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THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE MAKING OF THE CROATIAN NATION, 1970–1984

As a consequence of the liberal course of the Yugoslav communist regime of the 1960s, the six-republic federation was swamped by an upsurge of ethnic nationalism in all the republics and autonomous provinces.[1] The carriers of this nationalism were not initially the conservative anticommunist forces such as, the churches and surviving World War II enemies of the Partisans but were "ethnonationally sensitive" communist leaders in the republics and autonomous provinces. They demanded more power and autonomy at the expense of the federation. Nonetheless, they unwittingly became allies of conservative nationalists who saw the process as a step toward their separatist ideal. Although secular forces dominated these movements, religious institutions were not dormant.

The most massive of the Yugoslav nationalist movements of the late sixties was the Croatian National Movement, also referred to by its supporters as Croatian Spring, or, in the old regime's jargon, the "Croatian Mass Movement" (1967–72). The Croatian national movement, triggered by a Serbo-Croatian linguistic dispute in 1967, expanded into spheres of culture, economy, education, foreign and military affairs, interethnic relations, constitutional politics, and so on. Croat communists and noncommunists came together, bound by the appealing nationalist agenda. Thus, the secretary of the League of Communists of Croatia, Miko Tripalo, said that "national and class interests were the same as nation and class had become identical."[2] The movement's leaders believed that Croatia without the rest of Yugoslavia (especially if released from the "Balkan burden" of Serbia, Kosovo, and Macedonia), would attain the prosperity of western European countries.[3] The movement reached its pinnacle in the spring of 1971. Croatia was on the verge of revolution. Street protests and strikes took place in several Croatian cities. In December 1971, the unchallenged supreme authority in Yugoslavia, Josip Broz Tito, summoned the Croat communist leaders who sided with the movement to his Karadjordjevo hunting lodge and

threatened military intervention. Between 1972 and 1973 the regime jailed a large number the Croat National Movement's leaders and activists. Tito purged Croatia's League of Communists and established a rigid structure of power. The period from roughly 1973 to 1989 would come to be known as the "Croatian silence." During the same period, however, the Catholic Church in Croatia was agile and outspoken as both the carrier of the national idea and fighter for greater religious liberty.

The Catholic Church and the Croatian National Movement, 1970–1972

The Movement's ideas and initiatives found support and sympathy in the clerical ranks of the Croatian branch of the Catholic Church. Yet the episcopate did not directly support the movement. This does not mean that the Church ignored it, or adopted a "wait and see" policy, as one analyst argued.[4] As I will show, the Church hierarchy had a mobilizational agenda of its own. Nevertheless, the Movement's leaders hoped that the Church would more explicitly and directly support them. In a speech at the 1970 Catholic student convention at Rijeka, the student leader and Catholic layman Ivan Zvonimir Čičak urged the Church to

> get involved actively in political life. . . . [T]he Church, Catholic lay movement, and other forces must come together, united within one single movement operating under one single leadership, and in accordance with this leadership's policies. It is time for the forces other than the Communist Party to assume the leading role in this society and set in motion social and historical process. . . . Christianity is not merely prayer and conversation but also concrete action. We must become more active.[5]

Church leaders were not impressed by such calls. The archbishop of Split, Frane Franić, as he recalled in our 1989 interview, jokingly asked his colleague bishops on a meeting held late in 1970: "So are we going to put the Church under command of those Catholic students whose leaders have ambitions to replace the Pope, or perhaps we ought to let Marxists have command over the Church?"[6] On the other hand, the Capuchin theologian Tomislav Šagi-Bunić, who was one of the Movement's outspoken advocates, told me in our 1990 interview that the bishops had abandoned the Croatian people.[7] According to Šagi-Bunić, the archbishop of Zagreb, Franjo Kuharić, refused to see the prominent nationalist leaders Franjo Tudjman and Marko Veselica, who pleaded for the Church's support.[8] Some bishops even collaborated with the regime. Early in 1972, when the backlash against the Movement's leaders had already begun, Archbishop Franić assured representatives of the government of Croatia that the Vatican was keeping its

commitment to the Church's noninterference in domestic political affairs in Yugoslavia. In several meetings with high state officials, Archbishop Franić said that Pope Paul VI had urged the episcopate not to participate in or assist the movement.[9] The Church, according to the archbishop, sought to avoid bloodshed because the situation in spring 1971 was explosive. The archbishop argued that the regime should have been grateful to the Church for mitigating conflicts and curbing extremism. Franić, who worried most about the regime's blockade of construction of the new St. Peter's cathedral in Split (during the antinationalist campaign the authorities reduced the cathedral's size and relocated it on less attractive location) protested the regime's attacks on clergy but stopped short of protesting the regime's repression of the movement's leaders.

Even though the bishops abstained from direct involvement in politics, religious symbols were ubiquitous and churches were crowded. The Croatian Catholic lay movement was witnessing a second golden age after the interwar period. Religious life was dynamic: spiritual panels, catechism for adults, worship services for students and intellectuals, and Sunday sermons dedicated to the current social issues attracted large audience, especially in the major Croatian cities such as Zagreb, Split, Rijeka, Osijek, Zadar, Dubrovnik, and elsewhere. The Institute for the Theological Culture of Laypeople at Rijeka, with the affiliated lay group Sinaxis, were centers of the movement's Catholic wing. In the capital city of Zagreb, people flocked to the city's churches to hear popular preachers.[10] In Split, the Friars Minor Conventual ran a "Spiritual Panel for Adults" that was frequented by prominent student leaders and intellectuals.

