

Domagoj Tomas*

Ivan Tomas and the Smuggler for the Pope

ABSTRACT

During the pontificate of Pope Pius XII (1939–1958), the relations between the Holy See and the European communist countries were either strained or severed. In such circumstances, the trial against the Archbishop of Zagreb Alojzije Stepinac was held in the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia (FPRY). The proceedings were completed in 1946 when Stepinac was sentenced to sixteen years in prison. After five years in prison, he was given the choice of either going to Rome or serving the rest of his sentence under house arrest in his hometown of Krašić. After Stepinac was appointed cardinal in 1953, the FPRY severed its diplomatic relations with the Holy See, while Stepinac lost the opportunity of going to Rome and accepting the cardinal's insignia.

*At the time, the Croatian Catholic priest Ivan Tomas worked at the Vatican Radio in Rome. Tomas's efforts and the assistance from an American tourist of Slovenian origin, Frances Yenko Chilcoat, resulted in a fascinating and unusual journey of Stepinac's cardinal robe and its safe arrival to the territory of the FPRY in 1954. Yenko Chilcoat described her endeavour in a memoir titled *Smuggler for the Pope*, published in 2006.*

This paper will first explain the international political context at the time of Yenko Chilcoat's arrival from the United States of America to Europe and the church-state relations between the Holy See and the FPRY after World War II. Furthermore, the paper will verify the authenticity of Chilcoat's memoir and the credibility of her claims, analyse Tomas's role in the smuggling of the cardinal robe, as well as the consequences of the cardinal robe coming into Stepinac's possession. Finally, a conclusion will be made about the meaning and importance of Stepinac's cardinal robe being sent from Rome to the FPRY in the context of contemporaneous church-state relations.

Keywords: Ivan Tomas, Aloysius Stepinac, Frances Yenko Chilcoat, communist Yugoslavia, church-state relations

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IZVLEČEK

IVAN TOMAS IN PAPEŽEVA TIHOTAPKA

V času pontifikata papeža Pija XII (1939–1958) so bili odnosi med Svetim sedežem in evropskimi komunističnimi državami napeti ali prekinjeni. V takšnih okoliščinah je v Federativni ljudski republiki Jugoslaviji (FLRJ) potekal sodni proces proti zagrebškemu nadškofu Alojziju Stepincu, ki se je končal leta 1946, ko je bil obsojen na 16 let zapora. Po prestani petletni zaporni kazni se je Stepinac moral odločiti, ali bo odšel v Rim ali pa bo odslužil preostalo kazen v hišnem priporu v Krašiču, svojem rojstnem kraju. Ko je bil Stepinac leta 1953 imenovan za kardinala, je FLRJ prekinila diplomatske odnose s Svetim sedežem, zaradi česar ni mogel oditi v Rim, da bi prevzel kardinalske insignije.

Hrvaški katoliški duhovnik Ivan Tomas je v tistem času delal na Radiu Vatikan v Rimu. Z njegovo pomočjo in s pomočjo ameriške turistke slovenskega rodu Frances Yenko Chilcoat so Stepinčeva kardinalska oblačila po zanimivi in nenavadni poti leta 1954 varno prispela na ozemlje FLRJ. Frances Yenko Chilcoat je svoj podvig opisala v spominih z naslovom *Smuggler for the Pope* (Papeževa tihotapka), ki so izšli leta 2006.

V tem prispevku bodo najprej pojasnjene mednarodne politične okoliščine v času prihoda Frances Yenko Chilcoat iz Združenih držav Amerike v Evropo ter cerkveno-državni odnosi med Svetim sedežem in FLRJ po drugi svetovni vojni. Poleg tega bomo preverili pristnost in verodostojnost njenih spominov in trditev ter analizirali Tomasovo vlogo pri pošiljanju kardinalskih oblačil in posledice dejstva, da jih je Stepinac prejel. Na koncu bo podan zaključek o pomenu in pomembnosti popotovanja Stepinčevih kardinalskih oblačil iz Rima v FLRJ v kontekstu sodobnih odnosov med cerkvijo in državo.

Ključne besede: Ivan Tomas, Alojzij Stepinac, Frances Yenko Chilcoat, komunistična Jugoslavija, odnosi med cerkvijo in državo

Introduction

This paper will attempt to determine the authenticity of the relevant sources and the credibility of the testimony of Frances Yenko Chilcoat, an American of Slovenian origin. In an interesting memoir titled *Smuggler for the Pope*,¹ she described the transportation of the Archbishop of Zagreb Alojzije Stepinac's cardinal robe from Rome to Yugoslavia, which took place with the assistance of the Croatian priest Ivan Tomas in 1954, two years after Stepinac had been appointed cardinal. Furthermore, this

1 Frances Yenko Chilcoat, *Smuggler for the Pope. A True Story* (San Francisco: California Publishing Company, 2006).

development will be put into the context of the church-state relations between the Holy See and the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia (FPRY), which were completely severed at the time.

Simultaneously, the question of Yenko Chilcoat's willingness to take the risk of accepting the role of a smuggler and the role of Tomas and the Croatian emigrant clergy in delivering the crimson cardinal robe to Stepinac will be discussed. The potential role of the robe in church-state relations and the question of whether Stepinac publicly wore it and under what circumstances will be answered as well.

As a specific topic, modern church-state relations have been the subject of historiographical research for some time now. Among the Croatian historians who have dealt with the relations between the Catholic Church and the communist Yugoslavia, we should mention Miroslav Akmadža,² Jure Krišto,³ Stipan Trogrlić,⁴ Marina Beus,⁵ Margareta Matijević,⁶ Slađana Josipović Batorek,⁷ and others.

At the beginning of this article, a brief review is given of the relations between the Holy See and the European communist countries after World War II, followed by a short explanation of the communists' persecution of Stepinac and the role of Ivan Tomas in the Croatian programme of Radio Vatican. The article's conclusion provides an interpretation of the circumstances leading to the smuggling of Stepinac's cardinal robe into the territory of the FPRY, a feat carried out by Tomas, Yenko Chilcoat, and other parties mentioned by Yenko Chilcoat in her memoir.

