

MARIO JAREB¹

Croatian Institute of History, Zagreb, Croatia
ORCID 0000-0003-1292-7201

ON THE CROSSROADS OF FAITH: THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH IN THE KINGDOM OF THE SERBS, CROATS, AND SLOVENES/ YUGOSLAVIA THROUGH THE EYES OF THE US MINISTERS AND CONSULS IN BELGRADE AND ZAGREB

**Na skrzyżowaniu wiary – Kościół katolicki i Serbski Kościół Prawosławny
w Królestwie Serbów, Chorwatów i Słoweńców / w Jugosławii w oczach
pastorów i konsulów USA w Belgradzie i Zagrzebiu**

Abstract

Data on religious life, that is, the activities of various religious communities and organizations/ churches, were often mentioned and analyzed on the pages of dispatches and reports compiled by US ministers in Belgrade and consuls in Zagreb. They are available primarily among the documents of the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Record Group (RG) 84, Records of Foreign Service Posts, Diplomatic Posts, Yugoslavia, and on two microfilm publications published by NARA. Most attention in dispatches and reports was devoted to the Serbian Orthodox Church as a kind of state church of the Kingdom and to the Catholic Church, which at the same time represented the vast majority of Croats (and Slovenes).

Keywords: Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes/Yugoslavia; Catholic Church; Serbian Orthodox Church; US diplomacy

Abstrakt

Dane dotyczące życia religijnego, czyli działalności różnych wspólnot religijnych i organizacji/Kościółów często były wspominane i analizowane na stronach depesz i raportów sporządzanych przez amerykańskich pastorów w Belgradzie oraz konsulów w Zagrzebiu. Dostępne są głównie wśród dokumentów Narodowych Archiwów i Administracji Archiwalnej (NARA), Grupy Rejestrowej (RG) 84, w Rejestrach Stanowisk Służby Zagranicznej, Placówek Dyplomatycznych Jugosławii oraz na dwóch publikacjach mikrofilmowych wydanych przez NARA. Najwięcej uwagi w depeszach i raportach poświęcono Serbskiemu Kościołowi Prawosławnemu jako właściwie Kościołowi państwowemu Królestwa oraz Kościołowi katolickiemu, który reprezentował zdecydowaną większość Chorwatów (i Słoweńców).

Słowa kluczowe: Królestwo Serbów, Chorwatów i Słoweńców/Jugosławia; Kościół Katolicki; Serbski Kościół Prawosławny; dyplomaci USA

¹ Mario Jareb, PhD, Croatian Institute of History, Zagreb, Croatia, e-mail: m_jareb@yahoo.com.

Introduction

The primary objective of the US diplomatic missions in the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (SHS)/Yugoslavia throughout the interwar period was to serve more as listening posts than as active representatives of American interests in the country.² Thus, the duties of the American clergymen and consuls were limited exclusively to collecting and processing information on various aspects of life in Yugoslavia. Since they themselves were neither Orthodox nor Catholic, American ministers in Belgrade were able to approach both communities and their religious and political leaders sincerely and without prejudice. Their approach represents a new view of the position of religious communities and their mutual relations. Therefore, the paper aims to present their views and information gathered during their service in Yugoslavia.

Although the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church were not the only religious communities and church organizations in the country, they were the two largest and most influential denominations comprising the majority of believers.³ For example, the American minister in Belgrade and Episcopalian by faith, John Dyneley Prince, observed with sympathies the idea of close Orthodox-Anglican (Episcopalian) cooperation.⁴ In addi-

² According to *Hrvatska u diplomatskim izvješćima Sjedinjenih Američkih Država 1918.-1929. [Croatia in Diplomatic Reports of the United States of America 1918-1929]*, ed. H. Čapo, Zagreb: 2018, p. 39, “the American diplomatic post in the Kingdom of SHS was in the lower rank of the legation, throughout the entire period of existence of that country. The main tasks of the representative offices were communication between the US government and host countries, protection of the lives and property of American citizens abroad, monitoring of the political situation in host countries, and the protection of general and economic American interests. The tasks of the American Legation in the Kingdom of SHS did not differ from these general principles. «Listening Posts» was the shortest description of American diplomatic missions in Europe after the First World War. This characteristic was directly correlated with American foreign policy. In Republican hands after Wilson, the move was towards isolationism, i.e., a policy of non-interference in the internal relations of European states.” More on the US diplomatic posts in Yugoslavia and the US-Yugoslav relations during the period from 1918 to 1929 could be found in Čapo’s book on pages 21-55. See also, M. Jareb, *Američka diplomacija i Kraljevina Jugoslavija uoči i nakon Travanjskoga rata [American Diplomacy and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia on the Eve of and During the April War]*, in: *Srbi i rat u Jugoslaviji 1941. godine: Zbornik radova [Serbs and War in Yugoslavia 1941: Thematic Collection of Articles]*, Belgrade 2014, pp. 201-204.

