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A Croatian and Catholic State The Ustasha Regime and Religious Communities in the Independent State of Croatia**

Abstract: This paper will analyze the status that various religious communities enjoyed in the Independent State of Croatia (Nezavisna Država Hrvatska; hereafter NDH), focusing on the legal status and relations, both practical and financial, these communities enjoyed with the Ustasha movement and state authorities. The religious question was a key political problem in the NDH: the treatment of different religious communities serves as a paradigm of the character of the NDH as a state. Numerous studies have been written on the participation of Catholic clergy in the atrocities of the Ustasha movement and the NDH with the earliest being published immediately after the end of the war in 1945. The persecution of the Serbian Orthodox Church has been well documented in a number of important studies. Instead, this article will focus on legal and administrative issues and financial exchange between various religious communities and the NDH authorities as well as the state's program of mass religious conversion since these illustrate the authentic intentions of the Ustasha regime and the Roman Catholic Church in Croatia, as the dominant social and political forces in the state, regarding state religious policy. The article is largely based on primary archival sources drawn from the Croatian and Serbian state archives.

Keywords: Independent State of Croatia (NDH), Roman Catholic church, Greek Catholic church, Serbian Orthodox Church, Croatian Orthodox Church

Introduction

Established as a satellite state in the aftermath of the Axis invasion of Yugoslavia, the Independent State of Croatia (Nezavisna Država Hrvatska – NDH) was a condominium state divided between the occupation forces of Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany with smaller parts annexed to Hungary. Its territory comprised Croatia and Bosnia and Hercegovina as well as parts of Srem in Vojvodina, including Zemun, a municipality in Belgrade. When the new state

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was formally established on 10 April 1941, the invading German forces placed it under the rule of the Ustasha movement (Ustaša – Hrvatski revolucionarni pokret), a prewar radical nationalist and fascist political movement and terrorist organization whose leaders had lived mainly in exile in training camps in Italy and Hungary in the 1930s, but which had also created a parallel organization in interwar Croatia and Bosnia too. Added to this, the movement had a network of sympathizers among radical nationalist university students, separatist intellectuals, sections of the Catholic clergy and right-wing workers' syndicates.¹ Ultra-nationalistic, the Ustasha movement and its supreme leader, Ante Pavelić, arguably represented the culmination of Croatian nineteenth and early twentieth century ultra-nationalist ideology, characterized by chauvinism and antisemitism and augmented by aspects of corporativism, and fascist and National Socialist ideas. The Ustasha ideology envisaged a homogenous nation state, politically organized as an authoritarian system (the so-called *führerprinzip*) which would be exclusively Croatian by national and cultural identity and predominantly Roman Catholic.² Yet, the realization of such an ideological concept was not an easy task given the presence of national and religious minorities which constituted a significant portion of the new state's overall population, the most numerous one being the large Serbian minority which made up approximately one-third of the total population of the state. Given the obstacle the presence of such a sizeable and – from the Ustasha point of view – unassimilable minority presented to the realization of a nationally homogenous state, the Ustasha leadership headed by Pavelić as the supreme chief or *Poglavnik* decided from the outset – and almost certainly before they came to power – that the only sustainable means of resolving the so-called “Serbian question” and guaranteeing their permanent removal

¹ On the Ustasha regime and the character of the NDH, see F. Jelić-Butić, *Ustaše i Nezavisna Država Hrvatska 1941–1945* (Zagreb: Liber, Školska knjiga, 1977); B. Krizman, *Ante Pavelić i Ustaše*, 3rd edition (Zagreb: Globus, 1986); S. Trifković, *Ustaša: Croatian fascism and European politics, 1929–1945* (Chicago: The Lord Byron Foundation for Balkan Studies, 2011); R. Yeomans, *Visions of Annihilation: The Ustasha Regime and the Cultural Politics of Fascism, 1941–1945* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012); С. Трифковић, *Усташе: балканско срце таме*, 3. издање (The Ustaše: The Balkan Heart of Darkness, 3rd edition) (Београд: Катена Мунди, 2022).

² The history of the NDH is still a contested and controversial topic among historians. This is especially true in respect of the state's concentration camps and the number of victims who perished in them. Nonetheless, the vast majority of authors agree on the totalitarian nature of Pavelić's regime and extreme Croatian nationalism as the NDH's main ideological foundation. See e.g., *The Independent State of Croatia*, ed. Sabrina P. Ramet, (London: Routledge, 2007); R. Yeomans, *The Utopia of Terror: Life and Death in Wartime Croatia* (New York: Rochester University Press, 2015); *Pravni poredak Nezavisne Države Hrvatske*, eds. Boris Begović and Zoran S. Mirković (Belgrade: Pravni fakultet, 2018); H. Matković, *Povijest Nezavisne Države Hrvatske*, 3rd edition (Zagreb: Naklada P.I.P., 2022).

was through genocide. In practice, this was to be realized through a combination of isolation from the general Croatian population through ghettoization and in some regions a requirement to wear an identifying armband; ethnic cleansing involving the mass murder of Serbs, primarily in the countryside and the expulsion of large numbers of both rural and urban Serbian citizens to Serbia; mass incarceration in concentration camps; economic destruction through the confiscation of their businesses and properties; and forced assimilation and the eradication of the Serbian identity through a statewide policy of forced religious conversion to Catholicism. This, Ustasha theorists and social planners believed, would transform them into “Croats.”

In the case of other religious and national groups, the Ustasha regime demonstrated a more flexible attitude, sometimes because they were replicating the praxis of National Socialism but also because it corresponded to established nineteenth-century Croatian nationalist ideas about racial belonging.³ Thus, the sizeable Bosnian Muslim population, compactly settled in Bosnian neighboring territories, were considered by Ustasha race theorists to be racially Croats and indeed the racially purest of Croats though of the Islamic faith, largely derived from the ideas and writing of the nineteenth-century father of the Croatian nation, Ante Starčević whom the Ustashes revered as the progenitor of their own ideology. By contrast, although a significant number of Croatian Jews had converted to Catholicism before the establishment of the NDH, the racial laws introduced by the Ustasha movement in the first few months of the new state made it clear that such conversions would not protect them from the draconian racial laws application, which resulted in their increasing exclusion from Croatian society, the confiscation (Aryanization) of their property and exclusion from all economic activity, ghettoization and ultimately deportation either to the state’s concentration camps or the Nazi concentration camps in the East.⁴

Meanwhile, the religious, political, and economic rights of other, less numerous, minority communities in the NDH generally reflected the political and diplomatic relations between the NDH and the “motherland” of the minority or else was an expression of geopolitical concerns. It is no surprise, for example, that the state’s German minority enjoyed extensive autonomy and privileges; likewise, the Russian minority, radically anti-communist and compliant in its stance towards the Ustasha regime, also enjoyed the protection of the state authorities and religious autonomy. The same can also be said for the small Bulgar-

³ N. Bartulin, “The ideology of nation and race: the Croatian Ustasha regime and its policies toward the Serbs in the Independent State of Croatia 1941–1945”, *Croatian Studies Review* 5 (2008), 75–102.

⁴ I. Goldstein and S. Goldstein, *The Holocaust in Croatia* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, 2016); I. Goldstein, *Holokaust u Zagrebu* (Zagreb: Novi liber, ŽOZ, 2001); M. Švob, *Židovi u ratu i poraću* (Zagreb: CENDO, 2022).

ian and Romanian communities. The Ustasha regime also strongly supported the collaborationist Montenegro National Committee and all “national (i.e., separatist) Montenegrins” could count on favorable treatment in the NDH based on a shared enmity toward the Serbs.

Both Yugoslav socialist historiography and the historiographies of the Yugoslav successor states have produced voluminous works on diverse aspects of the NDH over the past eight decades. Generally, mass killing by Ustasha militias, the concentration camp system, antifascist resistance and socialist revolution have been the dominant topics while far less attention has been paid to relations between the state/regime and various religious communities. During the socialist period, studies within narrowly ideological frameworks were published on the wartime activities of Archbishop Alojzije Stepinac and the relationship between a section of the Catholic clergy and the Ustasha regime and its active participation in war crimes. However, many of them were characterized by an emotional or ideological bias, and often lacking in accuracy and reliability. After the dissolution of Yugoslavia, with a few exceptions, Croatian scholars and writers became highly invested in attempts to rehabilitate the wartime legacy of Stepinac and the Catholic Church while Serbian authors focused predominantly on the persecution of the Serbian Orthodox Church and its priests under the Ustasha regime.⁵ Consequently, the most historically sensitive and complex aspects of religion in the NDH, such as the mass religious conversions and the symbiosis of the Ustasha movement and the Catholic Church, were often either relativized and denied, or alternatively sensationalized, thereby preventing any reasonable, empirical scholarly debate.⁶ It is worth noting that both in the so-

⁵ Croatian narratives on Stepinac usually portray him as a martyr, a humble and agile Croatian patriot and an ardent Christian, who was persecuted because he was a true and proud Croat. On the other hand, in Serbian narratives, especially non-academic ones, authors have gone as far as to claim he personally ordered the slaughter and conversions of Serbs, and even witnessed some, which is unsupported by any reliable historical sources. Croatian historians close to the Roman Catholic Church have published numerous studies relativizing the responsibility of Stepinac and the Catholic clergy for collaboration with the Ustasha regime and even portraying them as victims of communism and Serbian postwar hegemony. Cf. V. Nikolić, *Stepinac mu je ime*, I–II, (Zagreb: Kršćanska sadašnjost, 1991); J. Krišto, *Katolička crkva u totalitarizmu 1945–1990* (Zagreb: Globus, 1997); J. Božanić, *Blaženi Alojzije Stepinac: baština koja obavezuje* (Zagreb: Krišćanska sadašnjost-Glas Koncila, 2010); M. Akmadža, *Katolička crkva u komunističkoj Hrvatskoj 1945–1980* (Zagreb-Slavonski Brod: Despot Infinitus, 2013); M. Akmadža i S. Josipović Batorac, *Stradanje svećenika Đakovačke i srijemske biskupije 1944–1960* (Slavonski Brod-Đakovo: HIP, Nadbiskupski ordinarijat, 2012).

