

# Between Repression and Defence The Condition of the Catholic Church in Communist Yugoslavia from *relationes ad limina* (1946-58)

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**Abstract** In post-World War II Yugoslavia, the issue of relations with the Communist state becomes central to the Catholic episcopate. The defence of the ecclesial presence and the preservation of the faith in the face of the repression carried out with force by the political authorities is a dominant aspect in the *relationes* sent by the bishops to the Holy See. In the complex and articulated Yugoslav reality, where different religious and national identities are intertwined and oppose each other, the bishops note that religious sentiment is still quite alive among the faithful, even in a political-social context dominated by socialist materialism, sustained by the state, and in this, the first instances of a kind of practical materialism also appear.

**Keywords** Yugoslavia. Communism. Materialism. Anti-religious repression. National identity. Religious practice. *Relationes ad limina*.

**Summary** 1 The Yugoslavian Contest. – 2 The *relationes*. – 3 The Ways of Repression. – 4 The Clergy. – 5 National Differences and Liturgical Peculiarities. – 6 The People. – 7 Non-Catholics. – 8 Conclusions.



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## 1 The Yugoslavian Contest

An examination of the condition of the Yugoslav Catholic Church in the immediate post-World War period, as it emerges from the *relations* sent by the bishops to Rome, must necessarily take into account the differences and peculiarities of the various dioceses, in the knowledge that the central problem common to all this episcopate is the relationship with the communist state.

The many traits of unevenness that this church presents (so much so that we should almost speak of ‘churches’)<sup>1</sup> are intimately related to the specific reality of Yugoslavia. This is a relatively young state; since its establishment after World War I as a monarchy led by the Serbian Karadorđević dynasty, it is pluriethnic (it was founded as the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes) and pluriconfessional (we find there primarily Orthodox Christians and Catholics as well as an Islamic component); after the tragic and intricate events, not only of war, related to the Second World War, Yugoslavia is reborn as a socialist state structured as a federation of republics; the leading role of liberation movement assumed by the communist component translates into the precise will to implement Marxist orientations, which overlap with the demands of the different national identities (and perhaps a common ‘Yugoslav’ identity perspective).<sup>2</sup>

The country’s multiple areas and ethnic groups (only to a certain approximation traceable to the new federated republics)<sup>3</sup> present deeply varied religious, linguistic and socio-cultural realities. The overlap between revolutionary action and the affirmation of national identity often carries tragic implications in the imposition of a totalitarian one-party political system; moreover, the definition of the new borders with the Italian state leads to lengthy diplomatic disputes and the sad affair of the exodus of a large part of the Italian-speaking population included within the new Yugoslav borders.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, Yugoslavia’s oscillating international position after the break with the Soviet Union (1948) places it in a rather peculiar position in Europe, as a communist but non-aligned country, in many situations supported by the Western bloc.<sup>5</sup>

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1 E.g. Mikrut, *La Chiesa cattolica e il comunismo* dedicates separate essays to the various political and national realities of Yugoslavia.

2 Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History*; Pirjevec, *Serbi, croati, sloveni*; Calic, *Geschichte Jugoslawiens im 20. Jahrhundert*.

3 Serbia (with the autonomous provinces of Vojvodina and Kosovo), Macedonia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Slovenia are federated republics in Yugoslavia.

4 Tenca Montini, *La Jugoslavia e la questione di Trieste*; Pupo, *Il lungo esodo*; Wörsdörfer, *Il confine orientale*.

5 Previšić, *Breaking Down Bipolarity*.

From a religious point of view, Slovenia and Croatia are compactly Catholic; Bosnia-Herzegovina, where Muslims, Catholic Croats and Orthodox Serbs coexist, has significant Catholic components; Serbia and Montenegro have an Orthodox majority (Catholics are a small minority, but of some size in a few circumscribed areas); Macedonia has an Orthodox majority with a significant Islamic component and a laughable Catholic minority. Superimposed on this is the ethnic issue: Croats and Serbs differ in defining their identity primarily on a religious basis. In the context of ethnic-religious relations, a special case in point is the Skopje diocese, which includes Macedonia (a few parishes and a few thousand baptised) and the autonomous region of Kosovo, dependent on Serbia but with an Albanian and Islamic majority (Catholics here, just over 20,000, are almost all Albanian).<sup>6</sup>

On a more properly ecclesiastical level, trying to summarise at least the most obvious differences between the various dioceses, we can note that five (out of more than twenty) still depend on Congregation De Propaganda Fide.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, there are dioceses that affect compactly Catholic territories, some in which Catholics are a significant component, others in which Catholics are a small minority; there are dioceses with nearly two million faithful (such as Zagreb) and others with only 30,000 (such as Krk, where, however, they correspond to the total population of the area concerned). The not many Catholics of Byzantine rite (Uniates), mostly in Croatia, are subject to the eparchy of Križevci, but in this study only the Latin-rite dioceses are considered.

In pre-war Yugoslavia, the path to reaching a concordat between state and church had failed.<sup>8</sup> The heavy wounds of the war, which had seen terrible internal contrasts made even more complex by the Italian and German military presence, had on the one hand compacted the entire anti-fascist front around the communist resistance, but at the same time this had opened the way for painful political purges. The Catholic Church and churchmen – who during the war in many but not all cases had shown closeness for nationalist groups – were soon identified by the new regime as a real enemy.<sup>9</sup>

Yugoslavia's special international position is reflected in the relationship between the state and the church. On the other hand, in a

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**6** Overall, less than 30,000 Catholics out of a population of 1,800,000.

**7** They are the three Bosnian dioceses (Sarajevo, Mostar and Banja Luka: for simplicity, I will mention them using these designations, although the correct references would be more complex), that of Bar (which includes much of Montenegro) and that of Skopje (Macedonia and Kosovo).

