

DEMANDS OF THE CROATIAN CATHOLIC CLERGY FOR UNIFICATION WITH THE ORTHODOX CHURCH DURING 1919

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INTRODUCTION

Western Balkan is a territory inhabited mainly by Christians, descendants of Slavs which came in early Middle Ages (Croats, Serbs, Slovenians). This area is a place of Catholic-Orthodox contact where cannot be drawn clear border due to high level of religiously mixed settlements. Great role in Christianisation played *the Slavic brothers* Cyril and Methodius whom were sanctified to the altar of the Catholic Church by papal encyclical *Grande munus*, published in 1880. Their feast was established on the 5th of July. The Pope's encyclical enabled the promotion of the idea of uniting the Catholic and Orthodox Churches in the Balkans. The most important promoters were the Archbishop of Zagreb Josip Strossmayer and his friend, the historian Franjo Rački, who saw the encyclic as a way to *unification of Slavs divided by faith* [2]. The idea of South Slavic Catholic-Orthodox unity gained more attention after the end of the First World War, when the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was formed. Religious diversity, in a politically unstable situation when the borders were not yet fully defined, posed a danger to the newly formed state. As early as the end of the World War I, emerged groups of Catholic priests who promoted the idea of unification with the Orthodox Church.

THE LOWER CLERGY REFORM MOVEMENT

Roots of this movement can be traced back to 1917, when Niko Petrić, the archpriest of Solin, printed a pamphlet *Rane u katoličkoj crkvi* (*Wounds in the Catholic Church*) in which he openly criticized church discipline, which he considered one of the reasons for the disunity of Christians. Already in the preface of his brochure, Petrić notes that religious schisms are reflection of bad human influence in the Church. The author indirectly indicates that unity will be achieved when *the wounds* in the Church were to be healed. It also emphasizes the importance of the impact of major political events on the creation of divisions. Author simplifies, Christian division and states that there are three churches:

Catholic, Greco-Eastern and Protestant. He is also wondering about the future: *Will this unheard-of world war create another "church of Christ" or will it unite the already separated? This is a big and important question that will be answered in the near future* [9]. Petrić believes that there will be a great religious renewal because humanity, tormented by the war, will find their safety in religion. He concludes that because of that, it is necessary for the Church to be purified from bad influences. He calls on all religious representatives of Christianity, to make every effort to fulfil as soon as possible the words that there will be *one flock and one shepherd*. Petrić believes that celibacy is one of the causes, which is on the way to unite and reconcile separated Christian churches. The author predicts that after the war, some states will pass laws that will be contrary to celibacy, and which will strive to make the clergy and the church as popular as possible. The author also believes that the war caused a financial crisis that worsened the difficult financial situation of the lower clergy. That is why he deals with the economic issues of the clergy and the redistribution of church money. [9].

The booklet *Rane u Katoličkoj crkvi* (*Wounds in the Catholic Church*) published) is considered by many to be the beginning of the reform movement of the lower clergy of the Catholic Church, which flared up in 1919. The most prominent representatives of this group were Fr. Stjepan Zagorac and Fr. Jeronim Tomac. A group of priests gathered around the aforementioned duo were trying to carry out a reform of the Catholic Church. They dealt primarily with class issues of the clergy and ecclesiastical discipline. They published their magazines (*Reforma*, *Nova Reforma* and *Preporod*) and several memoranda and booklets. One of the earliest program documents of the movement was unnamed document, signed by Fr. Josip Tomac in Varaždin in 1919. In addition to the already common themes of the reformers, the manuscript provides guidelines for rapprochement and, ultimately, the unification of the Catholic Church with the Orthodox Church. The draft recommends as much tolerance as possible towards the Orthodox in three points. He considered that Roman Catholic Church should allow and recommend mixed organizations of Catholics with Orthodox to support and defend the common faith in the divinity of Christ. Likewise, Church should tolerate private meetings among Catholic and Orthodox priests. Tomac also believes that Church should let Orthodox co-operate in Catholic journals, and even to discuss controversial issues for this purpose and with the same intention, *to pave the way for perfect unity as soon as possible, to be "one sheep and one shepherd" so that all may be one in Christ Our Lord* [4].