³ The organization of the Catholic Church in the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes basically relied on the organization which existed before its creation in 1918, with the Archdiocese of Zagreb as the largest province of the Church in the new state and the archbishop of Zagreb as the most influential Catholic prelate in the country. The Serbian Orthodox Church came into existence under that name and as the sole Orthodox Church organization in the country in September 1920. It united five different Orthodox ecclesiastic organizations that existed on the territory of the new Kingdom. More on the establishment of Serbian Orthodox Church could be found in I. Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia: Origins, History, Politics*, Ithaca and London 1984, pp. 220-222. The first patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church was Dimitrije Pavlović. Patriarch Dimitrije (Dimitrije Pavlović, 1846-1930) remained on that position until his death in 1930.

⁴ John Dyneley Prince (1868-1945) was appointed American minister to Belgrade in 1926 and remained in that position until 1932. For his biography, see C.A. Manning, *Memoir: John Dyneley Prince*, “The American Slavic and European Review,” December 1945, vol. 4, no. 3/4, pp. 223-226. In several reports, he sympathetically mentioned the possibility of establishing close ties and cooperation between the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Episcopal and Anglican churches. In Despatch no. 775 dated April 8, 1930, in Belgrade, sent by US minister Prince to the Secretary of State in Washington, the Prince reports on the death of the Serbian Patriarch Dimitrije (Dimitri in the text of the despatch), *National Archives Microfilm Publications, Microfilm Publication M1203, Records of the Department of State Relating to Internal Affairs of Yugoslavia 1930-1944, Decimal file 860h*, Washington, 1982 (hereinafter: NAMP, M1203) Roll 10, Target 2, 860h.404, Religion, document 860h.404/18, to whom he showed great respect and added that “Dimitrij was liberal minded and, I really believe, a devout Christian man. For example, he was very anxious to do his share towards establishing intercommunion between the Orthodox Christian churches and the Anglican bodies. He was especially friendly toward the American Episcopal Church and in 1927,

tion to the presented facts, the reports and despatches of US diplomats often contain critical remarks on the behavior and attitudes of various communities, especially their leaders. In some cases, there was even harsh criticism, and it is more than an impression that American diplomatic representatives approached the Serbian Orthodox Church in this way more often than the Catholic Church. However, persistent attempts to treat all parties with some respect and sometimes even understanding of wrongdoing are evident. Quite an appropriate example of such an attitude are the words of minister Prince of November 25, 1930, when he stated that “it is perfectly true that the Serb Patriarch [Varnava] openly expresses his dislike of Catholicism, because, at a recent interview which I had with him, he spoke bitterly of the «un-Christian character» of some of the Nuncio’s utterances.

It will, therefore, appear that the religious-political difficulties here are still far from solved. For an impartial observer, unattached to either of the contending bodies, it is hard to say which is to blame the more.”⁵

Sources

Therefore, data on religious life, that is, the activities of various religious communities and organizations/churches, were sometime mentioned and analyzed on the pages of despatches and reports compiled by US ministers in Belgrade and consuls in Zagreb. They are available primarily among the records of the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Record Group (RG) 84, Records of Foreign Service Posts, Diplomatic Posts, Yugoslavia, as well as on National Archive’s Microfilm Publications M358 (*National Archives Microfilm Publications, Microfilm publication M358, Records of the Department of State Relating to Internal Affairs of Yugoslavia 1910-1929, Decimal file 860h*, Washington, DC, 1973) and M1203 (*National Archives Microfilm Publications, Microfilm publication M1203, Records of the Department of State Relating to Internal Affairs of Yugoslavia 1930-1944, Decimal file 860h*, Washington, DC, 1982), which contain the Records of the Department of State Relating to Internal Affairs of Yugoslavia from 1918 to 1944. Both publications consist of almost 50 microfilm rolls, but probably the most important for the topic of this paper are the records related to religious communities in Yugoslavia from 1930 to 1939 of the publication M1203, roll 10.

on Christmas Day (New Style) he himself administered the Holy Communion to eight members of various Anglican bodies.” According to Despatch no. 904 of October 18, 1930, from Belgrade, sent by US minister John Dyneley Prince to the Secretary of State in Washington, NAMP, M1203, Roll 10, Target 2, 860h.404, Religion, document 860h.404/24, in October 1930 he accompanied the Anglican Bishop of Gibraltar Hicks on a visit to the seat of Serbian Patriarch in Srijemski Karlovci. At the invitation by Patriarch Varnava they attended “the meeting of the Synod of the Serb Church, [...]. As this is the first time a foreign layman has ever been present at the session of the ecclesiastical Synod, I motored the Anglican Bishop and his Chaplain to Sremski, some seventy kilometers from Belgrade.” In his speech to Serbian clergy on that occasion, Prince stressed that “the Episcopal Church with us is a very liberal body, inviting in many instances preachers of other Christian denominations to its pulpits. I mentioned the work of the late Bishop Darlington of Pennsylvania (Harrisburg) in trying to effect a cordial understanding with all the Orthodox Communions and I closed with the expression of the hope that I might live to see all the Christian bodies of the world united, at least in common effort to preserve international peace.”