**8** Salmič, *Al di là di ogni pregiudizio; Mithans, Jugoslovanski konkordat*.

**9** Roter, *Katoliška cerkev in država v Jugoslaviji*; Akmadža, *Crkva i država*; Morozzo Della Rocca, "La vita cristiana nella Jugoslavia comunista"; Boeckh, "Zur Religionsverfolgung in Jugoslawien"; Čipić Rehar, *Cerkev in oblast na Primorskem*; Krišto, *Katolička crkva u totalitarizmu*.

pluriconfessional context, the regime's attitude toward the Catholic Church – whose bishops answer to the Holy See – ends up being different from that toward the Orthodox Church (which is autocephalous) and the Islamic communities; from this point of view, the regime shows a preference for a kind of national church, which is considered more controllable and more in line with the politico-national project carried out by the regime.<sup>10</sup>

## 2 The *relationes*

Our point of observation is therefore the *relationes ad limina*. It must be said at once that those arriving in Rome from Yugoslavia in the period under consideration (1946-58) are relatively few: they concern less than half of the dioceses and only in part are associated with a Roman presence of the ordinary. The government does not easily allow the bishops to move and leave the state, or does so with criteria of evident discretion; the meshes are gradually opening in the late 1950s. Even the route of sending reports through the Nunciature is not smooth, considering the very likely loss of confidentiality that such communications should have. The gaze of the political police is keen to catch every movement and every document.

In addition, the governance of the dioceses often has precarious features: several sees are governed by apostolic administrators, who must be resorted to for various reasons, from the failure to appoint a new bishop, which would inevitably require a confrontation with the government, to the inability of the ordinary to exercise his jurisdiction because he is in exile or imprisoned.<sup>11</sup> The situation tends to unblock in the late 1950s, in parallel with the possibility granted to bishops to carry out the prescribed Roman visitation. This should be read from the overall perspective of Belgrade's diplomatic position.<sup>12</sup>

In examining the *relationes ad limina* of the Yugoslav bishops to the Holy See between the end of the war and the conclusion of Pius XII's pontificate, it should therefore be noted that these documents, from a chronological point of view, lie at the margins of the period considered.

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<sup>10</sup> Valente, *L'Ostpolitik della Santa Sede*; Alexander, *Church and State*; Buchenau, *Orthodoxie und Katholizismus*.

<sup>11</sup> Moreover, I do not consider in this reconnaissance the affair of the apostolic administrations of the parts of the Italian dioceses (Gorizia and Trieste) included within the Yugoslav borders, which would require a completely special investigation (Vidmar, "Apostolski administratorji slovenskega dela goriške nadškofije"). Also, there are no reports from the former Italian diocese of Poreč-Pula.

<sup>12</sup> Valente, *L'Ostpolitik della Santa Sede*, 54-68.

Six reports are sent between 1946 and 1948, although among them the one sent by Bishop Tomažič of Maribor<sup>13</sup> Tomažič in 1946 cannot be considered a true *relatio ad limina* since it is a brief – albeit significant – communication on the anti-Catholic repression suffered at the hands of the Nazis in the diocese of Slovenian Styria.<sup>14</sup> These reports usually passed through the Nunciature without the bishops leaving the country (with the exception of the bishop of Rijeka, Camozzo, who managed to make the visit in the late 1946).<sup>15</sup> It's need to remember that the diplomatic relations between Yugoslavia and the Holy See were not easy during this period: the Nunciature, without a titular from 1941, was headed by a Regent (Hurley, 1945-1949) and by an *chargé d'affaires* (Oddi, 1949-1952) until 1952 when there was a break in relations.<sup>16</sup>

Following the five-year scan of visits, the Yugoslav bishops were to make the visitation in 1948, 1953 and 1958. Skipping the 1953 round, four reports were sent in 1958; these received responses just during the pontificate of John XXIII. Of the four ordinaries drafting them, only Butorac (Dubrovnik) is titular of his own diocese;<sup>17</sup> the others are two apostolic administrators – Garković of Zadar and Držečnik of Maribor – and a coadjutor – Šeper of Zagreb – acting in place of the titular, namely Cardinal Stepinac, under house arrest and unable to exercise his ministry. The latter three would shortly thereafter become bishops of their respective sees. Others would be sent in 1959, but we are outside the Pacellian pontificate.

A separate – but inevitably connected – discussion must be made for the *relationes* of the five dioceses still dependent on Propaganda Fide: as soon as 1958 some bishops are authorised to make the visitation to Rome and thus transmit the relevant report. In the previous decade, however, several communications on the state of the dioceses or the condition of the church in Yugoslavia are sent through

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**13** For simplicity's sake, I indicate Maribor (actual episcopal see) when I mean the diocese which officially has the title of the diocese of Lavant. As a result of complex institutional events the original see (St. Andrā in Lavanttal) has long since ceased to be part of the diocese, but the original title was retained until 1962.

**14** Montanar, *Il vescovo lavantino*; Montanar, *La diocesi di Lavant*.

**15** The report (transmitted in July 1946) is completed in Venice because of obvious censorship problems; in a confidential communication Camozzo asks that all communication go through the patriarchal curia in Venice. Camozzo completes the visit in November of that year, meeting the deadline proper to the Italian episcopate.

**16** For the diplomatic relation between the Holy See and Communist Yugoslavia in this period: Valente, *L'Ostpolitik della Santa Sede*; Gallagher, *Vatican Secret Diplomacy*; Kolar, "Regens nuntiaturae mons. Joseph Patrick Hurley".

**17** With regard to the reports of the Dubrovnik diocese, it should be added that Butorac in 1958 also sent the 1953 report

the Nunciature.<sup>18</sup> These are never, at least for the period under consideration, written reports following the prescribed questionnaire.

### 3 The Ways of Repression

The relationship with the communist state, which promotes an “atheistic and enemy-of-the-church orientation”,<sup>19</sup> unites all these communications. In the new institutional context, where every aspect of public and private life must be conformed to the materialistic principles of Marxism,<sup>20</sup> the church finds itself in an obviously difficult situation, after the attitudes of several churchmen during the war were in many ways controversial or in an antithetic position with respect to the liberation army.

