

## The Most Catholic Country in Europe? Church, State, and Society in Contemporary Croatia

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Croatia is today the most Catholic country in Europe. The voice of the church is being heard well; the church is able to influence the legal order. . . . I do not know of any other country in which society and government pay such attention to what the church has to say, especially about social issues (Jutarnji, 2004).

These were the words of the papal nuncio in Croatia, Archbishop Francisco-Javier Lozano, in an interview with Radio Vatican on 27 July 2004. In a follow-up polemic the ruling Catholic party, the Croatian Democratic Community (*Hrvatska Demokratska zajednica* (HDZ)), sounded triumphant. The HDZ returned to power after a 2003 electoral victory assisted by the church. One of HDZ party leaders, Andrija Hebrang, was glad to hear the nuncio's words but said modestly 'Poland and Ireland remain grand champions of Catholicism; they are probably more Catholic than Croatia' (*Novi list*, 2004a).

Several critical voices, however, dissented from the triumphant mood on the Croatian Catholic right. The writer Drago Pilsel, a former Franciscan liberation theologian born in Argentina, attacked Lozano in his column in the Rijeka daily *Novi list*. According to Pilsel, Lozano, as a member of the ultraconservative organisation *Opus Dei*, favours a country in which the Catholic Church acts as patron to state and society. Pilsel describes Lozano as a hawk from the most conservative church circles, and accuses him of hating the poor, the working people and especially Africa (Pilsel, 2004). Both Pilsel and historian Ivo Banac (in his column in the satirical journal *Feral Tribune*) find Lozano sympathetic to the 'clash of civilisations' thesis which calls for culturally monolithic societies (Banac, 2004). In a similar vein Srdjan Vrcan, the founder of the South Slavic neomarxist school of sociology of religion, argues that Croatia differs from most other predominately Catholic countries of Europe by making Catholicism a state religion and rallying the nation around the church as idealised by conservatives such as Cardinal Ratzinger (now pope Benedict XVI) and Lozano's *Opus Dei* (Vrcan, 2004).

Whatever the nuncio's rationale for declaring Croatia a success story of sorts may be, the Croatian case invites a careful analysis. Previous analyses treated it as a problem of stalling democratic transition and perpetuating the 'Balkan conflict'. Now the nuncio's thesis seems to be revising the dominant negative perspective because the

Catholic Church in general has supported the EU and in particular democratic transitions in the europeanisation of the East. If the church praises a country that the EU routinely criticises and holds on its admission waiting list, does this signify a revision of the church's pro-EU course? More generally, what does the 'Croatian model' entail?

I want to argue that the case of Croatia is intriguing and has wider implications. Recently this country has come to represent an emphatically ethno-sectarian and extreme nationalistic type of Catholicism; while receiving boycotts and reprimands, it has nevertheless always managed also to receive backing from some countries and circles in the Catholic Church. The fact of the matter is, however, that Croatia's current image is a novelty, a product of recent history. In the nineteenth century, as Ivo Banac has pointed out, Croatia stood for something different: a worldly ecumenical type of Catholicism championed among others by Bishop Josip Juraj (Georg) Strossmayer (1815–1905) (Banac, 1984, pp. 82–86). Another time of contradictions in Croatia was the Second World War. Croatia as an ally of the Axis produced its infamous native Catholic 'clerical fascism'; but this very same country at the same historical moment generated Marshal Josip Broz Tito (1892–1980) leading one of the most massive antifascist resistance movements in occupied Europe. After 1989 the late Slav pope John Paul II awarded Croatia two saints, six blessed martyrs, three cardinal's hats, diplomatic recognition of nationhood, diplomatic backing during the war, wartime and postwar assistance in conflict management and relief effort, while all along lobbying for Croatia's admission to the EU. Croatia as an atypical model of eastern transitions also needs to be viewed in the broader context of designing the new Europe (that is, the EU) as a Christian Europe. East-central European Catholic countries were to be carriers of John Paul II's 'new evangelisation' idea. Now that Polish Catholicism, as sociologist José Casanova has recently observed, has apparently lost much of its messianic zeal (Casanova, 2006, pp. 67–71), only Croatia has shown the potential of being a fountainhead of re-evangelisation, although it is not even a EU member (or perhaps *because* it is not a EU member). For the same reason, Ukraine in the northeast is emerging as another potential epicentre of the new evangelisation.

My article is designed as a portrait of a church-national community. It will also provide a survey of major historical and sociological themes and problems in contemporary Croatia as a Catholic country, especially since the end of the 1991–95 war in Croatia and in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

### **The Simultaneous Construction of a Church-National Community**

Croats are old Europeans but Croatia is one of the youngest European nations (Perica, 2005, p. 130). The rise of the Catholic Church to its present-day prominence in Croatian society corresponds with the construction of the Croatian nation. The church was one of the nation's co-founders. The process started under communism in the early 1970s and concluded with the war of 1991–95 (Perica, 2002b). The nation making was completed under the first postcommunist president Franjo Tuđman. Since the 1970s the Catholic Church, in order to emphasise its nation-making role and its part in ethnoconfessional symphony (competing in nationalism with its arch-rival, the Serbian Orthodox Church), has adopted the semi-official title 'Church of the Croats' (*Crkva u Hrvata*). Thus both the nation and the church are to some extent new products. The 'Church of the Croats' label has become a part of the new political jargon and even liturgical discourse accepted by church and government leaders. Tuđman Croatia's 'national-Catholicism' was a reminder of, say, Franco's Spain.

The 'Church of the Croats' was not *de jure* (by the law) a state religion insofar the Constitution proclaimed separation between church and state and did not, like the Constitutions in some other Eastern European countries, mention in the preamble the historic role of the church or the Christian character and culture of the nation. Nonetheless, Croatian Catholicism was a state religion *de facto*.

Croatia's Catholic identity and belonging to western civilisation have become key tenets of the new patriotic ideology. The former Yugoslav communist regime's concept of the 'ideological state' continued at least during the Tudjman era (1990–99), albeit under different symbols. International reports have listed problems such as an inefficient judiciary, wasteful administration, growing corruption in politics and economy, Franjo Tudjman's authoritarian habits and slow reform since his death (see Perica, 2001). Party politics has been by and large a matter of nationalist boasting: the HDZ has claimed to have rescued Croatia from the Serb menace, while the former communists (the Socialist Democratic Party (*Socijaldemokratska partija* (SDP)) have invoked Croatian antifascist traditions of fighting for Croatia against Italians and Germans. In any case, leaders of both major parties have taken good care not to miss Sunday mass at the national cathedral and have shown their patriotism by a pious countenance in the first row facing the altar and the archbishop's pulpit.

Middle- and lower-level cadres of the regime show off their Catholicism as a patriotic duty. For example, Cardinal Stepinac Day is marked in schools, especially those bearing the martyr's name. Teachers take children to a shrine or mass as advised by the local parish priest. Recent pupils' attendance at Mel Gibson's 'The Passion of the Christ' reminded those who remember communism of the mandatory watching of Partisan movies such as 'Battle of the Neretva'. Parents, regardless of their religious conviction, send children to Catholic catechism because most children attend. Some zealous school principals have had 'anti-Catholic' books removed from school libraries.<sup>2</sup> The church remained silent.

Becoming a part of the newly-rich elite seems to have hurt the church's moral authority more than anything else, especially because society has become dramatically impoverished. During the socialist era, Croatia and Slovenia were the most developed Yugoslav republics. Slovenia has gone on comfortably to surpass its GDP in 1989; but the fifteen years of postcommunism have so impoverished Croatia that its economy has failed to reach the level of the late 1980s, which was itself considerably lower than the level of the golden days of the 1970s. In 2004, Croatia's GDP was at 92 per cent of the level in 1989, when communist-era Croatia was in the midst of a long-lasting economic crisis. To make things even worse, Croatia's external debt in 2005 surpassed US\$25 billion – over five billion more than communist Yugoslavia's highest-ever amount of foreign debt. Not all new Croats suffered equally: new elites prospered, and the church – although not comparable to the infamous tycoons – was becoming visibly better off.

The church took the opportunity to rebuild its resources and elevate clerical living standards. Yet new forms of corruption became so obvious that church leaders could not remain silent. Even the archbishop of Zagreb, Josip Cardinal Bozanić, attacked Tudjman's privatisation and for a moment became a hero of the liberal Croatia. In a homily he introduced the now established concept of the 'sin of the (power) structures'. Liberal priests such as Zvonimir Bono-Šagi and Ivan Grubišić, among others, called Tudjman's privatisation both immoral and harmful to the ideal of national renewal and social integration. The theologian Bono-Šagi insisted that what was earlier under communism called 'social property' belonged to the working people, including desperately poor people in retirement, who had created this wealth; they should not be deprived of it or forced to buy what they already owned (Bono-Šagi, 2005).

In spite of critical remarks even from within the church itself, clerical privileges remained evident. Clergy received state salaries and benefits. In 2003 the church asked for about €100-million worth of property restitution. The ex-communist Ivica Račan and his cabinet returned about 13 per cent of nationalised property to the church, which has so far received about 30 per cent of the property it claimed (*Slobodna Dalmacija*, 2004b). According to research by one newspaper on clerical living standards in 2004, the church receives annually 160–180 million *kuna*<sup>3</sup> from the state budget (*Novi list*, 2004c). According to the same source, in 2004 the best-paid Catholic clerics served in the Zagreb archdiocese, where a bishop's basic monthly salary was around 9000 *kuna* plus some additional earnings for various pastoral services (visitations, honorariums and fees for confirmations, for example) and that of an ordinary parish priest 4000 *kuna* plus some similar additional earnings (fees for funerals and weddings and for benedictions connected with local customs and traditions, for example) (*Novi list*, 2004c). Anticlericalists and liberals often exaggerate the church's wealth, but the clerical profession is in fact one of the most prestigious in society. The church's wealth continues to grow: according to *Novi list*, in 2005 the national Catholic Church was listed among the five wealthiest corporations in Croatia, next to oil and communications companies (Jakovljević, 2005).

1998 was a year of triumph: John Paul II visited Croatia, symbolically legitimised the Tudjman regime, secured ratification of a set of treaties between Croatia and the Holy See concerning the status of the church, and beatified Cardinal Alojzije Stepinac (1899–1960) who was archbishop of Zagreb in the Second World War and later jailed by the communists for alleged collaboration with the pro-Axis Ustaša regime and sabotage against the new government. The treaties between Croatia and the Holy See regulate issues such as pastoral care for Catholics in the Croatian armed and police forces, legal and economic issues concerning the Holy See and Croatia, and cooperation between church and state in the domains of culture and education (Ugovor, 1997; Ugovor, 1998). Croatian liberals and many foreign observers of Croatian affairs have criticised the treaties as establishing a monopoly for the Catholic Church and violating the principle of separation of church and state. One of the most often criticised provisions is in the 1996 treaty on cooperation in education and culture. It states that the public educational system in preschool, elementary, middle and higher education will consider and apply principles of Christian ethics. The critics say that this amounts to discrimination against non-Christians and non-believers. On the basis of this treaty, the Catholic catechism was introduced into state schools and Croatian taxpayers were required to fund Catholicism regardless of their personal preferences. Meanwhile the military vicariate and police chaplains also received state funding, as do church-run social services: all of this could be interpreted as missionary work and proselytising (Vrcan, 2001). The situation has been somewhat rectified with the 2002 Law on the Legal Status of Religious Communities (*Zakon o pravnom položaju vjerskih zajednica*). Under this law the government signed treaties with several non-Catholic faiths. Discrimination against non-believers has continued, however; and another restrictive feature of this law targets new cults and smaller religious communities by refusing to register those with fewer than 500 members.

