Archbishop Stepinac Reconsidered*

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On 28 September 1946, Archbishop Stepinac of Zagreb, the leading Catholic prelate of Yugoslavia, was brought to trial by the new communist government of Yugoslavia, the Partisans who had taken power at the end of the Second World War, after an occupation and civil strife which were bloody even by the standards of that war. The trial, which was a show trial, roused great interest and concern in the West, and has remained a symbol for a great deal that was controversial in the treatment of the Churches by the Yugoslav communists. But the controversy is not only one between Christians and Marxists. Even now, 30 years later, Stepinac is still for many Serbian Orthodox the symbol of the virtual destruction of the Serbian Orthodox Church on the territory of Independent Croatia during the war. On the other hand many Croatian Catholics consider him to be a saint. His tomb in Zagreb Cathedral is a shrine and a requiem mass is said yearly on the anniversary of his death. Recently the Archbishop of Zagreb called urgently for the whole story to be told: it was a monstrous injustice, he said, for a man to be condemned while the evidence in his favour was suppressed. So perhaps it is time to have a fresh look at this controversial figure.

Before attempting to evaluate the available evidence and describe the influence which his trial and subsequent imprisonment had on relations between the Catholic Church and the State until his death in 1960, it is important to look at his earlier life so that he can be seen in the context of his time.

During the First World War he had been taken prisoner by the Italians while fighting in the Austrian Army, and, like many Croats, had volunteered to fight for the Allies on the Salonika front. After studying in Rome for seven years and being ordained, he returned to Zagreb in 1930 and was appointed master of ceremonies to the elderly Archbishop Bauer. When the time came in 1934 to look for an eventual successor to Bauer, Stepinac, because of his war record, was the only available candidate

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who, it was thought, would be acceptable to the King. To his utter dismay he was appointed bishop coadjutor with right of succession to the largest archdiocese in Europe – a man of 36 who had never been a parish priest and who had the gravest doubts about his own fitness for the post. Two and a half years later in 1937 Bauer died and Stepinac became Archbishop of Zagreb, and as such President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference in Yugoslavia. He was by this time disillusioned with Serbian rule and the dictatorship, and let it be known that he was voting for Maček and his Peasant Party. When Yugoslavia was invaded by the Axis in 1941 and partitioned he was faced overnight with an independent State of Croatia. His immediate reaction was to welcome it, even though it came into being under the wing of the Nazis and the Italians. But the tone of his welcome, which was published in the semi-official *Katolički List*, was lyrical and fatally ill-judged:

> ... the times are such that it is no longer the tongue which speaks but the blood, by its secret union with the soil, in which we have glimpsed the light of God, and with the people from which we spring ... it is easy to see the hand of God at work.

He gave the new leaders the benefit of the doubt, although the welcome contained a veiled warning and concluded with a quotation from scripture: "Verbum dei non est alligatum (the word of God is not bound)" (2 Tim. 2:9).

The terrible events which took place in Croatia from that time till the end of the war were certainly unimaginable when Stepinac wrote those words, whatever he may have feared. What these events were and how he reacted to them is described below in the account of his trial, which took place 15 months after the defeat of the Axis in May 1945.

When the Partisans entered Zagreb in 1945 Stepinac was immediately taken into preventive custody for three weeks. During this time he saw Bakarić, the Croatian leader, and had a long interview with Tito which convinced him that the Partisans wanted the Catholic Church to break with Rome and form a national Catholic Church. However, when Bakarič later stated that this was not so. Stepinac accepted his denial. But the new authorities certainly did want a Catholic Church which put the brotherhood and unity of the Slav people first, and allegiance to the Vatican, which they believed was pro-Italian, second. They were not prepared to compromise about this which was vital to them, but they were at the time prepared to be conciliatory in general.