The breadth of the texts of the reports and the much information they contain suggest to us a sincere need for communication, although these are more often than not first reports, in which ordinaries are usually called upon to be precise and detailed. These reports do not appear to be documents drafted simply in response to an obligation. Even within the rigid schema posed by the questionnaire, the impression is that there is an urgent desire on the part of the episcopate to highlight the precarious condition in which their respective dioceses and the Yugoslav Church in general find themselves.

The bishops denounce the repression operated by the state, which “tends to take the faith out of the hearts of the people and to make life impossible for the Ecclesiastical Authority and the Clergy”,<sup>21</sup> and which is articulated by affecting the ecclesiastical structure and the broader dimension of religious life in a generalised manner.

In connection with the issue of repression, a first aspect is that of the requisition of property, in application of the Yugoslav agrarian law that imposed a limit on private ownership of land; and even ecclesiastical property was considered as such (associated with this is

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**18** There are quite different situations among these dioceses: the diocese of Sarajevo is in practice without an ordinary because Ordinary Šarić left Bosnia as early as 1946, first for Austria and then for Spain; Banja Luka has no ordinary after Garić’s death and the diocese is temporarily entrusted to Bishop Čekada of Skopje, whose actions are strongly hindered by the regime; the elderly Bishop of Bar Dobrečić (who died in 1955) seems to have good relations with the authorities, has good freedom of movement but does not report to Rome, except to defend himself or protest some local situations.

**19** Rijeka 1946, *Appendice riservata*, 16. Camozzo writes his report in Italian language. Unless otherwise stated, all translation are by the Author.

**20** “Vitam degimus in republica, cui finis supremus est, omnia in vita privata sociali, oeconomica, politica et culturali imbuendi principiis materialisticis marxismi omnemque formam vitae ad haec principia redigendi. Non statim sed per gradus iste finis ubique in praxim deducitur, consequenter, inexorabiliter, severissime” (Krk 1948, 4).

**21** Rijeka 1946, *Appendice riservata*, 100.

the end of public prebends to the clergy). These measures hit the ecclesiastical structure hard, coming to deprive it of its main sources of livelihood. "The material condition of the clergy and churches is rather precarious", notes Šeper, moreover, "there are few parishes where in-kind supports are practiced", and these are forbidden by the civil power.<sup>22</sup> But, writes Srebrnić (Krk) as early as 1948, the faithful (and thus the population), "because of the new economic methods, are in increasing difficulties".<sup>23</sup> A generalised malaise – according to this perspective. The trauma of the war, of which the bishop of Krk recalls the tragic passages and the consequences of the various occupations, seems to affect and amplify negatively in the new conditions.

Add to this the confiscations of buildings, the failure to repair churches and structures (from canonical houses to seminaries) damaged by the war, or the great difficulty of building new churches. An overall new condition, experienced even more painfully by those who, like the last Italian Bishop of Rijeka Camozzo, register with fear the transition from Italian to Yugoslav sovereignty, a transition that entails worsening.

But the main target of repression is the people.

Even leaving in the background iconic figures well known even at the time outside Yugoslav borders, as well as to the Holy See, such as Cardinal Stepinac<sup>24</sup> (about whose condition, however, Šeper reports in 1958), it should be noted how clearly evident from the reports is the attack on church personnel, carried out rather heavily through convictions, imprisonments and direct pressure. From this point of view, intimidation through arrest, detention and other forms of control indifferently affect church personnel of different levels, with traits of approximate regularity.

Srebrnić in his *relationes* (which he fills out following the old 150-question questionnaire of 1909) tells of the imprisonment he suffered on April 1945 (first in jail, then under close supervision in a convent) and his return to the diocese as recently as September of the same year.<sup>25</sup> Several bishops are affected by measures of imprisonment or restriction of freedom, with different times and modalities, not

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**22** "Facultas possidendi pro personis moralibus ecclesiasticis coarctata est, nam iuxta legem de reformatione agraria unumquodque ens ecclesiasticum solum usque ad 10 hectaros (17 iugeres) possidere valet. [...] Ideo conditio materialis cleri et ecclesiarum sat precaria est. [...] Paucae sunt hodie paroeciae in quibus praestationes in natura adhuc vigeant. Dura exactio etiam a potestate civili prohibetur" (Zagreb 1958, nos. 4, 10).

**23** "Cum propter novas methodos oeconomicas, quae ipsis in dies plus plusque applicantur, in angustiis semper maioribus versentur" (Krk 1948, 1).

**24** Batelja, *Blaženi Alojzije Stepinac – svjedok Evandjelja ljubavi*. Another relevant case is that of the Bishop of Ljubljana Rožman (Griesser Pečar, "Ljubljanski škof dr. Gregorij Rožman").

**25** Krk 1948, no. 3.

always made explicit in the *relationes*. Some choose exile, also sensing as a heavy danger the probable retaliation by the new authorities. From this point of view, the bishops are very careful in describing the situation of their clergy, called in this by precise questions, but also with the precise will to denounce individual events to the Holy See.

