

KOCBEK'S "REFLECTIONS ON SPAIN": AN INTRODUCTION

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"Reflections on Spain" originated long before anything happened in Spain that was important enough to attract attention in Slovenia. Kocbek's "Reflections on Spain" above all reflect on the role of the Catholic Church in the Spanish Civil War; they contain an implied but nevertheless direct comparison with the role and work of the Catholic Church in Slovenia. War had not yet come to Slovenia and Yugoslavia, and yet with the start of the civil war in Spain it was increasingly clear that a new, all-encompassing conflict—a war that would not pass the Slovenes by—was moving inexorably closer in Europe. And given its prevailing influence at that time, the role of the Catholic Church in Spain in wartime conditions indicated the most likely position of church leaders in Slovenia.

Serious divisions within the Catholic movement in Slovenia were already becoming apparent during the First World War. A split occurred in the political wing of this movement—in the Slovene People's Party—between pro-Austrian and pro-Yugoslav politicians. At the same time serious differences were developing in Catholic cultural circles. In 1914, the editorship of the most important Catholic arts publication, *Dom in svet* (*Home and World*), was taken over by Izidor Cankar,¹ who wished to impose new, more rigorous quality criteria on Catholic artistic production and at the same time to free it from its narrow, utilitarian educational role under the strict supervision of the church hierarchy. At that time, the dispute was more or less kept under control, and Cankar's flight into politics meant that a final break with old practice was avoided. As Cankar wrote in a letter to a likeminded colleague, the writer France Bevk, in February 1917: "I judge that a new crisis must occur sooner or

¹ Izidor Cankar (1886–1958)—art historian, critic, writer. He was a cousin of the more famous writer Ivan Cankar (1876–1918) and a priest who left the church in 1926 and got married. In 1936 he joined the Yugoslav diplomatic service and in 1944 he quit the Yugoslav royal government in London and joined Tito's partisans.

later.”² Among the main critics of Cankar’s new editorial policy at *Dom in svet* was the theology professor Aleš Ušeničnik,³ who believed that diocesan officials should retain control over the entire movement, particularly over intellectual life in the Slovene Catholic community. He advocated an indivisible metaphysical trinity—the true, the good, and the beautiful—meaning the subordination of esthetics to religious goals. Izidor Cankar also opposed the established concept of the “family” journal with a predominantly educational purpose (aimed at university students and schoolchildren) and announced the conversion of the periodical into an artistic publication with a free search for “the riddles of art and life.”⁴

Immediately after the war, *Dom in svet*, with various editorial combinations, maintained a kind of balance between the old and new principles, but the intergenerational conflict brought about the first postwar crisis as early as 1922. That year the editorship was taken over by two laymen, the art historian France Stele and the literary historian France Koblar.⁵ They succeeded in maintaining the publication at an enviable level of quality, open to the new generation and new ideas, for an entire decade. However, the publisher of *Dom in svet*, the Catholic Press Society, remained in the hands of the older generation of clerics, and this led to fairly frequent friction and pressures on the editors, although there was no actual rupture until 1937. Between 1930 and 1933, following the closing of the magazine *Križ* (*The Cross*, also known as *Križ na gori* [*The Cross on the Mount*], 1924–27, and then *Križ* from 1928 to 1930), the publication from which the Catholic youth movement took the name the “crusader” movement, the editorship was temporarily taken over by the younger generation (Anton Vodnik, Tine Debeljak, and

² Bogo Grafenauer, “Kriza Doma in sveta,” *Dom in svet 1888–1988: Zbornik ob stoletnici*, ed. Stanko Janežič (Celje: Mohorjeva družba, 1989), quoted in *Kriza revije “Dom in svet” leta 1937: Zbornik dokumentov*, ed. Marjan Dolgan (Ljubljana: Založba ZRC, 2001), document V, 65.

³ Aleš Ušeničnik (1868–1952)—philosopher and neothomist theologian, the most important ideologist of the Slovenian Catholic movement after Anton Mahnič (1850–1920) left Slovenia in 1896.

⁴ Izidor Cankar, “To Frančišek Lampe,” *Dom in svet* 30 (1917): 1.

