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## **Consequences of the Communist Revolutionary Ideology for the Catholic Community in Slovenia**

### **Abstract**

The Second World War began in Slovenia on 6 April, 1941 with the occupation of the national territory by the German, Italian and Hungarian occupying forces and resulted not only in the efforts to liberate the country but gave rise to intense revolutionary events. By declaring the liberation movement its exclusive right, the Communist Party, until then banned and working underground, announced a fierce fight against anyone not willing to submit to its plans and leadership. It also used the Civil War to launch a revolution. Following the Church's teaching, Slovenian Catholics were reluctant to go along with such conduct. Violence against ideological opponents of Communism began already in the autumn of 1941. At the end of war when the Communist Party and its satellite organizations took over the country, the violence against those who disagreed continued and culminated in the summer of 1945. Among them were many Catholic families, priests and members of religious orders. Pressure on the priests started to decline after 1960, yet the pressure on the Catholic laity grew stronger.

### **Keywords**

Catholic Church, Communist Revolution, Slovenia, totalitarian Regimes, World War II.

During his first visit to Slovenia in May 1996 which occurred after many years of hopes and expectations, because the political authorities considered the situation unfavourable for an earlier visit, Pope John Paul II delivered a speech at the main meeting with the faithful in Ljubljana, in which he mentioned: "Your Christian community underwent severe ordeals in the past, most recently the horrors of the two world wars. How could I forget the violent Communist revolution? The suffering caused by foreign occupation was aggravated by the civil war in which brother raised his hand over his brother. The venerable servant of God Lojze Grozde is but one of the countless

innocent victims who raise high the palm of his martyrdom as an indelible reminder and warning. During and after the war bishops, priests, religious and lay people were imprisoned, tortured, deported and violently murdered. They now all ask God for reconciliation, peace and concord among all the members of the nation<sup>1</sup>. In his appearances, the Pope broached the trying events during and after the war several times. There have been several attempts at reconciliation in the past twenty years, but traces of the nation's division due to the revolutionary events are still visible. Reconciliation in Slovenia appears even more remote than in 1991 when there was a change of political system and the advent of democracy in the country. At the time many, including the then president of the Slovenian Bishops' Conference, the Ljubljana Archbishop Dr. Alojzij Šuštar (1922–2005), hoped that reconciliation was possible and that the future could be built by mutual respect, recognition of diversity and relegating the relationship to the past. Even such a fundamental question as to whether those who died a violent death and took the anti-revolutionary side, had the right to a tombstone and rest in blessed earth became a controversial subject.

## 1. Introduction

Until the political changes, the study of the liberation struggle and the revolutionary process in Slovenia had been the exclusive right of the institutions influenced by the official ideology. Interpretations of historical events were in line with the ideology and were faithfully reflected in the historiography as well as in school textbooks. Uniformity prevailed. Few individuals had enough courage to think differently and express their view of the past publicly. Various events that echoed in Slovenia from the broader environment offered an opportunity for a different view of history, but a change in the official interpretation and consequently in the school system did not occur. Imports of literature from abroad were strictly controlled, personal baggage checks at border crossings were aimed mainly at finding books, magazines and ideas. Maintaining relations with foreign countries, especially the political emigres and the Vatican, which were considered the main exponents of the capitalist

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<sup>1</sup> Janez Pavel II, *Slovensko krščansko ljudstvo, poj Bogu z veseljem!*, in: *Bog blagoslovi predrago Slovenijo*, Ljubljana 1996, p. 59.

West, were considered for decades an important reason for investigations, arrests and court proceedings. The Communist controlled country considered it an important mission to fight against religion and capitalism which was its foundation. In the first two decades after World War II the fight took on all the forms of physical destruction of the enemy, but later the fight became more sophisticated. After the suppression of political parties and organizations that did not recognize the leading role of the Communist Party, the Catholic Church was the only one that remained outside its influence. The Party documents defined it as 'the backbone of the opposition'. Comparison between different parts of Yugoslavia reveals no significant differences in relation to the Catholic community. A slightly bigger variation is found only in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Here the Communist Party paid particular attention to the national aspect of religious communities and accused the Catholic community i.e. the representatives of Croatian nationality of nationalistic activities and thereby causing national tensions in a country where the national question had otherwise been regarded as irrelevant<sup>2</sup>. A repressive system was in the hands of the secret political police (UDBA, OZNA) which had a specific and well-organized department to monitor the functioning of the Church, individual clergymen and lay people. Evidence of its victims and co-workers has been preserved and also published in previous years. The publications caused further tensions and brought even more distrust, since the data did not provide evidence who had been a voluntary secret service collaborator, who was forced to collaborate and who was a victim. Several times reorganized and bearing different names, the secret service operated until the political situation changed and made its work felt particularly among the Slovenian emigrants, the priests working among them and the workers abroad.