In fact, when it comes to talking about the clergy and religious congregations, the tones, especially in 1946-48, resemble those of real war bulletins: we find lists of priests arrested or killed. From this point of view between 1946-48 and 1958 there is a certain evolution, in the sense that by the end of the 1950s there are almost a reduction of cases of priests or seminarians under arrest. Thus, always Butorac senses in 1958 almost with amazement the absence of new priests imprisoned.<sup>26</sup>

Question 17 explicitly asks about freedom of worship: all the bishops touch on different aspects in light of repression and limitations, but generally agree in pointing out the discrepancy between a constitutionally affirmed freedom and a reality made up of repression and limitations on public worship outside the churches. As early as 1946, Camozzo notes how only “apparently freedom of worship is respected” and is “obstructed with the surveillance of the Clergy in Church and outside and with the vigilance of the people attending Church”,<sup>27</sup> a situation that cannot be remedied. Butorac warns that “worship is freely practised”,<sup>28</sup> but those who attend (especially men or young people) suffer constant persecution. Later, in 1958, Garković summarises, “worship is free, however, limited within the church, as is the number of processions”.<sup>29</sup> Without major differences the bishops agree with similar statements. Thus, the picture drawn by Šeper becomes illustrative:

Freedom of worship since 1945 has been restricted in various ways. The exercise of worship is increasingly restricted within the framework of sacred places. E.g. places where processions can be held outside church spaces are rare; in fact, special permission must be sought. However, home blessings can be done anywhere. People who are assigned to teach in public schools are barred from public worship. Similarly, it is rare to see anyone enter the church in military clothing. Teachers and professors usually in secret contract ecclesiastical marriage and baptise their children.<sup>30</sup>

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**26** “In carceribus nemo sacerdotum vel theologiae alumnorum amplius reperitur” (Dubrovnik 1958, no. 45).

**27** Rijeka 1946, *Appendice riservata*, 17.

**28** Dubrovnik 1948, no. 17.

**29** Zadar 1958, no. 17.

**30** “Libertas cultus inde ab a. 1945 variis modis coarctatur. Exercitium cultus semper magis intra ambitum locorum sacrorum restringitur. Rara sunt v.g. loca ubi processiones



This is freedom understood in the two possible directions: on the one hand, the exercise of public worship by clergy, and on the other hand, being able to participate in worship, receive the sacraments, and show oneself Catholic. The picture is clear: access to places of worship and ceremonies is constantly under observation by the authorities. But the most serious consequence of this attitude is the obvious retaliation by the state on those who show themselves Catholic; the civil servant cannot do so, risking dismissal. On the other hand, already in this regard, as Šeper himself suggests, there is an adherence to religious practice that may be hidden but is not undone by the work of the regime.

The other concern that the bishops bring out is educational. The steps toward the secularisation of education (not only the exclusion of religious instruction in school definitively since 1952) are concrete and create not a few difficulties, which are answered by constant and laborious catechetical work, opposed by the authorities but which manages to find continuity and a space within parish circles. Practices therefore possible, but to be carried out in limited areas, over which, however, the vigilance of the police apparatuses is felt. Thus, even missions to the people are only in some cases possible (and still with some regularity towards the end of the 1950s).

Other restrictions on religious practice, which are far from minor, concern, for example, the management of cemeteries that are taken away from ecclesiastical authority, the issue of hospice care (the presence of nuns as nursing staff only in some cases is accepted) and also the restriction on freedom of the press. Only few Catholic periodicals have been allowed to be printed, probably because of special conditions related to particular relationships between individual bishops and political authorities. Few people complain that even pastoral letters cannot be printed. Sometimes stratagems are reported, such as in Zagreb, where the diocesan bulletin is not published, but “mechanically multiplied”.<sup>31</sup> Catholic organisations such as Catholic Action are banned, depriving these dioceses of an instrument that still shows its effectiveness elsewhere.

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extra territorium ecclesiasticum ducuntur, nam ad hoc specialis licentia petenda est. Benedictiones tamen domorum fere ubique fieri possunt. Personis quae magisterio in scholis publicis addictae sunt publicum exercitium cultus aperte interdictum est. Similiter raro videbis aliquem veste militari indutum ecclesiam ingredi. Ludimagistri et professores generatim secreto tantum matrimonia ecclesiastica contrahunt et suos liberos baptizandos tradunt” (Zagreb 1958, no. 17).

**31** Zagreb 1958, 10.

## 4 The Clergy

Hard hit during the war, often reduced in numbers (in proportion to parishes and the previous situation),<sup>32</sup> limited in public action, the Catholic clergy operates and lives in conditions that are certainly not easy. It is nevertheless still a clergy - as presented - respectful of the Holy See, prepared and faithful. The theme of fidelity to the Pope is not rubricable to a routine affirmation in a context in which the regime clearly pushes (especially in the immediate post-war period) for a 'nationalisation' of the Church and thus for a more or less sensitive detachment from Rome.

There is no lack of some cases of defection, but they are numerical-ly rather small and circumscribed. If anything, a serious problem is ensuring regular seminary formation, which is permitted by the authorities but hindered in practice. It becomes necessary for smaller dioceses to dispense with their own formation institutes (though active in the recent past), in order to converge on those that have managed to survive at the larger dioceses. Theological faculties (Zagreb and Ljubljana) have been deleted from state universities.

In addition to what has already been mentioned in the previous paragraph, one of the problems most keenly felt by the episcopate is the membership in clergy associations, promoted by the Regime probably with a view to exerting substantial direct control over the clergy and possibly to arrive at an autocephalous situation on the Orthodox model. These kinds of associations, the organisation of which also leads in 1948 to a harsh diplomatic exchange between Rome and Belgrade, are usually led by priests who sympathise with the regime, receiving reprimands from the ordinaries.

Some bishops are particularly harsh and proudly point out that in their own diocese almost no one has joined.<sup>33</sup> Others, while reiterat-

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**32** The complexity of the Yugoslav reality would make it necessary to evaluate with how much attention was happening between the two wars and what just happened during the war: the relationship that the Church has with the different political regimes that follow one another (both in terms of time and space, even in such a short chronologically span) is by no means marginal.

