Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe

Volume 40 | Issue 2 Article 6

3-2020

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RELIGIOUS CONVERSIONS AND RELIGIOUS DIVERSIFICATION IN INTERWAR YUGOSLAVIA AND SLOVENIA[1]

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Abstract

With the foundation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, the respective nationalities and ethnic communities were faced with the reality of a multi-confessional state. Internal migration and minority policy, in particular, set in motion a slow diversification in the religious sphere, even in the ethnically and religiously extremely homogeneous territory of Slovenia. This paper aims to analyze the role that religious converts—who were largely former Catholics—played during the interwar period in Slovenian regions in the phenomenon of the gradual transformation of the religious landscape over a long period of time. Converts were an important part of almost all religious minorities: including in "traditional" religious communities, such as the German Evangelicals (i.e., Lutherans of German nationality), as much as in religious communities that were new to this region, such as the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Old Catholic Church, and the Islamic religious community, and even in small communities, including the Baptists, the Nazarenes, and others. Religious conversions, above all, marked the contemporary and historical relationships among the various religious communities in Slovenian territory, and, in a broader framework, among Yugoslav nationalities—and often given the ethnic character of these religious communities, even cross-national and interethnic relations. Despite their conflictual hypostasis, it can be argued that these changes in relationships constituted the basis for further secularization, greater

[1] The author acknowledges that the research program (Slovenia and the Mediterranean, P6-0272) and the research project (Interreligious Dialogue–a Basis for Coexisting Diversity in the Light of Migration and the Refugee Crisis, J6-9393) in the scope of which this publication was published, have been financially supported by the Slovenian Research Agency.

heterogeneity among the congregation of the majority Catholic Church, and germs of religious plurality.

Keywords: religious communities, conversions, interwar Slovenia, Kingdom of Yugoslavia, history of religions.

Introduction

The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (hereafter, the Kingdom of SHS; in 1929 renamed the Kingdom of Yugoslavia) was a multi-national and multi-confessional state with varied historical, cultural, and political backgrounds. The history of religions in Yugoslavia is often viewed through the perspective of interethnic conflict, but interreligious relations were (and still are) all the more complex because there was not a nationality or religion with an absolute majority. Yugoslavia was the only European country with a large Orthodox (46.6 percent) as well as Catholic (39.4 percent), and Islamic religious communities (11.2 percent of the population).[2] The Serbian Orthodox Church had by far the greatest influence, particularly in politics, public administration, and the military. The ruling Karadjordjević dynasty was also a member of this religious institution, which had, *de jure*, lost its status of state church. Each of these religious traditions had their own interpretation of not only the role of religion in society and politics, but also of interreligious and interethnic cohabitation. The latter was very specific precisely in former Yugoslavia, where Croats, Serbs and Bosniaks shared a series of related characteristics, especially the language, while their ethnicities as their strongest identifiers, were based on religious and historical differences; i.e., the constructed ethnoreligious identity.[3] Precisely the representation of religious conversion, from conversions into Islam primarily in the 15th and 16th centuries to forced conversions of Serbian Orthodox to the Catholic Church in the Independent State of

[2] According to the 1921 Census; see Milivoja Šircelj, *Verska, jezikovna in narodna sestava prebivalstva Slovenije: popisi 1921-2002* [Religious, linguistic and national composition of population of Slovenia: 1921-2002 censuses]. (Ljubljana: Statistični urad Republike Slovenije, 2003), p. 68.

[3] Cf. Paul Mojzes, *Balkan Genocides: Holocaust and Ethnic Cleansing in the Twentieth Century* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2011), pp. 63-64; Vjekoslav Perica, *Balkan idols: religion and nationalism in Yugoslav states* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. vii; Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia: Origins, History, Politics* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1988).

Croatia, are at the core of national myths that are still being discussed, even by national historiographies.[4]

During the interwar period, the issue about conversion and the related proselytizing in the Kingdom of SHS/Yugoslavia was a delicate topic. In the first decade, the Slovenes and the Croats gained, for the first time, a partial acknowledgment as modern 'nations' through the inclusion of their names in the name of the state, the use of their languages in the state administration, intense cultural development, etc. But at the same time, in this multinational complex they were confronted with increasing Serbian centralism and Yugoslav unitarism, which, by attempting to weaken national and ethnic identities, particularly after the introduction of the royal dictatorship in 1929, also interfered with religious matters; for example, by banning political parties and societies of "tribal" (i.e., ethnic) and religious nature. This was markedly reflected in the relations between the historical rivals, the Catholic Church and the Serbian Orthodox Church, the affiliation to either of which carried a strong national and political connotation.

The area of interreligious relations was unregulated and most importantly, not unified from a legal point of view throughout the existence of the first Yugoslavia. Old laws were in force, which were regionally specific, even among Catholic Church members alone. For example, in the area of the Kingdom of SHS/Yugoslavia. which had been administratively part of Cisleithania prior to the First World War—i.e., today's Slovenia and western parts of Croatia[5]—the issue of interreligious relations after the cancellation of the Austrian concordat was primarily regulated by the Act on Interconfessional Relations of 25 May 1868. The only nationwide act also regulating the religious sphere was the constitution. Religious equality for members of accepted and recognized denominations was enshrined in the Vidovdan (1921) and the Octroi (1931) constitutions, which, however, does not mean that it was consistently guaranteed. The dominant majority religions were able to preserve their monopoly at the regional levels, with some temporary restrictions on their influence on politics. The accepted

[4] Cf. Bojan Aleksov, "Adamant and Treacherous: Serbian Historians on Religious Conversions", in *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*, 26, 2006, 1, pp. 23-52. Dubravko Lovrenović, "*Kroatizacija bosanskog srednjovjekovlja u svjetlu interkonfesionalnosti stećaka (O jednom modelu promjene historijskog pamćenja)* [Croatization of Bosnian Middle Ages in the Light of Interconfessional Tombstones (On One Model of Changing Historical Memory)]," in *Godišnjak/Jahrbuch* [Yearbook], 42, 2013, pp. 103, 109, 122-125; Caner Sancaktar, "Historical Construction and Development of Bosniak Nation," in *Alternatives: Turkish Journal of International Relations*, 11, 2016, 1: 1-2.

[5] With the exception of those parts of the western Slovenian and Croatian ethnic territories which were incorporated into the Kingdom of Italy following the Treaty of Rapallo (1920). Most of that territory was incorporated into Yugoslavia after the Second World War and the brief existence of the Free Territory of Trieste. It was not until the Treaty of Osimo in 1975–1977 that the border between Italy and Yugoslavia was officially demarcated.

denominations, those which had gained legal recognition in all parts of the kingdom, were the Orthodox, Catholic (of Roman, Greek and Armenian rites), Evangelical (Lutherans and Reformed Church), Jewish, and Muslim faiths, whereas the recognized religions included the Old Catholic, Mennonite, and Baptist churches. In 1923, by decree of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the Old Catholic and Baptist churches were also included among accepted denominations.[6] There were several attempts to pass an interconfessional law, but this prompted immediate opposition in the Catholic circles in Slovenia and Croatia, mainly due to the issues of interfaith marriage, religious affiliation and the upbringing of children born from interfaith marriages, and conversion. Later, other drafts of interconfessional law were submitted (in 1925, 1931 and 1940), but all failed to be passed during the period of the Kingdom,[7] in part because the Catholic Church insisted that a concordat should be adopted first. The agreement between Yugoslavia and the Holy See also addressed some issues from the sphere of interreligious relations, particularly the regulation of interfaith marriage, as well as the demand for institutions and property of the Catholic Church to remain in the possession of the church in the event of the population served by them converting to other faiths. Due to the opposition from the Serbian Orthodox Church and political opposition parties, the concordat was never ratified.[8]

Differences between "Yugoslav" nationalities were also evident in relation to the predominant type of the so-called collectivist religions[9] or perception of religious affiliation as "a given" (as opposed to religious identity as "a choice"). In this paper, I aim to show the role that representations of religion play in historical processes which have the power to strengthen or weaken religious identity at collective and individual levels, and how the latter, despite frequent perceptions to the contrary on the part of believers, is always subject to change. Relations between religious communities and state authorities can greatly influence that—for example, by politicizing religion, marginalizing or privileging certain religious communities—as can relations between religious communities themselves. A particular example is the relative openness to religious conversions—specifically, to joining a religion,

[6] Juraj Kolarić, *Ekumenska trilogija: istočni kršćani: pravoslavni: protestanti* [Ecumenical trilogy: Eastern Christians: Orthodox: Protestants] (Zagreb: Prometej, 2005), pp. 889-890.
[7] Gašper Mithans, *Jugoslovanski konkordat: pacem in discordia ali jugoslovanski "kulturkampf"* [Yugoslav concordat: pacem in discordia or Yugoslav "culture war"] (Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, 2017), pp. 81–86, 102–103.
[8] Ibid., pp. 188–203, 335–337.
[9] Slavica Jakelić, *Collectivistic Religions: Religion, Choice, and Identity in Late Modernity* (Farnham; Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2010), p. 45.

not to disaffiliating from one—which will be presented through different types of voluntary conversions in the Slovenian part of the Kingdom of SHS.[10]

I also intend to problematize Slavica Jakelić's thesis that unlike other nationalities of former Yugoslavia, the Slovenes cultivated an individualistic type of religion due to the absence of a strong "religious Other" (the majority religion in all neighboring countries is Catholic), the controversial role of the Catholic Church during the Second World War, and, compared to other nationalities of former Yugoslavia, due to the smaller role of the dominant religious institution in society or less importance of religion for the identity of the Slovenes.[11] At the same time, I will verify the weight of this argument, which is based on developments after 1941 and, particularly, following the disintegration of Yugoslavia, in the context of a significantly less "secularized" interwar period, the time of (the attempt of) the so-called first re-Catholicization or comprehensive social renewal according to the Catholic model in recent history.[12] The period under study was thus, on the one hand, taken as "a model" by most parties of the right-wing political spectrum after Slovenia's independence in 1991 and, on the other, it was the time of the first beginnings of religious diversification and modernization of society.[13]

Theoretical Framework

Most terminology in humanities, social sciences, and study of religions in particular is grounded on Western Christian scholarly tradition and thus biased.[14] As Meredith McGuire lucidly observes, Western scholars' concepts of religion and religious commitment were developed based on [Western] European [Christian-centered] experience of religious contexts. Therefore, established conceptual apparatus has not succeeded to appropriately address the notion of religious membership and individual religious practice built on mutually

[10] Despite its partial anachronism, I will occasionally use the term "Slovenia" for the geographical area of the northern part of the Kingdom of SHS, called Drava Banovina between 1929 and 1941, which was mostly inhabited by Slovene-speaking population. Although Slovenia as an autonomous administrative unit in the Kingdom of SHS/Yugoslavia did not exist, the term "Slovenia" was often used to refer to this territory, even in official documents.