⁶ Examples of the apologetic stream in Croatian historiography regarding the causes, nature, and scope of the mass religious conversion of Serbs to Catholicism in the NDH can be found in J. Krišto, *Sukob simbola. Politika, vjere i ideologije u Nezavisnoj Državi Hrvatskoj* (Zagreb: Globus, 2001); H. Matković, *Povijest Nezavisne Države Hr-*

cialist period and in the early years of the post-Yugoslav successor states, many of the most important and informative historical sources were unavailable to researchers, or access to them was limited. That only increased the currency and visibility of sensationalistic, populist and unscholarly narratives.

Drawing on a wide range of Croatian and Serbian archival sources, some of which were unavailable or unfamiliar to previous generations of scholars, this article seeks to reflect on the arguments of both Serbian and Croatian historiography, analyzing the relationship between the state and its religious communities from a different angle. It reconstructs the legal status, religious conversions, and financing of these communities, complementing and correcting in some cases established historiographical assumptions and narratives on the subject. This article argues that the study of religious conversions provides a crucial prism through which to understand the religious policies of the NDH and the Catholic Church's historical role in it. It shows that both religious conversions and the Catholic Church in wartime Croatia became instruments of a deeply sinister program of national and social engineering.⁷ As Margarita Matijević has noted in her exceptional study of Svetozar Rittig, while the number of religious conversions, on the territory of the four Croatian bishopric dioceses prior to World War One was around five hundred a year, during the campaigns of mass conversion in the NDH, entire Serbian villages converted in a single day; in some areas, dozens of thousands Serbs converted in the space of a few months.⁸ It is therefore hard not to see these conversions as driven, at least in part, by Ustasha terror, with a clear criminal goal to convert the Orthodox Serbs into Catholics, and in so doing transform them into Croats.

vatske, 3rd edition (Zagreb: Naklada P.I.P, 2022). Cf with Filip Škiljan's detailed study on the religious conversions of Serbs on the territory of the diocese of the Archbishop of Zagreb which is the most reliable available work on religious conversions under the Ustasha regime. See Ф. Шкиљан, *Покатоличавање Срба. Прекриштавање на подручју Загребачке надбискупије између 1941. и 1945. године*, књ. 1–3 (Catholicization of Serbs. Rechristening in the area of the Zagreb Archdiocese between 1941 and 1945, vol. 1–3) (Нови Сад: Архив Војводине, Српско народно вијеће, 2022).

⁷ Other authors, strongly relying on primary historical sources, have come to similar conclusions too. Cf. D. Simon, "The Task of the century": Local dimensions of the policy of forced conversions in the Independent State of Croatia (1941–1942)." In *Local dimensions of the Second World War in Southeastern Europe*, eds. X. Bougarel, H. Grandits and M. Vulesica, (London: Routledge, 2019), 50–65.

⁸ M. Matijević, "Između partizana i pristojnosti": Život i doba Svetozara Rittiga (1873–1961) (Zagreb: Plejada, HIP, 2019), 180–181 (here 181). Reflecting on how Croatian bishops perceived the conversions, she writes that "it didn't seem strange to anyone that in areas where, during a thirty years period, not a single conversion took place, or they could be counted on one's fingers, all of a sudden a local priest reported that he was expecting thirty thousand conversions."

At the same time, unpacking the trail of financial transactions and state subsidies and support clearly shows which religious communities enjoyed a privileged status, thereby helping us to identify the political and ideological motivations which drove such state support. The large quantities of money the authorities regularly spent on Catholic priests' salaries, bonuses and various forms of financial aid – for example, the investment of large sums to renovate or rebuild the structures and artefacts of the Catholic Church were almost certainly lavish, disproportionate and economically unjustified in the context of the socially straitened and desperate circumstances in which many of the state's citizens lived. Yet seen from the perspective of the ideological agenda of the Ustasha regime to construct a nationally homogenous society and in the context of the organized destruction of the Serbian Orthodox Church and the mass conversion program, it serves to highlight the central role that religion played in the Ustasha state as an instrument of cultural genocide on the one hand and national homogenisation on the other.

A comparative analysis of the state and religious communities in the NDH

This study of the NDH's religious communities begins with the Roman Catholics as they constituted by far the most influential and largest religious community and established church in the new state. Despite being a universal and non-national religious institution, over the centuries, the Roman Catholic Church had taken an active role in inter-ethnic and international relations in the Balkans, effectively influencing the outlook of the Croatian nation⁹ and Croatia's state-building process.¹⁰ From the early modern period onward, the Roman Catholic Church had openly engaged in proselytism among other religious communities, especially in regard to native Serbian citizens who were adherents of the autocephalous Serbian Orthodox Church. Although Serbs had settled in the territories of the Habsburg Empire with an already developed national identity and a national Orthodox church of their own, they were treated as an anational mass of schismatics by the hierarchy of the Catholic Church and

⁹ I. Guberina, "Katolička formacija Hrvatsva" (Vojni arhiv/VA/, holdings: Nezavisna država Hrvatska /NDH/, box 85, doc. 46/2).

¹⁰ Cf. J. Радоњић, *Римска курија и јужнословенске земље од XVI до XIX века* (The Roman Curia and South Slavic lands from the 16th to the 19th century) (Београд: САНУ, 1950); P. М. Грујић, *Политичко-верска активност Ватикана на Балкану кроз векове* (Politico-religious activity of the Vatican in the Balkans throughout the centuries) (Београд: Катена Мунди, 2020); Z. Kudelić, *Marčanska biskupija. Habsburgovci, pravoslavlje i crkvena unija u Hrvatsko-slavonskoj vojnoj krajini (1611–1755)* (Zagreb: HIP, 2007); and D. Vukšić, *Žumberački uskoci. Unijačenje i odnarođivanje* (Zagreb: Srpsko narodno vijeće, 2015).

every possible effort was made either to convert them to Roman Catholics, or compel their religious organizations to recognize Papal supremacy and accept a full communion with the Catholic Church.¹¹ This agenda lasted for a number of centuries since the Catholic clergy enjoyed the full support of and a privileged status in the Habsburg Empire (later Austria-Hungary) and the Venetian Republic. Pressure on Orthodox Serbs became especially intense during Maria Theresia's reign since she harboured the ambition to make the entire empire a religiously monolithic Catholic one. As a result, many Orthodox priests were arrested or expelled from the country; religious schools, Orthodox monasteries and churches were closed; and the religious and national autonomy granted to Serbs by Emperor Leopold I and confirmed by all his previous successors, was canceled.¹²

It was only when the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (from 1929 Yugoslavia) was established that the proselytism of the Catholic Church began to decline since the church was now just one of a number of Christian and non-Christian religious institutions accorded equality and no longer enjoyed a constitutionally privileged status. Such historical circumstances were new for the Catholic Church in the South Slav lands and proved to be unfavorable for its Balkans agenda; hence this church soon became a bitter opponent of the Yugoslav monarchy, advocating for the idea of an independent Croatia and "liberation from the Belgrade regime" among its flock. As prominent Croatian historian Ivo Banac has noted: "During the Royal Dictatorship, when the Croatian Peasant Party was banned, the Catholic church took over Radić's national flag."¹³ Numerous other studies and historical sources likewise suggest that the Catholic Church in Croatia became an important vessel for Croatian national and political activism during the late 1920s and 1930s.¹⁴ At the same time, the Croa-

¹¹ For a Croatian perspective on this historical process, see "Određivanje beriva za Grkokat. biskupskog vikara Dalmatinske Hrvatske", HDA, 218, B1. The famous Serbian writer Simo Matavulj (Šibenik, 1852–Belgrade, 1908) acutely described the pressure placed on Dalmatian Serbs to make religious conversion and accept communion with the Catholic Church in his exceptional essay "Pilipenda."

¹² D. Vukšić, *Žumberački uskoci. Uniženje i odnarođivanje*, 249–253; Д. Кашић, *Омнор марчанској унији* (The resistance to Marcha Union) (Београд: Православље, 1986).

¹³ I. Banac, *Hrvati i crkva. Kratka povijest hrvatskog katoličanstva u modernosti* (Zagreb: Profil, 2013), 61.

