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The Priestly Patriotic Associations in the Eastern European Countries

Abstract: The priestly patriotic associations used to be a part of the every day life of the Catholic Church in the Eastern European countries where after World War II Communist Parties seized power putting in their programmes the elimination of the Catholic Church from the public life and in the final analysis the destruction of the religion in general. In spite of the fact that the associations were considered professional guilds of progressive priests with a particular national mission they were planned by their founders or instigators (mainly coming from various secret services and the offices for religious affairs) as a means of internal dissension among priests, among priests and bishops, among local Churches and the Holy See, and in the final stage also among the leaders of church communities and their members. A special attention of the totalitarian authorities was dedicated to the priests because they were in touch with the population and the most vulnerable part of the Church structures. To perform their duties became impossible if their relations with the local authorities as well as with the repressive institutions were not regulated or if the latter set obstacles in fulfilling their priestly work. Taking into account the necessary historic and social context, the overview of the state of the matters in Yugoslavia (Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Croatia), Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia demonstrates that the instigators of the priestly patriotic societies followed the same pattern, used the same methods and defined the same goals of their activities. From the side of the official Church leadership the societies were looked on with suspicion, sometimes with complete rejection.

Key words: the Catholic Church, priests, the priestly patriotic associations, Communist countries, the Holy See.

Povzetek: Domoljubna duhovniška združenja v vzhodnoevropskih državah

Nastajanje domoljubnih duhovniških stanovskih združenj je bilo v desetletjih po drugi svetovni vojni sestavina obstoja Katoliške cerkve v vseh državah vzhodne Evrope, kjer so prišle na oblast komunistične partije in so med programske cilje svoje oblasti uvedle izločitev Cerkve iz javnega življenja ter v končnem pogledu uničenje religije nasploh. Čeprav so društva veljalo kot poklicna združenja naprednih duhovnikov, s poudarjenim narodnim poslanstvom, so njihovi pobudniki, predvsem so to bile različne tajne službe in uradi za verske skupnosti, z njimi želeli prinesiti notranjo diferenciacijo med duhovnike, med duhovnike in škofe, med krajevno Cerkvijo in Svetim sedežem, v končni analizi pa tudi med voditelje Cerkve in člane cerkvenih občestev. Totalitarne oblasti so največjo pozornost namenjale duhovnikom, ker so ti imeli stike z ljudmi in so bili tudi najbolj ranljivi pri opravljanju svojega poslanstva. Njihovo delo je bilo nemogoče, če so pri tem srečevali ovire s strani državnih uradnikov in represivnih ustanov. Čeprav je nujno upoštevati razlike med posameznimi državami, vendarle pregled stanja v Jugoslaviji (Slovenija, Bosna in Hercegovina, Hrvaška), Madžarski, Poljski in Češkoslovaški kaže, da so duhovniška patriotična združenja nastajala po istem vzorcu, z istimi nameni in da so njihovi pobudniki uporabljali iste metode. S strani vodstva Cerkve je njihovo nastajanje spremljalo nezaupanje, v nekaterih okoljih pa popolna zavrnitev.

Ključne besede: Katoliška cerkev, duhovniki, duhovniška narodna združenja, države komunističnega bloka, Sveti sedež.

Introduction

The primary method of incapacitating the Catholic Church in Communist European countries was by provoking schisms within the Church's structure. According to internal information given by a senior Communist Party official in Slovenia in 1953, "our entire policy regarding the Church is essentially a combination of different ways of segregating it; it is a question of deepening various existing conflicts. These include on one hand conflicts among the higher clergy and the Vatican, and also conflicts in the Yugoslav episcopacy itself. The Slovenian bishops play a positive role in the latter, because they encourage the Yugoslav bishops to take a stronger stance against the bishops of Dalmatia. There is further discord among the three Slovenian bishops, of whom the bishop of Maribor plays the most positive role as one who has not been exiled and has the cleanest history. /.../ Moreover, there is dissent among the unorganized clerics, who have a negative attitude toward us and are right-wing, as well as among the priests who are organized in the Cyril-Methodius Society (CMD). The Cyril-Methodius Society is an organized power which involves half of the clergy and represents an exceptionally strong means of further creating factions inside the Roman-Catholic Church. The basic purpose of such segregation and deepening of conflicts is, of course, the isolation of the faithful from a certain clerical influence" (Zdešar 2006: 16).

Now that archival documents are increasingly available, it has become easier to discuss patriotic clerical societies in the Communist context, and how they were as a means internally dividing the Catholic Churches within Communist East European countries. Such a study necessarily examines an institution with an efficient repressive objective, but without much credibility. In a number of eastern European states which adopted communism after 1945, and where the rule of the Communist party brought an end to the multi-party system, the Catholic Church remained the only institution exempt from direct party influence and control.¹ Other religious communities with their traditional state ties were already subjected to the new regime and did not represent any threat. The Catholic Church, on the other hand, stood as a pillar of opposition for the new political structures.

¹ Very rich bibliography on this topic has appeared in the recent years. Among many titles see Robert A. Graham, *The Vatican and Communism during World War II. What Really Happened* (San Francisco, 1996); Owen Chadwick, *The Christian Church in the Cold War* (London, 1993); Hansjakob Stehle, *Die Ostpolitik des Vatikans* (München-Zürich, 1975); engl. translation: *Eastern Politics of the Vatican 1917-1979* (Athens, 1981); J. Luxmoore-J. Babiuch, *The Vatican and the Red Flag. The Struggle for the Soul of Eastern Europe* (London, 1999).

Many saw it as something which needed to be eradicated from public life, and tried to lessen its moral respectability and ruin it economically. To achieve this, a system of repressive measures was established. Operations were planned at the top of the party structure and carried out by the secret police, which had a special department for clergy and devout laymen. Those performing of the most important tasks in this field were educated at the Dzerzhinsky Soviet Party School and used fixed methods of manipulation and touted principles of Communist ideology regarding religion. The primary motivating factor behind these deeds was Lenin's claim that religion would be destroyed by the infiltration of the class-fight inside the Church more efficiently than by any external attack (Martin 1979: 84).

Certainly, a different scholarly approach is necessary with regards to specific conditions in each country, and at the same time one must also take into account the manner in which the Communist Party came into power.² Cautiously, at least some common denominators may be found among the various Communist countries which may facilitate comprehension of the whole picture. This picture shows that the fundamental approach toward the Catholic Church was a negative one and that the fight against it, even in different places, was based on similar principles.