[11] Jakelić, 2010, p. 49; cf. Maca Jogan, *Katoliška cerkev in družbeno zlo* [Catholic Church and the Social Evil] (Ljubljana: Univerza v Ljubljani, Fakulteta za družbene vede, 2016), pp. 23–24.

[12] Jogan, 2016, pp. 13-15.

[13] Cf. Jogan, 2016, pp. 25-26.

[14] Cf. James A. Kapaló, *Text, Context and Performance: Gagauz Folk Religion in Discourse and Practice* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), pp. 26-27; Victor Roudometof, "Orthodox Christianity and the State: the Relevance of Globalization," in *Review of Ecumenical Studies*, 10, 2018, 2: 213.

exclusive categories, neither how individuals engage in their religions in their everyday lives.[15]

In this regard, I will specify the approach and outline some theoretical considerations that I consider appropriate to be applied to this and similar researches on religion through the lens of the phenomenon of religious conversion. However, I will not go into an in-depth analysis of conversion narratives as is often the case. Moreover, the emphasis will be more on methodology that will include institutional spaces relevant for the research in a particular religious field in Europe dominated by the Catholic Church, comparable with East Central and South Eastern Europe, and beyond. This coincides with the recent trend in the study of lived religion that emphasizes the importance of lived religion to focus on "the macro (sociocultural) and micro (individual or private) levels of lived realities and lives of actors in concrete situations."[16] This practice-based approach to religious phenomena has already been adopted in some interdisciplinary historical studies,[17] but in Southeastern Europe, it remains relatively unexplored.

The more recent trends in researching the phenomenon of religious conversion in history and anthropology emphasize the ambiguity, hybridity, and internal tensions within religious and other social identities.[18] Before, historians would focus on religious syncretism[19] and the authenticity of faith practices,[20] while anthropology and other social sciences, relying on Max Weber, polarized religion between "traditional" and "rationalized."[21] The researchers who distanced themselves from these debates described conversion as a cultural passage in search of human affiliation,[22] as a step to achieving elite

[15] Margaret B. McGuire, *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 24-25.
[16] Srdjan Sremac et al. "Lived Religion and Lived (In)Tolerance," in *Lived Religion and the Politics of (In)Tolerance*, ed. Ruard R. Ganzevoort, Srdjan Sremac (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 4-5.
[17] Kapaló, 2011, p. 32; Ellen Badone, "Introduction," in *Religious Orthodoxy and Popular Faith in European Society*, ed. Ellen Badone (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 6.
[18] *The Anthropology of Religious Conversion*, ed. Andrew Buckser and Stephen D. Glazier (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003); Heather J. Sharkey, *Cultural Conversions: Unexpected Consequences of Christian Missionary Encounters in the Middle East, Africa, and South Asia* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2013); Shanta Premawardhana, *Religious Conversion: Religion Scholars Thinking Together* (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015).
[19] Cf. *Beyond Conversion and Syncretism. Indigenous Encounters with Missionary Christianity, 1800-2000*, ed. Lindenfeld, David and Miles Richardson (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2011).
[20] Cf. Carole M. Cusack, "Towards a General Theory of Conversion," in *Religious Change, Conversion and Culture*, ed. Lynette Olson (Sydney: Sydney Studies in Society and Culture, 1996), pp. 4-5.
[21] *Conversion to Christianity: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives*, ed. Robert W. Hefner (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Robin Horton, "African Conversion," in *Africa*, 41, 1971, 2; John and Jean Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).
[22] Diane Austin-Bross, "The Anthropology of Conversion: Introduction," in *The Anthropology of Religious Conversion*, ed. Andrew Buckser and Stephen D. Glazier (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), pp. 1-14.

status,[23] or as a clear political statement against state-constructed identities.[24] According to Lewis Rambo, religious conversion means turning from and to new religious groups, ways of life, systems of belief, and modes or relating to a deity or the nature of reality. [25] It is thus a process of change that takes place in a dynamic field of persons, events, ideologies, and institutions.[26] Contemporary studies also support the idea that conversion does not happen in a vacuum, but in relation to the social and cultural contexts in which converts are situated.[27]

I understand religious conversion as a "passage" through levels, types, and phases of religious participation.[28] Despite the struggle of a convert to be accepted by other believers as a "full" member of the new religion, he/she will very likely be permanently labelled as a "convert." It is therefore salient for better understanding of a particular religious field to discuss the autonomy of converts' actions during the process of conversion—before and after the "formal acceptance." The agency of the converts should be analyzed in regard to their impact on re-evaluation, re-instatement, and re-negotiation of everyday and formal/institutionalized religious practices, expressions and meanings.[29]

As I mentioned earlier, changes of religious affiliation and/or worldview will be studied as a process influenced by several personal and sociocultural factors. We can distinguish between voluntary and forced, individual and collective conversions, but for the purpose of this contribution, the following typology of religious change based on a combination of different motives and reasons (i.e., push and pull factors)[30] for conversion and related phenomena adapted to the Yugoslav circumstances will be used:

- conversions of convenience (e.g., intermarriage, legalization of children born out of wedlock, political and professional opportunism, seeking protection, a political statement etc.);

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[23] David N. Gellner, "The Emergence of Conversion in a Hindu-Buddhist Polytropy: The Kathmandu Valley, Nepal, c. 1600–1995," in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 47, 2005, 4: 755-780.
[24] Gauri Viswanathan, *Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity, and Belief* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998).
[25] Lewis R. Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion* (New Heaven: Yale University Press, 1993), pp. 2-3.
[26] Peter Halama, "Empirical Approach to Typology of Religious Conversion," in *Pastoral Psychology*, 64, 2015, 2: 185–186.
[27] Elysia Guzik, "The Search for Meaning: Information Seeking and Religious Conversion," in *Advances in the Study of Information and Religion*, 3, 2013, 5: 15.
[28] Cf. Henri Gooren, *Religious Conversion and Disaffiliation: Tracing Patterns of Change in Faith Practices* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 4-5.
[29] Cf. James A. Kapaló, "Mediating Orthodoxy: Convert agency and discursive autochthonism in Ireland," in *Orthodox Identities in Western Europe: Migration, Settlement and Innovation*, ed. Maria Hämmerli and Jean-François Mayer (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), pp. 239–240; Yafa Shanneik, "Conversion and Religious Habitus: The Experiences of Irish Women Converts to Islam in the Pre-Celtic Tiger Era," in *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 31, 2011, 4: 505.
[30] To further elaborate on definitions of religious conversion see: Ines W. Jindra, *A New Model of Religious Conversion: Beyond Network Theory and Social Constructivism* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2014).

- forced conversions;

- deconversion (a person leaves and remains without religion);

- reconversion (as religious revival or return to original faith);

- conversions of 'committed' converts (converts are active in religious rites and social activities of the religious community they were recently accepted in).

The conversions I will focus on will mostly include those concerning state "recognized" religions not because I would consider them more relevant—although vastly prevalent in number and influence—but for the sake of the limits of presented research. Still, some of the insights may be pertinent also in the contexts of other denominations. Studying converts that cross the "hard" structures of religious institutions, the religious border that is more open for "incomers," while to leave the community is much less acceptable and stigmatized, offers an insight into individuals' agency and permeability of the boundaries of these institutions that represent themselves as "fixed," "solid," and "unchanging."

What definitions of religious conversions still often overlook, ignore, or underrate are conversions of convenience, which have primarily secular motives (i.e., are not religiously motivated—but do not exclude the possibility that a person becomes religious afterwards). Very specific in this case was interwar Yugoslavia, and especially its northern part—Slovenia or the Drava Banovina as it was called in the 1930s—due to several contradicting civil and confessional legal systems in Yugoslavia.

Another point that needs to be emphasized is that recent "committed" converts mostly do not seek to change their cultural identity, as the faith is a primary motivator, not just one of the elements that form a religious identity. This profoundly changes the perception of religious conversions, considered almost exclusively up until the 20th century as a form of "acculturation" to the dominant power.[31] However, proselytizing religious organizations are by no means "equal" in their position, capital, and power. In fact, John Witte designates the problem of proselytizing as "one of the great ironies of the democratic revolution of the modern world,"[32] while Johan van der Vyver describes the right to engage in missionary activity as "perhaps the most controversial component of religious freedom."[33]

[31] Nadia Marzouki, "Introduction," in *Religious Conversions in the Mediterranean World*, ed. Nadia Marzouki and Olivier Roy (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 3.
[32] John Witte, "Soul Wars: New Battles, New Norms," in *The Review of Faith and International Affairs*, 5, 2007, 1: 13; *Proselytization Revisited: Rights Talk, Free Markets and Culture Wars*, ed. Rosalind J. Hackett, (London: Equinox, 2008).
[33] Johan van der Vyver, "Religious Freedom in African Constitutions," in *Proselytization and Communal Self-Determination in Africa*, ed. Abdullahi A. An-Na'im (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), p. 128.