The Holy See and the European Communist Countries after World War II

The relations between the Holy See and the European communist countries developed after the Allied victory against the Axis powers in World War II, during the time when the global bipolar geopolitical order was formed in which the United

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- 2 Miroslav Akmadža, *Franjo Šeper. Mudročuju protiv jednoumlja* (Zagreb and Rijeka: Društvo za povjesnicu Zagrebačke nadbiskupije "Tkalčić" and Otokar Keršovani, 2009). Miroslav Akmadža, *Katolička crkva u komunističkoj Hrvatskoj 1945.–1980.* (Zagreb and Slavonki Brod: Despot infinitus and Hrvatski institut za povijest, Podružnica za povijest Slavonije, Srijema i Baranje, 2013). Miroslav Akmadža, *Biskupi, komunisti i svećenička udruženja* (Zagreb and Sarajevo: Hrvatski institut za povijest and Synopsis, 2018). Miroslav Akmadža, *Stepinac riječu i djelom* (Zagreb: AGM, 2019) and other works.
 - 3 Jure Krišto, *Katolička crkva u totalitarizmu 1945.–1990.* (Zagreb: Nakladni zavod Globus, 1997). Jure Krišto, *Partija, UDBA i svećenička udruženja* (Zagreb: Hrvatska kulturna zaklada – Hrvatsko slovo, 2014). Jure Krišto, *Stoljeće narda i Crkve. Povijest Katoličke Crkve u Hrvatskoj i Bosni i Hercegovini u 20. stoljeću* (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 2019).
 - 4 Stipan Trogrlić, *Mons. Božo Milanović istarski svećenik (1890.–1980.). Crkveno-vjersko i javno-političko djelovanje* (Zagreb: Kršćanska sadašnjost, 2011). Stipan Trogrlić, *Represija jugoslavenskog komunističkog režima prema katoličkoj crkvi u Istri 1945.–1971.* (Pazin and Pula: Državni arhiv u Pazinu and Institut društvenih znanosti Ivo Pilar, Područni centar Pula, 2014).
 - 5 Marina Beus, *Kolar između srpa i čekića. Položaj Katoličke Crkve i odnos komunističke vlasti prema dijecezanskom svećenstvu u Hercegovini u razdoblju od 1945. do 1966. godine* (Mostar: Crkva na kamenu, 2019).
 - 6 Margareta Matijević, "Između partizana i pristojnosti". *Život i doba Svetozara Rittiga (1873.–1961.)* (Zagreb and Slavonki Brod: Plejada and Hrvatski institut za povijest, Podružnica za povijest Slavonije, Srijema i Baranje, 2019).
 - 7 Slađana Josipović Batorek, *Sukob i(li) suradnja. Crkveno-državni odnosi u Đakovačkoj i Srijemskoj biskupiji od 1945. do 1959. godine* (Osijek: Oksimoron and Ogranak Matice hrvatske u Osijeku, 2020).

States of America (the USA) were dominant in one part of the world and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (the USSR) prevailed in the other. The attitude of the Catholic Church towards communism had been clear ever since the 19th century,⁸ and it was complicated further following The Decree Against Communism issued by Pope Pius XII in 1949, provoked by the Italian parliamentary election⁹ and coup d'état in Czechoslovakia.¹⁰ The political relations between the Holy See and the communist countries thus even exacerbated the tectonics of the Cold War bipolar division of the world.

Moreover, the post-war period was the time of the intense systemic communist political repression against the Catholic Church and its leaders, who were subject to trials in the European communist countries – for example Josyf Slipy in the USSR, Alojzije Stepinac in the FPRY, József Mindszenty in Hungary, Josef Beran in Czechoslovakia, and Stefan Wyszyński in Poland. Their unfavourable position further complicated and hindered the relations between the Holy See and the European communist countries, already challenged by the serious disputes between communism and Catholicism.

The processes in question ultimately resulted in the severance of the diplomatic relations between the Holy See and the European communist countries, worsening the position of the Catholics in these countries. Such conditions would later encourage the Holy See to alter its political paradigm towards the European communist countries, i.e. to shape the so-called “*Ostpolitik*” policy¹¹ as a concept which, after the Second Vatican Council, allowed for the coexistence (*modus vivendi*) between the Catholic Church and the communist regimes. The success of this policy is still being disputed today.¹²

The Case of Alojzije Stepinac and the Severance of the Diplomatic Relations Between the FPRY and the Holy See

The church-state relations started deteriorating after the first arrest of Archbishop Stepinac by the new government authorities in May 1945, followed by the discussions between Stepinac and Josip Broz Tito in June of the same year.¹³ However, the real problems for Stepinac and the Catholic Church in the Democratic Federal Yugoslavia

8 The opposition of the Catholic Church against communism was clearly stated in Pope Pius IX encyclical *Nostis et nobiscum* (1849) and *Quanta cura* (1864), as well as in the social encyclical *Rerum novarum* (1891) by Pope Leo XIII.

9 At the 1948 Italian general elections, the Communist – Socialist coalition received 31 % of votes.

10 The Communists came into power in 1948 with a coup d'état, after which they tried to control the Catholic Church by establishing priest associations under the patronage of the regime, regulating the Church finances, and with the mandatory approval of the contents of all pastoral letters.

11 *Ostpolitik*, the Vatican policy towards Eastern Europe, attempted to initiate a dialogue between the Holy See and the eastern communist countries. It was shaped during the pontificate of Pope John XXIII (1958–1963), and its architect was Agostino Casaroli.

12 More in: Achille Silvestrini, “Uvod,” in: Agostino Casaroli, *Mučeništvo strpljivosti. Sveta Stolica i komunističke zemlje (1963.–1989.)* (Zagreb: Kršćanska sadašnjost, 2001), 23–49.