An important medium for the internal supervision of the Church's structure was the infiltration of undercover agents into Church ranks. Such agents were positioned in official jobs where they had good access to information: members of the diocesan chancery, officials in bishop's offices, members of the bishops' secretarial conferences, heads of the former ecclesiastical benevolent society, and so forth. In such positions, they could influence decisions regarding church life. Also integrated into the socialist system of Church control were the so called Offices for Ecclesiastical Affairs, similar to the Soviet Department of Religious Affairs. Such an office was established in Slovenia in December 1944 and in Czechoslovakia in October 1949. Under the guise of working in favour of the religious communities, they attempted to control their activities by influencing Church appointments, extorting the priests' collaboration with the secret services prior to permitting them to work in certain social milieus, imposing new and strict measures on the leaders of the local

² For the situation in Yugoslavia, a valuable study is that by Stella Alexander conducted in the late sixties and early seventies, when she had the possibility to discuss very controversial topics among the state and Church representatives, clergy and laity as one of the first historians coming from the West. The study was published in 1979 under the title *Church and State in Yugoslavia since 1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

Churches, and implementing party ideology concerning the role of religion in society. In reality, however, these offices (occasionally also called Commissions for Religious Affairs) were anti-religious and their main objective was to make the practice of religious convictions as difficult as possible. Their directors were either important members of the executive power and the party structures, which was usually the case, or priests, not uncommonly called 'Trojan horses' by the Church hierarchy.

For a better understanding of the Church's situation in the Communist countries as well as the Vatican's attitude towards questions of Church-state relations, the recent publication of Cardinal Agostino Casaroli's memoirs, *Martyrdom of Patience: the Holy See and the Communist Countries (1963-1989)* (*Il Martirio della Pazienza. La Santa Sede e i paesi comunisti*) is of immense importance. It holds particular importance because of the inaccessibility of Vatican archival documents from the post-war period. Card. Casaroli (1914-1988) was an important protagonist of the Holy See's foreign policy for almost thirty years and was a very close collaborator of Popes John XXIII and Paul VI. Between 1979 and 1990 he served as Secretary of State to Pope John Paul II, and remained an influential figure in the Vatican curia after his retirement.³ With the help of public archives, periodicals, and other sources, including archives of some diocesan and state offices, a nearly complete picture of Church-state relations in Communist countries can be elucidated, keeping in mind that additional official and private documents will likely surface in the future.

Priests as Main Targets

Bishops, priests, and other Church officials were particularly attractive and sensitive targets of the new system implemented against religious institutions. One of the structures whose intention was to give rise to and execute internal strife within the ranks of clergy,

³ See Agostino Casaroli, *Il martirio della pazienza. La Santa Sede e i paesi comunisti (1963-89)*. Introduzione di Achille Silvestrini (Torino, 2000). An additional and essential contribution for understanding of the Vatican's Ostpolitik and Card. Casaroli's role in that process see the volume *Il filo sottile. L'Ostpolitik vaticana di Agostino Casaroli* (ed. by Alberto Melloni), preface by Card. Achille Silvestrini (Bologna, 2006). The volume includes an inventory of Card. Casaroli's archives as well as personal reports of imminent Church personalities and politicians, his colleagues, interlocutors and friends. The Associazione Centro Studi Card. A. Casaroli in Bedonia (Parma), Italy has been established for the promotion of Card. Casaroli's significance and his participation in the new direction of the Vatican international relations after 1963.

with the ultimate intention of weakening it, were the so-called Patriotic Clerical Unions (e.g. *Pacem in terris* in Czechoslovakia, *Opus Pacis* in Hungary, *Pax* in Poland). These groups were often presented as pride of rank associations whose tasks were outlined as providing for the welfare of priests - their social status, education, social and medical insurance - and building bridges between the new social order and the Church. An important dimension of such societies, more or less explicitly expressed, was to cause dissension among priests, between priests and the upper hierarchy, as well as between priests and the faithful. At the same time, the associations looked to remove their members from bishops' complete supervision, thereby diminishing their authority. By the same token, membership caused deep distrust and suspicion among priests - both members and non-members.

The associations were sponsored (and sometimes organized) by the secret services, which initiated, financed and controlled their work. Among the first members of such Clerical Unions were those who sympathized with the revolutionary party during the Second World War. They also favored plans to assume the sole right of introducing changes to the working social system, and claimed to be the only ones protecting the interests of the lowest social class. Such ideas had frequently been bred by clergymen in the past. For example, during the People's Front movement in the latter half of the 1930's, or during the Spanish Civil War and other times in between the two World Wars, they allied with left wing political groups and backed Christian socialist ideals. Their attitude toward the occupying forces during World War II was later considered a platform for their evaluation as citizens and as (un)reliable members of the newly created society. In addition, it became an excuse for the repressive measures taken against them in cases where they had sympathized with the political groups opposed to the new regime. However, state authorities categorically denied that they were persecuting the Church as an organization. Officially, they only tried and sentenced individual priests who had been criminals, who had shown sympathy with the occupiers or had collaborated, or priests who had demonstrated insufficient support for the new regime.

In *Hungary*, the clerical association was called *Opus Pacis*. The first meeting of the Priests' Peace Movement took place on August 1, 1950. Its aims were stated by a Cistercian, Richard Horváth. A year later, on May 18, 1951, a State Church office was established to address all issues regarding the place of the Church in Hungarian society, as well as the relations of the Hungarian Church with the Vatican and other Churches. Evidently, the Hungarian bishops were infor-

med of the new development; in July 1951 the bishops' conference issued a statement declaring its 'solidarity' with the Acts of the People's Republic. The conference also expressed its agreement with the Priests' Peace Movement. At the same time, extensive reorganization of the Catholic Church was taking place in which many Church officials of the old stamp were replaced with the pro-reform priests. In the summer of 1951 commissioners of the State Church Office appointed the so called 'peace priests' to be vicars and secretaries in the diocesan chanceries. Three years later (in October 1954) the Priests' Peace Movement merged with the Patriotic Popular Front, which used to be the public face of the Communist Party.

Some noticeable changes in Church-State relations were introduced during the Hungarian uprising in 1956 no sooner than the unrest was ruthlessly suppressed by the Soviet tanks. When in October of that year Card. Jozsef Mindszenty, Prince-Primate of Hungary, was released, he immediately suspended 11 leaders of the Priests' Peace Movement and ordered them to leave the capital immediately. Instead of the confrontation, the Hungarian Bishops' Conference of May 1957 decided to pave a new way of co-existence. They agreed to establish the Catholic Committee of the National Peace Council and recognized Opus Pacis as a Catholic peace movement. As a means of bolstering its image among priests and reassuring its fidelity with the Republic establishment, in May 1958 Opus Pacis invited priests to peace meetings held throughout the whole country. Because those in charge of the priests' seminaries did not agree with the official strategy of the society, they instigated a chain of repressive measures that rattled the Central Seminary in spring 1959. On March 14, 1959, at the request of the government, seminarians were expelled from the Central Seminary because of their hostile attitude towards the Priests' Peace Movement. Many students declared their solidarity with them. When the new academic year started in fall 1959 only 17 out of 100 seminarians of the previous year were allowed to remain. Perhaps most clear and indicative of the situation was when in October 1961 Bishop Havas became president of the Bishops' Conference, Opus Pacis and the Catholic Peace Council.