⁵ France Stele (1886–1972)—art historian and conservator; France Koblar (1889–1975)—literary and theatre critic and literary historian.

Rajko Ložar⁶). However, the pressures were too great. Between 1933 and 1937, the year of the periodical's worst crisis, the tried and tested Stele and Koblar were obliged to assume the editorship once again in a bid to keep the publication alive. They were joined by Anton's younger brother, also a "crusader," France Vodnik as the only representatives of the younger generation. The old Catholic ideologues, particularly Aleš Ušeničnik, were occasionally disturbed by the publication of items such as Izidor Cankar's speech on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the birth of the writer Ivan Cankar (in 1926), in which the former mentioned that his cousin had declared in the last years before his death: "Had I been Russian, I would have been Orthodox; had I been Prussian, I would have been a Protestant; since I am a Slovene, I am a Catholic."⁷ A stir was caused in 1932 by the publication of photographs of two religious statues by famous sculptor Ivan Meštrović (*Madonna and Child* and *Lamentation of Christ*), which were apparently too scandalous. And there were other such cases.

At the same time the position of the Catholic movement and their widespread organizations in Slovenia was growing more difficult. At the beginning of September 1931, when the new royal constitution was introduced, the Slovene People's Party (SLS) left the government. It was replaced by Slovene liberal politicians from the ranks of the former Independent Democratic Party and Slovene Peasants' Party. The new political team began a harsh campaign against all the constituent elements of the Catholic movement. The outward expression of this antagonism was the Yugoslav integrationist (unitarian) position of the liberal politicians, later united in the Yugoslav National Party, and the opposing Slovene position of political Catholicism. In late 1932 the leaders of the Catholic party signed and then disseminated the Slovene Declaration, demanding a more independent or sovereign status for Slovenes in Yugoslavia. The liberals used their political predominance to

⁶ Anton Vodnik (1901–65)—poet, critic, and editor of the review *Križ na gori*. During the war he joined the "Liberation front" under communist leadership; Tine Debeljak (1903–89)—poet, Slavist, and translator; editor of *Dom in svet* after its crisis, 1939–45. He emigrated to Argentina after WW II; Rajko Ložar (1904–85)—archaeologist, ethnographer, art and literary critic, and curator at the National Museum in Ljubljana. He emigrated to the U.S. after WW II.

⁷ Izidor Cankar, *Ob petdesetletnici rojstva Ivana Cankarja, Lepslovje — eseji — kritika*, vol. 2, ed. France Koblar (Ljubljana: Slovenska matica, 1969) 371.

dissolve or prohibit the most widespread and popular organizational network of the Catholic movement, the Educational League. At the time the league numbered around 30,000 members in approximately 400 different societies across Slovenia. Some of the most important Catholic politicians were arrested and imprisoned. The Christian socialist youth association *Krekova Mladina*⁸ was also dissolved and banned. A number of politically active priests were convicted at various trials.

With the ban on political parties and the subsequent dissolution of non-political societies, the Catholic movement transferred the weight of its operations to religious organizations, first to the Marian Congregations, and then above all to Catholic Action, which at that time was receiving special organizational impetus from the Vatican. Within the context of Catholic Action, an organization of the Catholic laity for the re-evangelization and Catholic renewal of society, a schoolboys' organization later known as the *Mladci Kristusa Kralja* (Boys of Christ the King), under the leadership of the secondary school teacher Ernest Tomec, and a student organization (*Straža* [The Watch]), led by the theology professor Lambert Ehrlich began operating in 1932. They were founded in the spirit of recommendations of the 1931 papal encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*, which called for a corporatist organization of society. Although the primary purpose of both was to combat the influence of liberalism and Marxism, they were distinguished by their especially severe action directed, in the first place, at the supposed "weak links" within the Catholic community. These, in the opinion of their spiritual mentors, were liberal Catholics: specific circles of Catholic intellectuals, especially those around *Dom in svet*, the Catholic youth movement—the so-called crusaders—and Catholic socialists within the *Jugoslovanska strokovna zveza* trade union.