**33** "Sacerdotum associatio, ab Ecclesia reprobata, nullatenus proficit. Toto hoc quinquennio nemo novus nomen dedit. Qui vero rarissimi initio adhaesere, aliqui etiam vi compulsi, fere nihil agunt ad societatem hanc propagandam, et si quis forsan audet, nihil proficit. In provincia Dalmatiae ecclesiastica minimo sociorum numero gaudent. Adversariorum propositum, ut huius associationis adminiculo nationalis, uti dicitur, ecclesia efformaretur, in cassum abiit neque quid ultra in re, in Domino confidimus, proficient" (Dubrovnik 1958, no. 52). "I sacerdoti, per fortuna pochi, associati nella 'Associazione professionale del clero' contro il divieto dell'Ordinario, sono stati sospesi ed i loro ricorsi alla Santa Sede sono stati respinti, ma non tutti si assoggettarono" [...] "Per tutelare la disciplina in questo senso, ed in altro ancora, l'Ordinario ha comminato la scomunica a chi si assenta illegittimamente dall'Arcidiocesi, dappoichè non si osservava la sospensione. Tre sacerdoti sono decaduti avendo contratto il cosiddetto

ing the ban, have a more pragmatic attitude, trying if not exactly to justify, at least to understand the (often very concrete) reasons behind such a choice:

Those [priests] who refuse due reverence and obedience are those who join the 'Professional Associations of Priests', which are promoted by the state but prohibited by the episcopate. In our archdiocese there are about 60 of them (about 12 percent). Most of these have joined either out of compulsion or material interest (social welfare, pension). However verbally almost all have shown loyalty to their superiors.<sup>34</sup>

These are, however, at least in the dioceses for which we have reports, rather limited accessions.

In contrast, very difficult in this regard is the Bosnian situation, where Franciscans (who had suffered heavy persecution by the communist liberation army during the war, given also the rather close relations with Pavelić's Croat nationalist government) adhere *en masse* on the Provincial's instructions, reaffirming a deep-rooted distrust of secular ordinaries.

Regular clergy is still present, but several houses are being closed. In many cases, these are foreign orders forced to leave the country (and again a political will to nationalise can be glimpsed).

The priests in general, according to what the bishops write, are completely alienated from political issues and are not fascinated by Marxism.<sup>35</sup> The few cases of priests close to the regime are removed or excluded themselves. While this kind of documentation may present some suspicions about the real correspondence of statements that in fact put the writer in a good light, the actual data on the circumscribed adherence to regime organisations and the rather widespread willingness to maintain an authentically Catholic dimension-

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matrimonio civile" (Zadar 1958, nos. 49-53 [*sic!*]; original in Italian). For a comparison: Griesser Pečar, "Cirilmetodijsko društvo katoliških duhovnikov"; Kolar, "The Priestly Patriotic Associations".

**34** "Iis qui debitam reverentiam et obedientiam denegant accensendi sunt ii qui 'Associationi professionali sacerdotum', a Statu promotae, sed ab Episcopatu prohibita, nomen dant. Tales in nostra Archidioecesi numerantur circiter 60 (i.e. 12%). Maxima pars vel metu coacti vel ob interesse materiale (assistencia socialis, pensio) associationi nomen dant. Ore tamen fere omnes fidelitatem erga superiores ecclesiasticos profitentur" (Zagreb 1958, no. 49).

**35** "Non habentur sacerdotes, qui in dioecesi immodice et indebite rebus politicis et ractionibus civilibus se immiscerent, neque in nostro clero nunc inveniuntur contentiones et aemulationes propter politicam, linguam vel nationem, quae aptae essent pacem in ipso turbae. Sacerdotes nostri iam tempore occupationis italiace multas pati debebant, uti in Relatione a. 1943 expositum est, at mala graviora eos exspectabant, quando Partisani-communistae territorium Dioecesis obsederunt" (Krk 1948, no. 48).

even in hierarchical respect toward Rome-shows the substantial resilience of this church and church personnel. Defence in the face of repression also passes through this entrenchment.

## 5 National Differences and Liturgical Peculiarities

The plurality of national groups and the many local peculiarities make the church a rather articulated and inhomogeneous whole. On the other hand, the individual reports necessarily tend to provide descriptions of particular realities from a mostly internal and compartmentalised perspective; usually from the comparison one can grasp the variety. So, some observations by the last Italian bishop of Rijeka, Camozzo, who looks at his diocese, which also includes Croatian and Slovenian territories, still from a substantially Italian point of view, are of some interest. Among other things, in his report, compiled at the crucial moment when the war was officially over but the peace treaties had yet to be signed, a heavy climate of demobilisation was felt. We can easily recognise between the lines his 'Italianness' not only in the used language, but also in his feeling toward the national belonging, which leads him to emphasise certain differences between Slovenes and Croats, essentially perceiving them as something different from himself and the city in which he resides. His is a view in which one can feel the legacy if not of fascist Italy, at least of the Italy that ruled here (evidently with rights, according to his point of view) and with whose authorities' relations were good. Writing in 1946, he evidently cannot yet make a real difference between a fascist pre-war and a post-war period that is still to come.

The prelate emphasises certain differences between Slovenes and Croats in his diocese: "the Croatian-speaking populations are very poor and in general are used to contributing inadequately" to the subsistence of their parish priests, while "in the Slovene-speaking parishes the conditions of the clergy are better".<sup>36</sup> If the clergy as a whole "are obedient to the Holy See", Camozzo notes, on the other hand, there is "the drawback of the lack of fusion between the clergy of different languages".<sup>37</sup> But "in the Slavic parishes the attachment to the Holy See is not as alive as it should be. This is partly due to political reflexes in the sense that Rome is... in Italy. As a matter of principle, however, their loyalty to the Pope is beyond question".<sup>38</sup> On the other hand, there is also a difference in the participation in Easter Communion, evidently considered a good parameter to meas-

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<sup>36</sup> Rijeka 1946, no. 10.

<sup>37</sup> Rijeka 1946, no. 40.

