

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH
IN SOCIALIST YUGOSLAVIA

Because of its ambiguous wartime role, the Catholic Church was singled out and targeted by the new authorities during the first postwar years. This situation was further exacerbated by its openly negative attitude toward the Communists and their ideals. Several bishops and lower clergymen from the "Catholic" parts of Yugoslavia were imprisoned or murdered, including Uniate bishop Šimrak (imprisoned for collaboration), and Catholic bishops Čule of Mostar (sentenced to eleven-and-a-half years' imprisonment, served seven), Josip Srebrnić of Krk (jailed for two months immediately after the war), Ivan Stjepčević, Stjepan Bauerlein of Djakovo (house arrest for three months), and Monsignor Stjepavac from Kotor (sentenced to six years). Catholic bishop Carević of Dubrovnik was declared missing.

According to data provided by the Catholic side, the casualties among the clergy numbered 501: 243 priests and monks were killed, 169 were imprisoned, and 89 are missing. In addition, nineteen theology students, three lay brothers, and four nuns were executed. It must be pointed out that Yugoslavia was not an exception in this respect: clergymen accused of collaborating with the enemy were executed immediately before or after the end of the war in other parts of Europe as well, including Italy.³² O'Brien notes that only 401 of the 1,916 Catholic clergymen in Yugoslavia remained after the war: 369 were murdered or executed, 175 were imprisoned, 409 fled abroad, and 562 were missing; twelve nuns were executed and fifty were imprisoned. Of the seventeen dioceses, only six had serving bishops and four had assistant bishops.³³

A large number of clergymen, especially those who openly collaborated with the enemy, sought refuge with the Anglo-American Allies, including Bishops Garić and Šarić from Banja Luka and Sarajevo, and Gregorij Rožman of Ljubljana. None had been authorized to do so by the Vatican. The total number of Catholic clergymen thought to have fled to the West is estimated at between four hundred and five hundred. How many were eventually repatriated and murdered is still unknown. Furthermore, many senior clergymen were physically assaulted or otherwise mistreated by the new authorities, including Assistant Bishop Franić of Split, Dragutin Čelik, the apostolic administrator of Banja Luka from 1951–58, and Ludvik Budanović, the apostolic administrator of Bačka from 1923–58. The number of Catholic publications was reduced from a prewar figure of one hundred to three. The church also lost hospi-

tals, orphanages, and homes for the elderly. Some schools and seminaries were nationalized, various funds were confiscated, and the theology faculty was separated from the university.

The Metropolitan See of Sarajevo (consisting of the archdiocese of Sarajevo and the dioceses of Banja Luka, Mostar, and Trebinje) entered this new age numerically weakened and still reeling from the aftermath of the war. According to some estimates, 127 Catholic clerics were murdered during the 1940s, including fifty-eight Franciscan monks in Herzegovina's Franciscan province.³⁴ Most were killed by partisans at the end of the war. Bosnia remained without an archbishop for a full fifteen years after the war. Marko Alaupović (1960–68), Smiljan Čekada (1968–77), Marko Jozinović (1977–91), and Vinko Puljić (from 1991 until he was appointed cardinal in 1995) eventually filled the position.

The Catholic Church in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina never fully accepted responsibility for the violence committed by the Ustasha regime during the war. The only important cleric ever to come close to an apology was Catholic bishop Alfred Pichler of Banja Luka. In his 1963 Christmas address he publicly sought forgiveness for crimes committed during the Second World War by Croatian religious nationalists against the Serbs merely because they were not Croats or Catholics. His exact words were: "we beg our Orthodox brothers for forgiveness, as Christ forgave mankind while He was on the Cross." The statement provoked a strong response within and outside his diocese and from the ranks of the Roman Catholic Church itself: some agreed with the statement, while others believed it to be superfluous and even offensive. A number of priests in his diocese refused to read the letter to their parishioners. As an advocate of practical ecumenism, Pichler nurtured cordial relations with his Orthodox counterpart, Bishop Andrej. The first "summit" meeting between Cardinal Šeper of Zagreb and Patriarch German of the Serbian Orthodox Church took place in 1967.

Nevertheless, it is necessary to point out that the Socialist authorities, especially the Serbs among them, and the Serbian Orthodox Church greatly exaggerated the number of casualties inflicted by the Ustasha. The figures for the number of people killed at Jasenovac, the most notorious concentration camp in Croatia and the incontestable symbol of Serbian sufferings in NDH, are conflicting: data released immediately after the war suggest that the number of victims was between 50,000 and 70,000 (the figures officially accepted in Croatia today are Tudjman's estimates of 40,000 killed at Jasenovac and 60,000 in total), but this number was later corrected to between 800,000 and 1 million. The most prob-

able figure for Serb casualties in Croatia is 300,000–350,000. On the other hand, Cardinal Franjo Kuharić's assertion that "only a handful of Serbs" were killed by the Ustasha regime is equally shocking.³⁵

The Socialist regime accused the clergy, especially the bishops, of a "dual loyalty"—to the state and to the Vatican. In some of the most aggressive Communist circles, Catholic clergymen were branded as "clero-nationalists," "chauvinists," "reactionaries," and "opponents of the state" because many clergymen had collaborated with the occupiers during the war, some of them supported the so-called Crusaders immediately after it, and because of their stubborn attitude toward the Communists. Although much of its wealth, land, and other property was nationalized, and its public and political role diminished, the church regained much prestige during the Stepinac affair. One of the unexpected consequences of the trial—for the authorities—was that "the Church came to symbolize the entire nation, despite the fact that it had never wielded real political power in Croatia before."³⁶ Socialist authorities never interfered with or attempted to control the church hierarchy but, rather, tried to reach an agreement with it. The church, however, was initially convinced "that the Communist régime would not last and that the best way of hastening its fall was to press it as hard as possible."³⁷ Svetozar Rittig—known for his conviction that the Serbs and Croats would eventually live in harmony—was appointed secretary of the Committee for Religious Affairs in Croatia (established in August, 1945).

