoslavia. He believed the official figures until 1966 when, as an historian, he obtained confidential information showing Ustasha victims at the lower figure of 180-240,000 ((SSJ 51:34)). Kocovic and Zerjavic calculated losses from all causes on the territory of the NDH follows ((VZ 27, BK 121, 138-141)).

	Kocovic	Zerjavic	Mean
Serbians	334,000	295,000	315,000
Croatians	203,000	170,000	187,000
Moslems	75,000	77,000	76,000
Jews	20,000	19,000	19,500
Gypsies	16,000	16,000	16,000

iii). Serbian Losses

Anti-Croatian books imply that all Serbian losses were of unarmed Serbian civilians killed by the Croatian Ustasha. But Serbian deaths in the NDH were due to many causes. All the Chetniks and many of the Communist Partisans were Serbians, and both suffered heavily while fighting each other. Both were also in combat with the Germans and Italians for four years. The regular Croatian army inflicted casualties as part of normal warfare, and Communists executed thousands of Serbian Chetnik 'class enemies'.

According to Zerjavic, the Serbian losses in the NDH were incurred in the following manner ((VZ 29)):

As Partisans fighting Croats, Germans, Italians and Chetniks	82,000.
As Chetnik collaborators of the Germans	23,000.
In the German Zemun detention camp	20,000.
Of typhoid fever	25,000.
Chetniks killed by the Germans	45,000.
Chetniks killed by the Italians	15,000.
Civilians killed during battles between Ustasha, Chetniks and Partisans	34,000.
killed by Ustasha in prisons, pits and small camps	28,000.
Killed by Ustasha in the Jasenovac camp complex	50,000.

This total slightly exceeds the estimates given earlier by Zerjavic of Serbian dead in the NDH. But as it was difficult to fight a guerrilla war on the flat Serbian countryside, many Chetniks and Partisans had moved into the mountainous NDH. Serbian 'class enemies', killed by the Communists, were hidden within these categories.

Some of the 34,000 civilian deaths would have been accidental and others due to a disregard for human life in the midst of battle. If we add together the 28,000, the 50,000 and a proportion of the 34,000, we arrive at a figure of 100,000 unarmed Serbian victims of the Ustasha. While this is much less than the 750-900,000 frequently asserted, it still represents a crime of atrocious proportions.

iv), Croatian and Moslem Losses

From the above, the Croats and Moslems lost a total of 250-280,000. A breakdown of these figures is not available, but there were reports of massacres of Croatian civilians along the Adriatic coast and in areas south of Zagreb, as well as in Bosnia. Moslems were 'ethnically cleansed' from areas of south-eastern Bosnia ((JT 256-9)). In the town of Foca alone 3,000 were massacred In February 1942 ((MD 139)). The Communists killed many Croatian and Moslem 'class enemies'. Probably at least 50,000 unarmed Croats and Moslems were deliberately killed. Combined with those who died on the 1945 'Death Marches' (see below), the total would rise to 100,000. This number is of the same magnitude as of unarmed Serbians killed during the war.

v). Jasenovac Camp

The NDH had several small and temporary camps for war and political prisoners, but the main ones were in the Jasenovac-Gradina area. During Stepinac's 'trial' in 1946, the prosecution alleged that 40,000 were killed during the period Filipovic was there ((RP 173)). If we double this, to allow for those killed in the earlier shorter but more violent period, we arrive at a figure of 80,000. Tujman said the number was 60,000 ((SSJ 51:34)).

According to Zerjavic, probably the most accurate, 90,000 died in this complex of camps consisting of 50,000 Serbs, 12,000 Croats and Moslems, 13,000 Jews and some Slovenes, Gypsies and others ((VZ 30)).

vi). The Death Marches

As the Communists advanced into Croatia at the end of the war, they killed those with a record of opposing Communism. Teachers, town, administrators, priests and local activists were the main victims. Many Croats, Serbs, Slovenians and others fled into Italy and Austria. No doubt a few were guilty of crimes, but most were ordinary young men who had fought for their villages against Tito. After being disarmed, the British returned them to Yugoslavia. They were then forced to march long distances without food, dying where they fell or being killed in pits. Exiles claimed 200-300,000 Croats perished ((VZ 10)) but, based on the overall losses during the war, more cautious estimates are 45-55,000 ((VZ 30)) or 30,000 ((MTA 170)).

vii). The Serbian Orthodox clergy

As recorded previously, of the eight Serbian bishops on NDH soil in April 1941 ((SAA 10)), four arrived in Serbia, one died of an illness in June ((SAA 11)) and Ustasha thugs murdered three. ((SAA 24-25)). 334 Serbian Orthodox priests and monks, out of 577, were deported to Serbia ((SAB 73)). Of the remaining 243, it is estimated that 170 were killed ((ECR 11, 1: 30)). Anti-Croat authors imply that the Ustasha were responsible for all these deaths, but this can't be so. Some died due to the normal conduct of war (bombing of towns etc.), five by natural causes ((SAA 25)) and others serving with Chetnik units. The Communists killed priests because they were priests or because they supported the royalist government in London. Many of those who served in the Croatian Orthodox Church were executed after the war. There does not appear to be a reliable calculation of how many priests were murdered by the Ustasha. In 1966 the Serbian Church stated that 549 clergy had lost their lives during the war ((ECR 11, 1:30)). From this it appears that over twice as many Orthodox priests lost their lives outside the NDH as within it.

viii). The Catholic clergy

In September 1945 a Pastoral Letter of the Yugoslav bishops gave provisional figures for Catholic priests as 243 dead and many missing. It said the Communists were mainly to blame ((SAB 127)). In September 1946, Stepinac stated that the Communists had killed 260-270 ((SAA 111)).

iv). Summary

About one million, not 1,700,000-2,500,000, died in Yugoslavia.

Just over 300,000 Serbs (including 100,000 in massacres and camps) were killed in the NDH, not nearly a million.

About 260,000 Catholic and Moslem Croats died, not the few often implied. Tens of thousands of these were massacred. About 50,000 Croats were murdered following the end of the war. In the NDH nearly twice as many Catholic as Orthodox priests were killed.

v). Despite the turmoil, the relative size of the communities in Bosnia, between the census of 1921 and that of 1948, remained about the same. The Orthodox

fell from 44% to 43%, the Moslems rose from 31% to 33%, the Catholics were constant at 23% ((RJD 87)).

CHAPTER III **THE REACTION OF THE CHURCH**

A). Archbishop Stepinac

Born in 1898 and conscripted into the Austrian army in 1916, Aloysius Stepinac became an officer and was decorated for bravery. Following capture by the Italians in 1917, he volunteered to fight in the Yugoslav Committee's Legion. As an officer he took part in the defeat of the German and Bulgarian armies at Salonica, and was awarded the very rare 'karageorge Star' ((AHO 5)).

After the war he studied agriculture and for a time was engaged to be married. But in 1924 he entered a seminary and was ordained in 1930. Four years later he became the youngest bishop in the world. Many of the older clergy had an attachment to Austrian culture, but Stepinac's war record made him acceptable to the Serbian king ((MR 21-35)). As Bauer was in poor health Stepinac administered the Archdiocese and, on Bauer's death in December 1937, became Archbishop ((AHO 6)).

Due to their education and dedication to the welfare of their parishioners, many priests throughout Eastern Europe became involved in political campaigns for social justice. With the development of political parties this activity could become full time to the near exclusion of parochial work. Parties developed a mixture of policies, some good but others non-Christian or debatable.

The Holy See saw the danger of priests neglecting their spiritual duties and becoming identified with a particular political party. A sudden ban would have left the poor in some areas without advocates, so local bishops were left to decide when to implement this policy. So while Slovenian priests were leaders of a Christian party, and had seats in parliament, Bauer had prohibited the clergy in his diocese standing as candidates ((SAB 29)). Stepinac confirmed this policy several times ((MR 139-140)) and suspended a Croatian Peasant Party priest ((RP 255)). His clergy did however warn against Nazism, Communism and uncontrolled Capitalism.

he kept private his own voting, but the government announced that he has voted for its candidate in 1939 election To refute this assertion he said he had voted for the Croatian Peasant Party, not because of all its policies, but as an

expression of support for Croatian rights ((SAB 55)). He maintained, however, his loyalty to Yugoslavia. When the coup occurred in March 1941, he ordered a Te Deum to be offered for the new king ((SAB 58)).

B) Stepinac and Pavelic

Anti-Catholic literature depicts Stepinac and the Ustasha leader, Ante Pavelic, as close personal friends and political collaborators. It is asserted that Stepinac, in April 1941, welcomed Pavelic on his arrival at the Zagreb railway station, offered a Te Deum to celebrate his coming to power and issued a pastoral letter of support for the NDH. These allegations are not true.

Stepinac told Veceslav Vilder, a leader of the Independent Democratic Party, that he detested Nazism. It was as bad as Bolshevism, and the Church was more free under Democracy ((SAB 50)). During the 1930s, Stepinac was absolutely opposed to the Ustasha, who were ready to identify Croatia's fate with that of National-Socialist Germany and Fascist Italy ((AHO 10)). During a sermon in August 1940 he attacked both Fascism and Communism. ((RJW 51-52)).

When the Yugoslav army disintegrated, the Croats celebrated in the streets of Zagreb. For them the doors of their Yugoslav prison had opened and their Serbian jailors had fled. By then most Croats had lost hope of building a multi-cultural Yugoslavia. Autonomy had been gained due to the exceptional international situation, but the government which had granted it had already been overthrown. Yet on the eve of the German invasion Stepinac still clung to the ideal of a federal Yugoslavia ((AHO 9)) and, according to the American Zagreb Consul, urged Mecek to join the Yugoslav coup government ((10: 7)).

Stepinac feared direct German rule. He was aware of the destruction of Catholic organisations, charitable activities, schools and press in Germany and Poland. He knew of the paganism taught to German youth, the terror used against opponents and the censorship of news and opinions. He had told a western visitor that the Munich agreement had been a mistake because Hitler would go on to take all of Czechoslovakia, dominate central Europe and launch a war within eighteen months ((MR 20)). He was not pleased on April 10th to observe young men cheering the entry of German troops into Zagreb. He commented to his aides:

" . . . these young men did not understand what it means to live under the Prussian Boot". ((RP 354)).

Earlier that day Slavko Kvaternik had declared Croatian independence and became 'de-facto' head of civil administration. So on the 12th. Stepinac called

on him to discuss the needs of the people. That same day Kvaternik, on behalf of Pavelic, asked the Germans for diplomatic recognition, which was granted later that evening ((JCS 24-5)).

Pavelic was expected to arrive from Italy at Zagreb rail station the following day. Kvaternik hoped to make his arrival a triumphal display of wide support and endorsement of Pavelic's leadership by popular acclaim. Stepinac's presence at the rail station would have greatly enhanced Pavelic's status and prestige. Contrary to false reports, Stepinac refused to attend ((RP 353)).

Like most Croatians, Stepinac had mixed views regarding the unfolding of events. As a Croat he felt and expressed the joy that Serbian domination had ended. He was also relieved that, due to the declaration of independence, the Germans were not establishing military rule. This meant the people and Church would not suffer the slaughter of intellectuals, priests, teachers and others as in Catholic Poland.

According to the International Hague Convention of 1907, an invading power may demand obedience but not allegiance ((SAB 167)). So Stepinac gave de-facto recognition to the civil authorities, appointed by the occupiers. He would also have been guided by: 'Sollicitudo Ecclesiarum' of Pope Gregory XVI, issued in 1831. This states that, 'At the time of a revolution, in the fight for power, one must not take the de-facto recognition of a state or a government by the representatives of the Church to be de-jure recognition, and one must not conclude from this that anyone's prior rights have ceased to exist' ((RP 197)).

Stepinac is criticised for recognising de-facto the Pavelic regime, yet little is said about events in Serbia. The Serbian Orthodox bishops on 8th July 1941 pledged themselves to observe the laws of the German occupiers, and to cooperate in maintaining order, peace and obedience. After August the 29th they recognized the German approved Serbian government and accepted clergy salaries from it ((SAA 14)). Both churches were facing reality and acting according to international law. Later, the Allies based their demand for the recognition of the Partisans as a regular army, on the International Hague Convention ((RP 197)).

On April 11th, the Ustasha radio told its listeners to look to their clergy for direction ((CF 272)). This was a practical recommendation as, in the absence of civil officials, parish priests would become leaders in most villages. It is not 'proof' that all priests were Ustasha members. On the 16th, Stepinac visited Pavelic and received promises that the administration would not interfere with church life nor spread Nazi paganism in the schools.

While these assurances were comforting, they had been given verbally and in private. The new administration was still seeking wide support so as to confirm in Hitler's mind that there was no need to appoint a military administration. There was no guarantee that Pavelic and other Ustasha leaders, once firmly in power, would keep these promises.

On April 28th, Stepinac sent a circular letter to his priests. In it he echoed the people's joy at gaining independence. "For, however complicated is the web of contemporary events; however heterogeneous the factors which influence the course of affairs, it is easy to see the hand of God at work". He urged his priests to work hard for their country. "So Croatia may be the country of God". He quoted from Scripture; "Give to God what is God's" but noticeably omitted the balancing phrase "and to Caesar what is Caesar's".

He continued:

"We must warn and teach that the holy enthusiasm and noble zeal in building the foundations of the new Croat state must be inspired by the fear of God and the love of God's law and His commandments, for only through God's law and not false natural principles can the Croat state be solidly established."

[Note: In Catholic eyes, Nazism, Fascism and Communism were based on false natural principles].

He warned that independence could be lost again. "Sovereignty passes from nation to nation on account of injustice and insolence and wealth (Sirach 10:8)". He knew that those who looked up this scripture would read just prior to this extract "Do not be angry with your neighbour for any injury". He wrote that he believed the Church in the new state would be free to: "convince, rebuke, and exhort, be unfailing in patience and teaching (2 Tim. 4: 2)". ((RP 85)). By Stepinac publishing this circular in the Press, Pavelic's promises were made public. This would make it difficult for him or his companions to later deny the promise of Church freedom.

Later, the Communists criticised his words "Knowing the men who are today at the helm of the Croat nation, we are deeply convinced that our work will find complete understanding and help". Yet the bishops addressed similar words to Tito on September 22nd, 1945.

After pledging loyalty and their willingness to collaborate in constructing the state, they wrote: "We are persuaded that the wisdom of our statesmen will

bring us victory and that through your efforts you will succeed in bringing lasting peace in Yugoslavia". ((RP 85)).

Offering a hand of co-operation to Pavelic and Tito, while sounding a note of optimism, didn't mean the Church was endorsing their ideologies or future actions.

Stepinac closed his circular of 1941 by instructing all parishes to hold a Te Deum of thanksgiving on May 4th ((RP 258-260)). He had referred to Croatia throughout not to the NDH ((RP 200)).

It has been said that by recognising Pavelic's authority before the Yugoslav forces surrendered on April 16th, Stepinac broke his oath of loyalty to the king. But the army's surrender would not cancel the oath, so this date is irrelevant. By the 12th, Kvaternick was the German appointed de-facto governor of the Croatian part of Yugoslavia. Stepinac treated him as such in accordance with international law. Stepinac gave his obedience but never swore allegiance to Pavelic or the NDH state ((RP 86)). When Pavelic invited the Zagreb clergy to pay him a visit, Stepinac refused to present them ((RP 353)).

In the course of his work as bishop he spoke to government ministers. But this didn't imply that he supported their policies and actions. Throughout the world, bishops meet government leaders who have a wide range of political programmes. Certain small religious acts of his have been used to try to discredit him. Slavko Kvaternik was not religious, but his brother Peter was. Peter had been killed during the fighting, and Stepinac on April 15th conducted his funeral ((SAB 60)).

On Easter Sunday, Slavko attended Mass and sat in the seat normally used by government ministers. At the end he went up to Stepinac, still standing at the foot of the altar, knelt and kissed the bishop's ring ((SAB 60)). Stepinac had no reason to refuse to conduct Peter's funeral or to deny Slavko a blessing. These were both pastoral acts and not evidence, as some have asserted, that Stepinac was an Ustasha sympathiser.

Stepinac has been criticized for holding a banquet for Ustasha officers at his palace on the 16th April. If this took place, it would not have been a crime. These men had been forced into political exile, but had now returned home. By meeting them at a social function, Stepinac was able to judge who were peaceful and who were dangerous. He could try to influence them to use their new influence with responsibility and justice. At this date there was no clear indication of how the new authorities would rule.

Many books state that by offering a Te Deum [a Mass of thanksgiving] in Zagreb Cathedral in the presence of Pavelic, Stepinac was showing his visible support for the new regime. But what actually occurred?

In the letter to his priests of April 28th, Stepinac ordered a Te Deum to be sung on May 5th in all parish churches to celebrate Croatian independence. ((SAB 62)). The local mayors, the great majority of whom were not Ustasha members or even supporters, were invited to attend.

A problem arose regarding the holding of the Te Deum for Croatian independence in Zagreb Cathedral. The Croatian people had not chosen Pavelic, his government had not been granted general international recognition and the de-jure Yugoslav government was still in existence. Stepinac had recognised Pavelic as the de-facto head of state, but not its de-jure head. In other words, Pavelic was seen as a German appointed administrator who had to be obeyed in civil affairs, but not as the head of an internationally recognised legal state. Pavelic was welcome to attend a Te Deum of thanks for Croatian independence as a private individual, but not as head of state.

This dispute regarding Pavelic's status first became public when Stepinac had been absent from Pavelic's arrival at the rail station. The dispute led to the proposed Te Deum in the Cathedral being cancelled ((RP 353)).

He did, however, offer a Mass for Pavelic each year on his birthday, June 13th ((RP 169, SAA 106)). He was praying for him as an individual who needed God's blessing to act justly ((SL 17)). The Archbishop told his clergy that his visit to Kavaternik and Pavelic did not mean he favoured Ustashism or that he had thereby recognised the government of the Ustasha. Relations between the de-facto state and the church were necessary to protect the people ((RP 353)).

Pavelic's office was close to the Cathedral, yet once only in four years did he enter it. This was to attend the funeral of the Italian Duke of Aosta in 1943. Pavelic was not officially received at the entrance by Stepinac or by a priest. Being a private individual, he was met by a lay sacristan ((RP 199 and 353)).

Apart from formal occasions, Stepinac visited Pavelic six times. On five these it was to plead for someone ((AHO 15-17)). On the other occasion, he walked into Pavelic's office, uttered the words, "It is God's Command: Thou shalt not kill", and then walked straight out ((AHO 17)). On June 26th the bishops paid a visit to Pavelic.

It was polite but Pavelic was not satisfied with the homage paid ((CF 285)).

Croatia became independent on the 10th and the Germans recognised the Ustasha government on the 12th. So the 12th each year was the anniversary of Ustasha rule, not the tenth. Any church services held on the 10th would not be marking an Ustasha victory.

On April 10th 1942 Stepinac preached: "The greatest victor is not he who grinds cities and villages into dust and ashes, nor him who scatters like chaff mighty armies, nor him before whom men tremble in fear for their earthly life, but Him who is lord of life and death, of time and eternity . . ." ((SAB 90)). Only one man was scattering mighty armies at this time — Hitler.

Some books say a pro-Ustasha sermon was preached in the Cathedral on April 10th. 1945. Two observations need to be made. Stepinac did not give the sermon. ((RJW 59)). Secondly, the sermon praised the sacrifices made by Croats for Independence. The version of it quoted in the West is that printed in the Ustasha controlled 'Katolicki List' ((RJW 59)). As is explained later in this booklet, the Ustasha censors often added pro-Ustasha words when reporting such sermons and could easily have done so in this instance.

According to the Communists, SS General Kasche paid Stepinac daily visits. But Kasche never visited Stepinac ((AHO 39)) and they only met on three formal occasions ((SAB 109)). Stepinac did however meet General Glaise von Horstenau, an anti-Nazi, several times to intercede for victims of the Ustasha ((SAB 169)). It was well known that the Italian representative in Croatia, Casertano, detested Stepinac ((SAB 170)).

In 1941 Pavelic ordered three priests to leave Stepinac's staff and take up government appointments. With Stepinac's backing they refused ((RP 354)) and in July, Stepinac sent Canon Josip Loncar, his close assistant and personal friend, to Mirko Puk, Minister of Justice and Religion. Loncar had often spoken against Nazism, racism and Ustashism to students and priests ((RP 355)). He had looked forward to the day when "All the Orthodox will return to their Orthodox Church" ((RP 233)). He now informed the minister that priests could not join the Ustasha or be Ustasha officials as this was contrary to Canon Law.

Loncar was condemned to death ((RP 355)). The Pope's representative to the bishops, Abbot Marcone, made a vigorous intervention, and the sentence was commuted to twenty years imprisonment ((SAB 72)). To save the canon's life the three priests had to resign from their positions on Stepinac's staff ((RP 354)).

After the war, Loncar gave evidence that the Ustasha authorities had asked the Holy See three times to remove Stepinac ((RP 355)). These incidents indicate the relationship existing between Stepinac and the rulers of the NDH during the summer of 1941.

C). The Holy See

Some authors claim that the Holy See plotted against the existence of Yugoslavia and that Stepinac worked hard to persuade the Holy See to recognise Pavelic's government ((CF 272-3)). They depict the Pope as eagerly recognising the NDH. Stepinac is said to have asked the Pope to bless the NDH. Others assert that the Vatican exchanged representatives with Pavelic's evil regime, and that the Pope received both the duke of Spoleto and Pavelic in private audiences. It is also asserted that the Pope welcomed groups of Ustasha to Rome. The facts need to be listed.

a. In August 1939 the Sporsiam agreement gave autonomy to Croatia. Three months later on the 15th of November, the Pope spoke to a group of Croat pilgrims. He urged them:

" . . . to let the Christian faith radiate to the very corner of public life, encouraged by the thought that in your country friendly relations between Church and State can only contribute to public peace and prosperity". ((CR 161)).

