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# RED TYRANNY VS. STEPINAC



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# RED TYRANNY

*vs.*

# STEPINAC

*by*

RICHARD GINDER



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# RED TYRANNY vs. STEPINAC

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Aloysius Stepinac is a Croatian peasant, Archbishop of Zagreb and spiritual chief of all the Catholics in his native land. In October, 1946, he was condemned by Joseph Tito, communist dictator of Yugoslavia, to sixteen years of forced labor, on the score of political activity against the State. At this writing he is still in prison, despite the pleas and protests of millions, literally, of those who know him not as a politician but as a saintly humanitarian, the indomitable palladium of all that is best in the Croatian culture.

Stepinac fought as a youth in the Austrian-Hungarian Army. He was twice decorated by his government for valor on the Italian front. As a Second Lieutenant on the Solonica Front, he

was awarded the highest Yugoslav military decoration.

Back in Zagreb after the war, he decided to study agriculture, but in 1924 he changed his mind and decided to become a priest. Ordained in 1930 at the age of thirty-two, he finished his studies with such a brilliant record that he was made both Doctor of Philosophy and Doctor of Sacred Theology.

Less than three years later, he was made Archbishop, the youngest in the world, and in 1937 he became Primate or Chief Bishop of Yugoslavia.

Such a man, of sound peasant stock, close to the soil of his native land, a soldier with a record of distinguished service, a doctor twice over, must have had unusual gifts to impress the experienced churchmen of the Vatican so highly as to make him Primate of Yugoslavia at the age of thirty-nine.

A friend of the Archbishop's gives us the following description of him: "His likeness with the name Saint was striking. His lean face was not only handsome, but really beautiful—of a beauty, however, that I have rarely seen. Yet

his mouth and his chin showed him as a man of character, will-power and determination. The light of his penetrating eyes revealed the intensity of his deep religious convictions and the strength of the spiritual flame burning within him. His speech was short and precise, not a single word too many, and always to the point. His thoughts were lightning. Swift and often of a terrifying logic, going straight to the essentials . . .

“This son of Croat small farmers carried himself with great dignity. Yet his modesty was at once striking and touching. His personality and everyone of his words and gestures radiated sincerity and kindness. I felt very clearly that I was in the presence of a man of real greatness of mind, heart and soul.

### ***A Glance at the Record***

Now let's look at the record. Hitler's troops marched into Zagreb, capital of Croatia, on April 10, 1941. Yugoslavia at the time was composed of three national groups: Croats, Slovenes, and Serbs. With the majority of prudent citizens, Dr. Stepinac had always re-

garded this as the ideal — a federation of the three groups with no group dominating — and, in fact, that is how it was set up after World War I in 1918.

But now the Nazis proclaimed an independent State of Croatia. Dr. Mathek, head of the Croatian Peasant Party, refused to collaborate and was hustled off to a concentration camp. The Germans then backed Dr. Anton Pavelitch, head of the Croat extremists. His army, called *Ustashe*, began crushing not only those who remained loyal to the old Yugoslav State, but also the Serb minorities within the confines of the new Nazi-erected State of Croatia. The Serbs, being most of them members of the Orthodox Church, were told by the politicoes to turn Catholic or be shot.

### **Protests Against “Shotgun Conversions”**

How did Stepinac and the Catholic Bishops regard this? With few exceptions they declared their detestation of these forced conversions. From the pulpit of his Cathedral, Archbishop Stepinac declared, in July, 1941:

“We call God to witness that we have always been opposed to any compulsory attachment to the Catholic Church. We must declare that the Church has done all in her power to give aid and protection to the Orthodox . . .”

In December of the same year, he wrote to the head of the collaborationist government in the name of his colleagues:

“The solution of all questions regarding the conversion of Dissidents (the Orthodox) is in the exclusive competence of the Hierarchy. Only those could be received into the Church who, without having been subjected to force of any kind, might be converted of their own free will, after having become convinced in their own mind that the Catholic Church is the only true Church.

“All illegal procedures against the personal liberty and against the property rights of Dissidents should be rigorously prohibited. Dissidents should suffer no punishment, unless it be like that of any other citizens after having had a trial in accordance with all legal requirements,” etc.



These were only the final steps in a long campaign against the Ustashe terrorism. The collaborationists had been at work hardly two weeks when — at the end of April — Archbishop Stepinac intervened on behalf of the Orthodox Serbs, held as hostages and threatened with execution.

On May 14, 1941, in a letter to the head of the quisling State, he solemnly protested against the execution of 260 Orthodox Serbs, without trial.

### ***Defends the Jews***

May 22, 1941, in a letter to the Croat Minister of the Interior, he denounced legislation discriminating against Serbs, Jews and Gypsies.

May 30, 1941, writing to the same official, he demanded fair treatment for “non-Aryans.”

May 15, 1941, in a circular he told the Jews and Orthodox that they must be sincerely convinced before they could be accepted into the Catholic faith.

One must understand the terms of the problem. These Orthodox and Jews,

normally at opposite ends with Catholics, were suddenly being told that the only way they could hope to save their skins was by turning Catholic. The Catholic Church, on the other hand, while it is supremely happy in receiving converts, abominates fictitious conversions, because they involve sacrilege. The Yugoslav clergy were torn then between two feelings: they wanted to help out the Orthodox and the Jews, yet they couldn't do it if it meant compromising their own faith.