<sup>38</sup> Rijeka 1946, no. 85.

ure the adherence of the faithful: “good in the Slovenian parishes, less so in the city, worse in the Croatian parishes”.<sup>39</sup>

In the appendix to his own report, which is added in Italy, Camozzo is more explicit:

In Croatian parishes, the new political conditions, the intense communist and anti-religious propaganda have led to a significant deterioration in religious and moral life, because the people, whether through ignorance or nationalistic spirit, have been easier to be misled. In the Slovenian parishes, which are more religious, the inconvenience has so far been minor; in the Italian parishes, there has been a mass exodus of the population; in the remaining ones, there has been a strong religious awakening and approach to the Church. The religious-moral future of Rijeka is largely tied to the current events.<sup>40</sup>

The religious reaction in the face of advancing communism, Camozzo seems to imply, is producing results. However, I repeat, Camozzo's point of view is substantially third with respect to the reality also of the Slovenian and Croatian ecclesiastics, which find themselves caught between the ideal adhesion to a Yugoslav nation-state (for the diocesans of Rijeka, newly incorporated in Yugoslavia, this is a novelty) and the reality of a communist state. On the other hand, a particular and strongly felt theme in the Yugoslav Church is that of liturgical peculiarities and concessions, which in the past had been the subject of heated strife and controversy. In the small diocese of Krk, bordering Rijeka but Yugoslavian since the first post-war period, the Roman rite is in use in the Paleo-Slavic language (Glagolitic), but not in the city of Krk where, the bishop reports, it is celebrated in Latin. Here, as in the other Croatian dioceses, the Roman Ritual “in the Croatian version” approved in 1930 is in use.<sup>41</sup> A peculiar element – punctually noted in the reports – is the concession made by the Holy See still in 1921 to sing the Gospel and the Epistle in solemn masses in the vernacular after the singing in Latin, a concession extended to the entire then Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes.

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**39** Rijeka 1946, no. 86.

**40** “Nelle parrocchie croate le nuove condizioni politiche, l'intensa propaganda comunista e antireligiosa portano ad un sensibile peggioramento nella vita religiosa e morale, perché il popolo sia per ignoranza, sia per spirito nazionalistico è stato più facile a lasciarsi traviare. Nelle parrocchie slovene, più religiose, l'inconveniente è stato fin'ora minore; in quelle italiane si è verificato l'esodo in massa della popolazione; nei rimasti si è verificato un forte risveglio religioso e accostamento alla Chiesa. L'avvenire religioso-morale di Fiume è in gran parte legato agli avvenimenti in corso” (Rijeka 1946, *Appendice riservata*, 84).

**41** Rijeka 1946, 86.

Šeper affirms that canonical norms are respected in the liturgies, reaffirming the privilege just mentioned, emphasising that “the faithful, especially in the countryside, during Masses and other sacred services sing popular songs”.<sup>42</sup> According to Butorac (Dubrovnik) even sacred singing is opposed if not prevented.<sup>43</sup> However, these aspects are felt intensely in the Slovenian and Croatian dioceses. The use of the vernacular language in certain precise and circumscribed areas of the liturgy has a strong value. On the other hand, a completely different point of view is that of Camozzo, who emphasises with some concern the even partial disregard of the liturgical provisions practised so far:

Under the present circumstances, the provisions concerning the use of Latin in liturgical services are no longer fully observed in Slavic-speaking parishes. In order to prevent greater evils, it was not deemed opportune to insist on the exact observance of the prescriptions in this regard.<sup>44</sup>

One can easily imagine how Slavic priests do nothing but willingly adapt to the provisions in force in the other Yugoslav dioceses. In this regard, one cannot but recognise against the light of day the will of a clergy that, having emerged from the ill-digested Italian domination, immediately adopted the concessions to the vernacular language in force in the Yugoslav dioceses: these priests now find themselves reunited with their motherland, and therefore apply all the prerogatives and distinctive traits – also liturgical – of the ‘Yugoslav’ church that are perceived as a sign of belonging.

## 6 The People

On a general and common level, the political problem overlaps with the pastoral one: as we have seen, the bishops denounce the massive atheist propaganda, which first and foremost affects young people (the elimination of religious education from schools is only one as-

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<sup>42</sup> “Populus fidelis, praesertim ruri, tempore Missae et aliarum sacrarum functionum cantus populares decantat” (Zagreb 1958, no. 19).

<sup>43</sup> “Cantui quoque ecclesiastico impediende regime nunc incumbit. Sic, inter alia, cantorum chorus ecclesiae cathedralis ragusinae abque ulla ratione solutus suisque privatus rebus. Omnia tentavi, at frustra, ut res in prisidinum restituerentur. Immo, si quis in ecclesiis canit, ima ideo in regiminis oppositorionem (reactio) accensetur” (Dubrovnik 1948, nos. 92-93).

<sup>44</sup> “Nelle attuali circostanze, nelle parrocchie di lingua slava non sono più osservate completamente le disposizioni circa l’uso della lingua latina nelle funzioni liturgiche. Per impedire mali maggiori, non si è creduto opportuno di insistere sull’esatta osservanza delle prescrizioni in merito” (Rijeka 1946, no. 19).

pect of the problem), but which affects society in general (civil servants are not allowed to display attitudes close to the Church).