## 2. The wartime events

The course of events in Slovenia after the Second World War cannot be understood without the knowledge of the circumstances brought about by the occupation at the beginning of the war. Slovenia was occupied and divided by the German, Italian and Hungarian occupiers. The fiercest actions against

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<sup>2</sup> See I. Lučić, *Progon Katoličke Crkve u Bosni i Hercegovini u vrijeme komunističke vlasti (1945–1990)*, »Croatica Christiana Periodica« 36 (2012) 69, p. 105–144.

the Church were conducted by the Nazis who occupied Styria and Carniola and thence exiled 90.83% of priests. All church property was confiscated, the Slovenian language prohibited. Also banished were the teachers and other public workers. In the area occupied by Hungary, national values were banned and church institutions placed in the service of occupation. The church had more opportunities to work in the area occupied by the Italians (Provincia di Lubiana). The Communist Party also spread its activities there. On 26 April, 1941 it established the Anti-imperialist Front (PIF) that was later renamed Liberation Front (OF), which attracted some smaller political groups, and declared the organization of resistance against the occupation as its exclusive right. In autumn 1941, only a few months after the beginning of war, the Communist Party began a campaign of violence against anyone of contrary belief. In August 1941, it formed a secret organization (VOS) for the liquidation of all potential opponents of the Communist movement. Besides the leaders of the bourgeois parties, the most exposed were the leaders of Catholic organizations, especially the young with leadership skills and greater influence on their peers. By the end of 1941 the secret organization liquidated 120 people in Ljubljana and its vicinity. From spring 1942 Slovenia experienced a civil war that was most widespread in the part of the Slovenian territory occupied by Italy in April 1941. In 1942, as many as 2,000 people fell victim to the weapons of the secret partisan liquidation services (among them 17 priests), while the opposing side caused 220 victims. In 1943, 11 priests were liquidated<sup>3</sup>. In 1944, eight priests were killed, seven of them by the partisans. The war becoming bloodier every year, there were ever more victims. Supporting the groups that fought against the revolution were also some priests, especially those who were themselves or their families, victims of Communist terror. It is essential to take into account the differences between the Slovenian regions: partisan forces were strongest in the area occupied by Italy where the partisans had also the greatest opportunities to organise and function. Together with the Bishop Dr. Gregorij Rožman (1883–1959), the majority of priests rejected any form of cooperation with the partisan movement because of their explicit reference to Communist ideology and atheism as its integral policy, although some priests joined the partisans. It is also true that it was the Catholics who helped to make the partisans a massive movement, but they were excluded from leading positions. The partisan movement was highly centralized and decisions to kill political opponents were taken at the highest

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<sup>3</sup> T. Griesser-Pečar, *Slowenische Katholische Kirche 1941–1960*, p. 484.

level. Nevertheless, it was emphasized on many occasions that some military commanders acted arbitrarily, for example in violent actions against individuals (priests, deserters) and groups (the Roma) and that the liquidations occurred only in individual cases, with no guilt on the part of the leadership.

A multi-year project *Fatalities among the population in Slovenia during the Second World War and its aftermath* which was initiated and conducted by the Institute of Contemporary History of the Republic of Slovenia in 1997 produced (to date) the most accurate data on violent deaths in Slovenia in the above mentioned period. The findings showed that during the war in Slovenia around 83,000 people died of violent death and after the end of war a further 15,000, which makes for nearly 98,000 people, about 6.5% of the total population. These figures put Slovenia in the third place in Europe (after the Soviet Union and Poland)<sup>4</sup> for the number of politically motivated violent deaths. The Catholic community had been affected in a special way, because among those killed there were many Catholics, fathers, young men, girls and whole families who refused to cooperate with Communism for religious reasons. The claim of rejecting the partisan movement and the alleged cooperation with the occupiers committed by the Catholic Church became a fixation in the relations between the State and the Catholic community after the war.

Time and again, demands were voiced (and still are) that the Church should apologize for its conduct during the war, as if this had not occurred many times. It first happened in July 1945 when a delegation of priests of Ljubljana Diocese and superiors of religious orders under the leadership of Vicar General Anton Vovk (1900–1963) expressed regret for what had been done wrong and a willingness to cooperate with the new authorities for the common good. Such a relationship with the past had been expressed by all the Slovenian bishops, yet it was not enough. A publication *For the truth. The Statements of Ljubljana bishops on wartime events* published by the Slovenian Bishops' Conference contains all the statements issued until 1998<sup>5</sup>. The association of the league of partisans has not yet stated any regrets for violence and mass killings during and after the war. Nevertheless, the proponents of such a historical view that was predominant until the political changes still seek to make the Catholic

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<sup>4</sup> T. Švagelj, *Vojna je postajala iz leta v leto bolj krvava. Statistika 1941–1946. Končno imamo seznam vseh žrtev na območju Slovenije, za katere je bilo mogoče izvedeti*, »Delo«, 17. maj 2012, p. 16.