The theologian Šagi-Bunić was a popular preacher in Zagreb and a member of the cultural forum *Matica hrvatska*, the umbrella organization that operated as the movement's "party" and its headquarters. From February to August 1972, Šagi-Bunić wrote a series of essays in the periodical *Glas koncila* about democratization and the interaction between religion and the Yugoslav national question.[11] Šagi-Bunić argued that a Church-state rapprochement through dialogue, if it resulted in greater democratization, would be for the benefit of both institutions. But he warned that believers could not consider the regime, as it was, a legitimate government because, according to the program of the League of Communists, its members must be nonbelievers and only they are allowed to hold power.[12] Šagi also criticized the regime's religious policies. He correctly observed that the ruling elite unwittingly boosted clericalism, trying to make a power-sharing deal with the episcopate rather than granting full religious liberty to citizen believers.[13] However, Šagi also admitted that the Church should do more to reform itself in the spirit of Vatican II, in order to help the democratic transformation of Yugoslav society.

Šagi-Bunić also wrote a series of essays on nationalism. He inferred that the Tito regime tend to magnify the nationalist threat to society. Šagi pointed out that Vatican II, the papal encyclical *Populorum progressio*, and the Third

Synod of Bishops that took place in Rome in October 1971 made it clear that the Church was against "excessive nationalism" and hatred rooted in ethnicity, religion, or race.[14] Šagi-Bunić argued that the regime was overreacting to "cultural nationalism," for example, ethnic patriotic songs, folklore, and an emphasis on ethnic history. He called for more freedom, which would provide a safety valve and eventually ease tensions in the multinational state. The regime was unreceptive toward Šagi Bunić's ideas. Only a few liberal Marxist intellectuals joined the debate.

According to an analysis released by the League of Communists of Croatia, the Catholic Church "sympathized with the movement's ideas, but only a few clergy and no religious leader joined the nationalists."[15] "The Church as a whole remained within the limits of legal religious activity," the document reads, "thanks to our good relations with the Vatican, and also because the nationalist leaders had failed to appreciate the Church's potential and find a proper role for the Church in the movement."[16] Croatia's commissioner for religious affairs, Zlatko Frid, thanked Archbishop Franić on the January 1972 meeting in Zagreb, saying that "although a few cases of nationalism and chauvinism have been observed in the Church, the nationalist ideas did not penetrate the clerical rank and file."[17]

Nonetheless, the Church carried out its national mission. To begin with, the Church reintroduced the cult of the Virgin Mary as the major religious and national symbol of Catholic Croatia. Further, as noted earlier, the expansion and consolidation of the Croatian Catholic Church abroad, through the establishment of the Bishops' Conference's Council for Croatian Migrants in 1969, had improved the Church's financial status and exerted a far-reaching impact on the Croatian national homogenization under the aegis of the Church. In addition, the Church reinvigorated Croatian nationalism through several specific initiatives. On 10 February 1970, the archbishop of Zagreb, Franjo Kuharić, held the first public commemoration dedicated to the controversial church leader Alojzije Cardinal Stepinac. Within the next decade the commemoration at Stepinac's tomb in the Zagreb Cathedral would attract large audiences and evolve into an unofficial Croatian national holiday—Cardinal Stepinac's Day. The first native Croat saint of the Catholic Church, Nikola Tavelić, was canonized in September 1970.[18] Thousands of jubilant Croat pilgrims attended the proclamation of the new saint at Rome. In 1971, the Vatican made another concession to Croatian nationalism: despite bitter protests from the Yugoslav embassy, the Church renamed the former Illyrian Institute and Church of Saint Girolamo at Rome (linked with the escape of Croatian fascists) the Croatian Institute and Church of Saint Girolamo.

The revival of the Marian cult was especially important. On 15–22 August 1971 the Church organized the "Mariological and Marian Congress" in Zagreb and at the nearby shrine of Marija Bistrica. According to a Church monograph, it was "the first in a series of grand jubilees and celebrations blessed with church-historical and Marian elements, which came to us in-

separable in mutual interaction."[19] The congress hosted 126 theologians, experts on Marian spirituality from 30 countries. The Archbishop of Zagreb, Franjo Kuharić, entitled his opening speech "The Tribulations of Croatia and the Virgin Mary." Kuharić pointed out that "small, oppressed nations worship the cult of Mary with an extraordinary piety."[20] The Franciscan Karlo Balić, a Mariologist from Rome, proposed that the Marian shrine of Marija Bistrica be consecrated as a "national" shrine of Croatia. Balić was actually reviving an official initiative made by the Archbishop of Zagreb Alojzije Stepinac. As early as 1939, Stepinac had begun preparations for the establishment of Marija Bistrica as the central Croat Catholic tabernacle. During the period of the Independent State of Croatia, Stepinac, in collaboration with the Pavelić government and financially assisted by the regime, organized works in Marija Bistrica conceived as a "national" shrine of the new Croatian state. In September 1971, the Bishops' Conference of Yugoslavia supported the initiative for a special status for Marija Bistrica presented by the archbishop of Zagreb. In the early seventies, emulating the Catholic Church in Poland, the Catholic Church in Croatia launched the mobilization of the Croats under the aegis of "the Virgin Mary, Queen of the Croats."[21] In 1971, Marija Bistrica became the Croatian equivalent to Czestochowa in Poland. Incidentally, the Croats, like the Poles, kept at Marija Bistrica a "Black" Madonna. The cult of "black" statues of the Virgin originated in the sixteenth century. It was believed that the Croat Black Madonna had saved the area from Turkish raids. The Croatian Black Madonna was referred to as the Queen of the Croats and the "advocata fidelissima Croatiae" (the most faithful advocate of Croatia). The cult of the Queen of the Croats emerged at the end of the eighteenth century, when someone engraved under the Madonna's icon at the Remete shrine, near Zagreb, the inscription *"Advocata Croatiae fidelissima mater"* (Advocate of Croatia, the most faithful mother). In the absence of native saints prior to 1970, the Virgin Mary Queen of the Croats had become the central cult of Croatian Catholicism as well as one of the most popular symbols of Croatian nationalism. Marian statues, shrines, and pilgrimages symbolically unify territories that Croatian nationalists considered historically Croatian. Icons of the Queen of the Croats, circulated across the multiconfessional Yugoslav labyrinth, symbolically embracing the ethnic nation.