A new page in Church-state relations in Hungary was inaugurated in the last months of John XXIII's papacy and also on account of the activity of Vienna's Card. Franz König. A special Vatican envoy initiated actions which was realized over the next few years. The first talks between the Vatican, represented by Msgr Agostino Casaroli, deputy Secretary of State to his Holiness, and Hungary, represented by the president of the State Church Office, took place in May 1963 (Casaroli 2000: 78). Talks continued and subsequent meeting took

place in the ensuing months. The next year, on September 15, 1964, the first agreement between Hungary and the Vatican was signed (Casaroli 2000: 89-91).

In spite of these new relations, daily life of the Church communities and priests was not considerably altered. The omnipresent secret service continued its operations and the separation between the Church and state was rigorously enforced. In the very year that the first agreement was signed, there were cases in which priests were arrested for illegal work with young people. A very limited number of religious publications were available. The conditions for Hungarian Christians did not change significantly even in the 1970s "Although priests were rarely arrested now, 90 per cent had been co-opted into the communist-controlled Opus Pacis association. Church attendance had fallen drastically and demoralization was rife" (Luxmoore-Babiuch 1999: 192). With the political changes in the Eastern Europe, among the first countries that opened its doors to new ideas was Hungary, and as a result the sectarian clerical organization lost its significance. In an interview broadcast on the Vatican Radio on October 25, 1989, Msgr Laszlo Danko, Archbishop of Kalocsa, announced the abolition of the Opus Pacis association in Hungary.⁴ The next year a new agreement between the Holy See and the Republic of Hungary was signed. Once again, Msgr Agostino Casaroli played a significant role in this (Casaroli 2000: 120-121).

In *Czechoslovakia*, the state-sponsored association of Catholic clergy was originally called the Peace Movement of Catholic Clergy (MHKD). It was founded in 1951 after Czechoslovakia officially entered the Soviet sphere. It was incorporated into the National Front for the purpose of promoting its program. "In international policy the MHKD backed in its publications and in the pulpit the Soviets and war of liberation. It denounced the threat to peace of the U.S. and its NATO allies. In domestic policy the MHKD defended collectivization and socialization and fought against national chauvinism" (Dunn 1979: 157). The political changes lent themselves to new circumstances, and the MHKD was somewhat transformed: "The successor clerical association to the MHKD in the 1960s was the Czechoslovak Association of Catholic Clergy or, more commonly, *Pacem in Terris*. This later name was taken from Pope John XXIII's encyclical of 1963. The *Pacem in Terris* priests were divided into Czech and Slovak branches" (Nyrop 1982: 176).

⁴ Information taken from the official internet site of the Hungarian Catholic Church. See: www.uj.katolikus.hu/en/kronologia (Table of major events in Hungarian Church History), March 7, 2005.

The state authorities were particularly keen on promoting the patriotic priests who were regularly controlled by the state secret police (Statni Bezpecnost-StB). According to some scholars, up to 10 percent of Czechoslovak priests were cooperating with the secret police, some of them reluctantly, others free-willingly. Many more participated in the activities organized by the official clerical association sponsored by the Communist Party and controlled by the secret services. The main purpose of the society was to encourage progressive priests to distance the national Church from the Vatican, the latter being considered the biggest enemy of the new order. The official clerical society was condemned by the Holy See in March 1982 and dissolved on December 7, 1989. "It literally collapsed hand in hand with the communist regime. The Christian Peace Conference, based in Prague and long tainted by its collaboration with its communist backers, decided to continue its operations, but to try to re-define its role" (Ramet 1994).

During the decades of the society's operations, priests who did not cooperate with the association experienced severe persecution. They spent long years in prison and were absolutely banned from pastoral work after their release. In 2003 Sr Zdenka Cecilia Shellingova was beatified by Pope John Paul II for helping prepare the escape of imprisoned priests. She was sentenced to 12 years in prison for alleged treason. Together with Bishop Vasil Hopko, also a victim of Communist persecution, they were declared Catholic heroes.⁵

Many additional factors must be taken into consideration for a broader understanding of the complexity of the role of the Czechoslovak clerical society. For a short period during the Prague spring in 1968, the association came under attack by Aleksander Dubček. But, like the liberation movement itself, it was short-lived. Aleksander Dubček and the followers of his movement were eliminated by 1969. Following the Prague Spring, Pacem in terris changed its face and was even more strongly controlled by the Office for religious affairs (Stehle 1975: 371). The Pacem in terris association was established in November 1971 from the remnants of Fr Josef Plojhar's 'peace movement,' the MHKD. It took its name from John XXIII's encyclical. When new leaders of the dioceses and other high church offices were chosen in the 1960s and 1970s, they were selected from

⁵ Bishop Vasil Hopko (born in 1904), auxiliary bishop of the Byzantine Catholic diocese of Prešov, died in 1976 after being poisoned over many years. He was appointed bishop in 1947, arrested in 1950, and released in 1968. Because of such brutal treatment he lost mind. Sr Shellingova's death came in 1955 shortly after being released. See »A frail Pope encourages his fellow Slavs,« *The Tablet*, September 20, 2003.

the ranks of *Pacem in terris*. No Church appointment was possible without the explicit 'consensus' of the association. Thus a new 'hierarchy' was created - one without canonical authority, but with strong State support (Casaroli 2000: 127).

The clerical movement became a real ruler over Church life. Any appointment not approved by it was not valid. One of the best known and questionable Church officials was Josef Vrana - the titular bishop, apostolic administrator of the Olomouc diocese and from 1971 president of the pro-regime clerical association. Upon the Vatican's demand, and in compliance with the Prague leaders, he promised to put aside his office in the society. According to the Vatican, the two offices were incompatible; as a bishop he was appointed to be shepherd of all priests and faithful, and not only of the *Pacem in terris* members. Vrana was solemnly inducted in his office in Olomouc by the Vatican foreign minister Msgr Agostino Casaroli on March 4, 1973. It was undoubtedly an eventful day: in a country where the state had been attempting to separate the Church from the Vatican for a quarter century, a high ranking Vatican diplomat installed a new bishop (Casaroli 2000: 160-163). Four days later, on March 8, 1973, Msgr Vrana in fact stepped down, but the news was not published by the official state press agency (Stehle 1975: 337-338). Nevertheless, the consecration of four *Pacem in terris* collaborators was resented by many Catholics.