Real pressure on Stepinac started in the autumn of 1945 when the provisional government set up by the Allies was disintegrating and the communists were preparing for elections for a Constituent Assembly which would confirm their legitimacy. It was at this moment, in September 1945, that the Bishops' Conference issued a pastoral letter strongly

attacking the new regime, the trials, the killing of many priests, the law on agrarian reform which had confiscated the majority of the Church's lands, the confiscation of seminaries, the appropriation of the Church's charitable foundations and the virtual suppression of the Catholic press. They complained that religious education was restricted and that civil marriage and the registration of births were compulsory before religious ceremonies. They condemned all ideologies and social systems not based on Christian revelation but on the "shallow foundations of materialist, atheist philosophy, and rejoiced in the awakening religious spirit shown among the faithful by the lively devotion to the Mother of God and the great number of pilgrimages to her shrines". In conclusion the bishops summarized their demands to the government: complete freedom for the Catholic press and Catholic charitable works, full freedom for inalienable personal rights, full respect for Christian marriage, the return of every confiscated institution. This letter was accompanied by a circular to the clergy alone which was couched in even more uncompromising language, and showed that the Church's claims were as far-reaching as the Party's and quite as absolute. The circular attacked the whole basis of the government's reforms and the separation of Church and State, rejected lay education and demanded religious education as a sacred right, rejected the right of the State to expropriate property arbitrarily and stated baldly that this was a sin which canon law punished by excommunication. At the same time the bishops wrote to Tito setting out their complaints and demands.

Tito was deeply angered. In a statement which appeared on the front pages of all the press he asked why the bishops had never issued a pastoral letter against the terrible killing of Serbs in Croatia during the war, and why they were spreading hatred at a time when everyone ought to be helping to heal the wounds of the war. If the bishops now said that they were ready to sacrifice themselves to defend the Church, they must have been silent under the *ustaše** not from terror but because they supported them – a telling point.

This anger was fuelled by other difficulties. The Yugoslav frontier with Italy was under dispute, and it rankled that the dispute was with a former enemy and occupier who now appeared to be supported by the western powers. The authorities had just caught and executed one of their chief enemies, the Serbian Četnik leader, Draza Mihailović, and with the need always to balance attacks or favours equally between Serbs and Croats (which continues to be characteristic of the Yugoslav government today)

* *ustaše*: extreme Croatian nationalists under the leadership of Ante Pavelić, many of whom went into exile to Italy and Hungary during the dictatorship of King Alexander and were responsible together with Macedonian nationalists, for the murder of the King in 1934. They returned to Yugoslavia in 1941 with the invading Italian and German forces to assume power in the Independent State of Croatia, set up under German and Italian protection. Also *ustaša* adj., from *ustanak* – an uprising.

they knew that they must take some corresponding action against a leading Croat. Three of his fellow bishops had fled without permission with the retreating *ustaša* and other enemy forces (and had never afterwards been received at the Vatican) but Stepinac had remained, inflexible, incorruptible and courageous, always a possible rallying point for the opposition. Tito had indicated privately to the Vatican that he would like them to withdraw stepinac and had warned the western powers, through the *New York Times* correspondent, that if Stepinac did not withdraw he would have to be arrested. But nothing except a direct order from the Pope would have shifted Stepinac. He had strong ideas about the duties of a bishop and the Vatican had given him liberty to act as he saw fit. The government decided – and there are indications that it was with some hesitation and in the end rather hastily – that he would have to be brought to trial, and pulled him in to a trial which had already begun after he had been implicated in the evidence. There is no doubt that virtually all Serbs, especially the Serbian Orthodox Church which had suffered so terribly under the *ustaša* regime, believed implicitly at that time in his guilt.

Immediately after the war a number of other trials involving the clergy had taken place. These were not show trials but deadly serious, ruthless retribution meted out in the flush of victory after a bloody, merciless war against all who had collaborated either ideologically or practically with the *ustaše*, and were certainly supported by most Serbs, especially the Serbian Orthodox Church. But the trial of Stepinac and his fellow-accused was one of the first of the big show trials which were staged like morality plays and had a definite political purpose. In the words of the Public Prosecutor they were "to unmask before the world a concerted conspiracy by the western imperialist powers against the new Yugoslavia, together with the remnants of the reactionary forces which had fought against the progressive forces of the people through the four years of the war and had continued their struggle after 1945".