<sup>5</sup> See M. Dolinar France (ed.), *Resnici na ljubo. Izjave ljubljanskih škofov o medvojnih dogodkih*, Ljubljana 1998, Družina, 40 p.

Church apologize for the revolution and all the violence done at the time, as if the Church had been the main organiser and initiator of the civil war.

### **3. The summer months of 1945**

The Communist Party in Slovenia established its authority on 5 May, 1945 and set up a large part of the structures that provided stability of leadership and absolute power of one political party. From the outset, an important measure taken by the new authorities were the exclusion of all who had advocated multiparty political system, sided with the counterrevolution during the war or did not agree with the introduction of a new form of government.

Consistent with the principle that the winners had the right to set the conditions of work and life and the losers to meet evil fate, they began committing mass murders. They reached their highest level in late May and June 1945. At that time they also took revenge on all who tried to seek safety abroad, this is mainly in Italy and Austria. Those who sought refuge in Italy found their way from there to various parts of the world and thereby saved their lives. A large part of those who fled to Austria with the allied army in power found themselves in the area governed by the army of Great Britain and were returned to Yugoslavia and murdered in mass executions. Among them were individuals and families, priests, seminarians and members of religious congregations. The data on refugees in Austria shows that around 17,000 civilians and soldiers (the Home Guard) who opposed the partisan movement sought refuge there. The winners were convinced that judicial proceedings against the returning 14,000 Home Guards and civilians were not necessary, but were liquidated without. For decades, it was forbidden to talk about those killed, their graves were concealed, the families had no right to obtain their death certificates. Survivors mainly in Argentina where the largest group of refugees took shelter, published the information and kept the memory of them and thereby helped in collecting material to write a more comprehensive history. Work in this area had already begun during their stay in refugee camps in Italy and Austria, where they established church communities, schools and cultural institutions until the camps were disbanded after 1949.

The departure abroad of many members of the Catholic community meant a further impoverishment of the Church in Slovenia. Many intellectuals who realized the evil of Communism and had already opposed it during the war,

escaped fled violent death by crossing the border and then leaving for different parts of the world. Argentina, Canada and the United States of America, but also elsewhere, saw dozens of Slovenian national parishes established, as well as other pastoral work, educational and cultural institutions. Joining the emigrants at the end of the war were 275 diocesan priests and religious (from about 1,000 priests who were in Slovenia at the beginning of war). They became the organisers of church life already in the refugee camps in Austria and Italy and continued work in new environments. Also going abroad was Bishop Dr. Gregorij Rožman who left for the United States through Austria and Switzerland. In the years after the war (until his death in 1959) he became the facilitator of all organised church life among the Slovenes around the world. Following the departure of so many priests, many parishes in Slovenia remained without their pastors. Members of religious communities began to take over their work. The Catholic community in Slovenia was depleted in all areas: prohibited were all church congregations and cultural institutions, schools and press, its property was confiscated, the work of the Church leaders was very limited and controlled in all areas. Having contacts with foreign countries, refugees or religious institutions was an typical reason for a trial or prison. Many priests were convicted just because of this. On the death of Bishop Dr. Gregorij Rožman it was not even allowed to sound the church bells<sup>6</sup>.

### 3.1. Pastoral letter of the bishops of Yugoslavia

At the end of the war there were two dioceses in Slovenia: Ljubljana and Maribor. The Ljubljana diocese remained without a pastor as Dr. Gregorij Rožman had gone to Austria and was not able to return to Slovenia and therefore joined the refugees. The Maribor diocese was led by the elderly and sick Dr. Ivan Jožef Tomažič (1876–1949). In 1946, both dioceses got auxiliary bishops: in Ljubljana it was the former Vicar General Anton Vovk, in Maribor the theology professor Dr. Maksimilijan Držečnik (1903–1978). In just a few months the Church, the clergy and laity, felt the radical effects of the new social order. A meeting was held in Zagreb in September 1945, of the bishops and vicars-general of the dioceses, which were without the diocesan bishops. At this meeting, a pastoral letter was prepared in which the leaders of local churches voiced sharp criticism of the new government's introduction of a new order including human rights abuse and in particular the suppression of church institutions. All bishops took responsibility for the contents of the letter; it was known, however, that one of the

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<sup>6</sup> See E. Škulj (ed.), *Rožmanov simpozij v Rimu*, Celje 2001, Mohorjeva družba.

main initiators and driving forces was the Zagreb archbishop Alojzije Stepinac (1898–1960). The letter was translated into all the official languages of Yugoslavia, copied and distributed in the greatest secrecy to all parishes<sup>7</sup>. The priests had to read it without comment at all masses on Sunday, 30 September, 1945. Few priests did not want, or did not have the courage, to read it. Those who did read it, experienced a new wave of repression, imprisonment and interrogation.