⁵ Confidential Despatch no. 930 dated November 25, 1930, in Belgrade and sent by US minister John Dyneley Prince to the Secretary of State in Washington, NARA, RG 84, Records of Foreign Service Posts, Diplomatic Posts, Yugoslavia, Volume 115, 1930, 800-Yugoslavia – October/December.

Religious diversity in Yugoslavia and the position of the Serbian Orthodox Church

However, the first American envoy to touch on the complexity of mutual Catholic-Orthodox relations and through them the Slovene-Croatian and Serbian relations in the new Kingdom was not a diplomat stationed in Belgrade or Zagreb but a member of the American Relief Administration (ARA), Arthur Wood DuBois, who on December 29, 1919 briefly reported to the US Legation in Belgrade that there “do exist great differences between peoples of Slovenia, Croatia, and Serbia, and one might add of Bosnia [and Herzegovina] and Montenegro; differences in religion, in culture, and in the conception of political life. Possibly an even more pronounced but temporary difference is that of spirit, i.e., the difference between the victorious Serb and the conquered Croat and Slovene.

In Croatia there exist a spirit of self-assertiveness natural of people who have enjoyed a fairly wide autonomy, and who still live with the memories of independent princes. [...] The question of religion also plays an important part in present day politics. The Slovenians are very clerical, and the Croats are Roman Catholics, and they fear a weakening of the position of the clergy, a separation of state and church, and a possible encouragement of orthodoxy to their detriment.”⁶

In the reports from the following years, the religious communities, their status, and activities were mentioned. In most cases, however, these references were short and very similar to the one quoted above. Thus, it is quite important to mention the report of July 13, 1926, written by the newly appointed US minister to Belgrade John Dyneley Prince, a distinguished linguist who specialized in Slavic languages, who analyzed the status and attitudes of the Serbian Orthodox Church. As mentioned above, he sympathized with the possibility of close Orthodox-Anglican (Episcopalian) cooperation. According to Prince, the “Serbian National Church is not a live spiritual body but is principally a propagandist organ for the Serbian irredentists. Thus, I attended recently a service in the local Cathedral and heard the preacher enlarge vividly, not on personal religious life as governed by common Christian principles, but on the glory of the Serbian name in ancient and modern wars and the need for the preservation of purely Serbian feeling. The large congregation, whenever a telling point was made in this connection, applauded vigorously and shouted its approbation.”⁷

However, in different circumstances several years later, Prince’s observations were in a way updated by the then US consul in Zagreb Egmont C. Tresckow, who in his report to the US Legation in Belgrade of August 1934 added that officially, “Yugoslavia has no State

⁶ Report no. 44 – DuBois, of December 29, 1919, in Vienna, on Internal and External [...] in Yugoslavia as viewed from Croatia and Slovenia, composed by the member of American Relief Administration (ARA) Arthur Wood DuBois, sent from Vienna to the American Legation in Belgrade, *National Archives Microfilm Publications, Microfilm publication M358, Records of the Department of State Relating to Internal Affairs of Yugoslavia 1910-1929, Decimal file 860h*, Washington, DC, 1973 (hereinafter: NAMP, M358), Roll 2, 860h.00 Political affairs, 860h.00/0-159, document 860H.00/29.

⁷ Despatch no. 46 dated July 13, 1926, in Belgrade, sent by US minister John Dyneley Prince from Belgrade to the Secretary of State in Washington, NAMP, M358, Roll 4, 860h.00 Political affairs, 860h.00/265-435, document 860h.00/291. In December 1931 Prince added that it is “a pity that Serb Church, which has, up to now, been nothing but a national formalistic symbol with almost no earnest inculcation of personal religion, could not receive some of the energetic leaven of Western Christianity.” Confidential Despatch no. 1225 dated December 30, 1931, in Belgrade, sent by US minister John Dyneley Prince to the Secretary of State in Washington, NARA, RG 84, Records of Foreign Service Posts, Diplomatic Posts, Yugoslavia, Volume 119, 1931, 840.4 – Catholic Churches in Yugoslavia.