### **Managing the Past**

History is the essence of nationhood, yet, as Ernest Renan insisted more than hundred years ago, 'national' histories are constructed by the manipulation of memory and forgetting: celebrating successes and triumphs and obliterating records of failures and

episodes of shame. Rewriting Croatian and South Slav history has been an important item on the Croatian Catholic Church's nation-building agenda. Ancient and medieval history has been rewritten in accordance with the so-called 'Thirteen Centuries Myth', which constructs a continuity of spiritual and legal links between the Holy See and Croatian leaders ever since the seventh century (Perica, 2005). Recent history has been rewritten so as to balance the stigma of the Second World War pro-Axis Independent State of Croatia with the martyrdom of the church under communism. In the light of this new history, the former Yugoslavia has been portrayed as an anti-Catholic country favouring Orthodox Serbia in its interwar period and under communism imposing atheism and retaining Great-Serbian hegemony. Even the name Yugoslavia has acquired pejorative meaning in the post-1990 discourse: the 'politically correct' name is 'the former state' (*bivša država*). The church also considers it inappropriate to refer to Cardinal Stepinac as a 'controversial churchman'. Cardinal Stepinac is now a blessed martyr and probable future saint, and the Stepinac myth has become one of the founding national patriotic civic myths (Perica, 2005).

It has turned out, however, that the views of ordinary Croatians do not fully conform to this new patriotic ideology. The memory of Croatia's native Second World War hero and Yugoslav communist leader, Tito, saw a revival on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of his death in May 2005. Earlier, in 2004, a poll by a weekly newspaper showed that

Josip Broz Tito, the famed Partisan commander in chief and longtime Yugoslav president, is the greatest Croat in history. This is according to the largest ever public opinion survey held in Croatia, with some 8000 people casting votes; their unambiguous large majority decision favoured Tito . . . . Second place goes to the scientist Nikola Tesla, Croatian-born son of a Serb Orthodox priest (*Nacional*, 2004).

In the church's perspective, Tito nostalgia is partly yet another foreign intrigue and partly the last stand of the defeated domestic communist forces. A more realistic view is that the Tito revival is a form of symbolic popular protest against the new reality. A number of public opinion polls conducted concurrently with the Tito cult revival, several by prime-time popular television shows, revealed that nearly 80 per cent of respondents had allegedly enjoyed better living standards under the Tito regime. New myths about the 'War for the Fatherland' (*Domovinski rat*) of 1991–95 (as Tudjman named it), Croatia's final liberation and the religious revival thus seem to have lost some of their appeal. Tudjman and the HDZ, backed by the church, are widely seen to have exploited the people's ethnic and religious identities and patriotic emotions primarily in order to acquire a privileged elite social status for themselves. The weak left-centre Račan government (2000–03) failed to take advantage of this popular disappointment – in fact, the former communist Račanites tried hard to prove themselves as good Catholic converts and Croatian patriots.

As 'Tito's comeback' has shown, the battle over the past has relevant symbolic dimensions that also include dynamic construction of new churches and the commemoration of nationalist heroes and myths, with the simultaneous destruction of rival symbols such as memorials of the Second World War Partisan antifascist struggle. According to a 2001 article, 'a real explosion of renovation of existing and construction of new churches can be observed in Croatia over the last ten years . . .' (Vijenac, 2001). This new Croatian church architecture has acquired a special name: 'the architecture of "triumphalism"'. The new building for the national military

vicariate in Ksaver district in the capital Zagreb was opened in 2000, inspiring much criticism for lavishness and show of newly acquired church power. The new headquarters of the Croatian Bishops' Conference is under construction at the time of writing, with similar responses from liberal media. In 1998 the archbishop of Split-Makarska, Marin Barišić, had his attractive palace overlooking the harbour renovated. The building used to house the University of Split's Medical School, which was evicted a couple of days before the papal visit (John Paul II's historic Croatian tour included stops in Zagreb and Split). During the pope's visit and his reception in the newly renovated palace, the archbishop ordered the removal of a memorial tablet dedicated to the Italian antifascist battalion 'Garibaldi' which was formed during the September 1943 capitulation of fascist Italy, when Split was held for a short time held by Partisans, and joined Tito's army. According to the archbishop the marble plate with the 'communist red star' would offend the Holy Father.

In the town of Split, early in 2001 there were under construction some twenty places of worship and buildings funded by religious communities. In 2003 the satirical journal *Feral Tribune* initiated voting for 'the ugliest church in our town' (*Feral Tribune*, 2003). As new symbols multiplied, symbols of the old regime were being physically destroyed. Between 3000 and 4000 memorials of the Partisan antifascist struggle in the Second World War were destroyed in the 1990s. Only a few dozen have been rebuilt by veterans' associations. The vandalism typically occurred on major church holy days such as Christmas, Easter and the Assumption of the Virgin Mary. A monument of artistic value, Tito's bronze statue in his native Kumrovec, was dynamited during the night of 26–27 December 2004. At Easter 2005 night attackers demolished an antifascist memorial on the Adriatic isle of Murter. *Slobodna Dalmacija* lamented:

From 1990 to 2000 more than 3000 antifascist Second World War memorials were destroyed by acts of vandalism or in several cases removed by decision of the local administration . . . no perpetrator of vandalism using explosives against memorials was ever found or prosecuted . . . in Dalmatia province, which was liberated from Italian fascists in the Second World War and annexed to Croatia by Croatian Partisans, 50 per cent of all memorials were destroyed (482), and in the wartime Partisan base of Makarska, for example, a hundred per cent of all memorials were destroyed! According to an analysis by Second World War veterans, *The Destruction of Antifascist Monuments in Croatia, 1990–2000* [Hrženjak, 2002–VP] the destruction was planned and systematic. First targeted were memorials commemorating the mass murder of Serbs and Jews by the Ustaše, the executions of prominent Croatian antifascist fighters, and the roles of Tito and the Communist Party in the antifascist liberation struggle. (*Slobodna Dalmacija*, 2004c)

The attackers remained unknown. In retaliation, heirs of the Partisans secretly painted red stars, the hammer and sickle symbol and partisan wartime slogans on public buildings, including churches and new memorials commemorating the Croatian 'War for the Fatherland' of 1991–95. Public protests against the destruction of Partisan memorials and neo-ustashism typically came only from antifascist veterans' associations and the liberal president Stjepan Mesić.

The Croatian far right also aimed for a new perspective on the Independent State of Croatia (*Nezavisna Država Hrvatska* (NDH)) (1941–45). The Ustaša vice-premier

Mile Budak, a published writer and intellectual who took part in designing and signed racial laws and supervised genocidal and ethnic cleansing policies against Serbs, Jews and Gypsies, acquired monuments and streets named after him. Budak was chosen as the main icon in the politics of symbolic reconstruction of ustashism in Croatia since the Ustaša leader Pavelić was too much discredited even for the Croatian far right (Perica, 2004). In August 2004 the HDZ government, hoping to start negotiations for joining the EU, had a memorial to Budak in Lika province removed. The monument had been the brainchild of the parish council in Budak's birthplace, which had raised funds for it. The local bishop Mile Bogović did express church support for government policies aimed at establishing the rule of law in a very general sense, but he also took the opportunity to lecture the public in a TV debate questioning whether genocide ever happened in the Independent State of Croatia and arguing that communist crimes had been minimised and Ustaša crimes magnified (*Slobodna Dalmacija*, 2004a). Some priests directly or indirectly encouraged the destruction of Second World War Partisan memorials in prominent public places or, more often, lobbied for their removal.<sup>4</sup>

Public controversies in Croatia over the legacy of antifascism are reignited annually on an official state holiday, the Day of the Antifascist Struggle (*Dan antifašističke borbe*), 22 June, commemorating the day when a group of Croatian Partisans formed an armed combat unit near the town of Sisak. On one such occasion the journalist Djermano 'Ćiće' Senjanović pointed out that 'Croatia may be almost 85 per cent Catholic, but it is at least 90 per cent antifascist' (Senjanovic, 2006). The church, however, has warned Catholics through bishops' statements and *Glas koncila* editorials not to believe in the communist myth about a 'good antifascism'. For the church in Croatia today there cannot be a 'good antifascism', even though many Catholics took part in the antifascist struggle (some biographers describe Pope John Paul II as an active antifascist), because it served the goal of the communist revolution. The antifascist theme has become a major controversy in contemporary Croatia, in which civil society, the state, the national church and political parties have actively participated (see among other books and articles: Lengel-Krizman, 1980; Melčić, 1994; Caratan, 1995; Giuricin, 1999; Dukovski, 2001, 2003; Goldštajn, 2002; Goldstein, 1996; Begonja, 2003; Vlačić, 2005).

A number of other European countries have also been coping with similar controversies.<sup>5</sup> In Italy, for example, Catholic antifascism is a recognised historical legacy and does not cause national controversy analogous to the Croatian case (see Trionfini, 2004; Campanini, 1987). In Spain, the situation is rather more similar to that of Croatia in terms of unresolved controversy, recently revived by the reparations issue under the Zapatero government (see Raguer, 2001; Sánchez, 1987; Sánchez Recio, 2004). In Croatia, however, the church teaches that antifascism equals communism. The church also plays down the role of Catholic clergy who sided with the Partisans (see Petešić, 1982; Hek, 1990), and the most prominent among them, such as Msgr Svetozar Rittig, are portrayed as naïve Christians deceived by the communists. There is a similar attitude towards theologians who took part in the dialogue with non-believers and non-Catholics after the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s and 1970s. According to *Glas koncila*, the red star should be considered comparable with the swastika and banned from public use under the law that prohibits the public display of certain symbols associated with racial, ethnic and ideological hatred.

The church has met strong opposition to this line of reasoning about the past. As noted earlier, Croatian liberal and antifascist circles commemorate the antifascist

tradition, with particular enthusiasm on the part of President Stjepan Mesić. Independent nongovernmental and human rights associations also protest against the historical revisionism and ‘relativism’ of the church. Zoran Pusić of the Croatian Helsinki Committee for human rights asks how it is that the Catholic Church fights so vehemently against the red star but has never condemned the abuse of the cross by the far right (including terrorist groups and perpetrators of genocide) in the past and today.<sup>6</sup> Pusić has also asked why the church accepted restitution of property confiscated by the NDH from Croatian Jews in the Second World War and transferred into the church’s possession in the Tudjman era. He has received no response.

Partly as a result of the political stance of the Catholic Church from the Second World War to the present day, Croatia has acquired the image of an extremist ethnoreligious country particularly infamous for its ‘clerical fascism’ (Pavelić, n.d.; Clerical, n.d.). The principal culprit is certainly the Ustaša, and there also has been much anti-Croatian and anti-Catholic propaganda from overzealous Orthodox, Protestant and Jewish circles. Nevertheless, the church cannot escape its share of responsibility for Croatia’s poor reputation. A number of fair and informative histories linking ustashism, Catholicism and the Holocaust have been written (see Goldštajn and Goldštajn, 2001; Phayer, 2000; Harran *et al.*, 2000), but the church still remains in denial. In 2004 the Croatian Church press exchanged bitter words with the media giant CNN over a comment about Croatia as a pro-Axis puppet and Cardinal Štapić as a collaborator. To be sure, Croatia is not quite an isolated case. The curious interaction between fascism and religion in eastern Europe during the Second World War is examined with insight by the British historian Roger J. Crampton in his widely used college textbook (Crampton, 1997, pp. 211–31). Recently the phenomenon of religion and fascism in a comparative global perspective was discussed in a special issue of the journal *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* and the Croatian case is included (Eatwell, 2003). In spite of everything, however, the Catholic Church in Croatia apparently sees the solution in forgetting rather than overcoming the past. It exerts pressure within the Croatian educational system in favour of history textbooks with church-approved perspectives on Croatian history. Before the start of the 2005–06 school year the Croatian historian Tvrtko Jakovina complained in several interviews that a commission he directed working on revising school textbooks was under a great deal of pressure concerning recent and contemporary history.

