

*Croatian Dominicans and Totalitarian  
Ideologies of the Twentieth Century*

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The history of Croatia in the twentieth century was a very troubled one, for it was subjected to all the prevailing ideologies – Bolshevism, Communism and Marxism – in their various forms, as well as Fascism.<sup>1</sup>

In 1918, Croatia was joined to the newly-created state called the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians, in which – even though it was a parliamentary and constitutional monarchy – real power was in the hands of the Serbs. They maintained control over the state administration, diplomacy, the army and police.

After the occupation of Yugoslavia by Germany and Italy on 10 April 1941, an independent Croatian State was created. It was led by the dictator, Ante Pavelić, who had already aligned himself with Fascist Italy and then with National-Socialist Germany. At first, the creation of an independent state was met with enthusiasm by the Croat people, but after the first racist, Fascist and anti-Semitic laws were promulgated by the regime of Pavelić, the Catholic Church publicly criticised his dictatorship. Cardinal Alois Stepinac, the Archbishop of Zagreb – who was very close to the Zagreb Dominicans – was a courageous critic of the Pavelić dictatorship. From 1941 onwards, he condemned it violently, so that, on several occasions he was threatened with arrest.<sup>2</sup>

At the end of the Second World War, the communists gained power over Croatia, which found itself incorporated into the federal system of the new Yugoslav Communist state with the dictator Tito at its head. His system of government was based on military and police suppression, characteristic of a communist state, and on one party alone, the Communist party. The pastoral letter of the Yugoslav bishops of 20 September 1945 makes clear the situation of the Church in the country: 'The present state of the Catholic Church in Yugoslavia, in our estimation, differs in name only from a state of open persecution'.<sup>3</sup> In their analysis, the bishops highlight that the condemning to death of Catholic priests did not cease with the end of military operations; on the contrary, the number of victims since then had been well over 500.<sup>4</sup>