

## Banja Luka 24 - 25 May 2011

In memory of Marco Aurelio Rivelli, historian and author.

Since the year 2000, the 27<sup>th</sup> of January has been proclaimed the Memorial Day in my country, as a result of this the general public has been acquainted to the tragic rosary of the extermination camps in Europe:

Auschwitz - Birkenau, Chelmo, Sobibor, Treblinka, Warsaw ghetto (Poland);

Bergen-Belsen, Buchenwald, Dachau (Germany);

Mauthausen (Austria), Janowska (Ukraine), Theresienstadt (Czechoslovakia).

Among the 65 concentration, labor and extermination camps, Jacenovac was the largest with Auschwitz and it was divided in 8 sub camps – Auschwitz had six sub camps - the Croatian ustasas used to call it *the death camp*, the cruelty of Jacenovac camp even stunned their German Allies, who had conceived the *final solution* for entire populations.

Jacenovac camp extended on a 240 kilometers surface and was divided in eight installations:

Camps number one and two were situated east of Jacenovac and operated only for a few months in 1941, then a river Sava flood wiped off all their structures..

Camp three covered over 124 hectares near Jacenovac and the crematoria was in an abandoned brick factory called *Cigлана*.

Prison number four was in Jacenovac in a leather tannery, for this reason its name was *Kozara*.

Camp five was located in the village of Ustice, it was exclusively for the Roma prisoners.

Camp six had been built around the Serbian villages of Mlaka and Jablanac, the detainees were only women and children younger than fourteen.

Prison number seven was located in the old Austrian fortress of Stara Gradiska.

Camp number eight was placed on the river Sava at Donja Gradina, it was an enclosure of 125 hectares and was mainly used for mass elimination.

From 1941 through 1945 these installations around Jacenovac produced a million victims among Serbs, Jews and Roma, and, it is to note, at least forty five thousand of them were women and children.

It was an enormous, impressive, horrific structure, yet the existence of Jacenovac camp and all the *logors* is never mentioned to the public as well as the ethnic religious cleansing operated by the Independent State of Croatia (Nezavisna Drzava Hrvaska). A strange silence abides on the Croatian extermination structures and the Ustasha massacres during Second World War.

I heard of the Jacenovac camp for the first time in 1993 during an interview with Simon Wiesenthal in Vienna. How is it possible that a murdering system as vast and cruel as Auschwitz is totally unknown to the public. Why this silence?

The explanation can be found in the political interests of the Croatian Catholic Church and of the Vatican to cover up this tragic period when many exponents of the Croatian Catholic church were strictly involved in the persecution and massacre of Jews and Serbs. The American Government also kept its eyes closed after the war, it was difficult to publicly admit to have hired a good number of German Nazis, Croatian and Italian fascist criminals to fight against the danger of Soviet Communism. In these concealed reasons we can also find the roots of the Yugoslav disintegration that initiated in 1990 and the tragic wars that took place then after.

A clear view of these tragic events comes from the writings of Marco Aurelio Rivelli, historian and author of two milestones in historical literature *The Genocide Archbishop* and *In the name of God* (L'Age d'Homme, Lausanne, Edizioni Kaos, Milan).

Marco Aurelio Rivelli passed away on the 18th November 2010.

He used passionately participating in the past conventions on Jacenovac, I think he is entitled to be present this time also with some fragments from his book *The Archbishop of Genocide*.

(...) In November of 1945, a few months after the end of the conflict, the Anglo-American Allies institute the Tribunals for the trials against the war criminals. But the Roman Church becomes active to save the Nazi-fascist criminals from earthly justice, and the Vatican becomes *the biggest organization involved in the illegal smuggling of criminal emigrants*.<sup>1</sup>

Various Catholic bodies become involved in preparing an escape route that starts in Austria and leads to the Vatican City: this route is parallel and linked to the structure organized by the US Army intelligence called *The Rat Channel*<sup>2</sup>. Thanks to this compassionate *channel*, several thousand war criminals, reach Rome in waves: accommodated in buildings protected by extraterritoriality, they are given passports with false identity (often documents of the International Committee of the Red Cross), and finally sent to safe havens in South America, especially in Argentina, Chile and Uruguay, countries ruled by authoritarian regimes where the Catholic Church is very influential and powerful. The Catholic organization that uses the *rat channel* is headed by the Ustasha prelate monsignor Krunoslav Draganovic, and it can count on the active collaboration (or even on sheer complaisance) of a large number of Catholic priests and prelates. Thanks to this *Divine providence*, in the first post-war years more than 4.000 war criminals, including 200 high-ranking Ustasha officials, manage to escape and evade both the trials and justice. The *rat channel* is used to help escape - just to mention a few - Adolf Eichmann<sup>3</sup> the organizer of the anti-Semitic *final solution*, Walter Rauff the designer of the mobile gas chambers, Josef Mengele the Auschwitz camp doctor, Franz Stangl the commandant of the *lager* in Sobibor and Treblinka, Gerhard Bohne the theoretician of euthanasia for *lesser beings*, Klaus Barbie the *Lyon Butcher*, and many other Nazi criminals.

The control room of the Catholic sector in the *rat channel* is located in Rome in *via Tomacelli 132*, near the seat of the *Collegio ecclesiastico di San Girolamo degli Illirici*, the historical center of the Croatian Catho-nationalism; when the Independent State of Croatia was proclaimed in April of 1941, the seminarians attending the *Collegio* immediately took down the Yugoslav flag and replaced it with the Croatian State banner. During the war, the Ecclesiastical College hosted Ustasha delegations, and served for meetings they had with the representatives of the Roman Curia, with the Argentine ambassador Llobet, with padre Agostino Gemelli (founder of the Sacro Cuore Catholic University in Milan, very powerful in the Vatican and president of the Papal Academy of Sciences). In October of 1943, in the *Collegio di San Girolamo*, the presentation of the book *Croatia Sacra* was staged. Written

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<sup>1</sup> Report by Vincent La Vista, special agent of the US Army CIC (Counter Intelligence Corps), dated 15 May 1947; in *Illegal Emigration Movements in and through Italy*, FW 800.128/5, Record Group 59, National U.S. Archives, Washington.