The International Marian Congress concluded at the newly consecrated national shrine at Marija Bistrica on 22 August 1971. Over 150,000 pilgrims came to pay tribute to the Madonna Queen of the Croats. "Catholic Croatia has never seen anything like this before," reported the church press.[22] "The small but united Croatian people," said Archbishop Kuharić in a homily at Marija Bistrica, "came together from this country and from abroad; the Croats have come here to embrace each other and the whole of Croatia."[23] The crowd chanted the Croatian national anthem "Our Lovely Homeland" and the religious hymn "Virgin of Paradise, Queen of the Croats." Archbishop Kuharić concluded that "the Marian congress reasserted Croatian

Catholic identity and unity." In Kuharić's words, "the main purpose of Marian festivals and congresses is bringing the Croatian people together while quenching the people's thirst for the spiritual."[24]

The year 1971 became one of the milestones in recent Croatian history, not only because of the Croatian National Movement but also regarding the activities of the Catholic Church of Croatia. In August 1971, at the shrine of Trsat near the Adriatic port of Rijeka, 40,000 pilgrims celebrated the feast of the Assumption. It became customary for pilgrims to display the Croatian colors, wear ethnic attire, and sing patriotic songs and church hymns. Occasionally the police intervened, confiscated what was viewed as nationalist insignia, and fined the violators. In August, the archbishop of Zadar, Marjan Oblak, led a pilgrimage to the early medieval Croatian diocesan seat of Nin in Dalmatia's hinterland. On 1 August 1971, the Archbishop Franić convened a metropolitan Marian congress at the second largest Croatian Marian shrine of Sinj. The Sinj congress was announced under the slogan "Let Our People Not Lose Their Identity." Archbishop Franić presided over a "Prayer for the Croatian People."

In 1972, church-state relations worsened. After Tito's purge of the League of Communists in Croatia, the first arrests of Croatian nationalists occurred in December 1971 and continued through 1972. The Church was attacked by the state press, and some churchmen were persecuted. In January 1972, at the session of the Intermunicipal Conference of the League of Communists of Croatia for Dalmatia, the state prosecutor reported that "certain circles from the Catholic and Orthodox churches are resisting the new political course . . . in defiance of warnings, they continue to wave national flags without the socialist symbols [and] publicize anti-Party and antistate articles in the church press, and some even organize worship service for the former political leaders."[25] Even in the traditionally nonnationalist Croatian province of Istria the Church was publicly attacked, so that the parish priest from Rovinj complained in a letter to the Municipal Commission for Religious Affairs, published in *Glas koncila*, that "political leaders in public statements contend that the Church and the clergy have always been and will remain ugly nationalists, the worst of all."[26]

In response to state repression, the archbishop of Zagreb, Franjo Kuharić, delivered a stern message to the communists, while his counterpart from Split, Archbishop Franić, was again in the role of the appeaser.[27] By contrast, Archbishop Kuharić held a series of protest sermons in the Zagreb cathedral from January through March 1972. The homilies were entitled "Let us Not Capitulate before Evil" and "Our People Needs Its Church."[28] On the occasion of Lent in 1972, the archbishop Kuharić released an epistle in which he attacked the regime's restrictions of religious liberty. The letter also addressed the issue of equality of nations in the multiethnic country of Yugoslavia. "Believers will never put up with discrimination against anyone because of his faith," Archbishop Kuharić wrote, emphasizing that

> political authorities have no right to command what philosophy and view of the world citizens should espouse. It is a duty for us believers to love our Croatian people. We understand that good relations with other nationalities are important and necessary, but these relations among nationalities must be just and based on freedom for all, equality and rule of law that is equal for all.[29]

At the regular spring session of the Bishops' Conference of Yugoslavia, held in Zagreb on 18–21 April 1972, the bishops released a public statement expressing unity and support for Archbishop Kuharić and said that Kuharić's Lent message was written in the spirit of the Second Vatican Council and based on the evidence of numerous documented human rights violations in Croatia.[30]

Concurrently, the theologian Šagi-Bunić wrote in *Glas koncila* an essay on the role of the Catholic Church in the formation of the Croatian nation.

> The Church and the Croatian nation are inseparable, and nothing can sever that connection. Catholicism cannot be deleted from the people's collective memory or the Croatian national identity, either by theoretical persuasion and propaganda or by a revolutionary act. The Catholic Church in our country has done nothing bad or harmful in recent years, no moves or gestures that could have possibly hampered the development of the Croatian people or that have been at the expense of any other nationality in Yugoslavia.[31]

In June 1972, Šagi-Bunić published in *Glas koncila* his boldest piece on the Church and nationalism. "The Church is not to blame for the formation of the Croatian nation," he wrote, concluding that "the Croatian nation is the finished product in which Catholicism is one among several key components of Croatian national identity."[32]

The Croatian crisis continued. Although domestic unrest was short-lived, the regime worried about an intensification of activities by Croatian exile groups. Between 1968 and 1972, exile anti-Yugoslav organizations carried out a series of deadly terrorist attacks.[33] The Belgrade government asked the Vatican and moderate bishops to intervene and condemn the attacks. The Vatican urged clergy to ease tensions, but no Catholic Church leader publicly condemned terrorism. In July 1972, Archbishop Franić met with the Croatia government officials Frid and Petrinović and informed them that the pope had urged church leaders to unite forces in order to make the Church stronger while helping stabilization of Yugoslavia, according to the current foreign policy of the Holy See. According to records of Franić's meetings with Croatian officials, Franić, whom Croatian officials viewed as a moderate church leader, was explicitly asked by state officials to publicly condemn terrorist activities (some of them with fatal consequences) carried out at the time by Croat extremist groups abroad. State officials reminded the archbishop that the Vatican was obliged to condemn such attacks by the Protocol

of 1966. Franić promised that he would put the issue on the Bishops' Conference's agenda and would himself condemn such violent activities. There is no evidence, however, that this church leader or the Bishops' Conference released any pronouncement in connection with the Croat terrorists who had been active between 1970 and 1972 (some were sentenced by criminal courts in Western countries), although they were obliged to do so by the Protocol of 1966 between the Holy See and the Belgrade government.