The bishops pointed out that the war was a severe test for all, including the Church. The consequences of the war were felt in all areas of private and public life. The bishops reminded the people that the state government had declared at the end of the war that it would respect the freedom of religion, the freedom of conscience and private property. The bishops had hoped that the unresolved issues in Church-State relations would be regulated through mutual consent including the Holy See. Events, however, had gone another way. Many priests and religious were liquidated or faced an unknown fate. Also many lay people were sentenced to death without the right to due process. The prisons were set up in the days after the war; the imprisoned were denied the most basic human needs. All Catholic press and printing were abolished. The seminaries were closed down and the buildings were used by the military. Religious education in schools remained (until 1952), but faced increasing obstacles. All private education and educational institutions led by male and female religious communities and dioceses were abolished. The bishops pointed to the public events that were intended to negatively impact on young people and discourage them from the influence of parents and the Church. Church charities rendered ineffective. Civil marriage was introduced. Agrarian reform denied the Church all opportunities to conduct an independent economic life and the maintenance of cultural, educational, formation and health institutions. Finally, the bishops drew attention to a strange and painful fact: the new government had not even spared the graves of the deceased; the graves had the crosses removed and any traces of their burial obliterated. The new government's measures did not differ from "a state of outright persecution of the Church".

The Communist Party produced a forceful response immediately after the pastoral letter was read. Any politician or civil servant who thought himself important attacked the letter and rejected the words of the bishops. By the end of

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<sup>7</sup> *Pastirsko pismo katoliških škofov Jugoslavije, izdano na vsesplošnih škofovskih konferencah v Zagrebu dne 20. septembra 1945*, in: B. Kolar (ed.), *V Gospoda zaupam*, Ljubljana 2000, Družina, p. 114–128.

1945, the party had published official responses to the letter. A special publication included the responses by Josip Broz Tito, Edvard Kardelj and Boris Kidrič<sup>8</sup>.

For Tito, the letter was an expression of the connection between the Church's leadership and the regimes in place during the Second World War, especially those who collaborated with the occupying forces. At the same time, he saw the letter as a kind of declaration of war against the new state and the social order built by the Communist Party. Slovenian Prime Minister Boris Kidrič presented the publishing of the letter as a watershed event that destroyed all plans to regulate relations between the State and the Church. He saw the letter as a continuation of the treacherous policy started during the war by the clergy and the Bishop of Ljubljana, Gregorij Rožman, and which continued after the Bishop's departure abroad by those seeking to eliminate the fruits of the revolution and restore the old social and political order.

The constitution adopted in January 1946 formed the legal basis for the State and Catholic Church relations. It laid down the principle of the separation of State and Church, which became the basis for controlling the Church regarding education and charity as well as any public events. In May, 1953 the Law on the Legal Status of Religious Communities was adopted which slightly limited the arbitrariness of state authorities. The basic principles of relations between the State and the Church formulated in the years after the war were repeated in all constitutions (the last being in 1974) and the laws on religious communities (the last was in 1976).

### 3.2. The Priestly Patriotic Association

The Communist Party leadership was aware of the prominence of Catholics in the partisan movement and the role of the Catholic Church in the life of the nation. In an attempt to resolve the conflict between Church and State, the Communist Party founded the so-called Religious Commission in February 1944 which also provided for the exercise of religious freedom in the new times. The commission, whose leadership had been set by the Party, included four Catholic priests who had worked with the partisan movement during the war. After the war, the slightly reformed Religious Commission became a means to exert pressure on the Catholic Church<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> See Maršal Tito, *podpredsednik zvezne vlade Edvard Kardelj in predsednik narodne vlade Slovenije Boris Kidrič, O pastirskem pismu*, Ljubljana 1945.

<sup>9</sup> T. Griesser-Pečar, *Slowenische Katholische Kirche 1941–1960*, p. 489.