<sup>2</sup> The structure was set up by the Americans to provide an escape route for their spies deployed in the communist countries in East Europe.

<sup>3</sup> In May of 1960 Eichmann shall be captured in Argentina by the Israeli secret service, and imprisoned in Israel; tried for crimes against humanity, he shall be sentenced to death. The capture of the Nazi criminal shall prompt great controversies in Argentina, and cardinal Antonio Caggiano, bishop of Buenos Aires, shall insist on the need to pardon, because Eichmann <<has come in peace to our country to forget>>; c.f. "La Razón", Buenos Aires, December 1960.

by monsignor Draganovic and by Ivo Guberina, it was an ode to the practice of forced conversions to Catholicism of the Orthodox *schismatics*<sup>4</sup>.

The most famous Ustasha saved by the Catholic sector of the *rat channel* is Ante Pavelic<sup>5</sup>. But the ex Poglavnik was only the first in a long series.

In 1945 the first commandant of the Jasenovac *lager*, Ljubo Milos, is held prisoner, together with the ex commandant of the Ustasha extermination camps Viero Slav Luburic, in the Allied prison camp of Alleato di Fermo, in Italy. After the arrival in the prison camp of monsignor Draganovic, the two Ustasha criminals, dressed in cassocks manage to escape and reach the hospitable *Collegio di San Girolamo degli Illirici*, in Rome. All traces are lost of the first, and the second shall join monsignor Ivan Saric in Madrid to establish, together with the former archbishop of Sarajevo, the Ustasha periodical *Drina* and the group called *Croatian National Resistance*. The list goes on.

(...) A close collaborator of monsignor Draganovic in the *Rat Channel operations* is the German bishop Alois Hudal, in charge of the basilica of *Santa Maria dell'Anima* in Rome; under the cover of Papal humanitarian assistance, he is involved in saving war criminals. As a member of the German National Socialist Party, and author in 1937 of the book *Die Grundlagen des Nationalsozialismus (The foundations of National Socialism)*, dedicated to Adolf Hitler, whom he calls *Siegfried of German Grandeur*, then founder in 1947 of the Nazi magazine *Der Weg* published in Argentina, Hudal shall reveal in his *Roman Diary*<sup>6</sup> the active role he played in the *rat channel* boasting that he has personally helped save more than 1.000 *persecuted ones*, and insisting that this whole work was a *task carried out for the Vatican*<sup>7</sup>.

On the other hand, the fact that the activities of monsignor Hudal in the Catholic *Rat Channel* had the blessing of the high Papal circles is corroborated by a letter sent to him on 4 April 1949 by the Vatican vice-Secretary of State - Giovanni Battista Montini (**he shall be elected Pope the 21 June 1963 with the name of Paul VI**): a letter that conveys to the pro-Nazi German bishop the benediction of the Holy Father, together with a contribution of 30.000 *Italian lire*<sup>8</sup>. (...)

The top secret report sent on 15 May 1947 by the US military attaché in Rome Vincent La Vista to the Secretary of State George Marshall, lists in detail all the responsibilities of the Vatican and the participation of numerous members of the clergy in illegal and covert activities related to the *Rat Channel*. All the criminals that benefited from the organization are fanatically fervent anti-Communists and hence *favorite children* of the Catholic Church<sup>9</sup>.

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4 The book *Croazia Sacra* had the extremely rare privilege of being printed in the Vatican by the "Officium Libri Catholici", and padre Agostino Gemelli collaborating in the drafting of the *Preface*.

5 Interviewed in 1955 by the Italian journalist Indro Montanelli, the ex dictator of Croatia shall confirm his presence in Rome during the escape, taking great care, however, not to reveal the identity of his protectors-accomplices; c.f. "Corriere della Sera", 19 July 1955.

6 A. Hudal, *Römische Tagebücher. Lebensbeichte eines altern Bischofs*, Stuttgart 1976.

7 The statement shall be denied by the official Papal historian - the Jesuit Robert Graham: but it is highly improbable that Hudal and his organization, including many prelates of great authority could have functioned without the full consent or at least the tacit assent of the Holy See.

8 C.f. E. Klee, *Chiesa e nazismo*, Turin 1993.

9 The "La Vista Report", found thanks to the research of the US historian Charles Allen jr, was published in Paris on 17 February 1983 by the "Agence Télégraphique Juive".

The presence of all these war criminals in the Americas has originated a strong Croatian lobby abroad, able to reach and involve the highest bodies in their new country, which also explains the mysterious silence on the evidence of a genocide operated in Croatia. In the nineties their successful political and Media actions succeeded in transforming their victims, the Serbs, in the new Nazis of the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In all possible ways the truth about that 1941 - 1945 war period has been clouded, but the responsibility of the Poglavnik, Ante Pavelic, and the complicity of the Archbishop, Alois Stepinac, is out of question.

(...) The Ustasha doctrine shaped by the *Defender of the Catholic Christianity*, Ante Pavelic, relies on a charismatic, obscure and medieval vision of Christianity. A fanatic and bloodthirsty racial-religious ideology which was implemented with the complete support from Hitler, the discrete complicity of Mussolini, and the silent *imprimatur* of the Vatican.

