MARC'ANTONIO DE DOMINIS: THE MAKING OF A REFORMER

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On the first day of winter, December 21, 1624 the Roman Inquisition pronounced Marc'Antonio De Dominis a relapsed heretic and his body, held unburied for three months during the Inquisition's investigation, was solemnly burned on a pyre in the Campo dei Fiori in Rome, where Giordano Bruno had been burnt alive 24 years earlier. De Dominis's books and papers were burnt with him, and the mixed ashes of his body and his works were scattered in the Tiber.

The offense for which De Dominis was tried and burned was his denial of the supreme authority of the Pope and his insistence on the need to unite the divided Christian churches. His ideas and his actions occasioned much discussion among both Catholics and Protestants at the time-particularly after his well-publicized flight to London, and his equally sensational return to Rome-but he had no success in his projects of reconcilliation. After his death he fell into obscurity, forgotten by both camps, as the cardinals of the Inquisition had desired. Only recently have scholars begun to examine his life and works. Opinion has been divided on the man himself. Many have seen him, like the English pamphleteer of the seventeenth century, as a "Man for Many Masters", an opportunist who acted out of greed and ambition, whose works were written only to serve as justification for his acts. Croatian historians in particular have attacked his acts as Bishop of Senj and archbishop of Split as opportunistic and anti-national, presenting him as "a dangerous opponent of all that smacks of uskok, Slavic rebellion in the Illyrian," as Miroslav Krleža would have it.² Certainly De Dominis was not an entirely attractive character: he was much concerned with money and was fond of luxury and prestige. Yet his writings and ideas show a great degree of internal consistency, presenting a utopian vision of a universal church, devoid of secular power, formed on a basis of mutual toleration and equality.³ These can be seen as precursors of eirenic and ecumenical movements in the Catholic Church. De Dominis's political negotiations in secular and ecclesiastical matters, as we shall see in reference to his acts in Senj and Split, are similarly consistent, and similarly utopian, always calling on a need for conciliation, harmony and mutual tolerance.

De Dominis was born about 1560 to an ancient patrician family of

Rab, a Dalmatian island in the possession of Venice. As a youth he studied at the Collegium Illyricum in Loreto. In Jerona, Padua and Rome, he studied philosophy, theology, mathematics and rhetoric as a member of the Jesuit order. He also lectured in Brescia and Padua, achieving great success as an instructor. In this period his scientific studies bore fruit in works on the tides and on optics, later praised by Newton and Kepler. When his uncle, Antonio De Dominis, Bishop of Senj, died, De Dominis left the Jesuits and his studies to take over the administration of his uncle's see, first as vicar then as bishop. Here he worked to mediate between the Habsburgs and the Republic of Venice in the matter of the uskoks of Senj. In 1602, partly in recognition of his services in the uskok affair, he was made Archbishop of Split and Primate of Croatia and Dalmatia. In this position he found himself engaged in endless conflicts with his chapter, the Venetian administrators of Dalmatia, ecclesiastical rivals and the Roman Curia. In 1615, now in open conflict with Rome, he left his see and went to Venice. Summoned to Rome on the basis of rumors of his writings against the authority of the Pope, he fled to England. On his way he published a pamphlet explaining the reasons for his flight and the basis of his criticism of Rome.⁴ As an eminent rebel against the authority of the Pope, De Dominis was at first received enthusiastically in London, where James I made him Dean of Windsor. The year after his arrival the first volumes of his great work De Republica Ecclesiastica began to appear. In England De Dominis was able to translate his ideas to the political plane, working on the unification of the Anglican and Roman Churches, and making overtures to Lucaris, Patriarch of Alexandria and later of Constantinople. Relations between De Dominis and the English court deteriorated with time. The English saw De Dominis as excessively ambitious for worldly preferment, and De Dominis, on the other hand, must have resented the many unfulfilled promises he had been given. More important, however, was his lack of success in the project of reconciling the Christian churches. The Anglican hierarchy was less amenable to reunification than De Dominis had apparently imagined. In addition, his patrons (Carleton and the Archbishop of Canterbury), as Calvininsts, were in no way inclined to his plans, nor could they accept the tolerance and latitudinarianism which De Dominis proposed as the basis for union. Unable to achieve anything in London, De Dominis was receptive to hints from Rome that his work might, after the accession of Gregory XV, find greater acceptance. In spite of warnings from friends,6 De Domonis returned to Rome and abjured some of his attacks on the Papacy. His erstwhile English protectors saw this as a betrayal of all his principles. His motives were dismissed as the lowest, and he was accused of hoping in this way to gain preferment in Rome. The contemporary English view was most vividly expressed in Middleton's popular