On the other hand, there is generally a religious situation that is still not completely compromised. "However, not everything is black and dark. There are also beautiful manifestations of faith and piety among the people".<sup>45</sup> Despite everything, the attachment to the faith is alive and even the customs of the people, although severely tested (and the more time passes the more this is emphasised), are still good. The people, says Camozzo, "sense" the "deaf, hidden and perverse persecution of the Church" and react by continuing to attend sacred services.<sup>46</sup> On the other hand, dangers to the faith and the spread of errors and estrangement was already present after the first war, recalls Garković from Zadar, and well before the advent of the new regime - which certainly aggravated the situation -, but "in general, the people kept the faith".<sup>47</sup>

The search for pastoral action in a hostile political context is not easy. But the very fact that at least part of the clergy manages to live thanks to the support of the faithful (at least according to the bishops) is a sign that in reality, regime propaganda aside, a strong attachment to the church persists, especially in the countryside. In fact, the data that the *relationes* report on religious practice (attendance at mass and Easter communion) do indeed show a marked difference between town and country (confirming a well-known paradigm), but percentages of those attending sacred services that in many cases exceed 80% of the baptised. Obviously not everywhere, and with fluctuations, but these data denote a strong resistance of religious attachment.<sup>48</sup>

Thus, Garković was able to state in 1958 that "in general, one can say that the religious and moral state in the population is still good",<sup>49</sup> although he pointed out the problem represented by the weakening of religious sentiments, especially in the cities. On the one hand, "the youth scarcely attend churches and even less the Sacraments, although they abstain from politics" and this because "they have many opportunities for distraction". The condition of civil servants, described as "addicts of materialistic", who cannot go to church or perform all religious practices, is different.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> "Non tamen omnia nigra et obscura sunt. Dantur et pulchrae manifestationes fidei et pietatis in populo" (Zagreb 1958, no. 100).

<sup>46</sup> Rijeka 1946, *Appendice riservata*, 36.

<sup>47</sup> Zadar 1958, no. 16.

<sup>48</sup> "In tredecim locis a 80-100% sacro adsistent; in quatuordecim a 60-75%; in novem 50-55%; in tredecim a 30-45%; in uno 15%. Generatim percentualis virorum numerus debilior est quam feminarum" (Dubrovnik 1958, no. 86).

<sup>49</sup> Zadar 1958, 16.

<sup>50</sup> Zadar 1958, 84.

Attention to marriage and married life is high, and responds to precise requests in the questionnaire. While dangers are already being felt at the end of the 1940s, ten years later these are more evident. On the other hand, the question of conjugal morality is certainly not a new problem, which was already well in the minds of this and other episcopates before the war. Šeper, the future Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, does not hesitate to list, even more carefully than others, all these evils, identifying the two worst in blasphemy and vulgarity (which he also emphasises is said by women and young people) and in “conjugal onanism”, the “white plague”. In essence, the practice of contraception is also propagated by the state as a remedy for large number of abortions.<sup>51</sup> According to Šeper, it is not so much a question of lesser or greater faith, but the fact that those people who live in a more ‘natural’ way are less corrupted by the contagiousness of modern civilisation.

But these are evils (vices, divorce, abortion) that are fostered by government policy: the deviation and estrangement come from there in the first place.<sup>52</sup> Those most at risk are the young, who lack religious education and who are easy prey to the materialistic novelties of contemporary society (“*iuventus practico materialismo semper magis imbuta est*”);<sup>53</sup> here, in addition, it is precisely the harm presented by the “*materialismum theoreticum*” supported by the government that seems to affect part of the young people, who perhaps experience the same general alienation “*a praxi religiosa*” as their peers in other countries.<sup>54</sup>

Moreover, the non-participation of several families in catechetical courses of preparation for First Communion is usually motivated by indifference or fear.

The impression is that attending church, however, becomes an occasion for dissent, sometimes underground, but still a behaviour not in line with the regime’s wishes. It is a different matter to what extent the regime’s propaganda actually succeeds in achieving its aim of eliminating the religious dimension from the population, although its successes do not seem so different – perhaps just faster – than what happens in Western societies. Šeper again points out, not with-

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**51** “Quoad populi due maxime deploranda sunt: blasphemiae et obscena verba quae magis magisque in usu populi, etiam feminarum et iuventutis, sunt; onanismus coniugalibus (“*pestis alba*”) qui semper magis grassatur non tantum in maioribus urbis, sed etiam ruri. Imo ultimis temporibus talis praxis (contraceptio) etiam a potestate publica maxime propagatur, uti remedium contra enormem numerum abortum!” (Zagreb 1958, no. 84).

**52** It is not just secularism that subverts all faith in God, “*quam gubernium Iugoslaviae ideis materialismi marxistici ductum ubique in educatione puerorum et iuventutis, in vita culturali, sociali et oeconomica propagat et applicat*” (Krk 1948, no. 1).

**53** Zagreb 1958, no. 84.

**54** Zagreb 1958, [no. 100].



out satisfaction, that in the last census, at the end of the 1950s, 87% of the population claimed to believe in God.<sup>55</sup>

## 7 Non-Catholics

In such a complex reality marked by religious plurality, this generally tends to remain in the background of reports, at least in dioceses with a Catholic majority. It is probably the very typology of the questions in the questionnaire that does not offer many insights. On the other hand, the perspective of these bishops and the demands of the Holy See is to all intents and purposes internal to Catholicism.

Let us go into detail. One of the few questions that explicitly refer to the relationship with non-Catholics is that concerning mixed marriages, which are punctually and meticulously highlighted, even where they have insignificant numerical consistency. Even minimal evidence of mixed marriages is denounced.<sup>56</sup>

In dioceses with a Catholic majority, Muslim and Orthodox presences are recorded as a result of the transfer of officials or military personnel. Once again, the danger posed by the state authorities, leading to threatening mixes that were a harbinger of error and instability, can be read against the light.

In the 1958 reports, the presence of non-traditional Christian sects active in the territory, such as Jehovah's Witnesses, began to be recorded.<sup>57</sup>

In the dioceses subject to Propaganda Fide one would expect a greater emphasis on the subject. Instead, the communications of the Bosnian bishops are much more careful to emphasise internal tensions, such as those between secular clergy and Franciscans, in dioceses where most parishes continue to be entrusted to Franciscans: in Mostar there are 21 secular priests and 83 Franciscans. However, there is no shortage of indications of suffering: "in Herzegovina, the Catholic border is shifting westwards. Parishes where the Catholic element lived on the border with the schismatic element see the number of faithfuls dwindling".<sup>58</sup>

Of some interest, on the other hand, is the report sent by the bishop of Skopje in 1958, which is actually a border observation point.