We dwell on those points at some length, too, because the uninformed, on hearing the charge that Archbishop Stepinac connived with the quislings in procuring "shot gun" conversions, might at first blush be tempted to believe it, putting the man down as an ambitious prelate more interested in power than in Religion — and such, as we are demonstrating, is far from the truth!

That this matter was on Archbishop

Stepinac's conscience is clear from the fact that he set up special commissions, directed by a committee of Bishops, to investigate every single "conversion" and to guarantee its freedom and sincerity.

To go on with the story: At the end of June, 1941, the Archbishop forwarded to the quisling premier a letter from the Archbishop of Belgrade asking that a halt be called to the persecution of Orthodox Serbs in Croatia and demanding more humane treatment of prisoners held for political or racial reasons.

### ***Quisling Campaign Flops***

As a result of all this, the quisling efforts to spread the Catholic Faith through force were a complete washout. The Orthodox in Croatia were officially recognized finally with an autonomous Croat Orthodox Church and a Patriarch in Zagreb.

Captain Rapotetz, sent from London by the Royal Yugoslav Government in Exile, interviewed the Archbishop and on his return reported as follows:

“As soon as the persecutions of the Serbs, Jews, and all the others started, the Archbishop protested against such acts to the quisling regime of Croatia. This happened about the end of June, 1941. When the persecutions did not stop, Archbishop Stepinac took more dramatic steps. He went to see Pavelitch himself. Entering his office, he said ‘It is God’s command: Thou shalt not kill!’ And without another word of explanation, he turned and left the quisling’s palace.”

In December, 1941, the Archbishop asked permission to visit the concentration camps and cheer up prisoners.

On December 31, 1941, from his pulpit in the Cathedral, he preached so violently against the *Ustashe* that they threatened to kill him.

In February, 1942, he protested to the Government against the destruction of Orthodox churches in the Province of Senj.

In March, 1942, he protested against

the extermination and mass deportation of Jews to concentration camps.

### ***Procures Repeal of Anti-Semitic Laws***

When, in October, 1942, the Government ordered all Jews to wear a Yellow Star of David, the Archbishop mounted the pulpit and roundly condemned all Nazi theories of racial superiority. A witness reports that:

“Two priests and six nuns of his Archdiocese were of Jewish origin and, therefore, had to wear the Yellow Star of David, too. The indignation of the population was so great and their comments so frank and drastic that the Croat Government, after having tried for a few days to suppress the people’s sound reaction by police force, quickly beat a retreat and exempted these eight people. Msgr. Stepinac, however, solemnly declared from the pulpit of his Cathedral:

“‘I have ordered these priests and nuns to continue wearing this sign of

belonging to the people from which Our Saviour was born as long as any others will have to do so!" "

The saintly Archbishop was fearless. Speaking of the Nuremberg Laws, promulgated in Croatia under Nazi pressure, he wrote to the quisling premier, March 6, 1943:

"No worldly power, no political organization has the right to persecute a man on account of the race to which he belongs . . . . The Catholic Church fears no earthly power when there is the question of defending human rights . . . ."

The following week, on the first Sunday of Lent, 1943, he preached so eloquently to his packed Cathedral against these racial laws that they were rescinded a few days later.

On March 27, 1943, informed that a trainload of 1,800 Jews was to pass through on its way to concentration camps in Poland, the Archbishop managed to get food and comfort through to the unfortunates in the face of every hindrance and official opposition.

The same thing happened a few weeks later in the case of 2,000 Jews being moved from Germany to Greece.

The Archbishop's criticisms of official inhumanity reached such a pitch that he was confined under house arrest for several days and newspapers were forbidden to report his sermons.

### ***Stepinac: A Great Humanitarian***

This has been only an outline, a few leaves from the diary of Archbishop Stepinac. Space forbids telling more of his battles on behalf of humanity. But we have surely given enough to indicate why no communist dictator could be comfortable with a man like Stepinac in the vicinity.

The Archbishop does not belong just to Catholics — although we have special reason to be proud of him. He represents civilization, the free spirit, challenging tyranny at every step.

Communist bullies may manhandle and beat him, they may strip him of his ring and cross, but they cannot pinion

the soul of this great man — and even though he be in prison, his influence waxes from day to day, giving hope to all who suffer under red Fascist tyranny.

### ***'What You Can Do***

There are two resolutions now before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs which would require our government to take formal action. One is the Rooney Resolution (House Concurrent Resolution No. 4) which calls upon the president to demand the immediate release of Archbishop Stepinac and all others imprisoned in defense of their faith.

The other is the Ross-Potts Resolution (House Concurrent Resolution No. 32) which demands that the Stepinac case be submitted immediately to the General Assembly of the United Nations.

You could help release this great humanitarian by writing in favor of these resolutions to Rep. Charles A. Eaton,



chairman of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Washington, D. C.

Copies of your letter should be sent, as well, to Rep. John J. Rooney, the author of the Rooney Resolution; Rep. Robert Tripp Ross, a co-author of the Ross-Potts Resolution; and Mr. Sava N. Kosanovitch, Yugoslav Ambassador, Washington, D. C.

The United States is a democracy, after all, in which your voice and mine count for something — and remember, it's the wheel that squeaks that gets the grease!



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