Mythologization of Religious Past and Rudiments of Religious Diversification in the Interwar Period in Slovenian Territory and in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1918–1941)

Two constants marking the first Yugoslavia were Serbian political centralism, often disguised as Yugoslav unitarism, and Croatian-Serbian conflicts resulting from past and ever-emerging disagreements, exacerbated by government policy. The most pressing issue was the national question, a chapter that the government establishment addressed too late with the Cvetković-Maček Agreement (1939)—i.e., the foundation of the Croatian Banovina—only managing to resolve it with the Croatians, and even in that case, unsatisfactorily. According to Sabrina Ramet, the Kingdom in the first decade of its existence functioned as a non-consensual, quasi-parliamentary system (1918–1929), then as a royal dictatorship (1929–1934), then for a short period assumed the form of police state under the rule of the Yugoslav Radical Community (1934–1939), and ended its existence as a Serbo-Croatian condominium (1939–1941) surrendering to the occupying forces.[34]

As Radmila Radić points out, the three major religious communities were unable to establish genuine cooperation throughout the 70-year period of the two Yugoslavias.[35] This is probably best reflected in the case of the unsuccessfully handled Yugoslav concordat. The government of that time succeeded in persuading the Yugoslav Muslim Organization, the political representative of the Muslim population of Bosnia and Herzegovina, not to interfere in the discussion about the concordat and to have their delegates and senators support it in exchange for a new constitution of the Islamic religious community (1936). Nothing of the kind could be achieved with the Serbian Orthodox Church, although before leaving for Rome, where on 25 July 1935 they signed the concordat, the government, contrary to any established diplomatic practice, had even asked the patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church for "consent." The patriarch soon changed his favorable opinion and the Serbian Orthodox Church became one of the strongest opponents of the adoption of the concordat.[36]

The decision of the government not to subject to ratification the agreement that would regulate the legal position of the Catholic Church and equalize its rights with those enjoyed (exclusively) by the Serbian Orthodox Church, or more specifically, the role that the Serbian

[34] Sabrina P. Ramet, "Vladko Maček and the Croatian Peasant Defence in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia," in *Contemporary European History*, 16, 2007, 2: 215–231.
[35] Radmila Radić, "Religion in the multinational state: the case study of Yugoslavia," in *Yugoslavism: Histories of a Failed idea, 1918-1922*, ed. Dejan Djokić (London: Hurst & Company, 2003), p. 196
[36] Igor Salmič, *Al di là di ogni pregiudizio: le trattative per il concordato tra la Santa Sede e il Regno dei Serbi, Croati e Sloveni/Jugoslavia e la mancata ratifica (1922–1938)* [Beyond all prejudice: concordat negotiations between the Holy See and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes/Yugoslavia and the failure of ratification] (Roma: Pontificio Istituto Biblico: Gregorian & Biblical Press, 2015), pp. 571-577; Mithans, 2017, pp. 188–203, 335–337.

Orthodox Church played in the protests against the concordat,[37] is believed to have influenced the attitude of the authorities in the Independent State of Croatia and of some high representatives of the Croatian Catholic Church towards the Serbian Orthodox during the Second World War, including forced conversion to the Catholic faith. The number of these forced conversions is estimated at around 100,000.[38] The developments in ecclesiastical circles were perhaps even more directly a response to the spreading of Serbian Orthodoxy, and to a lesser extent, the Old Catholic faith throughout the country. It is estimated that during the first Yugoslavia, as many as 200,000 people, mostly in Croatia, converted to Orthodoxy; but this is, including in the opinion of Tomasevich, probably an exaggerated calculation.[39] Whatever the case may be, the idea in both state-supported instances was to try to use religion conversion as a lever for national assimilation in the belief that the only distinction between a Croat from a Serb was their faith, and that an Orthodox would make a more patriotic Yugoslav than a Pope-guided Catholic.

These ethno-religious identifications, as well as national myths about Croats and Serbs, have a much longer history. The myth about the protectors of "Christian" Europe, *antemurale christianitatis* [Bulwark of Christendom], among others, is present in both nationalities. Paul Mojzes points out four myths present in the memory of "Balkan groups:" the myth of land and blood (the land inhabited by the ethnic group is sacred, all foreign rulers are evil, and foreigners are accountable for every present day evil), the crucifixion and resurrection syndrome (turning defeat into victory), time is understood mythologically rather than chronologically (concepts of the past and the present are so intermixed that a grievance of long ago is perceived as a present affliction; while it is believed that a present action may not only vindicate but actually eradicate and reverse a past defeat), and the glorification of war and violence as the best way to keep or reclaim one's freedom.[40] And emerging as neuralgic points of these national myths were, even prior to the First World War, the very religious conversions, beginning with the Christianization of "pagans," followed by the Islamization in the territories of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the Middle and early Modern

[37] Ibid.
[38] Filip Škiljan, *Organizirana prisilna iseljavanja Srba iz NDH* [Organized forced evictions of Serbs from the Independent State of Croatia] (Zagreb: Srpsko narodno vijeće, 2014), p. 107; cf. Jozo Tomasevich, *Rat i revolucija u Jugoslaviji 1941 -1945: Okupacija i kolaboracija* [War and revolution in Yugoslavia 1941-1945: Occupation and collaboration] (Zagreb: Europapress holding, Novi Liber, 2010), p. 599.
[39] Tomasevich, 2010, p. 599.
[40] Paul Mojzes, *Yugoslavian Inferno: Ethnoreligious Warfare in the Balkans* (New York: Continuum Publishing Company, 1994), pp. 39-41.

Ages, and by conversions of the Orthodox to Roman Catholic and Greek Catholic churches after the occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina by the Habsburg Monarchy.

Although we would have difficulties to find any of these myths among the Slovenians, all ethnic groups of former Yugoslavia cultivate the myth of a deep, inseparable connection between a nationality and the prevailing religion and religious institution, as well as their autochthony in that nationality.[41] Overall, in terms of the religious field, Slovenia exhibits the characteristics of an overwhelming Catholic society, a society that for centuries has been dominated by the Catholic Church, similar to Lithuania, Ireland, Portugal, Spain, Italy, Poland or Croatia.[42] The main features of predominantly Catholic society is "the marginal position of other religions, and the fact that the statistical dominance of the Catholic Church masks a wide variety in the attitudes toward Catholicism and modes of belonging to the Catholic Church throughout the population, as well as substantial differences within the Church itself."[43] In other words, if one distinguishes between American, British, Scandinavian-Lutheran, mixed i.e., dual, Christian Orthodox and Latin (Catholic) religio-cultural patterns, then historically Slovenians clearly belong to the latter.[44]

The case of Slovenia is, nevertheless, specific, for the Catholic Church played an ambivalent role in shaping the Slovenian national group: from radical counter-Reformation, which sought to nullify the attainments of Protestantism (modern standard language, first translation of the Bible into Slovene (in 1577 the New Testament was translated, in 1584 the whole Bible, etc.) and collaboration with the occupying forces during the Second World War, on the one hand, to resistance to denationalizing during the 19th and early 20th centuries, participation of certain Catholic circles in the Resistance during the Second World War and the role of opposition in the socialist system, on the other.[45] It should also be noted that during the socialist regime in Yugoslavia, the repression of religious institutions, "generators

[41] Cf. Mitja Velikonja, "Religija in cerkev: dejavnikov oblikovanja nacionalnih mitologij v postsocialističnih državah [Religion and Church: factors of forming national mythologies in post-socialist states]," in *Družboslovne razprave*, 12, 1996, 21: 61.
[42] See: Ingo W. Schröder, Vita Petrušauskaitė, "Pluralism of Traditions in a Catholic Majority Society. Catholic Hegemony vis-à-vis Nationalism and Ethnic Experience," in *Etniškumo studijos/Ethnicity Studies*, 11, 2013: 70.
[43] See: Schröder, Petrušauskaitė, p. 70; Gašper Mithans, "Relations of power in the Slovene Catholic religious field during the interwar period," in *Prediger, Charismatiker, Berufene: Rolle und Einfluss religiöser Virtuosen*, ed. Christine Aka (Münster, New York: Waxmann, 2018), pp. 133.
[44] Aleš Črnič et al., "Religious pluralisation in Slovenia," in *Teorija in praksa*, 50, 2013, 1, p. 209.
[45] Cf. Jakelić, p. 45; Marjan Smrke, Samo Uhan, "Atheism in post-socialist conditions: the case of Slovenia," in *Teorija in praksa*, 49, 2012, 3: 509; Paul Mojzes, *Religious Liberty in Eastern Europe and the USSR: Before and After the Great Transformation* (Boulder: East European monographs; New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), pp. 342-343.

of cross-national conflicts" in the eyes of the authorities, relented significantly after 1953.[46] The restriction of religion to the individual's private sphere and the discrimination against believers decreased in the belief of the Communist Party—i.e., League of Communists—that religion or the need for religiosity among people would eventually fade away.[47] In reality, the "secularization trend" characteristic of Slovenia particularly during the 1960s and 1970s, halted during the 1980s in harmony with Western Europe. In the early 1990s, religiousness was on the rise again, while the second half of this decade already showed the first signs of revival of the "secularization" trend.[48]

Although important, the Catholic faith or Christian faith in general was not a major factor in the Slovenian national development, but that did not discourage attempts at renewing the myth about Catholic Slovenia[49] in the sense of "Only a Catholic Slovenian is a true Slovenian" after the country's independence. This exclusivist slogan was advocated in Slovenian territories by the principal ideologue of the Slovenian political Catholicism and originator of the political schism between pro-clerical Catholics and anti-clerical liberals (the so-called division of spirits), Anton Mahnič, as early as the late 19th century.[50]

However, according to Marjan Smrke, contemporary Slovenian society seems to be "more resistant to the (social) re-catholicizing pressures" than other predominantly Catholic, post-socialist societies because of the liberal nature of Slovenian socialism, the (negative) role of the Catholic Church during the Second World War, and the "remarkable heterogeneity" of those who identify as members of the Catholic Church. The private character of Catholicism makes the Slovenian case very different from the rest of the former Yugoslav states and similar to Western and Central Europe. If Slovenia is similar to Western

[46] Mateja Režek, "Cuius regio eius religio: The relationship of communist authorities with the Catholic Church in Slovenia and Yugoslavia after 1945," in *The Sovietization of the Eastern Europe: New Perspectives on the Postwar Period*, ed. Balàzs Apor et al. (Washington D. C.: New Academia Publishing, 2008), pp. 220-221.
[47] Paul Mojzes, "Yugoslavia's Churches Squeezed between East and West during the Cold War," in *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*, 31, 2011, 4; James Andrews, "Inculcating Materialist Minds: Scientific Propaganda and Anti-Religion in the USSR During the Cold War," in *Science, Religion and Communism in Cold War Europe*, ed. Paul Bets, Stephen A. Smith (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 105–125; Jure Ramšak, "Between ideology and pragmatism: polemic on the civil rights of Christians in the socialist Slovenia of the 1970s," in *Religion, State and Society*, 43, 2015, 2: 171–179.
[48] Niko Toš, "Religioznost v Sloveniji - v medčasovnih primerjavah (1968-1998) [Religiosity in Slovenia – intertemporal comparisons (1968–1998)]" in *Podobe o cerkvi in religiji: (na Slovenskem v 90-ih)*, 1999, pp. 181; cf. Marjan Smrke, "Odtis poloma slovenske katoliške cerkve na podatkih raziskave SJM [The trace of collapse of the Slovenian Catholic Church on the survey data SJM]" in *Teorija in praksa*, 53, 2016, 2: 289.
[49] Velikonja, 1996, p. 61; Marko Kerševan, *Religija in slovenska kultura* [Religion and Slovene Culture] (Ljubljana: Partizanska knjiga, 1989), pp. 42, 51-57; Sergej Flere, Rudi Klanjšek, "Construction and reification in nation building: The case of Yugoslavia fully explained?" in *Ethnicities*, 16, 2015, 6: 9.
[50] Egon Pelikan, "Anton Mahnič – fundamentalizem in avtonomija [Anton Mahnič – fundamentalism and autonomy]," in *Annales – Ser. hist. sociol.*, 16, 2006, 1: 7-14.