The Roman Catholic Church in Yugoslavia was shaken by internal discord that often developed into open conflict. One such incident took place between the bishops and the various clerical associations that were beyond the bishops' control. These associations of "patriotic" clergymen were not a Yugoslav peculiarity and were common in other Socialist countries. They went under different names: the Catholic Clergymen for Peace movement in Hungary, the Clergymen for Peace—renamed *Pacem in Terris* after 1970—in Czechoslovakia, and the Pax movement in Poland, which was headed by the controversial Bolesław Piasecki.

Such associations emerged spontaneously in Slovenia, Istria, and Dalmatia in the late 1940s, while the authorities began encouraging them in 1950 as a way to exercise control over the "progressive" clergy within the church. An association known as *Dobri pastir* (Good Shepherd), established in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1950, became particularly popular among the Franciscans, who represented three-quarters of its fellowship. The Franciscans used the association, under the guidance of Franciscan Bono Ostojić, as a weapon against the parish clergy, with whom they were in constant conflict, thus earning them such taunting epithets as

the “Red Priests.” By 1953, similar associations had emerged in Serbia, Montenegro, and in Croatia. But unlike the Good Shepherd and the Association of Orthodox Clergymen in Yugoslavia, the Croatian chapter known as the Association of Catholic Priests failed to take root. The associations had large followings elsewhere, however, recruiting virtually all the clergymen in Istria, four-fifths of the clergymen in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and three-fifths in Slovenia.³⁸

These associations of priests (which were, in effect, clerical labor unions that appealed mainly to the lower clergy) were part and parcel of the Socialist regime. They operated under the auspices of the regime’s umbrella organization known as the Socialist Alliance of the Working People, and received various forms of assistance (social security status, financial support, access to the press, and such). Officially, the function of the associations was to protect and fulfill the clergy’s “professional interests.” Another important function of the associations was to promote ecumenical dialogue, especially between the Catholics and the Orthodox. Membership in the associations did not begin to decline until the late 1970s.³⁹

An encyclical issued by Pope Pius XII in July, 1949, (although he had come to this decision at the very beginning of his pontificate), prohibited Catholics from joining Communist parties or advocating communism. After the war ended he cautioned Catholics not to succumb to the intellectual trends of the modern age. Because of this interdiction, and because of his conspicuous fear of communism, Owen Chadwick refers to him as the “political Pope” and the “Pope of the political Right.” Following his predecessor’s footsteps, he signed advantageous agreements with fascist dictators Antonio de Oliveira Salazar of Portugal (1940) and Francisco Franco of Spain (1953).⁴⁰ His intolerance of communism was particularly counterproductive in the new Socialist states, where his policies contributed to the exclusion of Roman Catholic parishioners and clergymen from politics and society in general, which was undoubtedly to their disadvantage.

In a letter dated April, 1950, the conference of bishops (chaired by Archbishop Ujčić in the absence of Stepinac) labeled the clerical associations “inappropriate.” A confidential encyclical issued by the Vatican in the autumn of 1952 prohibited (*non licet*) clergymen from joining clerical associations, and a number of priests were suspended. Members of the priest association in Croatia were severely punished, especially by Bishops Franić and Čule, Monsignor Majić, and Archbishop Čekada: they lost their pastoral status (which meant they were prohibited from conducting mass, hearing confessions, and preaching) as soon as they

joined the association. Even the imprisoned Stepinac secretly wrote letters proclaiming his opposition to the associations. Catholic priests and monks in Bosnia-Herzegovina, however, were under no such pressure or sanctions. Similar associations were allowed to operate freely, without ecclesiastic interdiction, in other countries. The Yugoslav authorities accused the church of persecuting clergymen who were prepared to cooperate with the state.

The question of clerical associations cast a bone of contention between the authorities and the church. When the imprisoned Archbishop Stepinac's appointment to cardinal was scheduled for November 29, 1952, the most important Yugoslav public holiday—"Republic Day"—the dispute developed into open conflict. It could not have happened at a more inopportune moment: Yugoslavia was in an extremely ambiguous diplomatic situation—its relations with other Socialist regimes had been severed, the issue of Trieste remained unanswered, and it was desperately seeking ties to the West. The Vatican's decision caused a bitter reaction in Yugoslavia. Marshal Tito delivered an acrimonious speech in Smederevska Palanka in mid-December, and Kardelj accused the Vatican of being a tool in the hands of Italian irredentist politicians, interfering in Yugoslavia's internal affairs, refusing to participate in solving mutual problems, and denigrating Yugoslavia. On December 17, 1952, Yugoslavia severed its relations with the Vatican. The Vatican's reply, published in *L'Osservatore Romano* the following month, denounced the conditions being imposed on the Roman Catholic Church in Yugoslavia. Tito held another meeting with the bishops at about the same time, but failed to make any progress; the bishops remained staunchly loyal to the Vatican. The position of assistant archbishop of Zagreb was filled by the liberal Franjo Šeper, previously the rector of a seminary, in 1954. He became a cardinal in 1965.