Church; practically, it has, for the Orthodox Church forms an integral part of Serbian dominion. (...) It preserved and carried through the centuries the dream of «Great Serbia.» [...] This ideal goal necessarily meant the «Serbianizing» of all non-Serb elements, their remoulding into Yugoslavs as conceived in Serbia proper. Its accomplishment signifies the breaking down and demolishing of everything not in accord therewith and the obliterating of all past ties, traditions and conceptions, not in agreement with Serb policies present and future.”⁸

Conversions

It is certain that the “«Serbianizing» of all non-Serb elements” from Tresckow’s report is also related to the conversions into Serbian Orthodoxy, mainly from Catholicism. Already in July 1926 Prince noted in the above-mentioned report that “the Serbs are making every effort to induce non-Orthodox people, chiefly Catholics, to change their religion to that of the Serbian Church, chiefly by holding out the prospect of political benefit, but often even by intimidation.”⁹

The problem of conversion from Catholicism to Serbian Orthodoxy remained on the table in the years that followed. In May 1932, Prince was also told about the coercion of Catholics to convert to Orthodoxy by Zagreb Archbishop Antun Bauer who stated that “the Serbian Orthodox priests of Vojvodina are using every means in their power to encourage destitute Catholic peasantry to become orthodox, even offering them material advantages if they make the change.”¹⁰

Princes of the Churches

Despite the fact that already in July 1926 Prince viewed Serbian Orthodox Church as “a propagandist organ for the Serbian irredentists” and “not a live spiritual body”, he maintained great respect for the then Serbian patriarch Dimitrije. Upon his death in April 1930, Prince reported that “in the opinion of this Legation the old Patriarch was an influence for good so far as it was in his power to be.”¹¹ It is possible that Prince’s opinion was based on the mentioned Dimitrije’s will “to do his share towards establishing intercommunion between

⁸ The attachment to Despatch no. 186 dated September 10, 1934, in Belgrade is a report entitled “The Appointment of Monsignor Dr. Stepinac Archbishop Coadjutor of the Roman Catholic Church in Yugoslavia,” dated August 28, 1934, in Zagreb, and signed by American Consul Egmont C. von Tresckow, NAMP, M1203, Roll 10, Target 2, 860h.404, Religion, document 860h.404/57

⁹ Despatch no. 46 dated July 13, 1926, in Belgrade, sent by US minister John Dyneley Prince from Belgrade to the Secretary of State in Washington, NAMP, M358, Roll 4, 860h.00 Political affairs, 860h.00/265-435, document 860h.00/291. In its annual report for 1926, the British Legation in Belgrade also notes the conversion of Catholics to Orthodoxy in the southern parts of Dalmatia, so that “after intensive Orthodox propaganda, one and a half of the other island recently parted ways with the Catholic faith.” Quoted according to paragraph 48 of the annual report of the British Legation in Belgrade for 1926, published in Serbian translation in the collection of documents by Ž. Avramovski, *Britanci o Kraljevini Jugoslaviji*, vol. 1: (1921-1930), Belgrade and Zagreb 1986, p. 380.

¹⁰ Despatch no. 1328 on the Interview with Dr. Bauer, Catholic Archbishop in Zagreb, of May 5, 1932, in Belgrade, sent by US minister John Dyneley Prince to the Secretary of State in Washington on, NAMP, M1203, Roll 10, Target 2 – Religion, document 860h.404/38. Antun Bauer (1856-1937), Archbishop of Zagreb from 1911 (from 1911 to 1914 Coadjutor Archbishop of Zagreb Archbishop Juraj Posilović) until 1937. In 1934, Alojzije Stepinac was appointed Coadjutor Archbishop to Bauer.

¹¹ In Despatch no. 775 dated April 8, 1930, in Belgrade, sent by US minister Prince to the Secretary of State in Washington, the Prince reports on the death of the Serbian Patriarch Dimitrije (Dimitri in the text of the despatch) NAMP, M1203, Roll 10, Target 2 – Religion, document 860h.404/18.

the Orthodox churches and the Anglican bodies. He was especially friendly toward the American Episcopal Church.¹²

In the same report Prince stated that Dimitrije was “a strong upholder of the present régime here, which, he often informed me, he believed to be the only possible solution of the disorders which prevailed in this Kingdom during the first ten years of its political life.” By mentioning “the present regime,” Prince referred to dictatorship introduced in Yugoslavia by King Aleksandar I Karađorđević in January 1929.¹³

Prince also noted that late patriarch Dimitrije “spoke kindly of the Roman Catholics” but added that the papal nuncio [Ermenegildo Pellegrinetti] “disliked Dimitri intensely and has taken a very uncompromising stand toward the whole Serbian Orthodox communion.” Pellegrinetti’s opinion of Dimitrije differed not only from Prince’s view, but also from the opinion of Zagreb Archbishop Antun Bauer who considered him “gentle and christian” and “whose death we deplored.”¹⁴ More about Nuncio Pellegrinetti¹⁵ on the following pages of this paper, but before that, Prince’s views of Dimitrije’s successor, Varnava, are presented.