In June 2005 a newspaper columnist wrote as follows:

Last night I watched with some interest a live talk show on the economy. Then it started: a caller attacked the guest expert for wearing a medallion with a five-pointed star. Another caller replied: ‘Under that symbol this country was modernised, and without that red star we would have been like Rwanda today...’. What a militant society we live in! A couple of weeks ago I was in London and I saw students wearing T-shirts with the red star and hammer-and-sickle on them. It’s just fashion! It’s cool! But in Croatia it’s a red rag for the raging bulls of our far right and the church! The Ustaše versus the Partisans! Again and again. At the same time state TV says that the IMF has warned the government about looming bankruptcy! Croatian taxpayers fund 7500 professional politicians paid better than our best scientists! Hard times are in sight – and we still keep on talking about the red star versus the cross! (Ljubičić, 2005)



The Catholic Church in Croatia, then, has been particularly concerned with the construction and management of memory. Its agendas of spiritual awakening and nation-construction have required a suitable past that glorifies success and emphasises Croatia's western European character and its suffering at the hands of 'godless communism'; this has however also involved amnesia about infamous historical episodes. Necessary corrections of communist-era political mythology were, of course, in order; yet it seems that the iconoclastic assault on symbols of Yugoslavism, communism and the history of the Second World War have created a situation of struggle that has continuously plagued Croatian society. In this context the western reader should be mindful of the fact that the Second World War in Yugoslavia saw fratricidal bloodshed induced by the Axis invaders both directly and through domestic collaboration (Tomasevich, 2001, 1975). More than a million people perished, mostly at the hands of the Axis invaders and their collaborators. Retaliatory acts were organised by the Partisan movement, one of largest antifascist movements in Europe, a multiethnic liberation army that fought on the side of the Allies. These acts were especially brutal at the end of the war during the Partisan triumph and the communist revolution. Memorials targeted for destruction in Tudjman's Croatia included memorials to the Partisan movement. Wounds from this period have remained unhealed: there has been no successful 'national reconciliation' among the Croatian people, whose ancestors fought on opposite sides. The church could have contributed to such a reconciliation. Earlier it was prevented by the communists; more recently, however, it has been prevented by its own incapacity for self-criticism and dialogue. Dialogue was the key idea of the Second Vatican Council, cited in many proclamations and documents, but never successfully implemented and established in practice in Croatia.

### **The Nature of Growing Religiosity**

During the 1990s Croatia became one of the most religious countries in Europe.<sup>7</sup> A 1997–98 survey of eleven transitional countries classified them in four categories: 'distinctly Catholic' (Poland, Croatia); 'majority Catholic' (Lithuania, Slovenia, Slovakia, Hungary); 'Eastern Orthodox' (Romania and Ukraine); and 'distinctly secular' (the Czech Republic and former East Germany). According to this survey the highest level of belief in God was found in Poland, Romania and then Croatia (Aračić *et al.*, 2003). Empirical surveys of religiosity in Croatia show that the number of declared Catholics, always high, increased in the 1990s.

As Table 1<sup>8</sup> below shows, great changes occurred in the confessional structure of the population during the seven-year period from 1989 to 1996. The percentage of self-declared Catholics increased from 70 to 90 per cent, while the number of the Orthodox (typically ethnic Serbs) decreased from 10 to 2 per cent. There was also a dramatic decline in the number of nonbelievers and people without religious affiliation: from 18 to 5 per cent. From 1996 to 2004 the population structure remained relatively unchanged. The Catholic majority remained overwhelming, and the only change relative to the 1996 study was an increase in the percentage of Serbian Orthodox, from 2 to 5 per cent. The results also indicate that belonging to the Catholic Church involves not merely worship practices and family tradition but also national identity or even the sense of belonging to a civilisation.

Perhaps the most striking, far-reaching and historical change that has affected Croatia is the decline and near-disappearance of the Orthodox – that is, Serbs – as a result of war, 'ethnic cleansing' and a postwar exodus of more than 200,000 Croatian

**Table 1.** Confessional identity in Croatia (in percentages)

Self-declared identity	Study year		
	1989	1996	2004
Catholics	70	90	90
Serbian Orthodox	10	2	5
Muslims	2	2	1
Other faiths	<1	1	<1
No religion	18	5	4
Total	100	100	100

Orthodox Serbs. According to a the Croatian demographer Vladimir Žerjavić, the 1931 census showed that about 18.9 per cent of the total population in Croatian (Catholic) majority lands such as Croatia, Slavonia and Dalmatia were Serbs. For centuries until 1941 it was customary to reckon that about 20 per cent of the population in the ‘historic Croatian lands’ (Croatia, Dalmatia and Slavonia) was Orthodox – mostly ethnic Serbs and serbianised Arumanians or Vlachs. This figure was reduced during the Second World War, and although it recovered in postwar Yugoslavia it never again reached the 1931 figure. According to 2001 census data, the number of Serbs in the Republic of Croatia (including the provinces of Croatia, Dalmatia, Slavonia and Istria-Primorje) had fallen dramatically, to a mere 1.97 per cent of the total population. The total number of ‘Croatian Serbs’ was 647,137 in 1931, 581,663 according to the census of 1991 and 195,969 according to the census of 2001 (Žerjavić, 1992, p. 249). The media have highlighted the city of Split. Before the Second World War there were more than 40,000 Serbs and Montenegrins (traditionally Orthodox by religion) living in Split; of these some 12,000 declared themselves as members of the Orthodox Church. In 2001, the number of residents of Split who circled ‘Orthodox’ in the census religion box was nine. When this decline in the number of Serbs is viewed in the context of the recent ‘mass Catholicisation’ of the country it appears that, unfortunately, the strategic goal of Axis Croatia has eventually been fulfilled. Oddly enough, today’s Croatia is a novelty. From the time of Slavic settlement in Roman times to the early 1990s Croatia was always a pluralistic society. Major structural changes toward almost complete uniformity took place between the Second World War and the so-called ‘War for the Fatherland’ (1991–95). By the end of the Second World War Croatia had lost most of the significant historic ethnoreligious minorities that had lived side-by-side with Croats for many centuries. Between 40,000 and 60,000 Jews had been killed or expelled by the Ustaše, and up to 200,000 Italians had been expelled or had opted for resettlement. After the 1991–95 war Croatia also lost most of its Serbs: the largest single minority group, whose role in Croatia’s history was so remarkable that the socialist-era Croatian Constitution reasonably defined the Croatian republic and a ‘state of Croats and Serbs and other peoples who live with them’. It seems that neither the government, nor the Croatian intellectual community, nor (especially) the church or the majority of the population, have as yet become aware of the gravity of this loss. Sadly, some even consider it a success, as Tudjman himself described it in 1995. As a matter of fact, it is a devastating loss for such a small country which today has a population of about 4.7 million and a dramatically negative demographic growth rate, endorsing a tendency toward a cultural uniformity that deprives a developing society of much-needed creativity and

energy; not to mention the fact that these losses and sectarian tendencies have left Croatia with very few friends in the community of nations.

As far as religiosity is concerned, some recent studies show another novel trend: an increase in the number of practising believers; that is, those who do not just go to church on Sunday and see their Catholicism as a matter of identity, but who attempt to live up to all that their faith teaches (*Sociologija sela*, 2000). In a survey in the Zagreb region in 2004 nearly 78 per cent of the polled citizens said they were religious, and 40 per cent of the respondents expressed the total acceptance of all that their faith teaches (see Table 2<sup>9</sup>). Rising religiosity was accompanied by a sharp decline in the number of nonreligious, from 34 per cent in 1989 to only 8 per cent in 2004. Although liberal Catholics, non-Catholics and unbelievers resent the growing pressure of religion, this particular survey shows a relatively small, and decreasing, number of opponents of religion. Yet according to another comparative survey of religiosity in several Central European countries published in 2001 by the Slovene sociologist Sergej Flere, Poland and Croatia lead the group of countries in which respondents state that church influence on government policies and society is too strong (Flere, 2001).

Table 3<sup>10</sup> shows that traditional and folk religiosity measures remained high and unchanged from 1996 to 2004. At the same time, the average believer's knowledge of religious teachings and church matters remained poor. According to a survey in 2000, 81 per cent of respondents never or rarely read the Bible. Most faithful trusted the priest and received all information about the faith from church services; less than one per cent said they read the Bible daily. Likewise, most believers knew little about the organisation and history of the church or about ecclesiastical affairs: 90 per cent of respondents, for example, had never heard of the Second Vatican Council

**Table 2.** Religious conviction and attitudes toward religion in Croatia (in percentages)

Religious convictions and attitudes toward religion	Study year		
	1989	1996	2004
Convinced believers	15	36	40
Religious	27	37	38
Unsure	11	8	7
Indifferent	11	6	6
Nonreligious	34	12	8
Opponents of religion	2	1	1
Total	100	100	100

**Table 3.** Traditional religiosity in Croatia (in percentages)

Indicators of traditional religiosity	Study year	
	1996	2004
Baptised persons	95	94
Recipients of first holy communion	86	85
Recipients of confirmation	80	81
Attended catechism classes	87	82

(Marinović-Bobinac, 2000). Theologians and church researchers of religiosity have also made similar findings about ‘theological illiteracy’ (Šagi-Bunić, 1981; Šimunović, 1996). The predominant forms of religiosity in Croatia are Catholicism, commitment and piety as expressions of tradition or cultural and social belonging (Marinović-Bobinac, 2000).

Meanwhile over the transition years there was evident increase in adherence to traditional beliefs (see Table 4<sup>11</sup>).

Explaining these trends in the new Croatian religiosity, sociologist of religion Srdjan Vrcan finds them particularly instructive when compared with those in neighbouring Catholic Slovenia. Slovenia is considered to be one of the most successful eastern European transitional democracies, and was also the only former Yugoslav state to be completely spared from war except for a brief skirmish with the Yugoslav army in spring 1991. Vrcan finds that during the 1990s the number of publicly declared practising Catholics in Slovenia dropped from 73 per cent according to the 1991 census to 58 per cent according to the 2002 census. Partly, Vrcan argues,

this was because of war and ethnic cleansing in Croatia which did not occur in Slovenia, and partly because this revival of Catholicism was caused by the Tudjman regime, which wanted a merger between church and state and made Catholicism the official ideology and weapon against political opponents, Orthodox Serbs and Muslim Bosniaks. (Vrcan, 2003)

#### **Controversies over Abortion, Homosexuality and Other Issues**

The ‘Church of the Croats’ continued the project of building a Catholic nation. In spite of positive religiosity trends, a number of challenges and problems worried the church. The abortion issue topped a lengthy list of the church’s most serious concerns. As early as 1992 the church began lobbying for a law to outlaw abortion completely. The proposed law never reached parliament (the Croatian National Assembly (*Sabor*)). The church even tried to mobilise an ‘interfaith anti-abortion front’, inviting the Serbian Orthodox Church and Islamic Community of Croatia to join the initiative for an anti-abortion law. In 2004 the bishop of Varaždin, Marko Čulej, and the papal nuncio to Croatia, Francisco Javier Lozano, called for the suspension of all laws that allowed any form of abortion. The HDZ provided verbal support but, fearful of alienating many voters, stopped short of bringing the law before parliament. However, some individual HDZ politicians, including the parliamentary chairman Vladimir Šeks, echoed Vatican’s attitudes on abortion in their public appearances.

Before the 2003 parliamentary elections the national Bishops’ Conference urged Catholics not to vote for political parties and candidates tolerant of abortion,

**Table 4.** Acceptance of church beliefs in Croatia (in percentages)

Belief	Study year		
	1989	1996	2004
There is a God	39	75	82
God created man	30	62	
There is life after death	20	49	52
Belief in destiny	62	74	63

euthanasia and same-sex marriages. In his 2004 Assumption Day homily Cardinal Božanić blamed abortion and contraception for Croatia's dramatically negative demographic trends. In a 2004 survey carried out by the University of Zagreb's Institute for Social Research, however, respondents showed a majority sentiment against a complete legal ban on abortion (see Table 5) (see Goldberger, 2005).