European societies in terms of its religious culture, it also suffers from the same problems in dealing with religious pluralism.[51] Slavica Jakelić stated the following:

> the failure of connecting Catholicism, the Slovenian language, and national identity also occurred because Slovenian Catholic clergy could not appeal to their own historical traditions or narratives about Catholicism as constitutive of Slovenian collective identity. The narratives about Catholicism that they would appropriate and to which they would appeal, with an explicit acknowledgment, were the linguistic and cultural legacies of their religious Others, the Protestant Reformers.[52]

The private character of Catholicism in Slovenia and the heterogeneity of the members of the Catholic Church were crucially influenced by the period of socialism, but the national schism during the Second World War, which for the first time significantly impaired the reputation and power of the Catholic Church, has roots in the pre-war period and in the increasing religious diversity. What separates the Slovenian territories from much of the former Yugoslavia and Eastern Europe as well, is the experience of the Enlightenment and cultural struggle between the liberal and Catholic camps, which in the Austrian part of the Habsburg Monarchy led to the establishment of a space for spreading secular ideas and to a gradual limitation of the influence of religious communities in state structures through the reform of relations between State and Catholic Church.

Carrying considerable weight in the discussion on religious specificities of Slovenia is the thesis by Janko Pleterski that the most realistic portrayal of the balance of power in the Slovenian political field during the interwar period is provided by the elections results of 1920. At that time, the "Catholic" Slovene People's Party (hereafter, SLS) "only" received 36.1 percent of votes, while in other elections in the Kingdom of SHS/Yugoslavia and even before the First World War, it would regularly win an absolute majority. About one-third of the votes that year went to liberal parties and another third to the socialist camp. This result is quite comparable with the first elections in the Republic of Austria and in other central European countries. However, while many historians have presented these election results as an anomaly, rejecting the possibility of Slovenian society being so politically secularized at the time, Pleterski believes that such a decline in the support of political Catholicism was the result of the social changes brought on by the First World War, which could not be simply undone.

The renewed success of SLS in 1923 and 1927 parliamentary elections—with the results of subsequent elections at the time of dictatorship (in 1931 and 1935) and "post-

[51] Smrke, Uhan, 2012, p. 509; cf. Jakelić, 2010, p. 75.
[52] Jakelić, 2010, p. 127.

dictatorship" (1938) not being relevant in this sense—should be ascribed to the specific circumstances in the kingdom, where with the so-called policy of autonomism,[53] only the SLS partly stood up to the centralist and unitary regime, while other two major political parties in Slovenia—the liberals and the social democrats—supported Yugoslav unitarism. Also, in 1920, the Communist Party was banned. Thus, regardless of the subsequent election results, Slovenian society supposedly secularized, which may explain the division in the Catholic camp in the 1930s and in other circumstances, the surprising growth of influence of the handful of Communists[54] who filled the vacuum on the left wing during the Second World War, the only political party that had anticipated in good time, as early as the 1930s, that the national question would be critical to the future of Slovenia.

Table 1: Religious composition in interwar Slovenia (Drava Banovina) according to the 1921 and 1931 Population Censuses

	Catholics	Lutherans and Reformed Church	Christian Orthodox	Jews	Muslims	Greek Catholics	Old Catholic Church	No religion	Other
1921	96.57% (1,018,771 people)	2.59% (27,282)	0.63% (6,611)	0.09% (936)	0.06% (636)	0.05% (531)	/	(122)	(17)
1931	96.76% (1,107,155)	2.25% (25,717)	0.59% (6,745)	0.07% (820)	0.08% (927)	0.21% (2,377)	0.009% (102)	(257)	(190)

In this discussion about "religious idiosyncrasies," about a somewhat different role of the dominant church compared to other parts of Yugoslavia, and of the waning confessionality of Slovenian society even before the Second World War, one cannot disregard the extremely high number of the religiously affiliated Slovenians. Moreover, almost 97 percent of a population of a good one million declared themselves as Catholics.

[53] Autonomism was a pragmatic policy of moderate advocacy of Slovenian interests, in practice often appearing as dual policy–in Slovenia the party emphasised its autonomist stances, in the parliament in Belgrade it sympathised with centralist forces. Thus, it was intermittently an opposition and a government party. (cf. Jure Gašparič, *SLS pod kraljevo diktaturo. Diktatura kralja Aleksandra in politika Slovenske ljudske stranke v letih 1929-1935* [SLS under royal dictatorship. Dictatorship of King Aleksandar and the politics of Slovene People's Party in the years 1929-1935] (Ljubljana: Modrijan, 2007), p. 37).

[54] Janko Pleterski, *Pravica in moč za samoodločbo. Med Metternichom in Badinterjem* [Right and power for self-determination. Between Metternich and Badinter] (Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, 2008), pp. 187-211.

Nor does this paper wish to deny in any way the monopoly of the Catholic Church in the sphere of religion or its great power in politics; it is only calling into question the religious uniformity of its members in this period and the reliability of certain data or their interpretations.

The fact remains that it was socially unacceptable for most to be a nonbeliever at a time when religious communities were still so heavily embedded in state structures—they kept registers of births, marriages, and deaths, and religious education classes were compulsory at school—although there existed the institution of civil marriage for (almost non-existent) nonbelievers. In view of the high prevalence of one religious affiliation, a similar potential social exclusion applied to non-Catholics—who were often equated with foreigners—yet the commonness and, particularly, visibility of either increased in the physical urban space (construction of new non-Catholic religious buildings) as well as in the media and the arts (e.g., with Communist representatives of social realism).

Although in numerical terms, the religious composition in the Slovenian part of the Kingdom of SHS did not change significantly until the end of the first Yugoslavia,[55] there emerged, especially in towns, in this rather conservative milieu, the germs of religious diversification, which the mere statistical data do not reveal. In truth, Judaism and Protestantism had been present in certain regions and in cities even before that. One of the important "new" actors after the end of the First World War, however, was the Serbian Orthodox Church, which soon after the unification of the country founded three Serbian Orthodox parishes (in Ljubljana, Maribor and Celje) and erected the first Orthodox church buildings in major Slovenian cities.[56]

Initially, the Orthodox congregation prevalently consisted of immigrants from other parts of the country, but with time the number of Slovenian converts steadily increased. For example, in 1938, the Celje parish counted as many as 242 Slovenians and three Germans[57] among its 683 believers (the military, some 1,000 of them, are not included), and we can safely claim that they were all converts (i.e., approximately one-third of all permanent Orthodox residents), for there had been practically no Orthodox in this area before the First World War. The Serbian Orthodox Church registered the highest increase in membership

[55] Šircelj, 2003, pp. 69-71.
[56] Before, the Serbian Orthodox Church had only been present in the so-called Uskoki villages in the area of the Military Frontier (Slo. Vojna krajina), which belonged to Carniola, an Austrian part of the Habsburg Monarchy, nowadays situated on the border with Croatia.
[57] Bojan Cvelfar, *Srbska pravoslavna cerkev na Slovenskem med svetovnima vojnama* [Serbian Orthodox Church in Slovenia between the world wars] (Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, Arhiv Republike Slovenije, 2017), p. 317.

among all religious communities and was able to also recruit people through the public media and in national institutions, e.g., with pro-Orthodox articles (particularly in the *Nova doba* [New Age] newspaper) and, indirectly, from the Sokol gymnastics organization, which in the 1930s, openly supported the "national religion."

Also interesting were phenomena of "localized revolts" of entire villages or several families against the Catholic Church or its representatives, which however, usually did not go beyond threats with conversion to Orthodoxy.[58] According to the first census, the number of members of the Greek Catholic Church in 1931 stands out statistically, but the reason for that lies in the slightly modified borders of the Drava Banovina, due to which its territory came to incorporate the area of Žumberak inhabited by the descendants of Uskoks of Greek Catholic faith. Old Catholicism, which was partly a cover for freemasonry and partly civil religion, can also be considered as new religion in this area.[59]

The number of Muslims in this period was still minimal, but in a slightly upward trend, and in 1931, the first imamate in Slovenian territories was founded in Ljubljana. During the First World War, two mosques were also constructed for Muslim soldiers fighting on the Isonzo Front (one in Log pod Mangartom and one supposedly on the mountain of Rombon), the first two set in Slovenian territories, but soon after the end of the world conflict, they had been torn down as they had lost their purpose. Religious diversity in Slovenia was also enriched by the arrival of Russian emigrants[60] seeking refuge in Yugoslavia after the October Revolution, with whom many Slovenians shared opposition to Communism. Recruitment into minority religions generated discontent and complaints from the dominant religious organization and its members, not infrequently exacerbating its relations with other religious communities, although at the same time there was some initiative in it for an ecumenical movement, particularly in the sense of a moderate inclination towards association with Orthodox churches.[61]

Among the issues that the Catholic Church considered pressing were religious education in schools,[62] the ban on the establishment of new religious schools, and the influence that the Serbian Orthodox Church gained in schools nationwide, particularly

[58] Ibid., pp. 116-119.
[59] Aleš Maver, "V (ne)znanem novem svetu: paberki iz verskega življenja v Celju med svetovnima vojnama [In (un)known new world: gleanings from religious life in interwar Celje]", in *Studia Historica Slovenica: časopis za humanistične in družboslovne študije*, 14, 2014, 2-3: 507.
[60] Cvelfar, 2017, pp. 272-278.
[61] See: Stanko Janežič, "Franc Grivec in ekumenizem [Franc Grivec and ecumenism]", in *Grivčev simpozij v Rimu* [Grivec' symposium in Rome], ed. Edo Škulj (Celje: Mohorjeva družba, 2003), pp. 185-194.
[62] See: *Službene novine Kraljevine Jugoslavije* [Official Gazette of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia], 7/11/1930; Mithans, 2017, pp. 137-138.

through links with the Sokol gymnastics organization. Another important reason for the dissatisfaction of the Catholic Church was the allocation of state funding to religious communities, which did not only take into account the number of believers, but also ascribed considerable weight to the "arbitrary" criterion of "truly proven needs" of a determinate religious community, stated in the constitution of the Kingdom of SHS (1921) and in the constitution of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1931).