The frosty relations between the Vatican and the Socialist regime in Yugoslavia began thawing in the late 1950s. The "period of conflict" was replaced by a "period of compromise." Both sides pursued rapprochement. The Socialist authorities, finally realizing that they would be unable to use the clerical associations in their negotiations with the church, initiated direct dialogue with the bishops. In 1962, informal talks (formalized in 1964) began between the government and the Vatican, circumventing the Yugoslav bishops. These talks were concluded on June 25, 1966, with the ratification of a special protocol (not a concordat). The state promised to allow the church to freely conduct its religious affairs and rites, recognized the Vatican's authority over the Roman Catholic Church in regard to religious matters, and assured the bishops that

they would be permitted to maintain their links with the Holy See. In return, the Vatican promised that its priests in Yugoslavia would uphold the laws and not misuse religious and ecclesiastic functions for political ends.⁴¹ Bishop Franić of Split is quoted as saying on this occasion that the protocol promised a new era for the Catholic Church.

In 1970, Franjo Kuharić was appointed bishop of Zagreb and the church in Croatia was reorganized into three metropolitan sees: Zagreb, Split, and Rijeka. There were also some changes on the diplomatic scene: full diplomatic relations were established between Yugoslavia and the Vatican on August 14, 1970, and the Vatican ambassador replaced the apostolic delegate in Belgrade. The latter had been responsible for maintaining links between the two sides. In March, 1971, Tito became the first Socialist leader to be granted an audience with Pope Paul VI (1963–78), which the international media proclaimed to be an “unprecedented event.”⁴² The pope hailed Tito’s efforts and success in preserving and strengthening peace, saying, “Your Excellency is aware of the keen interest with which the Holy See and I personally have been following the activities that your government has undertaken in the field of world reconciliation.” During a visit to the Vatican in December, 1980, Cvijetin Mijatović, president of the Yugoslav Presidium, invited Pope John Paul II (1978–) to visit Yugoslavia.

There were two turning points in the popularity of the Roman Catholic Church in postwar Croatia. The first was the trial of Alojzije Stepinac, while the second was the “Croatian Spring” of 1969–71 (which the Catholic Church in Croatia applauded), and its traumatic quelling. More than ever before, this event transformed the church into an important national Croat institution and the symbol of the “suffering” Croatian people.⁴³ Many religious manifestations and pilgrimages that had hitherto been well established suddenly became mass events, for example in Solin (1976, the celebration of the thirteen hundredth anniversary of the arrival of Christianity among the Croats), Nin (1979, “Branimir’s Year”), and Marija Bistrica (1984, the National Eucharistic Congress). In June, 1970, Franciscan Nikola Tavelić (1340–92) of Šibenik, a martyr who died in the Middle East, was canonized as the first Croatian saint. Leopold Bogdan Mandić (1866–1942) was canonized in October, 1983, and martyr Marko Križevčanin (1589–1619) in 1995.

In 1977, a new dispute developed within the ranks of the Catholic Church in Croatia, between the Episcopal Conference and the Association of Contemporary Christian Theologians (*Teološko društvo Kršćanska sadašnjost* [TDKS]). The association, founded by Cardinal Šeper, himself a liberal and advocate of the Second Vatican Council, had been

uniting theologically progressive and ecumenically minded clergymen since 1968. The association published newspapers, brochures, and books that spread the council's ideas. In May, 1977, it changed its legal status to a "self-managing interest community." This move was condemned by several bishops (including Franić) and Jesuits, who viewed the association as the regime's "Trojan horse."⁴⁴ Consequently, several clerics who were members of the society were suspended.

Throughout the 1980s, the church was particularly emphatic about granting amnesty to political prisoners and rehabilitating Cardinal Stepinac. In particular, it wanted the cardinal's name cleared of the accusations of collaboration and participating in the brutality against the Serbs. The church participated in discussions on human rights and the development of democracy. For example, forty-three prominent members of the Catholic clergy from Croatia demanded amnesty for political prisoners in 1980. Cardinal Kuharić demanded greater respect for human rights, political equality for Christians, and access to prisons, hospitals, and the armed forces for Catholic priests. He also rejected the accusation that Stepinac was a fascist.⁴⁵ In the late 1980s, the church supported the political pluralization of Croatian society and openly displayed its preference for the main party, the Croatian Democratic Community (*Hrvatska demokratska zajednica* [HDZ]). However, it was more cautious than it had been a few decades earlier, and it maintained an independent and critical position that enabled it to distance itself from the outbursts of extreme Croat nationalism and prevent it from leaning too heavily on a single-party option.

The ancient myth that Bosnia-Herzegovina's Muslim Slavs were actually part of the Croat nation (Croats of two denominations) had not been altogether abandoned in some Croatian circles. Cardinal Kuharić demonstrated this in a statement he made in Australia in 1981, in which he hailed "my Croat brothers, both Catholic and Muslim." Similar theses of the common Croat origin and unity of Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina were published by the Croatian emigrant press. Catholic historian Dominik Mandić argued in 1963 that Bosnian Muslims are 95–97 percent Croatian and thus are "the purest Croats." In his 1981 book entitled *Nationalism in Contemporary Europe*, Franjo Tudjman, a former general in the Yugoslav People's Army and later a dissident historian, wrote that the two republics are in "geoeconomic connection; their union would be in the interest of Croatia, Bosnia Herzegovina, and all of Yugoslavia" and that "the objective examination of the numerical composition of the population of the Bosnia-Herzegovina cannot ignore that

the majority of the Muslims is in its ethnic character and speech incontrovertibly of Croatian origin."⁴⁶

The Communists' fear of a recurrence of the Polish debacle of the 1980s and their commitment to the gradual liberalization of politics in Yugoslavia led them to enter into polemical discussions with the Catholic Church. However, they continued to repress those within the ecclesiastic body who dared speak too vocally, accusing them of "political pettifoggery" and of being "profascist." In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the authorities criticized the wartime role of the Catholic Church, and especially Archbishop Stepinac, on one hand, and the current activities of senior church dignitaries, including Cardinal Kuharić, on the other.