To emphasize the reputation of the priests who had supported the partisan movement during the war and use them as bridge builders between the official Church and the new social order, the Slovenian political power stimulated and supported the creation of the priestly professional and patriotic association the *Slovenian Cyril and Methodius Priestly Patriotic Association* that initially united the so-called 'progressive priests'. The founding General Assembly of the Society was held on 20 September 1949. In establishing the Association, the Slovenian secret police (UDBA) played an important role. Some of them were chaplains in partisan units and participated in the implementation of the socialist revolution; after the war they tried to work as mediators between the State and the Church. The Association interfered strongly with the life of the Church, its internal relations, the relations between the clergy and the work of the Church in general. Similar associations were later established also in Croatia and in Bosnia and Herzegovina<sup>10</sup>. The Association was financed by the State and the members were afforded privileges: the state paid their pension insurance contributions, they had the right to health care, the possibility to teach Catechism in public schools (until 1952), the right to collect contributions from churchgoers for the maintenance of church buildings, the right to travel abroad and import theological books. If they joined the Association when in prison, their sentence was shortened or they were freed. The Association received money for publishing the newsletters and printing books, which priests and even bishops were not permitted to receive. O. Chadwick: "In Yugoslavia, the government at first encouraged priests' associations. These were like guilds or trade unions of progressive or radical priests who had the normal instinct that it was their duty to honour bishops and simultaneously to stop them running the Church. For a time these associations were important in all parts of Yugoslavia, for, when Tito first won power, the clergy with authority were not the bishops but the former chaplains to the partisan guerrilla armies. /.../ But, as in other countries, the influence of such associations declined steadily, partly because the bishops slowly reasserted their authority in the constitution and partly because the Communist leaders lost interest in their effectiveness"<sup>11</sup>.

The Slovenian bishops never recognized the Association, or its rules, but they did not post a decree banning such associations which was done by the Bishops'

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<sup>10</sup> B. Kolar, *The Priestly Patriotic Associations in the Eastern European Countries*, »Bogoslovni vestnik« 68 (2008) 2, p. 231–256.

<sup>11</sup> O. Chadwick, *The Christian Church and the Cold War*, London 1993, Penguin.

Conference in other parts of Yugoslavia in 1952. They thought it a lesser evil not to pay any attention to the Association and thus not cause further discord among the clergy. The Association's work and loyalty towards the bishops caused major conflicts among the priests who were members and non-members, between priests and bishops. It thus achieved one of the important goals set by the police: to create dissention within the Church in Slovenia and also creating stirring distrust of the Holy See. Many members of the Association had to report regularly to the police and thus became collaborators, which was one of the fundamental objectives of the Association in general (among the 142 delegates at the founding congress there were as many as 75% who were collaborators with the secret police). With 526 priests (more than half of the total number), the Association reached the maximum number of members in 1952. The Association was also seen as the basis for the establishment of a National Church and separation from the Vatican, which had been accomplished in the political sphere with the separation from Moscow by the Communist Party leader Josip Broz Tito. In 1990, the Association, which changed its name in 1970 to *The Slovenian Priestly Society*, decided to dissolve.

### **3.3. Disabling and expulsion of women religious**

In the areas occupied by the Germans in 1941, male and female religious institutions were abolished and denied any opportunity to function. The sisters who had not withdrawn to other parts of Slovenia were imprisoned or exiled. At the end of the war, religious communities were regarded as a threat by the new government. The religious orders were in the forefront of actions against church institutions because of their connections with the bishops and the leadership of the universal Church. During the war and revolution some religious institutions had been known for their frank opposition to the Communist Party plans and advocacy of the Church leadership teachings. Several male and female religious were liquidated. Just a few weeks after the end of the war and the onset of the new regime, plans were prepared for the deportation of certain religious communities, for the confiscation of their property and the arrest of their members. The strongest opposition to the new authorities among the male religious were considered to be the Jesuits, the Vincentians and the Salesians of Saint John Bosco. Due to the abolition of all private church schools the male and female religious communities devoted to education lost all opportunities to continue their work. All healthcare facilities were nationalized and the religious communities working in that area were excluded from public life. The sisters in hospitals were allowed to stay until new employees were educated, but were

then dismissed in violation of all contracts and agreements. Several male and female religious went abroad, where they became organizers of church life already existing in the camps and then in the new refugee environments. Most numerous were the Salesians, the Vincentians and Franciscan Brothers Minor. In some female religious communities all the members went abroad, especially if there were foreign citizens among them. Thus some religious communities disappeared from the Slovenian Church. For several decades they were not allowed to return from abroad and later they could not return because they had lost all the material means of life and work.