13 Akmadža, *Katolička crkva u komunističkoj Hrvatskoj 1945.–1980.*, 23–27.

started after the Bishops' Conference of Yugoslavia, which issued a pastoral letter in September 1945. The pastoral was read to the Catholics in the churches throughout the country. It criticised the authorities (noting the murders and arrests of the clergy), the issues of youth education, the appropriation of the Church property, the destruction of graves, the confiscation of the Catholic press and print shops, etc., and called for the complete freedom of all Catholic institutions. The contents of the pastoral letter represented a severe blow for the new authorities, which were preparing for the Constitutional Parliament elections at the time.¹⁴

Stepinac's predictions regarding his own arrest after having issued the pastoral letter soon came true, followed by a general media campaign against him personally and against the entire Catholic Church. The head prosecutor Jakov Blažević served as the long arm of Tito's regime in the trial against Stepinac, who was finally arrested in September 1946.¹⁵

The trial was brief: as soon as in October 1946, a verdict was reached, and Stepinac was sentenced to sixteen years in prison with forced labour and a five-year suspension of political and civil rights.¹⁶

Stepinac was supported by the Holy See's apostolic delegate in the FPRY Joseph Patrick Hurley, the French intellectuals François Mauriac and Paul Claudel, and many others.¹⁷

After World War II, the FPRY authorities tried to employ various measures to sever or at least weaken the connections between the Catholic Church in the FPRY and the Holy See. Their attempts to form a *National Church* under the control of the state encountered fierce opposition from the Catholic bishops, which was blamed on Stepinac as well.¹⁸

The issue of Archbishop Stepinac's imprisonment compromised the Yugoslav government, particularly in the eyes of the international community. Thus, in 1951, Tito expressed his willingness to release Archbishop Stepinac from prison provided that he left the FPRY. However, the Holy See refused the offer. Shortly after, Stepinac was transferred from Lepoglava Prison to house arrest in his birthplace of Krašić, subject to Tito's condition that he could not conduct the duties of the archbishop or any other prominent ecclesiastical functions.¹⁹

In November 1952, Radio Vatican announced that Stepinac had been appointed cardinal. Consequently, the FPRY severed its diplomatic relations with the Holy See.²⁰ Those relations had been previously challenged by the matters of Trieste²¹ and

14 Ibid., 32–35.

15 Ibid., 65–67.

16 Ibid., 77.

17 Akmadža, *Stepinac riječju i djelom*, 115–18.

18 Ibid., 129.

19 Akmadža, *Katolička crkva u komunističkoj Hrvatskoj 1945.–1980.*, 81, 82.

20 Ibid., 145.

21 The Yugoslav government blamed the Holy See for its contribution to the decision of the London Conference regarding Trieste in 1952, accusing it of pursuing Italian national policy.

the class-based priest associations,²² so Stepinac's appointment was the last straw that resulted in the complete cessation of diplomatic relations.

Afterwards, the FPRY authorities hoped – encouraged by Svetozar Rittig's estimates²³ – that Stepinac's appointment as a cardinal would result in his departure to Rome, which would be in line with the interests of the FPRY. However, Stepinac wanted to stay with his people, so he decided to remain under house arrest in Krašić.²⁴ At that time, Tito saw Stepinac as “a pawn in the game of Vatican's international politics, primarily in Central Europe and especially in Yugoslavia.”²⁵

Ivan Tomas and Radio Vatican

After having served as a secretary of the Diocese of Skopje under Bishop Smiljan Franjo Čekada, Ivan Tomas,²⁶ a priest of the Diocese of Mostar-Duvno, arrived in Rome in 1941 for his postgraduate studies. He attained his doctorate in 1951 and then worked at Radio Vatican as the editor and radio presenter of the Croatian programme

22 Some bishops, including Archbishop Stepinac, immediately opposed the foundation and work of class-based priest associations, while others tolerated it, and they were one of the main reasons for the deterioration of the relations between the Holy See and the FPRY. The 1950 Bishops' Conference of Yugoslavia stated that it was “not recommended” (*Non expedit*) to take part in such associations, while in 1952, the priests were unanimously forbidden (*Non licet*) from joining such associations.

23 Svetozar Rittig (1873–1961), a Croatian priest, historian, and politician. He studied theology in Sarajevo, Đakovo, and Vienna, where he attained a doctorate in 1902. Until 1911, he taught ecclesiastical history at the seminary in Đakovo, after which he was a secretary at the Archdiocese of Zagreb, a professor at the Faculty of Theology in Zagreb, and the editor of the Catholic newspaper *Katolički list* (1912–1913). He became politically active in 1908 as a member of the Croatian Party of Rights in the Croatian Parliament. In 1918, he was a member of the National Council of the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs, while from 1919 to 1920, he was a member of the Temporary National Representation. When the Independent State of Croatia was established, he moved to Selce, where he established contacts with the representatives of the national liberation movement. In 1943, he was a member of the ZAVNOH (National Anti-Fascist Council of the People's Liberation of Croatia), between 1944 and 1954 the president of the Commission for Religious Affairs, while in 1945, he became a member of the Constituent Assembly and then the Federal Assembly and the Croatian Parliament. In 1946, he was appointed a minister without portfolio in the Croatian Government (until his retirement in 1954). He encouraged the revival of the Old Church Slavonic Academy (1948), which was renamed as the Old Church Slavonic Institute in 1952. He was the Institute's director until 1961. In 1947, he was elected a full member of the JAZU (the Yugoslav Academy of Sciences and Arts).