MEDJUGORJE: "MESSAGES FROM HEAVEN"

Events in Medjugorje, a remote region of Herzegovina, first caught the attention of the local public then, at breathtaking speed, of the international (Roman Catholic) public as well. The Holy Virgin, the "Lady" or "Queen of Peace" as she is said to have described herself, was revealed to six local children (originally eight) several times, beginning on June 24, 1981. The apparition once again focused public attention on the intricate conflict between the church hierarchy (more precisely, Bishop Pavao Žanić of Mostar and the parish priests) and the Franciscans, who were not under the direct jurisdiction of the bishop, and between the Socialist authorities and the Roman Catholic Church.

The long-lasting discord within the church remained an open wound even under Socialist rule and began growing in the 1960s, when the Vatican instructed the Franciscans to relinquish jurisdiction over their parishes in the Mostar diocese to the parish priests and concentrate on missionary work instead. Many Franciscans from Herzegovina joined the Good Shepherd Association in protest. Although he had been imprisoned for a brief period after the war, Bishop Petar Čule of Mostar maintained cordial relations with the authorities, inviting the antipathy of the Catholic population whose relations with the state were, at best, somewhat restrained. While in Rome in 1965, Bishop Čule convinced the Vatican to revise the 1923 agreement. As a result, a further twenty-one of the sixty-three Franciscan parishes came under his jurisdiction immediately and the fate of the remaining forty-two was to be discussed. Two years later, the bishop managed to acquire, with the pope's assistance, twelve more parishes, and five more in 1975. The Franciscans reacted strongly to this incursion and, in an open letter, accused the bishop of arbitrari-

ness. They also wrote to the Vatican to protest the injustices they believed were being done to them. Nevertheless, the Holy See remained firmly on the bishop's side and enabled him to gradually assume control. In 1976, the Vatican abrogated Franciscan provincial dominion over Herzegovina and placed the Franciscans under the direct jurisdiction of the papal Franciscan superior.⁴⁷

When Žanić was appointed bishop of Mostar in 1980 he immediately fell out with the Franciscans over the new allocation of parishes. The parishioners, accustomed to the Franciscans, gave the new parish priests a cold welcome. Franciscan monks were affectionately addressed as *ujak* (uncle), while priests were addressed with the more stoical title of *gospodin* (Sir). Sometimes they ignored priests entirely or physically prevented them from entering churches. Consequently, some parishes remained without clergymen of any kind. The Franciscans, however, continued to covertly conduct masses and offer sacraments in unconsecrated buildings. Two young Franciscan monks, Ivica Vego and Ivan Prusina, openly resisted some of the bishop's rulings. Žanić arranged for their suspension in April, 1981, and their expulsion from the order a year later. Both remained at a Franciscan monastery in Mostar.

Dutch anthropologist Mart Bax refers to the two-year period before the first apparition as the period of "mystical preparation," which, needless to say, would not have succeeded had it not been for the rich and long religious tradition of the region.⁴⁸ Even before the Franciscans arrived centuries ago, the locals revered the spirits and anthropomorphic power believed to reside in the mountain on which the Holy Virgin is later said to have revealed herself, and they ritually sacrificed lambs to appease the spirits they believed dwelt there. The Franciscans added the mountain to their calendar of religious festivities, organizing processions there in praise of Jesus and the Holy Virgin in the hope of securing their protection. The Turks built a fortress on Mount Šipovac, also known as Grmljavinac, and several Serb families moved to the area when it was under Austro-Hungarian rule. This gave rise to religious tension and reciprocal violence, especially during the interwar period.

At the pope's request (according to the official version, Pius XI had a vision instructing him to erect a cross on the "highest Herzegovinian Golgotha") a huge cross was erected on the mountain, which had been renamed Križevac in 1933 to commemorate the nineteen hundredth anniversary of the Crucifixion. Brno Smoljan, a Franciscan monk who was also charged with accomplishing the task, brought the news to Medjugorje.⁴⁹ According to oral tradition, the natural disasters that had regularly devastated vineyards and tobacco plantations and destroyed har-

vests never occurred again. The region was, however, overwhelmed by a catastrophe of a different kind: it was afflicted by a series of horrifying war crimes. The Ustasha “cleansed” the area of Serbs by hurling them en masse from a precipice. Needless to say, the Chetniks retaliated with atrocities of their own. The blood-drenched region was finally “pacified”—through brute force, persecution, and appropriation—by the partisans. One of their many accomplishments was the summary execution of twenty-eight Franciscans from the nearby monastery at Široki Brijeg.

In the late 1970s, a Franciscan monk from Medjugorje reported the ongoing dispute between his order and the parish clergy to a number of senior members of a mystical Catholic group known as the Charismatic Revival Movement, who reassured the monk of the Holy Virgin’s help. Enthused by this revelation, the monk returned to his monastery and embarked on a vigorous campaign of religious enlightenment, prayer, and confession, and publicly announced that God would reveal a “special mercy” to the local children. It was in this electrified and expectant atmosphere that the Holy Virgin “actually” began revealing herself, and it was none other than Franciscans (including Ljudevit Rupčić) who relayed her messages to the witnesses to the public. Bax notes that an apparition of the Holy Virgin allegedly appeared in another parish within the Mostar diocese at almost the same time. The Franciscans distanced themselves from this second apparition, however, and it fell into oblivion.⁵⁰

It is worth noting that more than 100 apparitions were reported throughout the world from 1930–80, including over 60 in Italy, 11 in France, and 7 in Spain. However, none were ever reported in a country ruled by a Socialist government.⁵¹ The message delivered by the Holy Virgin when she appeared to the three children in Fátima, Portugal, was laced with anti-Communist sentiment.⁵² The alleged ability of an individual to channel communication between the earthly world and a world of spirits is an ancient and time-tested instrument for achieving specific goals. People with such an “ability,” the exclusive intercessors between the ethereal world and our own—in this case the Franciscans—use their exclusivity to manufacture a legitimacy and authority of their own that they can then use against their rivals or adversaries.