After May 1945, women religious disappeared from public life. Even wearing a religious habit could be penalized, although religious clothing had never been banned. In public, women religious were often attacked, insulted and physically threatened. There were even reports that police dogs were trained to attack religious dress. They were not allowed to use public transport. The fate of women religious in Slovenia after 1945 is largely unexplored, but it is a fact that the police and the secret service had the task of “liquidation of male and female orders”<sup>12</sup>. If they were sentenced to prison, they were sent to particularly difficult and exposed areas; often they had to participate in the destruction of church buildings. One of the main offences was committed on March 8 (sic!) 1948, when all the sisters refusing to discard religious dress and adopt the code of conduct prescribed by the politicians were expelled from Slovenian hospitals and other health institutions. They were welcomed with open arms in the mainly Orthodox parts of Yugoslavia (Serbia, Macedonia, Montenegro) where they could work also in military health care facilities. A similar fate befell the school sister communities, who sought new ways of work in the south of Yugoslavia where they also transferred their leadership and formation communities. Rapid ageing of the members and political changes around 1990 inspired the sisters to return to Slovenia and to move back the formation and leadership communities.

#### **4. Violence in the coming years**

Violence against the supporters of democracy, the multi-party system, human rights, freedom of movement, private property and the Church's role

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<sup>12</sup> T. Griesser-Pečar, *Die Verfolgung der Frauenorden in Slowenien nach 1945*, »Österreichische Osthefte« 42 (2000) 1, p. 79.

in society continued in the years after the adoption of a new constitution in January 1946. There were numerous show trials in which the accused had no rights. They were convicted by previously prepared verdicts, received monitory punishment and the testimonies in their favour were not taken into account. The appointed attorneys showed very limited interest in their clients for they could come under suspicion themselves<sup>13</sup>. The files were available so late that the defence could not be prepared. In cases against priests, people often wanted to testify or collect signatures in their favour, but the court refused to consider them. Basically, the charges against priests were collective accusations against which the individual had no chance of defence. Among the major objectives of the processes was confiscation of church property to destroy the economic foundations of ecclesiastical institutions. Penalties became somewhat less arbitrary and drastic after 1953 with the adoption of the first Law on the Legal Status of Religious Communities.

A revealing event, in the process of prosecuting the Catholic Church and its leaders, is the prolonged torture of Anton Vovk, the leader of Ljubljana diocese. Not being chosen at the discretion of the authorities, they opposed him as soon as he took up his office in June 1945 when he became vicar general. He was considered an extended hand of the Bishop Dr. Gregorij Rožman; reproached for not wanting to support the plans of the Communist Party and for not supporting the priests who wanted to cooperate with the new authorities. For several years he was tortured by the secret service with long night-time interrogations, public attacks in the media and attempts of liquidation. Hostilities reached their peak in January 1952, with the attempted murder of Anton Vovk, when he was set on fire at a train station in Novo Mesto. After he returned home exhausted from the hearings, it required great wisdom and composure for him to sit at a typewriter and record the main points of the hearings and the responses. His notes were published as *The Reminder and Warning. Personal Records of Bishop Anton Vovk from 1945 to 1953*<sup>14</sup>. They are a shocking testimony of the inhumanity of the regime that came to power in Slovenia during World War II and of Vovk's courage to resist it. He showed great respect for the clergy, love for the national

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<sup>13</sup> A comprehensive review of case law in Slovenia, particularly in relation to clergy and prominent leaders of ecclesiastical institutions can be found in T. Griesser-Pečar's book *Cerkev na zatožni klopi. Sodni procesi, administrativne kazni, posegi 'ljudske oblasti' v Sloveniji od 1943 do 1960*, Ljubljana 2005, Družina.

<sup>14</sup> A. Vovk, *V spomin in opomin. Osebni zapisi škofa Antona Vovka od 1945 do 1953* (ed. by B. Otrin), Ljubljana 2003, Družina.

community, for the leadership of the universal Church and its Magisterium. In October 2007, the diocesan process for the beatification of Bishop Anton Vovk was completed.

The celebration of church feasts was out of the question. When the emigrants came to visit Slovenia for Christmas, it was a normal working day. Just before the political changes the Christmas Day became a public holiday and the radio and television aired Christmas carols. Instead of Easter, the Slovenian emigrants came home for the Spring Break. Newspapers were not allowed to publish death notices with a cross. A 'personal holiday greeting' on the radio replaced a 'patron saint's feast day'. Renewing church facilities or obtaining permits for the construction of new religious facilities in the emerging areas meant facing an infinite number of obstacles. Until 1955, place names were intentionally changed; around 150 places lost their names, because they had been named after a saint or their name contained a word reminiscent of the Church. In order to disguise the church steeples and the presence of the Church in public, high buildings were built in the immediate neighbourhood.

Education experienced especially harsh measures. The new government did everything to exclude religion from schools and other public institutions. Teachers who were religious were persecuted and lost their jobs, because they were supposed to have a negative impact on children. For young people choosing a teaching profession meant having to choose between a profession and their faith. Any contact with the priests and the Church put the teachers in danger of losing their job. To reduce the number of priests, the work in seminaries was hindered and the aspirations of young people who opted for this route were thwarted in every way.