1624 play A Game At Chess, in which De Dominis, caricatured as the Fat Bishop, announces: "Ambition's fodder, power and riches, draws me;/ When I smell honour, that's the lock of hay/ That leads me through the world's field every way." Yet soon after Gregory's death De Dominis was seized, confined to the Castle Sant'Angelo, and died in the course of the Inquisition's investigation.

The seven cardinals of the Inquisition who condemned De Dominis stressed that he had never given up his heretical desire to reunite "the separate members of the Catholic Church, which are the Roman Church, the Anglican, and all the Protestant Churches . . . " as well as the Eastern Orthodox Church. This utopian dream of reconciling the Christian world in an ecumenically reconstituted church is at the basis of all De Dominis's works. In his letters and books he had repeatedly questioned the division of the church. "From the first years of my studies as a clergyman I nurtured an inborn desire to see the union of all of the churches of Christ; and could never think patiently upon the division of the West and the East, of the South from the North in matters of faith. I earnestly desired to know the causes for these schisms, so numerous and so great, and to consider whether any path could be found to bind up all the churches of Christ in their ancient unity . . . ''10 De Dominis found the root of the conflicts among the churches, and among secular rules, inflamed by religious quarrels, in the absolute primacy of the Pope, and in the usurpation of secular authority by the Roman Church. The path he saw leading to the reunification of the church was that of mutual tolerance and episcopal equality, allowing the liberty to dissent from all but the essential articles of faith (greatly reduced in number), nation by nation, confession by confession. De Dominis never formally left the Roman Church himself, and addressed his main work to his fellow Catholic bishops, as a reformer within the Church. As Dean of Windsor he wore an Anglican cope over his black Roman robes, to symbolize the unity of these two branches of the Church. One astute English observer punned that he was not so much a Protestant as a detestant of the Papacy. 11 His appeal for peace was addressed not only to the feuding churches, but also the the secular rulers, who wasted their forces in internal strife while the Ottoman Empire advanced into Europe. Instead of fighting one another they should "rather direct their forces to regain the ancient liberty of those churches who now groan beneath the yoke of the tyrants, the true infidels."12

De Dominis's years in Senj and Split had a considerable influence on the development of his ideas. He himself, in his manifesto explaining his flight to England, wrote that it was in Senj, when he was first called upon to concern himself with practical matters of pastorship, church administration and preaching, that he began to realize the disparity between the words of the fathers of the Church and contemporary practice.¹³ It was in his years as Archbishop of Split that he formulated his criticisms of the Roman Church and wrote the greater part of *De Republica Ecclesiastica*. These years also marked De Dominis' first forays into practical politics, attempts that prefigured, perhaps even motivated his later vision of a spiritual and political union that could stand against the Turk.

In 1596 Klis, an Ottoman border fortress above Split, was seized by a group of uskoks from Senj and citizens of Split, supporters of the Habsburg operations against the Ottomans in the Dalmatin hinterland. The Porte and the Habsburgs were in open war in the Balkans, and the attempt to take Klis was supported by Pope Clement VIII. These allies hoped that the fall of Klis-an important stronghold commanding a key pass into Bosnia-would raise the Balkan Christians against the Turk and permit a Christian offensive to drive the Ottomans out of Europe. Venice however had little faith in the success of such an endeavor, and instead sought to protect her commercial interests in the Adriatic and the Levant by maintaining good relations with the Ottomans. Determined to remain neutral, the Signoria forbade its subjects in Dalmatia any involvement in anti-Ottoman operations. Nevertheless, many joined the struggle. The uskoks of Senj, border raiders, refugees from Ottoman territory, privateers in the service of the Habsburgs who supported themselves through raids on the Ottomans, were the backbone of this attack on Klis. Before its fall to the Turk some 60 years earlier, Klis had been garrisoned by uskoks, and they had regularly attempted to take this important fort since. Their success in this attempt was short-lived. A large Ottoman army immediately besieged Klis. Venice, determined not to be forced into the war, blockaded all supplies and prevented toops from reaching the fort. A relief expedition failed and the uskoks were forced to leave Klis once more in the hands of the Turk. Among the many from Senj who perished in the battles was Antonio De Dominis, bishop of Senj and uncle of Marc'Antonio.