The suspended Franciscan monks, Vego and Prusina, provided support to the witnesses. The Holy Virgin is said to have spoken to some of them about the bishop’s wrongful condemnation of the insubordinate monks, adding that the bishop’s acrimony was based on a personal grudge, that the two monks should remain in Mostar, that the congregation should pray for them, and that the bishop should publicly reconcile with the “two sons of the Church.” Bishop Žanić’s reaction was restrained and

occasionally openly skeptical. He advised caution about officially acknowledging such miracles. After an unsuccessful attempt to silence the Franciscan "truth," a direct conflict developed between them. He issued a pastoral letter and circulated pamphlets through his parish priests banning parishioners from making pilgrimages to Medjugorje or from participating in the "theatrics" and "religious decadence" taking place there. He denounced the whole thing as a "farce" and a "lie," and called the apparitions a "Franciscan miracle." Anyone defying his orders was to be denied the sacraments.

The Medjugorje "cult," according to Bishop Žanić, did not comply with ecclesiastic canons and was a threat to the church's normal functioning. The bishop was not alone in this belief. In 1991, the Yugoslav Episcopal Conference issued the so-called Zadar Statement in which it officially declared that "it was not possible to state with any certainty that the apparitions and messages were of supernatural origin." Žanić managed to convince the bishops at the 1982 Episcopal Conference to publicly oppose "official" pilgrimages to Medjugorje organized by the church, although "unofficial" pilgrimages were tolerated. On the other hand, Žanić defended the witnesses ("these children tell no lies" he said), the apparitions, and even the Franciscan monks from the "inappropriate and offensive" press reports by the regime (which labeled the events "clerical," "fascist," and "nationalist") or other critical and skeptical media.

The Franciscans were by far the most numerous order in the territory of Yugoslavia: data from 1978 place their number at 1,094. As explained earlier, the Franciscans were a highly cohesive order that took a pragmatic and compliant approach toward authority. Needless to say, Herzegovina's Franciscans confirmed the authenticity of the Medjugorje apparitions and saw in this "special mercy" a unique opportunity to reestablish and secure their foothold in a territory they believed was traditionally "theirs." They skillfully exploited the apparitions to settle matters within the church in Herzegovina, calling the viewpoint of the bishop and his priests a "humiliation to God and the people." The bishop's furious responses worked to the advantage of the monks, who portrayed themselves as victims of his tyranny. It was a time-tested method: monastic orders had successfully defended themselves from the expansionist tendencies of the parish clergy with the "help" of the apparitions of holy figures on several occasions throughout the Catholic world, including seventeenth-century Ireland and New Spain, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Peru, and nineteenth-century Holland.⁵³

The intense popularity of the local Franciscans easily overwhelmed

the accusations of the Communist authorities and the skepticism of the Catholic hierarchy. Indeed, the first to support the witnesses and the Franciscans were the local population. The latter were also compelled by the prospect of making a profit and their tacit disappointment in the Socialist regime. The local authorities were evidently pro-Serb: Serb officials in the Croatian section of Herzegovina were referred to as “bureau Chetniks.” The Croatian diaspora (which hoped to cause a rift within the Socialist ranks) and a number of prominent Catholic officials endorsed the Medjugorje apparitions. For example, in December, 1983, Bishop Frane Franić of Split declared that the events in Medjugorje had achieved in two years more than their missionary work had in forty. Nevertheless, of the forty-two Catholic bishops in Yugoslavia, he alone publicly “supported” the apparition. Finally, some of the world’s most eminent Mariologists, including Hans Urs von Balthasar (the pope’s most cherished theologian), Michael Carroll, and René Laurentin, also endorsed the apparitions.

News of the “messages from heaven” traveled to the four corners of the world, changing the karstic backwater that was Medjugorje into a global pilgrimage center and attracting millions of believers and other visitors (70,000 in 1982 and 100,000 by the following year, between 8 million and 10 million by 1987, and a total of 18 million by 1991). The “Lady’s voice” (*Gospin glas*) reached out to non-Catholics as well: the “holy site” was also visited by local Muslim and Orthodox believers, which is quite consistent with Bosnia-Herzegovina’s syncretistic religious tradition.⁵⁴ There were reports of miraculous healing and unusual sightings: new apparitions, sudden illuminations, writing in the sky, revolving crosses, revolving sun, and omens. The witness were said to be able to heal by touch and were asked to bless pilgrims’ crosses and rosaries. Today, masses and confessions are still held in six different languages, and dozens of Franciscan monks of different nationalities still live and perform their religious duties in the newly erected buildings. Some of the witnesses—now adults—continue to report apparitions.

The Vatican found itself in a dilemma: it was unable to withdraw its support for the local bishop on one hand, and unable to ignore the exceptional interest Medjugorje generated among Catholic believers throughout the world on the other. It therefore chose to wait and advised the bishop to exercise a “high degree of caution.” Žanić convened a commission to look into the phenomenon, but it failed to find any incongruity with the teachings of the church. It was consequently dissolved and replaced by another. The second commission was interdisciplinary and included a lay member. In 1985, Žanić reversed tactics and tried

instead to prove that the activities of the Franciscans and the witnesses were indeed in accord with the traditions and teachings of the church.