On 14–15 August 1972, the Catholic Church in Croatia celebrated the feast of the Assumption of Mary at the national shrine at Marija Bistrica. Archbishop Franić convened his congregation in the historic Solin "by the graves of the Croatian kings" on 8 September 1972. Over 30,000 people chanted the Croatian anthem and Marian songs. After the collapse of the Croatian (secular) nationalist movement, the Church became the only driving force of Croatian ethnic nationalism. Many secular nationalist leaders recognized the Church's leadership and became practicing Catholics.[35]

A Symbolic Revolution: The Great Novena

After the Croatian Church–state quarrel in the spring of 1972, the Vatican sought to ease tensions in Yugoslavia. The domestic episcopate cooperated. Archbishop Kuharić, who vehemently protested the regime's policies after the collapse of the Croat National Movement, kept a low profile, while Archbishop Franić and Slovene bishops labored to ameliorate relations with the state. The Church was preparing the ground for the commencement of the nine-year-long jubilee, or the Great Novena, Thirteen Centuries of Christianity in the Croat People. Instead of commencement it would be more accurate to say continuation, for the jubilee had begun in 1941 and had been interrupted by war.

In September 1974, the Croatian episcopate announced the resumption of the Great Novena.[36] The bishops' committee for organizing the Great Novena explained the purpose of the jubilee as follows:

> Facing the phenomena of secularization, urbanization, industrialization, and atheism, the Church in Croatia wanted in the first place to revive the historic-redemptional consciousness and responsibility for the Christian legacy, as well as to strengthen the harmony of the Church by means of a profound Eucharistic revival.[37]

The pope proclaimed the year 1975–76 the "International Year of Mary." On that occasion the Catholic episcopate in Yugoslavia released a pastoral letter, "Thirteen centuries of Christianity in the Croat people," and announced the beginning of the jubilee. The jubilee's logo, showing a replica of the Madonna's image from the tenth-century king Zvonimir's basilica at

Biskupija near Knin, was labeled "Our Lady of the Great Croatian Christian Covenant." It would be circulating over nine years through parishes across Croatia and Croatian enclaves in neighboring areas. The nine-year jubilee was conceived not only as a liturgical and pastoral animation but also as a course in national and Church history. The Church monthly for the young, *Little Council,* initiated in parishes and missions at home and abroad a quiz in Church history: "The Catechism Olympiad for Prince Višeslav's Trophy." The contest became traditional and was accompanied with several editions of the new history textbook "A Little Key for the History of the Church in the Croat People."

Celebrations of the International Year of Mary were associated with the Croatian "Year of Queen Helen," in honor of the oldest Marian shrine at Solin, near Split, founded by Queen Helen in 976. The thousandth anniversary of this first known Marian shrine in Croatia was marked by a three-day international Marian congress in Split and liturgical ceremonies on 8–12 September at nearby Solin. The final liturgical celebration was preceded by a vigil at Queen Helen's shrine. The purpose of the vigil was to teach the faithful "A Course in Croatian Catholic History at the Tombs of our Catholic Kings."[38] The final ceremony, entitled "Day of the Great Covenant," with a congregation of 60,000 in attendance, took place at Solin on 12 September 1976.[39] The concluding "Prayer of the Great Covenant" mentioned Marian shrines dispersed across Yugoslav lands from Istria to Bosnia and Kosovo.[40] The Church underscored religious history as the hallmark of nationhood.

The Church evaluated the opening of the Great Novena as a success, with special compliments to the host, Archbishop Franić.[41] The Croatian Church leader had studied the precedent in Poland, held consultations with the Polish prelates, and emulated the Polish jubilee of the "Great Novena of the Millennium, 1956–1965." In many respects, Franić's strategy recalled the work of Stefan Cardinal Wyszýnski.[42] As a result, Croatia's commissioner for religious affairs, Ivan Lalić, in his toast at the 11 September reception for the participants, declared that all Church activities were strictly religious and therefore legal. However, a confidential document originated by the League of Communists of Dalmatia described the beginning of the Great Novena as "a nationalistic escalation and regrouping of the defeated nationalist forces around the Catholic Church."[43]

In 1977, the Church celebrated the eight-hundredth anniversary of the first papal visit to Slavic lands. The jubilee invoked a legend according to which Pope Alexander III, when he arrived at the Adriatic port of Zara (Zadar) was impressed as local Slavs chanted hymns in their native language. According to a Church document, the jubilee's goal was "to underscore the importance of the language for national self-determination."[44] Next year the Church marked the nine-hundredth anniversary of the basilica at Biskupija, built by King Zvonimir, who during his reign (1076–88) solidified Croatia's place in Western civilization. In preparation for the Zvon-

imir jubilee, the leading Church historians Josip Soldo, Bonaventura Duda, and Tomislav Šagi-Bunić wrote and lectured about the historic consequences of the King Zvonimir's consolidation of Roman Catholicism and rejection of Eastern Orthodoxy, thus cementing the character of Croatia as a Western nation. They referred to Serbian Church historians who describe Zvonimir as an enemy of the Orthodox faith.[45]