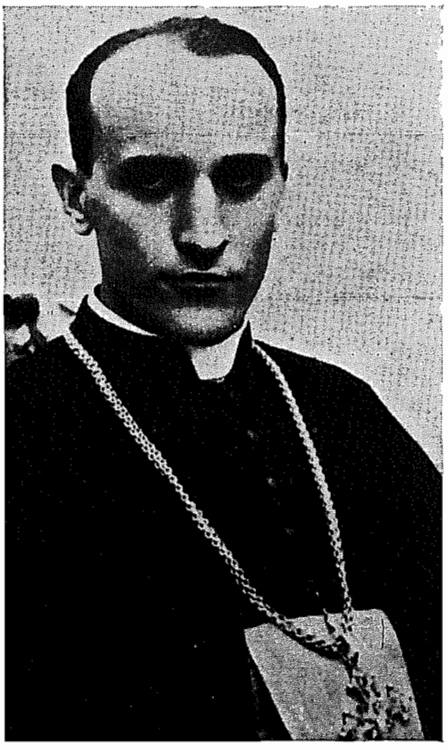
He was arrested on 18 September 1946 and ten days later joined 18 other accused, including some priests, whose trial had opened on 9 September. Nothing about his bearing suggested that he had been ill-treated, and when he did defend himself – for much of the time he refused to answer the court's questions – he did so vigorously.

He was accused of having controlled and supported the fascist line of the Catholic press during the war; of having been the president of various Catholic organizations which had "become the heart and centre of *ustašism*"; of having conspired with the *ustaša* leaders and with Maček, the head of the Peasant Party (the latter had lived in Zagreb in detention during the war) to invite an Anglo-American occupation of the country after the war to overthrow the Partisan forces; of having made many anti-communist speeches during the war, and after the war of having encouraged *ustaša* resistance and given shelter and encouragement to their

fighters. In particular he was accused of welcoming the *ustaša* leaders in 1941 and encouraging his clergy to co-operate with them; of having been present as head of the Church on official occasions and of having said masses at the anniversary of the foundation of the Independent State of Croatia. As military vicar he had appointed two deputies who were well-known for their *ustaša* sympathies. He had been responsible for a pastoral letter, issued in March 1945, which was written at the behest of the *ustaša* government and originally drafted by an *ustaša* official, to bolster support for them. And in the final days of the war he had received and hidden the archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which later proved also to contain items of gold pilfered from prisoners in the concentration camps. Above all he was held to be morally and directly responsible for the forced conversions of Orthodox Serbs to Catholicism, which had been undertaken by the *ustaša* government.

He had of course paid courtesy calls on Kvaternik, the military commander, and on Pavelić, the *ustaša* leader as soon as they arrived. This could be considered normal for the head of the Catholic Church. But the tone of his welcome to the new authorities could have left the clergy in no doubt that they were expected to accept them and cooperate with them. His lawyer defended him convincingly on a number of other accusations: he showed that Stepinac's control over the rigorously censored press had been largely formal (and this was later confirmed to the writer by someone who was close to the events); that he had no control outside his own diocese, or over publications belonging to religious orders. He was formally president of all the Catholic organizations but he took no part in their day-to-day running. When he was appointed military vicar the two deputies had already been appointed and it would have been virtually impossible for him to remove them. He had refused to accept the leadership of the government after the war, but had called on Maček, who was in forced residence, to urge him to take over. He had accepted the *ustaša* archives without examining them, and handed them over to the Partisans who gave him a receipt for them. The *ustaša* chief of police, Lisak (also on trial), who had escaped to Austria at the end of the war and then secretly returned to Zagreb, had come to the palace to see him but he had gained admittance in disguise and without Stepinac's previous knowledge, although his secretary had recognized Lisak when he admitted him and took him to Stepinac. Stepinac had listened to Lisak without comment, asked him to return the next day and then told his secretary to deal with the matter himself as he did not wish to see Lisak again, and he cautioned him about receiving this sort of visitor.*