This was clear encouragement for those wishing to make the Sporsiam work, at a time when the Ustasha were opposing the settlement.

b. Following the German invasion, the auditor of the Belgrade Nunciature passed through Zagreb on his way to Rome. Stepinac asked him to recommend to the Pope that the NDH be recognised by the Holy See ((SAB 63)). He was not recommending de-jure recognition. Stepinac himself was refusing this. But de-facto recognition would be in accordance with international law for a neutral country such as the Holy See.

While granting this de-facto recognition of to the NDH, the Holy See continued to give de-jure recognition to the Yugoslav government in exile. Archbishop Ettore Felici, the nuncio in Belgrade since 1938, returned to Rome via Hungary and, although he lived there, retained his accreditation to the Yugoslav government throughout the war ((JFM 148)).

The granting of de-jure or de-facto recognition is not based on whether one country agrees with the politics of another. It is a question of international law. Pavelic was furious at not obtaining the de-jure recognition which Slovakia had received in 1939 ((SAB 65)). But the situation of Slovakia was different as may be seen from the 28 countries, including Britain, the Soviet Union, China and France, which recognised her de-jure. ((See Slovakia booklet on this web site)).

The American Consul remained in Zagreb and informed the NDH government that the United States recognized the sovereignty of Croatia de-facto and that his country was only waiting for an opportune moment to recognize it de-jure. The American representative remained in Zagreb until 22nd June 1941 when, under German pressure, the NDH declared war on America ((IO 1)). Switzerland also granted de-facto recognition ((AK 124)). In October 1943 the Allies signed a secret treaty with the NDH. The Croats agreed not to fire on Allied planes passing over to bomb targets to the north. In return the Allies would stop bombing Croatian cities ((IO 185)). This was a form of de-facto recognition by the Allies.

c. Owing to the small size of the Vatican, several ambassadors to the Holy See, including Niko Mirosevic Sorgio representing Yugoslavia, needed to live in the Italian sector of Rome. Mussolini permitted this, but in July 1941 the Italians accused him of spying and therefore of abusing his accreditation to the Holy See, a neutral country. The Holy See refused to criticise him without proof. The Italians could not produce their evidence because this would have disclosed that they were tapping Vatican telephone lines. When on July 31st he was expelled across the Swiss border, the Holy See protested at this Italian infringement of the Lateran Treaty ((OC 162-4)).

The Holy See continued to recognise the London Yugoslav government as the de-jure government of all Yugoslavia, even though its ambassador was now living in Portugal ((OC 164)). The Communists were the source of much anti-Catholic propaganda, yet the Soviet Union had withdrawn de-jure recognition from the London Yugoslav government in April 1941 and expelled its ambassador ((FM 126)).

d. In May 1941 a delegation led by Pavelic arrived in Rome. It aimed to request the Duke of Spoleto to become king of Croatia; to finalise with Italy the borders of the NDH; and to obtain de-jure Vatican recognition ((SAB 63)). It would have helped Pavelic if Stepinac had been there, but he wouldn't join the delegation ((AHO 49)). As the delegation was planning to visit the Pope,

Stepinac asked his auxiliary bishop Salis-Seewis to accompany it: 'as a matter of form', and he reluctantly agreed ((SAB 63)). The Pope received the Duke of Spoleto as a private individual before he became king. The duke accepted the throne without enthusiasm but never visited Croatia ((SAA 21)). The Pope agreed to see Pavelic privately for half an hour on the 18th of May, providing the Italian press didn't use it for political purposes and Pavelic arrived in his own car ((ADSS:4 491-6)). The story of the Swiss Guard honouring Pavelic comes from Ustasha propagandists ((MB 105)). To underline the private nature of the receptions, neither the duke nor Pavelic were allowed to see the Secretary of State. Later that evening, the Pope received those who had accompanied Pavelic, but they were not treated as an official delegation. They were introduced as "A group of Catholic Croats accompanied by His Excellency Mgr. Francesco Salis-Seewis, titular bishop of Corico, and auxiliary of Zagreb" ((CF 330)).

During his meeting with Pavelic, the Pope repeated several times that it was a private audience. He refused to grant de-jure recognition to the NDH or send an ambassador. A circular was sent to Nuncios and Apostolic Delegates around the world to explain the private nature of the meetings with Spoleto and Pavelic ((SAA 21)). Despite this clear papal policy, Nikola Rusinovac arrived in Rome calling himself: 'The Croatian ambassador to the Holy See' and this was announced over Zagreb radio.

The Vatican Press Office publicly denied Rusinovac's right to call himself an ambassador ((SAB 66)). But the Ustasha controlled Croatian press repeatedly implied that the NDH had been recognised by the Holy See. Anti-Catholic authors quote these Ustasha lies as 'proof' of papal recognition.

e. Soon afterwards, the Pope appointed Abbot Giuseppe Romiro Marcone as his Apostolic Visitor to the Croatian hierarchy ((JFM 149)). This was not a diplomatic title ((JFM 149)) and he was not a nuncio, a legate or an envoy, as stated in some early dispatches. He was not a member of the diplomatic service ((SAA 21)). Neither 'Osservatore Romano' nor 'Acta Apostolicae Sedis' mentioned the appointment and he continued to be listed in church publications as the abbot of Montevergine ((CF 324)).

Lobkowitz, who had replaced Rusinovac as the NDH 'representative' in Rome, hoped Marcone would not lodge with the Archbishop, as this would emphasise his status as an envoy to the hierarchy not to the government ((SAB 66)). To avoid his presence being used by Pavelic to imply he was an ambassador, Marcone and his secretary, Giuseppe Masucci, arrived in Zagreb unannounced on 3rd August.

A hospital chaplain found beds for them in a monastery. When Stepinac was informed on the 6th, he invited them to live in his palace ((SAB 67)).

The Holy See had deliberately chosen two men without diplomatic training, but this left them open to dangers. They were like lambs amongst wolves. Neither could speak Croat and they were treated in a manner which could appear to be that of diplomatic status. Marcone was given precedence on the list of diplomats issued by the NDH ((CF 328)).

A major part of Marcone's work was to report on the religious needs of the country ((JFM 149)). As he was not accredited to the government, this could have made his work difficult. But Pavelic treated him as a de-facto nuncio so as to raise the prestige of the NDH ((JFM 149)). Marcone did not evade this unofficial honour as it enabled him to meet Pavelic and other government leaders to press the views of the Holy See and intercede for Serbs and Jews.

As he toured the country on fact-finding visits, which involved meeting national and local Ustasha officials, pictures were taken of him with these dignitaries. These were used so as to imply that the Holy See recognised the NDH de-jure and supported Pavelic's regime. These Ustasha photographs, together with other Ustasha propaganda statements, are now used by anti-Catholic authors as 'proof' of Catholic support for Pavelic. Yet the Ustasha were complaining to Marcone that the bishops were doing nothing to persuade the Holy See to grant de-jure recognition of the NDH ((RJW 55)).

f. The Pope has been accused of welcoming four groups of Ustasha criminals to Rome. But what are the facts? **i).** In 1941 a hundred Croatian policemen were guests of the Italian police. While in Rome they had an audience with the Pope on 22nd July ((CF 348)). The NDH had been in existence for only fifteen weeks and there was no evidence of these individuals being guilty of crimes. How many, if any, had joined the Ustasha is not known. Eugen Kvaternik was with them and the enemies of the NDH were accusing him of atrocities, but all sorts of people on all sides were being accused of crimes. Without clear evidence that he was guilty, the Pope couldn't refuse to meet him.

The papal words to the police would have been to urge them to carry out their duties in a Christian manner. If today a group of British doctors were at a papal audience, and it was alleged that some were guilty of killing unborn children, it is unlikely the Pope would refuse to speak to the whole group.

- ii).** On 6th February 1942, the Pope spoke to 206 young Croats. The Ustasha media asserted that they were youths in Ustasha uniforms. Anti-Catholics have repeated these Ustasha falsehoods. In reality they were mostly theology students attending Universities in Rome ((CF 348)), so would have been in clerical dress.
- iii).** At the end of that month, the Pope spoke to a group of Croatians resident in Rome ((CF 348)). It is difficult to see how people not living in Croatia could have been guilty of war crimes.
- iv).** In December 1942 Croat youths, who were visiting Rome, met the Pope ((CF 348)). There is no evidence they had committed crimes, or were members of the Ustasha party.
- g.** When Italy switched to the Allied side in 1943, Italians living in Croatia were arrested. The police called on Marcone, who lacked diplomatic immunity. Stepinac claimed that, as a personal representative of the Pope, Marcone was not an Italian. When Stepinac threatened to ring the church bells in protest if Marcone was arrested, he was left alone ((SAA 67)). Marcone continued to live in Yugoslavia after 1945 ((SAA 60)), which shows the Communists recognized that he had not been a diplomat accredited to the NDH.
- h.** During the life of the NDH, the Holy See did not recognise border changes, nor permit changes in Church administration in the Medjumurge district incorporated into Hungary. Nor did She recognise the absorption of part of Dalmatia by Italy.
- i.** The refusal of the Holy See to grant de-jure recognition in 1941 may be contrasted with Her recognition in 1992 ((MB 208)). In 1945, Tito's Communists regime claimed that the various ethnic groups were freely co-operating to build a Socialist Yugoslav Federation. So, as in the Soviet Union, large distinct ethnic peoples were granted the right to leave the federation ((BC 37, CB 53-4)), even though under a Communist dictatorship this could not occur. But with the introduction of free elections, Croatia voted for independence. In this situation the Holy See, as other countries, gave de-jure recognition to the new Croatian state.

D). Forced Conversions

The most serious charge made against the Catholic Church in the NDH is that She instigated the Ustasha's campaign of forced conversions. The 'evidence' for this outrageous accusation may be summarized as follows:

- a. Ustasha leaders declared that Serbs who remained in Croatia would have to become Catholics.
- b. The Ustasha implemented this policy.
- c. The bishops issued regulations in support of this policy.
- d. The bishops did nothing to help the suffering Orthodox Serbs.
- e. The clergy took a leading part in obtaining these conversions.
- f. Hundreds of thousands were converted.

The short answer to these accusations is that the first two items are correct, but the others are untrue. To understand this period, its history needs to be recounted in the manner in which it unfolded.

The Pope, like most observers, was aware of the pent up hatred of many Croats towards the Serbs, and that revenge was highly likely. As part of a letter to Stepinac in May 1941, he urged him to see that the Serbs were not "too harshly treated" ((SAB 63)).

During the first weeks of the NDH people were presenting themselves to priests asking to become Catholics or to be received back into the Church. There were varying motives for this. Some had joined the Serbian Church in order to obtain farmland or gain promotion. Eastern rite Catholics were asking for Eastern rite priests to replace the Orthodox ones who had been imposed on them. Some Catholic girls had become Orthodox so as to marry Serbs, but by now their husbands had fled or been killed. Many of these decided it would be safer to return with their children to the Croatian Catholic community ((SSJ: 63: 81)).

At a time when the government was expelling Serbian clergy so as to destroy all Serbian influence, there was an incentive to disassociate oneself from a church loyal to Serbia. This was especially true of Serbian farmers who had been settled on Croatian land. The most visible way was to leave the Serbian Church and join the Croats in the Catholic Church.

Bosnia had become part of the Austrian Empire in 1878 and, in the following years, several Moslem girls had fled from their families to ask Catholic clergy for protection. Some were wishing to marry a Catholic in the Catholic Church. Moslem politicians accused the bishops of kidnapping and forcing conversions. To stem Moslem agitation, the Austrian authorities passed a law in 1891. It introduced a state supervised process for conversion, including a two-month waiting period ((NM 145)). On May 15th 1941 the government simplified this law to enable local authorities to grant permission for immediate conversion on receipt of a written application ((SAB 75)).

Stepinac sent a circular to his priests giving guidance for dealing with different backgrounds and motives of those approaching them. This included normal enquiries required to validate marriages contracted by Catholics outside their church ((SAB 75, CF 279-281)).

About this time reports were heard of Ustasha bands forceably 'converting' whole villages. On May 22nd Stepinac, in a letter to the minister of the interior, condemned attacks on Jews, Serbs and Gypsies. [See Jewish section for details]. A week later, Stepinac published an explanation of his circular. In it he made clear that admission to the Church was for those who gave evidence of sincere belief, which was a matter of free choice. No other motives were valid. Applicants must receive instruction, come to Mass and share in the religious life of the Church. Great understanding was to be shown to those who had converted to Orthodoxy under pressure and now wished to return ((SAB 75)).

When the government's Panovu Agency sent out 'missionaries', the Church took steps to control its actions ((RP 233)). In the middle of June the five Croatian and the one Slovenian Franciscan Provincials held a meeting. At this they banned Franciscans from membership of the Ustasha. [See Franciscan section for fuller details].

Following an episcopal meeting, the bishops visited Pavelic on June 26th, to emphasise the need to restrain the Ustasha bands. The following day Pavelic issued an order that there were to be 'no arbitrary actions', but it didn't have any noticeable effect ((SAB 77)). By July the Ustasha authorities were facing the problem that Serbs had become Catholics in order to avoid deportation, but in their hearts remained loyal to Serbia. This was the reason why in several villages the Ustasha killed Serbs who had become Catholics ((FM 164)).

On July 14th a joint Ministerial circular informed the bishops who they could convert. Bishop Lach, auxiliary of Zagreb, replied on the 16th that the instructions were against the spirit and teaching of the Church ((SAO 27)). On the same day the government decreed that the Serbian Orthodox should be known as Greco-Oriental ((CF 276)).

Ignoring the Church's objections, the government published its regulations on July 36th. They may be summarized as follows:

i. The Croatian government desires that persons of Greco-Oriental rite should not change over to the Greco-Catholic rite [i.e. Eastern rite Catholic] save in those parishes which already exist and have already received Greco-Orientalists.

ii. Prospective converts must first obtain a permission certificate, costing 30 kuna from the local Ustasha authorities.

iii. Certificates must not be granted, except in exceptional circumstances, to the Greco-Oriental intelligentsia (schoolmasters, priests, tradesmen, artisans and rich peasants).

iv. Where a couple had married in a Catholic Church and their children had been brought up as Catholics, the non-Catholic parent will be granted permission. Where a Catholic married in an Orthodox church and children have not been brought up as Catholics, there should be careful investigation before permission to convert is granted.

v. Orthodox couples married in the Orthodox Church and their children baptised and brought up as non-Catholic cannot be accepted without approval of the Ministry of Justice and Religion.

vi. Peasants, save in exceptional circumstances, may have a certificate of good conduct without difficulty.

vii. Should Greco-Orientalists become Protestant and join the Kulturbund while not having German blood, they shall not have the rights of the German minority.

viii. Jews who become Catholics are still under the Non-Aryan law ((CF 283-5)).

These regulations were not promoting: 'forced conversions'. They were aimed at preventing members of the Serbian middle class outwardly joining a non-Serbian church while privately remaining loyal to Serbia.

In Bishop Lach's letter of July 16th, he had accepted that the state had to protect itself from those who became Catholics so as to enter Croatian society with the intention of destroying it. He had also accepted that converts to the Eastern rite and amongst intellectuals were few. But he had insisted on the right of converts to join the Eastern rite and of middle class Serbs to become Catholics if they so wished.

During the following years there were cases where the clergy accepted the honesty of a prospective convert but local officials would not issue a certificate of permission, or refused entry into the Eastern rite. This led to letters of protest being sent by clergy to the government. Anti-Catholic books have included extracts from these few letters as 'evidence' of the clergy complaining of Ustasha lack of enthusiasm in promoting forced conversions. But once the background is understood, the reason for these letters becomes apparent.

It also needs to be remembered that the NDH was not well organised. While priests were having these difficulties in some areas, in others Ustasha bands were still terrorising peasants into asking to become Catholic Croats. Much depended on the local military situation and the attitude of individual commanders. The efforts of the clergy were mainly devoted to reclaiming the Catholics lost pre-war. But they were also doing their best to protect Serbs from criminal sacrilegious actions.

At first the bishops mainly used private pressure when urging the government to uphold justice and human rights. But by the autumn they were also referring in public to the events of the summer months.

On 26th October 1941 Stepinac preached:

"I would like to draw your attention to one thing if you really want to be true subjects of Christ the King, and that is to love your neighbour, love for the man himself regardless of what his name may be. . . . The danger exists that even those who glory in the name of Catholic, not to mention those who glory in the priestly vocation, may become victims of passion, of hate, and may forget that law which is the most beautiful characteristic trait of Christianity, the law of love. . . ." ((RP 204)).

Despite the chaos, seven bishops got to Zagreb for a meeting on November 17th and 18th ((RP 384)). The Catholic archbishop Josip Ujčić of Belgrade, had learnt from Serbian refugees of Ustasha actions, and had expressed his outrage to the Pope. He was invited to attend as a guest, together with Abbot Marcone ((SAB 77-8)). The bishops agreed a list of decisions and the first ten were despatched to every parish council ((MD 25)). Stepinac sent a copy, which included the final item 11, to Pavelić with a long covering letter dated 20th November.

Note: It appears that a translation by Dr. Sava Bosnitch comes closest to the original, so is used here ((SSJ 5:1:38-47)). The translation in Richard Patey's book ((RP 384-395)), is very similar and also reliable.

"Poglavnik: The Croatian Catholic Episcopate, assembled in annual plenary conference on November 17 and 18, 1941, approved the following decisions concerning the conversions of Orthodox to the Catholic religion:

1. The Conference considers it a dogmatic principle that the solution of all questions pertaining to the conversion of Orthodox to the Catholic religion is exclusively within the province of the Catholic ecclesiastical hierarchy, which alone, according to Divine Law and canonical prescriptions, has the right to lay down rules and regulations for such conversions and, as a result, all extra-ecclesiastical interference in this matter is excluded.

2. For this reason no one, outside the hierarchy of the Catholic Church, has the right to appoint "missionaries" who are to take charge of the conversions of Orthodox to the Catholic Church. Any missionary of this kind must receive his mission and the jurisdiction for his spiritual work from the Ordinary [i.e. bishop or provincial] of the place where he is to act. It is, consequently, contrary to dogma and to canonical regulations that "missionaries" receive their mission, unknown to the Ordinary of the place where they work, from the commissioners of communes, representatives of the civil authority, Ustashi officials of the Religious Section of the State Directorate for Reconstruction, or from any civil authority whatsoever.

3. Every such 'missionary' must in his work be dependent only on the Ordinary of the place where he works, either directly or indirectly through the pastor of the parish in which he is active.

4. The Catholic Church can recognize as valid only those conversions which have been or will be carried out according to these principles.

5. The civil authority may not 'annul' conversions once they have been realized not only according to the laws of the Church, but also according to those of the State.

6. The Croatian Catholic Episcopate elected for this purpose, from among its members, a committee of three persons who are: the President of the Episcopal Conference [i.e. Stepinac]; Bishop of Senj, Monsignor Dr. Victor Buric; and the Apostolic Administrator of the Diocese of Krijevci, Dr. Janko Simrak.

This committee will discuss and settle all questions arising in relation to the conversion of Orthodox to the Catholic religion. This committee will function in agreement, with the Minister of Justice and Religion in those matters which have to do with the civil regulations concerning conversions.

7. [The bishops appointed an executive committee to provide guidance regarding conversions — Dr. Franjo Hermann, Augustin Juretic, Janco Kalaj, Nikola Boric, Krunoslav Draganovic. It would be under the supervision of the Bishop's Committee].

8. Only those may be received into the Catholic Church who are converted without any constraint, completely free, led by an interior conviction of the truth of the Catholic faith, and who have entirely fulfilled the ecclesiastical regulations.

9. [The bishops were here upholding the regulations issued by the Holy See on July 17 and October 18, 1941. These said that converts, especially when they were formerly Catholics of the Oriental rite and left because of threats or pressure, should be directed to Oriental rite parishes where available, but could join the Latin rite if they so desired. The bishops noted that these regulations were broadly in accord with the government regulations of July 30th. The bishops further endorsed the Holy See's insistence that local civil authorities and lay groups must not interfere in religious affairs].

10. The Bishop's Committee for Conversions will organize courses for priests who take charge of conversions to Catholicism. They will receive in these courses practical and theoretical instructions for their work.

11. It is necessary to create amongst the Orthodox inhabitants a psychological basis for conversion. Towards this end they shall not only be promised but actually be guaranteed all civil rights, especially personal freedom and the right to hold property.

All proceedings contrary to law in regard to Orthodox shall be strictly forbidden and they shall be penalized as other citizens through due process of law. And, most important, all private actions in destroying the churches and chapels of the Orthodox or the alienation of their property should be severely prohibited". [This eleventh point was not sent to the parish councils].

Stepinac continued:

". . . We do not accuse the government of the Independent State of Croatia of these mistakes. We do not intend to present these faults as if they were systematic, but rather as the acts of irresponsible elements who are not aware of their great responsibilities and the consequences of their conduct.

We realize that these acts were above all a reaction to the policies of the past twenty years and to the crimes of the Chetniks and Communists who have committed so many outrages against our peaceful Croatian people. We thank Almighty God for the fact that through your efforts, Poglavnik, the situation is on the verge of normalization and that is exactly why the Catholic Episcopate is exposing the foregoing to you, not in recrimination, but in order that in future all acts of irresponsible elements be avoided and . . . by making obvious what, after all, ought to be done to re-set this work in the right direction, without any further futile attempts".

[Stepinac then cited reports sent to him by four bishops giving precise details of atrocities carried out against both the Orthodox and those who had been converted to Catholicism, and of political interference in church affairs. Several of these incidents appear in other sections of this booklet]. Stepinac finalised his letter:

"No one can deny that these terrible acts of violence and cruelty have been committed, for you yourself, Poglavnik, have publicly condemned those which the Ustashi have committed and you have ordered executions because of their crimes. Your efforts to insure the reign of justice and order in the country deserves full recognition.

The Croat nation has been proud of its thousand-year old culture and its Christian tradition. That is why we await for it to show in practice, now that it has achieved its freedom, a greater nobility and humanity than that displayed by its former rulers.

. . . . the Church must condemn all crimes and the excesses of irresponsible elements and inexperienced youths and demand full respect for human beings without regard to sex, religion, nationality or race, for all men are the children of God and Christ died for all, that all men may be saved.

