

Chronicle

Summaries of Events and Background Information

Catholic Bishops Ban Controversial Body

Roman Catholic bishops in Yugoslavia have taken action, the first East European hierarchy to do so, on the Vatican declaration published in March 1982, which forbids priests to be members of politicised bodies. The declaration, issued by the Congregation for the Clergy under the title *Quidam Episcopi* (Some Bishops), is aimed at two types of organisations: "trade-union type" bodies that, according to the declaration, reduce the priestly vocation to the status of a secular profession and the role of the bishops to that of employers; and clerical associations which "directly or indirectly, overtly or covertly" serve political ends — even when this is done "under the outward guise of promotion of humanitarian ideals, peace and social progress". The Yugoslav Catholic bishops' conferences has responded to the Vatican document in two stages.

At their meeting in Zagreb from 20 to 22 April 1982, the bishops took cognisance of the declaration, noting that it had been confirmed and approved by the Pope and that it was binding for all bishops, priests and religious. The bishops stated that "priestly associations may not legally exist or operate within the Church without getting approval for their statutes and activities from individual bishops in whose areas they intend to operate". The conference 'appointed a special commission to study the status of associations affected by the decree. Mgr Josip Pavlišić, the Archbishop of Rijeka, was made its chairman and Mgr Djuro Kokša, Auxiliary Bishop of Zagreb, its secretary.

Five months later, at a meeting in Djakovo, in northeastern Croatia, held

from 27 to 29 September 1982, the bishops unanimously reiterated that priests may not be members of professional priestly associations and other bodies which are not in line with *Quidam Episcopi*. They emphasised that these bodies include the Theological Association *Kršćanska Sadašnjost* (TDKS) (Contemporary Christianity) in Zagreb. The Djakovo meeting of the hierarchy also "unanimously and resolutely" rejected "grave political insinuations" by the association's leaders against "those who take a critical stance towards TDKS". They ended by re-stating that "priestly activity, which includes Catholic theology, must be under the bishops' jurisdiction". Behind these two episcopal communiqués lies a protracted and complex dispute stretching back a number of years.

It was in February 1968 that Cardinal Franjo Šeper, the Archbishop of Zagreb, who had been a prominent figure at the 1962-65 Second Vatican Council, founded a centre for "conciliar" research called *Kršćanska Sadašnjost*. From the beginning, the centre's leading light and most eminent figure was Dr Tomislav Šagi-Bunić, a Franciscan theologian who had attracted much attention at the Second Vatican Council as Cardinal Šeper's *peritus* (expert). The centre found a publisher of real talent in Dr Josip Turčinović and an excellent editor and writer in Dr Vjekoslav Bajsić, like the other two a professor at the Zagreb Theological Faculty. The centre soon developed into a dynamic organisation exerting influence not only in Zagreb and Croatia but also beyond and attracting a good deal of support from, particularly, young people. Its high-quality publishing output included translations



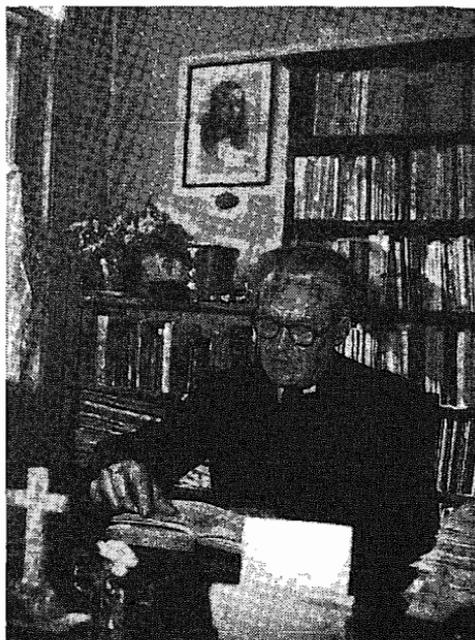
Three of the four newly-created Cardinals in Eastern Europe. *Above* Cardinal Joachim Meisner of East Germany, *below left* Cardinal Franjo Kuharić of Yugoslavia, (*both photos courtesy of Glaube in der 2. Welt*) and *below right* Cardinal Józef Glemp of Poland (*photo courtesy Keston Colege*). For biographical information, see pp. 204-7.