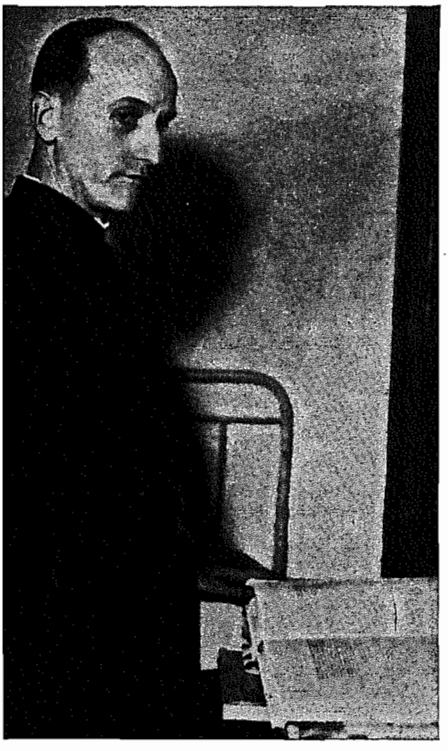
* There is no space to present the evidence about the comings and goings around the archbishop's palace, but as the trial proceeded the mediocre quality of the men around Stepinac who were on trial with him became very obvious. They were not villains but all too often third-rate individuals with minds full of romantic notions and with little judgement or common sense.



(*Above left*) Archbishop Stepinac of Zagreb, once the leading Catholic prelate of Yugoslavia, photographed before the war. The circumstances surrounding his trial in 1946 are examined in an article on pp. 76-88.

(*Below left*) Archbishop Stepinac at his trial in 1946.

(*Below right*) Archbishop Stepinac in prison.



(*Left*) Dr Albrecht Schönherr, Bishop of Berlin and Primate of East Germany (*left*), at Westminster with the Rev. Paul Oestreicher on Remembrance Sunday 1972. Recent discussions between Bishop Schönherr and Party Secretary Erich Honnecker have led to a new agreement between Church and State, writes Paul Oestreicher (see p. 95).

(*Below*) Bishop Schönherr in Erfurt Roman Catholic Cathedral (May 1974) during the then Archbishop of Canterbury's visit to East Germany.

(*Bottom left to right*) Bishop Krusche of Magdeburg (*second from left*); Bishop Michael Ramsey (then Archbishop of Canterbury); the Roman Catholic Bishop of Erfurt; Bishop Schönherr.

On the other hand, the pastoral letter of March 1945, issued in the last days of the war when defeat was certain, was a virulently anti-communist document, urging the faithful to stand firm against the forces of anti-Christ. It showed what was not in doubt, that Stepinac and the bishops who had signed the letter (only a handful, since others had not been able to travel to Zagreb) were anti-communist and feared a Partisan victory.

Much the most serious of the accusations concerned the forced conversions of the Serbian Orthodox population to Catholicism. It was during this part of the trial that Stepinac seemed most uncertain of himself. The conflict between the Croatian Catholic and the Serbian Orthodox Churches was historic, and both proselytized. The Catholic Church did so more openly and aggressively than the Orthodox, especially in Bosnia Hercegovina which had a mixed Catholic, Muslim and Orthodox population. The Orthodox Church proceeded by subtler political and social pressures. The defeat of Yugoslavia in 1941 and its fragmentation, the disappearance of the hated rule of Belgrade and the fiercely Catholic power which was installed in Zagreb, must have seemed a heaven-sent opportunity. There is no doubt that the Catholic bishops welcomed in principle the prospect of thousands of converts, Serbs living on the territory of independent Croatia who would be brought freely to see the error of their ways and welcomed back to the waiting arms of the true Church. This was joined to the strongest political motives for turning Orthodox into Catholics – they would then "count" as Croats not Serbs, and the weight of the numerical balance would be shifted from Serbs to Croats in Bosnia Hercegovina and the Croatian borderlands. As we shall see, the bishops shared this attitude. It is even more clear that the motives were political when one looks at the *ustaša* attitude to the Slav Muslims of Bosnia Hercegovina. They regarded them as Croat by origin, and their long-standing hostility to the Serbs could be exploited. They announced that Croatia was to be a land of two religions, Catholicism and Islam.