It was only a short time before the changes that priests got the opportunity for unrestricted access to patients in hospitals, the elderly in nursing homes and to visit prisoners. All activities that could be perceived as having a religious content were publicly prohibited; to make such activities public were stigmatized as an expression of dissension and an activity against the socialist revolution. As late as 1985, the police received a special manual with instructions to control the Church and each priest individually.

#### **4.1. Show trials**

From the end of military conflicts until the end of the nineteen fifties, Slovenian history was marked by numerous trials; first by military tribunals, then the National Courts of Honour and finally by the ordinary courts. The

accused in these processes were mainly accused of improper conduct during the war, alleged support of the occupying forces and later of delaying the revolutionary changes and the excitation of ethnic or religious intolerance. In addition to being punitive, the trials had a primarily educational purpose. They were held publicly and the courtrooms had the sound system installed to relay the events onto the streets. Their 'crimes' were widely reported on the radio and in the press, all with the aim to instil fear of authority and foster a sense that the state is ubiquitous and that at any time it could be your turn too. When important public figures stood trial, demonstrations were organized before or during the trial, where recruited demonstrators chanted slogans against "national traitors", traitorous bishops and priests, as well as demanding the strictest punishment.

The new government began to imprison priests as early as May 1945. The main allegations were their support of the occupiers and counter-revolutionary forces during the war, of impeding the changes of social order and having contacts with foreign countries. The priests of Ljubljana diocese were also accused of siding with Bishop Dr. Gregorij Rožman. An attempt by every means, including fictitious moral offences, which were widely reported in the press during the trials, was used to publicly destroy the reputation of priests and the Church. Having deprived the Church of its economic foundations, the new regime also tried to destroy it morally and ruin its reputation.

At a range of mass trials, groups of priests and religious, male and female, were convicted; the trials got the names after the type of order accused in the trials (Franciscan, Jesuit, Vincentian, Cistercian). Statistics show that since the end of military action until the end of 1955, there were over 320 priests convicted in the trials, until 1961 another 429 and many more were arrested. Most of them were sentenced to lengthy prison terms and some were fined. Several priests were sentenced to death, of these, three were shot, one was hanged and some death sentences were changed into prison sentences. Here we should count another 15 military chaplains who were killed: 12 had been returned to Yugoslavia from Austria by the English authorities and three had been arrested in Slovenia. In August 1946, Bishop Dr. Gregorij Rožman was sentenced in absentia: he was sentenced to 18 years in prison, he lost his civil rights and had all property confiscated. According to T. Griesser-Pečar around 500 priests and religious were arrested by the mid 1970s. After 1966, when the protocol was signed between the Holy See and Yugoslavia, fines were more common, prison sentences becoming rare. The same historian observes that the pressure on the Catholic Church in Slovenia continued in various forms

until the political changes in 1990<sup>15</sup>. The priests who were sentenced to lengthy prison terms could get a reduction if they were willing to join the Cyril and Methodius Association or if they agreed by signature to become collaborators of the secret police.

A special terror used by the Slovenian Communist authorities was the existence of two groups of camps. Already during the war, the first concentration camp had been established and more were created in the first months after the war. The camps were similar to the German concentration camps and most of the victims were murdered without legal proceedings. The second group was the labour camps that existed from the end of the war until the beginning of the 1950s. Integral parts of creating the new social order, at that time, were mass murders, political and show trials, forced deprivation of property, collectivization and deportations of the population. In 1946, the camps were renamed as institutions of forced labour and then to criminal and correctional homes. The ones sentenced to such penalties were typically those who had been accused of acting against the people's government and needed to be removed from society and 're-educated' for a certain period of time. These were mostly the so called 'class enemies', among them were, first of all, Catholic priests, former entrepreneurs and affluent farmers (called the *kulaks*). Forced labour existed in Slovenia until 1957. According to data collected so far by the researcher Milko Mikola, more than 20,000 people were sentenced to forced labour<sup>16</sup>. "Labour camps represented just one of the worst forms of violence carried out by the Communist authorities against their own citizens after the war. People should feel fear of the authorities, make them feel completely helpless and would not even dare think of any resistance" (M. Mikola)<sup>17</sup>.

#### **4.2. Confiscation of church property**

An important element of the trials in the whole of Yugoslavia was the confiscation of property and reduction of private property, all of which helped nationalization by means of production and the abolition of private property which was considered a source of social inequality. Initially, the

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<sup>15</sup> See T. Griesser-Pečar, *Duhovščina med nacizmom, fašizmom in komunizmom*, in: *Cerkev na Slovenskem v 20. stoletju*, Ljubljana 2002, p. 296.