As of April 1941 it becomes obvious that the absolute priority for the Independent State of Croatia is the ethnic-religious *cleansing* of the country. Whilst the Poglavnik, addressing his militia explains *that a good Ustasha is one that knows how to use his dagger to rip out the baby from his mother's womb*<sup>10</sup> (...) **From a Serbian mother of course.**

(...) For the Ustashes, the Jewish issue was not the prime *racial problem*: both because of the modest number of the Jews in Croatia, and because the wife of the Poglavnik - Mara - is of Jewish origin (her mother Ivana Herzfeld was Jewish) and many of the Ustasha officials were of Judaic descent<sup>11</sup>; for the Poglavnik the anti-Semitic persecution was needed to appeal to the mighty Nazi ally. The true *final solution*, for the Ustasha regime entailed the extermination of the Serbs: the only community capable of *polluting the pure Croatian race*, i.e. the Orthodox *schismatics* opposing the Roman Church, the ancient oppressors from the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.

(...)The ethnic-religious *cleansing* pursued by Pavelic does not leave out the marginal community of nomadic Gypsies. At the end of the dictatorship, estimates indicate that out of the original Romany population of 30.000, around 28.000 are dead<sup>12</sup>. It is an indicative but hardly verifiable figure, since the nomadic way of life involves the lack of data at the urban registry offices or in the parochial archives.

The Croatian nomads have no *Biblical sins*, have no churches or synagogues that can be plundered or destroyed, and have no economic weight or influence. For the Ustasha dictatorship the guilt of the Romany is that they are Gypsies, and as such carriers of social disorder, but above all semi-pagans since they are the followers of a religious syncretism disliked by Catholicism. And so they too become fully fledged victims of the Balkan Holocaust.

Comforted by the silence-consent of the highest representatives of the Croatian Catholic clergy, the Ustasha regime quickly completes the body of laws and regulations that codify the ethnic-religious *cleansing* of the Croatian State. The ministry of Interior, headed by Andrija Artukovic (that soon becomes known as the *Croatian Himmler*), issues a decree on 3 June 1941 ordering the closure of *all Orthodox Schools and] religious institutions of the Serbs*. The next day, Artukovic signs another decree, this time concerning the Jews. (...)

(...) The existence of the *divine blessing* for the massacre of the Serb population, is confirmed by the 15 June issue of *Katolicki Tjednik* - the periodical of the archbishopric of Sarajevo (headed by Monsignor Ivan Saric). (...)

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<sup>10</sup> :C. Falconi, *Il silenzio di Pio XII*, Milan 1965, p. 560.

<sup>11</sup> Such is the case of the ruthless head of Police Eugen Kvaternik-Dido: his maternal grandfather was Josip Frank - a Jew, and his mother (also Jewish) committed suicide due to the atrocities committed by her son.

<sup>12</sup> C.f. C. Bernadac, *L'Holocauste oublié*; Italian translation *Hitler e lo sterminio degli zingari*, Città di Castello 1996. According to Bernadac, the number of Romany victims in Europe in World War Two was around 240.000.

The Ustasha dictatorship gave particular importance to the ethnic-religious *cleansing* of the Croatian capital - Zagreb. (...) Most of the people evacuated from the town quarters specified by the Ordinance become refugees in the true sense of the word: no one in Zagreb is prepared to take them in, nor to rent them new lodgings. As soon as they leave the town, the evicted are immediately massacred by Ustasha militia, or sent to extermination camps (still being set up and kept secret); in both cases, all their belongings are requisitioned<sup>13</sup>. Although news on these first massacres spread rapidly and one after the other, the Catholic clergy continued to keep silent and provide full support to the Ustasha dictatorship. In July 1941 Eugen Kvaternik-Dido together with 100 Ustasha agents in full uniform was given audience at the Vatican<sup>14</sup>.

The 31 August issue of the Catholic periodical published by the archbishopric of Sarajevo, uses clearer wording for more explicit concepts. Thus, the *Katolicki Tjednik* writes: *Until now, God has spoken through papal encyclicals, sermons, doctrinal books, Christian press, missions, heroic examples of the saints. But they [the Orthodox Serbs, M.A.R.] did not lend an ear. They remained insensible. Now God has decided to use different methods. He shall inspire our work, our universal mission! It will not be guided by clergy but rather by authentic Hitler's soldiers. The sermons will finally be heard, with the hello of the cannons, machineguns, tanks and bombers*<sup>15</sup>.

**Mile Budak, ministry of Education and Faith, proposes a solution to the Serbian problem: 1/3 of Serbs should convert to the Catholic religion, 1/3 should leave Croatia, 1/3 to be eliminated. Over a population of six million people, the Serbs were two millions. In 1991, when Croatia proclaimed its independence from Yugoslavia, President Franjo Tudjman named a school after Budak and in 2004 Sveti Rok near Gospic dedicated a village square to the former Ministry.**

(...)The Ustashes start setting up the first extermination camps in Croatia in April-May 1941. They are *legalized* on 23 November 1941, with the name *Internment and Labor Camps*, through a special decree signed by the Poglavnik and the minister of Interior Andrija Artukovic. Also known as *logor*, they are distributed throughout the territory of the Independent State of Croatia.

The internment in the camps is not ordered by the courts, but rather by the *Ustasha Supervision Service* (Ustaska Nadzorna Sluzba - UNS), whose decisions are final according to the law that institutes the Service. In practice, any unit of Poglavnik's militia has the power to arrest and send anyone to the *logor*. In Croatia there are 22 active camps, but most of them will soon be shut down - after contributing to the ethnic-religious genocide. Only two camps - the one in Jasenovac and the one in Stara Gradiska - shall remain operational until 1945. The number of people that died from hardships or illness in the *logor* is impossible to determine: all the registers and documents (although in various camps no documentation on the inmates was kept) are destroyed by the fleeing Ustasha butchers at the end of the war. (...)

(...) In the winter of 1944-45 in the *lager* of Jasenovac the rhythm of the executions is stepped up: the end of the Poglavnik regime is nearing, and the butchers are running

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<sup>13</sup> :In 1945, after the Ustasha criminals escaped, trunks full of gold, jewels and other precious things were found in the archbishopric of Zagreb, in churches and convents throughout the city, just as Pavelic entrusted them to monsignor Stepinac and his clergy: this was one of the principal charges at the Zagreb trial against Alojzije Stepinac (autumn of 1946).