As soon as the government proclaimed its intentions, Stepinac and the other bishops announced that conversions were the business of the Church and not the State and gave the clergy rules to regulate conversions. He, certainly, and in varying degree all the hierarchy with one possible exception, wanted these to be carried out without undue pressure and as far as possible voluntarily. But the *ustaša* authorities were determined to keep the conversions in their own hands and assumed complete control from the beginning. They enlisted the co-operation of a certain number of parish priests and carried out forced mass baptisms, sometimes of whole villages, which were accompanied in many cases by savage cruelty and the slaughter of all those who refused re-baptism and sometimes even after they had acquiesced. It is also true that in some cases Orthodox believers clamoured to be admitted to the Catholic

Church in order to save their lives, and that some Catholic priests, against the ruling of the bishops, mercifully baptized them wholesale.

The weight of the moral case against Stepinac depends largely on his attitude to these events which took place for the most part in the spring and summer and early autumn of 1941, and his attitude to the anti-Serbianism and anti-semitism of the *ustaše*. As soon as Stepinac could bring himself to believe what was happening, and even more difficult to credit, that the highest authorities approved, he began sending protests to Pavelić, at first courteous and restrained but with growing indignation and forcefulness. For the best part of a year these protests were private, but he reported to Pavelić the horrifying accounts he was receiving, especially from Bishop Mišić of Mostar, who was not only genuinely appalled by what was happening but was wringing his hands in despair at the criminal stupidity of the authorities whose brutality was ruining a heaven-sent opportunity. Bishop Mišić had already instructed his priests to tell their congregations from the pulpit that those who murdered, or who misappropriated the possessions of others would not be granted absolution, and he wrote to Stepinac:

> At one time it seemed that a large number of schismatics would be converted to the Catholic Church. However [the *ustaša* officials] have abused their positions with the result that a reign of terror has come to pass.

He then went on to describe in detail this reign of terror, adding that a deputation of Serbs in Rome had begged for Mussolini's protection, with the result that the Italians re-occupied Hercegovina, the Serbian Orthodox priests came out of hiding and "the schismatic churches" came to life again under Italian protection. Bishop Mišić pointed out:

> If the Lord had given the authorities more understanding to handle the conversions with skill and intelligence ... the number of Catholics would have grown by at least 500,000–600,000, and thus in Bosnia Hercegovina we would have moved from the present number of 700,000 to 1,300,000.

and he continued:

> This can serve neither the Holy Catholic cause nor the Croatian cause ... we might have emerged into a majority in Bosnia Hercegovina and instead of coveting favours from others be able to dispense them ourselves ... in the interests of Croatia and the Church ... I say that we must do all in our power to prevent these disastrous consequences.

The ambiguous attitude of the Church to the whole question of forced conversions could not be put more plainly than by this well-meaning and ineffectual old man, who in fact died before the end of the war. It

helps to throw light on the uncertain tone which crept into Stepinac's answers during his cross-examination on this subject. He felt that he had done all he could to control events and that this had been patently ineffective, and he knew that several priests had taken part in the slaughter. He had protested privately all during the summer and autumn of 1941, and had written a long and forceful letter documenting all these charges and urging Pavelić to intervene. He told him that he had set up a small committee, consisting of himself and two other bishops, to regulate the manner of the conversions and was prepared to work in agreement with the Minister concerned. But there was never a chance that the *ustaše* would relinquish control, and the committee never met. From May 1942 he attacked the actions of the government in sermon after sermon, not only the forcible conversions but the anti-semitism and anti-Serbianism of the regime, the taking and shooting of hostages and the forcible breaking-up of Jewish-Gentile marriages, and he wrote bitterly to Pavelić about the conditions in the concentration camps, particularly the one at Jasenovac. He made repeated private interventions in individual cases, he refused to allow converted Jews to wear the yellow star in church, and he forbad military chaplains to administer the *ustaša* oath if a crossed dagger and revolver were lying in front of the crucifix. Eventually he arranged for about 7,000 children, who were either orphans or had lost their families, to be accepted into Catholic homes, but forbad the clergy to baptize them into the Catholic Church. The *ustaša* authorities were furious with him, Pavelić detested him and according to Fr Masucci, secretary of the Vatican representative in Zagreb, asked the Vatican on three occasions to withdraw him. His friend Ivan Meštrović the sculptor, who met him in Rome during one of Stepinac's visits to the Vatican, wrote later in his memoirs that Stepinac told him that he expected to be killed either by the *ustaše* or the communists.