The Socialist authorities' initial reaction to the events in this remote part of Herzegovina was nervous and repressive. Police blocked the route to the mountain, interrogated witnesses, conducted a search of the Medjugorje presbytery, and sent informers to infiltrate the ranks of the pilgrims. Pressure was applied on both the monks and the pilgrims. Several members of the local Čitluk League of Communists were expelled from the party for making the pilgrimage and even more were chastised. In 1981, Branko Mikulić, a Croatian member of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the League of Communists, accused the "clero-nationalists" of exploiting the "Holy Virgin" to "mislead the unschooled people and for political manipulation." A second Croat politician from Bosnia-Herzegovina, Franjo Herljević, also condemned the events. A local Čitluk politician, Milenko Bernarda, dubbed the apparition the "Ustasha Lady."⁵⁵ The press dismissed the entire matter as superstition and accused the Franciscans of being skilled manipulators.

The authorities eventually arrested three Franciscans. Ferdo Vlašić and Jozo Križić, the editor and secretary of the religious publication *Naša ognjišta* (which was particularly popular with the Croatian diaspora), were jailed for eight years and five and one-half years, respectively, for "hostile activities, contacts with Croatian nationalist circles in the West, preaching to Croatian emigrants," and for "being in possession of seditious literature" about Stepinac.⁵⁶ Also imprisoned was Jozo Zovko, the charismatic parish priest of Medjugorje, who was accused of preaching against the state in two sermons delivered in 1981 (in which he mentioned "forty years of slavery and discrimination against believers") and sentenced to four and one-half years in prison. The persecution of these clergymen was soon likened to that in Vendée during the mutiny against the French republican authorities in 1793–94. Less severely punished Franciscans were also seen as "political martyrs."

A media campaign against the defendants was launched as soon as the trials began. Zovko was accused of being pro-Ustasha, which provoked reactions from abroad: some forty thousand letters of support were sent from Italy alone. As a result, Zovko's sentence was commuted twice and he was released after serving only eighteen months. The exceptional interest the Medjugorje phenomenon generated worldwide eventually prodded authorities to relax their stance and, seeing an opportunity to profit from religious tourism, they granted permission in 1989 for the construction of hotels in Medjugorje).

Despite the ongoing war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and contrary to com-

mon practice, Pope John Paul II—known for his interest in the Holy Virgin and the Medjugorje apparition—immediately accepted Bishop Žanić’s resignation when the latter turned seventy-five in June, 1993.⁵⁷ Many saw this as a “reproof” for his opposition to the apparition. However, Ratko Perić, the new bishop of Mostar, and Cardinal Vinko Puljić, head of Bosnia-Herzegovina’s new Episcopal Conference, both shared Žanić’s views on the matter. Indeed, Perić’s reaction to a 1997 article about the “authentic apparition” in Medjugorje written by retired bishop Franić of Split, one of the most zealous advocates of the Medjugorje miracles, was very polemical. He reminded the retired bishop of the Vatican’s instructions and the Zadar Statement. Nevertheless, the church’s opinion had changed: In June, 1998, the Vatican’s Congregation for the Teachings of the Faith, for which Monsignor Tarsici Bertone serves as secretary, officially approved pilgrimages to Medjugorje.

RENEWAL AND DIVISION OF THE SERBIAN ORTHODOX ECCLESIASTIC STRUCTURE

Unlike Stepinac, Metropolitan Josif of the Orthodox Church held a service for the liberators—partisan and Soviet soldiers—when Belgrade was liberated in October, 1944, and Patriarch Gavrilo later thanked “Mother Russia” for rescuing Slavic unity. The Episcopal *sabor*, convened for the first time since April, 1941, ordered Orthodox priests back to their duties and allocated new priests to individual dioceses to fill vacancies. All forced conversions to Catholicism were reversed. Patriarch Gavrilo remained in the West for one and one-half years after his release from a concentration camp. While there, he and Bishop Velimirović met regularly with exiled politicians and, in October 1945, they anointed Prince Aleksander Karadorđević. Church and government leaders anxiously awaited Patriarch Gavrilo’s return to Belgrade in November, 1946. The synod expected him to revive the church, and the Socialist authorities, who acknowledged his patriotism and pro-Yugoslav sentiments, were counting on his cooperation.⁵⁸ A new ecclesiastic constitution was expected to acclimatize the church with the new situation—its separation from the state.

The problems faced by the Serbian Orthodox Church were similar to those faced by the Catholics: the authorities were nationalizing its schools, property, and presses; persecuting its priests; and shutting down its publications. They accused it of advocating a greater Serbia, and of chauvinism and hostile propaganda. The church was also short on human resources, having lost about 515 clergymen during the war. Several

of its senior officials were accused of collaboration, including Bishops Irinej and Velimirović, who spent the duration of the war abroad. What most annoyed the authorities were their anti-Communist attitudes and the fact that they remained in the West after the war and launched attacks on the Yugoslav regime. Velimirović condemned Yugoslavia as “a state without God’s blessing, a school without faith, politics without honour, army without patriotism.” Moreover, he considered it a slandering of Christ, Saint Sava, the people’s past, and all that the people held sacred.⁵⁹ Metropolitane Josef was also accused of collaboration.