<sup>14</sup> :Reported in a brief article by the "L'Osservatore Romano" on 22 July 1941.

<sup>15</sup> The Catholic Ustasha regime found a way to express its gratitude to the archbishopric of Sarajevo: in November of 1941 monsignor Saric received from the government the Grand Cross with Star, a high decoration of the Poglavnik, with the following rationale: <<For his activity, animated by a pure Ustasha spirit>>; c.f. S. Simic, *Vatikan protiv Jugoslavije [The Vatican against Yugoslavia]*, Titograd (Podgorica) 1958, p. 61.

Other apologetic articles on Ustasha dictatorship published by the Catholic press in Sarajevo, c.f. also H. Michel, *La guerra dell'ombra. La Resistenza in Europa*, Milan 1981, p. 156; and A. Rhodes, *op. cit.*, p. 338.

out of time. In March-April 1945, 15.000 new prisoners are liquidated upon arrival; the surviving prisoners are forced to bury thousands of cadavers. Afterwards, part of the *lager* is set on fire to cancel all traces of the horrors.

(...) The first commander of the Jasenovac extermination camp is the high ranking Ustasha official Ljubo Milos. In 1948, in a cell of the Zagreb prison, Milos had long talks with the British writer G. Bilainkin: among other things he told him about the introduction of special knives to make the slaughter quicker, how mallets were used to kill men and women, and how his men used to kill children by marching over their bodies and heads<sup>16</sup>.

The successor to Ljubo Milos as commander of the Ustasha *lager* of Jasenovac is the Franciscan friar Miroslav Filipovic Majstorovic, known as *Friar Satan* and personal friend of the Poglavnik (that awarded him the rank of major of the Ustasha Militia). When he takes over the command of the death camp, *Friar Satan* already has a reputation that leaves no doubts: the Franciscan already held the command of *Poglavnik's Guards brigade* - Ustasha death squadrons that operating between Banja Luka and Motica in October of 1941, massacred more than 4.800 Serbs<sup>17</sup>, and that in November of 1941, in the elementary school in Krivaja, stabbed to death a number of classes of Serb-Orthodox children<sup>18</sup>. In the *lager*, *Friar Satan* does not only issue orders: he personally takes part in the killing of inmates. (...)

The atrocities committed by the bloodthirsty Catholic friar prompt many protests and pressure on the Primate of Croatia monsignor Stepinac. The archbishop of Zagreb intervenes with great delay in 1943, issuing the simple *suspension a divinis* of the butcher-friar, avoiding any more drastic measures. On the other hand, though Miroslav Filipovic is undoubtedly one of the most ruthless killers in the Ustasha extermination camps, it is quite certain that he is not the only Catholic clergyman active in the death camps.

(...) There are countless testimonies about the ethnic-religious genocide in Croatia. Not only from the survivors, or from Yugoslav or British sources<sup>19</sup>: there is evidence provided by the allies of the Pavelic regime.

The methodical approach and the ruthlessness of the Ustasha crimes are shocking even for the Nazi occupation forces deployed in the Croatian sector controlled by the Reich. In December of 1942, general Glaise von Horstenau informs Marshal Slavko Kvaternik - commander of the Croatian armed forces - that a proposal shall be submitted to Hitler to replace the Poglavnik with a government headed by Vladko Macek, because *over the past few years I have witnessed so many horrible things of this kind, [but] nothing can compare to the crimes committed by the Croats*<sup>20</sup>. A report sent in that same period to

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<sup>16</sup> :C.f. G. Bilainkin, *Tito*, London 1949, p. 144.

<sup>17</sup> During the massacre of Motica, friar Miroslav Filipovic stabbed to death the little boy Djura Glamocan, and since such horrid upset even some of his Ustasha subordinates, the friar shrieked: <<I am converting Devil in the name of God, follow my example!>>. The incident is briefly commented even by Fiorenzo Cavalli who wrote the apologetic of monsignor Stepinac, stating that the massacre of the Serbs in Motica was <<a punitive expedition>> prompted by a Serb raid on a coal mine and also aimed at <<protecting the Catholic population>>in the town.

<sup>18</sup> An eye-witness of the massacre later told: <<Wearing the cloth of the friars and the Ustasha cap on his head, Filipovic entered the class accompanied by several Ustashes: he ordered the teacher to separate the Orthodox children from the little Catholics and Moslems. The teacher, suspecting nothing, called out several Serb children. When they stepped out into the corridor, friar Filipovic threw himself at the group brandishing a knife and slit their throats in the presence of other children that were screaming with terror. With their throat slit and chest cut open the children were running down the corridor and back into the class screaming with pain and horror>>(Dokumenti, cit.).

<sup>19</sup> The *Encyclopedia Britannica* states: <<...the Croatian regime began a massacre of Serbs that, in the whole annals of World War II, was surpassed in savagery only by the mass extermination of Polish Jews>>. More in general, <<testimonies on the massacre of the Serbs are far too well documented to be doubted>>(A. Rhodes, *op. cit.*, p. 345).

<sup>20</sup> :S.K. Pavlowitch, *Yugoslavia*, London 1971, p. 112; c.f. also *The Von Hassel's Diaries 1938-1944*, London 1948.

the headquarters of the 718<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division of the Wehrmacht, indicates that the *Francetic* regiment of the Usthas has been disarmed by the German military police because of the atrocities committed against Serb population, and that the Wehrmacht executed a number of Usthas guilty of conducting massacres, including the Catholic priest Mata Gravanovic.<sup>21</sup>

(...) On 8 May 1941 the Yugoslav Mission to the Holy See submits a note to the Vatican State Secretariat, indicating that *major persecutions and assassinations of the Serb element are taking place in Croatia...* The note prompted no reaction.