Unfication programme consists of gradual theological rapprochement of Orthodox and Catholic priests is defined through collaboration and discussion in journals. Mass rapprochement of believers of the two churches would be

achieved by joint Orthodox-Catholic organizations. These religious associations would be the first administrative step towards church unity.

Another booklet *Savremene želje nižeg klera* (*Contemporary Desires of the Lower Clergy*) was published in 1920. Reformers articulated their critiques and ideas in it. They pay great attention to the priestly celibacy they oppose. Authors believe that celibacy in the Catholic Church is obligatory for two reasons. The first is preservation of Church's property, which would be distributed to their children and wife in the event of a priest's marriage. Another reason for maintaining celibacy is found in the dualistic church-state view of the world. Modern desires predict a utopian future in which *state will be replaced by the people, and the union of states by the union of peoples, national differences will cease, political and economic borders will cease, there will be no wars, there will be a separation of church and state* so there will be no struggle for competence, for power. According to the authors, such a sequence of events would lead to the marriage of the clergy. In predicting state-legal and political relations, Bolshevik ideas can be seen, which were probably implemented in the text by fr. Tomac, who was a secret sympathizer of communism [13].

The authors give their vision of closer future of the two largest religious communities in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. They believe that the equalization of differences between Serbs, Croats and Slovenes would encourage the development of a movement to bring the Eastern Church (Orthodox) closer to the Western (Catholic) [13]. According to the reformers, the impetus for the unification of the two churches would come as a consequence of Yugoslav national integration. However, they believe that they will have to go further and demand the abolition of celibacy, because the Eastern Church will not agree to it in any way for the lower bar priesthood. Finally, they write *we have on the territory of Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes Greek Catholics whose lower clergy marry freely*. In the vision of the church union presented in the booklet, the Orthodox in the territory of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes would recognize the Pope as the supreme leader, while Roman Catholics from the same territory would accept the Eastern (Byzantine) rite. Thus, one church unit, one (eastern) rite and one head would be formed on the territory of KSCS. Thus, the goal was to erase within the state borders all religious, ritual, and disciplinary church differences among Christians. According to the authors, the Greek Catholics would play a big role in uniting the churches. They point out that the first condition of the union would be to allow the marriage of priests [13].

The lower clergy, creating a proposal for the introduction of optional marriage, greatly reckoned with the union. Namely, we were convinced that the Latin Church would finally reconcile with the East in the Balkans. Perhaps this reconciliation will be

carried out on a platform, so that we Latins receive the Eastern rite, and the Easterners, to recognize the papal primacy. For that, our Greek Catholics s have a great mission in the state of SCS and in the Balkans. But the first condition is the marriage of a priest. I think Rome would agree to abolish celibacy if given the hope that the union would succeed [13].

The reformers intended to resolve the issue of celibacy contrary to the then (and today's) practice of the Orthodox Churches. They suggest that the priest makes a decision on celibacy after priestly ordination: *Let the young priest go unmarried to the flock, let him work there practically, let him complete all his necessary examinations, and then let him decide either to marry or to be celibate* [13]. According to the then, and even today, canon law of the Eastern churches (Orthodox and Greek Catholic), the ordination of married men is allowed. However, an already ordained priest cannot marry, even when he remains a widower [20].

The Reformers therefore put forward a proposal for celibacy which is inconsistent with the ecclesiastical discipline of the Eastern Churches. Despite this in their eyes, the discipline of the Latin rite is considered one of the greatest obstacles to the unity of the church. It is significant that at that time there was a movement of the lower Orthodox clergy that demanded the possibility of a second marriage of priests, but this proposal was rejected by the Synod of Bishops of the newly formed Serbian Orthodox Church [15].

