

# Catholic Church and its defense of human rights during Second World War

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Keywords: Catholic Church, Church's doctrine, communism, human rights, right to life, necessity of defending human rights, World War II, Slovenia, moral authority

Catholic Church as institution of moral authority and defender of individuals symbolical and religious nature, has a right and an obligation to defend human rights, especially in the time of war. Because the war, laws of ethics are often disrupted and the state as a primary protector and an insurance of human rights fails in this task. During the WWII the Church tried to protect human rights in many different ways. Most of the defence was closely related to Church's doctrine, other forms featured individuals that took an active role in defence against communist regime. Such actions are against Jesus's commandment of love: »But I tell you to love your enemies and pray for anyone who mistreats you. Then you will be acting like your Father in heaven. (Mt 5,44-45) In this paper I will try to verify which methods were acceptable and compatible with the Church's doctrine in order to secure human rights and dignity against communism and why it was necessary for the Church to protect those rights. I will also investigate the motives of Church's actions during the WWII (self-interest motives and motives to help human beings according to Church's doctrine).

At first the Church has been the main component in the social, economical, political and cultural life of individuals, but later other philosophical, social and political systems tried to override this role. They also tried to take over the Church's and religion's place in defending human rights. But Church remained as moral authority (Juhant 2012, 148). In time of WWII the Church played an important role in social life, although it was independent of a state. Priests were often the only source of information among class of rural and poor people. Church is an important apologist of faith, belief and moral institutions.

As an example I will concentrate on Slovenian territory during the time of WW II, basing my investigation on pastoral letters, encyclicals, apostolic constitutions and speeches and historical account of the events (Granda 2008, 210-220; Griesser Pečar 2004, Lowe 2012, 265-280). The former will give us an insight into Church's doctrine toward communism as a system that threatens human life, and the latter will present concrete actions of Slovenian clerics in the time of war. Slovenian people were divided. On one hand we had communists, and on the other there were those, who tried to resist communist regime. Communists formed Liberation Front at first to protect Slovenians against occupying force. That is why many Slovenians joined Liberation Front, lead by Communist Part, regardless communists ideology. Others were marked by communist party as traitors, even if they did not cooperate with occupying force. That makes those the direct

enemy of communist party, which resulted in assassinations. Such differentiation remains today, even if the war is long gone. Slovenia struggled with the occupying force and also revolution (Granda 2008, 211). Church's doctrine is obligatory for its clergy. Slovenian clerics were convinced that resistance towards communism is necessary in order to defend human rights, which were violated by it (Juhant 2010, 73). Fajdiga claims that Church did everything it could and should be done (Fajdiga 33, 1945).

There is well known golden rule: »Treat others as you want them to treat you. This is what the Law and the Prophets are all about.« (Mt 7,12). Similarly Kant explains his categorical imperative, where he states that we must act in such a way that the maxim of our action could be accepted as a universal law. This imperative concerns all rational beings without exceptions. An individual normally tends toward peace, happiness (eudaimonia) (Aristotel 2002, 312-328), which surely excludes killings, concentration camps and starvation. In the time of war there were some people who were psychopaths, but on the other hand some serious crimes were committed by ordinary people. That is why it is hard to explain what happened to human's natural tendency to peace and happiness. Communists tried to infiltrate into people minds the idea of communism is good and that everything should be subsidiary to its ideology. Church's and also intellectuals' role should be in defending human life and freedom, which were seriously endangered in communism. Because of direct attack of communism toward the Church, the defence was also meant to protect the Church itself. The first defender of human rights should be state. Regarding state's failure in defending human rights, the only competent institution to step into its place was the Church (Stres 1989, 9-11).

That is why we will discuss Church's defense of human right to life against communism, to individual freedom and freedom of speech and religion. Communism often presents itself as moral system and as system that contains basic values. But it can be claimed that it opposes Christians ethics, based on natural intellect and also Holy Bible, since communism neglects and violates all commandments, especially the ones from 4th to 10th. It also uses lies and violence to overcome the old social system (Besancon 2014, 49-54). Primarily it can not be put in a position to judge who is to live and who not. And here lies the problem of the period of WWII. Communist leaders, wanted to fit all the people in the system, regardless their interest and their freedom. This is represented by »tendency of dictators to be guided by their fears and to turn into enemies all who could conceivably threaten their power— including the more idealistic among their own original adherents.« (Bennett 1948, 123) That is why pose the question what was the Church's role in defending individual's life and dignity as a basic human right.

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