The following month the Yugoslav king Peter II, writes a touching letter of denouncement to Pious X I (...) Pious XII replies to the Yugoslav sovereign that the Pontiff thinks much about the Serbian people, and that he is doing all he can to alleviate its sufferance<sup>22</sup>.

Along with the mass extermination, the Usthas initiate a systematic destruction of non-Catholic places of worship. Before the end of the war, in the Independent State of Croatia the militia of the Poglavnik destroyed 299 Orthodox churches, killed six bishops and 222 members of the Serbian Orthodox clergy. (...)

The destruction of the Orthodox Church and the assassination of its clergy are accompanied by a meticulous despoilment of its goods. The operation, intended to favor the Catholic episcopate headed by Monsignor Stepinac, is implemented by special bodies introduced by Pavelic for the systematic depredation of Orthodox Church property.

(...) The Ustasha dictatorship also takes steps against Judaism and against the entire people *enemy of the Catholic God*" (...) On 16 April 1941 Nazi and Ustasha military units, jointly devastate the beautiful synagogue of Sarajevo, including its library and ancient archives. Only a few days later, the same fate falls upon the Jewish temple in Mostar. The first anti-Semitic executions are carried out by the Usthas with the same merciless ferocity used against the Orthodox Serbs. The mass arrests of the Jews in the principal Croatian cities are made legal on 15 June 1941, with the adoption of a decree invoking the criterion of *collective responsibility*.

(...) Between 1941 and 1945, the Ustasha militia massacred nearly 50 thousand Jews (i.e. more than half of the Jewish community living in the state of Croatia). The figure includes all 47 rabbis, some of which were literally butchered<sup>23</sup>. The only Jews to escape the massacre are those that manage to find refuge in the mountains, or reach the territory under Italian jurisdiction<sup>24</sup>.

The Croatian Catholic Church also did not display even minimum disapproval in the face of evidence of anti-Semitic extermination. On the contrary, in several cases, influential figures of the Catholic clergy provided explicit ideological-religious support to the anti-Semitic genocide perpetrated by the Poglavnik regime. It is illustrated by an article published on 25 May 1941 by the periodical of the archbishopric of Sarajevo, the *Katolicki Tjednik*. (...)

Thus the genocide of the Jews in Croatia continues unobstructed. Already in May of 1942, Pavelic's propaganda announces the imminent "*final solution*" of the "*Jewish problem*". Inaugurating an "*Exhibition of the Hostile Activity of the Jews*", Vilko Rieger - head of the state information and counterespionage department - states: *It is significant, and we are proud of this fact, that the Ustasha Croatia, today, is the only state in this part*

<sup>21</sup> :C.f. V Novak, *Velika Optuzba*, cit., p. 62.

<sup>22</sup> :C.f. *Adss*, cit., IV doc. 405, p. 552.

<sup>23</sup> This happened in July of 1941 in Rogatica where 17 ordained Jews were first tortured and then quartered by an Ustasha named Longo - a professional butcher; c.f. G. Scotti, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

<sup>24</sup> :C.f. to pp. 135-42.

*of Europe that has solved radically, forever and with justice, the Jewish problem... Without the solution of the Jewish problem there can be no New Order that Europe is fighting for today, united in the struggle against the democracies and bolshevism*<sup>25</sup>.

Actually, the annihilation of the Jews in Croatia is far from finished. The propaganda statements made by the Ustashas are essentially intended to appeal to the mighty Nazi ally / occupying force. Thus, on 27 July 1942 the Poglavnik issues a new decree:

*All the individuals of Serbian or Jewish descent, regardless of their conversion to Catholicism or other religion, regardless of their residence or work permit, of their marriage with a person of Aryan or mixed descent, of the office they are holding or the services they are performing, must register with the authorities. Anyone failing to submit a statement of descent before 31 August 1942 shall be immediately sent to labor camps.*

The diplomatic representative of the Vatican to Zagreb, monsignor Giuseppe Ramiro Marcone, sends the following message to the Holy See on 17 July 1942: In that same period, the chief Rabbi of Zagreb addresses directly Pious XII sending him a letter that essentially confirms the alarming news already conveyed to the Holy See by monsignor Marcone, and appeals to the Pontiff to intervene in favor of *what remains of the remains of our community*<sup>26</sup>.

Regardless of the evident, pressing urgency of the two requests for intervention submitted to the Holy See, the Pontiff does not reply until 6 October, and then only to the Apostolic delegate in Zagreb: Pious XII invites monsignor Marcone to *find a favorable occasion to point the issue out - with all the necessary tact - to the Authorities [and] ensure a more benevolent treatment of these unfortunate Croatian Jews*<sup>27</sup>

(...) 1944. The imminent end of the Third Reich forces the Ustasha dictatorship to seek remedies. Pavelic tries to initiate negotiations with the Allied governments: he insists that the Independent State of Croatia must be protected in the interest of the Anglo-Americans, to fend the threat of Croatia being re-absorbed by a Yugoslav State led by a communist regime and allied of the Soviets.

(...) On 3 May 1945, Pavelic attempts to make one last political move: he signs a decree equaling in their rights and duties all the citizens of the Croatian State, *regardless of their race*, and thus ending the ethnic-religious persecution that led to the horrors committed by the Ustasha regime<sup>28</sup>. It is a desperate attempt, blatantly instrumental and void of any credibility. Before fleeing to what he thinks will be a brief *exile*, the Poglavnik - accompanied by the moderate leader Macek, visits the seat of the Zagreb archbishopric where he meets with monsignor Alojzije Stepinac, and consigns to the Catholic Primate of Croatia numerous cases containing government dossier and 36 chests containing gold, jewels and other precious goods.<sup>29</sup>

On 5 May Ante Pavelic leaves Zagreb, and under the protection of the surviving Nazi rear guard he finds refuge in Austria. Accompanying the dictator there are several thousand of

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<sup>25</sup> :G. Scotti, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

<sup>26</sup> :Adss, Cit., VIII, doc. 441, p. 611.