Religious dignitaries who refused to cooperate or who opposed the clerical associations were persecuted or imprisoned, including Metropolitane Arsenije of Montenegro, sentenced to eleven years’ imprisonment “for opposing the creation of clerical associations,” and Bishop Jovan Ilić of Niš, Bishop Emilijan Piperković of Timok, and Bishops Simeon Stanković (Šabac), Arsenije Bradvarović (Montenegrin littoral), Makarije Djordjević (Budimljan-Polimje), Nektarije (Banja Luka), Irinej Ćirić (Bačka), and Varnava Nastić (Dabar-Bosna). The most common charges were “spreading religious and national hatred” and conducting “activities against the Popular Front.” Joanikije Lipovac, a pro-Chetnik metropolitane from Montenegro who openly collaborated with the Germans and Italians, was killed while fleeing the partisan advance at the end of the war.⁶⁰ A number of lower-ranking priests were also under continuous attack and pressure and were continually tormented by the media.

Gavrilo held a meeting with Tito less than a month after his return from the West. From then until his death in May, 1950, he insisted he was loyal to the state and that he believed there were no conflicts between the Serbian Orthodox Church and the regime. Bishop Vikentije, who categorically supported the Yugoslav side in the dispute over Trieste, succeeded him. The regime returned the favor by awarding Vikentije a medal in 1954. The Orthodox Church fared little better than its Catholic counterpart when it came to internal discord: a dispute emerged between the church and an Orthodox clerical association, the Association of Orthodox Priests of Yugoslavia (established in March, 1949),⁶¹ which the regime hoped to use as a weapon against it. The association’s title mentions only “Orthodox” priests (as opposed to “Serbian Orthodox”), preempting the hitherto axiomatic likening of Orthodoxy among Yugoslav South Slavs to Serb nationhood (“Serb Orthodoxy”). The UPSJ’s goals were harmony, patriotism, enlightenment of the population, cooperation with authorities, and the advancement of literacy and culture in general. Its members, “patriotic” clergymen, were regularly decorated by the state in return for criticizing the church hierarchy and exiled bishops

through their publication, the *Vestnik (Gazette)*. In April, 1967, the official journal of the Serbian Orthodox Church, *Pravoslavje (Orthodoxy)*, finally began responding to these attacks.

Such associations first appeared in Serbia in the 1880s and were revived by a reform-minded lower clergy in November, 1942. After the war, an association was established in each republic, disregarding the borders of the existing Orthodox dioceses. The Montenegrin association was established in June, 1945, and the Croatian, Bosnian, Serbian, and Macedonian associations were established between August and December, 1947. According to the newspaper *Borba*, 80 percent of the 1,700 Serbian Orthodox priests were members of the associations by June, 1952. Of those, 81 were elected to organs of the authorities, 527 were active in the Popular Front, 452 in the Red Cross, 201 worked in state agricultural enterprises, and 122 were engaged on various cooperative farms. However, members of the associations, which claimed to represent 83 percent of all Orthodox priests in 1978, were still afraid of church reprisals. Negotiations between the bishops and the UPSJ on the organization of these associations were fruitless.⁶² Needless to say, the Holy Synod continued to refuse to recognize the associations, which were also renounced by the patriarchate on the grounds that they contradicted canon law and threatened church unity. The associations were seen as an internal opposition, a Trojan horse, the regime's "religious police."

After Vikentije's death, the *sabor* replaced him in August, 1958, with Bishop German (Hranislav Djorić) of Žiča, the editor of the patriarchate's journal, *Glasnik*, and general secretary of the synod, who was known to have openly collaborated with the UPSJ in the past. He became the "forty-third patriarch since the foundation of the patriarchate under Tsar Dušan, and the fifth in succession of the revived patriarchate." The "traveling Patriarch"—he visited the Soviet Union, the Middle East, and Bulgaria, and traveled widely across Yugoslavia—was the first postwar patriarch to visit Bosnia-Herzegovina and meet with the *reis-ul-ulema*, Sujleman Hadži Kemura. He was decorated several times by both the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia.

The church was particularly affected by the loss of its overseas parishes. In 1963, Bishop Dionisije Milivojević of the North American parish announced that they were seceding. Several Serbian Orthodox parishes in Czechoslovakia (1945, 1948), Hungary (Buda diocese) and Romania (Timisoara diocese) merged with the Orthodox churches in their own countries (the Czechoslovak Orthodox Church, founded in 1951, and the Romanian Orthodox Church). These events were followed by the—as they explained—"arbitrary secession" of the "Macedonian

Orthodox Church" (the dioceses of Skopje, Zletovo-Strumica, Štip, and Ohrid-Bitola). The Macedonians were striving to constitute their own Orthodox Church and revive the historical Ohrid archdiocese in order to defend their national identity from Serbian and Bulgarian appetites and those of the Serbian and Bulgarian Orthodox Churches. The Serbian Orthodox Church's *sabor* refused to recognize the Macedonian Orthodox Church, but the UPSJ did. The ecumenical patriarch in Istanbul also refused to recognize the new church. By the early 1970s, the Serbian Orthodox Church had a total of twenty-one dioceses in Yugoslavia, and the Macedonian Orthodox Church had four.

The church was also concerned that its parishes in Montenegro might secede. Patriarch German's announcement in 1970 that the Montenegrins were merely "Serbs with a different name" was intended as a step toward preventing further ecclesiastic schism and national division.⁶³ Serb nationalists still use popular idioms in reference to the Montenegrins: "common Serbs," "the elite of the Serbs," "constituent part of the Serb nation," and others. However, many Montenegrins emphasize their individual, non-Serb national identity.