24 Akmadža, *Stepinac riječju i djelom*, 130, 131.

25 Peda Radosavljević, *Odnosi između Jugoslavije i Svete Stolice 1963–1978*. (Beograd: Službeni glasnik, 2012), 33.

26 Ivan Tomas (1911–1992), a priest of the Diocese of Mostar-Duvno. He attended the grammar school in Stolac (1924–1925) and Travnik (1925–1932). In 1937, he graduated from the Faculty of Theology in Sarajevo. He was ordained as a priest in 1937. He ran the parishes in Prenj and Šipovača in Herzegovina, while since 1940, he served as the secretary of Bishop Smiljan Franjo Čekada in Skopje. In 1941, he left for Rome for his postgraduate studies and attained a doctorate in 1951 at the Gregoriana. In the meantime, he also earned a degree in archivistics, diplomacy, and palaeography. After World War II, he helped Croatian and other refugees in Rome. From 1954 to 1962, he worked at Radio Vatican as the editor and radio presenter of the Croatian programme and resided at the College of St. Jerome until 1961. Since 1961, he lived at the Blessed Nikola Tavelić House in Grottaferrata near Rome. He was the editor of the magazines *Travničko smilje* (1932), *Blagovijest* (1940–1941), and *Novi život* (1962–1970). He wrote many articles about Croatian history, culture, and the role of the clergy in the formation of the national and world cultural history. He wrote for the Croatian emigrant publications (*Glasnik Srca Isusova i Marijina*, *Hrvatska revija*, *Studia Croatica*, *Križ*, *Danica*, *Naša nada*, and others). See: Vlado Šakić and Ljiljana Dobrovšak, eds., *Leksikon hrvatskoga iseljeničtva i manjina* (Zagreb: Institut društvenih znanosti Ivo Pilar and Hrvatska matica iseljenika, 2020), 994.

between 1954 and 1962.²⁷ From his arrival in Rome until 1961, Tomas resided at the Pontifical Croatian College of St. Jerome. At the end of 1961 – as a result of mutual diplomatic initiatives and concessions whose goal was to initiate formal negotiations about the normalisation of the relations between the Holy See and the FPRY – Tomas was forced to leave the College of St. Jerome as well as his post at Radio Vatican due to Vatican's response to one of the demands of the Yugoslav government, which tried to depoliticise the College of St. Jerome.²⁸ The Yugoslav demands were listed and substantiated in a document titled *Kratak istorijat Zavoda sv. Jeronima u Rimu, njegova uloga i sadašnje stanje*,²⁹ even though Tomas and Krunoslav Draganović³⁰ had been named as the key threats to the relations between the FPRY and the Holy See at the meeting of the Yugoslav Federal Commission for Religious Affairs back in 1956.³¹

While he was working at Radio Vatican, Tomas first ensured that the number of Croatian radio broadcasts was increased to five a week in 1955 and later to every day. As he was openly patriotic, the Croatian programme paid considerable attention to historical topics as well as to the contemporaneous political situation in the FPRY and around the world. Stepinac's work inspired Tomas and represented one of his favourite topics, which was particularly annoying for the communist regime in the FPRY.³²

According to the sources in the Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia, the Tanjug news agency dedicated a special monitoring unit for Radio Vatican,³³ and according to Peđa Radosavljević, Tomas's editorial policy was under attack by the FPRY authorities.³⁴

27 Radio Vatican started broadcasting in 1931, while the Croatian programme, aired twice per week, was introduced in 1947, mainly due to the efforts of Juraj Magjerec and Ivo Omrčanin. The programme's first presenter was the writer Ljubo Wiesner, but he was soon replaced by the priest Pavao Jesih (1947–1954), who worked as an editor, host, and reporter. In 1954, Ivan Tomas took over the position. The programme was later aired five times a week and then finally on a daily basis. Later, its chief editors were Jesuits, Stjepan Tumbas being the first. Every day, Radio Vatican's Croatian programme would broadcast reports from the Vatican and the world and discuss the religious, social, and political events in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and among the Croatian emigration. See: Šakić and Dobrovišak, eds., *Leksikon hrvatskoga iseljenništva i manjina*, 873.

28 Miroslav Akmadža, *Katolička crkva u Hrvatskoj i komunistički režim 1945.–1966.* (Rijeka: Otokar Keršovani, 2004), 189, 190.

29 HR-HDA-310, box 44, Pov. 159/1-1961.

30 Krunoslav Draganović (1903–1983), a Croatian priest, historian, and politician. He studied at the Faculty of Theology in Sarajevo and was ordained as a priest in 1928. In 1932, he went to Rome, where he attained a doctorate at the Pontifical Oriental Institute in 1935. He became an assistant professor in 1940 and a full professor at the Faculty of Theology in Zagreb in 1942. Since 1943, he was a part of the Croatian diplomatic post at the Holy See. After World War II, he stayed in Rome and was active in the Croatian political emigrant circles until 1948. He moved to Austria in 1960, while in 1967, he returned to Sarajevo under mysterious circumstances. As a historian, he primarily dealt with the issues of the Catholic Church in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

31 Radmila Radić, *Država i verske zajednice 1945–1970., drugi deo: 1954–1970.* (Beograd: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 2002), 426.

32 Domagoj Tomas, *Pet redaka. Rimski dnevnik svećenika Ivana Tomasa (1943.–1944.)* (Rim, Mostar, and Osijek: Papinski hrvatski zavod svetog Jeronima u Rimu, Biskupski ordinarijat Mostar, and Odjel za kulturologiju Sveučilišta Josipa Jurja Strossmayera, 2014), 37.

33 The Telegraph Agency of the New Yugoslavia (Tanjug) was a news agency founded in 1943. Its primary task was to inform the public of the national liberation movement's activities in Yugoslavia. It was the sole privileged news agency in the Democratic Federal Yugoslavia/Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia/Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

34 Radosavljević, *Odnosi između Jugoslavije i Svete Stolice 1963–1978*, 54, 55.

Frances Yenko Chilcoat – an American Tourist and Smuggler

Frances Yenko,³⁵ an American of Slovenian origin, grew up in a small town of Rock Springs³⁶ in a family actively involved in the local Slovenian Catholic community gathered around the Saints Cyril and Methodius Catholic Church. At the time, the parish priest and spiritual advisor of the Slovenian and Croatian community was a Slovenian by the name of Albin Gnidovec. Thanks to her father's persistent tutoring, Frances learned to read and speak Slovenian.³⁷

Frances Yenko lived in Salt Lake City for a while before moving to San Francisco at the age of 19, when she accepted a tempting business offer by the airplane company United Airlines. When Gnidovec learned of this, he asked the Slovenian priest Vital Vodušek, who worked in San Francisco, to look after Frances and take her "under his wing".³⁸