<sup>27</sup> :Adss, cit., VIII, doc. 502, p. 218.

<sup>28</sup> The Decree dated 3 May 1945 reads: <<Equal rights of citizens are hereby granted to all those belonging to the Independent State of Croatia. Any and all racial discrimination among those belonging to the Independent State of Croatia is now declared invalid. All the legal decrees based on which the members of the Independent State of Croatia are discriminated in view of their race are hereby declared void as well as all the regulations passed in pursuance of such legal decrees>>.

<sup>29</sup> Pavelic's "legacy" shall be discovered more than a month after the liberation of Zagreb, and it shall constitute one of the prime elements of indictment in the trial against Stepinac.

his most loyal Ustashas, but also some 500 members of the Catholic clergy and nuns<sup>30</sup>, including the archbishop of Sarajevo Ivan Saric and the bishop of Banja Luka Jozo Garic; initially all the members of the clergy and Pavelic's most loyal followers find refuge in the Franciscan convents or those of other orders in the zone around Klagenfurt<sup>31</sup>. (...)

In February of 1946 the former Ustasha dictator is arrested in Austria by the British forces and sent to the Allied concentration camp in Klagenfurt. Yugoslavia presents an urgent request that the Poglavnik be turned over, but it is rejected, as confirmed by Mitar Bakic -secretary general of the Belgrade government - in a statement for the *New York Herald Tribune* on 14 August: *In February of 1946 the Department for War Crimes of the US Supreme Command in Wiesbaden informed our authorities that Pavelic had fallen into the hands of the English... However, the British authorities refused to turn Pavelic over to our officials.*

The reason why the British refuse to turn the ex-Poglavnik over to the Yugoslav justice shall always remain a mystery. A rather sorry mystery: Pavelic is set free, and precisely when in the zone of Klagenfurt arrives monsignor Krunoslav Draganovic - a prelate and former Ustasha official of the Croatian Ministry for Internal Colonization (the agency in charge of the confiscation of the Serb property in Bosnia and in Herzegovina). He has been just appointed Director of the Balkans Department by the Holy See. Furthermore, monsignor Draganovic possesses a pass - issued by the Allied military authorities, authorizing him to move freely around the prison camps set up by the Anglo-American troops.

The Yugoslav historian Sime Balen maintains that, once he is set free Pavelic remains in hiding in the convent of St. Gilgen until spring of 1948: after that he moves to Rome where he lives under the false name of *padre Gomez* at the *Collegio Pio Latino Americano*; a year later - also according to Balen - Pavelic flies to Argentina, with the help of monsignor Draganovic<sup>32</sup>.

(...) In Croatia, after the fall of the Ustasha regime and the advent of Tito, the Catholic Church remains the sole surviving and active structure: regardless of its deep involvement with Poglavnik's bloody dictatorship, the Catholic episcopate still maintains its power. (...) The anti-Catholic reactions of the Serb and Jewish population persecuted for years by the Ustasha dictatorship are marginal and episodic (...) The authorities arrest the priests most deeply involved in the persecutions: several hundred members of the Catholic clergy face regular trials, many of them being sentenced to death<sup>33</sup>.

Proving that the Ustasha dictatorship enjoyed the full support of the Croatian Catholic Church, monsignor Stepinac, immediately lifts his voice against the new socialist Republic: he contests the bases of the asset of the new Yugoslav state, he attacks broadly the new communist power, he eagerly opposes the legislative measures of the people's government, and actively endorses the return of the Ustashas and of the Independent State of Croatia. Thus the archbishop of Zagreb becomes a beacon for those nostalgic of

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<sup>30</sup> :C.f. E. Paris, *op. cit.*, p. 227. Fleeing with the Poglavnik there's also Vladko Macek; general Moskov - commander of Pavelic's personal guards - provides him with a passport-safe conduct and a large number of coins having enormous numismatic value. (c.f. deposition given by Moskov to the investigating judge in Zagreb, cit.). Later on, Macek shall reach the USA and take residence there.

<sup>31</sup> Subsequently Saric and Garic shall find shelter in Franco's Spain, where the former archbishop of Sarajevo shall publish the book *Martirium Croatiae*. Unlike them, the bishop Janko Simrak is arrested and executed by the Yugoslav Army, whilst the fate of the bishop Josip Karevic remains unknown.

<sup>32</sup> :C.f. S. Balen, *Pavelic*, Zagreb 1952, p. 192. Draganovic - a trusted figure of the Croatian Episcopal Conference - had been appointed in November 1941 member of the highly restricted "Executive Council" of the bishops that supervised the forcible "conversions"; c.f. to pp. 177-78.

<sup>33</sup> The Yugoslav historian M. Bulajic reconstructed a list of 629 Catholic clergymen directly responsible for Ustasha massacres.

the Poglavnik and for all those with anti-Communist standing in Croatia and in the new Yugoslav state.

(...) The first, although very vague, hint of self-criticism by the Croatian Catholic episcopate regarding the recent past of the Ustasha dictatorship with its burden of horrors, came on 20 September 1945. *We admit that there have been priests which, pushed astray by the national passion, have sinned against the Divine law and Christian charity and, because of this, deserve to answer for their actions before earthly Justice*. It is a passage from the *Pastoral Letter of the Yugoslav Catholic Bishops*<sup>34</sup>, issued after the Plenary Episcopal Conference in Zagreb. The *Pastoral* - signed by Stepinac, other 2 archbishops, 10 bishops and 4 general vicars - reduces to these four lines the question of the Balkan Holocaust and the collaboration of the Catholic Church with the fierce dictatorial regime of the Poglavnik. The remaining part of the *Pastoral* offers a long and vibrant harangue against the new Yugoslav regime headed by the communist Tito, accused of being authoritarian and of persecuting the Catholic clergy.