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<sup>55</sup> Zagreb 1958, [no. 100].

<sup>56</sup> E.g. Maribor 1958, no. 88, for the case of the Evangelical presence confined in the Prekmurje region.

<sup>57</sup> "Iam tempore ante ultimum bellum variae sectae protestanticae propagari ceperunt, quod etiam nunc continuatur, uti fit in aliis, etiam cultioribus, Europae regionibus (v.g. adventistae, Jehovistae, pentecostiani, baptistae)" (Zagreb 1958, no. 16).

<sup>58</sup> "Limes catholicus in Herzegovina versus occidentem declinat. Paroeciae ubi elementum catholicum in confinio cum elemento schismatico vivebat quoad numerum fidelium valde decreverunt" (Mostar 1958).

Here, Catholics are a small minority. In 1947 and 1949, says the bishop, “a systematic attempt was made to shake up our Catholic positions by the application of violent means against priests. There was an attempt to force priests out of their places of duty”.<sup>59</sup> There is an urgent problem of the education of the local clergy (Catholics here are mostly Albanian). The newly made seminary is now no longer diocesan property and the seminarians have been dispersed; some newly ordained after the war have gone abroad. A serious problem of the religious education of the faithful arises; and is also a ‘national’ and linguistic problem. The bishop writes:

Religious ignorance is the greatest enemy of religion. This enemy grows stronger every day. There is no Catholic press here. Books dealing with religious problems no longer come out, except to mock religion. The only exception in this regard are prayer books: every now and then small prayer books are printed in Serbo-Croatian; a little while ago a devotional book was finally published in Slovenian as well. But our Albanian Catholics, who are a strong majority among the Catholics in the dioceses of Skopje and Bar, have not even had a prayer book or catechism in their own language, not only now, but not even under the first Yugoslavia, when Albanian nationality was not officially recognised and when the Albanians had no political and cultural rights.<sup>60</sup>

## 8 Conclusions

In this rather gloomy context, the rare moments of hope are still offered to the bishops by the knowledge that even in the face of so many difficulties a significant attachment to the faith still persists in the population. The evils of the contemporary world, which the Pacellian Church seeks to counter, take on an even harsher significance in the communist world. Not only the evils of society, but also those sustained by a manifestly anti-religious state. The reports that come from a terrain of bitter battle in their own way mark the begin-

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<sup>59</sup> Skopje 1958.

<sup>60</sup> “L’ignoranza religiosa è il più grave nemico della religione. Questo nemico diventa ogni giorno più forte. Da noi non esiste una stampa cattolica. Non escono più i libri che trattino i problemi religiosi, se non per deridere la religione. L’unica eccezione in questo riguardo sono i libri di preghiera: ogni tanto vengono stampati piccoli libri di preghiera in lingua serbo-croata; poco fa uscì finalmente un libro di devozione pure in lingua slovena. Ma i nostri cattolici albanesi che sono una forte maggioranza tra i cattolici della diocesi di Skopje e Antivari non hanno avuto neppure un libro di preghiera od un catechismo nella loro lingua non solamente adesso ma neanche sotto la prima Jugoslavia, quando ufficialmente non fu riconosciuta la nazionalità albanese e quando gli Albanesi non avevano nessun diritto politico e culturale” (Skopje 1958; original in Italian).

ning of that *détente* that in the following decade will find concrete ways if not of dialogue at least of a possible *modus vivendi*. Even in the Pacelli years, however, Yugoslavia retained its own remarkable peculiarity compared to the rest of the communist countries, which did not escape the protagonists themselves. Finally we can consider some of the observations on the condition of the Church in Yugoslavia that the Bishop of Bar Tokić formulated in 1958:

The Moscow-Belgrade conflict [...] has greatly benefited the Catholic Church in Yugoslavia, where freedom of religion is certainly greater than in other communist states, except perhaps Poland. Although Yugoslav laws give religious freedom, this is practically very limited. Military officers and teachers in all schools cannot openly perform their religious duties, for other employees freedom depends on whether they can easily be replaced by atheists or not.

The Communist Party of Yugoslavia is certainly against religion like all Communist parties in other states. Its valuable instrument in the fight against religion are the clergy associations. The 'Orthodox' and Muslim associations are not of such importance because the Communist regime has bought off the leaders of these religions. More important are the Catholic associations. The communists know that it is not easy to separate Catholics from the Holy See.<sup>61</sup>

The point of view of difference with respect to other religious communities, looked upon with an evidently contemptuous tone, also because they were incapable of placing real curbs on the communist expansion, takes us back to a climate of distrust and conflict that characterised the Yugoslavian reality. The prospect is certainly not one of ecumenical dialogue, even in the face of a government that advocates atheism in practice. On the other hand, precisely the relatively low participation of the clergy in pro-government associations, as well as the unity shown by churchmen and the majority of the faithful, are a sign of a solidity that, on the whole, does not fail.

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**61** "Il conflitto Mosca-Belgrado [...] ha giovato molto alla Chiesa Cattolica in Jugoslavia, dove la libertà di religione è certamente più grande che negli altri stati comunisti, eccetta forse la Polonia. Benché le leggi jugoslave danno la libertà religiosa, questa è praticamente molto limitata. Gli ufficiali militari e gli insegnanti di tutte le scuole non possono apertamente fare i loro doveri religiosi, per gli altri impiegati la libertà dipende dalla circostanza se si possono facilmente sostituire cogli atei o no. Il Partito comunista della Jugoslavia è certamente contra la religione come tutti i partiti comunisti negli altri stati. Il suo valido strumento nella lotta contro la religione sono le associazioni del clero. Le associazioni "ortodosse" e mussulmane non sono di tanta importanza perché il regime comunista ha comprato i capi di queste religioni. Più importanti sono le associazioni cattoliche. I comunisti sanno che non è facile separare cattolici dalla Santa Sede" (Bar 1958).

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