We are sure, Poglavnik, that you share the same opinion and that you will do all in your power to restrain the violence of isolated individuals in order to ensure that responsible authorities rule the country. Should that not happen, all work aiming at the conversion of the schismatics will be illusory".

The resolutions were also sent to the Pope who thanked the bishops for: ". . . the decisiveness and courage with which the bishops had rejected the right of the civil power to give orders concerning religious conversion which must be the result of inner conviction and not outside pressures". ((SAB 78)).

It has been asserted that Stepinac in his covering letter was trying to make excuses for Pavelic. But the letter was not an academic or theological treatise, nor a judgement on the personal guilt of Pavelic. It was aimed to coax him into supporting the moderating elements within the Ustashe leadership. The bishops had doubts as to whether the government would be moved by protests based on moral principles alone, so they also used arguments based on national self-interest. These included national honour; the views of neutrals; economic and social problems and the danger of the Orthodox becoming Moslem or joining the Communist partisans.

The bishops were probably still uncertain as to what degree Pavelic was in full control and whether he was supporting or restraining the fanatics within his party. It must be remembered that a vicious civil war was being fought and the military needs of local commanders frequently dictated policy. In the early days, Serb survivors of atrocities had gone to Zagreb to protest at the actions of local Ustasha units, expecting Pavelic to protect and assist them ((CBA 43)). It was diplomatic for Stepinac to blame minor officials, and government 'mistakes', rather than to condemn Pavelic as a bloodthirsty fiend. This would have achieved nothing for the Serbs or for the Church.

Mile Budek had been removed from the government and the wilder Ustasha bands were being brought under control. Some who had been guilty of atrocities had been executed. There were therefore grounds for hope that government policy could be encouraged to move further in a more peaceful and lawful direction.

The same 'diplomatic' style was used after the war by Dr. Francis Salis, Vicar-General of Zagreb. While Stepinac was in prison, he protested to Tito regarding Communist officials persecuting nuns, those at prayer and the removal of crucifixes etc. He wrote: "We are convinced, Marshall, that you neither know nor approve of these outrageous actions". ((MR 191)).

Yet Salis was aware that as a Communist, Tito aimed to destroy religious belief and the Partisans had already deliberately murdered large numbers of priests and lay Catholics.

It is worth noting that during the summer of 1941, the Serbian Orthodox Church in Serbia asked the Germans to intervene in the NDH to protect the Serbian inhabitants. Some have criticised the wording of its letter as 'ingratiating'. The bishops used pleas rather than demands, hoping this would bring out German magnanimity ((JT 266)). Like the Catholic bishops, they were more interested in gaining relief for those suffering, than providing melodramatic quotes for Allied propaganda or future history books.

During the summer of 1941, individual priests faced terrible dilemmas. If a group of Serbs came to him asking to become Catholics so as to avoid Ustasha terror, what was he to do? To agree would be against Church teaching and law. Also he could appear to be co-operating with the Ustasha gangs. But if he refused he would be guilty of turning away panic stricken men, women and children begging for his help. This was a situation for which their training had not prepared them. Stepinac had to remove priests from parishes when their lives were in danger because they refused to accept 'converts' ((SL 21)).

The committee established in November 1941 by the bishops to watch over conversions, is accused in some anti-Catholic publications as having itself promoted a forced conversion campaign. But, due to the instructions already given and to the situation having improved by the end of the summer, the committee did not do any work ((RP 235)).

Stepinac does however appear to have modified his policy at times. Other bishops probably did so also. This is indicated by an undated 1941 circular found in Stepinac's office:

"When persons of Jewish or Orthodox faith who are in danger of death and wish to convert to Catholicism present themselves to you, receive them in order to save their lives. Do not require any special religious knowledge for the Orthodox are Christians like us and the Jewish faith is the one from which Christianity originated.

The role and task of Christians is first of all to save people. when these sad and savage times have passed those who converted because of belief will remain in our Church and the others will return to their own when the danger is over". ((SAB 85)).

It is not known to how many priests this was sent. It was marked: 'Confidential' ((SAB 85)) and would have gone to those under serious pressure. The last sentence would be politically sensitive if it fell into government hands.

On 27 September 1941, Stepinac had asked Rome for guidance regarding Orthodox property and wrote again on 21 November. A reply of 9th December ((CF 296-7)) set out principles which may be summarized as follows:

- i.** Where a Catholic church already exists, the schismatic [i.e. Orthodox] church should not be touched.
- ii.** When there is no Catholic church and all or nearly all, the schismatics have converted, their church may be used following a simple blessing. A solemn consecration should not be made. [i.e. a temporary measure].
- iii.** 'If the converts are a minority, it is improper to take over the schismatic church; some suitable hall should be adapted.'Property should not be accepted: unless there is certainty regarding the freedom and sincerity of the offer made by the lawful owners'.

By the late spring of 1942 the situation in most areas had changed. The Croatian Orthodox Church was being established and the government was not encouraging forced conversions, although isolated incidents still occurred. Most of those who had outwardly changed their religion had now transferred to the new Croatian Orthodox Church ((MO 50)). An insincere conversion was more likely to be due to reason of business, or social advancement, rather than fear. This was reflected in a public statement by Stepinac on March 5th, 1942:

"People seeking conversion to Catholicism must give evidence of real belief in Catholicism . . . if other motives exist and they are not sinful this is not an obstacle . . . The important thing is that the person wanting conversion should show goodwill. If at the end the priest makes a mistake the fault is not his but that of the aspiring convert, who has abused the goodness of the priest and ignored God's grace freely offered to him". ((SAB 85)).

The Germans and the Ustasha were claiming to be building a 'New Order' in Europe. At the end of May 1942, Stepinac referred to this in a sermon.

"It would be an absurdity to speak of a new order in the world, no matter what its source, if human personality is not valued in that order, the immortal soul of man ... which has its inalienable rights ... It would also be an absurdity to think that the Catholic Church could be afraid of any human force in defending the elemental rights of the human personality and the freedom of conscience". ((RP 269-270)).

During a sermon on 29th June 1942 Stepinac hinted that he had agreed to admit people into the Church, from the motive of Christian charity, when they had asked for protection ((SL 22)).

On March 14th, 1943 ((RP 271-6)), and again on October 25th ((RP 276-281)), he publicly and firmly condemned racialism as it affected the Jews, but his words also applied to the Serbs and Gypsies. [See Jewish section].

During a further sermon to thousands on the 31st of October 1943 he said:

"We have always asserted the value in public life of the principles of the eternal law of God without regard to whether it applied to Croats, Serbs, Jews, Bohemians, Catholics, Mohammedans, or Orthodox. . . . we cannot physically force anyone to fulfill the eternal laws of God. . . . each will answer for his actions (Gal.6:5). For this reason we are unable to answer longer for those hotheads and extremists amongst the clergy. . . .The Catholic Church knows nothing of races born to rule and races doomed to slavery.

The Catholic Church knows races and nations only as creatures of God . . . for it the Negro of Central Africa is as much a man as the European. For it the king in a royal palace is, as a man, exactly the same as the lowest pauper or gypsy in his tent. . . .The system of shooting hundreds of hostages for a crime, when the person guilty of the crime cannot be found, is a pagan system which only results in evil. . . . all the world is fighting for a new social order . . . the "Neue Ordnung". . . .We condemn all injustice; all murder of innocent people; all burning of peaceful villages; all killings, all exploitation of the poor. . . .the Catholic Church upholds that order which is as old as the Ten Commandments of God. We are for that social order which is written not on paper that will fall into dust but which is written by the hand of the living God in the souls of men". ((RP 283-6)).

He added that crimes and injustices were driving people to the forests ((RP 285)). By these words he was accusing the perpetrators of helping the Communists to gain recruits.

The Ustasha leaders were furious and priests were arrested for publicly reading extracts from the sermon. Stepinac was placed under house arrest for several days and the sermon banned from the press ((AHO 20)). But it was made known by leaflets.

Jules Makanec, Minister of Public Instruction, in a long article in 'Nova Hrvatska' of 7th November ((RP 287-291)) extolled racism:

"If a man is the image of God, then European man is so to a special degree: he is, without doubt, more so than a Negro of Central Africa". He attacked clergy who: "spread political confusion and defection among the soldiers. He wrote of: ". . . that high ecclesiastical dignitary who has recently, in his sermons, passed beyond the limits of his vocation and begun to meddle in affairs in which he is not competent".

Anyone who makes an estimate of the number of conversions, should state as to which type he is referring. A total of 200-300,000 has been suggested ((MT 111)). But amongst them would have been Catholics, who had "conformed to the Serbian Church due to pressure or bribery, and were now returning to the church of their youth. It was estimated that pre-war 30,000 Catholic girls had become Orthodox in order to marry ((TB 12)) and many men had done so for career or social reasons. It was generally accepted in Catholic circles that 200,000 Catholics had become Orthodox between the wars due to discrimination and political pressure ((SL 22)).

The Orthodox accepted as 'converts' in order to save their lives, were not considered by the Church as real converts. Others would have been opportunists lacking any true religious commitment. After the war, Stepinac stated that there were very few true conversions amongst the Serbs ((SAA 106)). Confirmation that the policy of 'forced conversions' was not motivated by religion comes from an unexpected source. In the Communist Indictment of Stepinac, read at his 'trial', were the words:

"No one believed at the time, since it was clear to all, that Pavelic or the Ustasha were interested in religion at all, but in terrorism against the Serb people. Everyone was aware that even conversion did not save the people from massacre". ((RP 182-3)).

Popagandists draw a picture of close Church-Ustasha co-operation and a cosy friendship between Stepinac and Pavelic. The killings and 'conversions' reached their peak in July 1941. Yet at that time Stepinac and Marcone were striving to prevent Stepinac's personal friend and subordinate, Canon Loncar, from being executed because of his outspoken defiance of Pavelic.

E). Some of Stepinac's actions

a. As the Yugoslav state collapsed in the spring of 1941, the Orthodox Metropolitan bishop of Zagreb, Dositej Vasic, was arrested and beaten prior to being expelled to Serbia. He told a fellow prisoner that he would have been killed if Stepinac had not firmly intervened on his behalf, and arranged for his release and safe journey to Serbia on May 14th. He also said that his Cathedral would have been burnt down with the Synagogue ((SSJ 53: 97)).

b. When Stepinac heard from Catholic Archbishop Ujcic of Belgrade, that Orthodox bishop Sava Trlajic of Gornji Karlovic was in jail, he went with Marcone to Pavelic to ask for his release. But they found he had already been murdered ((SAB 73)).

c. Orthodox bishop Ireneus Ciric asked Stepinac to help his brother Stephen Ciric, a former Yugoslav government Minister, who was in a concentration camp. Following Stepinac's intervention, Pavelic promised that he would be released ((SL 20)).

d. On May 14th 1941, Stepinac protested to Pavelic that he had heard that 260 Serbian men had been murdered at Glina ((AHO 15)).

e. After the war, Stepinac's secretary, Stephen Lackovic, wrote regarding his Archbishop: "Innumerable were his protests and interventions before Croatian and German authorities in favour of single or entire villages or groups of Serb Orthodox in Croatia, for whom the Archbishop sought mercy. I was there, as his former secretary. I wrote the protests and petitions and accompanied him". ((SL 21)).

f. Stepinac rescued 7-8,000 homeless, orphaned Serbian children of Chetnik and Partisan parents from camps ((RJW 57, SAA 36)). He placed them in foster homes or Catholic institutions and gave instructions that they were not to be brought up as Catholics ((SAA 75)).

g. Stepinac was criticised for putting Catholic monks into the Orthodox monastery of Orahovica. But this building had earlier been taken from the Catholic Pauline Fathers and handed over to the Orthodox. When they left it empty in 1941, Stepinac considered that he had the right to use it for sheltering Trappist monks driven out of Slovenia by the Germans ((SL 23, SAB 163)).

h. In July 1941 he protested to Pavelic regarding young priests being recruited into the Ustasha ((CF 411)).

i. In December 1941, Bogdan Raskovic, secretary to the Ministry of Communications in the Belgrade government, visited Stepinac secretly. He was pleased at all the archbishop had done to save Serbs ((RP 296)).

j. When, during a sermon on December 31st 1941, Stepinac condemned Nazi and Ustasha principles, some threatened to kill him ((AHO 17)).

k. In February 1942 Stepinac protested to the minister of the Interior regarding the destruction of Orthodox churches especially in Senj ((SL 21, AHO 17)).

l. Stepinac sent chaplains and welfare aid to Croats in German and Italian camps in various parts of Europe ((AHU 22)).

m. Stepinac has been criticised for not expelling any priests from the priesthood. but his immediate authority was limited to the priests in the Zagreb diocese. Of these five hundred, it is thought that 15 were in the Ustasha and thirty sympathised with it ((RP 354)). Although a few had to be disciplined for meddling in politics, none were guilty of a crime ((SL 17)). He did suspend priests who had come to Zagreb from other dioceses and were guilty of crimes. Also, as Vicar General of the army, he was able to suspend unworthy chaplains when he had proof of their misdeeds. [See Military Vicar section].

n. He helped a German Communist who was escaping from the Nazis to reach the Soviet Union ((MR 39-40)). He persuaded German and Italian commanders to discipline troops who had committed crimes ((RP 262-6)).

o. When professor Zunic criticised the anti-Ustasha activities of the clergy, Stepinac expelled him from the University ((SSJ 2: 20)).

F). The other bishops

a. Apart from Stepinac, there would have been fifteen other Catholic bishops on the territory of the NDH if all Sees had been filled ((CF 272)).

Wild accusations, contrary to the evidence, have been made that they were mostly members or supporters of the Ustasha.

b. The Croatian bishops welcomed Croatian independence, as did Catholic Croatian publications. For the bishops' enemies, this is enough to label them as 'Ustasha' and guilty of approving the most bestial of atrocities. So it is necessary to separate facts from assertions.

c. By May 1941 over 700 of the 831 priests in German occupied Slovenia had been arrested ((VAL 199)). When they were expelled to Croatia, the Croatian bishops found work for them (300 in the Zagreb diocese alone). They also established a bureau to aid other Slovene refugees through Croatia ((RP 107)).

d. Archbishop Ivan Saric of Sarajevo was accused of being a secret Ustasha member since 1934, of visiting Ustasha units in South America and of meeting Pavelic in Italy. He was also accused of dedicating an ode to Pavelic although the Ustasha had slaughtered Serbs.

Before 1941, Saric was popular amongst the Serbs and this annoyed Serbian political extremists ((TAB. 11 Aug. 1951)). It is agreed that he was a strongly patriotic Croat ((RJW 34)) and among the bishops the most favourably disposed towards the NDH ((SAB 93)). From 1922 Saric had been an archbishop with hundreds of priests, nuns and monks under his authority. He was holding an important place in Bosnian and church life. Is it likely that he would have taken the solemn Ustasha oath to obey the orders of a self-appointed leader of a few hundred armed men living abroad? If he had done so in public, he would have been arrested on his return home. If taken in secret, his detractors would have no evidence. The Italian author who first made this assertion didn't produce any evidence ((CF 271)).

A bishop visiting emigrants, far from their homes, will not exclude individuals from religious and social gatherings because of their political opinions. He is not likely to take notice of allegations made by their political enemies working on behalf of a dictator. Pavelic was a lawyer and former member of the Yugoslav parliament. If the country had continued as a democracy he would most likely have been a prominent member of parliament. Saric had no reason to refuse to speak to him.

His ode was not exceptional nor an encouragement to crime. Saric composed odes about other public figures, such as the Emperor Franz Joseph ((SAA 33)), the Emperor Charles ((SAA 33)), the Peasant Party leader Macek ((SAA 33)), Archduke Ferdinand ((MB 39)).

These people had widely different political agendas, so Saric could not have intended his odes to be a sign of approval of all their political aims and future actions.

Ustasha, Chetnik and Communist publications, each wishing to portray the bishop as a friend of the Ustasha, were keen to reprint this ode from time to time. It is often presented as having been written and published at Christmas 1941, following the Ustasha terrorism of the summer months, and therefore was condoning these horrors.

But the ode, 'When the Sun Shines', first appeared in the April-May 1941 edition of 'Vrhbosna' in Sarajevo ((EP 65)). This was during the first days of Croatian independence before the ethnic fighting and atrocities.

The archbishop took possession of a Jewish owned house ((CF 411)). It is claimed that this shows he was anti-Semitic. But this conclusion does not necessarily follow from what had occurred. Providing charity while not appearing to condone evil acts can pose ethical problems. When war has destroyed much accommodation and a town is full of refugees, a local administrator will frequently grant the use of empty properties to those in need. It appears that a Hungarian Jew left some properties empty when he had fled. In 1943 one was handed to Saric. Whether he used it for housing refugees, for relief organisations or other purposes we do not know. However, some Catholic priests and lay people felt that its use could imply the condoning of German violence.

They wrote to Marcone and he asked a government Minister to exchange the property for another or grant funds ((CF 411)). These funds would presumably have been used to repair another property. This event does not prove the Archbishop was acting in a reprehensible manner or was anti-Semitic. These Catholics in Sarajevo must have had a sharp sense of justice when they appealed to the Pope's representative regarding one empty house in the middle of a war. If this was the most controversial of Saric's acts, it points to him not being guilty of anything more serious.

e. Jozo Garic of Banja Luka. On 10th April 1941, Orthodox bishop Paton Javanovic of Banja Luka, refused to obey a government order to leave the country ((SAA 24)). When threatened, he contacted Garic on May 4th to ask whether he could gain him a few days respite. Garic obtained an assurance from the authorities that the bishop would be safe for two or three days while he prepared to leave. But that night six thugs broke into his palace and murdered him ((SAA 24-25)). Garic then broke off all relations with the government ((SSJ 2: 20)).

In a letter to Stepinac on 4th November 1941, he gave evidence of Ustasha crimes at Banja Luka and Stepinac used this information in his letter to Pavelic sixteen days later.

f. Aloysius Mistic of Mostar. He issued a circular to his priests on 30th June 1941 which was read from all pulpits. It informed the congregations that those who murdered and took the possessions of others would not be granted absolution ((SAA 32)). This was equivalent to excommunication.

On August 18th, he wrote to Stepinac deploring what was occurring ((SAA 32)). It was Mistic who in a letter dated 7th November 1941 made known to Stepinac the Ustasha atrocity at Surmanci near Mostar ((SAA 32)). This atrocity is mentioned in most books concerning this period, yet Mistic's part in exposing it, is usually ignored.

Bishop Mistic died in late 1941 and in April 1942, the Pope chose Dr. Petar Cule to replace him ((SAB 95)). At first Pavelic objected but, when threatened with excommunication by the Holy See, backed down ((SAB 96)). To stress the unity of the Church in the face of Pavelic's antagonism, both Archbishops, Stepinac and Saric, consecrated Cule as bishop in October 1942, with Abbot Marcone also being present ((SAB 96, CF 412)).

g. Pavao Butorac of Kotor and Administrator of Dubrovnik was accused of carrying a revolver. This is only hearsay. He was the bishop who, on 4th November 1941, wrote to Stepinac condemning the 'missionaries' sent by the Ustasha: ". . . in whose hands a revolver might be better placed than a crucifix". ((RP 391)). It is possible he said something similar to people in his own diocese and a garbled story reached the Chetniks in the forests.

h. Antun Aksamovic of Djakovo was accused of urging forced conversions. Yet Stepinac said he was the most anti-NDH of all the bishops ((SAB 93)). He was one of those singled out for praise by Rapotec, in his report to the Yugoslav government in London, as: "upholding Christian values". ((SAB 94)). Aksamovic had openly suggested the Orthodox could become Catholics to save their lives and return to Orthodoxy after the Ustasha had gone ((SAB 93)). He was active in saving Jews from deportation ((SAB 70)), and Pavelic's chaplain complained that he was not giving support to the government ((RJW 55)).

He was a cheerful character and managed to be on good terms with the officials of both the NDH and Tito's government. They each tried to win him over. The NDH awarded him a medal during the war and the Communists one in 1959 ((SAA 236)). This doesn't prove he was an Ustasha and a Communist. When a

telegram of congratulations to Pavelic was sent in his name, he publicly repudiated it ((SSJ 2: 20)).

i. Klement Bonefacic of Split was another bishop praised by Rapotec, the representative of the London government ((SAB 94)).

j. Dionizije Njaradi of Krizevci (the Eastern rite diocese) died in April 1941. So Janko Simrak, his auxiliary bishop took over the administration of the diocese. In April 1942 the Pope appointed him as its bishop ((SAB 55)).

Pavelic bitterly opposed his installation ((SL 23)) because he was anti-Ustasha, but the threat of excommunication quietened him ((SAB 96)). Simrak was installed on 18th August 1942 ((CF 412)). Despite his record, his enemies accused him of supporting attacks on the Serbs. It is claimed that a letter exists in which he appointed Fr. Naned Gavrilovac to the Orthodox parish of Bolfan. But this parish had been an Eastern rite Catholic parish until the Yugoslav government imposed a Serbian Orthodox priest. The parishioners had now asked for a Catholic priest ((SL 23)).

k. When the bishops sent their joint protest to Pavelic in November 1941, it was signed by Stepinac, Boniface of Split, Aksamovic of Djakovo, Srebrnic of Krk, Pusic of Harvar, Buric of Senj and Simrak the Apostolic Administrator of Krizevci ((SAB 78)). The See of Ragusa was vacant ((CF 332)) and some bishops were unable to attend due to travel difficulties ((SAB 78)). But from the letters sent by Garic, Mistic, Saric and Butoric prior to the meeting, as mentioned above, we can see they would have agreed with its resolutions condemning Ustasha sinful actions.

l. At the end of the war several bishops escaped to the West. Some authors present this as evidence that they were guilty of crimes because unwilling to stand trial. But these bishops had been particularly vilified by the Communists and would have been murdered on capture or following a mock trial. By saving their lives they were able to serve other refugees who had escaped to the west.

m. When reports of 'forced conversions' reached London, the Yugoslav government wrote to the Pope on 9th January 1942 asking him to condemn and restrain the Croatian bishops. This letter is sometimes offered as evidence of the guilt of the bishops. But it was based on third-hand allegations coming out of Serbia. Sixteen days later the Holy See replied that the Croatian Episcopate had been concerned when large numbers had asked to become Catholics. So a Bishop's Committee had been established to ensure conversions were due to conviction not constraint ((AHO 60)).