The attacks on *Dom in svet* intensified in 1935. In June of that year, eight months after the assassination of King Alexander in Marseilles, the regent Prince Paul made a radical political volte-face and formed a political coalition designed to allay national conflicts in the country. The former SLS once again entered the government and rapidly

⁸ "Krek's Youth," named after the popular Christian socialist leader Janez Evangelist Krek (1865–1917), was an extreme left-wing Slovenian Catholic movement. At the end of 1920s it accepted a Marxist social analysis and program but remained religious. See Ervin Dolenc, "Krekova mladina," *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino* 30 (1990) 1–2, 49–70.

restored its dissolved organizations. Under the new system Catholic Action changed its character and method of operation. The previously distinctly non-political educational work of the Mladci Kristusa Kralja began to be politicized. Its members were believed to have denounced communists—already badly persecuted by the police—to the authorities. In the Catholic press, in particular in the organs of the two Catholic Action youth organizations (*Straža v viharju* [Watch in the Storm], 1934–41, *Mi mladi borci* [We Young Fighters] 1936–41), resistance could be noted to the more liberal French Catholic influences (Jacques Maritain, Emmanuel Mounier), along with an appeal to strict Catholic doctrine, intransigence, and the authority of the Catholic Church. Portugal under the dictatorship of Antonio Salazar was seen as a model state; less so Catholic corporatist Austria and fascist Italy because of their enmity towards Yugoslavia and above all towards the Slovene minorities in these two countries.⁹

The crisis of *Dom in svet* was triggered by an aggressive article entitled “Krizna besede” (“The Crisis of the Word”), which appeared in *Straža v viharju* in December 1934. This article departed entirely from the “God seeking” of the 1920s youth movement and set out new values for the new youth of the 1930s.

In contrast to the previous concept, young people are establishing a new concept and saying: We are young Catholics only insofar as in us there is more faith, more hope and more love,¹⁰ insofar as our connection with the Church is youthfully gentle and boyishly enterprising, insofar as in us there is more virile yearning for Godlikeness, insofar as in us there is the truly revolutionary spirit of Christ and the eternally renewing power of His teachings. This is the only kind of youthfulness for which we strive.¹¹

Dom in svet's editor, France Koblar, wrote: “I calmed the agitation and refused to publish replies in DS on the grounds that DS cannot descend into polemics with a student publication.”¹² He was,

⁹ Bogo Grafenauer, “Krizna Doma in sveta,” ed. Dolgan, *Krizna revije “Dom in svet” leta 1937*, document V, 73.

¹⁰ Faith, hope and love: the three “theological virtues” in Catholic theology.

¹¹ “Krizna besede,” *Straža v viharju* 5 (10 December 1934): 24.

¹² France Koblar, “Dom in svet,” ed. Dolgan, *Krizna revije “Dom in svet” leta 1937*, document I, 19.

however, glad of Edvard Kocbek's¹³ article "Enemu izmed ozkih" ("To One of the Narrow"), written in the form of a letter to the unidentified (anonymous) author or authors of several articles in *Straža v viharju*, in particular the author of the article "Kriza besede." It sets out the difference between the generations of the 1920s and the 1930s and places this difference into the context of the general conditions of the time.

What is happening with the youngest generation of European youth is also happening with our young people: they are calming down, narrowing and distancing themselves from the fulfillment of chronological and personal destiny. Traditional social forces have recovered and are beginning to have a marked influence on all public and private life. We can all see the internal connection between the conservative shift to the right and the narrowing of human freedom, between the appearance of reactionism around the world and the abandoning of universal plenitude in today's youth. The younger generation is falling directly under the influences of programs, from economic and political theories to ideological actions, and turning to an alluring image of external order, from corporatist Christianity to conservative fascism. The great hope of the postwar years is disappearing, the fine beginnings are crumbling, young people are becoming the prey of the old camps.