But much as he hated the excesses of the *ustaše* he was anti-communist without any reservations in the style of Pope Pius XII. There is a difference in tone between his protests to Pavelić, when he was chiding an erring member of his own flock, and after the war to Tito and Bakarić. Then he could lay aside all inner reservations and ambiguities and face an enemy he recognized, against whom all the sacred prerogatives and rights of the Church must be defended. There is also some evidence to suggest that he and his advisers believed that the best way of dealing with the Partisans was to be absolutely unyielding. And yet he was human enough to be touched by the charm which Marshal Tito, who wanted in the early days to avoid a showdown with the Church, must have exercised. He told a Catholic layman, who years later repeated it to the writer, that after Maček, Tito was the most attractive political figure he had encountered in Yugoslavia.

He refused coldly during his trial to answer many of the prosecutor's

questions, but he made a vigorous speech at the end in his own defence. The court had appointed two distinguished advocates – Dr Politeo and Dr Katičić – to defend him, but then hampered them in their defence. They were only allowed to see Stepinac for an hour before the trial and many witnesses and documents were disallowed. Politeo's defence was skilful: he did not align himself with Stepinac against the court but spoke as a loyal citizen of the new Yugoslavia, and then went on to show that quite different assumptions could be drawn from the evidence brought against Stepinac. In particular he argued that Stepinac could not be held personally responsible for the crimes of the *ustaše*, which he did not try to gloss over. The trial, indeed, had been punctuated by groups of Serbian witnesses who had either themselves witnessed or been victims of the atrocities and who, one after another, told their dreadful stories.

The verdict was a foregone conclusion and the only relief was that the sentence was not much heavier. Stepinac was condemned to 16 years imprisonment, but was released after five years and sent to live in forced residence in his native parish of Krašić, where he spent the remaining years of his life with Fr Vraneković, the parish priest. In prison Stepinac was isolated from other prisoners, but two canons from the cathedral who were also serving sentences were allowed to be with him. He had a cell to himself and the next-door cell was furnished as a chapel where he said mass every day; he was allowed all the books he asked for and he gave a number of interviews to journalists.

Stepinac's trial and imprisonment set the tone of relations between the Catholic Church and the authorities, the Vatican and the new Yugoslav State until his death 14 years later. For several years after the trial the government tried to force the bishops to negotiate directly with them instead of through the Vatican, and in particular to recognize the officially sponsored priests' associations. The Church stood firm against all pressure – their resistance reinforced by private exhortations from the Vatican – until the government at last recognized that it must negotiate with the Vatican. In the meantime the Church refused to co-operate with the government and to comment officially on the draft law of 1953 on the legal status of religious communities.

Matters came to a head late in 1952 when the Pope appointed Stepinac cardinal. The Yugoslav government was very angry, considering such an appointment a deliberate insult and proof of Vatican support for Italy in the struggle over Trieste. The government at once severed diplomatic relations with the Vatican (which had been conducted by *chargés d'affaires* since the war) and these were not resumed until 14 years later in 1966 when an agreement was signed and diplomatic representatives exchanged. Stepinac's elevation to cardinal might have been an opportunity to invite him to Rome to receive his hat, but as soon as he heard the news he made it clear, in a statement to a journalist, that he would

never leave his diocese unless the Pope directly ordered him to do so, and this effectively tied the Vatican's hands.

During his period in Krašić Stepinac's health deteriorated. His doctors advised that he should be removed to a warmer climate and Tito, who had no wish to have an ailing martyr on his hands, let it be known that he would allow him to be transferred to the south. But Tito insisted that Stepinac must make the request himself since he did not wish to be blamed should something go wrong. Stepinac on his side refused to ask a single favour from the authorities, and knew moreover that once he left his diocese he would never be allowed to return. So he was determined not to leave of his own free will.