When the Yugoslav government obtained fuller details from the territory of the NDH, it sent a document to the Pope agreeing that the conduct of the bishops had been correct and in accordance with Canon Law ((O.R. Oct. 7-8, 1946)).

G). The Franciscan Order

Following the conquest of Bosnia by the Moslems in the 17th century, it was mainly Franciscan priests who served the Catholics. Their organisation could more easily maintain a low profile than bishops. In 1878 Bosnia became an Austrian protectorate. A hierarchy was established in 1881 ((NCE 14:1086-9)). Diocesan priests took over many parishes, but in 1941 the Franciscan clergy still predominated throughout Bosnia. In the NDH as a whole there was one Franciscan to every two diocesan priests ((CF 411)).

The Croatian Franciscan seminary was situated near Siena in northern Italy ((SAA 29)), and when Pavelic established his Ustasha camp close by, the young Croatians came to know one another. Many seminarians saw no conflict between a priest's ministry and his support for the right of Croats to wage armed resistance to Serbian rule. But for a few, 'nationalism', became their 'religion' and took precedence over loyalty to the Church. These men continued their studies and were ordained, so providing them with a clerical cover for their political activities.

An Ustasha paper in June 1941, referred to the time before the German invasion: "Things that you probably did not know were then taking place. Ustasha disguised as monks came to villages carrying all sorts of things under their robes, and prepared the people". ((EP 52)). Other priests were committed to both nationalism and the priesthood, and when their superiors forbade involvement in politics, some rebelled against Church authority but the vast majority were both patriotic to Croatia and led lives of religious dedication.

In April 1941 the Ustasha agents within the Franciscans took minor military actions against the Yugoslav forces. These Ustasha priests deserted their parishes and assumed posts in central and local administration, or joined Ustasha military units as government appointed chaplains.

In the Zagreb diocese, where much of the population was educated, priests were banned from involvement in politics. But many Bosnian villagers relied on their priests to speak up for their human and social rights. So the Franciscans still permitted their members to join political parties, providing they were not specifically anti-Christian ((RP 363-4)).

As soon as communications were restored following the German invasion, the Franciscan General in Rome made contact with the Provincials in Croatia. In a letter dated 14th May he wrote:

"Recommend to the brothers to fulfill their duties conscientiously and treat involvement in public affairs with much caution". ((OFM)).

On the 22nd he spoke to the Provincial of Dalmatia by phone. He seems to have heard disquieting news, because the following day he wrote to all the Provincials urging them to:

"Recommend to brothers to engage in their religious and priestly duties and not in public business and politics, where great caution is required. . . . to be just and noble in all things. Never to render evil for evil, nor persecute the innocent, nor support hatred. With meekness, carefully look after the illustrious name and honour of this Croatian nation. He especially advised then to have nothing to do with religious persecution against the Orthodox and the Jews. The Catholic Church can never approve the persecution of those who, in good faith, live in another religion. They must not repeat or approve religious propaganda against non-Catholics. In particular he makes himself blameworthy if he puts an external distinction on adherents of other religions and expels them from the soil where they have lived for centuries. The past injustices against Catholics must be corrected, but Croats must not do against others, especially the Orthodox, the same or perhaps greater injustices than that done by the previous Belgrade government". ((OFM)).

The Provincial of Dalmatia was in Rome from the 27th May till 2nd June. It was arranged that the Provincial in Zagreb would call all the Provincials in Yugoslavia to a conference. The five Croatian and one Slovenian Provincials, together with the Archbishop of Belgrade and Abbot Marcone, met on the 12th and 13th of June. It was agreed that a Franciscan could not be a member of the Ustasha because its constitution was not in accord with Catholic doctrine. They also recognised the need for all to hold prudent reservations regarding public and political affairs. The decisions were sent to all Franciscans in all the Provinces ((OFM)).

For the Bosnian Provincial the implementation of these directives was not simple. If a good priest resigned from his village civic committee, fanatics could take control and thereby increase the dangers for the Serbs. The Provincial needed time for consultation and persuasion. But on the 24th July the Franciscans in Rome issued detailed instructions allowing no room for compromises:

- 1.** Strive prudently but resolutely for the implementation of the conclusion adopted at the provincial's meeting . . . which bans any Franciscan from being a member of the Croatian Ustasha movement.
- 2.** Endeavour most resolutely that Franciscans attend only to spiritual and ecclesiastical affairs, leaving secular and political business to laymen and their control.
- 3.** Franciscans must not take part in the persecution of Serbs and Jews, in the confiscation of their personal possessions and land, in the banishment of Serbs to Serbia and the re-settling of Croats in places vacated by Serbs.
- 4.** In keeping with this, no Franciscan shall be member: a) of committees or courts investigating offences committed by Chetniks and other Serbs against Croats, and meting out punishment to the above-mentioned: b) of committees or offices dealing with re-settling of Croats in places vacated by Serbs and on land taken away from them, and: c) of committees or offices dealing with the banishment of Serbs and confiscation of their property.
- 5.** Franciscan parishes, monasteries or provinces must not accept as gift or buy property and personal possessions which belonged to Serbs and Jews before the war.
- 6.** Insofar as they are able, Father Provincials and more prominent Franciscans should spare no effort in pleading with the authorities and leading officials in today's Independent State of Croatia not to carry out reprisals, not to persecute the innocent, not to confiscate property and not to forcibly banish Serbs from their homes.
- 7.** Wherever the occasion arises, Franciscans should protect Serbs and Jews both from the populace and State authorities. Insofar as they are able, Futher Provincials and monastery superiors should extend cautious, clandestine and material assistance to the persecuted and needy Serbian brothers.

8. Franciscans must not take part in forcible and mass conversion of Orthodox believers to the Catholic faith. They must refuse to administer any Orthodox parish even if Their Eminences the local Ordinaries should offer it to them. Of course, individual conversions to Catholicism out of conviction and from free choice are permitted and desirable today as always.

9. All clergy (parish priests and chaplains) in Franciscan parishes, where Catholics are intermingled with Serbs and people of other faiths, who are irascible and unreasonable, should be removed and replaced by mature, honest and prudent people.

10. If a Franciscan carried away by national fervour, offends against obligatory tolerance towards people of other faiths and against Christian love for fellow-men, he should be punished in accordance with the gravity of his error, and in the first place by transferring him to another area where he will not have the opportunity for similar actions ((SSJ 10: 56)).

The accusation by anti-Catholics that the Franciscan Order organised an orgy of killings is based on the acts of a few individuals. An examination of how the Order treated its renegade friars destroys this myth.

Accusation 1. Fr. Tomislov Filipovic-Majstorovic, the Franciscan commandant of Jasonovac concentration camp attended Mass daily till the end of the war ((EP 255)). He was responsible for forty thousand Jews, Gypsies and Serbs being slaughtered there.

Answer: Filipovic, sometimes known as Miroslav, was vicar of Petricevac parish. During 1941, after repeated warnings to keep out of Ustasha politics in Banja Luka, his Provincial transferred him to Rama. In February 1942 the Banja Luka coal mines were destroyed and an Ustasha unit was ordered to undertake a punitive expedition against the nearby Serbian villages of Drakulici, Motike and Sargovac. These villages were situated in Filipovic's former parish. Without permission, he returned to Banja Luka, became chaplain to the unit, and went with it to attack the villages ((RP 364-5)).

At a trial held by his Franciscan superiors, he claimed he went in order to identify the few Catholics in the villages so they would not be harmed. The Catholics, being Croats, would not have been involved in the destruction of the Mines. His superiors refused to accept his defence and expelled him from the Order in May 1942. Soon afterwards he left the priesthood and the Church ((SAA 28)). Stories of him as an ex-Catholic being at Mass daily till 1945 are without foundation.

After he had left the Church, he became an Ustasha officer at the Jasenovac camp, serving under Vjekoslav Max Luburic, the camp commander ((MTA 152)). It was then that he committed the acts for which he became notorious.

Accusation 2. Fr. Justin Medic was a personal chaplain to Pavelic.

Answer: Medic was a chaplain in the Yugoslav army until it was disbanded. He then made himself a chaplain with the Ustasha militia. When he refused to obey his Provincial's order to leave this position, he was suspended. In response, he left the Franciscan Order ((RP 365)).

Accusation 3. Fr. Hinko Prejic was a member of the Ustasha.

Answer: Preejic was another chaplain with the Yugoslav army and, when it was disbanded, returned to his monastery. Later, following disputes with his superiors, he left the Franciscan Order ((RP 365)).

Accusation 4. Fr. Radoslav Glavas was an Ustasha leader who worked closely with Stepinac to obtain forced conversions.

Answer: Glavas was a young and energetic Franciscan who abandoned his parish in April 1941 to go to Siroki Brijeg. It is said he led the disarming of the local police and captured the post office ((EP 54)). In May he accompanied Pavelic to Rome ((TB 25)), and was then appointed by Pavelic to be head of the religious section in the Ministry of Justice and Religious Affairs ((SAB 75)). It was from this position that he became involved in trying to dictate to the bishops who they could and could not convert. (See 'forced conversions' section).

In February 1942 Glavas on behalf of the government, aided the formation of the Croatian Orthodox Church ((MO 40)). He ignored all Church orders for priests to cease political activities. He met Stepinac on once only ((SL 12)).

Accusation 5. Fr. Ilija Tomas was an Ustasha and took part in killings.

Answer: Tornas appears to have joined the Ustasha in 1937. As soon as the Germans invaded he deserted his parish and, together with another rebel priest, took military action. He became a local Commissioner ((EP 54)) and as such was allegedly involved in massacres. Soon afterwards, Chetniks killed him, allegedly with 22 knife wounds ((TB 37)). So his superiors did not have the opportunity to bring him to trial.

Accusation 6. Fr. Zvonko Brekalo assisted in massacres at three villages and later was an officer at Jasenovac.

Answer: When Stepinac heard of his shocking conduct at Banja Luka, he took steps in January 1943 to have him removed from his position as an army chaplain. He was suspended from the priesthood ((RP 352)). This was before he moved to Jasenovac.

Accusation 7. Fr. Brkljacic became an Ustasha officer serving at Jasenovac, and Fr. Bojanovic became prefect of Gospic, where he helped in a massacre ((SAA 28)).

Answer: If they did so they were deserting their religious vocations. Both the accusations were heard second-hand ((SSJ 2: 20)).

Accusation 8. There were other Franciscan murderers.

Answer: Some accusations may be true. The Franciscan superiors took action when necessary and able, but they did not treat a man as guilty merely because his enemies said so. Fr. Peter Berkovic was accused of crimes, yet Stepinac's secretary said he was innocent ((SL 13)).

Accusation 9. Most Ustasha leaders, such Artukovic, Djumandzic and Glavas were educated in Franciscan schools.

Answer: Ethnic hatreds were strongest where communities were intermingled and competing. So it was amongst the Croats living in Bosnia, and in the Serb districts of pre-war Croatia, where most of the extremists were to be found ((CBA 43)). Mirko Puk was from the Serb tpwn of Glina south of Zagreb ((SSJ 17:78)). Pavelic came from central Bosnia ((MTA 124)). Vjekoslav Vrancic was from Mostar in Bosnia ((IO 28)). Artukovic was from Ljubuski, southwest of Mostar ((IO 17)), as was Josip Dumandzic ((EP 60)). Budek was born in the Serb town of Grocac ((IO 18)) in Dalmatia.

As the Franciscans provided the high school education for Croats in these areas, nearly all Croatian Bosnian leaders of all parties would have attended them. From election results, we know that the huge majority of former pupils supported the moderate Croatian Peasant Party while only 10% voted for the 'Party of Rights' ((FCL 4)).

Other former students promoted the Yugoslav Ideal, while some became Partisans or non-political. Only a few joined the Ustasha and fewer still committed crimes. The Moslem Vice-President of the NDH also came from Bosnia ((RL 600)).

Accusation 10. Many Franciscans were executed, following war-crime trials.

Answer: Priests acted as chaplains to men serving in the Croatian conscripted army (the Domobran), not the Ustasha. If a unit was ordered to execute hostages, this doesn't mean the chaplain approved.

The Communists routinely executed captured officers and priests with the excuse that they were 'war criminals'. A secret trial, execution and a public notice that they were collaborator with the Ustasha, was standard practice ((MTA 177)).

A 'war-crime trial' of 200 intellectuals, including 15 priests, was held at Dubrovnic. The trial for each victim lasted one minute ((TB 48)). Modesto Martincic, the Franciscan Provincial, said he was sure most priests were not guilty of the crimes for which they were accused, at least not to the extent maintained in the accusations ((RP 368)).

Accusation 11. Twenty-eight friars at Krizevci convent were found guilty.

Answer: The Communists executed them for 'hostile acts', yet none had taken up arms. Most were known for their hostility to fascism and there was no semblance of a trial ((RP 472)).

Accusation 12. The Prozor monastery was an Ustasha stronghold.

Answer: The size of monasteries made them attractive places for armies to hold. If Ustasha or Dombran troops requisitioned them, there was little the monks could do. A Communist writer claims the prior of Prozor called the Ustasha to defend it ((MD 191)). As the Partisans were killing priests who fell into their hands, this is possible. When they captured Prozor the Communists massacred all the monks without trial, so needed an excuse to justify their action. When they captured the convent at Siroki Brijeg, fifteen monks were drenched with petrol and set on fire ((SH 212)).

Accusation 13. All Franciscans were Ustasha.

Answer: The Chetniks and Communists labelled all those who supported Croatian independence as 'Ustasha'. In 1941 there were hundreds of Franciscan priests and brothers in the NDH. It is possible that as many as a dozen committed crimes. Another thirty may have given the Ustasha political support but were free of crime. The huge majority were loyal to Croatia while persevering in their priestly duties. The Assistant Defence Council at Stepinac's "trial", said that a Franciscan friend of his was forced to receive 'converts'.

He did so by saying: "I baptize thee, and you are going to continue to believe as you have up to now. And when the time comes, you will make your own decision freely". ((RP 237)). Scores were martyred simply because, as priests, they were known to oppose Communism.

The Croatian Franciscan Institute of St. Girolimo in Rome is often labelled as a 'Centre of Ustashism'. Yet in May 1941, although situated in fascist Italy, it was not flying the Croatian flag. It was only when he was warned that a group of the men Pavelic had brought with him to Rome, were on their way to the Institute, that the rector hoisted two Croatian flags to avoid trouble ((SAB 65)). This incident took place over a month after the NDH was founded, so indicates a distinct lack of enthusiasm for the NDH at this Croatian seminary.

H. The Jesuit Order

Assertions that Jesuits led groups of bloodthirsty Ustasha to burn Serbian villages ((DM 269-270)), and helped the NDH in other ways, are pure fantasy. In 1941, Fr. Karlo Grimm the provincial, threatened to expel any of the 226 Jesuits in Yugoslavia who involved himself either in government activities (military or political) or in those of the Partisans ((VAL 198, 207)).

Allegations have been made that Jesuits Fathers Cvitan and Lipovac, led Ustasha bands of butchers ((CF 298)). Neither was a Jesuit ((VAL 204, 212)). Further accusations refer to Fr. Dragutin Kamber and Stefan Lackovic, yet again neither was a Jesuit ((VAL 212)). The first was a priest of the Sarajevo diocese ((SL 15)) and the second worked in Zagreb as Stepinac's personal secretary ((SL 15)). It is said that the Ustasha vice-governor of Bosnia during the first days of the NDH, Filix Niedzielski, was a Jesuit priest. Not only was he not a Jesuit, but never a priest ((SL 15)).

After the war, the Communists showed author Carlo Falconi three letters sent by Fr. Anton Wurster from Rome to Zagreb, to prove that Wurster was actively working in Rome for the Ustasha government.

Most Jesuits, including Fr. Wurster, had admired the Austrian Empire and had considered its dismemberment to be unwise ((VAL 206)). Much European informed opinion, including that of Winston Churchill ((VM 62)), supported the continued existence of this multi-cultural Empire. But once Yugoslavia had been established the Jesuits as a body accepted it.

Wurster was well known for his separatist views, so left the country in 1935 ((VAL 206)). In 1941 the NDH government asked Wurster to work for it. He was asked to send confidential reports on the effectiveness of Rusinovac, the inexperienced NDH 'ambassador' to the Holy See. By January 1942 Wurster had arrived in Rome and, as this work was in defiance of his superiors, he had to resign from the Order ((VAL 206)). Following Wurster's reports, Rusinovac was replaced on 31st July 1942 by Erwin Lobkowicz (Lobkovic). Wurster, no longer a Jesuit, became his secretary.

Although Wurster's political work was carried out after he had ceased to be a Jesuit, his correspondence is of interest. In his three reports to Zagreb, he mentions that the editor of *L'Osservatore Romano*, the head of Vatican Radio, the Jesuits, the Curia and Vatican officials in general, were all anti-Ustasha ((CF 356-8)). He also reported that the Franciscan Superior and the Rector of the St. Girolimo Institute (Croatian Catholic Institution in Rome) were both anti-Ustasha. In 1943 he confirmed that the Vatican had a regular link with the London Yugoslav government ((CF 361, 369)).

An article by a Croatian Jesuit in the Jesuit owned 'Civilita Cattolica' published in Rome, has been offered as firm proof of the Jesuits glorifying the 'Catholic Ustasha Crusaders'. But this article appeared in early 1941, before the German invasion. Written in preparation for the proposed June 1941 Zagreb Eucharistic Congress, it was a survey of Catholic organisational growth in Yugoslavia, including the pre-war Catholic Crusaders. It had nothing to do with Ustasha or other political groups ((VAL 204-5, 212)).

I). Diocesan Priests

A few diocesan priests joined the Ustasha and some of these committed crimes. But it is false history to present them as typical or acting with the approval of their bishops. Let us examine some of the names and events which frequently appear in anti-Catholic literature, and see how the Church treated them.

a. Fr. Ivan Mikan, curate of Ogulin, was accused of having spoken in favour of the forced conversion of Serbs ((EP 84, 160)). This is quite possible. He deserted his diocese of Senj ((SL 16)), moved to Zagreb, and joined Pavelic's delegation to Italy in 1941 ((EP 74)). Being away from his diocese, he had no authority to act as a priest. The government wanted him installed as parish priest of the prestigious church of St. Mark's, in central Zagreb. But Stepinac refused. He died in 1944 ((SL 15-16)).

b. Fr. Ivo Guberina is accused of many crimes and of being head of Catholic Action ((EP 108)). Excerpts from an article he wrote, 'Sacred Croatia', is considered to be major evidence of Catholic recruitment for the Ustasha:

"The Ustasha movement would prefer these foreign and hostile elements (i.e. the Serbs] to become freely assimilated, or for this poison to be removed from the body (and go back to the places from which it came). But . . . if they intend to remain in Croatia as a fifth column [i.e. spies and traitors] so as to undermine her or, worse, take up arms then, according to all the principles of Catholic morality, they must be viewed as aggressors and the Croatian State has a right to annihilate them by the sword . . . These are principles on which natural law is founded and hence every Catholic is obliged in conscience to help in carrying them out. . . . If the Ustasha movement . . . has taken on the task of achieving this end in Croatia, to put difficulties in its way would imply ignorance of what the Catholic mission is . . . it would be a sin against the Creator to stand aside from the final struggle. . . . It is the Catholic's duty to be an instrument of the complete expression of what is essential and positive in the Ustasha movement". ((CF 299-300)).

What do we know of Guberina? He appears to have joined the Ustasha in Italy during 1940 ((SAA 61)). Following the German invasion, he deserted his diocese, and lived for two and a half years in Zagreb ((SAB 102)).

He was not one of Stepinac's priests, and the Archbishop on 25th June 1943 forbade him exercising any priestly function within the diocese. The reason given was his conduct and actions, and the way he had scandalized the faithful ((RP 351)).

Guberina's article was published ten weeks later on 7th October ((CF 299)). It was his reply to Stepinac's action. So instead of being: 'head of Catholic Action', as alleged ((EP 108)), he was a suspended priest defiantly asserting that not only was the Archbishop wrong to place difficulties in the way of the Ustasha, but that he didn't understand Catholic teaching and duty.

c. Fr. Victor Gutic is often mentioned as a 'Catholic Ustasha'. But in pursuing his hatred of Serbs, he had little regard for the Church. In the summer of 1940 he had travelled secretly through Bosnia, building up the Ustasha organisation and appointing Ustasha officials ((EP 53)). In 1941 he became the prefect of Banja Luka and allegedly was involved in the murder of Orthodox bishop Platon ((EP 72, 98)).

He ranted and raved, calling for: "the abhorrent race" of Serbs to be wiped out and their bodies used as fertilizer: "for our fields which will become forever Croat". ((EP 81)). In one district near Prnjavor, where three churches had been seized by the Serbs, he urged the local people "You should take them over tomorrow and write on them Hrvatski Dom" [Croat Centre]. ((EP 81)).