Even though Msgr Vrana had been appointed only provisionally (*ad nutum Sanctae Sedis*), his appointment raised many doubts and questions. Many Catholics were convinced that the Vatican paid too high a price for certain favors and did not receive enough in return. The Vatican diplomacy did not appear to be very efficient. It seemed as if all acts of persecution by the anti-Catholic campaign were neglected in spite of the fact that years of Communist rule had reduced Czechoslovakia's Catholic clergy by 60 per cent (Luxmoore-Babiuch 1999: 189). In Msgr Casaroli's opinion the negotiations with the Prague regime was an 'impossible case'. In order to promote the *Pacem in terris* ideas, a weekly newsletter called *Katolické noviny* was published. In the early 1980's the Congregation for Clergy published a decree that was applied to *Pacem in terris* in Czechoslovakia, one in particular published in March 1982, and the Vatican officially barred priests from organizations 'undermining the authority of bishops'. In an interview to the Italian newspaper *La Repubblica* (March 11, 1982), Card. Silvio Oddi, the Congregation's prefect and earlier Vatican diplomat in Yugoslavia, declared, "We all know about the activities of this association and how brutally it interferes in the religious sphere" (Luxmoore-Babiuch 1999: 263). According to a Vatican Radio commentary, members were given a choice: either obey Rome

or renounce the priesthood. The regime leaders contradicted the decree, but in the following months several dozen priests did resign from the association. Card. František Tomášek, encouraged by the Vatican during his visit in March 1982, strongly opposed the society's operations. This meant the beginning of the disintegration of an association that strove for the isolation of the Catholic community and which worked alongside the Czechoslovak state, having brought about the community's complete dependence on domestic politics. This process of disintegration coincided with the ideas promoted by the Charter 77 movement, as well as with Pope John Paul II's resounding intervention in Church life in Eastern Europe.

In *Poland*, the clerical society Pax⁶ carried out the same goals of encouraging progressive priests to distance the national Church from Rome and to reconcile the Christianity with Communism. Amid the many Polish priests it was not difficult to find some willing to cooperate. They were headed by Count Boleslaw Piasecki who presumably had had Nazi connections. Condemned to death by the Soviets because of his collaboration with Nazis, he was freed on the condition that he formally work to infiltrate and to subject the Catholic Church for the purpose of the Communist revolution (Martin 1979: 82-83). The Polish bishops were convinced that Pax was a secret agency that demanded rigid obedience, and that its members were obliged to follow of the orders of the Office for Religious Affairs and were paid for their service. By the same token, Piasecki was considered to be directly dependent on the Secret Service as well as on the Office for Religious Affairs, which had complete and totalitarian power over questions concerning the Catholic Church in Poland. It has been noted that, "Piasecki was careful that the publications of Pax should be orthodox. He had a messianic idea. The Pope, and therefore the world, believed that Christianity and Communism could not be reconciled. Since Communism was the best system for just shares in the wealth of the State, Christians must come to see the moral value in the Communist structure of society. And Communists must come to see how Christianity could help them to their better goals. Most Communist countries rejected God officially; most Christian countries rejected Communism. Poland was a country both Catholic and Communist. It must become the model for the world and the Church" (Chadwick 1993: 42).

In his speeches and publications Piasecki called for a reformed Church in which the laity would have an influential role. He also cal-

⁶ Officially called the 'Movement of the Progressive Catholics in Poland' or 'Social Movement of Progressive Catholics'.

led for a more rationalized Church, simultaneously recognizing the transformation of society into atheists and Communists as a positive contribution. Count Piasecki and his followers were trying to win Catholic support for the Communist State while combining “a rigid Catholic conservatism, complete with elements of nationalism and anti-Semitism, with a ruthless commitment to communist aims. Its membership was clan-like and ha secret police links” (Luxmoore-Babiuch 1999: 83).

The situation was particularly painful in 1953, when the association defended the imprisonment of Card. Stefan Wyszynski and the takeover of the Catholic weekly *Tygodnik Powszechny* (founded in 1945 by Cardinal Sapieha). According to O. Chadwick, “The influence of Piasecki and Pax, though never wide, remained for decades. As late as 1975 Pax had about 15,000 members, of whom 1,800 were priests. It had several newspapers, including a small Warsaw daily. But its big influence faded at the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. That brought home to the Communists that they could not run the Church with their chosen clergymen. Willy-nilly, they had to get on with the official Church” (Chadwick 1993: 42-43). Count Piasecki exposed his ideas in the book *The Essential Problems* published in 1955; it was condemned by the Vatican Holy Office that same year. Pax particularly strove to generate public opinion regarding Church and state relations in Poland and abroad, mainly in France. The appropriation of *Tygodnik Powszechny* and its financial resources enabled Pax to publish articles (including additional volumes of the Church Fathers and the writings of some resounding Western Catholic authors, a significant achievement) and periodicals which published their stances. Young authors who had little possibility of publishing elsewhere wrote for publications issued by Pax, and in turn promoted its ideas.⁷

Evidently, the influence of the official Church was too strong to be overcome by a society with such an inconsistent vision. Even Piasecki's government-endorsed Pax - which sought to preserve its pro-regime and pro-Communist attitude to the end in its attempts to be ‘more socialist than the Party, and more devout than the Pope’ - did not achieve its primary goals of separating the Catholic community from within and enlisting as many Catholics as possible for Communism. As early as the late 1950's, Pax's main interest was assessed as being to ‘relive the good times of 1949-56’ (Luxmoore-Babiuch 1999: 130).

⁷ According to Card Casaroli's testimony, Count Piasecki had been trying since 1945 to foster a movement of both priests and laity in favour of the new socialist system. This movement had extensive financial means, particularly in the field of publishing. See A. Casaroli, *Il martirio della pazienza*, p. 292.

From the hierarchical side, the members of the clerical societies were seen as sympathizers of the new regime and were labeled as unreliable. Among other clergy they were thought to be untrustworthy, and were marked as pro-regime. The people saw them as clergymen who were sympathetic to the Party and prepared to cooperate with enemies of religion and the Church for certain privileges and benefits. They marked them as profiteers and political sell-outs. The main aim of those types of unions was the aspiration of starting a national church which would be independent from the Vatican and from the influence of other religious spheres.

An integral part of the fight against the Catholic community, and an effort to influence public opinion, were the so called show trials organized in all Communist countries. In addition to raising fear in the population, these processes wanted to display the superiority of the new justice system and in turn stem any forms of opposition or resistance. Based on the arguments that formed an integral part of the charges in these types of hearings, it is impossible to differentiate them from similar trials staged in Nazi Germany. Priests were typically accused of two things: financial indiscretions (the use of foreign currency) and moral ones (keeping company with adolescents and homosexuality). In this manner the Communist Party tried to destroy the priesthood's moral authority and public reputation. A dimension that differed from Hitler's Germany but was of primary importance to Communist leaders was the maintenance of foreign relations particularly with the Vatican. Many priests who were either broken or threatened by these trials became willing participants at the hands of the secret services. Many of them became involved in organizing clerical organizations and other covert action against the Church and its faithful.