Soon after she had accepted the job in 1947 and moved to San Francisco, Frances Yenko married Aaron Chilcoat. On Vodušek's recommendation, she provided boarding for the Croatian political emigrant Ivan Ivanković. For a while, she and her husband looked after Ivanković, and through him, she got in touch with Tomas.³⁹

After working as an employee of United Airlines for nine and a half years, in 1954, Frances Yenko Chilcoat received a thirty-day travel pass, which she could use to go anywhere in the world. She decided to fulfil her lifelong dream of visiting Slovenia, at the time a part of the FPRY under the name of the People's Republic of Slovenia. Being an active Merchant Marine, her husband refused to travel to a communist country, so she invited Grace Norton, her friend and co-worker from United Airlines, to join her, which she accepted. Frances then faced a painstaking procedure of acquiring a visa to visit the FPRY, where she planned to visit her relatives in the People's Republic of Slovenia.⁴⁰

After answering "many questions in a lengthy questionnaire from the Yugoslav Consulate's office in San Francisco",⁴¹ as she states in her memoir, she finally obtained a visa. In her memoir, she also underlines the role of the Consul General at the time,⁴²

35 Frances Yenko Chilcoat, the daughter of Angela (née Bozner) and Cyril Yenko, married Aaron Chilcoat in 1951. When her ancestors had immigrated to the USA, they started using the Anglophone version of their surname, Yenko, instead of Jenko, their original Slovenian surname.

36 Rock Springs, a small town in Wyoming, in the western United States. According to the 2010, the town's population was around 20,000, while before the 1950s, it had been less than 10,000.

37 Yenko Chilcoat, *Smuggler for the Pope*, 2.

38 *Ibid.*, 15, 16.

39 *Ibid.*, 20–25.

40 *Ibid.*, 20–27.

41 *Ibid.*, 27.

42 Based on the testimony of Yenko Chilcoat, the Consul General was either Rafo Ivančević or Branko Karadole. Ivančević was officially appointed the Yugoslav Consul General on 21 March 1950. See: *Foreign Consular Offices in the United States. April 1, 1950* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1950), 48. Apart from Ivančević, Siniša Košutić and Miodrag Vitorović were appointed as the Consul General and the Vice-consul of the FPRY in San Francisco on 8 August 1951. See: *Foreign Consular Offices in the United States. April 1, 1954* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1954), 48. On 2 June 1954, Branko Karadole replaced Ivančević as Consul General. See: *Foreign Consular Offices in the United States. April 1, 1957* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1957), 50.

in her opinion a Serb, who clearly cautioned her during the interview “to comply with the Communist rule”⁴³ in the FPRY, otherwise she could go to prison despite the fact that she and her mother had been born in the USA.⁴⁴

Frances Yenko Chilcoat also did not want to miss the opportunity of seeing Rome. Quite surprisingly, Tomas met the two Americans at the airport on 14 November 1954. He continued to keep them company every day during their four-day stay in Rome. “He wined and dined” them, pleasantly surprising Frances, who was accustomed to people taking care of priests rather than the other way around.⁴⁵

On her last evening in Rome, as she was packing for the trip to the FPRY, Yenko Chilcoat noticed that a piece of her Samsonite luggage had been damaged. A part of a broken metal strip was dangling from the side of the suitcase, and the hotel staff was unable to solve the problem. Around that time, Tomas phoned Frances, suggesting that they meet in the hotel lobby. According to Yenko Chilcoat, “he seemed rather anxious”, and she agreed to the meeting even though she was tired and in the middle of packing. After Tomas’s arrival, she noticed that he looked quite different than usual. He was wearing a black hat with the brim pulled down. The collar of his long black coat was up and he was carrying a black suitcase, conveying an impression of a person who was trying to avoid recognition and acting suspiciously.⁴⁶

After Yenko Chilcoat and Tomas sat at the table next to each other, he put the small suitcase between them and ordered two double brandies, which Yenko Chilcoat drank only after his insistence and due to his authority as a priest.⁴⁷

Tomas then told her the story of Cardinal Stepinac and his imprisonment in the communist FPRY, explaining that his cardinal robe was in the small suitcase between them. He also mentioned that Stepinac was the spiritual leader of seven million Catholics in the FPRY and that he had become universally known for his resistance to Communism. After serving five (out of sixteen) years of imprisonment, he had been put in house arrest in his birthplace of Krašić. There, he was appointed cardinal, but his confinement prevented him from travelling to Rome to receive his cardinal vesture (a red robe and a galero). Moreover, he knew that if he departed to Rome, he would never be allowed to return to the FPRY, and he did not want to abandon his people.⁴⁸

When he finished explaining Stepinac’s role, Tomas asked Yenko Chilcoat to take the cardinal robe to Stepinac in the name of the Catholic Church (“Frances, in this suitcase, I have the robe for Cardinal Stepinac. We – meaning the Church, F. Y. C. – are asking you to take this robe to him”). The only way Stepinac would ever be able to receive the robe was if someone who was travelling as a tourist could smuggle it into the FPRY,⁴⁹ and Yenko Chilcoat fitted that role perfectly.

43 Yenko Chilcoat, *Smuggler for the Pope*, 27.

44 *Ibid.*, 27, 28.

45 *Ibid.*, 28–31.

46 *Ibid.*, 31, 32.

47 *Ibid.*, 32.

48 *Ibid.*, 32–34.

49 *Ibid.*, 34, 35.