He didn't say the fields would be forever Catholic, or that the notice should read 'Catholic Church' or 'Catholic Centre'. As a racial fanatic he saw everything in terms of Croat or Serb and ignored the Church. At the end of the war the Americans imprisoned him in Italy, where he went out of his mind ((EP 81)). Whether he should be considered evil, mad or both, his actions do not justify holding the Church responsible for the crimes of a rebel half-crazy priest.

d. It is alleged that an unnamed priest in July 1941 said:- "Until now we have worked for the Catholic Faith with Missal and Crucifix. Now the time has come for us to go to work with rifle and revolver". ((FM 167)). This may be true, and was possibly said by Guberina or Gutic. But the very words show the speaker to be a traitor to Christ and to his Church.

e. Fr. Ante Djuric of the Zagreb diocese was said to be a criminal. It is true that Stepinac recalled him from his priestly duties. He had become involved in politics, but there is no evidence that he committed any crime to justify his execution following a Communist 'trial' ((SL 19)).

f. Fr. Kerubin Segvic was executed by the Communists as a criminal. This priest was 74 years old. In 1931 he had written a book explaining his scientific theory that the Croats were descended from the Goths ((SL 17)). He went with Pavelic to Rome in May 1941, but there is no evidence he was guilty of any crime.

g. It has been alleged that Wilhelm Haeger was ordained a priest in 1944 and through him Stepinac had close connections with the Gestapo. This is another baseless allegation. Haeger's wife was in a Yugoslav prison before the war and Stepinac intervened to save her. In gratitude, Haeger contributed to restoring the shrine at Maria Bistrica. His German sounding name led some to allege, without any evidence, that he was a Gestapo agent. Being a married man, not of the Eastern rite, he could not be ordained a priest ((SL 25)).

h. Accusations against Vilim Cecelja, a priest of the Zagreb diocese, will be discussed in the 'Military Vicar' section.

i. It is said that a priest was appointed President of the Ustasha Central Propaganda Office. The person appointed was not a priest ((SL 15)).

j. It is alleged that the first Ustasha meeting in 1929 was held in a house of a Zagreb Canon. But at that time a layperson lived there. The Canon moved in several years later ((SL 12)).

i. The NDH government wanted parishes to be founded for the 'converted'. Hundreds of Slovene refugee priests were available, but the government strongly opposed their or other non-Croat priests being appointed. It said: ". . . their co-operation would be a terrible blow to the Croatian national standing in these parishes". ((EP 165)). This is another illustration that the government's motivation was not religious but one of extreme nationalism.

j. There were 1,800 diocesan priests in the NDH ((CF 411)). It is difficult to estimate how many joined the Ustasha and how many of these were guilty of crimes. The huge majority carried out their religious duties honourably in very difficult circumstances. Many of them were martyred (by the Communists more than by the Serbs). Tito had held a particular dislike of the clergy since his youth ((MTA 313)). Some of the martyrs are being considered for recognition as saints ((SSJ 3: 75 and 61: 75)).

CHAPTER IV SPECIAL ASPECTS

1). Mile Budek

Those accusing the Catholic Church of instigating forcible conversion, assert that Milo Budek was a militant Catholic leader. They quote statements made by him in 1941.

Budek as a Croat was baptised a Catholic when a baby, but this does not mean his adult views were consistent with Catholic teachings. His hatred of the Serbs had become intense following being beaten in the 1930s by Serbian police agents during broad daylight ((SH 71)). As the leading Croatian writer of his time ((SAA 2)), he became Minister of Education in 1941. He was at a banquet on 6th June 1941 at which the Serbian rising of three days earlier would have dominated conversation.

He was asked a question and made a defiant response:

"We shall kill some of the Serbs, we shall expel others, and the remainder will be forced to embrace the Roman Catholic Faith. These last will in due course be absorbed by the Croat part of the population. We have three million bullets". ((FM 123)).

There is some doubt as to whether he uttered these words ((MTA 312)). But a report or rumour soon spread that he had said one third of Serbs would be killed, a third expelled and a third converted ((SAA 22)). If we accept that he said these words or a something similar, it is instructive to analyse them. The reason given for the need to convert the Serbs was so that they would: 'be absorbed by the Croats'. These were racial, cultural, military and political objectives, not religious. Those Serbs or part-Serbs remaining in the NDH would have to bring up their children as Croats, and Catholicism was seen as a cultural identifying mark of being Croatian. This was the same mentality as that exhibited by those Serbs who had used Orthodoxy as a means of promoting Serbian culture and nationality.

A month later Budek said:

"Our whole work is based on our fidelity to the Church and the Catholic faith, for history teaches us that if we had not been Catholic, we should have ceased to exist". ((SAA 22)).

At a first reading this appears to show loyalty to the Church, but what he meant by the twice used 'we', was 'Croats'. His 'fidelity to the Church' was not to Her as a religion that preached love of neighbour. It was to Her as a key cultural, therefore nationalist, force within Croatian life.

In the 1930s the bishops had attempted to publish a modern Croatian translation of the Bible. They had asked the Croatian Banovina's Minister of Education in 1939 for financial assistance, but the Germans invaded before a decision could be given. So a fresh application was made to Budek when he assumed this post. He refused the request ((SAB 49)). Some books claim he was blindly obedient to the alleged desire of the bishops to massacre hundreds of thousands so as to 'convert' others. Yet he refused the bishops this simple financial request.

In another speech he boasted that Ustasha agents had been ordained priests, so they were able to spread their political ideas under the cover of being sincere priests ((EP 52-3)). Whether this is true or not, a loyal Catholic would never boast of such a sacrilegious misuse of the priesthood.

2). Jasenovac Camp

Anti-Catholic authors have asserted that Catholic priests and laymen had run the Jacenovac concentration camp as part of a campaign of terror.

The reality was very different. In the spring of 1941 camps were established to the south of Zagreb, on the banks of a fifty-kilometre stretch of the Sava river, which formed the border between Croatia and Bosnia. Prisoners were set to work draining the swampy land. The village of Jasenovac was in the centre of this sparsely populated area, so the whole complex of camps is often referred to by this name.

During wars all nations establish camps for military and political prisoners and those thought likely to be disloyal. So at first there was no reason for the Church to comment. Some of the camps maintained reasonable conditions, but in others thousands died of overwork, poor food, disease or execution.

The priest in the village of Jasenovac was not permitted access to the camp nearby ((MB 145-161)), but when he heard stories of atrocities and killings, he informed Stepinac. These were third or fourth hand accounts, so when Stepinac protested about human rights violations, he used other examples. The authorities did permit priests to visit some camps ((JFM 153)). These, no doubt, were the best ones.

On 6th December 1941, Stepinac applied for permission for priests and representatives of Caritas to visit prisoners in the camps near Jasenovac and Lobor, so as to provide gifts and encouragement at Christmas ((RP 345-6)). This was refused but, as the camps were becoming internationally notorious, the government arranged a one-day visit to one camp on 6th February 1942. This was less than three weeks prior to the opening of the Sabor, a time when Pavelic was trying to improve his image. The visiting party included journalists, Red Cross officials from five countries including Serbia and the secretaries of Stepinac and Marcone.

It is now known that at the end of January 1942 an order had been given to this camp to prepare a display for visitors. Eight new spacious and heated barracks were erected and the prisoners were transferred from the unhygienic huts. The surrounding areas and the prisoners were scrubbed. Healthy workers were brought in to man the workshop, each working at his own trade or as a professional in an office. The prisoners were told they would be shot if they informed the visitors of the real conditions. A hundred hospital patients were killed and the hospital cleaned. New beds and linen were provided. Healthy people including nurses were put into the beds ((EP 139-140)). The visiting party did not see any sign of atrocities.

Stepinac wrote again on 21st November 1942 for permission for priests to visit camps ((ADSS viii, 226-7)). But the Church could do nothing for those in camps barred to visitors. But rumours multiplied and on 24th February 1943, Stepinac complained in a letter to Pavelic that he had been trying for months to find what had happened to seven Slovenian priests sent to Jasenovac. He presumed that they were now dead and wrote: "This is a disgraceful incident Jasenovac camp itself is a shameful stain on the honour of the NDH. . . . This is a disgrace to Croatia". ((RP 322)). One of these priests survived and the Communist press claimed that he had gone to Stepinac to protest at the archbishop's inaction. But the priest told Arthur O'Brien that he had gone to thank Stepinac for what he had tried to achieve ((AHO 39-40)).

A description of the type of person running some of the camps comes from Vladko Macek, the Croatian Peasant Party leader. Macek was held in Jasenovac from 15th October 1941 till 16th March 1942. Then he was sent to Kupinec under house arrest ((VM 246)). While at Jasenovac he was kept apart from other prisoners and had a personal guard, Ljubo Milos. But Macek soon gained some idea of what was happening. When Milos made the sign of the cross before going to bed, Macek asked if he was afraid of God's punishment for his monstrous actions.

Milos replied:

"Don't talk to me about that, for I am perfectly aware of what is in store for me. For my past, present and future deeds, I shall burn in hell. But at least I shall burn for Croatia". ((VM 243)).

The sign of the cross was nothing more than a habit formed in childhood. His motivation was not Catholic but one of fanatical racism. We may wonder whether he was mentally ill. There were Serbs of a similar fanatical nationalist mentality. More recently an Orthodox priest said that some Serbs, when making the sign of the cross, might as well be saying, "In the name of the Father, the Son and St. Sava". ((JKB April 1996)). This same fanatical mentality existed amongst racist criminals on both sides. It was not motivated by religion.

By late 1941 the worst of the Ustasha killers had been replaced in Bosnia by more civilized administrators ((SAA 34)). Some of the thugs found work as camp guards and continued their thirst for blood. As an example, in September 1942 the newly Catholic population of Pakrac were taken to Stara Gradiska camp. Fortunately, the local Catholic priest was able to contact Stepinac who got Pavelic to order an immediate enquiry. This led to the prisoners being released ((RP 407-8)).

On 13th October 1942 Ustasha from Jasenovac, led by Lieutenant Ljubo (possibly the same man involved at Pakrac) surrounded the nearby village of Crkveni Bok. Most of the villagers were Serbs who had become Catholics. Some were killed but most were taken to the camp, where those born Croatian were released. When the men from Jasenovac ignored the entreaties of the Catholic parish priest, he wrote to Pavelic asking him to intervene.

In his detailed letter he said that the Ustasha men involved were young, drunk, swearing the most gross oaths and stole from empty houses. Also he had heard shooting. The Sub-Prefect of the district and an Ustasha captain arrived on the 14th to see what had occurred.

They were disgusted and condemned the outrage as one which should not go unpunished ((RP 400-4)). In this way decent Ustasha came to despise the brutes at Jasenovac. The camp was closed in 1947 after being used by the Communists to kill several thousand of their enemies ((SSJ 59:76)).

3). The Jews

Based on the 1931 census, there would have been 30,000 Jews in the NDH. But the influx of refugees, and the wide definition of the word 'Jew' in Nazi thought, made the number of people under threat much greater. Over 80% lived in the German zone and the remainder in the Italian ((RH 455)).

Just under 20,000 were killed, but authorities do not agree as to where they died. It appears that 10,000 escaped to Italy ((BK 185)). One authority states that 6-7,000 were deported to Auschwitz ((RH 457)) and 13,000 died in NDH camps ((VZ 29-30)). Another gives 9-10,000 at Auschwitz and 10,000 in NDH camps ((JFM 160)). Yet another source claims 18,000 died in the NDH camps ((SSJ 55: 110)) so 2,000 at Auschwitz. Some were saved by being designated 'Honorary Aryans' ((RH 455)), by being in mixed marriages ((VZ 31)), by being part Jewish ((RH 457)) or by being a Christian. Others fled to the mountains or were hidden in Croatian homes.

In most East European countries, the Jews had an economic, cultural and political influence far in excess of what a small minority might expect. The reaction, especially amongst nationalists, led to varying degrees of antagonism. The Ustasha movement, left on its own, would probably have brought Jewish industrial, commercial and professional enterprises under Croatian control.

The size of the compensation, if any, would have depended on which Ustasha leaders had been most influential at the time. In 1941 the NDH leadership, under German domination, promulgated Nazi-type racial laws. But a picture of the Ustasha, including Pavelic, being personally anti-Jewish in the Nazi sense should not be accepted uncritically. Many facts challenge this picture:

i. The Ustasha were often known as 'Francovi' or 'Frankists' due to the dominance in their political evolution of Dr. Isaiah Frank, a Jew. He became leader of The Party of Right (Law) in 1896, following the death of Starcevic. Dr. Frank became a Catholic, taking the baptismal name of Josip ((EJ 16:917)). Frank was greatly admired and honoured by the Ustasha. Yet, if he had been alive in 1941, the racial laws would have driven him from his profession as a lawyer and ordered him to wear a yellow band.

ii. A Jewish lawyer, Hinko Hinkovic, was amongst the ideological and political leaders of Croatian nationalism ((EJ 16: 917)) and Vlado Singer, a Jewish intellectual, worked for Pavelic's election to parliament in 1927 ((MTA 125)).

iii. The Ustasha was not greatly interested in the Jews prior to the outbreak of the war ((SSJ 19: 22)). Their hatred was centred on the Serbs.

iv. Pavelic (as Chief of State) and Milovan Zanic (as President of the Legislative Committee) jointly signed the 1941 decrees concerning Jewish and Serbian property ((RL 606-627)). Yet both had Jewish wives ((MR 69)). According to Nazi ideology, the lives of these wives and their 'mischling' children were under threat.

v. Slavko Kvaternik who proclaimed Croatian independence on 10th April 1941, and became Commander of the Armed Forces and Pavelic's deputy, also had a Jewish wife ((IO 21-22)).

vi. Eugen (Dido) Kvaternik was appointed Director of Public Security. Being the son of Slavko he was therefore half Jewish.

vii. The coming to power of the Ustasha was sudden and unexpected. From the confusion in most sectors of administration, it is obvious that little thought had been given to preparing for government. Yet the anti-Jewish laws were promulgated very quickly and showed every sign of having been drafted by expert hands ((RH 454)).

viii. The laws were more comprehensive than those in Germany. But this doesn't point to the Ustasha being more anti-Jewish than the Nazis. The laws in Germany had been promulgated in 1937 to encourage the German Jews to emigrate. By the Spring of 1941 the German attitude had hardened greatly. Andrija Aktukovac, Minister of the Interior, informed Stepinac at the end of April 1941 that the Germans had ordered the laws ((MR 69)). There is no reason to doubt this.

ix. The government did obtain concessions from the occupying power. Pavelic, as head of state, was permitted to protect Jews who had contributed to, 'Croatian life'. He increasingly used this concession to save such: 'Honorary Aryans' ((RH 454-5)).

x. The Germans army destroyed the Sarajevo synagogue on 17th April 1941 ((EJ 16: 877)). This was before this part of Bosnia had become part of the NDH, so not due to Ustasha action.

xi. The mass arrest of Jews was stepped up after the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941 ((EJ 16: 877)). This was in line with German policy.

xii. When on 19th October 1941, 1400 Jews were arrested in Sarajevo, it was to celebrate: 'German Day' ((EJ 16: 877)).

xiii. The largest round up of Jews in Bosnia was organised by the Germans in mid-November 1941, when 3,000 were deported to Jasenovac ((EJ 16:877)).

xiv. The anti-Jewish laws promulgated by the NDH were implemented in the German zone only, not in the Italian ((RH 456)).

xv. It was easier for the Jews to survive in Croatia as compared with Serbia, because of the Italian zone. Also, the establishment of an 'independent' Croatia, not under direct German military administration, gave many the time to escape to Italy or into the mountains.

xvi. Jews were still holding official positions in Croatia, including senior ones within the Ustasha command, as late as 1944 ((RH 457)).

xvii. Until September 1941, Serbia was under direct German rule. In May 1941 eight thousand Jewish men were shot. Gas vans were brought to the Zemun camp and by June 15,000 Jewish women and children had been gassed.

The Zemun suburb of Belgrade was just within the NDH, but completely under German administration throughout the war ((RL 608)). German personnel carried out the executions. ((SSJ 53: 106)).

xviii. The official reports on the progress of the killings in Serbia were interleaved, in the Einsatzgruppen files in Germany, with those from Einsatzgruppen active in Russia ((RH 438)). This clearly indicates the deaths in Croatia and Serbia were part of the Europe-wide organization of the German anti-Jewish campaign.

xix. The Jews in Vojodina, which had become part of Hungary, met the same fate as those in Croatia and Serbia ((EJ 16: 878)).

The Ustasha boasted of Croatian independence, but if Pavelic had refused to promulgate Nazi laws or had prevented the Germans using the worst elements of Croatian society as assistants, he would have been removed from power. The wives and children of the Ustasha leaders would then have been in grave danger of death. How far the Ustasha leaders willingly supported the Nazi extermination programme is open for research. We are not concerned here with passing judgement on the motives and actions of individuals. Our aim has been to provide the background against which to view the Church's reaction to events as they unfolded, which we will now do.

In the late 1930s, thousands of Jewish and other refugees entered Yugoslavia from the north. Archbishop Stepinac organised aid and in 1937 established a special Relief Committee ((RP 357)). The German Minister made several protests to the Yugoslav government concerning this work ((AHO 11)). Stepinac provided documents, food, medicines and general aid to enable hundreds to escape to other parts of the world ((MR 133-4)). Protestant Jewish refugees asked the Protestant bishop of Zagreb for assistance but, although a charitable man, he could do little because of the anti-Semitism of his mainly German flock. Stepinac undertook half the cost of their maintenance with the rest coming from an English Protestant relief fund ((AHO 10-11)).

Following the invasion, the Germans demanded the names of Jewish refugees known to the Relief Committee. The Archbishop refused to provide them ((AHO 22)). The secretary of the Committee also refused and was arrested by the Gestapo ((SL 9)). Stepinac hid Jews in his own residence and in his property at Bresovice ((SL 2)). He hid the library of the Chief Rabbi, Dr. Miroslav Freiburger (SL 10)), and also a radio of Dr. Feler, a Jewish leader ((SAB 92)).

On 23rd April, Stepinac wrote to Artukovic, Minister of the Interior, protesting at Christian Jews being included in the proposed anti-Jewish legislation ((RP 299-300)). In reply, Artukovic explained that the laws:

". . . had to be promulgated in that form for reasons independent of us, but that their practical application would not be harsh".
((MR 69)).

So the Minister was blaming the Germans and promising to limit their effect. On 30th April the laws were published and Jewish property in the German zone was expropriated. Jews were removed from public posts, ordered to wear a yellow badge ((EJ 16: 877)) and banned from parts of Zagreb ((VM 100)).

On 22nd May, Stepinac wrote to Artukovic protesting at the violation of the human rights of Jews and others ((RP 301)). With regard to the Jews he accepted that it was just for the state to keep the economy in the hands of the Croatian people. But to deny those of other races their human rights was a question of humanity and of morals. He went on:

" . . . not even in Germany were the racial laws applied with such rigor and speed [He was unaware of the effects of the recent secretly held Wannsee Conference] . . . Neither notorious adulterers nor common prostitutes are marked with visible signs . . . [so] why treat this way those who are members of another race through no fault of their own?"

As a compromise he suggested that the Jews reimburse the state for the cost of the insignia, but not have to wear it ((RP 300-2)). During May a group of Catholics married to Jews asked Stepinac for help. So on the 30th he again wrote to the Minister urging that Christian Jews, those in mixed marriages, their children and those who had shown patriotism to Croatia, should be excluded from the laws ((RP 302-5)). Following this and the intervention of the Papal Nuncio, the partners in mixed marriages and their children were excluded ((SAB 70)). Over one thousand lives were saved in this way ((VZ 31)).

These requests did not imply that Stepinac was indifferent towards the fate of non-Christian Jews, but that he was using whatever arguments were available to protect as many as possible. He pointed out that Christian Jews had a double burden. They were excluded from Jewish society as 'apostates' and from Gentile society as 'Jews'. The State's laws were preventing them practising their Christian faith ((RP 302-5)).

When during June 1941 there were mass arrests of Jews ((EJ 16: 877)), Stepinac sent his secretary, Dr. Lackovic, to see camp conditions and arrange for all possible assistance ((AHO 22)). As in the rest of Europe at that time, the 'Radical Solution' of the 'Jewish Problem' was understood to mean that all Jews would be sent to a new Jewish state in South Eastern Poland. On 21st July, Stepinac wrote to Pavelic urging that deportees should be allowed time to settle their family and employment arrangements, given enough food, medical care, the opportunity to communicate with their families, and not be placed in overcrowded sealed carriages ((SAB 72)).

On 30th July, a government circular stated that the law of 30th April, regarding disabilities for Non-Aryans would still apply to Jews who had become Catholics ((CF 283-5)). The law regarding the wearing of the Star of David came into force on 8th August ((SAB 70)). Two priests and six nuns were affected but, due to widespread indignation, these eight were eventually exempted ((AHO 18)). In response, Stepinac announced from his pulpit:

"I have ordered these priests and nuns to continue wearing this sign of belonging to the people from which Our Saviour was born as long as any others will have to do so". ((AHO 18)).

In September, the government agreed that Christian Jews and those married to Christians would not have to wear the star ((SAB 70)). Having gained this concession, Stepinac tried to widen its application. In a confidential undated circular during 1941 to his priests, (See 'forced conversions' section) he gave permission for Jews as well as the Orthodox, to join the Church even though they did not believe Her teachings. But on 13th November the government ordered imprisonment for those contracting Gentile-Jewish marriage, and also for the priest or minister involved ((SAB 69)).

The main resolutions of the November 1941 bishop's conference were concerned with the Orthodox. But another resolution was sent to Pavelic petitioning him to intervene in the persecution of Catholic Jews by lower officials ((RP 305-6)).

By the end of 1941, 6,000 male adult Jews were working as forced labourers in the salt mines of Karlovac and Yudovo, with a few at Jasenovac ((RH 455)). In early 1942 there were arrests of Jewish women, children and the elderly. On 7th March 1942 Stepinac wrote to the Minister of the Interior to protest against them being placed in concentration camps. He asked that actions by 'irresponsible elements' be stopped ((RP 306)).

Stepinac arranged for South American passports to be sent by the Vatican. With these, hundreds of Jews were able to pass through Italy on their way to safety ((SL 9)). Stepinac sent nuns to care for the inmates of the Schwarz Home for sick and aged Jews, when the staff was arrested. ((SL 10)).

In July the Germans ordered that all Jews must be deported within six months ((JFM 153)). Kvaternick, the Police Chief, said he knew two million had been killed but he could do nothing. His successor repeated this ((JFM 156)).

On 8th August 1942 the Chief Rabbi of Zagreb wrote to the Pope. He thanked him for the help given to the Jewish Community by the Croatian bishops and the representatives of the Holy See. He asked whether he could get help for the Jewish women and children then in camps ((SAB 105)). But on the 13th of August a train left Zagreb with 1,300 Jews heading for Auschwitz ((JS 265)).

