



Stepinac, a Man, a Name and a Nation still being Manipulated

I would firstly like to thank my fellow Aussie, Vice Batarelo for giving me this opportunity because it is indeed a great honour and privilege to be speaking to you today in defence of Cardinal Stepinac.

Vice is ill and unable to see the fruits of his labour. He and his colleagues at Vigilare have done a sterling job in putting this magnificent conference together. He is in our thoughts and prayers during his convalescence. Get well soon mate.

It is a great honour and privilege to be on the same bill as Dr. Robin Harris and Dr. Jure Krišto who are the foremost authorities in their fields, let alone on Stepinac.

It begs the question, why am I on the same bill as these eminent authorities, talking about Stepinac.

I am here representing each and every one of you because I want to show you that private initiative is required by a voluntary organisation and individuals in order to combat lies and deception.

I will be talking about how three individuals took on the Serb government, I would like to say and won, but there is still a lot of work to do but and at least we made a dent in their campaign against Cardinal Stepinac and Croatia for that matter.



Still being manipulated

The title of my talk is Stepinac, a Man, a Name and a Nation *still* being Manipulated.

It not just Stepinac but our nation that is being manipulated.

And it is not just being manipulated recently or today but *still* being manipulated since before the communists took power, during and after they fell from power.

In his opening Chapter entitled The Lie, Dr. Harris quotes Alojzije Stepinac who said that Communism was born of lies, lives by lies, and will die from lies.

Dr. Harris goes on to say that (read page 2 from the book)

The strategy to vilify Stepinac and with him the Catholic Church, was pursued deliberately, cunningly, persistently and to a remarkable extent successfully, by the Yugoslav Communist Party, from before the Partisans took power in 1945 up to the collapse of Communist Yugoslavia in 1991.

It overlapped with a desire within Serbian nationalist circles to achieve hegemony for a Greater Serbia.

Sound familiar? Some of you or at least your parents lived through the same thing not that long ago.

That project - as Stepinac himself well understood - meant that, in practice, the Yugoslav Communist Party and elements within the Serbian Orthodox Church, which otherwise had nothing in common, share a joint goal.

The other day a taxi driver was telling me how when he went to school he was learning all about how Stepinac was a war criminal and enemy of the state and he and many people did not know any better and at home his grandparents would paint a totally different picture of Stepinac.

The Serbs continue to manipulate Stepinac to blacken Croatia.

This is as much about standing up for Croatia as it is about standing up for Stepinac because it is part of a wider and continuing slander campaign aimed at the Croatian people and State.



LETTER

So what did three individuals do about the lies and manipulation that we heard from the Serbian Government about Stepinac and Croatia during last summer?

Like everyone else on Vigilare's mailing list, I received an email from Vice Batarelo at the beginning of summer with a letter in Croatian, demanding an apology from Serbian Foreign Minister, Ivica Dačić for the lies that he was saying about Stepinac and asking us to sign it and it to send it to the Serbian Embassy.

I immediately translated his letter into English and sent it back to him and told him, mate, even if all 8 million Croats, 4 million in Croatia and 4 million in the diaspora, all write to the Dačić telling him that he is a dirty liar, he will just laugh at us.

We then decided to write a letter in English to the people both in the EU and around the world, who will be deciding on the future of Serbia.

Vice gathered me and Dr. Harris so that together we would draft a letter in response to the Serbian lies and manipulation.

We simply set out the facts. We took each slanderous accusation and lie that the Serbs said and refuted it with the facts, the truth.

As Dr. Harris says in his book, which is dedicated to ensuring that the truth about Stepinac is known and acknowledged,

The only antidote to lies – and few have been more lied about than Stepinac – is the truth.

Dr. Harris has sought to tell it in his book which sets the record straight and that is what set out to do in our letter.

The slanderous accusations include that Cardinal Stepinac was:

the 'Vicar of the genocidal NDH regime' and a 'war criminal' who gave 'genocide his blessing.'

Not only did they use these historical lies but the Serbs also attributed words to Cardinal Stepinac which he never said.

They claim that Cardinal Stepinac praised the role of the Ustasha Movement and of the Axis Powers in his 1941 Easter Sermon when he preached that *'the NDH was created by God's grace, by the wise sacrificial work of the Leader (Poglavnik) (Ante*



Pavelić) and by the Ustasha Movement, as well as by the will of our allies (Hitler and Mussolini).'

Dr. Harris found the documents evidencing that these are actually the words of a high level officer of the quisling Independent State of Croatia, the NDH, Slavko Kvaternik in his statement proclaiming the establishment of the NDH on 10th April 1941.

The Serbs just transposed Kvaternik's words to Stepinac.

We then cited the actual text of Blessed Alojzije Stepinac's sermon on Easter Sunday (13th April 1941) which clearly contradicts what the Serbs claim.

Stepinac's sermon is a call to peace, which he says is "one of the most beautiful gifts of Jesus Christ". It laments the "chaos" of war, the "sighs of the oppressed", and the "tears of the worn out and unfortunate".