The final ceremony of the King Zvonimir jubilee took place on 14–17 September 1978 at the village of Biskupija, which harbors the relics of a basilica built by him and dedicated to Mary. The Zvonimir basilica is one of numerous important sacred landmarks posted along communal boundaries amid the Yugoslav ethnoreligious maze (the village of Biskupija, not very far from the regional centers of Knin and Drniš, is located in the area overwhelmingly populated by Orthodox Serbs). At the Zvonimir jubilee, a new practice was introduced: the icon of "Our Lady of the Great Croatian Christian Covenant" on display inside the church was decorated by the Croatian national flag. The flag differed from the official state flag of the Socialist Republic of Croatia (there was no red star in the middle). The Church was attacked by the official press. Still the disputed flag remained on display in all ensuing events of the Great Novena. The regime press also criticized the chanting of the Croatian national anthem as inappropriate practice for religious events.[46]

Over 30,000 pilgrims, clergy, and bishops, with the papal legate the cardinal Silvio Oddi, and state officials and representatives of the Serbian Orthodox Church were in attendance at the mass in Biskupija on 17 September 1978. The ceremony was dedicated to the consecration of the renovated replica of the historic church of King Zvonimir. In the evening, at the vigil in the magnificent sixteenth-century romanesque cathedral at the nearby diocesan center of Šibenik, Archbishop Franić spoke in his homily about the importance of sacred rebuilding, which, according to his words, epitomized the perpetual process of renewal and continuity of the Church and the nation.[47]

In 1979 the Catholic Church in Croatia commemorated another medieval ruler, Prince Branimir. The Year of Prince Branimir was a continuation of the previous jubilee dedicated to the crucial connection between the Croat medieval rulers and the popes.[48] On the occasion, Tomislav Šagi-Bunić wrote: "in the Year of Branimir, we commemorate the return of the Croatian Church and people into the Church of Rome, which also means appropriation of Latin culture and inclusion into the West."[49] In the light of the contesting Catholic and Orthodox interpretations of history, Prince Branimir (who ruled from 879 to 887), made the critical choice between Rome and Constantinople in favor of the former. Branimir had his rival, Duke Sedeslav (878–79), who favored alliance with Constantinople, executed. Serbian Church historiography views Sedeslav as a martyr of the Orthodox church and Branimir's ascension to power as a disaster that separated two Slavic peoples who both leaned toward the Orthodox church. The Serbian Church

historian Bishop Milaš built his historiography on the assumption that Serb and Croats were ethnically the same people, predetermined to form a unified nation had the fatal religious split not occurred.[50] Milaš's most often quoted Croatian Catholic opponent is the Franciscan historian Dominik Mandić, who argued that the Serb and Croat have different ethnic origins and so many distinct characteristics that the ideal solution for each people is to have a nation-state of its own.[51] Updating the classical Milaš-Mandić debate and accommodating it to the ecumenical spirit of the Second Vatican Council, Tomislav Šagi-Bunić argued in a lecture delivered to the clergy of Istria in Pazin of 9 July 1979 that the churches of East and West (and their respective Serb and Croat branches) had been separated in the course of history because of the interaction of multiple "historical-cultural factors" and also because of a "lack of mutual understanding and love" rather than because of Branimir's feud with Sedeslav.[52]

As a part of the 1979 jubilee, the Church organized a "Croatian national pilgrimage" in honor of the first Slavic pope, John Paul II. The pope officiated at the mass for the Croat pilgrims at Saint Peter's Basilica on 30 April 1979. Speaking in Croatian, the Pope stressed the importance of the Great Novena. He praised "the love and loyalty of the Croats to the Holy See" and encouraged the pilgrims to be "faithful, fearless, and proud of the Christian name."[53] The "Year of Branimir" concluded on 2 September 1979 in Zadar and Nin. More than 150,000 people paid pilgrimage to the eighth-century Basilica of the Holy Cross at Nin, which is the oldest preserved church in Yugoslavia. Cardinal Franjo Šeper presided over the jubilee as a papal legate and celebrated the mass with cardinals and bishops from Italy, Austria, Poland, France, Hungary, and domestic bishops and clergy. The congregation loudly applauded when the announcer mentioned the names and tiles of the state officials and representatives of the Orthodox Church. Yet again, the national flag without the red star was displayed, and the crowd chanted the two Croatian anthems. According to a Church document, the Branimir jubilee "has shown to all, this time with thus far unseen massive turnout, that the Church in the Croat People is strong, alive, and visible, and that people are expecting from this Church to accomplish important things."[54]

In 1982, the Church expanded the jubilee in the neighboring Yugoslav republics. In Sarajevo on 1–4 July 1982 and later in other Bosnian diocesan centers the Church commemorated the one hundredth anniversary of the restoration of the regular ecclesiastical authority in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The Church paid tribute to the Austrian bishop of Croatian background, Josef Stadler (1843–1918), who had administered Bosnia-Herzegovina from the Austrian occupation of Bosnia in 1878 to the collapse of Habsburg rule. In September 1982, Croatian pilgrims set out to Istria to commemorate the one hundredth anniversary of the Istrian native bishop, Juraj Dobrila (1812–82), who defended the national rights of the Croats under Italian rule. On 1 October 1982, on the occasion of the centennial of the cathedral in the northern Croatian town of Djakovo, the Church honored the most notable

bishop of Croatian origin, Josip Juraj Strossmayer (1815–1905), a reform-minded participant in the First Vatican Council, philanthropist, and church-builder, the founder of the Yugoslav Academy of Arts and Sciences, and the champion of ecumenical dialogue between the Catholic and Orthodox churches in Slavic lands. On 16 October 1983, the Great Novena commemorated the Catholic past of what is now Montenegro. Catholic pilgrims from Herzeg Novi, Montenegro, joined by other Croatian pilgrims and clergy, went to Rome to pay tribute to another saint of Croatian descent—the Franciscan Capuchin monk and popular confessor Leopold Bogan Mandić, a native of Herzeg Novi. Growing enthusiasm of the faithful Catholics after the canonizations of two native Croatian saints within twelve years propelled the Great Novena toward a triumphant climax.