At first, Frances turned down Tomas's proposition, afraid of ending up in prison, which was something that the Yugoslav Consul General in San Francisco had actually warned her about. However, after kindly assuring her of the support and prayers of the Bishops, the Cardinals, and Pope Pius XII himself, Tomas finally managed to encourage and convince her that the task was feasible, adding that only communists could enter and leave the FPRY and that she was the only person trustworthy enough to deliver the cardinal robe to Stepinac.⁵⁰

In any case, Chilcoat's fear of what might happen to her if they found Stepinac's cardinal robe in her possession when she was crossing the Italian-Yugoslav border was completely justified. Indeed, the FPRY criminal code at the time provided for prosecution and three-year maximum security imprisonment or a death penalty for those "who transported armed groups, individual terrorists, spies, agitators, weapons, ammunition, or propaganda material into the territory of the FPRY" (Article 111), while maximum security imprisonment awaited those "who intentionally undermined the government of the working people, the defensive capability of the country, the economic foundations of socialism, or those who intended to destroy the brotherhood and unity of the FPRY by drawing, writing, publicly speaking, or disseminating materials against the government, the social system, or any other political, economic, military, and other important national regulations" (Article 118).⁵¹ Importing the publications of the political emigration into the FPRY was considered smuggling enemy propaganda material, and the enforcement of the regular criminal code can be seen in the examples of Bruno Bušić,⁵² Janjko Sarajlić,⁵³ Krešo Barišić,⁵⁴ and many others. In 1974, a special legislative framework was introduced dealing with importing and distributing foreign publications in the Yugoslav territory.⁵⁵

Furthermore, prosecution and maximum security imprisonment awaited "the citizens of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia whose intention was to take down the government and the social system or to carry out other hostile activities against the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia by contacting a foreign country, a foreign organisation, a certain party or an exile group, or by helping such organisations carry out hostile activities" (Article 109).⁵⁶ The law was put into practice in the case of Bušić, Franjo Tuđman, and Dragutin Škućanac, who were accused of contacting several well-known political emigrants.⁵⁷

50 Ibid., 35, 36.

51 "Krivični zakonik," *Službeni list Federativne Narodne Republike Jugoslavije* 7, No. 13 (1951): 197, 198.

52 Anđelko Mijatović, *Bruno Bušić: prilog istraživanju života i djelovanja (1939.–1978.)* (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 2010), 82, 83.

53 More in: Ivica Miškulin, "Neprijatelj države iz Okučana: slučaj političkog zatvorenika i emigranta Janjka Sarajlića," *Scrinia Slavonica* 19, No. 1 (2019): 241–69.

54 Okružni sud u Mostaru, nr. K. 72/70, Rješenje o produljenju pritvora za optuženoga Krešu Barišića, Mostar, 4. lipnja 1970.; Vrhovni sud Bosne i Hercegovine, nr. K.605/70, Presuda Kreši Barišiću i odbijena na žalbu, Sarajevo, 2. rujna 1970. (both documents in the private possession of Krešo Barišić were presented to the author of the article, with consent to use them for scientific purposes)

55 "Zakon o unošenju i raspačavanju inozemnih sredstava masovnog komuniciranja i o inozemnoj informativnoj djelatnosti u Jugoslaviji," *Službeni list Socijalističke Federativne Republike Jugoslavije* 30, No. 39 (1974): 1290–300.

56 "Krivični zakonik," *Službeni list Federativne Narodne Republike Jugoslavije* 7, No. 13 (1951): 197.

57 Wolff Krašić, *Hrvatsko proljeće i hrvatska politička emigracija* (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 2018), 346.

The same thing would have undoubtedly happened to Yenko if the connection between her and Tomas had been discovered. In the Yugoslav sources, Tomas was described as “the Ustasha priest”⁵⁸ and a member of “the Ustasha emigration”,⁵⁹ although no evidence has ever been found that he was a member of the Ustasha movement. Moreover, the fact that Tomas was in the service of the Holy See while the diplomatic relations between the FPRY and the Holy See were severed would make Frances’s position even more difficult. Consequently, the attempt to smuggle Stepinac’s cardinal robe into the FPRY would be particularly incriminating at the time of the severed diplomatic relations between the FPRY and the Holy See and Stepinac’s house arrest.

After she found out what Frances had agreed to do, her American companion Norton tried to talk her out of it, pointing out how dangerous such smuggling was, but Yenko Chilcoat managed to convince her of the righteousness of the mission. After Tomas folded the robe very neatly into the suitcase and made it look like a red blouse, he informed Yenko Chilcoat that she was not to speak Slovenian on the train but to insist on communication only in English. He also advised both of them to deny all knowledge of the cardinal robe should it be discovered during luggage inspection and not to speak a word of their mission, not even to their families after they returned to the USA.⁶⁰

The two Americans travelled through Trieste and were inspected by the Yugoslav Military near the Yugoslav border. When a Yugoslav inspector asked them to pull their luggage from the overhead rack, Norton responded in English, using her hands to point at the luggage and at him, implying that he should take it down himself if he wanted to inspect it. After he tried to reach for the Samsonite suitcase with the robe in it, the inspector cut himself on the edge of a broken metal strip. He started bleeding profusely, so he left the compartment and never returned to complete the search.⁶¹

When they arrived in Ljubljana, Yenko Chilcoat and Norton boarded another train for Škofja Loka, where they were graciously welcomed by Yenko Chilcoat’s uncle Ivan Jenko and other relatives. On the evening of the day they arrived in the nearby village of Pungert, Manca Jenko, Frances’s single aunt, appeared. She lived and worked with the nuns⁶² who lived nearby. When she entered the room, she sat down next to Yenko Chilcoat and asked her if she had brought anything special. Then they went to the bedroom, where she asked her if Frances had brought anything from Rome. Yenko Chilcoat understood the hint and handed her the suitcase.⁶³

Manca Jenko took the cardinal robe out of the suitcase, put it into a homemade cloth bag, and went for a walk with Yenko Chilcoat. While they were walking along the dark streets hand in hand, the two women started singing Slovenian songs, which Yenko Chilcoat had learned from her father as a small child. After about twenty or

58 Akmadža, *Katoliška crkva u Hrvatskoj i komunistički režim 1945.–1966.*, 184.

59 HR-HDA-310, box 38, Pov. 70/1-1958.

60 Yenko Chilcoat, *Smuggler for the Pope*, 36, 37.

61 *Ibid.*, 39–41.