It is important to emphasize that their *Reforma* magazine was opened for cooperation for both, Catholic and Orthodox clergy. For example, Archimandrite Ruvim from Serbia wrote about the rapprochement of the two churches [15]. This magazine was quickly shut down, and the *Preporod* was launched, in which a *Memorandum to Archbishop Bauer* was published in early February 1920, calling for the unification of all Christian churches and the formation of an independent ecclesiastical province with a primacy for Yugoslavia. It also insisted on the autonomy of the church on democratic principles, but with the retention of its monarchical-hierarchical constitution and the use of the people's living language in masses, sacraments and all rites [5]. If they were fulfilled on the state territory of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, there would be a single church administration. The signatories also demanded that during the reform of theological studies, Orthodox and Anglican theology be approached and studied in more detail. After unsuccessful negotiations with the Church authorities, a group of priests prone to reforms in 1925 founded the Croatian (Old) Catholic Church, which still exists today.

The then higher hierarchy of the Catholic Church in Croatia did not look favorably on the idea of unification with the Orthodox: *The unionist base of the reform clergy may be liked by liberal unbelieving spirits in Yugoslavia; but it can never*

and never be the basis of the religious agreement of our Churches [1]. In addition to this group of priests gathered around the *Reforma* magazine, other individuals and groups advocating for disciplinary change in the Catholic Church acted independently of them after the First World War. At the beginning of 1919, a prominent Catholic journalist, Petar Rogulja, met with an Orthodox priest and theological professor, Vojo Janjić, and discussed the possibility of a Catholic-Orthodox union in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. The meeting concluded that the church union would enable better resistance to Bolshevik ideas among the Yugoslav people [7].

Independently of the reform movement, Fr. Božo Milošević gave a lecture in Split in May 1919 in which he fiercely criticized the Catholic Church. He was very quickly suspended from the Franciscan order. After that, he gathered like-minded people and started publishing the biweekly *Novi rod*, in which he presented his ideas. He preached until the end of 1920, after which he went to America. One of the guidelines of his action was: *To support all efforts and movements that lead to the realization of our ideal; such as a movement for the unification of all Christian churches in our nation*. Unlike the reform movement, Milošević planned to establish a completely new religious community, which he called the People's Church. His speeches have often been criticized in Catholic media accusing him of links to Masonic organizations. This movement was short-lived, and Milošević himself emigrated to the United States in early 1921 [6].

In addition to the reform movement and Milošević, a third group with similar demands appeared in the post-war press. On May 22, 1919, the *Novo doba* published the *Declaration of the Clergy in the Cetina Region*. It was joint statement of Catholic and Orthodox clergy. The first point of this proclamation reads: *We do not make any distinction between the names of Serbian and Croatian, and someone rightly called us Serbs or Croats, because our political ideals are the same*. The second calls for interfaith tolerance among the clergy and believers on evangelical principles. The third deals with the equality of all classes (citizens, peasants and workers). The fourth point states that the cultural struggle in our nation, which needs education, peace would be harmful and deadly. In the fifth point, they called priests to establish priestly associations, where two of our denominations live in the same region. The initiators hope for the soon unification of the Catholic and Orthodox Churches and call for the establishment of joint Catholic-Orthodox priestly associations. They expressed hope that the higher clergy would support their initiative and that one day the word of the Lord would be fulfilled, *that there would be one flock and one shepherd... May the world collapse, love will lead us, unite us and save us* [14].