The Serbian Orthodox Church found its *modus vivendi* with the Communist authorities, although the latter frequently accused it of nationalism: some experts state that it represented a feeble and loyal opposition to the Socialist regime. The Holy Synod and all three postwar patriarchs eagerly cooperated with the authorities during those decades. The church recovered, over a period of several years and with the considerable assistance of the state, both financially and in terms of manpower. By 1971 as many as 181 new churches and eight new monasteries had been built, and 841 churches and forty-eight monasteries had been renovated. The publication of books and journals resumed and began to grow. The state also subsidized the church (social insurance, financial assistance), which in return offered the regime access to eastern European "Orthodox" countries (Romania, Bulgaria, the Soviet Union, and also Greece), which Serbian Orthodox clergy regularly frequented. From around 1955 the Serbian Orthodox Church enjoyed a much higher degree of freedom than other religious organizations under Socialist rule.⁶⁴

As it had throughout its history, the church repeatedly emphasized the strong relationship (because it could not emphasize the identity) between Serb nationhood and Orthodoxy. Among the most outstanding examples are the ritual cremation of Tsar Dušan's mortal remains in the Church of Saint Mark in Belgrade in 1968, the common referral to Macedonians as "southern Serbs," the reaction to Croatia's national euphoria (the Croatian Spring) in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and the appeal to

defend the Serbs and their holy sites in Kosovo in 1982.⁶⁵ On that occasion, the bulletin *Pravoslavje* used terminology such as “our memories, our heart, the essence of our being,” in reference to Kosovo.⁶⁶ Some of the clergy began reviving the old myths that the Serbs were “Christ’s nation,” that as a nation they “suffered more for Christ than other nations,” and that the Serb population in Kosovo was being “crucified.” An editorial in *Glasnik* criticized attempts to rehabilitate Cardinal Stepinac, holding him responsible for the violence committed against the Serbs during the Catholicization campaign in the NDH. The clergy further demanded that the pope instruct bishops to apologize to the Serbs for the Ustasha’s war crimes, and that the pope himself should repent at Jasenovac.⁶⁷

In the 1980s, during the first decade of the Kosovo crisis, the church “saw a chance to pull itself out of the marginal position.”⁶⁸ In the latter half of the 1980s it began making more demands, seeking, for example, a simpler procedure for acquiring building permits for churches, social benefits for teachers and students at the Faculty of Theology, and the restitution of nationalized property. It had already started to address the issues of religious education in schools and civil marriages. It also demanded that the state stop interfering in its internal affairs. The church was growing in confidence and its relations with the state were improving. Indeed, the wave of rejuvenated Serb nationalism was riding abreast of the church’s renaissance. In the April 1, 1986, issue of *Pravoslavje*, Father Žarko Gavrilović mentioned the alleged threats to Serbs in Bosnia-Herzegovina and posed the question, “Is Bosnia and Herzegovina becoming another Kosovo for Orthodox Serbs and Serbian priests?” Similarly, in 1988, Father Dragomir Ubiparić wrote that the Orthodox Serbs in Bosnia-Herzegovina were being subjected to “cultural and religious genocide.” Atanasije Jevtić and Jovan Pavlović, representatives of the church hierarchy, began to contribute “in highlighting the threat from Islam and delegitimizing Islam’s very presence as valid.”⁶⁹

In 1988, the remains of Prince Lazar, who had recently been canonized by the Serbian Orthodox Church, were taken on a procession through all “Serb” lands, including Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo. The trek began at the monastery in Ravanica and continued through the dioceses of Zvornik-Tuzla, Šabac-Valjevo, Šumadija, and Žiča, to Gračanica in Kosovo. In some places, the remains of Serb soldiers and civilians killed during the Second World War were disinterred and, following a special service, ritually buried in Bileća, Kupres, Fahovići, and Vlasenica in 1990; and in Žitomisljić, Prebilovci, Glamoč, Livno, Ljubinje, Trebinje, Majeвица, and Banja Luka in 1991. “The grave is the greatest sacred object and the oldest Serbian church,” wrote Matija Bećković in 1988. “The

grave is our farthest and most persisting faith. We are still swearing solemnly to bones and graves because we are still not having steadiest pillars, better remedies, nor more powerful convictions."⁷⁰ The logic of such events—which will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter—helped to set the stage for the carnage that was to eventually follow in Croatia and especially in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

THE JEWISH COMMUNITY

Only one-fifth of Yugoslavia's thriving prewar Jewish community survived the war. Of the 12,495 Jews residing there in 1946, 7,578 emigrated to Israel between 1948 and 1952.⁷¹ According to Jewish sources, 1,292 survived the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, 1,871 were there in 1948, 1,285 in 1958, and 1,292 in 1965. Their suffering during the war helped reduce the difference between Sephardim and Ashkenazi within the Jewish community. Although formally organized as the Federation of Jewish Communities of Yugoslavia, it never regained the vitality and influence it enjoyed before the war. However, it is difficult to estimate the correct number of Bosnian Jews after the war because official censuses and data provided by the Jewish community differ considerably. Many Jews moved to other parts of Yugoslavia or declared themselves as members of other national groups. So, officially there were only 310 in 1953, 381 in 1961, 708 in 1971, and 343 in 1981. According to data from the Jewish community, about 1,100 Jews lived in Sarajevo in 1984 and 1,200 in 1992.⁷² In Sarajevo alone there were 1,413 Jews in 1946 and 1,304 in 1964—all served by a single rabbi.

THE MUSLIM RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY

The Muslim religious community fared little better under Socialist rule than its Orthodox and Catholic counterparts. Muslim schools were mostly closed, religious orders were banned, and *vakuf* property was nationalized. Islamic courts, religious education in public schools, tax collection, and cultural-religious organizations and associations were abolished. The religious press was shut down, and orthodox Muslim women were forbidden to wear the veil. Islam was forced to retreat to the private sphere. Among the associations that were banned was the Young Muslims. Although it at first "succeeded in re-establishing around the same three founding groups a network," it was soon severely attacked and practically disappeared.⁷³ Many of its members and leaders were arrested and imprisoned. Some were condemned to death. The persecution of this stu-