It was during the summer of 1942 that the Holy See was informing bishops throughout Europe that there was strong evidence that those Jews being 'resettled' in Poland were all being killed ((See Slovakia on this web site)). The ability of the bishops to intervene was very limited and by the end of the year 5,000 Jews had been deported. Further batches went during 1943 and 1944 in coaches hooked to regular scheduled trains ((RH 457)).

The Apostolic Delegate, Marcone, had arrived in Zagreb on 3rd August 1941 and three weeks later had reported to the Holy See regarding the situation of the Jews. The reply of the 3rd September instructed him "to recommend moderation concerning the treatment of the Jews residing in Croat territory." ((JFM 150)). As the Germans permitted Pavelic to exempt Christian Jews and those married to Christians from deportation, he was able in conjunction with Stepinac, to bring such people to Pavelic's attention. Through his connection with Mr. Schmidlin of the Red Cross and Stepinac, he was involved in moving a small group of Jewish children, including the son of the Chief Rabbi, through Hungary and Romania on their way to neutral Turkey ((JFM 153-4)). His secretary managed to visit some of the camps to bring solace ((JFM 153)).

When 4,000 Jews fled into the Italian zone, he reported this to the Holy See. Vatican officials were thereby able to contact Mussolini who granted them permission to stay ((JFM 151-7)). Cardinal Maglione eventually obtained permission for all Jews who escaped into the Italian zone not to be sent back ((JFM 153)). Marcone tried to persuade Eugene Kvaternik (Chief of Police) to slow down deportations ((JFM 153)). This would have provided more time for escape, but by late 1942 the authorities were not answering Marcone's questions regarding the Jews ((JFM 152)).

Abbott Marcone obtained evidence that in March 1943 Pavelic was resisting German demands to persecute the baptised Jews. Pavelic was claiming that he had made promises to the Holy See ((JFM 159)). It is no doubt more than a coincidence that in the middle of that month Stepinac was openly attacking racism and thereby strengthening Pavelic's stand. On 8th March, Stepinac had written to Pavelic, listing human rights abuses. These included those committed within the camps:

" . . . if there is here the interference of a foreign power in our national and political life, I am not afraid if my voice and my protest carry even to the leaders of that power, . . .". ((RP 310-2)).

A few days later, on the 14th, he showed his willingness to let his protest reach the German leaders. He preached to thousands in his cathedral:

"Consequently, every man, of whatever race or nation, whether he has studied in the universities of the civilized centres of Europe or hunts his food in the virgin forests of Africa, carries equally on himself the stamp of God the Creator and possesses inalienable rights which must not be taken from him nor arbitrarily limited by any human power . . . we have seen such tears and listened to the sobs of stalwart men, and the cries of women without assistance, over whom this danger hung, for the sole reason that the sanctity of their families did not conform to the theories of racism". ((RP 271-6)).

The anti-Jewish campaign was European wide. On the 15th March 1943, the first train deporting Jews left Greece ((JS 94, 100)). On the 27th, the Grand Rabbi of Zagreb, Dr. Freiburger, informed Stepinac that 1,800 Greek Jews, on their way to Germany were on a train at Novska (100 kilometres south of Zagreb). They were not being allowed water or food. The train was expected to arrive in Zagreb that evening but, although the Red Cross had volunteers at the station, the Germans were not going to permit them to supply food or water. After five hours of frantic work, one of Stepinac's secretaries, through the influence of a woman, managed to speak to the German officer on duty. An agreement was reached. We do not know the details, but it resulted in the Red Cross being able to serve warm food. When a second train containing 2,000 Greek Jews arrived on 24th April they were again permitted food ((RP 313-4)).

On 7th July 1943 British Radio quoted Stepinac's sermons condemning the persecution of Jews and others. It reported that Vatican Radio had broadcast Stepinac's words ((RP 291-3)). The Soviet station: 'Slobodna Jugoslavia' in Tiflis, also gave extracts from his sermons ((AHO 14)).

On the 25th October, Stepinac delivered a long sermon in which he stressed that each man is nothing apart from what God has given him:

". . . How, then, must we judge those individuals who raise their heads proudly as if God no longer existed on the earth and as if the law of the Gospels were superfluous.

We ought to say to them that which Christ said to the unfaithful city of Capharnaum. . . . You will descend into hell." (Mt. 21:23). . . . Only one race really exists and that is the divine race. Its birth certificate is found in the book of Genesis . . .".

He went on to stress the dignity of each man:

"All of them without exception, whether they belong to the race of Gypsies or to another, whether they are Negroes or civilized Europeans, whether they are detested Jews or proud Aryans, have the same right to say, 'Our Father who art in heaven'. . . .the Catholic Church condemns . . . every injustice and every violence committed in the name of the theories of class, race or nationality. One cannot exterminate intellectuals . . . as Bolshevism has taught . . . One cannot extinguish . . . Gypsies or Jews because one considers them inferior races". ((RP 276-281)).

On 31st October 1943 he again preached against racism and its cruelties [See 'forced conversions' section]. But on 18th April 1944 the Germans said that the Croatian 'Jewish Problem' had been solved ((EJ 16: 878)).

Mr. Schmidlin of the International Red Cross frequently visited Stepinac seeking means of aiding Jews and others ((SL 9)). Amiel Shomrony, secretary to the last Chief Rabbi of Zagreb, recalled:

"I took part in many actions to save Jews in the war with, the help of the Kaptol (the Archbishopric). In that way we managed to get many children out to Hungary and from there to Palestine. . . . besides that, the Archbishop personally saved a lot of people and children by hiding them.

He gave the community flour every month and financially supported Jews who had been left without any means of support by the persecution. . . .". ((MTA 156)).

Meir Touval-Weltmann, Jewish relief official in Turkey wrote that Archbishop Stepinac had done all that was possible for the Jews of Croatia ((JFM 161)). The World Jewish Congress was grateful in September 1943 to Cardinal Godfrey of Great Britain and the Vatican for assisting in the transfer of 4,000 Jews to a safe Italian island ((JFM 162)).

Louis S. Breire, Programme Director of the American Jewish Committee ((AHO 72)), said during a speech on the 13th October 1946:

"This great man of the Church was accused of being a Nazi collaborator. We Jews deny this. We know from his life, from 1934 onwards, that he was always a true friend of the Jews, who in those times were subjected to the persecution of Hitler and his followers. Alojzije Stepinac is one of those rare men in Europe who stood up against Nazi tyranny, precisely at the time when it was most dangerous to do so . . . He spoke openly and fearlessly against the racist laws of Nuremberg and his opposition never faltered. It is due to him that the law of the 'yellow armband' was withdrawn . . . Next to His Holiness Pope Pius XII, Archbishop Stepinac was the greatest champion of the Jews who were being persecuted in Europe". ((OR 29-4-92)).

4). The Old Catholics

In 1923/4 some ex-Catholic priests, having problems with celibacy, formed the 'Yugoslav National Church', which conducted wedding ceremonies for divorced Catholics. They affiliated themselves to 'The Old Catholics of Utrecht' and in 1931 had 6,000 members ((CF 409 and BK 139-140)). The Yugoslav government gave them more financial support, in proportion to their numbers, than that received by the Catholic Church ((CF 268)).

In February 1942 Mirko Puk, Minister of Justice and Religion, announced the abolition of this church. He asserted that it had been recognised by the Yugoslav government because it created religious and national division within Croatia ((SAB 84-5)). The bishops were no doubt pleased that Yugoslav subsidies to these former priests had ceased. But there is no evidence that the bishops supported any persecution. A hint to this effect in the so-called "Stepinac Diary" is not reliable (See propaganda section).

5. The Gypsies

The claim that 28,000 Gypsies were slaughtered in the NDH as part of a 'Holy War' against non-Catholics ((DK 112, 183)) must be due to the writer having been misled by Chetnik/Communist propaganda.

About 27,000 were killed in the whole of Yugoslavia ((SSJ 68: 43)). In the 1931 census 16,000 Gypsies inhabited the areas that became the NDH ((BK 137-141)). There would have been a natural increase to 17,000 by 1941. Movements into Italy in 1940 and 1941 ((DK 108-110)) would have offset arrivals from Austria after 1938. Only 1,000 declared themselves as Gypsies in the 1948 census, but many had emigrated during the two years before the census was taken ((DK 110)). The Germans also targeted part-Gypsies, such as those with three Gypsy grandparents. ((DK 115)). So the number of deaths in the NDH would have been about 16,000 (as listed in Chapter II).

There was nothing anti-Gypsy in Ustasha principles, providing an individual was not loyal to Serbia. The NDH government unsuccessfully tried to obtain the release of at least one Croatian Gypsy family from Auschwitz ((DK 155)). Those living in the Italian zone were left in peace. The reason for the killings was not religious, but the European-wide Nazi racial programme, which judged Gypsies as sub-human. The Germans also killed the Gypsies in Serbia. When the gas-vans were returned to Germany in June 1942 from the Zemun camp ((RH 442)), the German commander boasted that he had: 'Solved the Gypsy problem in Serbia' ((DK 119)). A few Ustasha thugs helped the Nazis, but it would be naive to ascribe all Gypsy deaths to the Germans and their aids. Pogledala, the most vibrant Moslem Gypsy village in Bosnia, was completely destroyed by the Serbs, with survivors fleeing to the North-West ((NM 118)).

The Gypsies tended to adopt the religion of those amongst whom they lived ((DK 21-2)). Most of those living in Bosnia were Moslem or Serbian Orthodox ((NM 116-7)). But in the whole of the future area of the NDH, the 1931 census recorded the Gypsies as being 60% Catholic, 32% Orthodox and 8% Moslem ((BK 137-141)).

Many of the Orthodox would have joined the Serbian exodus to Serbia in 1941, while arrivals from Austria would have increased the number of Catholics. So 70-80% of those killed in the NDH would have been Catholics. How can the killing of a mainly Catholic Community be logically described as a: 'Holy war against non-Catholics'?

The repeated calls by the Church for the human rights of everyone to be respected included the Gypsies.

The Gypsies were obviously included in the vow the Pope called Humanity to take at Christmas 1942 (See Papal Silence section). Stepinac specifically referred to them in his sermon of 25th October 1943:

"One cannot extinguish from the face of the earth Gypsies or Jews because one considers them inferior races". ((RP 279)).

During a sermon on the 31st October 1943, he defended them under the name of 'Bohemians' and added:

"The king in a royal palace is, as a man, exactly the same as the lowest pauper or gypsy in his tent". ((RP 283 and 285)).

6). The Moslems

The NDH did not, as is often asserted, establish itself as a Catholic state. The government proclaimed the new Croatia as a state of two faiths - Catholic and Moslem ((FS 175)). The government converted a large circular art gallery in Zagreb into a mosque ((FM 168)). Dzafer Kulenovic, a non-Ustasha Moslem, was Vice-President from November 1941 till the end of the war ((NM 185-6)). Many Moslem administrators were appointed and some became members of the Ustasha. The Commissioner for Bosnia was a Moslem ((NM 186)).

The Ex-Grand Mufti of Jerusalem visited Bosnia to give his blessing to the Moslem Handjar (Sword) division ((EJ 16: 877)). This was trained to fight in Russia, but returned to maintain order in Bosnia ((NM 190-1)). Despite this Moslem involvement, they held little real power. The twenty-two generals including the Minister of the Armed Forces, the Chief of Staff and the Commanders of the airforce, navy and military regions, together with their deputies were all non-Moslems ((SSJ 6: 7)).

The Moslems were not enthusiastic supporters of the NDH but, following the Serb uprising of June 1941 when over a thousand Moslems were massacred in two villages, much of the fighting in Bosnia was between Moslem and Serb ((NM 176)). The Serbs and Communists destroyed or badly damaged 756 mosques ((NM 196)). As with the Croats and Serbs, a small violent element took the opportunity for revenge, cruelty and pillage. And, like the Catholic bishops, the Moslem religious leaders condemned atrocities committed by members from their own community ((MO 39)).

7). The Military Vicarate

It has been said that Stepinac, as; "Supreme Apostolic Vicar of the army", was ultimately responsible for all crimes committed by Ustasha army chaplains.

A few facts are required. In December 1939, Pope Plus XII entrusted Stepinac with the function, although without formal title, of Military Vicar of chaplains in the Yugoslav army ((SAB 86)). He made this known in November 1940 ((RP 412)). In July 1941 the Domobran (NDH conscripted army) was formed. It asked for volunteer chaplains sympathetic to Ustasha ideals ((RP 185)), but by September few suitable ones had been found ((SAB 86)).

It is normal for the bishops to decide which of their priests would be suitable for chaplaincy work. But on 18th September the army sent a curt letter to Stepinac informing him of a meeting where he would be told what was required. It was clear that the government intended to select, appoint and control the chaplains ((SAB 86, RP 412-3)). In October, Pavelic at a public meeting in St. Mark's Square, without consulting the bishops: "announced that he had appointed Fr. Stripe Vucetic as Military Vicar and Fr. Vilim Cecelja as his deputy ((SAB 157)). Both had joined the Ustasha pre-war but were good men. Cecelja was well known for helping the poor and defending Serbs and Jews ((SL 24)).

In most countries the senior chaplain is a bishop, so the army demanded that Vucetic be consecrated ((RP 359)). Stepinac must have consulted the Holy See regarding this developing situation because a month later the Pope appointed Stepinac as Military Vicar ((SAB 157)). There were now two Military Vicars - one appointed by Pavelic and the other by the Pope.

Here was a struggle as to whether Church or State had the right to choose the army chaplains and their bishop. The twists and turns of this struggle have not been fully researched, but in early 1942 Pavelic gave way without losing face. He 'appointed' Stepinac in place of Vucetic ((SAB 86)).

As Stepinac had little time to devote to this work, he appointed Cecelja, to act as Military Vicar on his behalf, and Vucetic to assist him ((RP 131, 368-9)).

Stepinac didn't: "attend all the big Ustasha parades" as has been asserted. He went on rare occasions when he needed an opportunity to intercede for Jews, Serbs or Communists ((SL 24)). His attendance didn't make him an Ustasha. His attendance at a Partisan parade at the end of the war didn't make him a Communist and therefore guilty of Tito's crimes.

In all countries an army prayer book will include prayers for God's blessing on the country and its leaders, praying that they will rule justly and with compassion. The Croatian army's prayerbook was not a sign of the Church praying for all the government's political aims or blessing its sins.

Most 'forced conversions' and atrocities occurred in the spring and summer of 1941. Stepinac was not appointed as Military Vicar by the Pope till November ((RP 412)), and was unable to function until early 1942 ((SAB 86)). Even then the army provided little information as to who were acting as chaplains, where they came from, where sent and what problems they had. Other bishops or Provincials could have agreed to a priest acting as a chaplain in a part of Croatia out of touch with Zagreb. So Stepinac didn't exercise his function except to discipline any priest who he came to know had been involved in unworthy activities ((SAB 87, RP 237-8)). It was his position as Military Vicar that enabled him to suspend a few Franciscan priests and those from other dioceses, who would normally not have been under his jurisdiction.

Stepinac was Military Vicar of the chaplains with the conscripted Domobran, but not of chaplains in the Ustasha units ((MB 83, SL 24)). It is also relevant to note that when the NDH forces were at their peak in September 1943, two thirds were under German command ((JT 107)).

The Archbishop was accused of having taken part in the departure ceremonies of Croatian vessels heading for the Black Sea to fight the Russians, but he never attended such affairs ((RP 106-7)). The Communists implied that there was something sinister in the Archbishop sending gifts to the 'Ustasha Legion' in Russia. But most of these men were not Ustasha. Attracted by double pay and rapid promotion, 8,000 were recruited ((MTA 153)). There was nothing shameful in Stepinac sending them gifts of cigarettes, rosaries and religious pictures ((RP 107)).

8). The Sabor

It has been asserted that Archbishop Stepinac, bishop Aksamovic and nine priests had seats in the Ustasha Sabor. So what are the facts?

On 24th January 1942 a decree was issued establishing a Sabor (Council of State), similar to an old Croatian institution. Its members were to be the Croat delegates elected to the 1918 and 1938 parliaments, some Croat Peasant Party leaders, appointees of the Party of Rights and the Ustasha, and representatives of the German minority ((RL 608)). Amongst those appointed were eleven Moslems ((NM 185)) and nine Ustasha priests ((EP 167)).

The Church was not given the right to nominate anyone. The Archbishop of Zagreb had had a seat in the traditional Croatian Sabor, but he was not offered one in this Sabor ((SL 17)). In a circular of 4th February 1942, Stepinac informed his priests that the ban on taking part in politics was still in force ((SL 3)). On 8th February, he confirmed this policy to Pavelic in a letter.

" . . . The small good that might be derived from the political; activities of the clergy cannot justify the double damages to the Church and State resulting from priests leaving their sacerdotal activities and dedicating themselves to politics in the Peasant Party or in the Ustasha movement . . .". ((SL 3)).

A priest who accepted a seat in the Sabor knew that by doing so he became suspended from the priesthood. Stepinac never softened this policy. On 24th September 1943 in a confidential circular to his clergy, he quoted St. Paul in 2 Tim. 2: 4, "No soldier on service gets entangled in civilian pursuits". ((SL 3)).

Photographs of Stepinac and the Nuncio in the Sabor do not always make it clear that they were sitting in the visitors' galleries. It was important that they heard certain debates, so they could plan their responses.

Although the Ustasha, and behind them the Germans, still held overall control, the Sabor did enable a wider spectrum of opinion to influence government policy. It assisted the trend to neutralise the fanatics, but was far from being representative of the whole Croatian people.

It was proposed to hold a religious service in St. Mark's church when the Sabor opened. This would have been normal on such an occasion, but Stepinac was not happy ((RP 209)). He wished to be involved in this historic event in Croatian life and hoped that the Sabor would help towards moderation.

But his realisation that his presence at the service could appear to give the present rulers more legitimacy, made him hesitate. Eventually he did agree to take part ((RP 209)). In a short welcome to Pavelic and the delegates at the church door, he said that it was not his purpose to give political advice but to:

"Proclaim God, who is the foundation and source of all law, to the lawmaking body . . ." ((AHO 39)). "Let it pass just laws: where there are equal burdens, let there be also equal rights . . . Let the Eternal Judge . . . impress into the hearts of all your co-workers a profound sense of responsibility so that they may successfully assist you, the leader of the Independent State of Croatia, in the

reconstruction and reformation of our beloved fatherland on the eternal foundations of the principles of the gospels of Christ." ((RP 209)).

Parts of this echoed point 11 of the bishop's statement of the previous November about equality for the Orthodox under the law.

Pavelic realised that these words implied that the laws up till that time had been unjust, irresponsible and not based on the Gospels. He didn't consider the administration needed assistance to become more just. As he left, Pavelic was overheard remarking to a colleague:

"This greenhorn would not teach him politics," and to another "that because of the sermon, relations with the Church had become still worse". ((RP 352-3)).

Stepinac had welcomed Prince Paul, at that same door, two years previously ((SL 17)), and was later present at the opening of the Partisan's parliament and their theatre ((SAB 152)). He accepted the government, whether Royalist, Communist or Ustasha, which was de-facto in power.

The Ustasha reformulated its objectives during August 1942. Not one of the ten new objectives mentioned religion ((RL 611-2)).

9). Stepinac and the political options

The three political forces in which the Croats were involved had a mixture of positive and negative aspects. The Serb dominated government in London promised to establish a Royal democracy with free elections. But it had decided to end Croatian autonomy, after the war ((VM 226)).

The Partisans promised autonomy, but its leaders were Communists, so likely to impose a marxist anti-religious dictatorship. The Ustasha wanted an independent Croatia, but were influenced by extreme nationalism and depended on Nazi paganism winning the war.

So people of good will not only opposed one another, but found themselves associating with unattractive colleagues. The Church saw the need to be above these political rivalries and to encourage the best elements in each movement. As the Ustasha was the de-facto government, the bishops had the most visible contacts with its administrators, but this did not mean that they excluded contacts with the other two forces.

Lt. Stanislov Rapotec, representing the government in London, landed from a British submarine in April 1942 to gather information. As a former student in Zagreb, he had many contacts in Croatia. Rapotec found the Serbs and Jews full of praise for the archbishop. They wanted the British radio to stop attacking him ((SAB 94, 101)). Rapotec was secretly introduced to Stepinac by an underground group of Jews and Serbs. The archbishop was relieved that he had come and met him four more times during the next two months ((SAB 92)).

Stepinac said that the desire for Croatian independence was waning. He believed in a post-war Yugoslavia as a federation of nations. He had not broken with the NDH and withdrawn to a monastery, as he would not have been able to help those who entirely depended on him ((AHO 17, SAB 93)). He immediately agreed to Rapotec's request that he transmit Yugoslav humanitarian funds from London sent via Switzerland, to the Belgrade Red Cross ((SAB 94)). He then used his Romanian and Bugarian diplomatic contacts to obtain passports for Rapotec to escape to Turkey ((SAB 93)).

Although the Communists controlled the Partisan leadership, its fighters were drawn from a wide section of society. The Partisans opposed the extreme nationalism of the Chetniks and Ustasha, and promised Croatian autonomy and religious freedom. In Croatia itself 60% of its membership had been baptised Catholic ((SSJ 59: 76)). Ten times more Croatian Catholics fought for the Partisans than were in the Ustasha ((CWR March 1992, 17)).

When the Ustasha discovered that one of Stepinac's priests, Fr. John Kokot, had been collaborating with the Partisans, Stepinac hid him in his own residence until he could get to Partisan territory. Stepinac allowed him and other Partisan priests, such as Victor Merz and Auguste Stanzer ((RP 132)), jurisdiction over Catholics in those territories, which were very extensive ((MTA 163)), where the Partisans were the de-facto administration ((SL 4-5)).