We sent our letter to our neighbouring countries, Members of the Croatian Government Commission monitoring Serbia's negotiations with the EU, all foreign Ambassadors to Croatia, all members of the European Commission, all EU Foreign Ministers, the Council of Europe, all the Members of the European Parliament as well as leaders in other Western countries including the US, Canada and Australia.

Did our letter produce any results, did it have any impact at all.

You may recall the other night when the high powered panel of lawyers and politicians were telling us that they take on the secular militants by passing legislation etc. and I asked, what can we, as individuals do to fight the militants and I jokingly said that it was not a rhetorical question. Stjepo Bartulica responded by quoting Edmund Burke who said that *"All that is needed for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing."*

Firstly, we woke up some people both in the government and in the church who were enjoying the usual Croatian custom of nothing happening during July and August. Meanwhile, the Serbs were taking full advantage of the silence in Croatia.

Foreign Minister Miro Kovać suddenly decided to act and it was all on the basis of the documentation that Dr. Harris found and sent to the Foreign Ministry.

We ended our letter by asking something of the recipients.



“We ask you and your colleagues to note these falsehoods and to be alert to any more, which the Serbian campaign to delegitimise Croatia, may involve in the future.”

We actually got a reply from Juncker thanking us for our letter and that he will reply in detail in due course.

Many Ambassadors acknowledged receipt of our letter when I saw them in person at various events and they promised to reply but even if they didn't, because they are diplomats, the fact that they read it and are aware of the contents and mentioned it to me, means that our letter was effective.

Shortly after we sent our letter, the Serbian Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić also wrote to Juncker saying that Croatia was pursuing quote “a blatant anti-Serb policy” which Serbia did not provoke in any way, except for expressing its disagreement with decisions in cases related to World War II Zagreb Archbishop Alojzije Stepinac, Croatian Member of Parliament Branimir Glavaš and Barešić, underlining that Serbia could not accept the legacy of Nazism and support for terrorism.

Juncker also replied to Vučić saying that good neighbourly relations, regional cooperation and reconciliation were the basic principles that should be respected by all EU candidate countries, potential candidates and EU member-countries.

Serbian Foreign Minister Ivica Dačić was livid, saying that Juncker did not answer any of the concrete questions raised by Vučić, he did not comment on the rehabilitation of the fascist Ustasha regime. He did not even tell us what we did not do.

Maybe because they had already done enough!

Dačić said that “This can no longer continue. We did not ask you about world peace but about the anti-Serb policy of an EU member-country which jeopardises peace and stability in the region.”

Well he actually contradicts himself because they did ask his opinion about peace and stability which Juncker gave them!

This cannot be just coincidence. Clearly, Juncker did what we asked. He took note of the facts that we presented and our warning to be wary of any more lies in the Serbian campaign to delegitimise Croatia, which he then received straight after our letter defending Stepinac and Croatia.



So you see, individuals can make a difference. You are also making a difference by being here tonight and supporting Vigilare's efforts.

When you think that something should be done about an injustice that you see or a lie that you hear, then do something about it.

Vice wanted me to share what Stepinac means to me personally.

Stepinac was a large part of my life as a Croatian and a Catholic growing up in Australia and ever since.

There are three large Croatian parishes in Melbourne and every year, while I was still living there, there would be one big joint mass celebrating Stepinac on 10th February, well before his beatification.

Today, mass is celebrated every 10th February by the Arch Bishop of Melbourne at St. Patrick's Cathedral in the centre of the City there is now a bust of Stepinac in front of the Cathedral.

When I was travelling around Europe after finishing university, I stayed with an elderly English couple in London who told me that they had personally signed a petition in the UK to free the Croatian Cardinal.

I lived in Vienna before moving to Croatia and an American priest, Father Carolacelebrated mass for the expat community.

We became friends and I introduced him to Stepinac and he came to Croatia and concelebrated mass for the beatification.

He later realised that he lived in the same house that Stepinac lived in when he was in Rome. Father Carola has been a proponent of Stepinac ever since.

I would like to once again express my gratitude for the opportunity to defend Stepinac after all that he has done for me. I feel it my duty as a Croatian and a Catholic and personally, as trying to repay a debt I owe him.

I would not be able to do what I have been doing in Croatia without my faith and devotion to Stepinac.

I went back to Australia to be with my dying father.



Our last conversation was about Stepinac. I asked him to do me a favour, when he gets to heaven to ask Stepinac to help out in Zagreb and his last words to me were “I will”.

When I got back to Zagreb, I got the most highest paying job I ever had in my life and I bought a dilapidated house, literally on St. Mark’s Square. Everybody laughed at me but I loved it because it was 300 years old, older than Australia, and on St. Mark’s Square with the Church with the *Hrvatski grb* on the roof. When I eventually got the permits to renovate it, I discovered an eighteenth century fresco of the Holy Family under the old façade. And now people ask me, how did you get this house, *tko stoji iza tebe*, and I tell them *tko stoji iza mene!*

Thank you.

Don Markušić