¹⁴ The Roman Catholic Church became an increasingly bitter opponent of integral Yugoslav nationalism and Yugoslav social organizations. The Conference of Croatian Bishops condemned the Yugoslav Soko youth organization as an anti-Croat institution and called on parents to prevent their children from joining it. It also protested the celebration of St. Sava's Day in public schools and institutions. At the same time, Catholic laity organizations such as the Catholic Action (Katolička akcija) and the Great Brotherhood and Sisterhood of Crusaders (Veliko bratstvo i sestinstvo Križara) youth

tian Catholic clergy nurtured and increasingly publicly articulated a narrative which depicted the Catholic Church as a victim of mistreatment and repression in Yugoslavia, supposedly threatened by the proselytism of the Serbian Orthodox Church aiming at the denationalization of the Croats. Over the intervening years, this basic discourse was continually replicated and recontextualized, contributing to the ideological preparation of and acceptance among a section of the Croatian population for the propaganda of the Ustasha regime and the implementation of its genocidal anti-Serbian program.¹⁵

In fact, in the years before the creation of the NDH, sections of the Catholic clergy and the Ustasha movement were in close contact.¹⁶ Catholicism, as a fundamental marker of Croatian national identity, was strongly rooted in Ustasha ideology. Therefore, it was not surprising that a significant section of Catholic clergy, especially at the village level, as well as some senior figures, were exultant when NDH was established and rushed to personally congratulate Pavelić and offer their services to the new state and Ustasha movement.¹⁷ Numerous letters sent to Pavelić and the Ministry of Justice and Religion (Ministarstvo pravosuđa i bogoštovlja – MPB) reveal that many monasteries and churches had already been, during the interwar period, used for concealing Ustashas and their illegal propaganda materials and the organization and indoctrination of youth with the Ustasha ideology. As numerous studies have shown, Catholic religious

organization were combining Catholic activism with a radical nationalist and separatist outlook. As such, they were effectively creating parallel social and cultural institutions for the promotion of Croatian ultra-nationalism under the cover of religious education and the promotion of Catholic values. See I. Banac, *ibid*, 61–85.

¹⁵ V. Novak, *Magnum Crimen. Pola vijeka klerikalizma u Hrvatskoj*, drugo izdanje (Beograd: BIGZ, 1986), 469–1100; В. Ђ. Крестић, *Досује о генези геноцида над Србима у НДХ* (Dossier on the genesis of the genocide against Serbs in the NDH) (Нови Сад: Прометеј, 2009); В. Ђурић Мишина, *Злочин је почео раније. Прилози за историју страдања Срба у бановинама Приморској и Савској 1934–1939. године и Бановини Хрватској 1939–1941. године* (The crime started earlier. Contributions to the history of the suffering of Serbs in the provinces of Primorska and Savska 1934–1939 and Banovina Croatia years 1939–1941) (Београд: В. Ђ. Мишина, 2004).

¹⁶ See, for example, the case of Branko Zupančić, a priest from Bosanska Gradiška. In 1937, he was carrying out research for his dissertation at the Pontifical Croatian College of St. Jerome in Rome when he was arrested at the request of the Yugoslav authorities for transporting letters and messages for the Ustasha movement and Pavelić personally. He was imprisoned in Zagreb but, as documented in a letter recommending him for promotion in July 1941, he was released from prison after an intervention made by Stepinac himself. See HDA, *Ministarstvo pravosuđa i Bogostovlja*, 218. B3/46825–1941.

¹⁷ See, for instance: HDA, 218, B1, doc. 12/5 (Letter to Pavelić, sent by Alojzije Venko, priest in Dubica, 10th May 1941); HDA, 218, B2–19.749–941 (Letter of Croatian Franciscan provincials to Pavelić, 14th June 1941), HDA, 218, B–5, Letter of Božidar Bralo to Pavelić, 15th May 1941.

organizations such as the Crusaders¹⁸ and “Domagoj” were strongly orientated towards the Ustashas and had many Ustasha members and sympathizers. Likewise, a section of the Catholic clergy in Croatia, not only welcomed the establishment of the NDH but supported the Ustasha movement long before April 1941, reflecting the sharing of a common goal: the creation of a Croatian state which would be exclusively one for Croats and Catholics.

It must be stressed that the Catholic Church in Croatia is, and was, in the period between 1941 and 1945 a substantial, dynamic, and heterogeneous institution. As numerous documents testify, some conscientious and ethical Catholic priests as well as devout Catholic citizens protested the persecution of the state’s Serbs, Jews, and Roma by the Ustasha regime, requesting intervention to end the terror. The existence of such letters is attested to in Archbishop Alojzije Stepinac’s diary¹⁹ as well as documents in his State Security file, even if it is also clear that he mostly ignored these appeals.²⁰ At the same time, numerous letters were written to local Ustasha authorities or state dignitaries denouncing Catholic priests who were reluctant to participate in the forced religious conversions and assimilation of the state’s Serbs. In many cases, these priests were accused of working against the Croatian state and national interests,²¹ or of aim-

¹⁸ When Banovina Hrvatska, a Croatian autonomous province within Yugoslavia, was formed in August 1939, the majority of Catholic organizations abandoned the policy of supporting V. Maček and the Croatian Peasant Party. Instead, they advocated radicalization of political actions and played a significant role in attacks on local Serbs and Yugoslav institutions. Reports sent from Banovina to the Belgrade government testify that Crusaders and other similar organizations became even more radical, and that Maček had no control over “clericals,” who were led by Ivo Protulipac, “a notorious Serb-eater” (Arhiv Jugoslavije /AJ/, holdings: Centralni Presbiri (38), 16–56, “Reports from Zagreb, August 1940”).

¹⁹ HDA, holdings: MUP SRH SDS, file: 301681 Stepinac Alojzije, 66.1.2, Dnevnik neovjereni prepis, frame 516 (sent by “a Catholic, Croat and Yugoslav” from Split, 10th June 1941); frame 517 (sent by Josip Ujčić, Belgrade Archbishop, on June 11th 1941); frames 519–520 (sent by an anonymous Catholic on 9 July 1941); frames 521–522 (sent by Ambrozije Benković, 12 July 1941); frames 523–524 (sent by a female Catholic, signed with Z. R., Zagreb, 19 July 1941); and frames 525–526 (sent by fra Dominik Mandić, Rome 19 July 1941). The aforementioned letters contain detailed information regarding the mass killings of Serbs and Jews throughout NDH territory.

²⁰ On 21st July 1941, Stepinac wrote to Pavelić: “I have heard from different sources that the treatment of Serbs and Jews is occasionally inhuman and cruel during deportation to concentration camps and in the camps themselves.” Stepinac mainly protesting about conditions during the transports rather than the transports themselves and he especially pleaded for Jewish “Catholic converts” to be spared from deportation, and if deported, to be separated from other Jews. HDA, 218, B3, Predsjedništvo biskupskih konferencija, Br. 152/BK.

²¹ Such was the case in the denunciation of Adam Žabarović, a priest at the Church of the Holy Cross in Petrovaradin (HDA, 218, BI-Ministarstvo bogostovlja i nastave, za-

ing to nurture “Yugoslav ideology” while others still were implicated in the “Belgrade regime’s” alleged plot against Croats.²² Some of the accused were removed from their positions and forcibly retired and others were relocated to different parts of the state while the fate of other individuals is unclear.²³ Catholic priests who supported and protected the Partisans and communists could expect the worst from the Ustasha, and some were even murdered.²⁴ The actual number of Catholic priests who actively supported resistance in the NDH was quite limited; however, of notable members of the clergy, only the name of Svetozar Rittig, who fled Zagreb and spent some years in Dalmatia prior to joining the Partisans, stands out.

Between 1941 and 1945, however, the vast majority of Catholic clergy in NDH, including the entire hierarchy, collaborated with Ustasha, from the first until the last day of the state’s existence. Archbishop Stepinac immediately recognized the new state and wrote in his diary that 10 April 1941 was a crucial moment in Croatian history.²⁵ Already on 28 April, he officially and publicly called the entire clergy to devote all its efforts to working for the benefit of the NDH. His address was circulated to the clergy and published on the front page of the diocesan Catholic newspaper, *Katolički list*, on 29th April. Moreover, Stepinac acted as an unofficial diplomat of the NDH, heading a mission to the Vatican in June 1941 with the aim of securing official recognition of the state

pisnik 12.445-941). After an investigation was conducted, Žabarović’s superior, Bishop Antun Akšamović, informed the Ministry of Justice and Religion that all accusations against this priest were groundless and that he was a good priest and Croat. See HDA, 218, B4, Biskupski ordinijat Đakovo, br. 1613/941.

²² During the first weeks of the NDH’s existence, Ustasha officials arrested and/or requested removal from their positions of a number of Roman Catholic priests, accusing them of cooperating with the “Belgrade regime” or spreading the Yugoslav national ideology and hero worship of King Aleksandar I. Among better-documented cases is that of Vladimir Krenais, a priest from Županja. See HDA, 218, B1-14/V. In July 1941, the NDH authorities petitioned the Diocesan Chancery for the removal of Mirko Veslaj, a priest in Dubovac, near Karlovac, on the basis that “in his time [he was] a strong supporter of the Croatian-Serbian Coalition and Independent Democratic Party,” someone who “neglected his parish and churches” and was even “baptizing antinational elements.” See HDA, 218, B3, 46821-941.

²³ Stjepan Popović, honorary president of the Diocesan Chancery, administrator of St. Catharine’s Church and nobility convict regens, was retired from all his duties at his own request by Stepinac on 19th May 1941. As a replacement for Popović, Stepinac appointed Matija Markov. See HDA, 218, B1-24/V.

²⁴ Such was the case of Karlo Čulum, a priest in Zavojane village, who was murdered by the Ustasha in May 1943. Supposedly, he was in touch with local Partisans (VA, NDH, box 94, 12/10).