The new Cardinal from Latvia, Julijāns Vaivods (*above left*). An interview with him appears on pp. 207-9. (*Photo courtesy of Keston College.*) A lecture by Dr Franc Rode (*above right*) entitled "Our True Christianity — Today and Tomorrow" (translation on pp. 217-21) remains unpublished in his native Slovenia, Yugoslavia. (*Photo courtesy of Dr Rode.*)

The selected writings of the Hungarian Lutheran Bishop Lajos Ordass (*right*) are reviewed on pp. 178-87. (*Photo courtesy of the Conference of the Hungarian Lutheran Church Workers Abroad.*)



from western theological literature. Under the editorship of Dr Bajsić, the centre also launched a highly successful popular family magazine called *Kana* (Cana — in Galilee) and a bulletin of religious news called *AKSA*, which soon became one of the chief sources of information, about not only the Catholic Church in Yugoslavia but also about the broader field of church-state relations.*

In May 1977, the *Kršćanska Sadašnjost* group founded a new body — the Theological Association — and registered it with the Yugoslav authorities as a “self-managing organisation”. This step caused a good deal of upset within the Church, not least because it had been taken without prior consultation with the hierarchy. Cardinal Šeper criticised the new body over the Croatian-language section of Vatican Radio and dissociated himself from it. Archbishop Franjo Kuharić, who had succeeded Cardinal Šeper when the latter was appointed prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (formerly Holy Office), was also deeply upset. He had been kept in the dark — despite the fact that he had given much encouragement to the group in the past.

Some bishops, notably Mgr Frane Franić, the Archbishop of Split, saw the Theological Association from the start as a factor of disunity within the Church and, whatever the intentions of its founders and members, a potential instrument of the Church’s manipulation by the regime. TDKS’s reply was that there was nothing sinister about its activities or, for that matter, registration with the State, which — TDKS leaders claimed — was purely for the purposes of obtaining a tax concession for which only “self-managing” bodies are eligible under Yugoslav law. This did not reassure the critics, who noted the record speed with which TDKS’s registration with the authorities was rushed through as well as other signs of the Yugoslav regime’s approval for the new body and benevolence towards it.

No immediate action against TDKS was taken by the Church authorities but the Vatican issued an instruction whereby TDKS members could not fill the positions of dean and sub-dean of the Zagreb Theo-

logical Faculty or sit on its directing body. It also became quite clear that TDKS members stood little chance of being appointed bishops. The church authorities could not disband TDKS because it is a body formed under state, not church law, but its leaders were asked by the bishops not to recruit new members. They promised to follow the bishops’ instruction. The line that had won the day was the patient and conciliatory one of Archbishop Kuharić. But this did not stop Archbishop Franić from banning the priests of his archdiocese in southern Croatia from membership of TDKS. He also forbade TDKS activities in his archdiocese.

TDKS’s parent organisation, *Kršćanska Sadašnjost*, continued to go from strength to strength in the publishing field. It extended its activities into film-making (documentaries on religious and historical themes), and the production of records and cassettes. Its series of Croatian Christmas carols, recorded with the participation of well-known singers and instrumentalists, achieved instant popularity and success not only in Croatia and elsewhere among Croatian Catholics in Yugoslavia but also abroad.

By contrast, the Theological Association and its leading figures continued to cause controversy and annoyance. In 1978, Fr Turčinović offended many in the Church by giving a long interview to *Start*, the Yugoslav counterpart to the *Playboy* magazine, which regularly publishes anti-Church articles. His claim that he was unaware the interview was for *Start* did not impress the critics. Fr Bajsić wrote in a regime-controlled magazine that the Church in Croatia was still suffering from a “colonial, bunker mentality”, appropriate when the Church was the only force defending the Croatian nation, but not any longer. Once again, much annoyance and hurt in the Church. In February of last year, Fr Šagi-Bunić took part in a debate on Zagreb television, a rare appearance by a Catholic theologian. His remarks about marriage and divorce, which were widely interpreted as an indication of his disagreement with the Church’s teaching, caused much criticism. The fact that Fr Šagi-Bunić allowed himself to be treated rather patronisingly, not to say insultingly, by the woman chairing the discussion, made for even more hostile criticism on the ground that the theologian had indirectly hurt the Church’s prestige. Two years