The text of the statement was severely criticized by the lecturer of the Makarska seminary, Dr. Grabić, in the pro-clerical newspaper Jadran. He accused the signatories of not recognizing the papal primacy. He also criticized the possibility of a church union [16]. A new meeting of Orthodox and Catholic priests from Dalmatia was held in Split on September 3, 1919 [20]. About eighty priests attended. Don Ante Anić, a Catholic, was elected president, and Jakov Mandić, an Orthodox priest, was elected secretary. The speakers were Fr. Nedeljko Subotic, Fr. Milan Trisic, Fr. Frane Ivanisevic and Fr. Lovre Katic. The gathering passed a resolution for full national and state unity. The resolution also states a willingness to work for the common good. The group opposed any religious intolerance, the disappearance of which would pave the way for rapprochement and unification. The group demanded the abolition of monasticism and the giving of a systemic reward to priests. The group sent a telegram to Regent Alexander: Priests of both religions of Dalmatia, gathered at a common and religious unification, greet the most loyal of their King Peter and Your Majesty [17]. The third meeting of the Cetina Group took place on January 23, 1920. [16].

On June 28, 1919, Catholic priests from the island of Brač issued their statement. The meeting was held in Dol on June 17. Priests from Brač were the first to publicly support the Yugoslav Club in Vienna. They support freedom and national unity, and the revival of the people's state under Karadjordjevic's scepter. They represent Christian morality in the education of the people. In the third point, they seek autonomy for the Catholic and Orthodox Churches and Muslim associations, and beg the Almighty to *achieve the unity of the churches as soon as possible* [13]. They condemned imperialism and gave their views on agrarian reform. A total of twenty-five Catholic priests serving on Brač signed this statement [3].

In Croatia, in addition to Catholic demands for reform and church unity, some Orthodox priests also demanded it. On July 22, 1919, several priests gathered in Sinj and passed the Resolution of the Orthodox Clergy in Dalmatia. They supported the statement of the Cetina group, written a month ago, especially emphasizing that only in the unity of the churches lies the salvation of the human race individually for our two-named people (one flock and one shepherd) [15].

CONCLUSION

After the end of the First World War, the territories inhabited by the southern Slavs were united into one state called the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, led by the Karadjordjevic dynasty. The situation in the newly formed

state was unstable due to the territorial claims of neighbouring states. The broad social circle sought to strengthen state unity by propagating the creation of one nation. Certain circles put forward the idea of achieving ecclesiastical unity of Catholics and Orthodox in the territory of the new state.

Three views of the ways in which churches were united were represented. The group around *Reforma* magazine initially hopes to bring about change and achieve church unity by bringing the Orthodox back to a completely changed Catholic Church. After unsuccessful attempts to reform the Catholic Church, this group of priests and believers joined the Old Catholic Church, and they founded the Croatian Old Catholic Church. Former Franciscan Bozo Milosevic planned to achieve unity through his newly founded People's Church. In May 1919, a group of Catholic and Orthodox priests from the Cetina region published a declaration demanding certain church reforms, but also the rapprochement and unification of the Orthodox and Catholic Churches. The Cetina group held three meetings during 1919 and 1920. After the enactment of the constitution in 1921, all currents that advocated church unity were marginalized. The stabilization of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was achieved by the constitution, and religious diversity and disunity no longer threatened the newly formed state.

SUMMARY

After the First World War, group of Catholic priests in Croatia, required certain reforms of the Church. They were heterogenous group which consisted of several factions which published pamphlets in which they proposed changes mainly of church discipline. The focus of previous historiographical research has been on the demands for celibacy and the vernacular in the liturgy, while the ecumenical idea of ecclesial unity has been neglected. This paper will show that the reforms of church discipline were only an instrument that would facilitate the implementation of the ultimate goal - the union of Croatian Catholics with the Orthodox.

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Abstract

The article discusses the efforts and attempts at unification between Roman Catholics and Orthodox in the territory of today's Croatia in the past. It also describes the individual dialogues and possible disputes based on period documents, which significantly influenced the development of the whole experiment. the article does not omit the individual personalities of the time who were most significantly involved in this process. The general description is completed on the socio-cultural background of the environment where these experiments took place. The author of the article does not forget to draw attention to the characteristics of individual experiments and their division into church-reform, political and folk-cultural nature.

Keywords

Catholic Church, union, Orthodoxy, ecumenism, unification of churches, Croatia