²⁵ HDA, MUP SRH SDS, file: 301681 Stepinac Alojzije, 66.1.2, Dnevnik neovjereni prepis, frame 505.

and gaining moral support from the Holy See.²⁶ For his part, the Archbishop of Sarajevo, Ivan Šarić, a prewar Ustasha supporter, frequently expressed his admiration for the Poglavnik, in public statements and private letters alike, even in a form of poetry. Meanwhile, the Bishop of Srem and Đakovo, Antun Akšamović, collaborated closely with the Ustasha and state authorities in the mass conversions of the state's Serbs to Catholicism and requested, on multiple occasions, permission to expropriate confiscated Serbian property.²⁷ Not a single member of the Croatian Bishop's conference showed any open opposition to Pavelić's regime or publicly criticized its policies.²⁸ On the contrary, they worked hand in hand with the Ustasha authorities in the policy-making process and in the shaping of public morale which ranged from the drafting of decrees against abortion to the NDH's educational policies. Although some of them had doubts regarding the applied methods, all of them were glad to witness thousands of religious conversions to Catholicism.²⁹

²⁶ HDA, MUP SRH SDS, file: 301681 Stepinac Alojzije, 66.1.2, Dnevnik neovjereni repis, frame 515. Stepinac traveled completely incognito and didn't write much about this special, secret mission, except to state that he was accompanied by Franjo Cvetan, a priest, and that his goal was to "introduce some form of relations between the Holy See and the Independent State of Croatia".

²⁷ On his role in religious conversions and ethnic engineering in Srem and Slavonia, see: J. Horvat i Z. Štambuk, *Dokumenta o protunarodnom radu i zločinima jednog dijela katoličkog klera* (Zagreb, 1946), С. Симић, *Прекрштавање Срба за време Другог светског рата* (Conversion of Serbs during the Second World War) (Титоград: Графички завод Титограда, 1958), В. Ђурић, *Прекрштавање Срба у Независној Држави Хрватској. Прилози за историју верског геноцида* (Conversion of Serbs in the Independent State of Croatia. Contributions to the history of religious genocide) (Београд: Алфа, 1991). Strangely enough, although Akšamović's role in NDH was well-known, he became close with post-war communist authorities and evaded any kind of formal investigation or sanctions. Moreover, he was awarded the Brotherhood and Unity medal (Orden Bratstva i Jedinstva i reda) in May 1959 by Yugoslav President Josip Broz Tito, effectively becoming one of the very few people who received high-rank medals from both Pavelić and Broz.

²⁸ One of the main topics of the Bishops' Conference held in October 1941 was the Ustasha atrocities, and they were condemned. Pavelić and Pope Pius XII were informed of the conference's conclusions, but they weren't made public at the time. On the other hand, the Bishops' Conference held in April 1945 had murders of priests by Partisans as the main item on its agenda. On that occasion, condemnations of actions and pleas were publicized. A simple comparison shows that the Bishops' Conference was much braver and more agile when criticizing Yugoslav or communist actions than NDH's.

²⁹ M. Matijević, *ibid*, 177–183. Alojzije Mišić, Bishop of Mostar, was among those who had grown up believing that "there is no salvation outside of Catholic Church." Although he protested against the killings of Serbs, wrote quite direct and provocative letters to Stepinac and Bishops' Conferences warning them about Ustasha atrocities, he still perceived religious conversions in NDH as something positive (I. Banac, *ibid*, 92).

Some Croatian scholars have reasonably pointed to specific statements and documents from, for example, the Croatian bishop conferences as indicating that Stepinac and the senior Church hierarchy protested the mass killings perpetrated by Ustasha militias and the program of mass conversion of the state's Orthodox Serbs to Catholicism. However, documents from the archives of the MPB suggest that the intention to convert hundreds of thousands of Serbs and thereby forcibly assimilate them was a national, nation-engineering project and one in which the Catholic clergy played a central role. Missionary priests and monks sent to the countryside carried out the conversions, in many cases, coordinating their actions with local Ustasha organizations and municipal authorities. The subject of conversions had been discussed at the Bishops' Conferences of 1941 and, in addition, certain instructions on that matter were also provided by the Vatican Congregation for the purposes of religious propaganda and the Holy Congregation for the Eastern Churches.³⁰ The Catholic press in Croatia strongly advocated in favor of the conversions, presenting them as the "return to the faith of fathers and ancestors." Meantime, numerous Catholic priests sent their suggestions on conversion regulations directly to Pavelić and the Ustasha government, usually requesting that even stricter regulations and restrictions should be imposed on members of the affluent Serbian middle-classes such as industrialists, businessmen, local political leaders, Orthodox clergy, the intelligentsia, and wealthy farmers.³¹ Quite often, it seems, the impetus for the mass conversion of particular villages came from local Catholic priests. The same was true in the case of initiatives to either destroy or expropriate certain Orthodox or Old Catholic religious buildings and utilize them for the needs of the Catholic Church.³² Local priests and senior bishops alike, in significant numbers, aspired towards taking over the property of the Serbian Orthodox Church.

The process of religious conversion was characterized by a second, even more sinister stage. In many areas of the NDH, Catholic clergy and ecclesial authorities were in the habit of stalling the conversions. Frequently, they expressed doubts about the sincerity of those undergoing the conversion process

³⁰ P. M. Грујић, *Политичко-верска активност Ватикана на Балкану кроз векове* (Politico-religious activity of the Vatican in the Balkans throughout the centuries), 80; B. Ђурић Мишина, *Саслушања српских избеглица. Историјски контекст и анализа саслушања* (Hearings of Serbian refugees. Historical context and analysis of hearings) (Бања Лука–Нови Сад: Архив Републике Српске: Архив Војводине, 2023), 38, 61.

³¹ A letter sent to Pavelić from Catholic priests in Grubišino Polje, Veliki Grđevac and Sremski Karlovci in August 1941 is a perfect example of such an initiative. See HDA, 218, B5, 533–B–1941.

³² For example, a Catholic priest from Petrinja petitioned Pavelić not to demolish the local St. Spyridon's Orthodox Church but to transform it into a Catholic church instead. Mihael Razum to Pavelić, Petrinja, 11 August 1941, HDA, 218, B6.

and would request additional lessons to be given to the candidates for conversion or would else declare themselves unable to perform the mass conversion ceremony. In such cases, desperate Orthodox peasants petitioned Pavelić himself, asking for intervention to accelerate the conversion.³³ Needless to say, ordinary rural Serbs were anxious to convert as local Ustasha officials made it clear to them that this was the only means to avoid deportation to Serbia, repression, or liquidation.

To reinforce and make permanent the effects of conversions, the Church established new parishes and branch parishes (*župe* and *župske ispostave*), for the “converts and colonists.” This development was especially prevalent in the territory under the ecumenical jurisdiction of Akšamović, the bishop of Đakovo and Srem. Such a fundamental change in the organization of Catholic life had to be authorized by the highest ecclesial authority, in most cases by Stepinac himself, who signed the documents establishing new parishes and defining their territorial and religious parameters. Priests serving in new parishes received special supplements and bonuses on top of their salaries, and those that performed the conversions also received financial rewards. Effectively, converted Serbs would become Croats, and their children would also be raised in a Catholic and Croatian spirit.

Some documents suggest that the NDH authorities had the ambition to convert as many as a million Serbs. However, the deterioration in the political situation in the NDH and the course of the war prevented such a scenario. In a letter Stepinac sent to Pope Pius XII in May 1943, he referred to around 244000 converted Serbs. This represents the most accurate figure available and was also the one adopted by the Serbian Orthodox Church. In January 1942, the Office of the Prime Minister of the NDH issued a circular to all local authorities in which they were instructed “to treat all Greek-Easterners who have converted to Roman Catholicism as Croats.” The role the Catholic Church played in the Croatization of the state’s Serbs ultimately extended far beyond religious conversion and grew to encompass a systematic process of re-education and identity shaping through pedagogic, religious and propaganda activities. The initiatives for some of these came from the local Ustasha authorities and at other times from the clergy, though the Catholic Church was often earmarked for an important role in the envisaged plans of the secular authorities in any case. For

³³ Well-documented cases include petitions from peasants in Mali Gradac and Ličko Petrovo Selo who petitioned Pavelić in August and September 1941, respectively, to grant their desire to convert to Catholicism while complaining that despite their wishes and urges, the Catholic clergy had done nothing. In both cases, the Office of the Poglavnik issued an order to the Ministry of Justice and Religion to ensure that no obstacles were placed in the way of conversion and that the ecclesial authorities should accelerate the procedures and convert the petitioners.

example, the local Ustasha camp in Pakrac sent a proposal to various NDH ministries and the State Directorate for Renewal to convert the Serbian Orthodox Church's parochial buildings into a Catholic convent so the nuns could assume teaching in kindergartens and girls' public schools. The author of the proposal claimed that "the sisters of mercy would be the only ones capable of making something [good] out of Serbian, Yugoslav and Croatian-in-name-only children."³⁴

The question of national identity and the role the Catholic clergy was to play in shaping and transforming non-Croatian identities was a matter of great importance to the Ustasha regime. Hence, it was not enough for those who filled all important social, political, financial, and ecclesial positions in the state to be Catholics; they also had to be "good Croats" too: in other words, committed Croatian nationalists. Non-Croatian Catholic priests and nuns in NDH were looked on with suspicion, as is well documented in the case of Slovenian clergy. Already in the summer of 1941, the Poglavnik himself issued an order for all Slovenian nuns and sisters of mercy to be removed from positions of responsibility and effectively replaced by their Croatian subordinates.³⁵ The MPB requested lists of all Slovenian nuns active throughout NDH territory. While presenting their argument as to why some of the Slovenian sisters should remain in their positions, the ecclesial authorities contended variously that they had been "raised as Croats," "have served in Croatia for a long time" and "work with children extraordinary successfully, aligned to the national direction of NDH."³⁶ Soon enough, however, the anti-Slovenian agenda was extended to monasteries and monastic orders. MPB officials explicitly requested Croatian monks to leave their Slovene seniors and establish a provinciality for themselves, stating that "from now on, no Slovene should be head of any monastery nor hold any other influential position."³⁷ By late August 1941, Slovenes were not only to be removed from influential and leading ecclesiastical positions in the NDH, but so

³⁴ HDA, 218, B3-44.538-1941. Later, the same Ustasha camp petitioned the state authorities to give the buildings of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Pakrac to the local Franciscans "because that is in the interest of Pakrac's Croatization." See HDA, 218, B4, Ustaški logor Pakrac, br. 58/41, 12th July 1941.