While an analytical study of these trials and subsequent traitor-like behavior may provide a broader understanding of events in these times, we must not overlook each individual's personal tragedies and circumstances. After all, they were victims abused and without the strength to resist the system which was by far more powerful. Those who succumbed first, succumbed forever. Once sentenced and imprisoned, they still remained victim to continuous harassment. Proceedings mounted which eventually caused mutual false accusations, such as fictitious biographies intended to gather evidence against suspects. They were often incarcerated with common criminals, the later considered their superiors who were given authority to treat them worse than other prisoners. Various National and Party holidays were staged as opportunities to show loyalty in exchange for possible amnesty. However, pardons such as the possibility of joining

a clerical society (if one had not done that before) were only granted to priests who had shown signs of earlier collaboration. They were treated as forced labourers, often working in construction building power plants, residential buildings, shops, schools, or forced to destroy churches and other religious structures. Through this work they had the opportunity to display a positive attitude towards the new social order as well as towards physical labour, as the proletariat was considered the most important and the best part of the new social order. During their imprisonment they were subject to constant brainwashing. Various methods of testing the success of political re-education were forced upon them, such as signing statements against bishops, the Vatican, or the Pope, or against various important world events (one must remember that this was during the Cold War where denouncements against western capitalist societies, American Imperialism, and its Vatican supporter were frequently mounted).

The stages of these courts also forced priests to join clerical societies as an expression of accepting the new social order and the socialist society's values. Upon joining, a priest's prison sentence was reduced or abolished. He was granted the right to return to his parish and continue his pastoral work, but before being released had to sign an oath of silence regarding what he had experienced in prison. Furthermore, he had to promise to co-operate in the gathering information as ordered by police authorities. Such a large number of priests were imprisoned in the Republic of Slovenia that a popular proverb emerged that, "Every good priest goes to prison at least once." However, people also became suspicious if a priest was not sentenced and imprisoned. At certain periods nearly ten per cent of the Slovenian clergy was detained, and in total more than two-thirds of all Catholic priests in Slovenia were imprisoned. Members of clerical societies were awarded various State medals, were able to travel abroad, or subscribe to foreign theological literature.

The Case of Yugoslavia

In *Yugoslavia*, two simultaneous struggles were being waged during the Second World War. One was the resistance against occupying forces, the other a civil war over the installation of the Communist Party to power and the introduction of a revolutionary social order. Compared to the situation in other countries, Communism was not imported to Yugoslavia from abroad (eg. the Soviet Union), but grew and festered based on local conditions. Communist groups

were created soon after the First World War, after the Social-Democratic movement was radicalized.⁸ Although the Communist Party was excluded from politics, it illegally functioned through a network of clandestine groups. It was also able to obtain sympathizers from all walks of life (including seminarians and priests). The new parliament organized by the communists first convened as early as in 1942. The following year the dissolved the monarchy, and banished King Peter II. In August 1946 the Party declared a republic and implemented the separation of religious groups from the State. A characteristic long-term policy of the Communist Party was to include representatives of the clergy and even grant them certain responsibilities into their higher echelon.

From its beginnings, the Communist regime that emerged in Yugoslavia in May 1945 had minimized the role of the Holy See in Church life and in restoration of Church structures that had been deeply affected by the war (Alexander 1979; Shepherd 1980: 315-323). Throughout the existence of the Yugoslav Socialist State, a common accusation was made against the clergy for their decision to side with occupying forces during World War II. The Catholic Church in Croatia was particularly reproached for having had a special Papal representative, Msgr Ramiro Marcone, to the Government of the Independent State of Croatia (NDH). An essential part of Tito's attitude towards the Catholic Church was to make it as disassociated from the Vatican as possible. Again and again his intention was confirmed by the members of his staff, particularly articulated by his biographer Vladimir Dedijer,⁹ and by Jakov Blažević and Vladimir Bakarić, the Croatian members of the supreme leading group. According to the latter, the main goal and leading motive of Tito's meeting with Archbishop Msgr Alojzije Stepinac in June 1945 was to promote the idea of an autonomous Catholic Church in Yugoslavia. Tito was looking for an independent Church that would at least have its own primate (Damiš 1995: 243). Clerical associations became a form of self-organization and a means of co-operating with the new government. O. Chadwick's assessment could be taken as a summary of the situation: "In Yugoslavia, the government at first encouraged priests' associations. There were like guilds or trade unions of progres-

⁸ For a more detailed treatment of that period see the first chapter »Wartime: the fateful events«, in S. Alexander, *Church and State in Yugoslavia since 1945*, pp. 7ss.

⁹ See V. Dedijer, *Novi prilozi za biografiju Josipa Broza Tita (New Contributions to a Biography of Josip Broz Tito)*. Vol. I, (Zagreb, 1980), p. 398. Comprehensive minutes of the meeting are reported by V. Dedijer, *Novi prilozi za biografiju Josipa Broza Tita*, Vol. III, (Beograd, 1984), pp. 34-38, 95-97.

sive or radical priests who had the normal instinct that it was their duty to honour bishops and simultaneously to stop them running the Church. For a time these associations were important in all parts of Yugoslavia, for, when Tito first won power, the clergy with authority were not the bishops but the former chaplains to the partisan guerrilla armies. Milan Smiljanić was Tito's chief army chaplain in the resistance. After the war he became minister of agriculture and vice-president, though still a priest. He stood at the patriarch's right hand in official ceremonies" (Chadwick 1993: 37). A very similar role was played in Croatia by Msgr Svetozar Ritig, a high government official and leader of the Office for the Religious Affairs that had been established in each republic already before the end of the War. In Slovenia, Jože Lampret, chaplain to the partisan units during the war who was also at odds with his bishop and banned from performing his priestly duties in the Diocese of Ljubljana, was named leader of the Office for the Religious Communities and promoted to various places of the Slovenian public life. In September 1952, the Yugoslav Episcopal Conference forbade the founding of clerical associations. The authorities regarded this as a direct incursion by the Holy See on the constitutional rights of priests, like all citizens, to organize societies. The Holy See interfered with the workings of these societies in Yugoslav internal affairs, resulting in one of the reasons for the severing of diplomatic relations between Yugoslavia and the Holy See in December of 1952.

It is not my intention to depict a comprehensive picture of the Church's situation in Yugoslavia during the Communist period. Because of significant differences in the Church's position in individual republics, I will treat clerical societies in Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Croatia (the republics with strong Catholic communities) separately.

In *Slovenia* in 1949, after the failed attempt to separate the Church from the Vatican, the *Cyril-Methodius Society of Catholic Clergy in the Republic of Slovenia* was founded. In 1970 it was renamed as the *Slovenian Priestly Society*. Preparations for its establishment took a considerable amount of time and began soon after the new government was installed in Slovenia on May 9, 1945. The original protagonists were the priests who had worked with the Partisan movement during World War II and had openly favoured the new establishment. Patriotism was displayed first in their actions, since the recently finished war was viewed as a great patriotic act. As early as 1947, a planning committee was founded to promote the ideas of *esprit de corps* among the clergy - the necessity to work with the authorities and to distance itself from the behaviour of the Slovenian

Church during the war.¹⁰ This group of clergy presented a rather critical stance towards contemporary Church authorities.