Since 2003 the Catholic Church in Croatia has ventured into the wide public promotion of church teachings, policies and documents concerning abortion, contraception, homosexuality, divorce, biogenetics and other topics. Croatian Church leaders have asserted themselves as ardent supporters of John Paul II and Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI). The church has made it clear that the above-mentioned issues should be considered as of the highest priority. Other issues addressed in church documents, such as social justice, peace and conflict, tolerance and

**Table 5.** The abortion issue

Attitudes to abortion	Degree of agreement (percentages)				
	Don't agree at all	Largely disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Largely agree	Completely agree
Abortion should be permitted in case of serious defects of the foetus	8	3	15	19	55
The law should grant the right to decide to the woman	17	7	15	12	49
Abortion should not be regulated by law	26	8	20	9	37
Abortion should be permitted in poor economic circumstances	26	9	22	15	28
Abortion should be permitted if the couple does not want more children	28	9	24	12	27
Abortion should be banned by law because it endangers the woman's life	34	13	18	11	24
Abortion should be banned by law because it is a crime and causes moral disorder	38	14	16	9	23
Abortion should be banned by law	42	11	17	7	23
Abortion should be permitted in the case of an unmarried woman	30	10	26	11	23
Abortion should be banned by law because it threatens the demographic survival of the people	39	13	18	9	21

solidarity, are said to be of secondary importance (Grünfelder, 2003). In the 2003 Croatian bishops' pre-electoral campaign the strongest emphasis was put on abortion, same-sex marriages and homosexuality. The church urged elected representatives to ban homosexual marriages and publicly condemn or possibly outlaw homosexuality. However, according to research data the majority of citizens do not share these views.<sup>12</sup> The outspoken liberal Catholic lay theologian Anna-Maria Grünfelder called Croatia's church leaders 'the best pupils of the Ratzinger school' (Labus, 2000), while another Catholic woman activist from Zagreb, the clinical psychologist Gordana Buljan-Flander, stated in an interview that 'as a Catholic, I hold that the church should not even talk about use of condoms... and once and for all leave homosexuals alone, because their behaviour is totally natural and healthy' (*Slobodna Dalmacija*, 2005b). Other similar issues also sparked controversies. In February 2005 the church launched a public campaign aimed at blocking a law on medically assisted human conception.

Regarding church policies on the role of women in church and society, Anna-Maria Grünfelder has become the bishops' nemesis. She is not alone. Gordana Buljan-Flander from Zagreb and Mirjana Nazor from Split, both practising Catholics, have been equally critical. Grünfelder initiated a seminar for women to study critically the papal encyclical *Mulieris dignitatem*. In her words, this and other similar church documents are founded on a hierarchical concept of gender relations (see for example Grünfelder, 1989). Small wonder that when assessing the role of the church in society the liberal media in Croatia often echo views of such as Buljan-Flander, according to whom the church in Croatia must 'stop wasting its energy on irrelevant issues... let people live, love and have sex with whom they want... [the Church needs to] let society breath freely and stop meddling in everything' (*Slobodna Dalmacija*, 2005b).

### **Factions in the Church: Conservatives, Liberals and Radicals**

Under the new circumstances after 1989 the church itself became relatively more democratic. Not only leaders more often spoke in public on a range of issues, but also various clerical and lay factions emerged in the church and competed with each other through free public debates over various issues concerning the church, society and government. A standard liberal-conservative split would surface over almost every publicly debated issue. The conservative faction in the church includes mostly moderates with some radicals, and there are also liberal and leftist factions.

The right wing in the church used to be vocal during the war and immediately following Tudjman's death, but in recent years has been heard less. Among several right-wing clerics the most outspoken have been the military vicar Juraj Jezerinac and the bishop of Gospić-Senj, Mile Bogović. Bogović, for example, has denounced the UN War Crimes Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia as a 'political court' seeking to blacken Croatia's past. Bogović has also called runaway war crimes suspect General Ante Gotovina 'a symbol of victory'.<sup>13</sup> The archbishop metropolitan of Split-Makarska, Marin Barišić, is remembered for his removal of Second World War antifascist memorials and for his letters of sympathy to families of internationally wanted war crimes suspects. Notorious clerical nationalist extremists such as Vjekoslav Lasić and Luka Prcela draw attention to occasions such as anniversaries of events in the history of the NDH but the two are largely considered obscure figures. A Bosnian priest active in Croatia, Anto Baković, was formerly vocal on the far right. A young priest, Zlatko Sudac, is a rising star on the clerical right; he is a 'charismatic healer' and a favourite public figure of the tabloid magazines. However, the uncrowned king of the radical Catholic nationalist right is still (after all these

years) Živko Kustić from Zagreb, the former longtime editor-in-chief of *Glas koncila*. He is, incidentally, a Greek Catholic rather than a Roman Catholic. From the late 1970s to the present day Kustić has waged media wars against such targets as communism, the Yugoslav state, Serbian nationalism, liberalism, foreign missionaries and the international community critical of Croatia. Kustić's journalistic heirs are the priest Ivan Miklenić, editor-in-chief of *Glas koncila*, and the lay theologian Ivan Ugrin, who is with the conservative minority among the staff of the liberal daily *Slobodna Dalmacija*. Among conservative Catholic scholars, one of the most prolific is the historian Jure Krišto.

It is almost impossible to talk about the Croatian Catholic Right without mentioning the Franciscans of western Herzegovina, even though their major centres are not in Croatia proper and the influence of the notorious 'West Herzegovinian lobby' in Croatia has diminished since Tudjman's demise and is now difficult to assess. However, these Franciscans are indeed prominent among rightist-conservative circles: historically they included key Ustaše supporters and epitomes of extreme Croatian nationalism; they have also been involved in the centuries-old dispute with the Vatican over administration of local parishes; and they are best known world-wide for their association with the miracle of Medjugorje (still officially unrecognised by the church) and rise of the popular shrine at the heartland of the territory they control in defiance of the local bishop.

The Catholic weekly *Glas koncila* (*Voice of the Council*) has been 'not a voice of the [Second Vatican] Council but a voice of the Croatian far right', as Grünfelder once put it. On the battlefield over the recent past, this Catholic paper has commemorated the Bleiburg massacre of 1945, when columns of defeated Croatian troops and refugees were massacred on the Slovene-Austrian border, and has insisted that guilt is to be apportioned equally to the fascist Ustaše and the communist antifascist Partisans. It supports the anti-abortion crusade and attacks foreign missionaries, with a growing number of editorials against globalisation and what it perceives as the gradual takeover of Croatia's natural resources by neoliberal capitalist foreign corporations.

Most of the bishops are moderately conservative. Prominent figures are Cardinal Bozanić and the archbishop of Istria-Primorje, Ivan Devčić. The chairman of the national Bishops' Conference, cardinal archbishop of Zagreb Josip Bozanić, is most often referred to for his 1997 'sin of the structures' public intervention criticising privatisation policies and indicating the responsibility of the government. However, in the view of Grünfelder 'That famous Christmas 1997 statement by Bozanić has been overrated; let me remind you that no action followed his words; nothing happened afterwards, absolutely nothing . . . after "grand programmatic" Christmas, Easter and Assumption Day homilies by bishops usually nothing happens' (*Novi list*, 2004b). In his 2005 Assumption Day homily the cardinal recited numerous ills in society (including abortion, ruthless capitalism, crime, corruption, an inefficient judiciary, incompetent administration and the exodus of the young to wealthy western countries); the liberal media praised him more than the church press, but there was no response from the authorities. To be sure, the cardinal is trying harder than other church leaders to put his words into effect, at least in his own archdiocese. He has managed to curb his own diocesan clergy's showy behaviour in public, spoken against some wealthy believers' lavish lifestyles and called for better social programmes and overall modesty in the church.

Liberal Catholic clerical and lay activists have become influential opinion-makers in Croatia, but their influence on the bishops is rather dubious. It may even be possible to

speak about a 'liberal opposition' in the church insofar as the leadership is largely conservative. Again, there is diversity in the liberal camp itself. Those leaning towards moderate conservatism include, for example, the sociologist of religion Željko Mardešić and a priest from Kotor (Montenegro), Branko Sbutega. In the liberal camp the most outspoken critics are Grünfelder and the historian Ivo Banac. Former national chairman of the Liberal Party and currently a member of parliament, Banac often speaks publicly on current issues, declaring himself a practising Catholic. He insists on his Catholic identity and involvement in the church; even though his Catholicism may be closer to the mainstream nominalism than to the new zealotry, he senses that democratic development in Croatia badly needs a critical and liberal voice coming from the 'Church of the Croats' itself. When Banac criticises bishops he makes sure that the criticism is easily identified as an insider's discontent and patriotic protest rather than something that could be easily rebuffed as 'neocommunism', atheism or anti-Catholicism.

Finally, there is a moderate left (no extreme or radical left can be found in the church, despite claims by the far right). Here the name of Tomislav Janko Šagi-Bunić (1923–99) is outstanding. He was probably the most world-famous Croatian Church historian and theologian and champion of the reforms of the Second Vatican Council. In July 2006, on the occasion of the seventh anniversary of his death, no bishop publicly commemorated him and *Glas koncila* mentioned the occasion only briefly in an obscure note on the last page, provoking protest even from the conservative cleric Živko Kustić. Šagi-Bunić was a member of the theological circle '*Kršćanska sadašnjost*' and one of the most dedicated church reformers inspired by the Second Vatican Council, along with theologians and historians such as Josip Turčinović and Vjekoslav Bajsić. From the 1960s to the mid 1980s the archbishop of Split, Metropolitan Frane Franić, was a liberal, an ardent champion of the Council reforms, pioneering ecumenical dialogue and dialogue with unbelievers and bold approachment with the liberalising Titoist self-management socialism. During the war and in the increasingly troubled postwar world, however, he has turned increasingly conservative. Among left-wing priests in the 1980s and 1990s, Luka Vincetić, a popular village priest and provocative newspaper columnist from a Slavonian parish near Osijek, stood in the first multiparty elections on a reformed communist ticket. The champions of liberal and left-wing Catholicism from the '*Kršćanska sadašnjost*' theological society that was prominent in the two post-Council decades are either deceased or keep a low profile in public life. The leftist Capuchin Zvonimir Bono-Šagi frequently criticises church leaders, right-wing clergy and the HDZ. Bono-Šagi's critique is moral as well as rational. The writer and former Franciscan liberation theologian Drago Pilsel is also a well-known voice of the Catholic left. The sociologist priest Grubišić and his colleagues from the Croatian Academic Association (*Hrvatska akademska udruga*) are primarily concerned with upgrading poorly developed popular spiritual culture. The Franciscan theologian and social critic Špiro Marasović is by no means a man of the left but he frequently speak out against corruption and privilege, as do the theologian Stjepan Baloban, the parish priest Luka Vuco and some others, notably the famous *dobri pastiri* (good shepherds): Franciscans from the Bosnian Province whose influence is felt in Croatia even though their headquarters is now in a foreign country. The liberal Catholic sociologist of religion Željko Mardešić – again, by no means a leftist – has written against corruption, altar-throne symbiosis, poor religious culture and ethnic nationalist excesses. The maverick cleric from the Croat Catholic diaspora in the Bay of Kotor in Montenegro, Don Branko Sbutega (who passed away in June 2006), did not hesitate to criticise church leaders on a number of issues and was a frequent interviewee in the liberal media. The Bosnian Croat author



Ivan Lovrenović and Bosnian Franciscans are also occasionally active in Croatian public life and are considered allies of the left.<sup>14</sup>

There is a struggle amongst writers and journalists on religious affairs. The liberation theologian journalist Drago Pilsel has been denied the right to call himself a Catholic. In a polemic with Pilsel the conservative Catholic journalist Ivan Ugrin (known as the spokesman for the right-wing archbishop of Split Marin Barišić) refers to Pilsel as a 'so-called Catholic' (Ugrin, 2004). Ugrin also affirms the episcopate-endorsed Association of Catholic Journalists (*Udruga hrvatskih katoličkih novinara*), urging the faithful to ignore Pilsel and other liberals and dissenters (Ugrin, 2004).