³⁵ "Sestara Slovenka odstranjenje sa vodećih i odgovornih mjesta," HDA, 218, B4, 169-1941. This order was met by protest from the highest Croatian ecclesial authorities since introducing nationality as an exclusive criterion by the state authorities meant their direct involvement in strictly ecclesial administrative matters. See HDA, 218, B4, Nadiskupski duhovni stol u Zagrebu, br. 9832/41.

³⁶ HDA, 218, B4, Biskupski ordinijat Mostar, br. 887. All the mentioned "praise" referred to Franciscan nuns serving in Herzegovina.

³⁷ "Osamostaljenje franjevačke kapucinske provincije u Hrvatskoj," HDA, 218, B4,

were all non-Croats, as explained in the instructions MPB sent to the Merciful Sisters of the Sacred Cross in Đakovo.³⁸

Finally, mention should be made of something often overlooked in historiography: the financial aspect of the seeming symbiosis between the NDH authorities and the Catholic Church, which greatly benefitted the latter institution. The NDH spent enormous sums of money supporting the building and reconstruction of hundreds of Catholic religious structures. All members of the Catholic and Greek Catholic clergy, from the lowest administrative clerks up to bishops, were eligible for state financial aid, and in practice, very few missed the opportunity. Not infrequently, letters sent to Pavelić or the Ustasha regime requesting financial help or the “correction of injustices perpetrated by the Belgrade regime,” contained intentionally emotional phrases, seeking to convey a deep sense of affection among Catholic clergy, whether active or in retirement, for the Poglavnik and NDH.³⁹ Whenever a Catholic church or monastery had to be repaired or a Catholic social home, seminary or other religious structure constructed or upgraded, local priests or monastic orders reached out to the NDH authorities for assistance.⁴⁰ Stepinac personally and the Bishops’ Conference of Croatia as an institution often petitioned the state authorities with similar requests, achieving, over time, privileged status for the clergy.⁴¹ Apart from providing extensive financing to the Church and clergy on the territory under its administration, the regime allocated significant financial resources for the support of the Croatian Catholic clergy in territories under Italian control, such as in Dalmatia and Istria and the College of St. Jerome in Rome.⁴² Thus, it is likely that the close cooperation between the NDH authorities and the Catholic Church at the institutional and individual level was not simply a matter of ideological alignment or religion but also economics.

Two other religious groups enjoyed the status of recognized and acknowledged communities in the NDH and as such were entitled to state financial and logistic support: the Greek Catholic and the Islamic community.

³⁸ HDA, 218, B6, 950–B–1941.

³⁹ See e.g., Mihovil Kedmenec, retired priest, to Ante Pavelić, Bjelovar, 2 July 1941, HDA, 218, B3; Sarajevo Dominican Sisters of Mercy to Ante Pavelić, 19 July 1941, HDA, 218, B3, 45834–1941; Don Ivo Subašić, priest in Stup to the MPB, 18 July 1941, HDA, 218, B3, 45857–941; priest from Veliko Trojstvo to the MPB, 2 September 1941, HDA, 218, B8, 1397–B–1941.

⁴⁰ The holdings of the MPB in the Croatian State Archives are full of such petitions and requests, numbering in their thousands. See e.g., Guardian and administrator of the diocese in Vukovar to the MPB, 23 August 1941, HDA, 218, B6,

⁴¹ See e.g., HDA, 218, B3, Predsjedništvo biskupskih konferencija, br. 149/BK.

⁴² Dr Krunoslav Draganović to NDH Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 6 March 1944 (VA, NDH, box 369, 40/2).

The Greek Catholic Church, which was in full communion with the Roman Catholic Church and recognized papal primacy, had deep historical roots in Croatia, stretching back to the seventeenth century.⁴³ In Croatia, its origins were derived from the conversion of Orthodox Serbs who were permitted to continue to follow the Byzantine Rite while adopting some elements of Catholic doctrine (*filioque*) and recognizing papal primacy. Over the course of time, most Greek Catholics in Croatia – Serbs by ethnic origin – became Croatianized. Both the Serbian political leaders in Croatia and Dalmatia and the Serbian Orthodox Church perceived religious unionism and Greek Catholicism as hostile to Serbian national identity and interests. Consequentially, during the interwar period, the Greek Catholic church, although equal to other major religions in Yugoslavia, was neglected and to a certain level repressed by the authorities, who would occasionally take away its property and give it (or in many cases restore it) to the Serbian Orthodox Church. In the NDH, by contrast, the Greek Catholic clergy were, like Roman Catholic clergy, entitled to financial aid, and certain budgetary resources were also allocated for the repair and reconstruction of religious structures belonging to this community.⁴⁴

The Ustasha authorities, at first, took rather a negative attitude towards Greek Catholic proselytism, and members of other religious communities, Serbs primarily, were forbidden conversion to this religion.⁴⁵ Some members of the Catholic clergy shared this prejudice and drafted petitions calling for conversion to Greek Catholicism to be forbidden. Such was the case of a priest in Garešnica who emphasized in his letter to the MPB that “our Croatian people don’t have real trust in Greek Catholics, given that it considers them to be half-Vlachs [a derogatory term for Serbs].” He complained too that the Greek Catholic Church wasn’t “able to transform [Serbs] fast enough, neither religion nor nation-wise, to make them one with us.” On the contrary, the “Greek Catholic ritual would always remind them who they were, even after the current generation of converts dies.”⁴⁶ However, after a mass uprising by Serbs in reaction to their persecution, led by the nascent Partisan movement and Chetniks – the Royalist resistance, paralyzed the NDH, the policy abruptly changed: Serbs and

⁴³ For a detailed insight, see note 10 above.

⁴⁴ Already in 1941, substantial amounts of money were provided for the repair of Greek Catholic churches and parochial homes in Kričke, Baljci and Vrljka. “Molba grkokatoličkog biskupskog vikarijata u Kričkama za novčanu pripomoć za popravku župnih crkava i stanova u Kričkama, Vrljci i Baljkama,” HDA, 218, B6, Later, significant amounts were transferred for the repair of the Cathedral and Bishop’s offices in Križevci. See “Saslušanje dr. Janka Šimraka, biskupa križevačkog, Zapisnik od 22. V 1945,” HDA, MUP SRH SDS, 301385 Šimrak Janko.

⁴⁵ See “NDH – Okružnica,” 30th July 1941, HDA, 218, B3, br. 48468/1941.

⁴⁶ HDA, 218, B3, 45.807–1941.

others were now permitted to convert to Greek Catholicism if a Greek Catholic parish and church existed in the area where the conversation was requested.⁴⁷ From late 1941 onwards, Greek Catholics were even allowed to take over some Orthodox churches and create new parishes.⁴⁸ In fact, German intelligence from early 1942 confirms that Pope Pius XII himself, during a private audience in Rome, authorized Janko Šimrak, a Greek Catholic bishop from Križevci, to convert Orthodox Serbs to Greek-Catholicism.⁴⁹ It is, however, true that local Ustasha commanders and authorities would, occasionally, still seek to make life difficult for both Greek Catholic converts and clergy, as documented in a letter Šimrak sent to Pavelić in October 1942. In some territories, Greek Catholic priests would simply arrive and arbitrarily appropriate the property and church protocols of the Serbian Orthodox Church, conducting mass conversions of local Serbs without any official record.⁵⁰

Comparative analysis suggests that Serbs were indeed more eager to convert to Greek Catholicism than Roman Catholicism when they were allowed to make a free choice. Yet, it should be stressed that the Greek Catholic Church profited from Serbian hardship just as the Roman Catholic Church did and that it supported the regime and closely collaborated in the Croatization of the Orthodox population. Janko Šimrak was a loyal collaborator of the Ustasha regime and a convinced nationalist, anti-communist, and antisemite, as was clear from the content of *Hrvatska straža*, the journal he edited. In addition, Šimrak was decorated with a prestigious medal for state service, while other Greek Catholic priests, such as Aleksandar Vlasov,⁵¹ were liquidated by Partisans for having been active members of the Ustasha movement.

⁴⁷ An intervention by the Diocesan Chancery in July 1941, naming the Greek Catholic Church as the protector of Croatian identity and holy objects, and pleading for less strict restrictions regarding conversions to this denomination, certainly contributed to the change. HDA, 218, B3, Nadbiskupski duhovni stol u Zagrebu, br. 9259/1941.