The Society was given such a directive predominantly in the region under the Diocese of Ljubljana, although members of the committee in the Primorska region, where the Slovenian patriotic movement was very strong, also had a leading role. The central part of Slovenia was where dissent arose among priests and the Apostolic Administrator of the Ljubljana diocese, Msgr Anton Vovk, mainly over the decisions of Ljubljana Bishop Msgr Gregorij Rožman. Rožman had left the diocese on May 5, 1945, and remained in British occupied territory in Austria after being unable to return to his diocese (Plut-Pregelj 1996: 240).

The basic intention of the authorities in the founding and promotion of the clerical society was to cause conflict among priests, and between the priests and Bishops in Slovenia. Since priests were offered a series of benefits (the right to pastoral work and material gains), the authorities viewed them as 'official' partners instead of the local bishops. Bishops feared the establishment of a National Church in which members of the association were encouraged by the government and Tito himself. However, this did not come to fruition as the majority of society members were able to see through the clandestine intentions of the authorities. In spite of that fact, bishops maintained a negative stance towards the association and did not give it their official recognition (the only exception was the Apostolic Administrator Msgr Mihael Toroš, who later rescinded his permission). The Slovenian bishops recognized that banning the society and excommunicating its members could lead to more severe consequences, even a schism. Because of that, they did not publish the excommunication released by the Holy See. Such a severe punishment was pronounced only for the three leading members, Anton Bajt, Viktor Merc and Jože Lampret, who were not willing to surrender and cease organizing activities. Their excommunication brought about a new wave of State persecution of the non-members, threats to bishops, and a new campaign against the Church (Čipič-Rehar 2005: 101). The conflict reached its height when Jože Lampret was appointed lecturer at the School of Theology in Ljubljana in 1950. Lampret had been puni-

¹⁰ See France. M. Dolinar, »Katoliška Cerkev v Sloveniji in Rim po letu 1945,« *V prelomnih časih. Rezultati mednarodne raziskave Aufbruch (1995-2000). Cerkev na Slovenskem v času komunizma in po njem (1945-2000) (The Catholic Church in Slovenia and Rome after 1945)*, (Ljubljana, 2001), pp. 248-249. For the very beginnings of the society in the coastal region (on the border with Italy) see Marija Čipič Rehar, »The Committee of Priests Members of the OF (Osvobodilna fronta – Liberation Front) and the Ciril-Method Society in Primorska in the Years 1947-1952«, *Kronika* 53 (2005), 91-106.

shed and the Vatican Congregation did not pardon him. Lampret's appointment was an evident provocation in organizing a new campaign against the Church and its ties with the Vatican. All petitions sent to Rome by Slovenian bishops explaining the status of society and the clergy were left unanswered. Pope Pius XII and the Consistorial Congregation held steady to principles that already had been passed for these specific circumstances by the Holy See.

The herald of the clerical society was the periodical *Nova pot* (*New Way*) which in its early years was known for its sharp criticism of the Pope and the Vatican. It was also a staunch supporter of the new regime as well as Yugoslav foreign policy. On February 15, 1950, the Holy See published an admonition (monitum) of all collaborators of the bulletin. The situation did not escalate due to the fact that Lampret willingly denounced his appointment at the School of Theology, and other members were spared excommunication. Historical documents clearly state that Bishop Msgr Anton Vovk, who led the Ljubljana diocese, avoided rising tensions with the society by accepting lesser evils and attempting to find some sort of *modus vivendi*. The guild was tolerated and the diocese tried not to afford it too much meaning. Otherwise, it was feared that the status of the Church would diminish further, since the authorities kept a watchful eye on the bishop's treatment of members. On a few occasions society leaders asked Msgr Vovk to confirm the regulations which he proposed amending, and which could have allowed him to ask for recognition from Rome. He did not succeed in this, since the association refused his suggestions (Ceglar 1997: 148). According to secret service reports, Msgr Vovk's wise approach towards the guild – not allowing tensions to escalate and his personal affection towards individual society members - facilitated the reduction of guild members. As soon as 1958, it was concluded that membership had started to decline; of 968 clergymen in the Ljubljana diocese, only half (480) were members (Ceglar 1997: 157). According to F. M. Dolinar, "The role of the Cyril-Methodius Society of Slovenian priests diminished when the Yugoslav Government decided to directly negotiate with the Holy See, and when later in 1966 it agreed upon a protocol which from then on defined Church-state relations" (Dolinar 2001: 249). Indicative of Msgr Vovk's wise disposition towards the association was his appreciation demonstrated by Pope John XXIII during their first meeting on February 1, 1960; the Pope greeted him as 'a friend and martyr' (Ceglar 1997: 154).

Through the years when the government finally realized that the guild had not achieved its political goals, but instead was limited solely to the organizational and logistic purposes of its members, the

objective of gaining control over priests was no longer intriguing. The primary goal of the association resulted in failure; the regime lost interest in its further existence. In 1990 the group was disbanded at its last general assembly. Thanks to its final leadership, the society's archives, a rich source for understanding the conditions of the Church in Slovenia, were moved to the Archives of the Ljubljana Archdiocese. Unfortunately, documents from the crucial period of its founding had been destroyed in the early 1960's when society offices were relocated.

In *Bosnia and Herzegovina* the religious situation was particularly complicated. Members of the Muslim community represented a new national constituent, and thus Muslim religious identity also corresponded to an ethnic identity. The Serbian Orthodox Church was the predominant among the Serbs. Regarding the Catholic Church, a great majority of priests were members of the Franciscan order. In the beginning of January, 1950, a clerical association called *Dobri Pastir* (Good Shepherd) was created in Sarajevo. The society was initiated by three Franciscan Provincials, Fr. Mile Leko, Fr. Josip Markušić, and Fr. Karlo Nola, as well as by Dr. Svetozar Ritig. The role of the Franciscans was so strong that the society was occasionally called the 'Franciscan Priestly Society' (Damiš 1995: 276-277). In fact, when the society was founded 49 % of the Bosnia Franciscan Province members joined it, among the members were, nevertheless, 25 % of the secular clergy (Gavran 1990: 139). Initially, according to the Franciscan sources, leaders of the local Churches Sarajevo, Banja Luka, and Mostar, as well as the head of the Apostolic Nunciature in Belgrade were not against a clerical society (Blažević 2002: 248-249), they changed their attitude afterwards. However, many priests did not want to join due to their conviction that it was work of the Secret Service. They rejected the right of the State to intervene in Church circumstances, such as the organization of a clerical society. They also rejected the police's organized attempts to push priests against the bishops and the Pope. According to a report in the November 24, 1955, Belgrade daily *Politika*, a meeting of the Sarajevo clerical association was dedicated to issues such as, 'protest against the emigrants slandering our country,' 'priests' collaboration with the national government,' 'condemnation of a part of the emigration,' and 'support to the state leadership.'¹¹

¹¹ See »Skupština udruženja katoličkih sveštenika Bosne i Hercegovine« (The General Assembly of the catholic priests of Bosnia and Herzegovina), in *Politika*, November 24, 1955, p. 4.