### **Dissent in the Church: the 'Croatian Savonarola' Ivan Grubišić**

The priest-sociologist Ivan Grubišić and his academic circle from Split were the most outspoken intra-church dissidents from the early 1990s until the 2003 elections, after which Grubišić called it quits and *de facto* retired. This dissident circle started as a cultural movement aimed at advancing religious values, but evolved into a political organisation opposing war and defending human rights. In 1993 Grubišić founded the Croatian Academic Association (*Hrvatska akademska udruga*) as a cultural forum based in Split. The forum criticised the government for sluggish democratic transition, growing poverty, corruption, extremist ethnic nationalism, symbiosis between altar and throne and other problems in society and the church. The Grubišić circle initially backed the left-centre Račan coalition government, but after a year and a half Grubišić discovered a continuity between the Tujman and Račan dispensations: 'Račan should not seek legitimacy from the Catholic Church; he must stop trying to please the bishops; instead he must do something specific to improve lives of ordinary people, to bring about economic reforms and rule of law', said Grubišić in a June 2001 interview.<sup>15</sup> Grubišić also noted that the church exploited the cult of martyrdom of the Blessed Cardinal Stepinac for the purpose of intimidating opponents (Vjesnik, 2002).

The Grubišić circle tried to revive moribund interfaith dialogue. An annual award was inaugurated, called 'Person of the Year – Person of Dialogue' (*Osoba godine, osoba dijaloga*). The award went to more than a dozen prominent public figures in Croatia as well as non-Croats who excelled in promoting liberal values such as freedom, tolerance, individualism and dialogue between diverse ideological and religious viewpoints. The winners included the Dalai Lama (during his 2001 trip to Croatia) and Muslim religious leader Ševko Omerbašić. At the 2002 award ceremony in Split Grubišić said: 'By selecting the imam Ševko Omerbašić as Person of the Year – Person of Dialogue, we call for dialogue and warn once again against a growing climate of mistrust and against an "Us versus Them" way of thinking' (*Slobodna Dalmacija*, 2003). One of the last political ventures by Grubišić before his self-imposed retirement was his 2003 initiative 'Alliance for Peace and Justice: a Vote for Man' (*Alijansa za mir & pravdu: glas za čovjeka*), also known as the call for a 'Third Croatia'. He invited the senior academician and physicist Ivan Supek, a veteran of the Partisan antifascist struggle in the Second World War and a former communist, to co-chair the Alliance. For the founding convention Grubišić wrote a 'solemn hymn' of the Alliance in the chakavian dialect of mid-Dalmatia. Speaking in an interview about the Alliance's purpose and objectives, Grubišić said that

Croatia is being torn apart by many conflicting partisan interests; the main political parties and their leaders are discredited, corrupt and worn out; all major parties lack both ideas and sound programmes. Politics must begin to

serve the common good and human needs instead of the present situation in which people are servants of corrupt political elites. (*Slobodna Dalmacija*, 2003)

The Alliance performed poorly in the 2003 elections that brought the HDZ back to power; after this the Grubišić circle largely withdrew from activism.

### **The Church versus the Liberal Intelligentsia; Euroscepticism and Antiglobalisation**

The situation in contemporary Croatian politics is analogous with that in the second half of the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries. At that time the so-called ‘clericalists’ (*klerikalizam*) were initially supporters of Hapsburg Austria, calling for tight clergy control over society; later they espoused ethnic nationalism in advancing towards an ethnically based Croatian nation-state. They vied with ‘liberals’, notably Bishop Strossmayer and the priest-historian Franjo Rački, who invented the western variant of the Yugoslav ideology. The ‘liberals’ sought a more democratic and ecumenical church and hoped to attain national freedom through a federation of Slavonic peoples (Gross, 2004; Krišto, 1994). The spectrum of factions I described above related to the situation in church and society. It seems that in Croatian politics today two major ideological blocs can be identified: clericalists and liberals. The former are conservative nationalists and include chauvinistic factions; the latter are largely moderate nationalists open to reform and dialogue. Inside the church the two factions have split since the Second Vatican Council, with clericalists favouring the old ways and the liberals advancing reform; in secular politics the clericalists are on the right and liberals occupy the centre and the left. Both blocs want Croatia to join the EU, but for different reasons: the clericalists because Croatia is an icon of European Catholicism and a western country which, according to them, merits special honour for defending the West from eastern threats; the liberals because Croatia is a modern European country with antifascist, liberal and socialist traditions and with an educated urban population capable of implementing europeanisation. The two blocs transcend party politics. The major parties – the reformed post-Tudjman HDZ and the former communist SDP – are in fact centrist free-market pro-western parties without clearly articulated ideologies, prepared to play any card and adopt any discourse in order to gain power and stay in power. In between the two ideological blocs are moderates from both church circles and secular circles. Moderates such as Željko Mardešić see excesses in both camps. They call for dialogue and urge restraint in public exchanges (Mardešić, 2005, pp. 127–31). A number of symposia bringing together representatives of the liberal intelligentsia and conservatives, under foreign mediators, have addressed, with some success, the continuing controversy between the liberals and the clericalists and other ideological disputes, yet have failed to halt them or visibly soften the tense and often radical discourse (see Fleck, 1999).<sup>16</sup>

Let us look at some examples of exchanges between clericalists and liberals. In his recent novel *Civitas Dei 2053* the satirist Ivo Brešan points to the church as the chief threat to democracy in Croatia. His vision of Croatia’s future is an Orwellian one and the role of Big Brother is ascribed to the Catholic Church. We should note that in contemporary Croatian political language the term ‘*civitas dei*’ usually refers to the NDH Ustaša state during the Second World War. In a similar vein speaks Zagreb scholar Lino Veljak, who is one of a small number of outspoken and determined members of the new association of Croatian atheists, agnostics and followers of

alternative faiths that is seeking public promotion under the name 'Protagoras'. He argues as follows. Under communism believers were sporadically persecuted and routinely considered backward and 'abnormal' by the ruling regime, including the educational system and the media. Since the end of communism the situation has been similar, but the roles have been reversed: religious believers now have the attitudes of the communists, looking down on nonbelievers as perverse, unpatriotic and morally inferior (*Slobodna Dalmacija*, 2006). What provoke a particularly vehement response from the liberal press are examples of the church acquiring material wealth apparently at the expense of common social needs. Thus, for example, the church was much criticised when it had the medical school in Split evicted in 1998 in order to turn the building into a lavish bishop's residence. In 2005 the church sued for the eviction of the computer engineering school in the city of Varaždin, claiming the building as pre-Second World War church property to be returned to the church under the 1998 treaty between Croatia and the Holy See. The liberal Rijeka newspaper *Novi list* quotes the evicted faculty in Varaždin as allegedly saying that 'the priestly bloodsuckers take everything away from the people' and points out that the church was awarded a building recently renovated with several million euros of taxpayers' money (Pilsel, 2006). In 2005 the church and the liberal press clashed over the so-called 'Caritas Affair', which unveiled child abuse in a church-run educational institution (*Slobodna Dalmacija*, 2005c). More recently Caritas again made the headlines in tax evasion allegations. In another affair early in 2005 the auxiliary bishop of Zagreb, Msgr Valentin Pozaić, said in a comment to the press that the church doubted the legality and objectivity of the criminal trial of a priest, Fr Čuček, who was sentenced to a prison term for sexually abusing several underage girls in his parish (*Slobodna Dalmacija*, 2005c). Shortly after the Caritas affair, liberal and clerical media clashed over the 'Zlikavci' satirical television show (a Croatian cartoon equivalent of American Comedy Central's 'South Park'), which allegedly ridicules religion. 'The late pope John Paul II used to crack jokes about meetings with young believers; why does our church lack any sense of humour?' asked a *Slobodna Dalmacija* columnist (*Slobodna Dalmacija*, 2005d).

The issue of Croatia's admission to the EU has been simultaneously a point of disagreement but also of convergence between the rival Croatian ideological blocks. The two still blame each other for the long delay but recently they have come to see the EU as biased and incompetent. Many see the way the EU has treated Croatia during the war and especially since 1995 as going beyond retribution for Croatia's sins and involving humiliation, discrimination and a manifestation of ideological bias by the dominant EU liberals. After Lozano's 2004 accolades to Croatia as a role-model Catholic nation (quoted at the beginning of this article), in February 2005 the pope and the Vatican secretary of state Cardinal Sodano received premier Sanader and stated that Croatia was 'in the heart of Europe' (*Nacional*, 2005); and after prosecutor Carla del Ponte's recent charges that war crimes suspects might be hiding in the Vatican or a monastery, the church responded angrily calling for a swift admission of Croatia to the EU (*Nacional*, 2004). In the pages of *Glas Koncila* the 'Church of the Croats' has rejected 'regional associations' and has demanded a swift, dignified and direct integration into the western world. The same newspaper has continued to attack globalisation, mobilising the faithful to resist what it views as a sell-out of the country to foreigners. In response to Carla del Ponte's interview in the British *Daily Telegraph* concerning Croatian runaway war crimes suspects (the key figure, General Gotovina, was soon thereafter captured in Spain and sent to the Hague to stand trial), *Glas Koncila* criticised the British argument that the Gotovina case alone should

delay Croatia's EU admission process, and implied that British policies toward Croatia (which the church considers unfair) have too much influence on the EU (Miklenić, 2005b). Delay on Croatia's admission to the EU, accompanied by pressure and diktats from the EU centre and the Hague Tribunal, and foreign capitalism penetrating Croatia have created, according to *Glas koncila*, a 'climate of fear and anxiety among the Croatian people', reminding them many similar threats and attacks from enemies and armies in the past. While the editorials in *Glas koncila* often sound bitter and use strong rhetoric, the occasional columnist Đurdica Ivanišević-Lieb writes from personal spiritual conviction and the experiences of a believer in a softer yet often more compelling tone. Lieb is especially critical of the materialism and inhumanity of the globalising neo-liberal world in which she perceives Croatia as a victim. She convincingly argues that the EU systematically humiliates Croatia and unfairly punishes innocent people collectively rather than specifically and solely those responsible for corruption and the flaws of Croatian democracy. Indeed, a sense of humiliation and loss of dignity in the face of EU unfairness and arrogance is spreading. The current wars in the Middle East raise questions about why the military men who defended Croatia are being tried by a criminal court while excessive violence by the Anglo-Americans and their allies is by and large unpunished. Under such circumstances, bitterness and frustration grow. The 2006 tourist season in Croatia saw a massive influx of western European and US tourists but also an increase in hooliganism and fights between visitors and locals; these provoked comments in the western press about Croatia as allegedly unprepared for EU admission.

At the same time, however, Eurosepticism and concern with effects of globalisation on small nations have often become points of convergence between Croatian conservatives and liberals. Željko Mardešić, the moderate Catholic lay scholar who has always been of a conservative bent although he has never espoused rightist politics, considers globalisation a serious challenge (though not necessarily a completely negative one) for Christianity. He particularly emphasises Christians' responsibility for the fate of humanity in a profoundly changing world (Mardešić, 2002, pp. 129–218; Mardešić, 2005). Sometimes these otherwise rival factions even agree about the imperial nature of the EU. The fact that the EU now evidently puts Croatia's candidacy behind that of Romania and Bulgaria has triggered not only anti-European barrages by rightist columnists but also critical texts and bitter statements from leading disappointed liberals. These liberals are also patriots: they see that the EU policies do indeed generate a sense of humiliation and that they so often play into the hands of the far right. The penetration of foreign capital into Croatia and the foreign ownership of property, particularly land, is also a cause for alarm on left and right alike. Liberals and conservative-clericalists alike applauded Cardinal Bozanić's public calls for restrictive laws and policies on sale of land to foreigners, especially on the Adriatic littoral. At the 2006 national bishops' conference Cardinal Bozanić said that the church wanted Croatian negotiators with the EU to delay talks about sales of property along the Adriatic Riviera to foreign buyers until Croatia was officially and completely admitted to the EU. Favourable responses to his comments came even from well-known left-wing columnists such as Duško Čizmić-Marović of *Slobodna Dalmacija* and Drago Pilsel of *Novi list*, who applauded Bozanić and the bishops for their defence of Croatia's property and dignity. Even *Glas koncila* followed suit. Although it did not want to run the risk of openly attacking the Sanader administration for its quite apparent collaboration in the sell-out of land in the Adriatic to foreigners, it gave space to the architect Miće Gamulin who was fired by local authorities in Dalmatia for opposing their policies on foreign investment in

property. Gamulin accused the government of being indirectly, and in some cases directly (through bribery), responsible for what he viewed as taking the Croatian coast away from the Croats (Razgovor, 2006). *Glas koncila* also ran an interview with the liberal Catholic layman Goran Dodig, a psychiatrist from Split, with his strong words cited in the title: 'globalisation means injustice, inequality, destruction, immorality and selfishness' (Dodig, 2006). His grim portrayal of the leading western states and their contemporary influence is straightforward and dramatic. He adduces numerous analogies between Rome in its decline and the West today (including absence of compassion and humanity in the privileged, cults of youthfulness and material pleasure and manipulation of the masses by means of entertainment), and hopes for a critical role for Christianity in a moral and spiritual transformation of the eroding empires of our time.