At the beginning of his service as Patriarch, Varnava was viewed by Prince quite similarly to his predecessor Dimitrije, probably due to the fact that at the time he showed great respect for the Anglican (and Episcopal) Church:¹⁶ “I believe that the Serb Patriarch’s policy of liberalism is largely dictated by politics in the sense that he wishes to have a link with England primarily, and secondarily with Americans, by advocating church fellowship. At any rate, there can be no harm in such ideas, as they certainly tend to promote international good feeling, so far as the Churches can do so.”¹⁷

However, in November 1931 the above-mentioned nuncio Pellegrinetti informed Prince about his dissatisfaction “with the attitude of the Serb Patriarch Varnava, who last April published a sort of manifesto clearly directed against the Catholics in the Kingdom, and has, since that time, constantly been on the watch to annoy the members of the Roman Church.”¹⁸ Although prior to that Prince did not have a high opinion of Pellegrinetti, it is obvious that then in November 1931 he accepted his views on Varnava. Namely, in May 1932 Zagreb Archbishop Bauer whom, contrary to Pellegrinetti, Prince highly respected, told him “that at no period in his experience had the Catholic Church stood in worse relations with the Serbian Orthodox community. This fact he attributed to the chauvinism of the Serb Patriarch

¹² Ibidem.

¹³ More on Aleksandar’s dictatorship see in J. Rothschild, *East Central Europe between the Two World Wars*, Seattle and London 1998, pp. 234-235, 237-245.

¹⁴ Bauer’s words quoted by Prince in Confidential Despatch no. 1328 dated May 3, 1932, in Belgrade, sent by US minister John Dyneley Prince to the Secretary of State in Washington, NARA, M1203, Roll 10, Target 2, 860h.404, Religion, document 860h.404/38.

¹⁵ Ermenegildo Pellegrinetti (1876-1943), titular archbishop of Adana (from 1922) and cardinal from 1937. As a diplomat, he first served in Poland from 1919 to 1922. From 1922 to 1937, he served as nuncio to the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes/Yugoslavia.

¹⁶ Varnava (born Petar Rosić, 1880-1937) became the Serbian patriarch in 1930. He died in July 1937, in the midst of discussions on the Concordat between the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and the Holy See, which he ardently opposed.

¹⁷ Despatch no. 904 dated October 18, 1930, in Belgrade, sent by US minister John Dyneley Prince to the Secretary of State in Washington, NARA, M1203, Roll 10, Target 2, 860h.404, Religion, document 860h.404/24.

¹⁸ Despatch no. 1186 dated November 12, 1931, in Belgrade, sent by US minister John Dyneley Prince to the Secretary of State in Washington, NARA, RG 84, Records of Foreign Service Posts, Diplomatic Posts, Yugoslavia, Volume 119, 1931, 840.4 – Catholic Churches in Yugoslavia.

Varnava, who the Department [of State], appeared to me only recently in a very unfavourable light when I called upon him in Belgrade. (See Despatch No. 1225 of December 30, 1931).¹⁹

In the above-mentioned despatch of December 30, 1931, Prince mentioned that Varnava “continued for about a year the liberal policy of his predecessor Dimítiri, of being friendly with the Anglicans. [...] Now, however, owing to the reproaches heaped upon him at that time by the adamantine Antónii [émigré Russian metropolitan residing in Yugoslavia],²⁰ the Patriarch has shown himself distinctly unfriendly even to Anglican or other Protestant Services in this place.”²¹ Prince reported that according to Pellegrinetti in October 1931 the “edition of the Catholic Herald (Glasnik) was confiscated by the Police at the instigation of the Government and the Patriarch, because it gave the text of a pastoral letter by the Roman Catholic Bishops here, in which, in one paragraph, regret was expressed that the Government school children were compelled by ordinance to take part in athletic games, etc., arranged at the same hour as the Mass in the Roman Catholic Churches. This, the Nuncio said, he could only believe was done as a repressive measure and to prevent the Catholic children from attending their brief religious duties on Sunday mornings.” In May 1932 archbishop Bauer “referred especially to the opposition to the Eucharistic Congress soon to be held in Sarajevo which was voiced in the Belgrade Senate at the instigation of the Serb Patriarch and with the approval of the Minister of the Interior, Mr. Srshkich [Milan Srškić], by Senator Shola [Atanasije Šola]. This Senator objected strongly to the holding of such a Catholic Congress in the chief city of Bosnia [and Herzegovina] on the ground that Sarajevo being a Moslem city, there would be strong objections from the Moslem religious authorities. This point of view was almost immediately shown to be absurd when the Moslem element of Sarajevo expressed their hope that the Congress might be held there, [...].