62 Most likely the Ursuline Convent of Škofja Loka. In 1954 the convent and school buildings were expropriated. More in: “Zgodovina -” *Uršulinke Rimske Unije*, accessed 30th October 2021, <https://www.ursulinke.si/zgodovina/>

63 *Ibid.*, 43, 44.

thirty minutes of walking, they heard a male voice ahead of them. While she was passing by, Manca Jenko reached out, hanging the cardinal robe to a man completely unknown to Yenko Chilcoat. They returned to Ivan Jenko's house, refraining from mentioning the robe or Cardinal Stepinac. Soon after, Yenko Chilcoat and Norton returned to the USA, visiting Brussels on their way home.⁶⁴

After returning to the USA, Yenko Chilcoat received a postcard from Tomas stating "mission accomplished". Soon after the postcard had arrived, two strangers rang Yenko Chilcoat's doorbell, claiming they were two countrymen from Yugoslavia. Yenko openly asked them whether she had met them on her travels there, but they mysteriously answered "maybe". After a bit of small talk, she telephoned her husband and asked him to return home from work. When he arrived, he asked them why they were in San Francisco, and they claimed to be shopping for "rope". After they left, Aaron Chilcoat was not sure if they said "rope" or "robe". Yenko Chilcoat and her husband had no idea whether the two men were friends or enemies trying to extract information about the precious cargo transported from Rome to the FPRY. Finally, Yenko Chilcoat claims that she did not reveal the information about the smuggling of the cardinal robe to anyone in the USA other than her husband.⁶⁵

The Croatian public knew nothing about Yenko Chilcoat smuggling Stepinac's cardinal robe to the FPRY until she published her memoir *Smuggler for the Pope*. However, the book did not enjoy a considerable media response in Croatia, while it was somewhat successful in the USA, especially in the Catholic press,⁶⁶ which had shared the untold story even before the book was published.⁶⁷

Apart from the memoir, sources (diary entries) exist as a part of Ivan Tomas's legacy dealing with the period in which the cardinal robe was delivered from Rome to the FPRY. As such, these entries could provide additional information about the event, but they were not available to the author of this article.⁶⁸

Friar Dominik Mandić's legacy was also researched to determine the potential existence of any additional information about the organisational circumstances of Stepinac's cardinal robe being sent from Rome to Yugoslavia among the prominent individuals among the Croatian emigrant clergy.⁶⁹ Despite the existence of some correspondence between Mandić and Tomas between 1953 and 1956, the content of the letters does not reveal any further details about the event.⁷⁰

64 Ibid., 44–49.

65 Ibid., 51, 52.

66 See: Dan Morris-Young, "Local parishioner records adventure as 'Smuggler for the Pope,'" *Catholic San Francisco*, 19 December 2008, 24.

67 First published in *San Mateo County Times* in December 1998 and in *Catholic San Francisco* at the beginning of 1999, and then in the following newspapers: Abby Williams, "Wyoming native recalls smuggling adventure," *Casper Star-Tribune*, 3 May 1999, 4, 5. "Woman recounts role as robe smuggler," *The Daily Sentinel*, 1 May 1999, 10. "Rock Springs native recounts robe smuggling," *The Billings Gazette*, 16 May 1999, 25.

68 Arhiv Biskupskoga ordinarijata u Mostaru, Ostavština Ivana Tomasa, Dnevnici.

69 Mandić's correspondence with Tomas between 1952 and 1956 was analysed.

70 Arhiv Hercegovačke franjevačke provincije, Ostavština fra Dominika Mandića, box 5, "Vlč. Dru Ivanu Tomas" (a letter by Friar Dominik Mandić), Rome, 25 April 1953; box 5, "Dragi Mnogopoštovani" (a letter by Ivan Tomas), Rome, 1 August 1953; box 6, "Mnogopoštovani Oče!" (a letter by Ivan Tomas), Rome, 1 August 1954; box 6, "Mnogopoštovani!" (a letter by Ivan Tomas), Rome, 6 December 1954; box 6, "Rev. dr. Ivan Tomas, Roma, Italy."

In his *Journal*, Josip Vraneković, a priest in Krašić during Stepinac's house arrest, never explicitly mentioned the circumstances of Stepinac's cardinal robe being brought into the FPRY during the relevant period in 1954,⁷¹ even though, at one point, he noted Stepinac's dream about his installation ceremony in Rome, during which he put on a red cardinal robe.⁷² Furthermore, in the log entry of 30 July 1954, an interesting remark made by Stepinac can be found, mentioning the possibility of receiving the cardinal robe in Zagreb.⁷³ This information was, by all accounts, passed on to him by the Archbishop of Vienna Theodor Innitzer. Even though this period is chronologically close and thus intriguing, it would be unfounded to claim, based on only a single note, that the information is in any way related to Frances Yenko Chilcoat smuggling the cardinal robe from Rome to the FPRY. Thus, the context of Stepinac's remark remains unclarified.

Conclusion

Despite her well-founded concerns, Yenko Chilcoat apparently managed to smuggle Stepinac's red cardinal robe across the Italian-Yugoslav border. Keeping in mind the severance of the diplomatic relations between the FPRY and the Holy See, caused precisely by Stepinac's appointment as cardinal, the vestment would have been confiscated had it been discovered by the border control when Frances entered the Yugoslav territory. Moreover, criminal sanctions would have been imposed on her if her contacts with Tomas had been discovered, as the official sources in the FPRY considered the priest a member of the hostile emigration. In any case, the regular criminal code of the time provided for imprisonment in the case of smuggling hostile propaganda materials. According to the notes contained in her memoir, Frances was well aware of the risk she was taking, which was intensified by the vivid memory of the unpleasant conversation she had experienced at the Yugoslav consulate in San Francisco before her trip to Europe.

The successful delivery of the cardinal robe to the territory of the FPRY also attested to the porosity of the Yugoslav border when it came to the smuggling of undesirable goods from the West during the Cold War period, as well as to the abilities of the Holy See – i.e., to the creativity and connections that the Croatian emigrant clergy could employ to carry out classified and risky tasks.