Church-state symbiosis remains undisturbed, and is indeed even being consolidated, despite the objections of President Mesić. Since May 2005 the national Bishops' Conference has inaugurated a new practice of inviting the premier to sessions of the Conference to brief the bishops about various aspects of the cabinet's work and current problems in state and society. The new premier and practicing Catholic Ivo Sanader has complied. The liberal president Mesić has publicly protested against the practice, which seems inappropriate to him as a blatant violation of the principle of separation of church and state. Consequently, in spite of the 2004 return of the HDZ to power the church remains frustrated and perceives the nation to be in crisis. According to an editorial in the church's publication *Glas koncila* in 2005, Croatia's national development is stalling. The editorial describes the situation as a 'stalemate' that is becoming 'unbearable', especially since the spring 2005 postponement by the EU of official talks on Croatia's admission as a result of numerous problems plaguing government and society. According to the editorial the major problems are

electoral boycotts; complacency on the part of the political elite; insensitive government policies on social justice; the quiet rehabilitation of communism as manifested in the revival of the Tito cult; nostalgia for the former Yugoslavia backed by foreign countries that do not like Croatia; appropriation of Croatia's wealth and resources by foreigners at the expense of Croatian interests. (Miklenić, 2005b)

### **Recent Developments**

The title 'most Catholic country in Europe', awarded to tiny Croatia rather than to a bulwark of European Catholicism such as Spain, Poland or Ireland, has, as the liberal Catholic journalist Pilsel hypothesised, apparently come from the ultraconservative Roman Catholic organisation Opus Dei. The nuncio to Croatia, the Spaniard Francisco-Javier Lozano, who first spoke on Radio Vatican on 27 July 2004 about Croatia's new role in Europe, is a member of this organisation, and he was echoed nearly in the same words by Jorge Ramos, a Portuguese prelate and head of Opus Dei in Croatia, on Croatian television on 30 August 2004. Speaking for the church at a time when the Vatican and Austria were aggressively but unsuccessfully lobbying for Croatia's admission to the EU, Opus Dei apparently wanted to emphasise Croatia's role as a historic symbol of European Catholicism. Meanwhile Croatia has reinvented itself as an icon of the anticommunist struggle, in which it allegedly played a stauncher role even than Poland, having fought communism in the Second World War and the

Cold War and having continued to do so to the present day. Yet, in spite of all this, Croatia still remains outside the EU. This position undermines the standing of the Vatican and of European Catholicism in international politics and also weakens one of the founding myths of the Croatian nation (see Žanic, 2005; Perica, 2005; Goldstein, 2005).

What does this view of the role of the church in society and in contemporary history entail? Opus Dei seems to be pleased with the scope and degree of the church's influence on the state and public opinion. Aware of the domestic tensions between liberals and clericalists, Opus Dei backs the latter. The Vatican lobbied in Brussels in favour of Croatia's EU membership. It evidently places hopes on Croatia in the context of the papal hope that East-Central and Eastern Europe will engender a new impetus leading toward a great Christian renewal or, in papal terms, the 'new evangelisation' of Europe.<sup>17</sup>

One of the unique features of Catholic Croatia is the continuing of the anticommunist crusade that helped to reinvigorate eastern European Catholicism in the 1980s. With the continuing controversy over the Second World War, the church in Croatia is at the front of the struggle against so-called 'neocommunist'. In May 2005, on the 60th anniversary of the end of the Second World War, which was also commemorated as an anniversary of antifascism, president Mesić and even premier Sanader made attempts to explain how Croatia commemorated antifascism but condemned communism as a totalitarian ideology. A *Glas koncila* editorial, however, stated that the commemorations dedicated to antifascism in Croatia unveiled the strength of Croatian 'neocommunist', which was thwarting Croatia's admission to the EU. The same newspaper attacked the Hague tribunal for extending its indictment of Croatian military leaders for allegedly conspiring to cleanse Croatia of Serbs at the end of the 1991–95 war (Miklenić, 2005a).

Following a number of domestic and all-European antifascist commemorations in May the church also responded to the Bleiburg controversy. On 14 May some 20,000 pilgrims, mostly Ustaša nostalgics and right-wing groups, gathered at the site of the Bleiburg massacre. Among several clerics in attendance were the cardinal archbishop of Sarajevo, Vinko Puljić, and the religious leader of the Muslims in Croatia and Slovenia, the chief imam of Zagreb Ševko Omerbašić. The two commemorated the victims of the Bleiburg massacre, but also mentioned the victims of the Jasenovac concentration camp, including Jews, Serbs and Croatian antifascists, and said that they must also be remembered.

Similar controversies have continued to attract media attention. In June 2006 local school authorities on the island of Brač removed from a schoolyard a statue of a native woman Partisan fighter killed in combat under the pretext that the heavy statue was jeopardising the safety of the children at play during break. A few months earlier, in Kaštela Bay near Split, local Catholic parishes and HDZ party cells had a monument built dedicated to priests killed without trial by Partisans at the end of the Second World War. The moderate local priest Luka Vuco lobbied for a dedication to 'all people of Kaštela Bay who were victims of the war', but he remained in a minority because of the feeling that hundreds of priests executed without trial in 1945 had so far had no memorial of the kind they deserved.

Passions rose on the occasion of the official state holiday, the Day of the Antifascist Struggle, in June 2006. President Mesić went to the memorial site of the Jasenovac concentration camp, which the bishops avoid. Speaking in the presence of high-level delegations from Serbia, the Serbian Orthodox Church, Jewish communities from the region and Israel, he condemned Ustaša crimes and evoked the struggle of Tito's

Partisans against them. At the same time, a group of Croatian bishops and priests made a surprising move: for the first time in history a group of them went to hold a commemoration service on Goli Otok island in the northern Adriatic where during the Tito-Stalin struggle (1948–53) many diehard communist supporters of Stalin were imprisoned and tortured. It was hard to comprehend what those Croatian Catholic priests were doing on a spot where long ago communists killed and tortured other communists, especially since most of those communists were of non-Catholic (Serb and Montenegrin Orthodox) background. Was the visit simply a rather poorly conceived provocation in the ongoing conflict over memory between the Croatian clericals and liberals? It came in the aftermath of a low-key discussion in the Croatian parliament on 5 June of a declaration by the EU earlier in the year condemning the crimes of European totalitarian communist dictatorships. Just before the summer vacation and on the eve of the World Cup the Croatian parliament produced a quiet and formal response to this declaration – a response that however angered church leaders, who seemed to detect a conspiracy at work. Shortly afterwards, a *Glas koncila* editorial<sup>18</sup> thundered as follows:

During the formation of the new Croatian state leaders professed national reconciliation, which the communists abused. They quickly put on masks, and acting in disguise restored control over state and society – those communists in disguise today pull all the strings of political, economic and cultural power with their own hands and through networks of supporters and sympathisers. . . . The declaration [condemning the crimes of totalitarian communism passed by the Croatian parliament on 5 June 2006–VP] has been obviously intentionally marginalised and turned into a mere formality so that it will not generate any effect or change anything. Nevertheless, this [manipulation by the communists in parliament] has unmasked the situation in Croatian society, which has been firmly captured by neocommunism . . . [it has unveiled] the power of the neocommunist minority and the helplessness of the noncommunist majority, the indifference of the judiciary and politics toward victims of communism, and – what is worst – disrespect for the people. (Miklenić, 2006)

Who is the church targeting under the label ‘neocommunism’? Evidently not all former communists. The founder of the modern Croatian state, Franjo Tuđman, was after all once a communist general and Tito’s Croatian protégé. Under his rule the church won generous favours and favourable treaties, and Cardinal Štepinac was beatified. According to the *Feral Tribune*, the alleged ‘neocommunists’ do not exist: it compares the church to an alcoholic suffering from *delirium tremens* who sees apparitions of white mice (Čulić, 2006). Since the death in 2004 of the renowned Croatian Marxist scholar and former head of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia, Stipe Šušvar,<sup>19</sup> and the disintegration of his Socialist Workers’ Party, nobody in Croatia has been politically advancing Marxism-Leninism. The only socialist party, Ivica Račan’s SDP, is widely considered a nationalist party of the centre-left, and Račan’s recent pre-electoral rhetoric about workers’ rights was hardly taken seriously. Croatia’s political spectrum in fact does not include an organised left. Meanwhile the many outspoken critics of the church include figures who have never had anything to do with communism but are well-known and published anti-communists, such as for example the historian Ivo Banac or the influential writer Igor Mandić (who recently in his new book and on a Croatian prime-time television

show referred to the church as a 'malign, dark force (*potmula sila*) in our society'. These two, and many others like them who have spoken and written critically of the church in postcommunist times, could not be affected by laws against former communists or collaborators with communism of the kind that have been passed in some former communist countries of eastern Europe.

The church may be denouncing as 'neocommunists' the secular-liberal intelligentsia, which includes relatively small but vocal anticlerical and anarchist factions. A majority of highly educated people who hold academic degrees and work in the educational system and the media are the product of the modernisation carried out during the golden age of Tito's socialism from the late 1960s to the 1980s. This period, incidentally, coincides with the period of the great reforms of the Second Vatican Council and of liberalisation within the church itself, so that dissenting clergy are also a product of this time. This does not mean that they are all leftists, however. Many were practicing Catholics under socialism; some had earlier been labelled nationalists, especially during the National Movement of 1971. Meanwhile many former communists 'converted' out of convenience to the new nationalism and became practicing Catholics after the changes in 1990. This new elite formed the nationalist bloc that won the 1990, 1995 and 1997 elections, assumed all senior positions in state administration and even acquired the bulk of former 'socialist' property under special terms via state-directed privatisation favouring selected party members, their families and ideological allies, among which the church and certain émigré circles returning to Croatia have played prominent roles. Thus, as noted earlier, a new class was formed. The consolidation of new relations of property and power involved the 'purging' of a large number of functionaries of the former regime by laying them off or forcing them into early retirement: in today's Croatia a large number of retired people are in their forties and fifties and living on insufficient pensions. The politically crippled and impoverished liberal intelligentsia did not give up, however. It survived and formed a new democratic resistance, seeking changes not in order to restore communism but in order to achieve a better democracy. We should bear in mind that the former Yugoslavia, after the Tito-Stalin split of 1948 and particularly after the liberalisation of the 1960s, when borders were opened and limited capitalist economy allowed, was noticeably different from, say, communist Romania or Poland: Titoism was in many respects more democratic and more progressive than Tudjmanism and certainly enjoyed a much higher international reputation. The new liberal opposition to Tudjmanism wanted something even better than Titoism, and by far better than Tudjmanism. It had the aptitude and credentials to form a political opposition and to fight against the flaws of the new system with propaganda; quite a few individuals from this generation also succeeded in business and assisted the opposition financially; and foreign support for democratisation came from bodies like the Soros Foundation 'Open Society', the EU, the USA and numerous non-governmental and human rights groups.