Furthermore, Archbishop Bauer stated that the Patriarch takes every occasion to prevent the erection of the proposed Catholic Cathedral in Belgrade [...].

In short, the Archbishop said that Patriarch Varnava has shown himself a pronounced bigot and a bad Yugoslav patriot.²²

Almost a year and a half before that, Nuncio Pellegrinetti informed minister Prince about the obstacles preventing the construction of a Catholic church (cathedral) in Belgrade by saying that it was Patriarch Varnava who “literally berated the Holy See and that he has since then put every obstacle possible in the way of building another (third) and commodious Roman Catholic Church in Belgrade, where there is not sufficient accommodation for the mass of worshippers. This site for the new church had been acquired last year by the

¹⁹ Confidential Despatch no. 1328 dated May 3, 1932, in Belgrade, sent by US minister John Dyneley Prince to the Secretary of State in Washington, NARA, M1203, Roll 10, Target 2, 860h.404, Religion, document 860h.404/38. Prince also added that he “was very much pleased with the personality of Archbishop Bauer who is now in his 74th year. He appears to be in perfect health [...] and spoke most kindly of the United States and our endeavors to further progress.”

²⁰ Metropolitan Antony (Aleksey Pavlovich Khrapovitsky, 1863-1936), former Metropolitan of Kyiv and Galicia. He left Russia in 1920 and settled in Srijemski Karlovci in the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. There, he initiated the establishment of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad.

²¹ Confidential Despatch no. 1225 dated December 30, 1931, in Belgrade, sent by US minister John Dyneley Prince to the Secretary of State in Washington, NARA, RG 84, Records of Foreign Service Posts, Diplomatic Posts, Yugoslavia, Volume 119, 1931, 840.4 – Catholic Churches in Yugoslavia.

²² Confidential Despatch no. 1328 dated May 3, 1932, in Belgrade, sent by US minister John Dyneley Prince to the Secretary of State in Washington, NARA, M1203, Roll 10, Target 2, 860h.404, Religion, document 860h.404/38.

Roman Catholics after much saving and sacrifice, the Nuncio said, and now it is impossible to know when the building may be erected. The Nuncio went on to say that the Patriarch is working together with the Young Men's Christian Association (British) in Belgrade, to frustrate every Catholic move and to slander Catholic practice."²³ The Catholic cathedral in Belgrade was never built.²⁴

Archbishop Bauer's benediction

Several months before that "in final benediction addressed by Archbishop Bauer to a crowd of a 100,000 packed into Jelačić Square," occurred "the omission of any reference to Yugoslavia or the King."²⁵ The crowd gathered on Zagreb's main square on the occasion of the closing of the Eucharistic Congress that took place from August 14 to 16 "under the auspices of the Papal Nuncio in this Kingdom, Archbishop Pellegrinetti, and Archbishop Bauer, the Catholic Diocesan of Zagreb."²⁶ Minister Prince approached Bauer's benediction as "clearly anti-regime that nothing but Dr. Bauer's archiepiscopal cloth could save him from the treatment usually meted out here nowadays to political recalcitrant. The Benediction, from the Yugoslav point of view, might easily be regarded as an inflammatory utterance disguised as a prayer."²⁷

In a conversation with King Aleksandar, Prince realized that the latter put the blame for what had happened on Pellegrinetti, "under whose influence he thought the Archbishop of Zagreb had fallen. The King said nothing against the Archbishop of Zagreb, although, [...], Archbishop Bauer's final prayer was almost a political speech against the Belgrade government. The King evidently blames the Nuncio and the Vatican for the attitude of the leaders of the Eucharistic Congress."²⁸

²³ Confidential Despatch no. 930 dated November 25, 1930, in Belgrade, sent by US minister John Dyneley Prince to the Secretary of State in Washington, NARA, M1203, Roll 10, Target 2, 860h.404, Religion, document 860h.404/26. Prince also reported that Pellegrinetti "complained bitterly that, in a recent public statement, the Serb Patriarch, Varnava, spoke ill of the Roman Catholic Church, asserting that the Vatican was using unfair means to makes converts from the Orthodox faith."

²⁴ More about the desired and planned construction of the Catholic cathedral in Belgrade can be found in R. Skenderović, *Crisinum i lutrija – dva neuspjela potvhata beogradskog nadbiskupa Rafaela Rodića [Crisinum and the Lottery – Two Failed Attempts of the Belgrade Archbishop Rafael Rodić]*, "Croatica Christiana Periodica," 2000, vol. 45, pp. 159-176.