Mgr. Svetozar Rittig, parish priest of St. Mark's church prior to the war, was a keen supporter of the Yugoslav ideal. On Pavelic taking power, he moved to the Italian zone. In December 1942 he thanked Stepinac by letter for his very generous help for Polish refugees ((SL 4)). In 1943, Stepinac didn't prevent Rittig becoming a Partisan chaplain. He was not a Communist, but believed the Partisans were the only force able to heal Croat-Serb enmity ((SL 68)).

Eventually seventy-eight Catholic priests lived with the Partisans of whom 42 were killed ((RJW 62)). At the end of the war the government appointed Rittig as Secretary of the Religious Affairs Commission with Fr. Pallua as his deputy. Stepinac privately agreed to this ((SAB 116)).

On 23rd November 1943 Stepinac's brother was executed for aiding the Partisans. The family farm was destroyed because his mother supplied them with food. Stepinac sent copies of his sermons, via his estates manager, to enable the Partisans to broadcast extracts over their radios ((SAB 95)).

Stepinac was so impartial that in 1943 he said that he expected to be killed by the Ustasha or the Communists ((SAB 95)). On three occasions Pavelic demanded that the Holy See remove him ((RP 353)). In early 1946 Tito informed the Holy See's representative in Belgrade that he desired the Pope to replace Stepinac ((SAB 135)).

At his 'trial', Stepinac was accused of being an enemy of the peoples' authority. He pointed out that during the war there were four groups claiming to be the legal authority: that in London, the one in Cairo, the Partisans in the woods and the Ustasha in Zagreb. He was unable to give allegiance to them all. He accepted the Communist government from 8th May 1945, when they occupied Zagreb. Before that the Ustasha were in power ((RP 240)).

10). The 1945 collapse

During the last days of the NDH and the first days of Partisan rule, Stepinac was active trying to keep suffering and destruction to a minimum. But several of his acts have been used to try to discredit him. It was alleged that Pavelic, Stepinac, General Modkov and Macek plotted to preserve the NDH, call in foreign troops and ultimately restore the Ustasha ((RP 176-7)).

The facts are that, according to Croatian tradition, the Archbishop of Zagreb would act as Regent when there was a vacuum of political authority. But when Pavelic offered Stepinac the regency, he refused because it would now be a political position. Also he would not take anything from Pavelic ((RP 218)). But Stepinac feared the Germans and Ustasha would carry out their threat to defend Zagreb and massacre 40,000 of its anti-Ustasha citizens ((RP 218)).

Macek had been elected before the war as leader of the Croats. Having spent the war period in Jasenovac and under house arrest, he could not be accused of collaborating with the Germans and the Ustasha. He would be the natural leader of a Croatian Republic within a new federal Yugoslavia. So Edo Bulat and the NDH foreign minister, Alajbegovic urged Stepinac to ask Macek to assume leadership ((SAA 108)). General Moskov's offer to escort Stepinac through the guards was accepted. Although Moskov advised Macek to flee, Macek told Stepinac he would stay ((RP 218)). But the following day he heard that Dr. Kosutic, Vice-President of the Croatian Peasant Party, had been arrested.

This showed that the Partisans were not going to share power with non-Communists and have free elections. Macek therefore left Zagreb to cross into Austria on 7th May ((SAB 113)). The responsibility to save the city from destruction was now left to Stepinac.

On the 8th, Stepinac persuaded the Germans and Ustasha not to defend Zagreb nor destroy its electrical plants, bridges and civic buildings, which had been mined ((SAB 114)). In the afternoon the Partisans occupied the city unopposed. In April 1941 the Germans had been met by welcoming crowds ((RJW 52)), but now: 'the city was as quiet as the grave'. ((SAB 115)).

It was alleged that Stepinac hid secret Ustasha files in his palace ((SL 26)). But what happened was that Alajbegovic asked Stepinac to store historically important Foreign Office documents in his palace because government buildings might be bombed. The Archbishop agreed with the proviso that the Partisans would be notified. The documents were not secret because most had been published already ((SL 26)). The Partisans were notified and the archbishop was told to look after them until he received further instructions ((SL 26)). Stepinac was arrested on 17th May and not released till 3rd June. The following day he met Vladimir Bakaric, Partisan Prime Minister of Croatia and, during the conversation, raised the question of the documents. This was confirmed in a letter of the 6th. On the 13th the government instructed Stepinac where to send them ((RP 413-5)).

It was asserted that an Ustasha leader, whilst plotting with Stepinac to overthrow the government, had slept at the archbishop's palace in September 1945 ((RP 55)). What occurred was that Eric Lisak, former police chief, returned from Austria. Using a false name, he obtained an appointment with Stepinac. The archbishop recognized him, but listened to what he had to say for 20-30 minutes. Stepinac spoke twice.

He asked what had become of the children of the refugees and of Fr. Tiso of Slovakia ((RP 119-220)). Lisak said that he was not planning terrorist actions. Stepinac instructed Salic to refuse to admit him again. The following day he was turned away but eventually spoke to Masucci, the secretary of Macone ((RP 220)), who had diplomatic immunity. It was very late when they finished talking and, as Lisak didn't have a key to his lodgings, Salic reluctantly provided him with a bed ((SAB 138-140)). There was little justice for opponents under Tito. So when individuals came for humanitarian assistance, advice or to provide an opinion, the clergy would not deliver them to the police.

The same policy had been followed during Ustasha rule. Dr. Lorkovic, a government minister, and Ante Vukic, an army general were executed for trying to contact the Allies as part of a plan to overthrow Pavelic. The mother of their young English-speaking helper, asked Stepinac to protect her son. Stepinac agreed and the boy was hidden in the palace ((SL 25)).

Stepinac couldn't see everyone who knocked on the door of the palace. He relied on his experienced secretary to know how to deal with suspicious individuals. Many people were helped without the archbishop knowing ((SL 27)). When his secretary, Fr. Lackovic, visited Rome in 1945, the Communists would not permit him to return ((SAB 140)). So the less experienced Fr. Salic had to make very difficult and quick judgements as to when to provide humanitarian help when it may provide unintentional aid to a political faction.

During his 'trial', Stepinac was accused of receiving letters from secret Ustasha members ((RP 221)). But receipt of a letter doesn't mean a person wishes to receive it or agrees with its contents. Just after the war, Canon Boric found a secondary school student, exhausted and semi-conscious in Zagreb Cathedral. He provided shelter over night. It was later discovered that the boy had shot a Partisan captain. For his act of kindness, Boric was sentenced to five years in prison ((SAA 79)).

11). Archbishop Stepinac's Trial

Nine days after the Communists occupied Zagreb, Stepinac was arrested. On 2nd June, Vladimir Bakaric (Partisan Prime Minister of Croatia), Fr. Rittig (Minister of Religion) and Tito met the two auxiliary bishops, the Vicar General and three Canons. The churchmen refused to negotiate without Stepinac, so he was released the following day. Tito invited him to a private meeting on the 4th. Stepinac insisted that the Church must have freedom to teach, to publish and to administer schools.

He also suggested 'as a man not as a bishop' that Tito broaden his government by incorporating Croatian Peasant Party members and honest Ustasha. Two senior Partisan legal officials, Hrnecvic and Rankovic, were waiting in an outer office and, immediately after Stepinac left, went in to see Tito. Although Tito had not yet decided to hold a trial, he instructed them to prepare for one so that they would be ready if required. ((SAB 142)).

For several months the Archbishop was treated with honour as one of the victors of the war. In September 1945 pictures were published in the Yugoslav press of three Orthodox bishops, Archbishop Stepinac, his auxiliary bishop Josip Lach, the Soviet Military Attaches and the Croatian Communist leaders. They were guests of honour at a Zagreb parade to celebrate the establishment of a: 'Peoples Government' ((AHO 37-8)).

See following page for a sample of these pictures.

Within a few days of this parade, an intense government propaganda campaign through radio, meetings and the press, was launched against the Church. Priests and bishops were attacked physically when visiting parishes. The honoured patriotic prelates had suddenly become traitorous Ustasha plotters guilty of crimes stretching over four years. The reason for this sudden about face and vilification of the Archbishop, was the Pastoral Letter issued by the bishops on 20th September. In it they said they were willing to work with the state for the good of the people, but at the same time condemned the anti-religious acts that had taken place ((SL 26-7: SAA 40)).

In November 1945, Fr. Ivan Salic (Stepinac's new secretary), Fr. Martincic (Franciscan Provincial), Fr. Margetic and some minor politicians were brought to Court. Salic admitted allowing a catechist to bless an Ustasha flag in a small chapel ((SAB 140)). Margetic had permitted some money to be buried inside a church ((SAA 100)). In neither case was Stepinac implicated. After nine months of interrogation, they also agreed that their attitude had been influenced by Stepinac's sermons.

This was a vague agreement. Everyone who had heard Stepinac over the years, friend and foe, could agree that they had learnt something from the archbishop's words and so had been influenced by them. The Prosecution claimed that these acts pointed to Stepinac being at the centre of an Ustasha plot to overthrow the Communist government. The trial was suspended and Stepinac arrested on 18th September 1946.



GUESTS OF HONOUR: From left: Three dignitaries of the Orthodox Church; the Partisan General commanding in Zagreb; the Secretary to the Apostolic Visitor: Auxiliary Bishop Dr. Lach; Archbishop Stepinac; Dr. Bakaritch, Communist "People's Premier" of Croatia; the Soviet Military Attache and the Croat Minister of the Interior, Dr. Hebra.

The trial recommenced on 28th September with Stepinac included amongst those charged. The auxiliary bishops appointed Ivo Politeo and Dr. Andrus as defence councils, but the state replaced Andrus with Matko Katicic ((AHO 47)). The prosecution had had fifteen months of open access to captured government and church documents in which to prepare its case. Politeo was restricted to a one-hour visit to his client and one week in which to collect evidence for the defence.

During this short period, Salis was subjected to two long police interrogations, and Canon Slamic was imprisoned for two days. Salis and Slamic knew the diocesan archives well, so their absence greatly hampered Politeo's researches ((SAB 144)). Fourteen defence witnesses were not permitted to appear ((SAA 112)), yet 58 witnesses for the prosecution were heard, even though most were from areas outside Stepinac's diocese ((SAB 153)).

The Court refused to accept documents produced in Stepinac's defence ((SAB 174)). It was not permitted to read in Court a letter from from Fr. Rittig, the new Partisan Minister of Religion ((SAB 169)). During the war, Milutin Radetic, Serbian head of the Zagreb University clinic, had been found passing medical aid to the Partisans. Stepinac had intervened to save his life and he now visited Blazevic to intercede for Stepinac. His evidence was ignored and he was then dismissed from his post ((SAB 175)).

It was said that Ustasha gold was hidden at the Cathedral with the Archbishop's knowledge. Allegedly, Glavas had provided the evidence for this. As he had been executed, he could not be questioned and challenged ((SL 12)). The official Yugoslav account (Sudjenje) omitted the speeches by the defence lawyers, the evidence of the few permitted defence witnesses and the attempts to question those of the prosecution ((SAA 95)).

Kvaternik, who had proclaimed the NDH, was brought as a prosecution witness, but said that both Pavelic and the Ustasha hated Stepinac ((RJW 57)). His statement was omitted from the transcript and was not reported in the press ((SAB 148)). The Prosecutor was seen to 'revise' notes taken by the stenographers ((SAB 148)). Some of the notes taken by spectators were confiscated. On 18th September one hundred and fifty priests of the Zagreb diocese risked arrest by issuing a statement in support of their archbishop ((SL 3)).

The trial was held under Communist laws which had not existed during the war ((AHO 50)). Many of his judges were professional lawyers and had taken an oath to Pavelic, something the archbishop had never done ((RP 239)).

On 11th October he was found guilty of co-operating with the Ustasha during and after the war, and sentenced to sixteen years imprisonment. In November 1946, Tito admitted that the trial had been prepared months in advance ((SAA 119)). This showed the hypocrisy of the claim that the trial of priests and Ustasha agents had exposed evidence which led to Stepinac's arrest. He was transferred to house detention in 1951 ((SAB 191)), made a Cardinal in 1952 and died in 1960.

Nearly forty years later Hrncevic, the official who had arranged the 'trial', stated. "The indictments were designed rather more for publicity than for legality". ((SAB 138)). The public prosecutor, Jakov Blazevic, admitted that if Stepinac had agreed to head an independent Catholic Church, he would not have been brought to Court ((SAB 147)).

Milovan Djilas, who at the time had been a member of the inner circle of the Communist leadership, wrote in 1983 that if Stepinac had not opposed Tito's regime, the trial would not have taken place ((MTA 180)). Any book that prints that Stepinac was found guilty of war crimes, without mentioning the nature of the trial, is providing a distorted view of history.

12). Papal Silence

Some authors produce evidence that the Pope knew of atrocities committed by the Ustasha. They then point to the absence of any specific condemnation, as something of which the Church should be ashamed.

These writers live in an unreal world. The Holy See received reports, rumours, distorted stories and lies from all over Europe. Every side wanted the Pope to endorse their accusations. But he refused to be drawn into these thousands of disputed allegations. Even if desirable, it would have been impossible for him to judge the guilt of individuals from second and third hand accounts concerning incidents in remote countries and far away villages. Even when the guilt of a particular incident may have seemed clear, there may have been a worse but hidden atrocity committed by the other side. To have condemned crimes committed by one side, while not doing the same regarding those of the other because its' were hidden, would have been irresponsible, unjust and a contravention of neutrality.

The Pope left the bishops free to take whatever actions they judged best to aid and protect victims in their countries. He encouraged them and their clergy to be brave but prudent also. Throughout the war the Pope issued firm but general condemnations of sins.

Both the guilty and the innocent, whether Nazis, Italians, Communists, Ustasha, Chetniks or Partisans, knew the committing of atrocities was wrong.

In his Christmas broadcast of 1941, the Pope said:

"In a new order founded on moral principles . . . there can be no place for (1) open or subtle oppression of the cultural and language characteristics of national minorities, (2) contraction of their economic capacities, (3) limitation or abolition of their natural fecundity." He added that justice would make it easier for a government to demand loyalty of its citizens ((CMC 319)).

At Christmas 1942, he complained over the radio:

"International Conventions entered upon to make war less inhuman by confining it to combatants, by regulating the treatment of occupied countries and of prisoners of war, have in various places remained a dead letter . . ." He called on all men of courage and honour to unite in a solemn vow to bring society back to observing the divine law. He continued: "Humanity Awees this vow to those hundreds of thousands who, without any fault, sometimes only by reason of their nationality or race, are marked down for death or gradual extinction." ((PXIIC 18-19)).

While he may have had Jews and Gypsies mainly in mind, his words would also have applied to Poles, Serbs and Russians. This papal utterance, like others, was prohibited from being published in the NDH ((AHO 18-19)). Six months later, in June 1943, the Pope issued 'Mystici Corporis Christi' (The Mystical Body of Christ). This Encyclical, while expressing the desire that all should become Catholic, included this passage:

"We declare that it is absolutely necessary that this should come about by their free choice, since no man believes unless he is willing. Wherefore if any persons, not believing, are constrained to enter a church, to approach the altar, and to receive sacraments, they certainly do not become true believers in Christ; because that faith without which 'it is impossible to please God' must be a perfectly free 'homage of intellect and will'. Should it therefore at any time happen that, contrary to the unvarying doctrine of this Apostolic See, a person is compelled against his will to embrace the Catholic faith, We cannot in conscience withhold Our censure". ((PXIIM para. 103)).

The NDH was the only area where 'forced conversions' had been reported. The Pope was making Catholic teaching clear without becoming embroiled in the political sphere by naming any individual or group.

When discussing how Pavelic reached South America after the war, it is frequently asserted that the Pope thought highly of him. As evidence it is recounted that the Pope told the British Ambassador, Francis Osborn: "Pavelic was a much maligned man". While it is true that these words were used, they were not a judgement on Pavelic's 1941-45 period of rule. They were spoken on the 13th June 1941, soon after Pavelic had taken office. A fuller version of the ambassador's report to London reads:

". . . the Pope, in discussing Pavelic, had said that he believed him to be a much maligned man and to have had nothing to do with the murder of king Alexander".

Osborn was pressing the Pope to condemn Pavelic for his alleged involvement in this 1934 murder. This would have greatly assisted Allied propaganda. Osborn asked London for proof of Pavelic's involvement. But his superior admitted that Pavelic had not committed the assassination. He claimed that there was an extremely strong presumption of Pavelic being an accomplice and instigator, but added: "I am afraid we have no evidence here which is likely to be circumstantial enough to convince the Pope that Pavelic is to all intents and purposes a murderer, . . .". ((FO 371/30219/R7327/162/92)).

Andrya Artukovic, also suspected of involvement in the assassination, had been arrested in Britain and extradited to France. The French Courts lacked firm evidence against him. So when Yugoslavia asked for his extradition, they agreed on condition he was not tried for terrorist activities ((IO 17)). This French attitude indicated that the evidence as to who was responsible was not clear. The assassin was a Macedonian and the 'League of Nations' indicted Hungary as the main author of the plot ((SCA 4)). When Stepinac asked Pavelic directly whether he had been involved, he replied that his conscience was absolutely clear and that the French had been unsuccessful in trying to implicate him ((SAB 64)).

It is now accepted that Pavelic did plan the assassination of the royal dictator, and that Artukovic was in Britain to make a further attempt if that in France failed ((IO 17)). But in June 1941 neither the Pope nor Britain had the evidence required to prove that Pavelic was guilty.

13). The Crusaders (Krizari)

Claims have been made that leading members of the Catholic 'Crusader' youth movement were supporters of Ustasha crimes. Clarification is therefore required.

Following the First World War, the Communists built a small dedicated movement of youth amongst the students. The secular 'Sokol' youth movement also expanded. As the Sokols promoted Yugoslavism, it was accused of Serbianising Croatian youth ((RJW 41)). During king Alexander's dictatorship it enjoyed a state monopoly of youth work ((SSJ 14:29)).

There were two Catholic groups, the Domagoj for students, and the Crusaders (Krizari) for non-students. Although founded by priests and lay Catholics, not all their members were religious. Many had been attracted by the provision of social, intellectual and sporting activities. An indication of this was seen when Stepinac found it necessary to rule that at least five minutes of each meeting should be devoted to religious instruction or prayer ((SAB 40)). At the age of thirty, members could transfer to the adult 'seniors' ((RJW 41)).

The lack of interest in Croatian culture shown by the Communists and Sokols alienated those who were proud of being Croatian. These youths joined the Catholic organisations and thereby gave them a Croatian nationalist flavour as well as a religious orientation ((SAB 43)).

In the late 1930s many young Croats were impatient with the failure of the Croatian Peasant Party to gain concessions from the Serbs. The Frankists were illegal but, by volunteering to assist in youth work, they were able to use the Crusaders as a cover for encouraging Croatian nationalism. A senior leader telling stories of Frankists or other nationalist heroes, around a camp fire, could be very influential.

A struggle developed between the extreme nationalist elements amongst the 'seniors' and the bishops ((EP 65-66, SAB 44-45)). At Christmas 1934, the bishops established 'Catholic Action', an organisation under their tight control ((RJW 44)). They also attempted to bring the Domagoj and Crusaders under firmer religious leadership. In 1936 Stepinac was concerned at Communist and Nazi ideas influencing young Catholics ((RJW 48)). In 1937 the bishops were worried at Frankist influence, so closed down the 'senior' Krizari groups. But the Frankists, as individuals, continued to exert influence ((VM 180, CF 272)).

The Frankists often met under fictitious names, such as: "Mary's Congregation", in the homes of Crusaders ((EP 66)). In 1938 there was another attempt by the bishops to gain firm control of the Crusaders ((RJW 48)). During this same period of 1937-41, the Communists were infiltrating the Sokols with varying degrees of success ((SSJ 14: 28-45)).

When the Ustasha achieved power, Frankists sent messages of praise to Pavelic in the name of some Crusader branches ((EP 66)). It is these messages which anti-Catholic books print so as to imply that all the Crusaders and the bishops were keen Frankist supporters of Pavelic.

At a later date, several organisers (Frankist and non-Frankist) in the Crusaders were offered posts in the NDH Civil Service. As an inducement, their years of full-time paid employment in the Youth Services were treated as credits towards their pension ((CF 272)). This didn't mean that all who joined the Civil Service were Ustasha, or that all Civil Servants condoned crimes. Soon after the German invasion, Stepinac arranged a meeting with teachers of religion to plan how to resist the penetration of nazi and fascist ideas ((SL 4)). The Crusader magazine was banned several times by the NDH government ((SL 12)).

The national leaders of the Crusaders were loyal to the Church, yet this does not prevent anti-Catholics making accusations against them. The pre-war President, Ivan Protulipac, was always anti-Nazi ((SL 10)). Felix Niedzielski succeeded him ((RP 116)), but in 1941 gave up this position with the Crusaders and took an appointment in Bosnian local government ((SL 11 and 15)). It appears that he joined the Ustasha two and a half years later but did not become a fanatical thug. He was always ready to protect the persecuted. When captured by the Partisans, 850 Serbian Orthodox families appealed on his behalf, but the Communists still executed him ((RP 116)). Leo Znidarcic, an exemplary Catholic and anti-Nazi ((SL 10)), had replaced Niedzielski as President of the Crusaders. The Ustasha suspected him of being a spy for the Partisans, and Stepinac had to intervene several times on his behalf ((SL 12)).

The assertion that Fr. Grega Peinovic, the Crusader Director, was made president of the Ustasha propaganda office ((AM 59)) is untrue ((SL 15)). The accusation that the Crusaders were a 'Criminal Organization' was pure invective. Canon Milan Beluhan was well known as a saintly friend of the poor workers, so even the Communists dared not charge him with any crime. But as the foremost Spiritual Assistant of the Crusaders he should logically have been accused of being the 'Chief Criminal' of a 'Criminal Organisation' ((RP 116-7)).

The Catholic Action organisation was composed of dedicated Catholics and under close Church control. On 7th December 1941 membership of it and the Ustasha was declared incompatible. ((RP 114)).

14). The Catholic Press

Some books provide quotations from publications with Catholic sounding names, such as 'Katolicki List'. These purport to show that pre-war they published articles praising fascist Slovakia, asserting that Catholics could be National Socialists, and later welcoming the Ustasha to power.