⁴⁸ New Greek Catholic parishes (*župe*) were created in Bjelovar, Narta, Prgomelj (including Gudovac), Rovišće, Bolč, Veliki Zdenci (Dišnik included) and Veliko Vukovje (Stupovača and Rogož included), and in Hrvatska Kapela. All these parishes were established to accommodate increased numbers of converts and in some cases, former Orthodox churches and Serbian Orthodox Church structures were used. See Šimrak to Pavelić, 14th October 1942, HDA, MUP SRH SDS, 301385 Šimrak Janko.

⁴⁹ HDA, MUP SRH SDS, file: 301385 Šimrak Janko.

⁵⁰ Ф. Шкиљан, *Покатоличавање Срба. Прекрштавање на подручју Загребачке надбискупије између 1941. и 1945. године* (Catholicization of Serbs. Baptism in the area of the Zagreb Archdiocese between 1941 and 1945), I, 85–90. According to Šimrak in his postwar interrogations, the lack of any proper formalities during the conversion of Serbs to Greek Catholicism also provoked strong objections from the head of the MPB's religious office, the Franciscan monk Radoslav Glavaš.

⁵¹ On Vlasov's murder, see: HDA, 218, B54, Zapisnik 9536–B–1942.

Another religious community fully recognized in the NDH was the Islamic community. The Ustasha national ideology perceived the Bosnian Muslims as Islamized Croats, or Croats of the Muslim religion. This is something that had been advocated by Ante Starčević in the second half of the nineteenth century; Ustasha theoreticians simply adapted and racialized his views to the ideological context of National Socialism and the reality of the wartime situation. Hence, Islam in Bosnia was allowed to flourish, and as an act of goodwill and recognition, the Ustasha regime constructed mosques even in towns and cities where Muslims did not constitute a meaningful portion of the overall population. One of the strongest symbolic actions of this kind was the conversion of Meštrović's atelier and museum in central Zagreb into a large mosque, praised by the state and party media as "the most beautiful in Europe."⁵² The Islamic clergy were entitled to state salaries and occasional financial aid, but the existing documents confirm that financial support to the Islamic community was often late or delayed, and that the Reis-ul-Ulema (the most senior Muslim cleric in the state) had to intervene personally on numerous occasions to speed up payouts and to remind the Croatian authorities of their financial obligations.⁵³ While a certain amount of finance was allocated for the construction, repairs and maintenance of Islamic structures, the sums were hardly comparable to the enormous state support the Roman Catholic Church could count on.

Despite the favorable legal status and state subsidies it enjoyed, the Islamic organization in the NDH was faced with certain unusual and unacceptable requests, at least from the Islamic perspective. Ustasha organizations and the Croatian state authorities did not always show sufficient understanding and appreciation for Islamic customs and religious dogma, imposing the replication of certain celebrations established in the Roman Catholic Church. Already in mid-1941, one such awkward situation emerged when it was publicly announced by the state media that all mosques in Sarajevo and elsewhere would be organizing a special prayer commemorating Ante Starčević, Ante Radić and Ante Pavelić's name-day, held on the feast day of St. Anthony of Padua. The Reis-ul-ulema protested, stating that a mosque was no place for a celebration of a Catholic holiday, explaining that even during the Yugoslav era no prayers had been held in mosques for similar festivities and prayers, not even on Vidovdan (St. Vitus Day) "although Serbs had requested that."⁵⁴ He appealed to the authorities to

⁵² VA, NDH, kut. 290, 7–2; M. Jareb, *Mediji i promidžba u Nezavisnoj Državi Hrvatskoj* (Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2016), 804–806.

⁵³ HDA, 218, B136, Reis-ul-ulema Spaho to NDH Financial directorate, Sarajevo 20th August 1941; Hakija Hadžić to Fehim Spaho, Sarajevo 2nd August 1941; Spaho to MPB, Sarajevo 31st August 1941; Spaho to MPB, Sarajevo 18th December 1941; Spaho to MPB, Sarajevo 10th January 1942, etc.

⁵⁴ HDA, 218, B1-23/VI.

provide him with a list of NDH state holidays that would require a special event in temples of all religions. This matter resurfaced again later, as it wasn't properly resolved by a legal act.⁵⁵ In fact, it realistically showcased the exclusive, predominantly Catholic mindset of the Ustasha regime and state authorities.

The attitude of the state to religious conversions to Islam underlined the extent to which the NDH was intended to be a Catholic state. Especially in the historical territories of Croatia and Slavonia, local Ustasha authorities called upon a 1906 law forbidding citizens to convert from Christian denominations to non-Christian faiths.⁵⁶ This created immediate practical problems since it meant that permission for religious conversion could not be given even if the reason for such a conversion was marriage. On the other hand, the authorities encouraged Serbs and Jews to convert to Islam in parts of the state where Muslims constituted a majority of the population. At the same time, numerous cases were recorded in which local Muslims prevented members of the Serbian Orthodox religious community from converting to Roman Catholicism through threats. Nonetheless, in the confrontation between Muslim and Catholic proselytism,⁵⁷ Catholicism invariably triumphed.

Some communities in the NDH had to be tolerated for reasons of international relations, even if their existence was hardly pleasing to the Catholic clergy. The German Evangelical Church, a Protestant and Reformist denomination was one such case. This religious community was recognized by the NDH authorities and even received modest and regular state financial support.⁵⁸ During the first few months of the NDH's existence, it seemed that Protestant denominations could, at least, hope for a status similar to the one that the Islamic community enjoyed, but it turned out not to be the case.⁵⁹ The Catholic clergy invested a lot of effort in limiting the influence of the Evangelical Church solely to the German minority. On the other hand, the community enjoyed strong

⁵⁵ Reis-ul-ulema to Velika Župa Vrhbosna, Sarajevo 20 August 1942 (VA, NDH, box 183, 52/5).

⁵⁶ Reis-ul-ulema's representative S. Bašić to Džaferbeg Kulenović, Vice President of the NDH government, Sarajevo 25th August 1943 (VA, NDH, box 87, 2/39).

⁵⁷ Compare: VA, NDH, box 195II, 5/10; VA, NDH, box 153a, 9/10; VA, NDH, box 138, 31/1.

⁵⁸ NDH subsidies for the German Evangelical Church were determined as early as May 1941 by the Ministry of Religion and Education and from that time onwards were paid regularly. The initial amount came to less than 50.000 dinars, which can be considered a very modest financial contribution. "Predmet: Državna pripomoć za Njem. Evang. Crkvu za mjesec lipanj 1941 god.," HDA, 218, B1,

⁵⁹ Optimistically, the German Evangelical Church's bishop in Zagreb petitioned the NDH authorities on 24 July 1941 to institute a special department for Protestants in the MPB and to name a protestant as the department's head. After consideration, the proposal was put on hold until further notice. See HDA, 218, B5, 551-B-1941.

support and the protection of German diplomatic and military circles in the NDH, so most of the disputes this religious community experienced with the authorities and the Catholic clergy were resolved in a favorable manner. In addition, the NDH authorities enjoyed no influence on its internal organization and life. However, proselytism was strictly forbidden and religious conversions to the Church were permitted only among members of the German ethnic community (Volksdeutsche) or individuals who wanted to get married to members of the Evangelical Church. Even the official protest regarding this matter, made by Philip Popp, the supreme Evangelical bishop in NDH, to the highest state authorities was fruitless.⁶⁰

The Russian, Bulgarian and Romanian Orthodox communities were also tolerated.⁶¹ The higher-level state authorities invested a lot of effort in explaining to local and regional Ustasha organizations that all limitations and bans imposed on Orthodox Christians were strictly limited to Serbs. The existing historical records suggest that the relationship between the Russian émigré community and the NDH authorities was generally cordial. Russian priests were allowed to continue their service and, on numerous occasions, Serbian Orthodox Church structures were temporarily handed over to the administration of Russian émigrés.⁶² As early as summer 1941, Russian émigrés requested to take possession of the largest Serbian Orthodox Church building in Zagreb, on Preradović Square.⁶³

Among the communities that did not receive formal recognition and were outlawed by the NDH authorities was the Croatian Old Catholic Popular Church. It had emerged from the ranks of the disaffected lower Catholic clergy who had requested reforms of the Catholic doctrine and specifically did not rec-

⁶⁰ Copy of Popp's letter from 19 November 1941 (Archivio Storico della Segreteria di Stato – Sezione per i Rapporti con gli Stati, AA.EE.SS., Pio XII, Parte I (1939-1948), Jugoslavia, Pos. 178, ff. 14-15). The letter was written in the form of a protest against religious discrimination, as Popp argued that the Evangelical Church was clearly discriminated against compared to the Roman Catholic and Islamic community.

⁶¹ The NDH authorities also responded affirmatively to individual requests and appeals by Ukrainian Orthodox priests, as attested to by the case of Dimitrije Mrihin. See Mrihin to the MPB, 3rd September 1941, HDA, 218, B9, D.

⁶² Russian priests were allowed to perform funeral rites for Russians, Romanians and Bulgarians of the Orthodox religion, but were strictly forbidden, in September 1941, to do so for Orthodox Serbs. HDA, 218, B9, 2300-B-1941.