(...) In the fall of 1945 the new Yugoslav Republic guided by the communist Tito is faced with the expansion of the clandestine subversive activity of the *Krizari* i.e. the *God's Crusaders* - Catholic integralists and nostalgic Ustasha supporters.

(...) At the beginning of January of 1946, the Yugoslav authorities submit to the official representative of the Holy See in Yugoslavia, monsignor Patrizio Hurley, extensive documentation on the collaborationist activities of monsignor Stepinac and of a large part of the Croatian clergy with Ante Pavelic's dictatorship. The diplomatic initiative is intended to induce the Holy See to withdraw the archbishop from Zagreb, and appoint monsignor Stepinac to some other high pastoral office in some other country: a move that would permit him to avoid the trial, and to save the diplomatic relations between Belgrade and the Vatican<sup>35</sup>. But the Holy See needs an anti-Communist *martyr* for a propaganda campaign structured around a *victim* of a political-judiciary case capable of re-igniting the fanaticism of Croatian Catholicism and creating difficulties - domestically and internationally - for the *materialist, atheist and Bolshevik* regime of the new Yugoslavia headed by Tito. Hence the Vatican confirms monsignor Stepinac - Primate of Croatia.

Thus, on 18 September 1946, the Magistracy of Zagreb issues the warrant for the arrest of Alojzije Stepinac, accused of collaborationism and subversive activity against the Yugoslav State.(...) Monsignor Stepinac is arrested on 17 May 1945 and he remains in detention until 3 June. On 4 June, right after being set free, Stepinac has confidential talks with Tito (that already met with some of the high representatives of the Catholic Church in Zagreb several days earlier): the new regime intends to establish good relations with the Holy See, from which it expects - in return for keeping silent about the responsibility of the clergy in the genocide of the Orthodox - an open and collaborative policy. But the Vatican foreign policy remains characterized by visceral anti-communism, and the Roman Church not only fails to show any opening towards the *new Yugoslavia*, but opposes it with vehemence

The trial against the archbishop of Zagreb begins on 30 September 1946, based on the indictment signed by the Croatian magistrate Jakov Blazevic. The principal charges against the accused Alojzije Stepinac are six:

1) Support given by the archbishop to the Nazi-fascist occupying forces and his collaboration with the Ustasha dictatorship from April 1941 to April 1945. To prove this are the public statements issued in those years by the episcopate, the articles in the Catholic

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<sup>34</sup> The integral text of the *Pastoral Letter* is quoted by "Civiltà Cattolica" in its 17 November 1945 edition.

<sup>35</sup> This circumstance is confirmed on 7 November 1946 by the secretary of the Italian Communist Party - Palmiro Togliatti. In an article in "Unità", Togliatti reveals that the Yugoslav leader Tito had informed him quite some time ago that there was proof of the collaboration of monsignor Stepinac with the Ustashes and with the Nazis, and that the Yugoslav leader had immediately informed the Chargé d'Affaires of the Apostolic Nunciature in Belgrade: through him, Tito had invited the Holy See to withdraw Stepinac, in order to exempt the archbishop of Zagreb from the otherwise inevitable trial.

publications from the period, the pro-Ustasha activism of various Catholic organizations headed by the Primate of Croatia, the numerous religious ceremonies he officiated in favor of the regime (such as the solemn Mass on 10 April of every year to celebrate the advent of the Independent State of Croatia);

2) The direct responsibility of the archbishop in organizing and practicing the forced *conversions* to Catholicism of the Orthodox Serbs in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, conversions achieved under the threat of massacre;

3) The responsibility of monsignor Stepinac in the ethnic-religious genocide of Serbs, Jews and Romany, as the military apostolic vicar of the Ustasha Armed Forces, i.e. head of all the chaplains that assisted spiritually the murderous militias;

4) The responsibility of the archbishop of Zagreb for never taking any step against the multitude of clergymen stained with horrendous crimes taking personally part in the Ustasha massacres;

5) The political activism of monsignor Stepinac in the final phase of the Pavelic dictatorship in an attempt to avoid the fall of the Ustasha regime, an attempt which culminated with the concealment - in the palace of the archbishop of Zagreb - of the *archives of the Foreign Ministry of the Independent State of Croatia and of the Prefecture to the Poglavnik*;

6) The support given by monsignor Stepinac to the subversive activity of the *Krizari* and of the *Ustashes Lisak and Gulin*, involved in a clandestine effort to organize a revolt of Croatian nationalism.

In practice, the accusations against Stepinac correspond to - pursuant to all legislations and even international laws - *treason and collaborationism*. In fact the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, attacked in April 1941 by the Nazi-fascists to create an artificial Independent State of Croatia, never ceased to exist, and its government in exile continued to be recognized by all the non-Axis countries - the Vatican included. Hence, like all other Croatian citizens, monsignor Stepinac did not lose his juridical status of Yugoslav citizen, whilst committing in the period between 1941 and 1945 *treason and collaborationism*. During the trial, hundreds of articles published by the Catholic magazines in the years 1941-45 are presented as evidence. Articles that openly endorsed the Ustasha dictatorship, that shared or approved its religious fanaticism and the aberrant racial stands, that praised Nazi-fascism and the Poglavnik, that bolstered the practice of forcible *conversions*, that kept silent about the ethnic-religious massacres perpetrated in the meanwhile by the Ustasha militias, and hid the existence of concentration camps and the deportations of Serbs, Jews and Romany.

On 10 October 1946 the judges of the Zagreb Court find the accused Alojzije Stepinac guilty of favoring the enemy (i.e. *collaborationism*) and treason, and sentence him to 16 years of imprisonment with forced labor.

The Holy See calls the Zagreb process a *farcical trial*<sup>36</sup>. In its 30-31 December 1946 issue, the *Osservatore Romano* writes that the only guilt monsignor Stepinac has is *being the herald of Christian faith and of the Christian tradition against the atheist materialism that the communist dictator, supported by Moscow, is trying to impose upon his country*. At the end of October 1946 the Holy See has already excommunicated the judges that passed the guilty sentence against the archbishop of Zagreb.