He must have been an exasperating prisoner and he was becoming an inconvenient one. The severing of diplomatic relations with the Vatican coincided with the climax of the struggle between the bishops and the government. But then followed a quieter period during which relations developed slowly and away from the public gaze, and oppression began to lighten. It was becoming clear to the government that neither the Church in Yugoslavia nor the Vatican was responding to violent methods, and that Yugoslavia's reputation in the West, a matter of increasing concern to her, was being seriously harmed. The Law on the Legal Status of Religious Communities was passed in 1953, codifying the constitutional provisions for the separation of Church and State and the guarantees of freedom of religious belief and practice. The Church began to take heart and even occasionally to stand on its rights and to perceive that it was possible to obtain justice under the law. Tito made a widely reported speech at Ruma in 1953 in which he deplored violence against priests: "excesses have taken place which ought not to happen in a socialist country like ours – this is illegal and we demand that the law be respected in our country".

At the end of 1959 Stepinac received a summons from the district court at Osijek to give evidence in a case involving priests and seminarians at Djakovo. His letter refusing to obey the summons was angry and bitter and uncharacteristically self-pitying. Benigar writes, on the authority of Fr Vranekovič, that Stepinac seized on this as an opportunity for telling the authorities exactly what he thought of them. It was his only lapse from the cold dignity which had marked all his exchanges with them. He was by then a very sick man, tormented by a host of physically humiliating ailments which made his life a misery, and a few weeks later, on Wednesday 10 February 1960, he died.

But he still posed a problem for the authorities: if they allowed the funeral to take place in the cathedral at Zagreb they feared the effect of the demonstrations which this might provoke; but if the funeral was held privately at Krašić, the Catholic population would be offended and still might demonstrate. At first it was decided that it should take place in the

parish church at Krašić after an official autopsy (to clear the authorities of any possible imputation of blame for his death). Bishops assembled from all over Yugoslavia and to the dismay of the authorities many people gathered spontaneously for a pilgrimage on foot to Krašić. Then there was a sudden change of plan which must have originated from the highest authority. On Friday the cathedral authorities were informed that the funeral would take place in Zagreb the following day with all the honours due to a cardinal-archbishop. The Zagreb churches put out black hangings, the bells tolled and all night long a procession filed past the open coffin. Next morning the cathedral was packed for the requiem mass; there was a huge overflow into the square outside, and a number of representatives of foreign consulates were present to see the coffin lowered into a tomb behind the high altar.

Pope John, like Pius XII, had ignored the bishops who had fled without permission from their dioceses. But he did Stepinac the unusual honour of celebrating a special papal requiem mass in St Peter's during which he acknowledged the gesture of the Yugoslav authorities in allowing the funeral, and ended by putting Yugoslavia under the special heavenly protection of the late cardinal.

But Tito's gesture also had its effect. Ten years after the event a Catholic dignitary in Ljubljana told the writer that the permission given for Stepinac's funeral to be held in the cathedral had made a profound impression on him at the time. It had awakened in him hope of better times to come, and, he added, he now saw it as one of the crucial turning points in the relations between the Yugoslav government and the Catholic Church. For the Orthodox Serbs, however, it was a puzzling and unwelcome "posthumous rehabilitation".

So what is to be made of this man, thrust almost by accident into a position where his responsibilities became suddenly so much greater than he or anyone else could have anticipated. His first and deepest loyalty was to the Church, and this was centred for him in the Vatican and in the person of the Pope. He was in many ways a typical son of the Church in Croatia of that time, fervidly pious, narrow and dogmatic, believing, in his own words, that "Jews, freemasons and communists" were "the worst enemies of the Church", and that the Orthodox Serbs, the schismatics must whenever possible be brought back to the true Church. This was coupled not only with great courage, but with social concern and charity, especially when he was confronted with individual cases; he was a good pastor and felt close to his people. The impression he makes is also, unexpectedly, one of simplicity and personal modesty. He was conscious of the dignity and weight of his office but never of himself. His courage, which was always great, increased as the pressures on him grew heavier and in the end could be described as heroic; this and his devotion to duty made flight or even withdrawal from his diocese un-

thinkable. But his political short-sightedness limited his grasp of the apocalyptic events of 1941 to the immediate future of Croatia and the Catholic Church in Croatia, and this left him open to the charge of complicity in the terrible crimes of the *ustaše*. The same blinkered outlook kept him from establishing some kind of *modus vivendi* with the new government immediately after the war.