⁶³ HDA, 218, B3, 46790-1941. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs strongly supported this initiative, but it was blocked by the Ministry of the Interior, which claimed that "this church will be, as soon as possible, demolished, and all memory of it removed." However, the church remained in place, and after the establishment of the so-called Croatian Orthodox Church, it was given to this new ecclesiastical state organization.

ognize the decisions made at the First Vatican Council.⁶⁴ This community was met with the understanding and support of the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Yugoslav authorities, factors which were later used by the Ustasha regime to legitimize their suppression of it. Although many prominent Croats had supported the Church, including Stjepan and Ante Radić, and the Church was a purely Croatian one, the Ustasha perceived it as a foreign body in the Croatian organism.⁶⁵ Hence, this church was prohibited in the NDH. On the Poglavnik's order, relevant ministries and the State Treasury stopped all payments to its clergy.⁶⁶ All its churches were closed, some were converted for the use of the Catholic Church, and more were destroyed; even ones that were spared had to remain locked until the end of the war. The Old Catholic clergy were the target of ferocious state propaganda, as well as physical, legislative, and proselytizing attacks. Representatives of the Croatian Old Catholic Church wrote letters and petitions to Ante Pavelić and relevant governmental bodies asking for protection for church members and themselves from Ustasha threats and attacks, but received no answer or the urgently needed protection.⁶⁷ Religious services were forbidden completely, and within eighteen months of the establishment of the NDH, most Old Catholics had reverted to Roman Catholicism.⁶⁸ Members of the Roman Catholic clergy denounced and intervened with the authorities, demanding that Old Catholic churches be demolished or converted for the use of Roman Catholics and that its priests be arrested or prevented from conducting any religious services. And, indeed, a number of individuals belonging to the Old Catholic clergy were arrested and deported to the Jasenovac-Stara Gradiška concentration camp, where they met their end.⁶⁹ Others were accused of anti-Croatian actions and even of supporting the Partisan movement.

⁶⁴ For a detailed historical overview of the Croatian Old Catholic Church's genesis and development, see M. Miholek, *Hrvatska starokatolička crkva između Zagreba i Beograda* (Zagreb: Durieux, 2022).

⁶⁵ See: Kalogjera's letter to Pavelić from 11th September 1941, with attached press clipping. HDA, 218, B3, 49527/B-41.

⁶⁶ "Obustava beriva svecenstvu Hrvatske Starokatolicke crkve," HDA, 218, B3, 46332

⁶⁷ F. Škiljan, "Starokatolička crkva u Nezavisnoj Državi Hrvatskoj," *Historijski zbornik* 67/1 (2014), 195–213. See also Josip Ivelić, Old Catholic priest in Šurkovac, to Ante Pavelić, 22nd July 1941, HDA, 218, B5, 568–B-41; HDA, 218, B8, 1636–B-1941.

⁶⁸ Even before an official decision on this matter was made, local Ustasha prevented Old Catholic religious services and physically attacked members of the church. This was the case in Habjanovci, where on 21st May 1941 the priest was prevented from entering the church, and worshippers were beaten by local Ustasha and Catholics. Vinko Pančić, an Ustasha leader and Crusader, threatened Old Catholics that they would have to wear armbands like the Jews. HDA, 218, B1, 9.820–B-1941.

⁶⁹ F. Škiljan, "Starokatolička crkva u Nezavisnoj Državi Hrvatskoj," 212. However, some Old Catholic clergy had become acquainted with Ustasha concentration camps as early

Smaller religious communities were either restricted and obstructed, or completely forbidden to operate and exist in the NDH. Two well-documented cases were the Nazarenes and Adventists (in former Yugoslavia called the *Subotari*), perceived as religious sects. They were forbidden to conduct religious services and even to have any properties registered in the name of the organizations.⁷⁰ Absurdly, given how small, persecuted and insignificant these communities were, they were accused of proselytizing in Croatian territories. Nonetheless, such accusations were repeatedly filed by local Catholic priests. Another similar case involved the Baptist Church, which was not prohibited from functioning but encountered discrimination, including retroactive cancelation of religious conversions. First, in June 1941, Serbs were banned from converting to Baptism, and local authorities in Modruš and Ogulin were instructed to allow conversions only to the Catholic religion.⁷¹ Just a week later, the MPB wrote to the authorities of the grand governate of Modruš instructing them that all Serbian Orthodox religious conversions to Baptism made prior to 10 April 1941 were to be legally annulled.⁷²

This article ends with an analysis of the two religious communities that suffered the most under the Ustasha regime: the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Jewish community. Given the fact that Jews were treated according to racial laws – not as a religious group but as a race – this paper won't be focusing on them in much detail. Instead, it will showcase the repression of Jews briefly and

as mid-1941. Davorin Ivanović, a priest from Andrijaševci, was reported to be imprisoned in the Koprivnica concentration camp in July 1941. HDA, 218, B3, Kotarska oblast u Vinkovicima, br. 4287–1941.

⁷⁰ A local organization of the Adventist Christians in Banja Luka petitioned the MPB for permission to organize religious services. In their request, they enclosed a decision of the former Yugoslav authorities from 1930 granting the Adventists the right to hold services under certain conditions. However, the local NDH authorities intervened, stating that “the Catholic Church does not want Adventist religious services to be permitted,” effectively influencing the decision of the Ministry to forbid them. See HDA, 218, B5, 428–B–41. In August 1941, both the Ministry of the Interior and the MPB stated that “it is no longer desirable to tolerate this sect.” See HDA, 218, B5, 650–B–1941.

⁷¹ The reason for this reaction was probably the submission of several requests for conversion to Baptism by peasants from Serbian villages in Trojvrh, Janjagora, Kunic and Begovac in the Plaški area. The local Ustasha authorities petitioned the relevant ministries to forbid such conversions, perceiving them as a fraud local Serbs had invented so as to retain their Serbian identity. In the letter, the Baptist Church is referred to as a “sect.” See HDA, 218, B5, 16156–B–1941, prilog 1.

⁷² HDA, 218, B5, 454–B–1941.

direct interested readers toward a number of valuable published works on the Holocaust in Croatia.⁷³

The persecution of Jews in the NDH was motivated by racial and economic concerns and had as its goal the complete destruction of the Jewish population and the Aryanization of Jewish property. The destruction of synagogues throughout NDH territory is well documented, with Zagreb and Osijek as the most paradigmatic cases. Jewish temples were either burned or destroyed brick by brick and the materials sold to private buyers. Initially, conversions from Judaism (“the Israelite religion”) to Catholicism were permitted and even promoted by the Ustasha authorities and, consequently, many Jews converted to save themselves. However, already by the fall of 1941, Jews who had applied for religious conversions were informed that conversion would not affect their status under the state’s racial laws. Unfortunately, religious conversion was not able to save more than a handful of Jews from the awful fate of the Holocaust.

The state’s Serbs, Orthodox Christian by religion, made up around one-third of the total population of the NDH, around 1.9 million citizens out of an overall population of 6.8 million. The Serbian Orthodox Church was the second largest religious organization in the territory of the NDH and was a cornerstone of Serbian national identity. That is the overriding reason it was marked for destruction, as studies by historians such as Dinko Davidov, Jovan Mirković and Veljko Đurić Mišina have described in detail.⁷⁴ The scale of the destruction and the human, material, and cultural losses were enormous. In all, during the existence of the wartime Croatian state, three bishops and over 170 Serbian priests and monks were murdered while hundreds of others were deported to Serbia. In the most notorious cases, clergymen murdered at the hands of Ustasha forces were brutally tortured before being killed and their bodies and faces

⁷³ Besides the literature mentioned in footnote 4, see: O. Kraus, ed., *Antisemitizam, holocaust, antifašizam* (Zagreb: Židovska općina Zagreb, 1996); M. Najman, “Stradanje osiječkih Jevreja”. In *Mi smo preživeli: Jevreji o Holokaustu*, II (Beograd: Jeverski istorijski muzej, 2003) 206–219; Lj. Dobrovšak, “Židovi u Slavoniji”. In *Slavonija – sociodemografski problem/izazovi*, eds. Dragutin Babić, Filip Škiljan, (Zagreb: Institut za migracije i narodnosti, 2014), 71–96; Lj. Dobrovšak, “Židovi u Osijeku”. In *Židovski Osijek*, eds. Ljiljana Dobrovšak et al. (Osijek: Nansen dijalog centar, 2020), 16–27.

⁷⁴ В. Ђ. Ђурић, *Голгота Српске православне цркве 1941–1945* (Golgotha of the Serbian Orthodox Church 1941–1945) (Београд: Алфа, 1997); В. Ђурић Мишина, *Српска православна црква у Независној Држави Хрватској 1941–1945 године* (Serbian Orthodox Church in the Independent State of Croatia 1941–1945) (Ветерник: Дијам-м-прес, 2002); D. Davidov, *Independent State of Croatia: Total genocide, 1941–1945* (Belgrade: Svet knjige, 2015); J. Mirković, *Suffering of the Serbian Orthodox Church in the Independent State of Croatia* (Belgrade: Svet knjige, 2016); A. Stojanović, “A Beleaguered Church: The Serbian Orthodox Church in the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) 1941–1945”, *Balkanica XLVIII* (2017), 269–287.

afterwards mutilated. Almost 450 religious structures and buildings belonging to the Church were destroyed or heavily damaged and almost the entire property and financial assets of the Church were nationalized. Even the use of the term “Serbian Orthodox” was banned by order of a special decree and replaced with the expression “Greek Easterner” while the Serbian Orthodox Church was effectively outlawed and presented in the media and in state propaganda as well in the statements of Ustasha officials as one of the greatest enemies of the Croatian state and its national interests.⁷⁵

As early as May 1941, Serbs in the NDH, often the target of brutal Ustasha attacks, were being offered the opportunity to convert to Catholicism to save themselves from persecution. Between May and late winter 1941, tens of thousands of ordinary Serbs submitted applications for conversion, with the majority taking place in the fall and winter of 1941. In most regions of the state, the conversion program was complete or else had been abandoned by the end of spring 1942, though in some parts of the state, such as Bjelovar county and Derventa, as well as parts of Srem, mass conversions continued until fall 1942.⁷⁶

Despite its brutality, the repression of the Serbian Orthodox Church and a systematic campaign of anti-Serbian terror did not have the effect the Ustasha regime and the Catholic Church in Croatia were anticipating. On the contrary, the mass atrocities perpetrated by Ustasha militias and police units in the countryside against rural Serbs, as well as the mass deportation program between June and August 1941, fueled a large-scale uprising by desperate Serbs who felt they had nothing more to lose. The conversion program was designed as a solution to the Serbian “problem” which would enable the pacification of the population but ultimately it failed because of the often violent and threatening way it was carried out and because it increasingly became clear to Serbs that converting to Catholicism would not protect them from extermination at the hands of the militias or deportation to the state’s archipelago of concentration camps. As a final, largely futile gesture to calm the uprisings in the countryside which were having a detrimental impact on their ability to govern the state, German diplomats and occupation forces persuaded Pavelić and other members of the Ustasha leadership to establish an autocephalous Orthodox Church in Croatia for the Serbian minority.⁷⁷ Consequently, Pavelić gave a speech in the newly-

⁷⁵ M. Jareb, *ibid.*, 822–828.