From 1981 to 1984, the Church organized a series of massive pilgrimages and festivals in the form of diocesan Eucharistic congresses. According to a Croatian government analysis, the Church, through Eucharistic congresses, "sought to flex muscles, deliver a message to enemies, encourage the faithful, revitalize the faith, and mobilize believers in response to crisis and challenge."[55] The total number of active participants and organizers in local parish congresses, as estimated by the government source, was between 1,052,000 to 1,315,000. The number of pilgrims and participants at the last congressional festivals held at the level of the deanery and diocese varied from several thousand up to 20,000. According to the regime's sources, the Church employed between 690,000 to 920,000 activists in the preparation of the congresses. "The Church is obviously in a state of general mobilization, and we can expect a massive turnout, possibly in the hundreds thousand, at the final ceremony of the National Eucharistic Congress at Marija Bistrica," concluded a 1984 governmental analysis of church-state affairs.[56] Finally, the most massive diocesan Eucharistic congresses took place in Split. On 6 September 1981, Archbishop Franić convened 100,000 pilgrims at the final ceremony of the diocesan Eucharistic congress of the metropolitanate of Dalmatia at the shrine of Vepric near the one-time diocesan seat of Makarska. The papal legate Silvio Cardinal Oddi, joined by 11 bishops and 220 priests, presided over the Mass. According to a Church source, 17,600 pilgrims received Holy Communion on the day of the main event alone.[57]

As the main event of the Great Novena, the National Eucharistic Congress (NEK '84), was nearing, the regime in Yugoslavia became conscious of the growing power of Croatian Catholicism. The regime's press frequently featured articles on Church-state relations. Communist experts on religion and church politics were warning of the danger. In a series of articles, the semiofficial newspaper of the League of Communists, *Komunist,* argued that the activities of the Great Novena were

> carefully designed to make a synthesis of the nationalist and religious agendas through the manipulation of symbols, themes, and dates from Church and national history, in order to penetrate popular consciousness

with both of two key themes, religion and ethnic nationalism, fused and merged into a single whole. Through the Great Novena, the Catholic Church is closing the ranks of the Croatian nation, while emphasizing the leading, essentially political role of the hierarchy."[58] *Komunist* concluded: "The Great Novena simply means the clerical exploitation of ethnicity, folklore, history, and Croatian cultural heritage, coupled with the transformation of national history, into a myth. The Church's objective is to reinvigorate the reactionary consciousness, which, in this multinational country, may produce destructive outcomes."[59]

Seeking to appease the Orthodox Church and the regime, the National Eucharistic Congress included ecumenical activities in the jubilee's program. From January to September 1984 numerous interfaith meetings and ecumenical vigils took place in Croatia. "In the hope of overcoming our differences, Catholics always appeared as prime movers of all ecumenical activities," a Catholic Church document summarized the historic experience of Catholic-Orthodox relations.[60] Cardinal Kuharić invited Patriarch Germanus to attend the congress as a guest of honor. The Patriarch of the Orthodox Church also wrote to Cardinal Kuharić to inform him that the Serbian Church was preparing for a commemoration of a new chapel at Jasenovac on 2 September 1984, only a week before the NEK, and invited the cardinal to attend the Jasenovac commemoration. Kuharić excused himself but announced that a high Catholic delegation led by Bishop Djuro Kokša would be in attendance at Jasenovac. Then the patriarch refused to attend the NEK and nominated Metropolitan Jovan Pavlović as the representative of the Orthodox Church.

On 8–9 September 1984 several hundred thousand people turned out at the national shrine of Marija Bistirica. State television mentioned gave number as 180,000. The Church press wrote of 400,000 to half a million pilgrims in attendance at the final ceremony of the Great Novena. On 8 September, at the evening Mass in the Zagreb cathedral, the papal legate, the archbishop of Vienna, Franz Cardinal Koenig, opened the National Eucharistic Congress. Pope John Paul II addressed the jubilee through Radio Vatican. The papal message was broadcast live in and around the cathedral. The controversial Alojzije Cardinal Stepinac was mentioned several times in prayers and sermons. After the opening ceremony, the pilgrims attended the "Great Congressional Vigil," which proceeded simultaneously in Zagreb and Marija Bistrica. The vigil consisted of spiritual and folk music, prayer, and a history course taught in form of a drama, a chronicle of the "Thirteen Centuries of Christianity in the Croats." The vigil was labeled by the Church press the "Vigil of the Century." The purpose of the vigil was to present a survey of a new history of the Croatian Church and people from 641 to 1984.