He rejected the younger generation's accusations of confusion, lack of uniformity, and falsity in the spiritual searches of his own generation:

What you see, we also see, but what we see, you do not see. Perhaps some of you will one day arrive at a secular truth and then you will see what you cannot see now: that in us there is no affectation or verbiage, German mysticism,

¹³ Edvard Kocbek (1904–81), novelist, poet (book of poems, *Soil* [1934]), essayist, editor of the "crusader" review *Križ* and the new Catholic review, *Dejanje* (*An Act*, 193–41), after the crisis of *Dom in svet*. He was very critical of pre-war Catholic policy and the church. He was the most important Catholic politician within the Liberation front during and after the war. When the communists no longer needed him, he was sent into retirement and isolated in 1952.

anathematized philosophies, artificial God-seeking, copied ideologies, but rather time experienced in the whole human being and the human being moved by the whole of time.¹⁴

Kocbek's article triggered a broad attack on *Dom in svet*, the most significant article in which undoubtedly was Aleš Ušeničnik's "On Statics and Dynamics."¹⁵ An undisputed theological and ideological ecclesiastical authority, Ušeničnik justified, in contrast to Kocbek, the correctness of eternal (static) religious "truths" (i.e., faith in God, love of Christ and loyalty to the Church) and their importance for young people's proper upbringing. He rejected the imputation that young people were unwitting victims of those seeking to lead and educate them with only worldly interests in mind.

In the final issue of the review in 1936, editor France Koblar responded in a reasoned and calm manner to all the attacks on *Dom in svet*, including the severest pressures from the publisher (the Catholic Press Society and the *Dom in svet* Consortium led by Gregorij Pečjak), by means of an extensive article on the two decades of disputes surrounding the publication. This was in order to prepare the way for its jubilee fiftieth volume (1937).¹⁶ At the same time the editorial board offered its resignation to the publisher, but at the end of January 1937 Koblar was yet again persuaded to accept the editorship. Bishop Rožman is believed to have ordered Koblar's opponents (Ušeničnik, Ehrlich, Tomec et al.) not to respond to the article.¹⁷ *Dom in svet* was the most prestigious and representative publication of the Slovene Catholic movement and boasted a long tradition, but at the same time the arrival of new contributors at the end of the 1920s, particularly those from the "crusader" youth movement, increasingly carried the publication out from under the control of the diocesan hierarchy. At the same time, frictions between the two main generations of contributors were increasingly evident, with the result that the editorial board led by Koblar and Stele often found itself caught between two fires, and a great deal of patience was necessary for successful work.

¹⁴ Edvard Kocbek, "Enemu izmed ozkih," *Dom in svet*, 48.3 (1935), quoted in ed. Dolgan, *Kriza revije "Dom in svet" leta 1937*, document XI, 123–24.

¹⁵ *Čas*, 29.9–10 (1934–35): 302–305.

¹⁶ France Koblar, "Navzkrižja in nasprotja," *Dom in svet* 49 (1936): 537–60.

¹⁷ Dolgan, *Kriza revije "Dom in svet" leta 1937*, I, 22.

The first issue of the fiftieth volume, containing Kocbek's "Reflections on Spain," appeared on 22 April 1937.¹⁸ Kocbek had promised a brief report on how the war in Spain was seen in other countries, particularly in France. When the then co-editor France Vodnik¹⁹ brought the article to the editorial board, Koblar was dissatisfied with its sharpness and a few unconsidered passages. He sent it back to Kocbek with some proposed changes. In the autumn of 1936 Kocbek had returned from Varaždin in Croatia and was working as a French teacher at the grammar school in Ljubljana. Kocbek did not accept all the recommendations, however, and insisted that he would prefer to withdraw the article altogether. He added an introduction and expanded it by placing it in the context of a cultural struggle, with the result that the editor was forced to publish it as an essay rather than as a news item, as was originally intended. Despite this, Koblar gave the article to France Terseglav²⁰ for further correction, but Kocbek paid little heed as well to Terseglav's corrections. It was already time to send the edition to press, and Koblar, as he himself writes, was too busy with other work and unhappy that almost all the responsibility and work of editing the publication and negotiating with the publisher rested with him.

What will be will be! Otherwise, freedom will find its voice. I have already persuaded Terseglav to complete the article in the next issue. Further development is evident in our press. *Slovenec* felt aggrieved and reacted in an unfriendly way. *Straža* shrieked that it was scandalized.²¹

A series of articles on this topic were also published by *Mi mladi borci*, the organ of the Mladci Kristusa Kralja, and, with approval and gloating, by the opposition publications *Jutro* and *Slovenski narod*, the Christian socialist *Delavska pravica*, and others. The campaign against

¹⁸ Edvard Kocbek, "Premišljevanje o Španiji," *Dom in svet* 50.1–2 (1937): 90–105.