There was also another side to the man. Nearly everyone who came into contact with him (with the exception of most of the journalists who interviewed him during his imprisonment, who were chilled by his mask of cold formality) held him in esteem and affection. His personal life was ascetic; the numbers of dinners and receptions at the palace diminished sharply under his rule and some of his clergy referred to him privately as "the Bolshevik archbishop". He spent very little on himself and gave the rest at once to the poor. He left nothing but a few personal possessions at his death, and those, his ring, a cross given to him by the Pope, he left to the cathedral for his successors.

The terrible times in which he was fated to play a part called for a moral and spiritual giant, and he did not quite measure up to them. During his trial, his imprisonment and growing ill-health, his bearing was courageous and undeviating, but the martyrdom which he would have accepted without complaint was denied to him by the Yugoslav authorities, who handled him with considerable care.

Stepinac's dogmatic faith, which made it natural for him (and for most other Croat Catholics of the time) to think of the Orthodox as schismatics to be brought back to the fold of the only true Church, was soon to be left behind by a Church moving, with the Second Vatican Council, into a new age. And happily for Yugoslavia its rulers were almost simultaneously discarding their Stalinist past and taking the first, hesitating steps towards decentralization, liberalization and a loosening of the old rigidities.

Yet his inflexibility served a purpose. The Catholic Church in Croatia was traditionalist, authoritarian and even at that time old-fashioned. It had been severely shocked by the blows of the immediate postwar years, the change in its economic circumstances and the growing realization that the new government had come to stay. An accommodation reached when it was in this condition would have proceeded from weakness and might well have led to further demoralization. The Church needed time to recover from its wounds and begin to reconsider its position. The 15 years of withdrawal were also a time of slow renewal. Stepinac's uncompromising bearing and his refusal to yield an inch on any side, gave the Church the moral backbone which it needed to help it to recover. In this respect, perhaps fortunately, he did not outlive his usefulness, and after his death the Church in Croatia emerged able to undertake a self-respecting relationship with the government without sacrificing its Christian fundamentals.

NOTE ON SOURCES

1 *Sudjenje Lisaku, Stepincu, Šaliću i Druzini* (The Trial of Lisak, Stepinac, Šalić and Others): the official account of the trial, with many omissions.

2 *The Case of Cardinal Aloysius Stepinac*, R. Pattee, Milwaukee 1953 (this uses documents released by the Vatican after the trial, including evidence omitted from the official account).

3 *Vjesnik* (Herald) and *Narodni List* (People's Newspaper) Zagreb: official newspapers which reported the trial daily *in extenso*, including evidence omitted from the official account.

4 *Stepinac*, A. Benigar, Rome 1974. A biography by a Franciscan who used the diaries of Fr Vranekovič, the parish priest at Krašić with whom Stepinac spent the last nine years of his life, and to whom he entrusted a full account of his life.

5 B. Petranović, "Aktivnost rimokatoličkog klera protiv sredjivanja prilike u Jugoslaviji: mart 1945 – septembar 1946" (Activity of the Roman Catholic clergy against the normalizing of conditions in Yugoslavia in March 1945 – September 1946) in *Istorija XX Veka Zbornik Radova* (History of the 20th Century Collection of Works) Belgrade, 1963, pp. 263–313. An important source; Patranović had access to Croatian state archives.

A definitive biography of Stepinac must await the release of all the documents concerning him, including the stenographic account of the trial and the four volumes of Stepinac's diary, which were hidden but found and confiscated in 1950. Extracts from these have been quoted in official Yugoslav information publications, but out of context and with no means of verification.

Annual General Meeting

KESTON COLLEGE, 7 OCTOBER 1978

Please put this date in your diary. As in previous years, we intend to have an open day with reports and lectures. The reason for holding a second AGM in 1978 (we had one in January) is that they have always been nine months later than the accounts to which they referred, and we hope to present a more up-to-date picture by bringing the AGM forward by three months. It will be held at roughly this time every year from now on. Further details and the Agenda will be circulated with *RCL* No. 3.