When compared by the number of members, the Old Catholic Church was the most well-funded, but even the Serbian Orthodox Church was in a considerably better position than the Catholic Church. Still, the Serbian Orthodox Church and, to a lesser extent, the Old Catholic Church may have been spreading through the kingdom to territories where previously they had had no adherents, but so was the Catholic Church, especially in Macedonia (at the time called Southern Serbia) and Kosovo, with Slovenian priests playing an influential role in the effort. Even the first bishop in Skopje, Janez Frančišek Gnidovec (1924–1939), was a Slovenian. These regions, including Bosnia and Herzegovina, were officially still under the authority of the *Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide* as missionary territories.[63]

During the 1930s, the society in Slovenia was influenced by social, economic, and political crises of divisions into anti-Communists and anti-Fascists, although some affiliated with both groups.[64] This same model can be used in the analysis of differentiation within the Catholic camp itself.[65] The Catholic right-wing as the official and most numerous group in the Slovenian Catholic camp radicalized almost contemporaneously with its Western European counterparts, which has been the subject of many historical studies.[66]

The process was accompanied by growing religious intolerance, most often amplified by political and ethnic strife. At the same time, the Catholic Church in Slovenian regions was faced with divisions within its own ranks, particularly with regard to views on democracy, the

[63] Mithans, 2017, pp. 239-241.
[64] Ervin Dolenc, *Med kulturo in politiko: kulturnopolitična razhajanja v Sloveniji med svetovnima vojnama* [Between culture and politics: cultural-political divergences in interwar Slovenia] (Ljubljana: INZ, 2010), p. 125.
[65] James Chappel, *Catholic Modern: The Challenge of Totalitarianism and the Remaking of the Church* (Cambridge, MA, London: Harvard University Press, 2018), p. 13.
[66] Cf. Martin Conway, *Catholic Politics in Europe 1918-1945* (London, New York: Routledge, 1997), pp. 6-8; Clerical Fascism in Interwar Europe, ed. Matthew Feldman, Marius Turda, Tudor Georgescu (London, New York: Routledge, 2008); Roger Griffin, "An unholy alliance? The convergence between revealed religion and sacralized politics in inter-war Europe," in *Catholicism and Fascism in Europe 1918-1945*, ed. Jan Nelis et al. (Olms: Georg, 2015), pp. 49–66; Egon Pelikan, "L'ideologia del cattolicesimo politico sloveno e le premesse ideologiche del fascismo nel periodo tra le due guerre," in *Catholicism and Fascism in Europe 1918-1945*, ed. Jan Nelis et al. (Olms: Georg, 2015), pp. 349-356; Alberto Guasco, *Cattolici e fascisti. La Santa Sede e la politica italiana all'alba del regime (1919-1925)* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2013).

free market, and political pragmatism.[67] Whereas the Catholic right-wing displayed a marked "narrowing of views" (support of Catholic integralism, corporatism, anti-Communism, antisocialism, non-democratic ideas and, to some extent, Fascism) and subjugation to church structures (e.g., within Catholic Action), its antipode after espousing certain Marxist ideas, the Catholic left (i.e., Christian socialists), exhibited greater autonomy among lay people in relation to the Church. The Catholic center (i.e., Christian Democrats), who opposed the abolition of parliamentarism and market economy and advocated the rights to private property, was pushed to the sidelines.[68]

Religious minorities or religious communities with less sociopolitical influence, although legally recognized, were also otherwise faced with numerous problems brought about by "religious equality," as they had difficulties "competing" with the majority and/or most influential religion in the country.[69] For example, the Senj-Modruš diocesan ordinariate sent a warning to the then minister and leading Slovenian politician, Anton Korošec, about a proselytical Baptists campaign spreading from Croatian regions to Bela Krajina in Slovenia.[70] This was clearly a top-level communication. While all religious activities of Adventists and Nazarenes were prohibited and were to be reported to state authorities as they were, due to their pacifist beliefs, considered to be defying the laws of the country regarding military service that were in the interest of the state.[71]

Religious Conversions in Slovenian Territory

Interreligious relations during the period of the Kingdom of SHS/Yugoslavia (1918–1945) and even later were thus primarily determined by the relations between religious communities and state authorities, by the politicization of religion (and vice versa, namely, integration of religious contents into politics) and by the very history of religious conversions: the mythization of conversions to Roman Catholic and Greek Catholic faiths and to Islam in Bosnia and Herzegovina under the rules of the Ottoman Empire and Austria-

[67] Dolenc, 2010, pp. 124-125.
[68] Pelikan, 2015, pp. 349-356; Gašper Mithans, "The Slovenian Catholic right in relation to the totalitarian and authoritarian movements in the interwar period: the case of Slovenian Catholic Action," in *Südost-Forschungen*, 69/70, 2010/2011: 129-134.
[69] Cf. Gašper Mithans, "The Italian Fascist regime, the Catholic Church and Protestant religious minorities in terre redente (1918-40)," *Approaching religion*, 9, 2019, 1-2½: 57-76.
[70] NŠAL, Religious and moral affairs 292, Letter of Bishop's office of Senj-Modruš diocese to Minister Anton Korošec, Senj, 6/12/1937.
[71] Cf. Aleksandra Đurić-Milovanović, "Alternative Religiosity in Communist Yugoslavia: Migration as a Survival Strategy of the Nazarene Community," in *Open Theology*, 3, 2017, 1: 449; Aleksandra Đurić-Milovanović. "Conservative neo-Protestants: Romanian Nazarenes in Serbia," *Religion in Eastern Europe*, 30, 2010, 3: 34-43; AJ, 69 Ministry of religions of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, 309, Vojislav Janjić, The Minister for Religious Affairs to all mayors of Belgrade, Belgrade, 5/5/1924.

Hungary,[72] the spread of Serbian Orthodoxy during the interwar period, and the forced religious conversions of the Orthodox to the Catholic faith in the territories of the Independent State of Croatia.[73] At first glance, we could say that religious conversions in Slovenian territories did not play as prominent a role in history as they did for Serbs, Croatians and Bosniaks. However, if we expand our analysis of conversion processes to include Christianization, Reformation and Counter-Reformation, as well as the perpetuation of the image of a non-Catholic as a stereotypically negative religious and ethnic Other, conversions suddenly appear of much greater import.

Most conversions during the interwar period in Slovenia indeed occurred in connection with other ethnic communities and largely involved disaffiliation from the Catholic Church. These were conversions from Catholicism into Lutheranism among the German population, and conversions of Slovenes to the Serbian Orthodox Church motivated by the perception of this religion as "Yugoslav," although in practice, the converts to this autocephalous church underwent some sort of Serbian "acculturation." In conversions of Slovenes to the Old Catholic Church, although some members would occasionally be associated with adherents to the former Croatian Peasant Party, the ethnic affiliation was not of the essence, which however, does not mean that the Catholic Church viewed these any more favorably.

In studying religious conversion and broader interreligious relations in Slovenian territories the scarcity of sources is a major problem, and even more so their dispersion. As expected, most data refer to conversions to and disaffiliation from the Catholic Church, the materials concerning Orthodox parishes are preserved in Celje and Ljubljana,[74] while data about the Evangelicals are available, mostly their parishes. Religious conversion and disaffiliation trends are extremely difficult to analyze statistically, if at all, as even research in centralized registers, such as those of the Ljubljana, Maribor, and Trieste-Koper dioceses, at best yields information linked to the Catholic Church. Data can also be obtained from City Hall archives and, in part, from archives of other religious communities, as converts were required to notify the state authorities about their disaffiliation, and they usually provided information on the faith they intended to join instead or if they wished to remain without religion.

[72] Aleksov, 2006, pp. 45-46, 49-50.
[73] Škiljan, 2014, pp. 95-108.
[74] See Cvelfar, 2017, p. 11.

Since non-Catholic religious communities often had an ethnic character, the religious conversions themselves and the disputes they (could have) triggered transcended the boundaries of the sphere of religiosity. These were typical cases of double minorities[75] and processes of othering, not generated solely by the members of the original religion that a convert abandoned, but also by members of the newly elected religious community in which the convert was for a long time (sometimes forever) perceived as the "Other." We know of cases where even priests were not happy with certain converts. The main reason of their displeasure was, of course, the large share of converts who changed their faith with the sole purpose of obtaining a divorce, as many of them would afterwards not even attend religious ceremonies.[76] Such "circumvention" of the law and religious conversions for personal (secular) benefits, which according to some estimates occurred in as many as 80 percent of cases of conversions to Orthodoxy,[77] also point at the changed appreciation of religion. Often we come across comments made by people from Catholic circles that the "apostasy" of these people from the Catholic Church was not a loss, as they never were good Catholics anyway and would not make good Orthodox either [and the same applies to converts to other faiths].[78] In another variant, the Serbian Orthodox rector in Celje asserted in his writings in 1936 that the large number of Slovenes converting to the Serbian Orthodox Church were reluctant to adopt Orthodox customs and remained Catholics "at heart."[79]

We can conclude from this that a conversion to the Serbian Orthodox Church in a predominantly Catholic environment represented a cultural shock and that converts were excluded from certain segments of the society. For similar reasons, only a small number of Slovenian converts chose to convert to Protestantism, as affiliation to Evangelical religious communities (except in the northeastern part of the country, in Prekmurje, which had been part of the Hungarian half of the Habsburg Monarchy prior to the First World War) was considered as "a refuge of the Germans."[80] An overview of statistical data shows that conversions in Slovenian regions spiked in the first years following the First World War,

[75] Cf. Aleksandra Đurić Milovanović, *Dvostruke manjine u Srbiji. O posebnostima u religiji i etnicitetu Rumuna u Vojvodini* [Double minorities in Serbia. On the particularities in the religion and ethnicity of Romanians in Vojvodina] (Beograd, Balkanološki institut SANU, 2015), pp. 291-292.
[76] Janez Cvirn, *Boj za sveti zakon: prizadevanja za reformo poročnega prava od 18. stoletja do druge svetovne vojne* [Fight for holy matrimony: efforts to reform marriage law from the 18th century until World War II] (Ljubljana: Zveza zgodovinskih društev Slovenije, 2005), pp. 92-95.
[77] Ilija Đ. Bulovan, *Kronika Srbske pravoslavne parohije v Celju, napisana leta 1937* [A Chronicle of the Serbian Orthodox Parish in Celje, written in 1937] (Celje: Zgodovinski arhiv; Beograd: Arhiv Srbije, 2010), p. 72.
[78] Cf. Cvelfar, 2017, pp. 114, 118-119.
[79] Bulovan, 2010, p. 72.
[80] Cf. Boštjan Zajšek, "Nemški evangeličani na Slovenskem med obema vojnama [German Evangelicals in interwar Slovenia]", in *Kronika*, 59, 2011, 1:100.

increasing again, though with less prominent highs, in the 1930s, particularly in 1937 and 1938. Given the highly predominant number of Catholics in Slovenia, disaffiliation from the Catholic Church can tentatively also be assumed in cases of joining other faiths where the converts' original faith is not explicitly stated.