The authenticity of Yenko Chilcoat's memoir has been verified in multiple places and is publicly available in online databases, where *Smuggler for the Pope* is listed as a self-published copyrighted work. All in all, it is undoubtedly an authentic work.

(a letter by Friar Dominik Mandić), Chicago, 4 December 1955; box 6, "Dragi Mnogopoštovani!" (a letter by Ivan Tomas), Rome, 18 December 1956.

71 Josip Vraneković, *Dnevnik: život u Krašiću zasužnjenog nadbiskupa i kardinala Alojzija Stepinca* (5. XII. 1951. – 10. II. 1960.) (Zagreb: Postulatura blaženoga Alojzija Stepinca, 2011), 250–362.

72 Vraneković, *Dnevnik*, 270.

73 "While we were taking a walk, he mentioned that a certain man had visited Cardinal Innitzer the other day and told him that Cardinal Stepinac would soon be able to go to Zagreb to receive the crimson robe. Then he added: "It might be so, but the only thing I would like to live to see was the priest who would be my successor. I believe that my mission is not to be the hammer but rather the anvil upon which the executioners' blows – those of the enemies of the Church – will shatter." See: Vraneković, *Dnevnik*, 337.

The credibility of Frances Yenka Chilcoat's testimony is supported by the promotion of *Smuggler for the Pope* in the American Catholic press, as well as by the fact that none of the clergy or the laity denied Yelko Chilcoat's testimony so far, which would be expected if it was falsified, all the more as her testimony concerns the Blessed Alojzije Stepinac and the current candidate for a saint, who is often at the centre of attention of public discussions in the Republic of Croatia as well as in the territory of the former Yugoslavia. Another fact that supports her testimony is Yenka Chilcoat's book dedication in the preface of her memoir, in which she also addresses the Stepinac Museum in Zagreb and an article published in *Catholic San Francisco*, stating that Yelko Chilcoat's memoir describes the cardinal robe that is currently kept at the Stepinac Museum. However, it is quite odd that the museum itself does not provide any information about the origin of the cardinal robe on display.

Finally, no evidence has been found that Stepinac ever appeared among the people in his cardinal robe, so it seems that he refrained from wearing it publicly after it had been smuggled across the border.

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Domagoj Tomas

IVAN TOMAS IN PAPEŽEVA TIHOTAPKA

POVZETEK

V času pontifikata papeža Pija XII (1939–1958) so bili odnosi med Svetim sedežem in evropskimi komunističnimi državami napeti ali prekinjeni. Leta 1949 je Sveti sedež izdal Odlok proti komunizmu, uradni dokument, ki je po encikliki *Divini*

Redemptoris iz leta 1937 obsodil komunizem, katoličane, ki so zagovarjali komunistično doktrino, pa razglasil za izobčene iz katoliške cerkve. Politični odnosi med Svetim sedežem in komunističnimi državami so tako še bolj zapletli tektoniko bipolarne delitve sveta med hladno vojno.

V takšnih povojnih okoliščinah je v Federativni ljudski republiki Jugoslaviji (FLRJ) potekal sodni proces proti zagrebškemu nadškofu Alojziju Stepincu, ki se je končal leta 1946, ko je bil obsojen na 16 let zapora. Po prestani petletni zaporni kazni se je Stepinac moral odločiti, ali bo odšel v Rim ali pa bo odslužil preostalo kazen v hišnem priporu v Krašiću, svojem rojstnem kraju. Izbral je hišni zapor in tako postal živi simbol mučeništva pod komunistično oblastjo. Ko je bil Stepinac leta 1953 imenovan za kardinala, je FLRJ prekinila diplomatske odnose s Svetim sedežem, zaradi česar ni mogel oditi v Rim, da bi prevzel kardinalske insignije.

V tistem času je na Vatikanskem radiu v Rimu delal hrvaški duhovnik Ivan Tomas, ki je javno govoril o Stepinčevem primeru in promoviral njegovo vlogo v uporabi proti komunistični vladavini v FLRJ. Ob njegovem posredovanju je ameriška turistka slovenskega rodu Francis Yenko Chilcoat leta 1954 prinesla Stepinčevo kardinalsko obleke na ozemlje FLRJ. Svoj zanimivi podvig je opisala v spominih z naslovom *Smuggler for the Pope (Papeževa tihotapka)*, ki so izšli leta 2006.

V prispevku so najprej pojasnjene mednarodne politične okoliščine v času njegovega prihoda iz ZDA v Evropo ter cerkveno-državni odnosi med Svetim sedežem in FLRJ po drugi svetovni vojni. Prispevek si prizadeva ugotoviti tudi pristnost in verodostojnost spominov in trditev Frances Yenko Chilcoat ter tveganje, ki ga je prevzela v vlogi tihotapke. Analizirani so tudi Tomasova vloga pri prenosu kardinalskih oblačil in druge okoliščine tega procesa ter posledice tega, da so oblačila postala Stepinčeva last.

Nazadnje sta v prispevku preverjeni pristnost spominov v knjigi *Smuggler for the Pope*, ki jo je napisala Frances Yenko Chilcoat, in verodostojnost njenega pričevanja, ki jo je dodatno potrdil katoliški tisk v ZDA. Frances Yenko Chilcoat je s tihotapljenjem kardinalske obleke na ozemlje FLRJ nedvomno veliko tvegala, saj bi jo za takšno dejanje po takratnem kazenskem zakoniku FLRJ lahko obsodili na zaporno kazen. Potem ko so prispela v FLRJ, kardinalska oblačila niso imela pomembne vloge v cerkveno-državnih odnosih med Jugoslavijo in Vatikanom ali v širšem kontekstu vojne, saj niso bila javno na ogled. Vendar pa je uspešno tihotapljenje teh pomembnih oblačil zagotovo pokazalo na prepustnost jugoslovanske meje, kar zadeva vnos nezaželenih predmetov z Zahoda, pa tudi na iznajdljivost Svetega sedeža oziroma hrvaške izseljenške duhovščine v njegovi službi.