To the outside observer, the society's beginnings clearly articulated its fundamental character: the hall where the constituting assembly took place was rented by the regime, huge pictures of Tito and Lenin decorated the walls, and a message of congratulations that had been sent to Tito and to his collaborators was displayed. Conspicuously, there was no similar message to the Pope or to bishops, nor was there any statement from the appropriate Church authority granting permission for the society's foundation. From the day it was established, the clerical union *Good Shepherd* prompted feelings of discord among the Catholic priests in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It has also played a significant role in the sometimes strained relations between the Franciscans and local bishops who were against the association, after they had taken part in the meetings of the Yugoslav Bishops' Conference and after they had received instructions from the Belgrade Apostolic Nunciature. The founding and the functioning of the clerical society *Good Shepherd* in Bosnia and Herzegovina remains a controversial topic in the Church history of the country (Blažević 2002: 244-245).

In Croatia the clerical society was founded after a long, discriminating process (Krišto 1997) and it lost its purpose in mid 1960's. As early as June 2, 1945 Josip Broz Tito (1892-1980) visited Zagreb. He met with members of the Croatian Catholic clergy with the exception of Archbishop Msgr Alojzije Stepinac, who was still detained. In his speech Tito emphasized that he was also Catholic (although this was excluded in the officially published version) and reiterated the role of the Catholic clergy throughout Croatian history, comparing it to the role of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Serbia. However, according to Marshall Tito the Catholic Church could do more for the people if it was independent of the Vatican and more national such as the Serbian Orthodox Church (Krišto 1997: 39-41). In the same speech, Tito informed priests about the Party's plan to create a new community of the South Slavs. To realize such a plan priests could contribute significantly by keeping alive the idea of Bishop Josip Juraj Strossmayer (1815-1905).¹² Only such priests would be acceptable for the new social and political order; all others had no place in the system. In fact, the latter were considered enemies of the newly conceived plans. Already in that speech, Tito had revealed his intention to cause an internal differentiation among catholic pri-

¹² Bishop Josip Juraj Strossmayer of Djakovo, Croatia, was known as a promoter of the union of Churches, establishing contacts among Orthodox and Catholics, Serbs, Montenegrins, and Bulgarians. He was considered by the Yugoslav socialist government as a bishop-model for the pan-slavic movement. See *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed., vol. XIII, pp. 550-551.

ests that was to be carried out through the clerical societies in the following years. To the Croatian bishops, the patriotic clerical association in Slovenia was a bad example. It proved to be a noxious organization that aimed to disintegrate internal unity among the clergy as well as to separate them from the Holy See, i.e. it would lead to a schism (Benigar 1993: 644). After his internment at his native village of Krasič in 1952, and after being informed about the clerical societies in Slovenia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, Archbishop Alojzije Stepinac rejected the establishment of such societies. In their founding and promotion he saw a very sophisticated plan to fight the Catholic Church by instigating the separation of the Church in Yugoslavia from the Holy See and also establishing a national church. He recognized the similarities between the situation among the clergy in Yugoslavia with that of the so called 'constitutional clergy' and attitudes of revolutionary authorities during the French revolution. He said, "change the names and the dates, and you have the same, only the subject is a different one" (Benigar 1993: 645).

It can be said that at the end of the war in Croatia (and in Yugoslavia in general), Nazi totalitarianism was replaced by Communist totalitarianism. It soon purged all of its wartime opponents and oppositional parties, and installed a new totalitarian regime. The subjugation of the Church became a major priority. This would lead then to the establishment of a National Church and separation of the Church in Yugoslavia from the Holy See. According to the Party's scenario, the leader of this plan was to be the Archbishop of Zagreb Msgr Alojzije Stepinac (1898-1960). For refusing to take part in such a plan, a show trial was staged and Stepinac was sentenced to 16 years in prison. According to the later reports given by his oppressor Attorney General Jakov Blažević, Stepinac's only crime was not partaking in the separation of the Church in Croatia from the Vatican.¹³ In addition, the effective protagonist of Church separation should have been the Croatian Clerical Association, which Stepinac had refused to establish. Josip Broz Tito continued to emphasize this point and took advantage of various occasions to remind priests of that possibility. At the end of 1949, Tito asked a group of priests why the Church in Yugoslavia could not separate from the Vatican like the Party had done politically from Moscow the previous year (Krišto 1997: 49; Stehle 1975: 260).¹⁴ As a senior party official to Bishop Msgr

¹³ See the magazine *Polet* (Zagreb), February 15, 1985; V. Dedijer, *Novi prilozi za biografiju Josipa Broza Tita*, Vol. III, pp. 95-97.

¹⁴ The article with Tito's words was published by the Slovenian Bulletin of the Clerical Association *Nova pot* (New Way), 1 (1949), nr. 1. The words are quoted also by A. Casaroli, *Il martirio della pazienza*, p. 200.

Frane Franić of Split suggested in 1952, “We have renounced Moscow, you should renounce Rome. Thus we can settle together for what we are looking for, for our common homeland of Croatia and Yugoslavia” (Franić 1995: 194). Msgr Franić’s testimony is eloquent proof of the well planned strategy to separate groups of clergy. This is further underscored by the fact that his region of Dalmatia did not fall under the central Croatian diocese of Zagreb, headed by Archbishop Stepinac.

As distinguished from the situation in Slovenia and Bosnia and Herzegovina the initial committee of the Croatian Clerical Society (The Class Association of the Catholic Priests in Croatia) was founded in 1952 only. When in February 1953 priests were invited to join the society all the bishops of the Zagreb Church Province rejected the initiative recalling priests of their promises of ‘oboedientia et reverentia’ made in the day of their priestly ordination (Akmadža 2003: 63). According to the same scholar, “Croatian bishops strongly resisted the establishment of this Association and only a small number of priests applied for membership. With the support of the Vatican, the bishops decided to denounce the association’s activities ban and membership for their priests. This resulted in a fierce reaction by the communist regime, which was one of the main causes for the severing of diplomatic relations with the Vatican. Nevertheless, despite all the pressure, the founded Class Association of Catholic Priests in Croatia never attained the success anticipated, nor did it ever attract any significant number of members” (Akmadža 2003: 156).

Amid the strong tension and distrust that existed between the Church’s hierarchy and the revolutionary Yugoslav authorities, members of the clerical society presented themselves as leading in new directions and working to restore bridges between new authorities and the heads of the Catholic Church. They wanted to fashion a new kind of priests who would be suitable for the new circumstances. The state authorities were very interested in having as many priests as possible as members. Until the middle of the 1960’s they materially supported the members and gave them various privileges that weren’t given to other clergy. These privileges included, for example, social and health insurance, the possibility to teach Catechism in the school, the right to collect contributions from churchgoers, favorable financial credit, the right to import objects needed to renovate the churches, and the right to import theological books. The Society also had the right to issue religious literature and catechism as well as a religious gazette. In the gazette’s *Bilten (Bulletin)*, the Slovenian Priestly Society published articles that were hostile to the Vatican and western powers. One of the most self-explanatory article titles

was “The Vatican and other religions in the service of invading American politics.”