The course in the new Croatian history authorized by the Catholic Church, designed as a dramatized chronicle, was written by the Catholic

historian Josip Turčinović. The chronicle included narrative, poetry, prayer, music, and singing performed by students of theology, nuns, and pilgrims. The narrative began with a poetic account on the baptism of the Croats in the eighth century. It described the growth of the Church under the medieval ethnic rulers, balancing between Rome and Constantinople and exposed to the pressure of the powerful Franks and the Magyars. The controversial topics of Zvonimir and Branimir were also elaborated. The chronicle also mentioned relations with rival religions, in particular Serbian Orthodoxy and Islam. The historic role of the Serbian Orthodox Church was portrayed in dark colors. The foundation of the Serbian Church was described as a political trickery of Saint Sava, who had played off the pope against the church of Constantinople and finally sided with the latter in accordance with interests of the Nemanjić ruling house. The Great Migration of Serbs under Patriarch Arsenije III in 1691 was viewed as an invasion of Croatian territory. The chronicle emphasized that the Serbian Church leaders had launched a war for the reconversion of Uniate communities in northern and western Croatia. According to the chronicle, the so-called concordat crisis of 1937, when the Serbian Church led demonstrations in Belgrade against the concordat between the Belgrade government and the Holy See, was evidence of the Serbian Orthodox Church's support for Serbian hegemony in the multinational state. No mention was made of the genocidal massacres committed by the Croat fascist Ustašas (the Church considered these massacres to be lesser in scope than the terror against Croats carried out by the Serb nationalist guerilla Četniks and the communists). World War II is a gap in the chronicle. However, the new history rewritten through the Great Novena dwelled at length on the postwar communist persecution of the Church and the trial of Archbishop Stepinac. Stepinac and the clergy who were persecuted by communist regime were portrayed as saints and martyrs. The chronicle concluded by stating that Church-state relations had improved since 1966, when the Church acquired more freedom than elsewhere in communist countries, although "numerous contradictions in the ideologically monolithic one-party state that is also a multiethnic and multiconfessional country have not yet been resolved."[61]

On the eve of the National Eucharistic Congress Archbishop Franić delivered an important homily at the Great Congressional Vigil in the Zagreb cathedral. Among other things he emphasized that the Slavic pope John Paul II, in his message to the 1976 jubilee at Solin, had drawn parallels between the churches of Poland and Croatia. Franić referred to the current situation in Poland and found it analogous to the situation in Yugoslavia. He reminded the faithful that the pope had pointed out the following three similarities shared by the churches of Poland and Croatia. First, both churches played a paramount role in the defense of the eastern borders of Catholicism. Second, both churches worship the cult of the Blessed Virgin Mary with an extraordinary piety fused with patriotism. Third, both churches are especially devoted to the popes. Franić concluded that the two

Catholic Slavic peoples stand again in the first line of defense of the Catholic West against the Orthodox East and exclaimed: "God rendered to us Catholic Croats this land in which we have lived for a thousand and three hundred years, and we will not let anyone else rule over us in our own land." As the eruption of patriotic zeal swamped the packed cathedral, the archbishop urged the faithful not to succumb to euphoria.[62]

The Polish-Croat analogy was strongly emphasized by the Croatian episcopate in the Croatian Great Novena so as to suggest that in the 1980s both Catholic nations were again the bulwark of the West against the danger from the East—communism, incidentally emanating from Orthodox Russia and Serbia, respectively (concurrently, the Serbian Orthodox Church sought to upgrade relations with the patriarchate of Moscow and the Russian Church—see more later). Visitations by Polish Church dignitaries during the jubilee (especially in 1979 and 1984) were to show symbolically the restored "natural" and traditional "brotherhood and unity" between the two western Catholic Slavic nations, as opposed to the communist-Titoist "artificial" brotherhood and unity between Catholic Croats and Orthodox Serbs. At the historic meeting between a Croatian delegation representing the Great Novena organizers and participants with the Polish pope in the Vatican, on 30 April 1979, Karol Wojtyla said in his address, among other things, the following: "you also commemorate your ancestral homeland that you call White Croatia, which was located precisely in the area where I was born."[63] Thus the pope espoused the Great Novena's myth of the Croats' fourth-through sixth-century migration southward from the western slope of the Carpathian Mountains, where they allegedly lived side by side with the Poles, while no trace could be found of the Serbs.[64] The organizers of the Croat Great Novena sought to fortify the restored Croat-Polish brotherhood by inviting the pope to the NEK and emphasizing the role of the Croats as helpers to the Roman missionaries who had evangelized the Poles. On 13 February 1984, the archbishop of Zadar, Marjan Oblak, met with the Polish pope in a private audience in the Vatican. The purpose of Oblak's visit was to inform Wojtyla that the Croatian Church would like in the program of the Great Novena to stress the role of the Croats in the evangelization of Poland, according to Oblak, they welcomed the papal missionaries traveling to northern Slavic lands from Rome via the Croatian port of Zadar.[65] At the meeting with the Pope, Oblak cited some Polish as well as Croat historians as sources of the theory about the Croatian role in the evangelization of Poland. Oblak also emphasized that a cathedral in Zadar proudly housed the oldest icon of the holy queen Jadwiga, who made possible the evangelization of the Poles. The Croatian *Glas koncila* wrote that the pope was delighted with the initiative and encouraged the Croatian episcopate to underscore the historic ties between the two Slavic Catholic nations.[66]

Birth of the Catholic Nation

The final ceremony of the National Eucharistic Congress on Sunday, 9 September 1984, at Marija Bistrica was labeled by the Church press the "Grand Convention of the People of God." The night before the main event, tens of thousands of people took part in spectacular torch parades and vigils along the "Way of the Cross" at Marija Bistrica. On Sunday morning, a crowd of 400,000 packed the liturgical area in front of the Bistrica church and the surrounding hills. The ceremony commenced with a procession moving slowly from the church to the altar in the open for over two hours. The procession displayed religious and ethnic symbols, including Marian icons from 32 Marian shrines across Yugoslavia. The participants carried artifacts from museums and collections of Croatian medieval history. The march concluded with a procession of the Croatian Church's clerical resources, including thousands of monks and nuns followed by a "white wave" of 1,100 priests in liturgical attire. In front of the clerical column marched a young Uniate (Greco-Catholic) deacon carrying the Bible. Finally came the hierarchy: foreign and domestic superiors of monastic orders, bishops and high prelates, 5 cardinals, sixty archbishops, and representatives of state authorities, the Orthodox Church, the Islamic Community, and several Protestant denominations.