The membership of the Serbian Orthodox parish in Celje (Graph 1) registered the largest gain during the royal dictatorship in 1929, while disaffiliation from it grew in the years preceding the Second World War, a fact well perceived by the diocese of Ljubljana, which at the time registered an increased number of cases of re-conversion,[81] also spurred by the change in political regime with the Yugoslav Radical Union coming to power. In Slovenia, the "liberal" power was at the time replaced by a regime of which the "Catholic" Slovene People's Party was a constitutive part. Membership of the Serbian Orthodox parish in Ljubljana saw completely different developments (Graph 1).

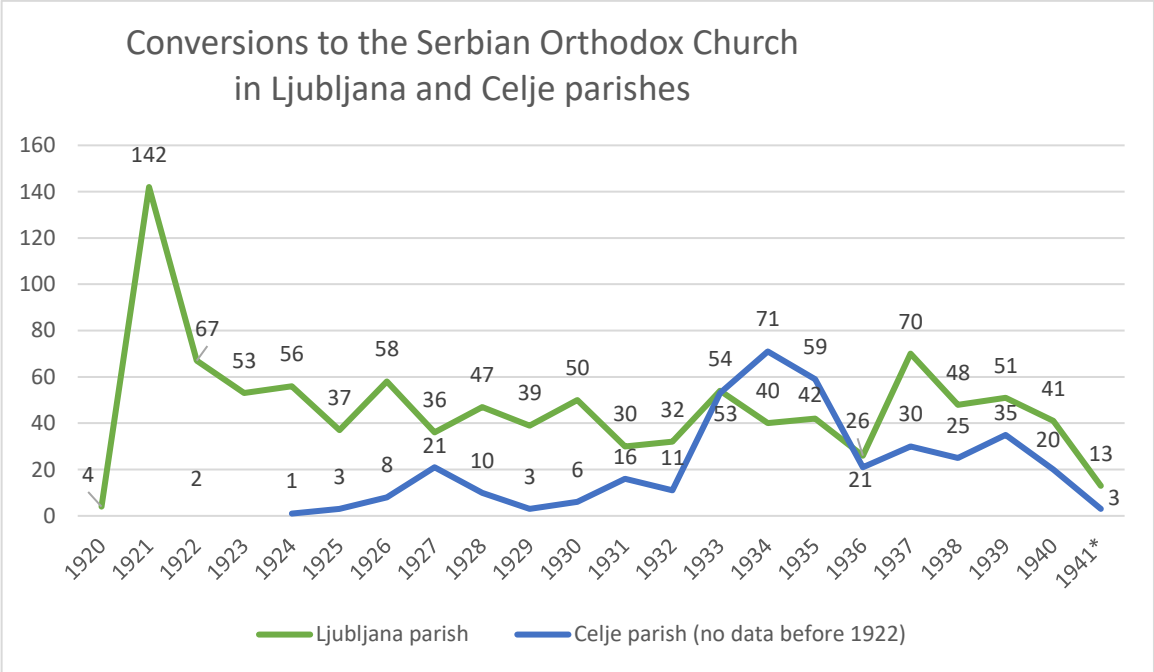
The first striking growth was recorded immediately upon the end of the First World War, most probably due to the arrival of Russian emigrants and to the enthusiasm over the unification into the Kingdom of SHS, in which the Serbian Orthodox Church was promoted as the "national" religion. The numbers then constantly fluctuated, slightly declining in 1936 but instantly picking up a year after that, when the number of registered conversions reached a high second only to that of 1921. A large share of the Orthodox population in Slovenia was made up of soldiers and their families, certain officials, teachers and judges, immigrants from Serbia. Among the most common reasons for conversion to Orthodoxy in Slovenia were divorce in males, and marriage in females, occasionally including child legitimization (the same applies to conversions to Islam).[82]

Another frequent reason was professional opportunism, particularly in military ranks, but also among officials, often intertwining with the belief in a greater "patriotism" that the affiliation to the Serbian Orthodox Church would allegedly ferment, as opposed to the Catholic Church, which many believed in collusion with Mussolini. Interestingly, in the Ljubljana parish the converts included more females than males, while in Celje, they were gender-balanced.[83] In trying to determine the causes for an increase of religious conversions,

[81] Archiepiscopal Archives of Ljubljana (NŠAL), V, 100 Converts 1874-1938.
[82] For more, see: Gašper Mithans, "Medverski odnosi in konvertiti na Slovenskem med svetovnima vojnama [Interreligious relations and converts in interwar Slovenia]," in *Stičišče religijskih svetov: družbeni in politični vidiki ekumenizma na Slovenskem = Religious encounters: societal and political aspects of ecumenism in Slovene lands*, ed. Gašper Mithans (Koper: Znanstveno-raziskovalno središče Koper, Znanstvena založba Annales, 2018), pp. 77-98.
[83] Historical Archives of Celje (ZAC), SI ZAC-0995, Orthodox parish of St. Sava in Celje, no. 4, List of Orthodox Households of the Serbian Orthodox Parish in Celje – Composition as of 31 December 1936; Cvelfar, pp. 124-125.

several social processes should be taken into consideration, such as laicization and modernization, changed political borders, migration and minority policies, interreligious contacts, unregulated legal matters spawning deviations in the religious sphere as well, greater social differentiation, state policy favoring a determinate religion(s), and domestic political conflicts.[84]

Graph 1: Conversions to the Serbian Orthodox Church in Ljubljana and Celje parishes (1920–1940)[85]



The case of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession (in this territory called the German Evangelical Church) in Maribor is specific (Graph 2), registering a high number of conversions after the First World War,[86] a sort of second "Away from Rome!" movement [Ger. Los-von-Röm]. This, however, was no longer limited to Catholicism or

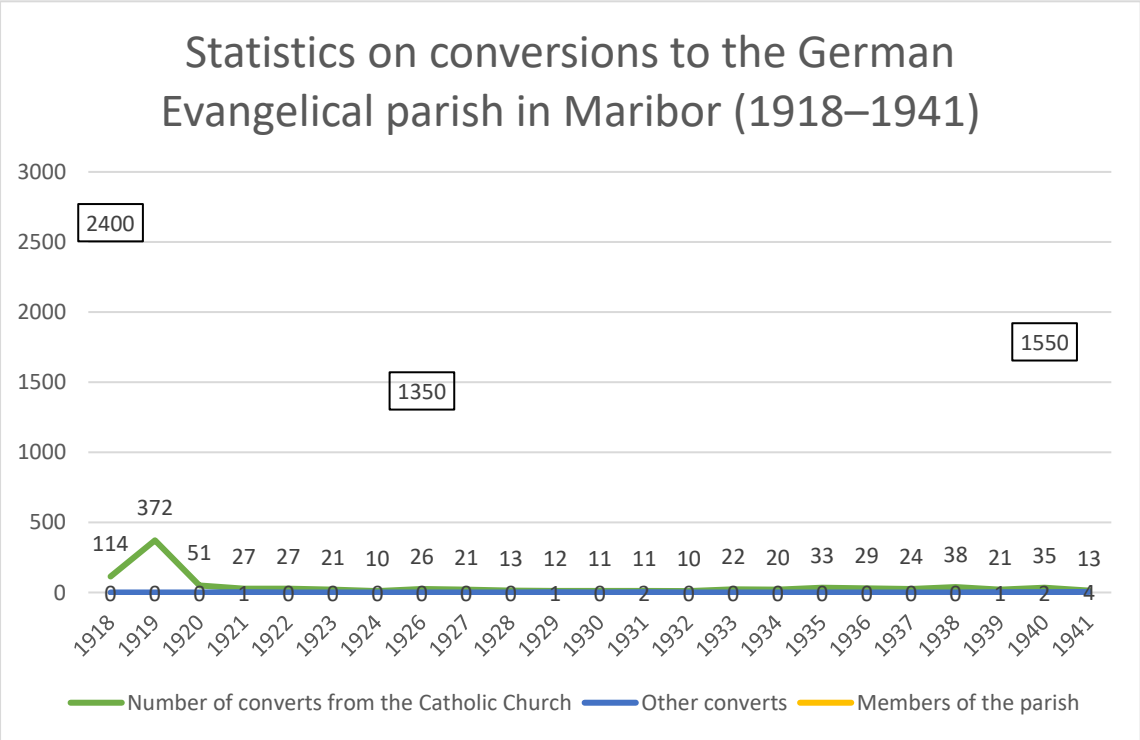
[84] Cf. with the 1928 document about conversions of Catholics to Serbian Orthodoxy, which states among the reasons for conversion primarily the hope of being able to remarry in Orthodoxy (among legally divorced Catholics) or the expectation to rise in rank in state or military service (among men), with the least number of conversions supposedly prompted by "ideal" reasons, and even those not by religious, but "national" ones (among the converts considering the Serbian Orthodox Church as a "national faith") (Historical Archives of Ljubljana (ZAL), LJU-489 The city of Ljubljana, f. 2012 the general city registry, p. 977).