¹⁹ France Vodnik (1903–1986), the younger brother of Anton Vodnik; poet, critic, essayist, translator; together with his brother a prominent member of the "crusader" movement; a teacher of Slovene at the grammar school in Ljubljana.

²⁰ France Terseglav (1882–1950), journalist, editor of the main Catholic daily newspaper *Slovenec*, essayist, translator, sociologist; a Christian socialist in the 1920s.

²¹ France Koblar, "Dom in svet," in *Kriza revije "Dom in svet" leta 1937*, document I, 23; document II, 43–44.

Kocbek also continued at public assemblies, while attacks on other *Dom in svet* writers were more subtle and longer term, with various pressures and intrigues.

The most frequently quoted part of the sentence that Kocbek wrote in the introduction to his "Reflections" was undoubtedly: "All heresies and apostasies were clear acts, the spiritual heroism of convinced people that follow their conscience and choose a bigger and better truth..." This part of the text was even condemned by Bishop Rožman of Ljubljana on the grounds that it was completely mistaken, that it was contrary to the position and teachings of the Catholic Church, and that it provoked among readers unjust judgments and hatred towards the church.²² The violent reactions to the article naturally put a halt to the publication of the periodical. For some time the writers negotiated with the publisher on the possibility of continuing publication, but without success. In June 1938 they published (privately) the collected documentation on these negotiations in a special pamphlet entitled *Dom in svet v letu 1937 (Dom in svet in 1937)*. A supplement to this documentation, from the papers of France Koblar, appears in the collection of documents entitled *Kriza revije 'Dom in svet' leta 1937*. Just as had happened during the first crisis, in 1917–18, publication did not resume until a year later, under the supervision of Joža Debevec,²³ an elderly professor from the Faculty of Theology, who died the same year. The review continued to be published under the editorship of Tine Debeljak, a former contributor, but with a greatly altered editorial team. In early 1938 the younger and more radical element among the contributors began a new publication, *Dejanje*, under the editorship and spiritual leadership of Edvard Kocbek. This role gave Kocbek the importance he would have for the communists during the next war.

Thus Kocbek's "Reflections on Spain" had a direct influence on the outcome of a crisis that had dragged on for two whole decades, sometimes latently and sometimes more openly, since the time of the disputes with Izidor Cankar, editor at the time of the First World War. The questions of trust in the editors, control over the contents (since the periodical was published by an ecclesiastical publishing house), the types and quality of contributions, the breadth of issues covered and

²² *Ljubljanski škofijski list* 74.8 (2 August 1937): 113–14.

²³ Josip Debevec (1867–1938), theologian, writer, professor of comparative religion at the Faculty of Theology; editor of DS in 1915, 1918 and 1937–38.

approaches to general social problems, and the educational nature of the publication remained the same throughout these twenty years and were never fully resolved. The timing and subject matter of the controversial article were not a coincidence.

As has already been mentioned, conditions throughout Europe in the second half of the 1930s, combined with the special problems in Slovenia, greatly worsened ideological conflicts at all levels: political, generational, institutional, economic, and cultural. In Spain, following the victory of the left-wing Popular Front in the elections of February 1936, a military uprising five months later, supported by the Catholic Church, led to the Spanish Civil War. Nazi Germany and fascist Italy rendered generous military and financial aid to the fascist organizations in the army, among royalists, nationalists, large landowners, and the Catholic Church, while the republican government was mainly supported by the international communist movement led by the Soviet Union. In almost every country in Europe, two ideologically opposed political blocs formed over the Spanish Civil War, one anti-fascist and the other anti-communist. The general and profound crisis of the liberal democratic system was also shown by the policy of non-interference of France and Great Britain. Thus, even in Slovenia, the Spanish Civil War foregrounded general European political problems. These European problems served to crystallize positions with regard to spiritual, political, cultural, and social issues in the Slovene Catholic community, which was then undergoing its final schism.

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