Bishops in Croatia and Slovenia did not recognize the societies in the least; the Croatian bishops went so far as to forbid entry into the Society and punish the clergy. In 1950 the Yugoslav Bishops' Conference pronounced that the societies were “non expedit”, which the bishop's in Slovenia refused to execute (it was published by the official bulletin of the Ljubljana and Maribor dioceses). An important immediate incentive for taking such a decision was the founding of the *Good Shepherd* Society in Sarajevo, for which the Holy See as well as the Superior General of the Franciscan Order had expressed a negative stance in advance (Blažević 2002: 257, 259). In Slovenia, only the leaders of the society were punished. The more rigid “non licet” was published by the Yugoslav Bishops' Conference and implemented in September, 1952, but it was not implemented in Slovenia (Merlak 2002: 139).

The Canon law valid for the clerical societies, which exceeded the diocese and were therefore governed by universal Church rules, demanded that their legal status and all questions pertaining to the societies be answered by the papal nuncio of each country. In Yugoslavia, this task was performed by Msgr Joseph Patrick Hurley (1894-1967) from Cleveland, OH and bishop of the Diocese Saint Augustine, Florida. He came to Yugoslavia in 1946 and stayed until 1950, though he kept the title of regent even afterwards.¹⁵ Besides carrying out the demanding tasks of Church organization and reorganization of hierarchy, Msgr Hurley strove to settle issues of the Clerical Society and also preserved contact between the Holy See and Yugoslavia. After his return to the United States, Msgr Silvio Oddi, who later became cardinal, took charge of the Nunciature, and was followed by Msgr John D. McNulty, who later became the rector of the National shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C. In 1952, diplomatic relations between Yugoslavia and the Holy See were suspended. The societies of patriotic clergy continued to be active with modifications and operating tasks until the fall of the communist regimes in the early 1990's.

The Yugoslav bishops were extremely cautious due to their bad experiences with clerical societies organized by the Communist authorities after World War II. The idea of such an *esprit de corps* association carried negative connotations in the Yugoslav context and had a negative history from the very beginning. As a result of this, the Croatian bishops reacted with disapproval towards the for-

¹⁵ www.catholic-hierarchy.org/bishop/bhurleyj.html of December 13, 2004.

mation of an association around the *Kršćanska sadašnjost* publishing house (Alexander 1979: 310). In 1977, a group of theologians organized such a society with the same name as the publisher (TDKS, or *The Christian Presence Society*) in Odra, in the vicinity of Zagreb. Church leaders in the Dalmatian Church Province in particular expressed grievances towards it. They interpreted this initiative as an attempt by state authorities to cause discord within the Church and to lessen the authority of bishops, as it withdrew part of the clergy from under their direct influence. Thus, bishops understood the theologians' attempt to form a society to be a threat to the Church's unity. Some bishops required that the association disband. Others, like Archbishop Franić of Split, forbade priests who were members to perform their priestly office in the territory of his diocese.¹⁶ The Zagreb Archbishop Card Franjo Kuharić called attention on the danger of such an association, but was not opposed to its founding. The Yugoslav Bishops' Conference allowed the association ad *experimentum*. Nevertheless, it was condemned by Card Franjo Šeper, head of the Vatican Congregation of Holy Office and former Archbishop of Zagreb. The Vatican Congregation for Clergy banned the foundation of the TDKS with a document called *Quidam episcopi*. Later accounts indicate that the Croatian authorities wished to use TDKS in the hope of creating a pro-regime movement within the ranks of theologians and the clergy. In hindsight, the fear the bishops expressed was not unfounded.

Relations between Yugoslavia and the Church gradually settled down after the 1960's. Following a few years of negotiations the first international agreement called *Protocol* was signed in 1966. It was not considered an international document by Yugoslav politicians and was not published by the *Official Bulletin* as a part of its international activities. In fact, the repression of Catholics continued in spite of the document, but the situation for the Church in Yugoslavia began to improve (Krišto 1997: 28).

Conclusion

In spite of many differences and individual histories, the Catholic Church was considered to be an important and dangerous adversary

¹⁶ See J. Krišto, *Katolička Crkva u totalitarizmu 1945-1990. Razmatranja o Crkvi u Hrvatskoj pod komunizmom*, p. 82. J. Krišto has written another article on this topic, »Relations between the State and the Roman Catholic Church in Croatia. Yugoslavia in the 1970's and 1980's,« *Occasional Papers in Religion in Eastern Europe* 2 (1982), nr. 3 (June), pp. 22-33.

in almost every East European country where Communism rose to power after World War II. The main grounds for this attitude were its ties with the Vatican, strong influence and respect among the faithful. Due in part to its centuries-old organization it was able to avoid immediate state control. (This stands in contrast to the Orthodox Churches, which organized as State Churches in which the head of State held a significant position; a crucial issue was the possibility to influence the appointment of bishops). Among the groups inside the Catholic community, priests were particularly vulnerable. Presumably, therefore, clerical societies were organized to provide priests with certain support while making them dependent on the political structures. For example, as one of the senior officials of the clerical society in Slovenia recalled in his memoirs, “the Cyril-Methodius Society was under control of the secret service. Fortunately, the authorities’ intentions with the Society were not realized. Priests in fact stayed faithful to the Church, to bishops, and to the Pope. I call the Society ‘damned’, because it was perverted in its roots, set up with corrupt intentions” (Camplin 2003: 62). Even where such associations were at first influential, their role diminished very soon. As O. Chadwick states in discussing the situation in Yugoslavia, “as in other countries, the influence of such associations declined steadily, partly because the bishops slowly reasserted their authority in the constitution and partly because the Communist leaders lost interest in their effectiveness” (Chadwick 1993: 37).

Knowing that all types of malpractice was possible, the Church hierarchy was very distrustful from the very establishment of such associations. The distrust remained even when similar professional associations were later founded. When a group of Croatian theologians organized *The Christian Presence Society* in 1977 as a means of offering support and legal backing to a publishing house with the same name, their actions were strongly criticized by local bishops and finally forbidden following the intervention of the Vatican watchdog for the Doctrine of Faith Card. Franjo Šeper, the former Archbishop of Zagreb. Past experiences, especially those concerning the crucial protagonist Msgr Franjo Šeper, were so deeply rooted in the mind of the bishops that they gave no concessions.

The profound political changes of the late eighties and early nineties along with the newly established Church-State relations helped to reiterate the role of the clerical patriotic associations and eventually resulted in their disbandment. In recent years, there has been a resurgence of interest in those clerical associations that collaborated with the Communist regimes, and which, after the fall of Communism, continued to operate without credibility and often

also without an economic basis. Such attention has been particularly keen in the case of societies which maintained continuity with the past and for which secret services documents have been preserved.

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