[85] Cvelfar, 2017, pp. 124-125; ZAC, SI ZAC-0995, Orthodox parish of St. Sava in Celje, no. 4, List of Orthodox Households of the Serbian Orthodox Parish in Celje – Composition as of 31 December 1936.

[86] The fond of the Evangelical parish of Maribor in the Maribor Regional Museum preserves 564 certifications of disaffiliation from the Roman Catholic Church dating from 1918 to 1922 (Regional Archives of Maribor (PAM), PAM-1821060/2 Evangelical parish of Maribor 1862-1945, Disaffiliation from the Roman Catholic Church 1911-1918; PAM-1821060/3 Evangelical parish of Maribor 1862-1945, Disaffiliation from the Roman Catholic Church 1919-1945; cf. Zajšek, 2011, p. 97).

Protestantism, for dissatisfaction with the Catholic Church was in a way expressed by every single case of disaffiliation from it, and most notably through the actions of the German ethnic community, which indicated the emergence of national consolidation among the remaining Germans in Slovenian regions. In fact, after disaffiliating from mainly, the Catholic Church, they connected with fellow countrymen within the Evangelical parish. Nevertheless, membership in the German Evangelical Church decreased as a result of expulsion and voluntary migration of the members of German nationality; in the Evangelical parish in Maribor, it dropped from around 1,800 in 1918 to 900 in 1925. The pressure on the converts was considerable, with the police interrogating each and every one of them to establish whether the conversion was politically motivated.[87] The number of people joining the German Evangelical Church rose slightly again before the Second World War from 1937 through 1941.[88]

Graph 2: Statistics on conversions to the German Evangelical parish in Maribor (1918–1941)[89]

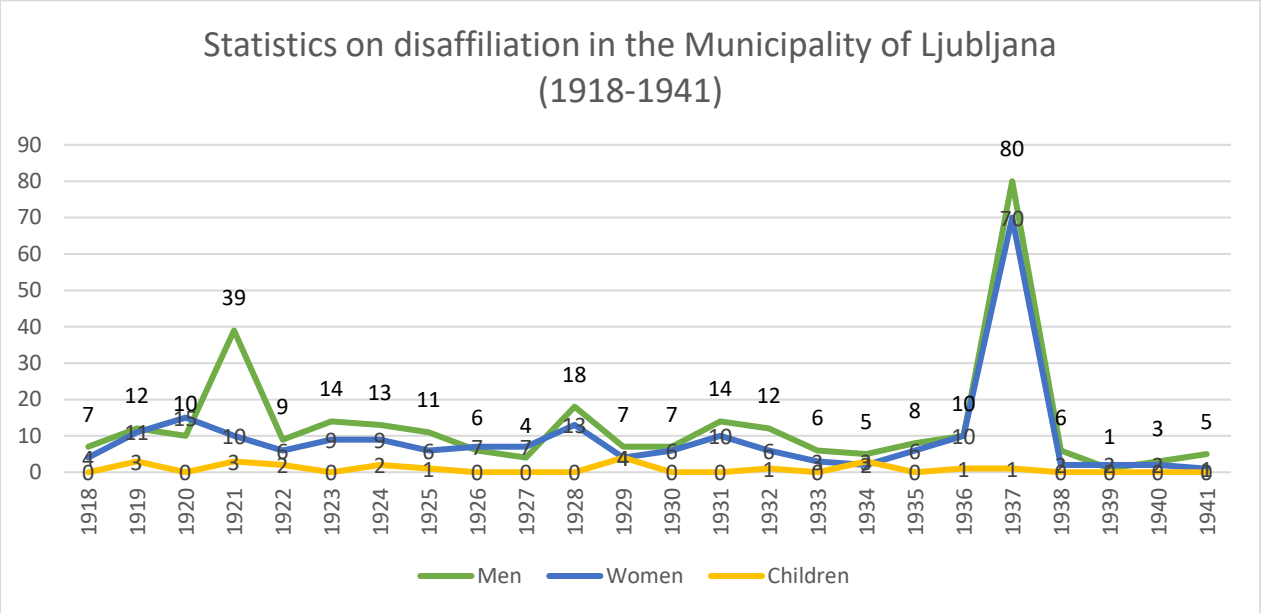


[87] Zajšek, 2011, pp. 98–100.
[88] PAM-1821060/2 Evangelical parish of Maribor 1862-1945, Disaffiliation from the Roman Catholic Church 1911-1918; PAM-1821060/3 Evangelical parish of Maribor 1862-1945, Disaffiliation from the Roman Catholic Church 1919-1945; cf. Zajšek, p. 97.
[89] PAM-1821060/3 Evangelical parish of Maribor 1862-1945, Disaffiliation from the Roman Catholic Church 1919-1945.

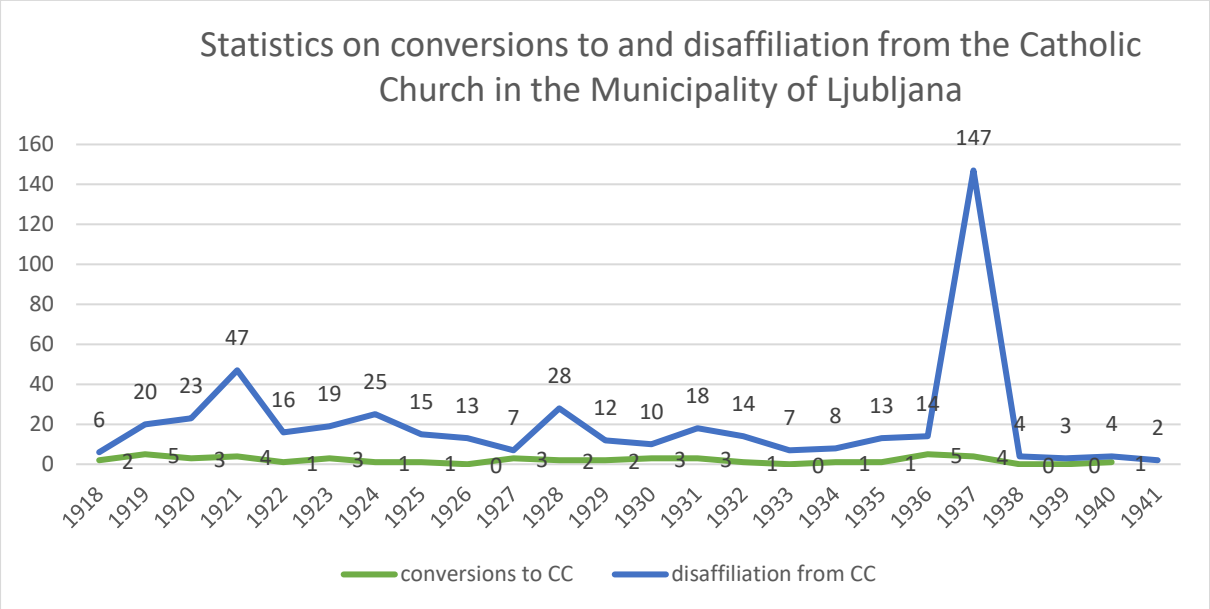
Religious conversions for the Municipality of Ljubljana can also be reconstructed based on the mandatory notifications of state authorities, the City Hall, about religious disaffiliation.[90] Predictably, this information is not entirely accurate, as people only related their likely choice of religious (non)affiliation, and on a voluntary basis, nor is it comparable with the data from the archives of the Serbian Orthodox parish in Ljubljana[91] for example, as the latter covered a much larger area; it can, nevertheless, suggest a certain trend. According to the data from the Ljubljana City Hall, there were 549 cases of religious disaffiliation in the Municipality of Ljubljana during the period of the Kingdom [we can, however, assume that the number was higher than that], with a total of 221 women, 307 men and 21 children leaving religious institutions (Graph 3). These were mostly cases of people leaving the Catholic Church, which in Ljubljana throughout the period outnumbered those of people joining it (Graph 4), with two years standing out: in 1921, there was a significant increase in cases of disaffiliation without opting for another confession, which can be attributed in part to the incidents that occurred during the railway strike in 1920, involving Slovenian Communists, and the ban on the Communist Party proclaimed towards the end of that same year. From the 52 cases of disaffiliation of that year, as many as 18 former Catholics announced they would remain unattached to any religion. Many more cases of disaffiliation were registered in 1937: no less than 147 of a total of 476 believers who left the Catholic Church between 1918 and 1941.[92] That year, the Old Catholics launched a very successful proselytizing campaign after having founded their parish in Ljubljana in 1936. 1937 was also the year when the so-called concordat crises reached its acme, bringing on severe discord between the Catholic Church and the Serbian Orthodox Church; such a dramatic increase in religious conversions in the center of the Drava Banovina indicated that at least in Ljubljana—called the liberal stronghold as early as the end of the 19th century—there was no noticeable consolidation among the Catholics in support of the adoption of the concordat.

[90] ZAL, LJU-489 The city of Ljubljana, f. 1801, f. 1939, f. 2012, f. 2098, f. 2107, f. 2114, f. 2121, f. 2131, f. 2143, f. 2232, f. 2233, f. 2282, f. 2298, f. 2315, f. 2361.
[91] See document: ZAL, LJU-489 The city of Ljubljana, f. 2012, p. 977; Cvelfar, pp. 124-125.
[92] ZAL, LJU 489, f. 1801, f. 1939, f. 2012, f. 2098, f. 2107, f. 2114, f. 2121, f. 2131, f. 2143, f. 2232, f. 2233, f. 2282, f. 2298, f. 2315, f. 2361.