Tito's regime then makes one last attempt to spare monsignor Stepinac from serving the sentence passed by the Tribunal: he is offered to leave the country, but the former Catholic Primate of Croatia refuses the offer.

Transferred to the Lepoglava Prison, monsignor Stepinac is given the treatment suiting his rank of *special prisoner*: He is exempted from forced labor he was also sentenced to, and instead of 16 he spends only 5 years in prison: on 5 December 1951 the presumed *Catholic martyr* is released and restricted to forced residence in his native town of Krasic. (...) On the 12 January 1953, Stepinac the *herald of Christian faith* is appointed cardinal,

<sup>36</sup> This is the definition that the Vatican insisted on for more than half a century: on 2 October 1998 the "Osservatore Romano" still wrote that <<Stepinac was condemned in 1946 on a farcical trial>>

and the elevation is announced at the Vatican by Pope Pious XII with a solemn commendation: *He is not here, but we embrace him with brotherly tenderness... We want everyone to know that in granting him the dignity of Roman purple we wanted to reward him in conformity with his merits*<sup>37</sup> Cardinal Alojzije Stepinac dies at Krasic on 10 February 1960, at the age of 62<sup>38</sup>; he is buried behind the main altar of the Zagreb Cathedral.

(...) The Balkan Holocaust and the accountability of monsignor Stepinac is taboo, and western historiography covering the years of the Ustasha dictatorship in Croatia is nearly inexistent: it is the will of the Holy Roman Church. Only a few scholars dared and dare challenge the Catholic ban on the genocide in Croatia in 1941-45: the price is boycott, intimidation and even persecution<sup>39</sup>. The Vatican has chosen to punish with the excommunication the scholar Viktor Novak, author of *Magnum Crimen*, a highly documented historiographical book dealing with the Balkan Holocaust: the Catholic extreme punishment - the excommunication - was never applied to any of the Ustasha slaughterers that drenched with blood the Independent State of Croatia for years, *in the name of God*.

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In the early 90's the new wave of Croatian nationalism that leads to the creation of the independent Republic of Croatia brings back to life the spirit of the genocide archbishop.

On 11 February 1991 the Croatian Catholic Church diffuses the *Letter of the Croatian Bishops in Yugoslavia to all the Catholic Bishops in the World*<sup>40</sup>, a pastoral initiative motivated by the *risk of a return to the communist dictatorship*. The ambitious document retraces the history of the Croatian Catholic Church from 1918 onward. The Ustasha dictatorship and the ethnic-religious genocide is dealt with in the paragraph entitled *The Martyrdom of the Croats and of the Church during and after World War Two (1941-1980)*, where the issue is forged and dismissed with the following words:

Marija Bistrica (Croatia), Saturday 3 October 1998. The Sanctuary of the Virgin in Marija Bistrica is packed with believers. At the altar, towered by a large ancient statue of Our Lady, John Paul II celebrates the solemn Mass that sanctions the beatification of Alojzije Stepinac. The Pontiff and all the high prelates present, wear purple red robes - the color of martyrdom.

**Marco Aurelio Rivelli has clearly proposed serious grounds to understand why the cruel events in Croatia are not as known as the similar tragedy provoked by the German Nazis in**

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<sup>37</sup> C.f. "The New York Times", 13 January 1953. On 29 November 1952, the news that Pious XII intended to appoint 14 new cardinals, including monsignor Stepinac, caused the interruption of diplomatic relations between Yugoslavia and the Holy See (17 December 1952).

<sup>38</sup> The cause of death of Stepinac is the aggravation of the ailment that troubled him for years - the polycythemia (excessive production of red blood corpuscles). The myth of the "martyrdom" built by the Holy Roman Church around him included the legendary shadow of the cardinal's death being caused by <<constant humiliation of imprisonment and by probable progressive poisoning>>; obviously in the role of "probable poisoners" the communists ...

<sup>39</sup> <<There is an ongoing new inquisition. Unable to rely on "traditional" methods it adapted to the times turning to modern systems of repression: hence the use by the Tribunals of Article 166 that punishes offenses to divinity, hence the fines and the imprisonment... and hence - above all - the discrimination at work, the segregation the professional isolation>>, says the German historian Karlheinz Deschner (author of numerous works dealing with the wrongdoing of the Holy Roman Church), in an interview gathered by Ettore Mo and published by the "Corriere della Sera" on 13 April 1988. The same journalist also quotes <<pressure, threats, blackmail, flattering>> used on former Catholic priest and theologian Hubertus Mynarek, to prevent him from publishing his book *Herren und Knechte der Kirche* ("Masters and Slaves of the Church"), and open accusation against the German curia and the <<absolutist and monarchical character of the Roman Church>>.

<sup>40</sup> Published in its integrity by "La documentation catholique", N<sup>o</sup> 2030, 16 June 1991, pp. 595-98.

**Europe. The power of the Holy See has clouded and protected the Catholic nation considered a front line against communism.**

**The Vatican was actually the first European State, after Germany, to recognize the new State of Croatia in January 1992, when Croatia unilaterally separated from the Yugoslav Federation.**

**A sophisticated disinformation has been employed through the international Medias to demonize the Serbs accusing them of ethnic cleansing and finally of genocide.**

**The former victims of World War II have ironically been consigned to history as the new Nazis of the end of the twentieth century.**

**Genocide means the intention to eliminate an entire population. In the past twenty years, there has been a tendency to apply this term to dramatic events far from being a genocide, albeit cruel.**

**The popularization of the concept of genocide is used to minimize the meaning of the real tragedy occurred in 1940 - 1945 in favor of the nations that operated a genocide overturning the guilt: victims become exterminators like their former persecutors. JTMV**