²⁵ Attachment no. 1 with Despatch no. 870 dated August 29, 1930, in Belgrade is Political report No. 9 dated August 26, 1930, in Zagreb, sent by American Consul Paul Bowerman to American minister in Belgrade John Dyneley Prince, NARA, RG 84, Records of Foreign Service Posts, Diplomatic Posts, Yugoslavia, Volume 115, 1930, 800 – Yugoslavia – July-September.

²⁶ Despatch no. 870 dated August 29, 1930, in Belgrade, sent by US minister John Dyneley Prince to the Secretary of State in Washington, NARA, RG 84, Records of Foreign Service Posts, Diplomatic Posts, Yugoslavia, Volume 115, 1930, 800 – Yugoslavia – July-September.

²⁷ Ibidem.

²⁸ Despatch no. 871 dated August 30, 1930, in Belgrade, sent by US minister John Dyneley Prince to the Secretary of State in Washington, NARA, RG 84, Records of Foreign Service Posts, Diplomatic Posts, Yugoslavia, Volume 115, 1931, 800 – Yugoslavia – July-September.

Status of the Churches and the Concordat

There is no doubt that Pellegrinetti obviously supported the content of Bauer's benediction, but it is not certain whether the latter had fallen under his influence or what he said was solely the outcome of his feelings and observations. At that time, it was not only Varnava's stance toward the Catholic Church that might have encouraged Bauer to take such a position, i.e., to express dissatisfaction with the position of the Catholic Church and the Croatian people. Namely, numerous American reports from that time onwards show that the main obstacle for the position of the Catholic Church in Yugoslavia was its unresolved status towards the state, i.e., the conclusion of the desired Concordat between the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and the Holy See. Already in 1929 Nuncio Pellegrinetti "expressed to me [minister Prince] his disgust at being unable to come to an agreement with the present Government regarding a Concordat."²⁹

In contrast, the status of the Serbian Orthodox Church has been regulated since its establishment as a single body in 1920. In November 1929, minister Prince reported that "the Government has recently proclaimed a new law governing the activities of the Serbian Orthodox Church throughout the country, [...]. The principal distinction between the new status of the Orthodox Church and the one which existed before the present Act consists in the proclamation of the financial independence of the Church from the State, so far as regular budgetary allotments are concerned. [...]"

The Legation is informed that the new law is the result of a compromise between the Orthodox clergy and the Government and that the first draft of it, as originally prepared by the Minister of Justice, provoked considerable discontent in ecclesiastical circles. The present arrangement, however, has apparently been accepted with satisfaction and the Government can now probably rely on the support of the Orthodox clergy."³⁰

In the same despatch, Prince expressed his hope that it would become "possible that after the enactment of this law the Government will take up with more willingness the conclusion of a Concordat with the Vatican in order to settle its relations also with the Roman Catholic Church." In spite of that, still in 1935 the then US minister in Belgrade Charles S. Wilson could only report that efforts "have been made for some time to negotiate a Concordat between Yugoslavia and the Vatican, but unsuccessfully owing chiefly to the unyielding attitude of the Orthodox Church of Old Serbia which opposes all new concessions to the Catholic element of the country."³¹

²⁹ Despatch no. 870 dated August 29, 1930, in Belgrade, sent by US minister John Dyneley Prince to the Secretary of State in Washington, NARA, RG 84, Records of Foreign Service Posts, Diplomatic Posts, Yugoslavia, Volume 115, 1930, 800 – Yugoslavia – July-September.

For brief overview of negotiations and attempts between the Yugoslav Government and the Holy See to conclude the Concordat see M.M. Ninčević and Filip Brčić, *Diplomatski odnosi Vatikana i Kraljevine Jugoslavije: konkordat iz 1935. godine [Diplomatic Relations between Vatican City and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia: The Concordat of 1935]*, "Nova prisutnost," 2006, vol. 14, no. 2, pp. 299-307.

³⁰ Despatch no. 690 dated November 15, 1929, in Belgrade, sent by US minister John Dyneley Prince to the Secretary of State in Washington, NARA, RG 84, Records of Foreign Service Posts, Diplomatic Posts, Yugoslavia, Volume 112, 1929, 840.4 – Orthodox Church.

³¹ Despatch no. 276 on Internal Political Situation dated February 20, 1935, in Belgrade, sent by US minister Charles S. Wilson to the Secretary of State in Washington, NARA, RG 84, Records of Foreign Service Posts, Diplomatic Posts, Yugoslavia, Volume 140, 1935, 800 – Internal Affairs of States: Political affairs. YUGOSLAVIA: Political reports.