It is necessary to place the quotations into context. The early Communists had a vision of a world socialist revolution and government, but in several countries political parties developed which wished to combine socialist aims, such as a more just distribution of wealth, with national independence. Several called themselves 'National Socialists'. This didn't imply that they had the same beliefs as the 'National Socialists' (Nazis) of Germany. As an example: the large party of that name in Czechoslovakia was secular, liberal and democratic. So Benes and Masaryk, its leaders, were 'National Socialists' who spent the war years in London fighting German 'National Socialists'.

Hitler's National Socialists had cured inflation, apathy, unemployment and social disorder. So a few Slovaks and Croats, including some Catholics, wondered whether they could develop a national socialism to achieve economic social reform whilst at the same time preserving human rights. It is absurd to suggest that such Catholics wished for a Nazi anti-Catholic pagan future.

Slovakia obtained autonomy in 1938 and became independent in 1939. It was not shameful that some Croats hoped that Croatia might follow a similar path. An account of how Slovakia became independent, and of its alleged fascism, is provided elsewhere on this web site.

The Archbishop of Zagreb appointed the editor of the weekly 'Katolicki List'. Its policies during the pre-war years were broadly in accord with its Catholic readers. In its pre-war editorials it regularly attacked both Nazism and Communism. In June 1934, following a bishop's Pastoral Letter condemning Nazism as: 'an extreme nationalist view . . . the worst of heresy . . . an apostacy from Christianity', it wrote: "Hitlerism is a very poisonous growth in the soil... where it is beginning to bear fruit". It also provided statistics of Hitler's victims ((SAB 53)).

In 1941 the editors of Catholic publications, like most Croats, welcomed independence and praised Pavelic for achieving it ((SL 17)). But this didn't mean that they supported Nazi paganism or the unchristian acts of Pavelic's government during the following years.

Within two days of achieving power, Pavelic closed the leading Catholic daily, 'Hrvatski Glas', and within two months two thirds of the Catholic periodicals had been closed down ((RP 112)). 'Katolicki List' was permitted to continue but, like other papers, was strictly censored. This not only involved words and phrases being suppressed, but words being added or changed. As an example, in May 1945 when the bishops issued their joint Pastoral Letter, they referred to 'Hrvatska' (Croatia), but the censors changed this to 'NDH' ((RP 216-7)).

Katolicki List was constantly made to refer to Marcone as if he was the Pope's representative to the NDH ((EP 77-8)):

Catholic publications had the choice of submitting to censorship and distortion, or closing down ((SL 16)). The Church was determined to retain some publications so as to be able to influence thought. She relied on readers 'reading between the lines' when pieces were distorted. When there was a similarity of expression and phraseology in diverse publications, readers were alerted to these passages having been added by the censor ((RP 113)). Even so, the government twice suspended publication of Katolicki List ((RP 357)).

An item in Katolicki Tjednik of Sarajevo in June 1941 shows how little the smaller publications remained Catholic. It wrote that the killing of Serbs: "Does not concern our religious and Catholic conscience". ((EP 85)). On 29th June 1942 Stepinac openly challenged the censors from his Cathedral pulpit:

"We cannot be Catholics in church, and in the streets attack like pagans the orders of the Vicar of Christ given for the purpose of public welfare because, perhaps they do not suit our personal taste. We cannot today because it suits us praise the Holy Father, and tomorrow in the newspapers cross out in red pencil his words and his sermons, given for the sole purpose of leading men to God". ((RP 205)).

When in 1944 Stepinac preached against government atrocities, the whole Croatian press attacked him for: 'meddling in politics'. Katolicki List joined in this attack ((AHO 50)), clearly showing who controlled it. So extracts taken from publications with Catholic names or under catholic auspices are completely unreliable for assessing the views of the bishops and loyal Catholics at that time.

15). Rebaptisms and Oaths

The word 'rebaptism' is misleading. Once a person is baptised he cannot be baptised again. It is possible that gangs of thugs poured water over terrified Serbs, so as to make them 'Croats'. If so, this would be sacrilegious play-acting and indicate a complete disregard for religion amongst the thugs involved.

There are different accounts of the setting in which the Ustasha oath was taken, and it probably varied. Stepinac's view was made clear in a letter to be communicated to all military chaplains in October 1943.

"Since complaints have increased, during the past few days, that oaths are being taken in front of the Crucifix with a dagger and a revolves alongside it, thus profaning the sanctity and holiness of the Crucifix, the President of the Episcopal Conference informs you that it is forbidden to administer oaths in front of a dagger and a revolver . . .". ((RP 368-9))

CHAPTER V **PROPAGANDA**

1). The Authors Manhatten and O'Brien

Knowledge of an author's background can often assist in deciding his reliability. So it is interesting to compare Avro Manhatten with Anthony O'Brien.

Manhatten was born in 1915 and hated religion from a young age ((RHA 317)). Although a close friend of Marie Stopes, the pioneer of contraception in England, she called him a 'murderer' when one of his girl friends had an abortion ((RHA 317)). During the war he was trained by the Allies in Political Warfare ((AM 114)), so became proficient in the production of deceptive propaganda. He spent the rest of his life using this skill in his warfare against the Catholic Church. As a friend of Communism, many of his falsehoods came from that source, but in 1976 he admitted to admiring the British racist 'National Front', Enoch Powell, the leading opponent of coloured migration into Britain and Ian Paisley of Northern Ireland ((RHA 317)).

Anthony H. O'Brien was a lawyer born in Austria of Irish parents. He commanded the auxiliary formation which quelled the Nazi Austrian rising of 1934. Later, when Hitler invaded Austria, O'Brien escaped to Czechoslovakia. But the Germans demanded his extradition, so he fled to Yugoslavia. He had been in correspondence with Stepinac for over four years. For the next two and a half years he had a weekly lunch with him ((AHO 3-9)). For two of these years he assisted relief work for Catholic Jewish refugees from Hitler ((AHO 10)). When the Germans invaded Yugoslavia he tried to leave, but was interned with 1,000 Jews in an Italian camp on the isle of Korchula ((AHO 12)). So O'Brien's small book, 'Archbishop Stepinac' that witnesses to Stepinac's firm anti-Nazism, was authored by a dedicated anti-Nazi.

2. Propaganda Tricks

The statement issued by the bishops in November 1941 which clearly forbade forced conversions, presents a problem for anti-Catholic authors. It is therefore instructive to see how they have dealt with it.

On page 97 of his 1986 book, Manhattan mentions the statement and prints an extract from point 1. Following pages of pictures, he then prints on page 100 an extract from point 2. This stated the need for each missionary to gain authority from a Church authority. But the part forbidding a 'missioner' being appointed by the civil authorities is omitted. Manhattan then prints the first two sentences of point 11, with the following omitted: "All proceedings contrary to law in regard to Orthodox persons shall be strictly forbidden and they shall be penalized as other citizens through due process of law. And, most important, all private actions in destroying the churches and chapels of the Orthodox or the stealing of their property should be severely punished".

At the end of the shortened extract from point 11, a small number is given as if it is a reference to source material. Few may bother to look it up, but those who do so will come to pages 227 and 228. There the reader will see abbreviated versions of points 3,4,5,6,9 and 10, which gave instructions of how priests should prepare people to join the Church. By breaking up the statement of the bishops in this confusing manner, many readers may not notice that points 7 and 8 have not been given at all. If they should notice this, they are likely to presume that they were of little importance. Yet point 8 is the most important of all. It reads: "Only those may be received into the Catholic Church who are converted without any constraint, completely free, led by an interior conviction of the truth of the Catholic faith, and have entirely fulfilled the ecclesiastical regulations".

It may be added that when introducing the bishop's statement, Manhattan provides a wrong date. This hinders a reader's ability to locate the full text. (See forced conversions section).

The anti-Catholic writer, Edmund Paris, in his 1961 book: 'Convert or Die', does list the points, but avoids the problem by writing that the bishops were being hypocritical ((EP 144)). In another book he omits mention of this key statement, yet finds room to print that Stepinac, Saric and nine members of the Sabor were Jesuits! ((EPA 144-5)). Such assertions would be laughable if not about a serious subject. While useful pieces of information may occasionally be found in his books, his writings are very unreliable.

Dr. Milan Bulajic's book, translated into English in 1994, exudes a blind hatred of Croats and Catholics. It omits the statement itself and merely quotes short extracts from Stepinac's covering letter to Pavelic ((MB 125)).

Another trick, amongst many, used by Manhattan appears in his 1986 book. He implies that Louis Adamic was the main Catholic defender of the Church's record. He writes that Adamic: 'was the Catholic spearhead . . . and that the ponderous Catholic machinery was set in motion to promote the Adamic line' ((AM 113)). When he disposed of Adamic's arguments, readers could fall into the trap of believing the Church's defence to be weak. But Adamic was not a Catholic spokesman. A Slovene born in 1890, he went to America in 1913 and visited Yugoslavia in 1932. In 1934 he published a book condemning the Serbian dictatorship and called on Eastern Europe to revolt and join the Soviet Union.

When Tito, backed by Communist intellectuals, emerged as head of the Partisans, Adamic wrote articles for the American Press urging Yugoslavia, and the Yugoslavs in America, to support Communism. At the end of 1944 he told a friend that the: ". . . well meaning liberals and particularly the Catholic clergy, had to be removed if not wiped out". He closed his mind to the persecution of the Churches and was highly praised by Tito while visiting Yugoslavia in 1949 ((SSJ 5: 15-30)). So, as the spokesman for Yugoslav Communism in America, Adamic was an enemy of the Church, not its 'spearhead'. Manhattan used this ruse to distract attention from the fact that he didn't mention the real defenders of the Church and the evidence they presented.

3. Photography

Pictures are available of Catholic bishops, priests and nuns associating with Ustasha leaders and Croatian troops. In anti-Catholic books, captions are added presenting them as evidence of Catholic friendship for Ustasha killers.

As in all countries, it is necessary for the clergy to meet government ministers and local officials. In Britain, hospital chaplains converse with doctors, even though several may be carrying out abortions daily. In business meetings and at official and informal ceremonies, such as the presentation of a retirement gift to a nurse, priests and abortionists may be seen together in photographs. They may even be caught on a film smiling at the same joke. But these pictures are not evidence that the Catholic Church, or the priest shown, advocates or condones the killing of babies.

Throughout its existence the NDH government endeavoured to show that it had Church support. So it was eager to publish pictures of clergy in conversation with government officials. Accompanied by photographers, Pavelic would arrive at the same public functions as Stepinac ((SAB 93)). One photograph 'shows' Stepinac having a 'political meeting' with Pavelic and other Ustasha leaders. In reality it was taken at the annual Zagreb Fair to which both had been invited ((AHO 38-39)). There are pictures of Ustasha leader Macanec visiting the Franciscan college of Visoko in Bosnia. As he was the Minister of Education ((SL 24)), there was nothing surprising or sinister in him visiting a school. He was the man who in November 1943 wrote the long racist and bitterly anti-Stepinac article, which appeared in all the papers ((AHO 50)). It is quite likely that Macanec spent his visit to Visoko arguing with the Franciscans.

As in other Catholic countries, many nuns in Croatia acted as nurses. There are photographs of them walking to the front line with Croatian troops, but this didn't make them criminals. Some were awarded service medals, but this didn't make them guilty of condoning atrocities committed by undisciplined bands in a different area of the country a few years previously.

Pictures of clergy showing respect to a chequerboard flag are presented as evidence of their support for the Ustasha. But the design was not an Ustasha invention. It was the traditional Croatian 'Sahovnica' symbol ((RJD 291)) and became so again in 1990 ((RJD 292)). The Croatian people did not give permission for the Ustasha 'U' emblem being placed above the chequerboard.

A photograph of Stepinac leading a group of bishops to meet Pavelic is captioned as an example of their alleged 'frequent conferences with him'. ((AM 94)). But the bishops were dispersed throughout the country and rarely came together. The picture appears to have been taken when they met Pavelic at the end of their November 1941 conference. It was at that meeting that they demanded that state officials stop 'converting' the Orthodox.

In one picture soldiers are shown giving a Nazi-type salute at a funeral. The priest's arm is also raised and the implication in the caption is that clergy eagerly gave this salute. But a priest raises his arm, although not so high nor so stiffly, in order to give a blessing over a grave, yet in a picture this could look like a Nazi salute. A wave by a bishop to someone leaving by train may also look like a low angled Nazi salute.

Some pictures could be genuine when concerning a rebel Ustasha priest, but in general this type of photography merely aims to inflame emotions and distort evidence. It doesn't add any factual knowledge about life in NDH. Many Ustasha and Chetnik bands, especially in the early days of the war when most atrocities were committed, did not have uniforms ((HT April 1992)). It is not possible therefore to determine whether those shown near atrocities were: 'wild Ustasha' or 'wild Chetniks'.

Edmond Paris wrote a caption under one picture as: 'Stepinac together with his personnel bringing New Year greetings to Pavelic' ((EP 240)). This evokes feelings of friendly intimacy. Milan Bulajic prints this picture in a wider frame ((MB 105)), and it shows a Moslem wearing a fez just behind Stepinac, so not 'part of Stepinac's personnel'. He dates it as 3rd February 1945, which is rather late for a New Year greeting. In another book we are able to view the whole photograph, showing not only the Moslem leader but also the Metropolitan of the Croatian Orthodox Church ((CF 273)). So the picture was not of an intimate private Catholic-Pavelic meeting, but of a formal gathering of all the main religious leaders with the head of state.

During Archbishop Stepinac's 'trial', thousands crowded the churches to demonstrate their support for him. Normally 200 Zagreb university students participated in the Easter retreat. But in 1946 this rose to 4,000 ((RP 50)). The Communists were desperate to show pictures of anti-Stepinac crowds. So in January 1946 the Partisans organised a 'peoples demonstration' against the black market. As it was led past the Archbishop's residence, a few Communists, using the huge numbers as a backdrop, demanded the trial and conviction of Stepinac for crimes against the people ((RP 53)). The photographers were ready to take pictures of the angry faces and banners. So the impression was given of a huge angry crowd of Croatian Catholics having gathered precisely to demand Stepinac's conviction.

4. Archbishop Stepinac's Diary

Many books print extracts from this diary so as to indicate Stepinac's alleged character and frame of mind. They show him as secretly hating the Serbs, Orthodoxy, Protestants, the Old Catholics and the Yugoslav state, while Outwardly showing goodwill towards them.

How reliable are these alleged extracts? The diary consists of five books about the size of large dictionaries. They cover the period 30th May 1934, when Stepinac became auxiliary bishop, to 13th February 1945 ((CF 273)). The government did not use them at Stepinac's 'trial'. The Communists claimed to have found them during 1950 in the building which had housed the Foreign Ministry of the NDH ((SAA 109)).

It was not a private diary of Stepinac's inmost thoughts as implied. It was an official diary of public events, drawn up by himself and members of his household ((CF 420)), such as secretaries and the Master of Ceremonies ((EP 56, CF 273)). Letters and other documents were pasted-in ((SAA 109)). Some documents were merely 'attached' to the diary ((CF 420)). Many entries are in the third person ((CF 273)) such as: "The Archbishop had his first meeting", rather than: "I had my first meeting" ((MB 73)). This semi-public official diary in, scrapbook form, would have been a most unlikely place to write down secret evil thoughts.

The author Falconi was permitted a brief look at it, so that he could write down some of the alleged entries ((SAA 109)). Anti-Catholic Communist and Serbian authors have printed edited extracts they claim were in the diary. But both the Communist and the Serbian Belgrade governments have refused to permit Western scholars to examine it ((RJW 60)). The published extracts conveniently supported the Communist propaganda image of Stepinac. They could have added them after the war. For example: "The Schismatics are the curse of Europe — almost worse than the Protestants". ((FM 162)). These words do not appear in larger extracts reproduced in other books ((MB 61-3)).

Most countries refuse to publish classified State Papers, but this 'diary' is not such a paper. Until the diary is made available to international scholars, including handwriting experts and forensic scientists, extracts should be considered as fiction. If it were truly unfavourable to Stepinac, it would have been released many years ago.

5). A 1943 Report

During the 'trial' of Stepinac in 1946, the prosecution produced a report allegedly sent by the archbishop to the Pope dated 18th May 1943 ((RP 184)). This bitterly condemned the Serbs and the Orthodox Church. It also showed Stepinac working for the Ustasha and calling on the Pope to arrange for foreign intervention in Yugoslavia ((RP 211)).

Stepinac denied he had sent it ((RP 211-2)). It was not written on diocesan paper, was without an address, signature or conclusion. It was in Italian, instead of the formalized Latin style normally used by bishops. It referred to Stepinac as: 'Metropoleta de Croatiae et Slavoniae', yet Stepinac never referred to himself as such. It contained detailed information about Bosnia and its history which Stepinac was unlikely to know ((SAA 113)), especially as Bosnia was not part of his diocese. The Communists claimed that it was found in the NDH Foreign Ministry, yet Stepinac didn't send copies of his reports there and others were not produced. As the Foreign Ministry archives were left at the end of the war in the Archbishop's palace, Stepinac would have had the opportunity to remove such an incriminating report, if it had existed. The Holy See had sent a letter to Stepinac on June 17th 1943, but the subject matter was completely different to that in the alleged report ((RP 212-5)).

No just legal system in the world would have accepted this 'Report' as evidence. Yet this Communist Court did so, and it is reprinted as factual evidence by anti-Catholics authors.

6). Allied Intelligence Documents

These are sometimes used to provide apparently independent evidence of Church support of crimes. But Allied agents sent home vast quantities of information. Facts were inter-mixed with rumours, lies and propaganda from all sides. It was for the experts in London and Washington to try separate truth from falsehood. Some of this information has now been declassified and it is possible for it to be misused. Items were obtained from Chetnik, Ustasha, German or Communist sources, some were mere rumours. Sometimes an agent would add his own assessment of the partial information he had collected from his area. When an extract is photocopied from Allied files, with important looking reference numbers, an unwary reader may be deceived into accepting it as coming from an unbiased well informed American or British source. Yet they were usually merely comments made on the basis of Chetnik or Communist propaganda.

7). The Aksamovic Leaflet

Copies of a leaflet have been found which claimed to have been produced on the printing press of bishop Aksamovic. It was entitled 'Friendly Advice' and signed 'Friends of the People'. Undated, it was in circulation during May 1941 ((SAB 74, 225)). It urged Serbs to become Catholics so as to avoid being killed. There is no proof that it was printed on the diocesan press or authorised by the bishop.

Since the time of the proposed Concordat in 1937 the country had been flooded with alarmist rumours, anonymous pamphlets and tendentious articles ((SAA 5)). So this leaflet is valueless as evidence of the bishop's views. Most likely an Ustasha militant produced it to frighten Serbs into leaving the country. Even if printed on the press used by the diocese, this would not prove that the bishop was aware of it. Rapotee, the London Yugoslav government's agent, named Aksamovic as one of the three outstanding Catholic bishops upholding Christian values ((SAB 94)). At a later date, pro-Partisan leaflets were secretly printed in Stepinac's palace without his knowledge ((SL 27)).

8). The Grisogono Letter

In December 1941 copies of a letter signed by Dr. Prvislav Grisogono, a well-known Catholic and a respected Croatian politician, came into circulation. It was addressed to Archbishop Stepinac and condemned the leaders of the Church for permitting priests and monks to kill and torture thousands of Serbs. The writer condemned the sending of nuns, with a dagger in one hand and a prayer book in the other, to convert the survivors. He condemned bishop Aksamovic's threatening leaflet. He gave details of priest-led gangs of thugs, of jars of Serbian eyes, strings of tongues and even greater acts of bestiality. Signed by such a man, his charges could not be explained away as Chetnik propaganda.

A Serb in the Yugoslav government in London ordered the letter to be broadcast from the Middle East over 'Radio Kavageorge' to Yugoslavia ((SSJ 51: 87)). The Germans also encouraged its circulation as it promoted hatred between Serbs and Croats ((SSJ 51: 86)). A later and expanded version was dated 8th February 1942 and had the address of the German concentration camp at Zemun ((SSJ 51: 86)).

Although this letter was reprinted in many books after the war, it was a forgery. Prvislav Grisogono was in the Gestapo prison at Banjica, near Belgrade, from 1st October 1941 till late January 1942. On his release he wrote to Stepinac to disown the letter ((SSJ 51: 86)). Stepinac's secretary has confirmed that this letter of denial was received ((SL 19)).

Prvislav was dedicated to the unity of Yugoslavia so can not be justly accused of Ustasha sympathies by writing this denial.

Since the war Prvislav's son Nenad and daughter Vivian, have both informed historians that the letter was a forgery. Nenad, In September 1943, led the defence of Split against German and Ustasha forces ((SSJ 55: 1)).

He then became a minister in the Royal government in London. Both he and his sister remained firm supporters of Yugoslavia and loyal to king Peter throughout their lives so their testimony cannot be ignored. The Serbian son and daughter of Adam Pribiceic have stated that it was their father who forged the letter. Adam's political assistant throughout his career, Vlastimir Stojanovic, has endorsed their statements ((SSJ 51: 87)).

Despite all this evidence, anti-Catholic authors still use this forgery. Edmund Paris prints extracts in his 1961 book ((EP 162)) and Manhatten introduces it in his 1986 book with, "Yet nothing could more eloquently indite his Church than this letter . . ." ((AM 117)). In May 1992 he repeated it in an article in a Serbian publication ((SSJ 51: 86)). This falsehood has been repeated so many times that even normally reliable authors have thought it to be authentic.

FINAL POINTS

1. It has not been possible in this booklet to answer all accusations made against Croatian Catholics. In many cases witnesses are unfortunately no longer with us.
2. The allegation is sometimes heard that the Holy See helped Ustasha criminals escape to South America at the end of the war. This is part of wider allegations concerning what happened to Hitler's supporters who had been active throughout Europe, so it is more logical to consider this allegation in another booklet

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The full texts of three sermons preached by Archbishop Stepinac against racial hatred during 1943, are available on this web site.

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