On the streets and in the bars in Croatia people wear communist insignia and T-shirts with Tito's portrait; on the radio people sing Partisan songs from the Second World War and Republican songs from the Spanish Civil War. Many people also remain nostalgic for old Yugoslav films and remember sports victories from communist times; others continue to love and listen to folk music from Serbia and elsewhere in the Balkans. The church and right-wing parties often feel frustrated and angry. *Glas koncila* frequently attacks 'subversive' lifestyles in the same way that communist youth and party mouthpieces would attack 'bourgeois' lifestyles. Church hardliners and right-wing nationalists want to silence and 'purge' these nostalgic 'communists', anarchists and even liberal democrats who value pluralism, diversity and individualism. To this end



*Glas koncila* and some right-wing papers occasionally call for so-called 'lustration', which has been applied since 1989 (with ambiguous results) in Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary in order to eliminate senior officials of the communist regime from key positions in state and society and to punish the old regime's collaborators, spies and secret police members. Those churchmen who seek lustration in Croatia, however, often overlook a significant difference between Yugoslavia and other eastern European communist countries: the former was not under Soviet occupation and Croatian communists were not the unpatriotic vassals of a foreign communist empire, but in fact patriots, who first won Istria and Dalmatia for Croatia from the Axis and later defended Croatia with Tito against the Soviet Union (very few Croats sided with Stalin in 1948). At the same time, they should bear in mind the fact that unlike the Catholic Church in Poland, for example, the Catholic Church in Croatia has a record stained by collaboration with the Axis during the Second World War. What is more, both before and after 1989 Croatian communists explicitly condemned the crimes of communism, while the church has never adequately condemned the crimes of the Ustaša state. The church is thus on shaky ground when it calls for lustration.

There are several more specific reasons why lustration was never put into effect in Tudjman's Croatia. There was for example a tacit 'nonaggression pact' between Tudjman's HDZ party and Račan's ex-communists, according to which the former agreed not to inquire into their rivals' communist past or carry out lustration, while the latter agreed not to press for investigation into the criminal privatisation of the Tudjman era (1990–99) or the communist past of some HDZ members. The church also gained from Tudjman's minimising of Ustaša crimes and a new perspective on the past that balanced the crimes of fascism against the crimes of communism (with the latter being considered worse), as well as from privatisation and other favours during the Tudjman regime: these favours apparently included the transfer into the church's hands of communist secret police files concerning collaborator priests and bishops.<sup>20</sup> The church does not want to open those files in order to preserve its own unity. Even more importantly, as a patriotic church in a small nation the church in Croatia is not enthusiastic about Central Europe-style lustrations. It would rather not put national unity at risk: Croatia was divided by a bloody civil war during the Second World War, and a repetition is not to be excluded, particularly because the sources of conflict have never been completely extinguished. For example, the liberal nationalist leader Ivan Zvonimir Čičak used to speak publicly about a civil war threat in Croatia. Many church leaders shared this fear and for this reason maintained the politics of national reconciliation, or in Tudjman's new patriotic parlance '*pomirba svih Hrvata*' ('reconciliation of all Croats').

Moreover, lustration was impossible in Tudjman's Croatia because of Tudjman himself and his close aides. Tudjman was a high-ranking communist general and later head of a communist historical research institute. According to some allegations he collaborated with the Yugoslav secret police following his imprisonment and early release. The founders and top leaders of his HDZ party, such as Stipe Mesić, Vladimir Šeks and Josip Manolić, all used to be high-ranking communist officials (Manolić was even a secret police chief). Furthermore, as the Croatian communist Stipe Šuvar once revealed on the basis of his research in party archives, almost 60 per cent of the original HDZ rank and file once held League of Communist membership cards (Perica, 2002a, p. 242).

The lustration idea became hypothetically applicable only after Tudjman's death. Now it would be a weapon against the Croatian president Stipe Mesić, who has turned into a major liberal figure and has begun creating serious problems for the Croatian right. What particularly irritates the church is that Mesić has been an outspoken

champion of the Croatian Partisan epic and the antifascist tradition. At the Jasenovac concentration camp memorial site he has commemorated the many Serbs, Jews and Partisans who perished there and has emphasised that the Croatian communist Tito and his Partisans liberated the lands ceded to the Axis and brought Croatia onto the side of the Allies in the Second World War. Most Croats who honour the Partisans and abhor the ultranationalist Ustaše come from Partisan veterans' families or families in which there used to be at least one a party member. To all intents and purposes, the church wants to 'cleanse' Croatian society of these 'subversive memories' by purging their carriers as 'communists in disguise'. A problem is that the EU, which the church wants Croatia to join, wants a Croatia that can be europeanised and this can be done only by its 'Partisan' cadres, which include most of the best-educated citizens and liberals. A vicious circle has thus been created for the church. It cannot adjust to 'peacetime' conditions and come to terms with a diverse ideologically plural society; it thus remains in conflict with a much larger portion of Croatia's population than *Glas koncila's* 'neocommunist minority' phrase suggests. Church conservatives are not prepared to begin listening to liberal critics from within the church or to open a dialogue with society. Instead, the bishops have recently indicated that they will be seeking to counter liberal ideas through a new daily newspaper sponsored and managed by Catholic laymen who enjoy the bishops' confidence. The church is also developing ideas such as a Catholic university and Catholic television.

Moderates in the church have expressed uneasiness about the conflict between the conservative/clericalist and liberal forces in Croatia, and many have tried to mediate. In a 2004 interview for a liberal daily the head of the national Bishops' Conference's office for the media and public relations, Anton Šuljić, argued that church-society dialogue was not working as a result of shortcomings in both parties; specifically, he said, there were only a few church leaders open to and prepared for a tolerant dialogue, while antichurch ideologies were still influential in society (Cvrtila, 2004). In the meantime, many churchmen have been arguing that the church must boldly liberalise, admit to its own past and present faults and open dialogue with society. One recently most active among these reform-minded figures has been the internationally well-known Bosnian Franciscan Marko Oršolić who teaches at Franciscan schools in Sarajevo and Munich and serves as director of the International Multicultural and Inter-Confessional Center in Sarajevo (IMS BH). In a well-publicised book published in 2006 Oršolić examines the interaction between religion and Nazi fascism. He argues that before the Second Vatican Council the church was too often silent about injustice and even grave crimes against humanity such as the Holocaust, but that the Council prompted the church to speak up more boldly in defence of human rights even when Council reforms were stalling (Oršolić, 2006). Moderate voices from the church and other religious communities were also heard on the occasion of the death in June 2006 of one of the best internationally-known Croatian Catholic laymen, the sociologist of religion, human rights and peace activist and personal papal adviser from Split, Željko Mardešić. Mardešić (also known under pen name Jakov Jukić) was highly regarded in his own church but also by other Christians, Jews, Muslims and members of other faiths as well as by nonbelievers. The evangelical scholar Peter Kuzmič, one of founders of the Pentecostal Church of Croatia, wrote about him in the *Osijek* daily newspaper *Glas Slavonije* under the title 'Željko Mardešić – a spiritual giant'; he contrasted Mardešić's kind of Catholicism to that of Croatian Church leaders.

In his life and work we have seen a synthesis of honesty and intelligence, a profound faith and first-rate science, genuine spiritual qualities combined

with an ability for critical reflection... [Mardešić was at the same time] a benevolent teacher and a farsighted prophet... He was instrumental in the dialogue among all worldviews, especially between Christianity and the contemporary world. I have never met a man from our spiritual circles who was so strongly dedicated to the interpretation and implementation of the great ideas of the Second Vatican Council... The [Croat Catholic] bishops respected him, but during the most critical moments of our recent history they did not have the courage to listen to him and follow his advice. If they had, our Christianity would have been today much more compelling and effective in its social and evangelising missions... He once told me that Croatian Christianity in our time had lost connection with Jesus and his Gospels... he did not hide his disappointment with those Christians who, following the 'victory' over communism became complacent, triumphalistic and arrogant, rejecting all kind of criticism, becoming hypocrites, remaining silent in the face of evil and injustice... [he also argued that] after the collapse of the Berlin wall new walls were erected worldwide as many believers returned to pre-modern intolerant forms of religion. (Kuzmić, 2006)

As noted earlier, for the church in Croatia the most important dimension of the social conflict since the early 1990s – or perhaps since the 1970s, when its own revolution started – has been the struggle over memory. In the 1980s this struggle involved rivals such as the communist system and Serbian nationalism, over which the church eventually prevailed. In postcommunist Croatia the struggle over memory has continued: the church and its allied ideological front face the liberal and left-wing opposition, whose major weapon is the memory of the anti-fascist Partisan tradition of the Second World War juxtaposed against the NDH and the wartime church. During the brief interlude of centre-left coalition rule (2000–03) the church allied itself with the far right, which engaged in activities that could be described as a coup attempt, but which failed to secure the continuity of 'Tudjmanism', largely thanks to liberal international public opinion, a domestic free press, the liberal president Mesić and Pope John Paul II (see Perica, 2001). After the return of the new HDZ in 2004 under the church's favourite, Catholic layman Ivo Sanader, the church has not been happy, however. The conflict between liberal media and the clerical right over numerous issues has further escalated. The liberal dissent within the church has never been silenced, even after Ivan Grubišić's semi-retirement in 2004 and his later hospitalisation.

On the issue of europeanisation, the clericalists believe that European identity is synonymous with Catholicism and hope that Croatia's anticommunism and conservatism will impress the EU; by contrast, the liberals emphasise Croatia's contribution to the reforms of the Second Vatican Council, its antifascist tradition, its good relations with neighbours of other faiths and ethnicities and the liberal character of a democratic society. Most recently, with progress in the relations between Croatia and the Hague War Crimes Tribunal following the arrest of the chief Croatian suspect General Gotovina, and ongoing negotiations between the EU and Croatia, Croatian state politics and even the church have shown a great deal of pragmatism. The Sanader administration, with the Catholic premier taking the lead, has recently aggressively played the liberal card in order to speed up the EU admission process. Sanader has greeted the Croatian Serbs in public with traditional Orthodox Church greetings and has visited their communities at Orthodox Christmas and Easter; he has

cited Tito's famous patriotic and 'nonaligned' slogans, accompanied president Mesić on his commemorations of antifascist anniversaries and visited the Jasenovac concentration camp; and in the summer of 2006 he put on a great show in celebration of the 150th anniversary of the birth of the American inventor Nikola Tesla, who was a Croatian-born Serb. On these occasions Sanader and Mesić hosted their counterparts from Serbia, and spoke about how much the two neighbouring Slav peoples have in common. As the war crimes suspect General Gotovina languished in jail, largely forgotten, neither church nor state protested about another high-profile prosecution, against the HDZ hawk Branimir Glavaš, wartime chief in Slavonia and Tudjman's close aide. In the summer of 2006 one of the most notorious hawks in the episcopate, Archbishop Barišić, went to a formerly Serbian village near Knin, and over mass at a disputed historic church uttered a traditional Serbian peasant greeting: *Pomoz' bog braćo Srbi!* (May God help you, brother Serbs!). On 19 September 2006 even the Catholic prime minister, Ivo Sanader, made a move to woo domestic and EU liberals who view the church in Croatia as too powerful. Ignoring loud church protests, Sanader voted against a church-backed bill to ban work on Sunday. In televised statements he said that the state would not allow the church to make laws.

## Conclusion

I, as a Catholic . . . .