In the summer of 1937, things seemed to have changed in favor of the conclusion of the Concordat, so in mid-July the US Legation “had the honor to report the progress toward ratification of the Concordat between the Vatican and Yugoslavia, signed in July 1935.”³² In late July 1937 the Concordat was ratified by the Yugoslav People’s Assembly. However, fervent opposition of the Serbian Orthodox Church which also stirred violent riots in Belgrade and in some other Serbian cities, as well as the death of Patriarch Varnava, forced prime minister Stojadinović to postpone the submission of the Concordat to Yugoslav Senate for ratification.³³ Opponents of the Concordat were convinced that it would provide “unusual privileges to the Catholic Church, and although the Orthodox Church threatened excommunication of those who voted for ratification, Prime Minister Stoyadinovich [Stojadinović]³⁴ was able to muster a substantial majority in the ‘Skupshtina’ [Assembly]. Opposition to the unpopular document was so great, however, that the Prime Minister announced that he would postpone submission of the Concordat to the Senate for ratification for some months and that he would in the meantime attempt to demonstrate to the Orthodox Church that no unusual and discriminatory privileges were being granted to the Catholic Church.”³⁵

Finally, in October of the same year, Stojadinović gives up all activities regarding the possible full acceptance of the Concordat. The fate of the Concordat revealed the real state of power in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, with the Serbian Orthodox Church as the one that could impose its will on the Yugoslav government to prevent an attempt to regulate relations between the state and other religious communities in the country – the Catholic Church in that case.

Conclusion

Although the views of American diplomats were not biased and based on the imperative to implement specific policies of their country, in previous studies of interwar Yugoslavia (Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes/Kingdom of Yugoslavia), American diplomatic documents were used very seldom. This also applies to their views on religious communities,

³² Despatch no. 784 on Internal Political Affairs. The Concordat dated July 13, 1937, in Belgrade, sent by US minister Charles S. Wilson to the Secretary of State in Washington, NARA, RG 84, Records of Foreign Service Posts, Belgrade Legation and Embassy, General Records, 1937: 700 to 1937: 810, Box 9, 800 – Internal Affairs – Political. Concordat between Vatican and Yugoslavia.

Already in May 1937, minister Wilson reported that the “Minister of Foreign Affairs, however, at the beginning of the present session of the Parliament presented the Concordat and it has for some months now been under examination by a special parliamentary committee. It has been met with violent opposition throughout the country by the clergy and the members of the official Orthodox Church, and it seems to be very doubtful as to whether it will be ratified in its present form.” Despatch no. 746 on The Concordat between the Vatican and the Yugoslav Government, dated May 6, 1937, in Belgrade, sent by US minister Charles S. Wilson to the Secretary of State in Washington, NARA, RG 84, Records of Foreign Service Posts, Belgrade Legation and Embassy, General Records, 1937: 700 to 1937: 810, Box 9, 800 – Internal Affairs – Political. The Concordat between Vatican and Yugoslavia.

³³ More on that could be found in Despatch no. 796 on Internal Political Affairs. The Concordat. The Government and the Orthodox Church dated July 30, 1937, in Belgrade, sent by Chargé d’Affaires ad interim Charles S. Reed II to the Secretary of State in Washington, NARA, RG 84, Records of Foreign Service Posts, Belgrade Legation and Embassy, General Records, 1937: 700 to 1937: 810, Box 9, 800 – Internal Affairs – Political. The Concordat between Vatican and Yugoslavia, Chargé d’Affaires Reed.

³⁴ Milan Stojadinović (1888-1961), Serbian politician and economist, Prime Minister of Yugoslavia from 1935 to 1939.

³⁵ *Ibidem*.

whose activities they followed, and to what they reported on. Their opinions are a new and valuable view of the position of religious communities and their mutual relationship.

Due to the scope of this article, it was possible to mention only a limited number of reports by American diplomats in the preceding pages, most of which were written by minister John Dyneley Prince. However, I believe that they touch on important aspects that indicate differences in the status of the Catholic Church and the Serbian Orthodox Church in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes/Yugoslavia. Although the Serbian Orthodox Church was only directly identified as the true state church of the Kingdom in the above-mentioned report of the consul in Zagreb, Tresckow, the data presented in numerous documents confirm this claim. The influence and strength of that Church in the Kingdom was particularly evident in the events related to the conclusion of the Concordat between the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and the Holy See. It was prepared for a long time but was finally rejected in 1937 precisely because of strong pressure from the Serbian Orthodox Church. From the beginning of its existence as a single body in 1920, that Church regulated relations with the state by means of special acts, i.e., the Law of 1929. The fate of the Concordat exposed the real stance of the government in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, with the Serbian Orthodox Church as a force that could impose its will on the Yugoslav government to prevent an attempt to regulate relations between the state and other religious communities in the country – in this case, the Catholic Church.

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