**AKSA* is now regularly excerpted and summarised in *RCL*; see pp. 197-99 of this issue — *Ed.*

before, at the time of President Tito's death in May 1980, the Theological Association had held a special commemorative meeting at which Fr Šagi-Bunić, its president, had delivered what many Croats, Catholics and non-Catholics alike, judged to have been an excessively eulogistic lecture about Tito the statesman.

Last year opinion against TDKS had hardened because of the political and theological stance of its leadership. On the eve of the bishops' meeting in Djakovo in September last year, they received a petition from 150 young Catholic intellectuals in Zagreb, Split and Zadar criticising TDKS and asking the bishops "whether it was possible within the Church to hear a view different from that held by TDKS members". *Glas Koncila* (Voice of the [Second Vatican] Council), the main Croatian-language Catholic paper in Yugoslavia, published in Zagreb, strongly condemned a long critique by TDKS of Archbishop Franić's views published in August in *Vjesnik* (Herald), the semi-official paper in Croatia. In the statement, which took up four columns, TDKS was replying to some criticisms made by the Archbishop of its activities. The passage in the bishops' Djakovo statement which spoke about "grave political insinuations" by the Theological Association's leaders against "those who take a critical stance towards them" was a reference to this *Vjesnik* statement about Archbishop Franić by TDKS's presidium.

The Yugoslav authorities' reaction both to the Vatican statement and to the Yugoslav Catholic bishops' follow-up action was strongly critical. "The Church demands unity with the believers," stated the main commission dealing with religious affairs in the Party-controlled Socialist Alliance in Bosnia and Hercegovina on 8 October, but that is "merely a cover for political acts. This 'unity' involves swearing oaths of loyalty to the Church and thus breaking down the unity of atheists and believers expressed through the Socialist Alliance". In Zagreb, Mr Vitomir Unkovjč, secretary of the Commission for Religious Affairs in Croatia, told the weekly *Danas* (Today) in

October that certain churchmen wanted to become partners of the State and were using the Catholic Church in Poland as their model. He deplored the banning of TDKS whose emergence he called "an event that had enriched both religious freedoms and our intellectual and cultural life". A commentator in *Vjesnik* spoke of a "guillotine for TDKS" and called the bishops' ban on TDKS "a tragedy for the Church and culture here". An article in the Split daily *Slobodna Dalmacija* (Free Dalmatia) on 5 December spoke of "some sinful theologians" who are "questioning the Church's hierarchical structure". The *Slobodna Dalmacija* article also referred approvingly to a "differentiation process" within the Catholic Church, implying that TDKS was on the right side as far as the regime was concerned. A TDKS statement issued on 9 December claimed that TDKS wished for no "differentiation" of a kind described by the Split paper. It did not question the hierarchical structure of the Church nor advocate heresies imputed to it but, on the contrary "upheld the integrity of the Catholic faith and remained loyal to their Church". But the TDKS statement made no reference to the bishops' September ban nor to the subsequent specific decree by Archbishop Kuharić of 26 November which confirmed the ban's validity for the area of the Zagreb archdiocese, TDKS's principal power-base.

Will the Theological Association bow to the bishops' and the Pope's verdict? The hierarchy certainly hopes so. In an interview published in the Christmas edition of *Glas koncila*, Archbishop Kuharić stressed the bishops' unanimity over the September decree but then went on to say that the bishops were "seeking ways to remove the evil of disunity without destroying the good things". This indicates that the search for a solution is on. That search should be helped by Archbishop Kuharić's elevation to cardinal announced in January* which has strengthened the will to unity among Croatian Catholics.

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*See p. 206 — *Ed.*