Marshal Josip Broz Tito, head of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, opening a conference with a delegation of Catholic bishops in Zagreb, 1945. (Djilas, 1985, pp. 112–15)

This article provides a portrayal of society in a process of landmark changes. It thoroughly examines some aspects of national formation while remaining conscious of the broader world context, particularly that which the sociologist Casanova has labelled 'deprivatisation of religion' with its momentous consequences (Casanova, 1994; Huntington, 1991; Huntington, 1996; Byrnes, 2001; Thomas, 2005). Croatia today, to borrow a remark from the recently deceased American expert on south-eastern Europe, Denison Rusinow, is a country with many problems, like any other country: in other words, it is not a problem-country but a normal country with problems. In addition, Croatia has evidently by now become a western liberal democracy with a free market economy, a free press and politics based on the usual democratic stalemate, an established equilibrium between the liberal and conservative blocs. To be sure, extremist factions are visible at both ends of the political spectrum, but their size, appeal and influence are diminishing, taking them into obscurity and irrelevance. Croatian political culture is democratic. Radicalism of the leftist or rightist brand is abhorred by the majority of liberals and conservatives alike. In spite of its emotional charge and sensitivity to symbols and myths, the Croatian liberal-conservative split does not mean that Croatia suffers from protracted instability, an identity crisis or an unarticulated political culture. On the contrary, the commitment to liberal democracy was supported broadly by all segments of Croatian society as early as the late 1980s while it was carried out by reform-minded former communists. This movement engendered the multiparty elections of 1990. Problems emerged afterward with the Serbian nationalist armed rebellion and the ascent to power of the authoritarian-minded nationalist strongman Franjo Tudjman. Tudjman ruled for nine years, his style reminiscent of some ugly periods in the past, and he caused a great deal

of damage to Croatian democracy and to the cause of europeanisation. At the same time, he encountered a bold and vigorous liberal resistance, especially from urban centres such as Rijeka, Pula, Zagreb, Split and Osijek (among the country's major cities only Zadar and Dubrovnik were completely taken over by the Tadjmanites). Liberal Catholics, clerics and laypeople alike, also played an important part in this democratic movement, sometimes at the risk of facing their fellow-believers' ire and canonical sanctions. I would consider one of the main revisionist points in this article the seemingly surprising fact that Croatian Catholicism has been dominated by liberals and moderates for more than a century – from the great liberals Strossmayer and Rački in the second half of the nineteenth century to the patriotic antifascist Istrian priests in the Second World War (Petešić, 1982; Dukovski, 2001, 2003), Šagi-Bunić's circle in the 1960s and the liberals and moderate conservatives of the 1990s and early twenty-first century. By contrast, the few Ustaša clerics of the Second World War (with the unfortunate inept wartime church leader Archbishop Štepinac elevated by communist blunder and subsequent political mythology to martyrdom and undeservedly great historical significance) and the somewhat larger group of latter-day nationalists and hardliners comprise a minority among the clergy and faithful. This of course does not mean that their relevance should be underplayed, or their nastiness minimised as the Croatian Catholic right hopes for. It is nevertheless unfair and slanderous that this minority has for various reasons been tendentiously exploited and presented as typical of the Croatian Church and by extension even of Croatian culture. Many renowned Croatian scholars have pointed this out, including nonbelievers such as notably, among others, the historian Ljubo Boban and the sociologist Srdjan Vrcan.

Tudjman is also responsible for a class conflict induced by mismanagement of the transition from socialist to capitalist economy via unfair and manipulative (if not criminal) privatisation, from which only a few privileged benefited and many suffered. Here also lay some of the causes of a continuing and often bitter anticlericalism: the church was clearly visible among architects of the new nation-state and also among the few privileged beneficiaries from the ill-conceived economic change; it was as if the state existed not for the people but for the wealthy few. The frustration and anger arising out of this class conflict could not invoke the socialist-era discourse, and instead sought an outlet through controversies over culture, religion and history. To be sure, wounds of the past are deep and unhealed. In this respect Croatia is analogous with Spain insofar as both European Catholic nations experienced bloody conflicts along the right-left ideological divide. This trauma also affected the national churches in these European countries. Yet Croatia's national cohesion was consolidated during the 1991–95 war when both left and right, liberals and conservatives, united in the war effort and agreed upon the essential idea of Croatian independent statehood and nationhood (Tanner, 2001). It is also evident that the two rival Croatian blocs occasionally unite, for example on the ideal of europeanisation and its costs: this happens when Croatia is facing outside threats and pressures that give rise to a sense of humiliation, involving disrespect for national dignity by financially and militarily powerful foreign countries and international organisations such as MMF, the World Bank and NATO. In such a situation, the nation-state, the people and the church reach as high a degree of unity as during the 1991–95 war.

At any rate, Croatia today is a European and Catholic nation, a fact that both liberals and conservatives endorse (at least in a cultural sense). The church also generally endorses this Croato-Euro-Catholic identity scheme, in spite of its criticism of the excesses of globalisation, and the Catholic majority is happy to follow suit, insofar as the predominant religiosity in Croatia has always been that of identity,

tradition, commitment and belonging. To be sure, the ‘other’ also has a role, and this Croatian insistence on its western or at least Central European Catholic identity also comes from the fact that the rival groups against which Croatia defines itself, namely the Orthodox Serbs and Bosnian Muslims, are perceived as ‘not quite’ westerners.

Croatia has invented itself as an emphatically Catholic European country. Catholicism has, however, operated as an ambivalent factor. On the one hand, thanks to its ‘transnational’ character Catholicism fosters a world-wide culture, thus safeguarding Croatia from an isolationist mentality and ‘europeanism with reservations’ (of a kind that characterises neighbouring Orthodox Serbia and some segments of the Bosnian Muslim community) and making it amenable to the transformation of a unifying Europe and an interdependent world (Byrnes, 2001). Consequently, in some respects the church has positively contributed to the progress of both the democratisation and the europeanisation of Croatia. It also championed the positive changes, including the exercise of free expression, involved in the religious and ethnic awakening of the 1970s and 1980s. On the other hand, it was not only because of war that Croatia lagged behind Eastern and Central European countries, which are now EU members, but also because of a number of negative internal factors that frustrated its democratisation and europeanisation. As described in this analysis, the church is found among those unhelpful factors.

Contemporary Catholicism in Croatia thus shows an ambivalent nature, with two different faces. This is not Croatian peculiarity, however; it is a more general problem, which students of religion in our time have often overlooked. José Casanova and Samuel P. Huntington, for example, argue that post-Second Vatican Council Catholicism (in contrast to Islam and Eastern Orthodoxy, which experienced no major reforms) has assisted democratisation in many countries. They take it for granted that the reforms of the Second Vatican Council have largely succeeded (Huntington, 1991; Casanova, 1994). However, it seems appropriate to observe on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the conclusion of that great church Council that its ideas were never triumphant. The church has since remained divided between liberal reformers inspired by the Council and conservatives who consider the Council a mistake. The Council was supposed to enable the church to come to terms with a dynamic modern changing world. However, since 1989 the world has undergone unforeseen changes. For a time after 1989 the church saw itself as a ‘victorious force of history’, thus becoming less prone to compromise than it was (or was compelled to be) in the 1960s. The church’s responses to the changes since 1989 have shown up the differences between the Council-inspired liberals and the conservatives. In the Croatian Church the conservatives seem relatively strong, and this is presumably what pleases Opus Dei. As this analysis shows, the two blocs have clashed in Croatia amidst remarkable, almost revolutionary changes, including war and relapses into authoritarianism. Religiosity was growing, but its spiritual quality remained ambiguous. The further democratisation of Croatia will depend, among other things, on the progress of europeanisation, and also the situation in the church: even if Croatia is not ‘the most Catholic country in Europe’ it is Catholic enough to recognise the importance of the religious factor.

## Notes

- 1 The author would like first of all to thank the sociologist Ankica Marinović-Bobinac of the Institute of Social Research (IDIS) in Zagreb, Croatia, for the data and information in the tables. My gratitude also goes out to Srdjan Vrcan, professor emeritus at the University of Split, Croatia and Sergej Flere of the University of Maribor, Slovenia, for taking the time to

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- 2 The best-publicised case of this kind was the Korčula case. Not only books printed in Cyrillic letters but also other 'heretical' literature such as works by Oscar Wilde, Ernest Hemingway, Jack London, Mark Twain, the only Yugoslav literary Nobel Prize holder Ivo Andrić, the Montenegrin bishop-philosopher Njegoš, legends about Prince Marko and the Kosovo cycle of folk poetry, and many other classics, were cleansed from school libraries and dumped in waste containers.
- 3 The *kuna* has been the Croatian currency unit since 1990. The Tudjman regime insisted that the name of the currency should be the same as in the Second World War Croatian pro-Axis state. There are currently about six *kuna* to the dollar; an average medical doctor in Croatia earns about 10,000 *kuna* a month.
- 4 According to a newspaper report a priest from Slavonia allegedly initiated the removal of a Second World War memorial because it seemed to him to be shaped like the coat of arms of the former Yugoslavia. In another case a priest insisted that the red star was a satanic symbol and must be removed from a memorial. The memorial was later dynamited.
- 5 There are current debates about antifascism and the identity of the EU, but one recent volume on this theme omits consideration of the successor states of Yugoslavia, presumably because they are not members of the EU. See for example De Bernardi and Ferrari (2004) and Collotti (1975).
- 6 Probably the best-known example of this kind of abuse is the Ustaša battle-cry 'For Croatia and Christ against the communists!' (see Munoz, 2002).
- 7 The Slovene sociologist Sergej Flere analysed 39 traditionally Christian countries on the basis of data from the World Values Survey, 1991–2001. He found that the most religious country in Europe was Malta and that Croatia ranked ninth (information provided to the author by Flere).
- 8 The data come from Marinović-Jerolimov (1999), and from three research projects conducted by the Institute of Social Research (IDIS) in Zagreb: 'Social Structure and the Quality of Life' (1989); 'Social Structure and the Quality of Life during the Transition' (1996); and 'Social and Confessional Changes in Croatia' (2004). References provided by Ankica Marinović-Bobinac.
- 9 For sources see note 7.
- 10 For sources see note 7.
- 11 For sources see note 7.
- 12 Public opinion surveys conducted in the Zagreb region in 1999 and 2002 examined values and attitudes concerning homosexuals. In response to the statement 'homosexuals are same as criminals and lawbreakers' barely 58 per cent of practising ('fundamentalist') believers agreed with it while some 82 per cent of those who identified themselves as religious disagreed (see Labus, 2000).
- 13 While it is as yet unproven that the ethnic cleansing of Serbs was pre-planned by the Croatian political and military leadership, Gotovina's troops killed a number of mostly elderly and unarmed Serbian civilians and destroyed property in the August 1995 Croatian military campaign known as the 'Storm' which ended the Serbian insurgency (see RFE, 2005).
- 14 The Franciscans of Bosnia have praised the liberal theologian Grünfelder: 'Anna Maria Grünfelder, a woman theologian from Zagreb, writes in her column in the *Feral Tribune* about current social and political affairs concerning the Catholic Church. She is very critical of the views and policies of the highest church hierarchy. Her pen is sharp and her assessments of church affairs well taken. She openly discusses the moves of the bishops and church leaders'

- perspectives on all aspects of reality. Most often she criticises concrete political moves taken by church leaders. Yet Grünfelder does not only record negative events and failures but also praises all that she finds positive and praiseworthy' (*Bulletin*, 2001, p. 55).
- 15 'The church today cannot even imagine its mission without an adversary. This "mentality" lives in the church. It is the same mentality that held the Jewish people collectively responsible for the death of Jesus. It is the same mentality that kept the hatred against Muslims alive for so long in our church. And the same mentality today calls for a renewed struggle against "neocommunistism". But the church turns a blind eye to ubiquitous neofascism. And because of this kind of mentality Christians have forgotten Jesus' call to love our neighbours and even our enemies; yet, in Jesus words, only by our love we can be recognised as Christians!' (Grubišić, 2001).
  - 16 Participants in the 1999 meetings in Split and Zagreb and contributors of articles include Zlatko Matijević, Mario Strecha, Jure Krišto, Elvio Baccharini, Anna-Maria Grünfelder, Tihomil Radja, Darko Polšek, Ivan Padjen, Alan Uzelac, Stjepan Kušar, Franjo Zenko, Žarko Puhovski, Dinka Marinović Jerolimov, Ankica Marinović Bobinac, Branko Sbutega, Miomir Matulović, Nikola Skledar, Željko Mardešić; Elvio Baccharini, Hans-Georg Fleck.
  - 17 'This Holy Week and Easter will be for all of you a time of prayerful closeness to Christ, and of renewed commitment to the Church's mission. The new evangelisation needs your energies and enthusiasm! God bless you all!' (Pope John Paul II, 2000).
  - 18 Editorial commentaries in *Glas koncila* have gained a reputation reminiscent of communist-era use by the Party of daily and weekly editorial commentaries on television and in the main newspapers to promote the party line and condemn enemies.
  - 19 Šušteršič was several times attacked during daylight hours by right-wing militants in the Croatian capital Zagreb, and seriously injured; the church never condemned the attacks.
  - 20 See Perica (2002b). I was told about this in interviews with persons who want to remain anonymous.

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