During the Mass, which the Church press labeled "Mass of the Century," more than 100,000 believers received Holy Communion from Cardinal Koenig, with several bishops and more than three hundred priests circulating in the crowd.[67] The chairman of the Bishops' Conference of Yugoslavia, Cardinal Kuharić, delivered a homily. After wrapping up the proceedings and events of the Great Novena, he brought up the case of Cardinal Stepinac as the crowd applauded. Kuharić then demanded the lifting of all restrictive provisions from laws on religious communities and an unambiguously favorable of the regime policy toward the churches.[68] At the conclusion of the "Grand Convention of the People of God" at the Croatian national shrine of Marija Bistrica, a choir of several hundred thousand people chanted "Virgin of Paradise Queen of the Croats" and "Our Lovely Homeland."

Scenes from the national shrine appeared on Sunday evening on state television prime-time news program. The British magazine *Economist* compared the Catholic Church in Croatia to the Church in Poland.[69] The Croatian edition of the League of Communists weekly *Komunist* lamented:

> Religion is *en vogue* again. The Valley of Tears, as Marx has labeled Christianity, looks fresh, vital, and attractive to people, although we thought that it would wither away. Religion seems to be attractive for the young, too: How to explain this paradox? And we in Yugoslavia also believed that we have resolved the national question in this country once and for all, but it seems that it is not so. The Church is defending its people from something or someone, but from whom? From atheism, for example. In

> Marija Bistrica Cardinal Kuharić said that atheists are bad people. He refers to nonbelief as evil. Further, the Church again commemorates Stepinac. Our Constitution guarantees freedom of religion, but nobody has a right to utilize religion for political purposes. Some churchmen think that the political use of religion is perfectly normal.[70]

The chairman of the Central Committee of Croatia's League of Communists, Mika Špiljak, accused the Church of manipulating ethnic identity and nationalist sentiments in order to restore clerical wealth and power in society.[71] The party daily, *Borba* (Belgrade), wrote that "some church dignitaries sought to exploit the National Eucharistic Congress inaugurate a clerical strategy that equates religion and nationality, glorifies Stepinac, and sanctions the Church's meddling in politics."[72]

Nonetheless, the Great Novena had succeeded, despite the pressure in the media and from the ruling circles, and in spite of the fact that from 1973 to 1985 (which roughly coincides with the Great Novena), 85 people were jailed on account of Croatian nationalism, including seven Catholic priests.[73] The Church could only profit from more Stepinacs. The Catholic Church, operating autonomously and independently from Croatian secular nationalists, accomplished mobilization and homogenization of the Croat masses. The Great Novena supported the Church as a political force and affirmed the episcopate as national leadership. The numbers of socially active Catholics grew from the 60,000 at Solin in 1976 to nearly 200,000 at Nin in 1979. Several hundred thousand people took part in the diocesan Eucharistic congresses of 1981–83. Nearly half a million came to Marija Bistrica in September 1984. The crowds of the Great Novena operated as a plebiscite for the new Croatia as designed by the Catholic Church. The Church supplied the newborn nation with the necessities such as a new history and new symbols and myths. The key component of the new nation was its new history, authorized by the Church. The new Croatia was reinvented as a "100 percent Western" nation though its interaction with the Byzantine ecclesiastical and political authority and tradition, and Orthodox Christianity was underrated and portrayed in overall negative colors (as a "hegemony," as opposed to the papal and Western imperial patronage, presented as civilizing mission and protection). Further, the Great Novena revived and "resolved" the classical controversy of church versus national historiography regarding the early medieval religious split caused the by policies of the Croat and Serb feudal lords and rulers. The Great Novena denounced the Serb Church historian Bishop Milaš, who had laid the foundations of Serbian ecclesiastical historiography (which coincides with the nationalist perspective in the secular Serbian historiography) on the assumption that Serbs and Croats were ethnically the same people, predetermined to form a unified Slavic (Orthodox) nation, had the popes not intervened and prevented these two fraternal Slavic peoples from becoming all Greek Orthodox. The Great Novena reasserted the main argument of the Croatian nationalist ideology

that Serbs and Croats were "two ancient distinct peoples" each entitled to a nation-state of its own. Finally, concerning very recent controversies from church history, the dark spots from the history of the Croatian Church and nation during World War II were "forgotten," while the leading church figure of this period, Alojzije Cardinal Stepinac, was portrayed as a martyr, the victim of a conspiracy masterminded by the enemies of the Catholic Church, namely, the Serbs and communists.[74]

The jubilee "Thirteen Centuries of Christianity in the Croat People" was a well-organized political as well as religious mobilization of the people by the Church. Yet this mobilization was in its essence nationalistic and religious only in form. The spiritual impact was definitely weaker than the political. Fighting modernization, secularization, communism, the Yugoslav multinational state, and the rival faiths, the Church worshiped itself and consecrated new ethnic and ecclesiastical histories as part of the making of the new Croatian nation. The clerical leadership in the Croat national movement was established in the 1970s, paradoxically, with the communist regime's implicit help and owing to the communist suppression of the Croatian secular liberal opposition. By the mid-eighties, the Church would also challenge another secular rival: the pro-Yugoslav League of Communists of Croatia. After the triumph of the Great Novena, Croatian Catholicism became an increasingly influential social and political force. Yet the advancing "Church in the Croat People" had yet to confront its most powerful rivals: the Serbian Orthodox Church and Serbian nationalism. Incidentally, as I have shown in the preceding chapter and will show further, a similar Serbian ethnic nationalist revolution was unfolding and corresponded with the Croatian mobilization on an ethnoreligious basis. In this Serbian revolution the Serbian Orthodox Church emerged as one of the driving forces. In the second half of the 1980s, the history of Yugoslavia witnessed, not surprisingly, a "war of the churches."