<sup>16</sup> See M. Mikola, *Osvobojeni gradimo*, Ljubljana 2006, Sektor za popravilo krivic in narodno spravo.

<sup>17</sup> I. Žajdela, *Taborišča za 'prevzgojo' in suženjsko delo*, »Družina«, 14. januar 2007, p. 10.

main focus was those accused of wartime collaboration with the Germans, later the farmers.

The factories, other industrial plants, agricultural areas and larger housing were nationalized. The agricultural sector experienced a collectivization process, land reform and compulsory delivery quotas. The new authorities viewed ecclesiastical institutions as land owners who used foreign labour. Since the holders of church public services had not cultivated the land themselves, the land was confiscated. As the Church was prohibited from being active in the media, formation, education and health services, it meant all printers, schools, residential homes, hospitals, orphanages and nursing homes were confiscated. Confiscation of church property was often a matter of arbitration by the local Communist Party officials. They took from the arrested: their libraries, part of their furniture, works of art, typewriters and other property. When sentencing those in charge of church public services, the sentencing involved also the confiscation of all assets held by the institution to which the convicted belonged or held any responsibility.

Ecclesiastical institutions were allowed to maintain a maximum of 10 hectares of land. The Catholic community was deprived of several rectories, other church buildings and some churches. In the Kočevje area, which became a closed military area after the war, 95 churches were destroyed.

In November 1991, the Slovenian parliament adopted the law on denationalization to correct the injustices that had been committed during the time of revolutionary measures. The basic principle was that the property would be returned in kind, or the beneficiaries would get a fair compensation if the restitution was not possible. At the last moment, Article 19 was added which prohibited the return of all the buildings that served health, education, military or other government activities. These were mainly the buildings that formerly belonged to religious communities and dioceses. Opposition to the law and deliberate hindrance of its implementation, where the courts and other government offices that remained a stronghold of the old system, maintained an important influence, which meant that by the end of 2012 the law had not yet been implemented and there are still several hundred cases in the legal process. At the same time, a systematic public campaign was initiated against the Catholic Church, the largest institution with the right to recover the confiscated property. The most common complaint was that the returned property would become the property of the Holy See, which would have supreme control in the management of church property. It was also maintained that the Church had acquired the

property in an unfair and non-transparent way at the time of feudalism. The ownership of the island of Bled and the church on it was among the most problematic of cases, as the reason presented for the nationalization of the island was the fact that a private entity could not be the owner of cultural property. At the moment, the church on the island belongs to the parish, other buildings were handed over to the parish in rent for 40 years. In the context of denationalization a new fact has appeared in recent years: the cases that had already been finally settled are being opened again.

## 5. Conclusion

Beside the suppressed political parties, the biggest victim of the revolution was the Catholic Church, which in spite of the limited opportunities to live and function, managed to maintain its unique position. No judicial proceedings or punishment of any participant due to their involvement in the revolutionary violence during and after the war has been carried out in Slovenia. So far over 600 mass graves have been discovered in Slovenia, some of which have been made public, but most have not. If during the political changes the need to break with the past and condemnation of crimes had been more pronounced, such ideas would have been labelled as revanchism, which would have discouraged even the most determined defenders from regulating the relationship to the past. Thus Slovenia has not experienced a break with the past. Mentioned in a speech by Pope John Paul II, a respected member of the Slovenian Catholic Action, Lojze Grozde was declared a martyr and beatified on 13 June, 2010. He was the first victim of Communism in Slovenia whom the Church recognised and honoured in this way. Today, procedures are still in progress for several others. Slovenian politicians had also major problems with the adoption of the European Parliament resolution of 2 April, 2009 on European conscience and totalitarianism which condemned totalitarian regimes. In October 2009, the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia rejected the adoption of the resolution and adopted only the information about it. Only in 2012, did the Slovenian government adopt a resolution proclaiming 23 August as the European Day of Remembrance for the Victims of All Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes. This was done despite the public discontent of individuals and institutions that are still seeking to promote the preservation of the value system of the past. During the Slovenian presidency of the European Union in 2008, a conference on *Crimes Committed*

by *Totalitarian Regimes*<sup>18</sup> was prepared and records and proceedings were published, but it all went unnoticed by the Slovene public.

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<sup>18</sup> See *Crimes Committed by Totalitarian Regimes. Crimes and Other Gross and Large Scale Human Rights Violations Committed During the Reign of Totalitarian Regimes in Europe: Cross-National Survey of Crimes Committed and of Their Remembrance, Recognition, redress, and Reconciliation. Reports and Proceedings of the 8 April European Public Hearing on »Crimes Committed by Totalitarian Regimes«*, organised by the Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the European Union (January-June 2008) and the European Commission. Ljubljana 2008.