⁷⁶ A huge number of individual applications for religious conversion in the Derventa and Bjelovar counties and a number of Srem towns are kept in HDA, 218, boxes B26, B27, B29, B55, B56 and B57.

⁷⁷ A. Стојановић, Р. Ломпар, “Оснивање Хрватске православне цркве у контексту немачке политике и ратних интереса у окупираној Југославији” (The establishment of the Croatian Orthodox Church in the context of German politics and war interests in occupied Yugoslavia), *Српска политичка мисао* 3 (2017), 35–53.

established Croatian State Sabor (the NDH diet) in which he proclaimed that Orthodoxy as such was not a problem, but adding that the Serbian-Orthodox religion could not exist within the Croatian state. A few months later, in April 1942, the state media heralded the founding of a so-called non-canonical Croatian Orthodox Church (*Hrvatska pravoslavna crkva*),⁷⁸ with the assistance of some former Serbs such as Vasilije Šurlan,⁷⁹ a Nazi from Zemun, and Milos Oberknežević, a corrupted ecclesial clerk from Belgrade. This new religious organization enjoyed state support analogous to that of the Roman Catholic and Greek Catholic churches. However, from the beginning the new Orthodox Church represented a Potemkin village: most of the clergy was recruited from the Russian emigration although a few former Serbian Orthodox priests joined too. In the meantime, some of the closed Serbian Orthodox churches were reopened and bequeathed to the new church, but very little of the rest of the property of the Serbian Orthodox Church had a similar fate.

In an attempt to strengthen the legitimacy of the new church, the authorities established a journal for the new church, *Glas pravoslavlja* (Voice of the Orthodox), set up a department for the research of Orthodoxy within the Faculty of Religion of the Croatian University in Zagreb, and drafted Serbs into the labor battalions of the Croatian Home Army (Domobrans). The NDH was officially reframed as a state of three religions: Catholicism, Islam and Croatian Orthodoxy, and the senior clergy of the Croatian Orthodox Church now assumed a prominent position in the state's liturgical and secular ceremonies. The

⁷⁸ Compare: В. Ђ. Ђурић, *Усташе и православље. Хрватска православна црква* (Ustasha and Orthodoxy. Croatian Orthodox Church), (Београд: Космос, 1989); Р. Пожар, *Хрватска православна црква у прошлости и будућности*, (Zagreb: Naklada Ravčić, 1996); М. Виталевич Шкарковский, "Создание и деятельность Хорватской Православной Церкви в годы Второй мировой войны", *Вестник церковной истории* 3/7 (2007), 221–262; М. Шовљаков, "Галерија ликова Хрватске православне цркве", ("Gallery of figures of the Croatian Orthodox Church"), *Споменница историјског архива "Срем"* 9 (2010), 66–84; А. Стојановић, Р. Ломпар, "Ангажман Независне Државе Хрватске на међународном признању Хрватске православне цркве 1942–1944" (Engagement of the Independent State of Croatia in the international recognition of the Croatian Orthodox Church 1942–1944), *Токови историје* 2 (2019), 35–58; С. Продић, *Ретрофутуризам Хрватске православне цркве* (Retrofuturism of the Croatian Orthodox Church) (Јагодина: Гамбит, 2020).

⁷⁹ On Šurlan, a truly unique figure in Serbian history: Р. Пилиповић, "Момчило Ђујић и Василије Шурлан – два антипода у свештеничким мантијама" (Момчило Ђујић and Vasilije Šurlan – two antipodes in clerical mantles), *Гласник Удружења архивских радника Републике Српске* 3/3 (2011), 339–356; А. Стојановић, "Писма свештеника Василија Шурлана поглавнику Павелићу 1941. године. Прилог истраживању идеолошке колаборације са усташким режимом НДХ" (Letters of priest Vasilij Šurlan to Chief Pavelić in 1941. Contribution to the research of ideological collaboration with the Ustasha regime of NDH), *Токови историје* 1 (2023), 221–242.

creation of the church had a direct impact on the intensity of religious conversions to Catholicism. Although the church was clearly a state project with the Poglavnik being mentioned during liturgies, it was still reminiscent of the Serbian Orthodox Church to ordinary people, and so the rate of Catholic conversions declined even further and the need for conversion became, to a certain extent, superfluous as far as ordinary Serbs were concerned. Moreover, the NDH authorities invested considerable effort to achieve the recognition of the church in the Orthodox ecumene. However, such endeavors came to naught, and the church failed to receive a single official recognition from canonical Orthodox churches, although some of them did cooperate with the Croatian Orthodox Church. To showcase that the church was supposedly equal in status and rights with the Roman and Greek Catholic churches and Islam, the state even permitted a small number of religious conversions to Orthodoxy, including among Serbs who had in the meantime converted to Catholicism.

Conclusion

The religious question was a central plank of the Croatian national policy during the existence of the NDH. According to Ustasha ideology and, to a lesser extent, the nineteenth-century nationalism of Starčević, whom the Ustasha movement and radical nationalists in Croatia generally viewed as their ideological inspiration, a Croatian state – in this case, the NDH – would inevitably have to be a racially and ethnically pure state, primarily of Croats and Catholics, with Islam theoretically a co-equal religion though one which was to be accorded far less importance and privileges in reality. The concept of a Croatian Catholic state founded on “Catholic” values constituted a national and ideological alignment of the predominantly secular Ustasha movement and the Catholic clergy in Croatia and provided the basis for their symbiotic relationship. As this article has demonstrated, the NDH authorities provided generous and substantial financial and logistic support to the Catholic Church while repressing, discriminating, or openly persecuting most non-Catholic religious communities and their organizations. The Catholic clergy and the Catholic Church in Croatia in return provided moral, cultural, and propaganda support for the regime. Some notable members of the hierarchy of the Catholic Church in Croatia, such as Archbishop Stepinac and Radoslav Glavaš, were either directly or indirectly involved in the politics of the state, performing special diplomatic missions or employed as high-ranking governmental officials.

Together, the Catholic Church in Croatia and the Ustasha regime organized and carried out mass religious conversions in order to denationalize and Croatize Orthodox Serbs, effectively participating in ethnic engineering and genocide. Together with various state agencies, the Catholic Church and indi-

vidual members of the clergy were either direct participants or, at the least, beneficiaries in the systematic destruction of Serbian and Jewish religious structures and the plunder of properties belonging to these communities.

Although some non-Roman and Greek Catholic religious communities in the NDH were tolerated due to pragmatic political considerations (for example, non-Serbian Orthodox communities) or reasons of national ideology and racial theory (for example, Islam and Bosnian Muslims), the general pattern was one of extreme repression and persecution. Nowhere was this dynamic clearer than in the incremental and systematic terror directed against the Serbian Orthodox Church, but it was also central to state policy towards the Croatian Old Catholic and Baptist religious communities in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Arguably, none of these religious communities ever fully recovered from the war of destruction waged against them by the Ustasha regime from 1941 to 1945. Many of their monasteries, churches and religious structures were razed to the ground and never rebuilt, while thousands of civilians continued to live their lives as reluctant and frightened religious and national converts. Finally, many of the senior prelates most responsible, if only by implication and omission, for the persecutions of non-Catholics – for example, Bishop Antun Akšamović or Bishop Ivan Šarić – escaped justice for their callous and unchristian conduct during the existence of the NDH. This absence of justice only compounded the pain of the victims who struggled to recover both psychologically and spiritually in an atmosphere of impunity in which some of the most culpable individual clerics continued to live, work and, in the case of Akšamović, retain influence and position under the new socialist authorities as if nothing had happened.

While a central aim of this article was to highlight and unpack the brutal and cruel reality of everyday existence for non-Catholics (and, in many cases, non-Croats) in an ideologically nationalist and Catholic state, it would be naïve to think that it could, overnight, change the dominant apologetic narrative in Croatian historiography and public discourse concerning the role of the Catholic Church in the persecution of non-Catholics and non-Croats. Still, it would be encouraging to think that it could at least contribute to a more scholarly, empirical, and, above all, victim-centered debate about the role of religion and especially Catholicism in the NDH in the future.

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