Graph 3: Statistics on disaffiliation in the Municipality of Ljubljana (1918–1941)[93]



Graph 4: Statistics on conversions to and disaffiliation from the Catholic Church in the Municipality of Ljubljana (1918–1941)[94]

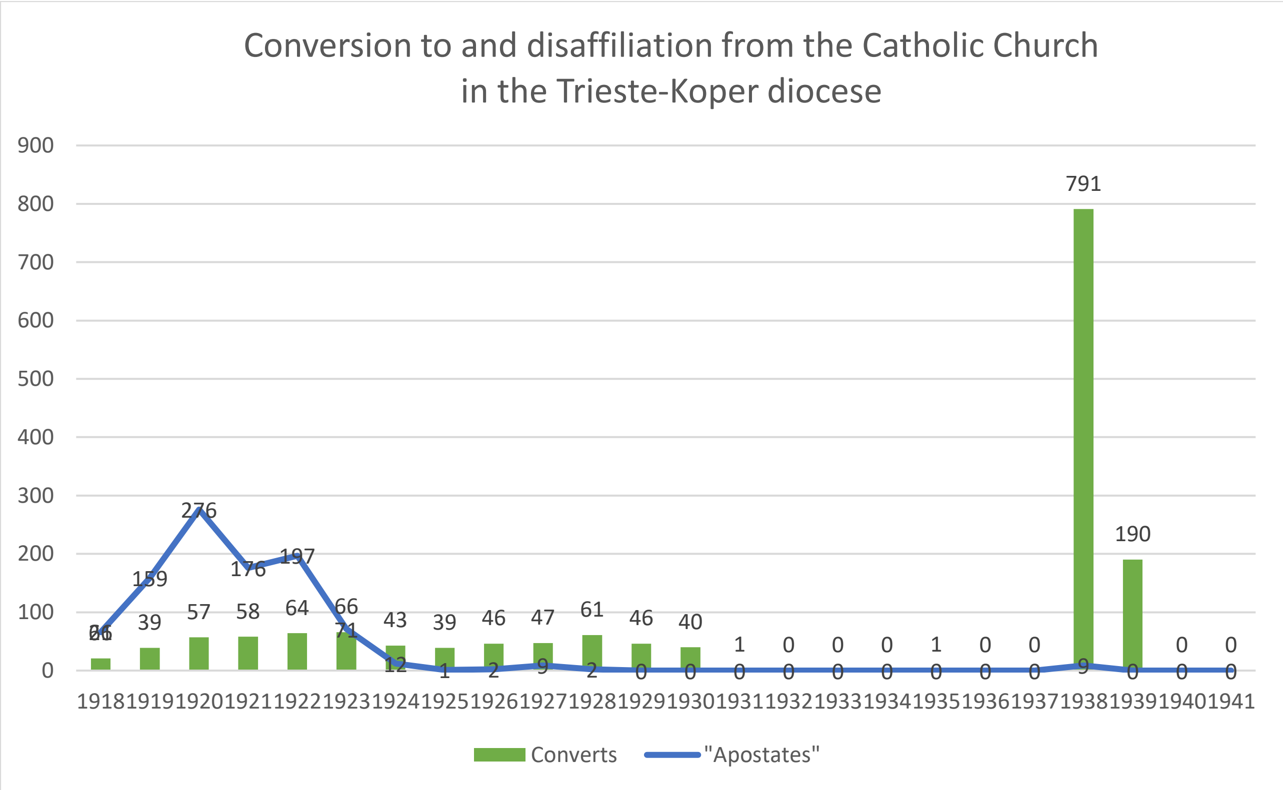


A comparison of statistical data with the annual registers of the Trieste-Koper diocese (Graph 5)[95] reveals a similar trend of rise, decline and renewed rise of conversions and

[93] ZAL, LJU-489 The city of Ljubljana, f. 1801, f. 1939, f. 2012, f. 2098, f. 2107, f. 2114, f. 2121, f. 2131, f. 2143, f. 2232, f. 2233, f. 2282, f. 2298, f. 2315, f. 2361.
[94] ZAL, LJU-489 The city of Ljubljana, f. 1801, f. 1939, f. 2012, f. 2098, f. 2107, f. 2114, f. 2121, f. 2131, f. 2143, f. 2232, f. 2233, f. 2282, f. 2298, f. 2315, f. 2361.

disaffiliation during the interwar period. Particularly in 1937 and 1938, the number of people joining the Catholic Church recorded a steep increase: 981 of a total of 1,520 converts registered between 1918 and 1941,[96] mostly Jews prompted by the adoption of the racial law. The anti-Jewish policy pervaded the pre-war atmosphere throughout all of Europe, and in Slovenia too, the Jewish population sought refuge in the Catholic Church. In the Parish of the Annunciation in Ljubljana, for example, as many as 36 Jews converted to Catholicism during the 1937–1941 period, compared to a mere 10 in the two previous decades.[97]

Graph 5: Statistics of conversions to and disaffiliation from the Catholic Church in the Trieste-Koper diocese[98]



In Slovenia, and in the countryside in particular, there was a small, but not negligible number of converts during the period under study. The role they played within religious minorities was particularly important, as they represented a significant share of the religious community both among the Serbian Orthodox and German Lutherans, which despite an

[95] The otherwise multinational Trieste-Koper diocese included part of the Slovenian ethnic territory that was incorporated into Italy after 1920.
[96] Episcopal Archives of Trieste (ADT), Diocesan Registry, 1918-1941.
[97] Archive of the parish of the Lady Day Church in Ljubljana, Book of converts.
[98] ADT, Diocesan Registry, 1918-1941.

increase in religious conversions at the time, registered a decline due to considerable expatriation, either voluntary or forced, of its members.[99]

Further, the manner in which the converts were integrated into the new religious community (if at all) and the permanence of their decision could also be in contrast with their expectations in view of the reason for their conversion. A person who at first intended to convert in order to advance professionally could later develop genuine religious feelings towards the religion to which they converted, becoming profoundly religious. Or the initial enthusiasm over the newly adopted religion could give way to disillusionment. Many Slovenians complained, for example, that the Serbian Orthodox Church spoke exclusively Serbian and used the Cyrillic alphabet, the Brotherhood of Orthodox Slovenians even demanding that the Slovenian language and the Latin alphabet be introduced into Orthodox liturgy in Slovenia and a Slovenian Orthodox Church be established.[100]

Conclusion

The phenomenon of religious conversion as one of the most fundamental factors of pluralistic religious society and often the basis of exclusivist national mythologies in the southern European region is largely unexplored, both theoretically and empirically,[101] and particularly in relation to periods before the Second World War, which remain uncovered even by sociology, ethnology, and anthropology.

In contemporary Slovenian history[102] this topic is unexplored, mainly because of the low number of converts. This area, during the interwar period, was prevalently (originally) inhabited by Catholics, which is to be expected given the overall predominance of Catholicism and the slow religious diversification. Many of the converts were either of non-Slovenian nationality or they converted into religious communities that spread to Slovenia from other countries or other parts of the Kingdom of SHS/Yugoslavia and preserved their

[99] Zajšek, 2011, p. 99-100; Mithans, "Medverski odnosi," 2018, pp. 84-85.
[100] See: Bulovan, 2010, p. 72; Cvelfar, 2017, pp. 100-101.
[101] *Konverzija i kontekst. Teorijski, metodološki i praktični pristupi religijskoj konverziji* [Conversion and context. Theoretical, methodological and practical approaches to religious conversion], ed. Zorica Kuburić, Srđan Sremac (Novi Sad: CEIR, 2009); cf. *Historische Anthropologie im südöstlichen Europa: Eine Einführung* [Historical anthropology in Southeastern Europe: An introduction] ed. Karl Kaser et al. (Vienna: Böhlau, 2003); *Ponovno iscrtavanje granica: transformacije identiteta i redefiniranje kulturnih regija u novim političkim okolnostima*/*Ponovno izrisovanje meja: transformacije identitet in redefiniranje kulturnih regij v novih političnih okoliščinah* [Redrawing borders: identity transformations and redefining cultural regions in new political circumstances], ed. Marijana Belaj et al. (Zagreb: Hrvatsko etnološko društvo; Ljubljana: Slovensko etnološko društvo, 2014).
[102] With a few exceptions: Cvirn, 2005; Cvelfar, 2017; Mithans, "Medverski odnosi," 2018; Maver, 2014; Zajšek, 2011.

ethnic character. This made adapting to a new religious environment difficult and exacerbated the "stigma" of converts. The increase in conversions out of protest, for political reasons, and personal gain, and the conflicting relations between the two major churches in the state did not help towards a greater social acceptance of this phenomenon. The latter does indicate a growing perception of religious affiliation as a choice, which not even a strong religious socialization could suppress. On the other hand, the Serbian Orthodox Church, for example, despite its active proselytism, was not entirely prepared for the arrival of Slovenian converts, some of whom were upset by the exclusive use of the Serbian language and the Cyrillic alphabet within the religious community and its activities. Undoubtedly though, religious conversions also influenced the heterogenization of identification with and perception of Catholicism.

Due to the marginality of (non-Catholic) religious Others as well as the importance of Protestant writers for the development of the Slovenian standard language and literary culture, the dominant religious institution in the Slovenian environment is reflected as having a less central role compared to other Yugoslav nationalities even before the Second World War and the period of the socialist regime, which triggered the process of greater secularization and religious pluralization. But we could hardly speak of an individualistic type of religion in Slovenian territory before independence in 1991,[103] although certain socio-religious specifics did exist, mainly due to a different state structure prior to the First World War, the circumstances of the so-called cultural nationalism and thereby the experience of other historical processes. The interwar period in particular was crucial for the later religious diversification, with urban space, culture, politics, and the media slowly opening to religious plurality and secularism, even though that frequently generated tension and intolerance.

[103] At present, there are 54 religious communities registered in Slovenia (see: Nadja Furlan Štante, "Ženski glasovi in akcije v medreligijskem dialogu in religijski izgradnji miru v slovenskem kontekstu" [Women's Voices and Actions in Interreligious Dialogue and Religious Peacebuilding in the Slovenian Context], in *Poligrafi*, 24, 2019, 95/96: 26). Interestingly, Slovenia is one of the most secularized countries that we know if we consider the criteria of religious education in public schools, the legal status of abortion and regulation of proselytism. Only six other countries in the world, besides Slovenia, have none of these policies: Cape Verde, Montenegro, North Korea, South Africa, Taiwan, and the United States [the abortion is legal, however with restrictions in several states], see: Jonathan Fox, *Political Secularism, Religion, and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 198.

List of abbreviations

ADT = Archivio diocesano di Trieste/Episcopal Archives of Trieste, Italy

AJ = Archives of Yugoslavia, Belgrade, Serbia

NŠAL = Nadškofijski arhiv Ljubljana/Archiepiscopal Archives of Ljubljana, Slovenia

PAM = Pokrajinski arhiv Maribor/Regional Archives of Maribor, Slovenia

ZAC = Zgodovinski arhiv Celje/Historical Archives Celje, Slovenia

ZAL = Zgodovinski arhiv Ljubljana/Historical Archives Ljubljana, Slovenia