Marc'Antonio received the news of the fall of Klis a month later in Rome, where he was studying, although the first news was that his uncle had been captured and not killed. De Dominis was permitted to travel to Dalmatia to ransom him. After De Dominis's flight to England rumors circulated that De Dominis had known of the death of his uncle, but had forged letters with the story of his capture as and excuse to leave the Jesuits and go to Dalmatia. There does seem to have been some real doubt in Dalmatia whether the bishop had indeed been killed-though one of the first reports presenting this tale may well have come from the hand of De Dominis hemself. Whether or not he left Rome on a pretext, De Dominis succeeded in impressing the court at Graz to the extent that he was proposed as the administrator of the bishopric in 1597, and was permitted to leave the Jesuit order in order to take up the post

(though the General of the order refused a request to help him obtain it).¹⁶

The aftermath of the Klis affair had left the uskoks in Senj in a rage against Venice. The Signoria's representatives, concerned for peace with the Porte, had long sought to hinder the uskoks from attacking Ottoman shipping in the Adriatic, or from crossing Venetian Dalmatia to assault Ottoman territory, incurring the resentment of the uskoks, who saw the Ottoman infidel as legitimate prey under any circumstances. Venice's intervention in the Klis affair and the subsequent persecution of everyone involved, as well as a renewed effort to contain the uskoks, fanned their anger into open revenge. Uskoks plundered Venetian as well as Ottoman trade wherever they could, attacking Venetian territory directly. Venice responded with strong measures against the uskoks and against their Habsburg protectors-blockading the Croatian Littoral so that no supplies could pass in or out, and retaliating against uskok acts by assaulting several coastal towns. The Habsburgs, in the past, had not been displeased to see Venice drawn into conflict with the Ottomans by the uskoks. Furthermore, the court seized every discussion of the uskok problems a pretext to raise the question of free navigation of the Adriatic (against the Serenissima's claims to sovereignty of the sea). However, Venice's retaliation against Habsburg possessions, instead of against the uskoks themselves, spurred the Habsburgs to rein in the uskoks. These, however, convinced of the legitimacy of their attacks on the Turk, enraged at Venetian colaboration with the enemy, and supported only by what they could plunder, were not to be easily tamed.

It was into this maelstrom that De Dominis, straight from the academic life of Pedua and Rome, plunged. The uskok problem had troubled the councils of Graz, Prague, Venice and Rome for years, and De Dominis must have already been familiar with it through his uncle and through his stays in Venice and Graz. As soon as he arrived in Senj De Dominis began testing solutions to the conflict caused by his unruly charges in Senj. The uskoks were an ideal defense force for the Croatian border: they were familiar with area, inexpensive to maintain, and effective in keeping the Ottomans away from the border areas. However, they had little real source of support beyond plunder. Theoretically, a portion of them should have received a stipend as regular border troops, but this rarely materialized. The raids on Ottoman territory that provided their livelihood inevitably antagonized Venice, for in order to reach their victims they had to cross Venetian territory, provoking the Ottomans in turn to retaliate against Venice. De Dominis at first negotiated an accomodation with Venice, restraining the uskoks from plundering across the Republic's territory, but he soon saw that it was hopeless to forbid them to raid without making other provisions, "for need observes no laws". 17 Other provisions had to be found, as merely

removing the uskoks from Senj would leave the border open to the Ottomans, and De Dominis quickly realized that Venice's project of purchasing Senj and the Croatian Littoral could not be approved by the Habsburg court or by the Croatian Diet. Encouraged by the Archbishop of Zadar and by the Pope, De Dominis shuttled between Graz, Prague, Senj, Venice and Rome trying to reconcile the interests of all the parties concerned. His first plans to support the uskoks with stipends from Venice and Rome, and to limit severely the scope of their raids, met with little success. He began to believe that in order to achieve a lasting peace between Venice and the Habsburgs in the uskok matter it would be necessary to remove the uskoks from Senj and settle them in the interior on the Croatian border where they could still be used against the Turk, where there would be no objection to their raids, and where, unlike Senj, they would have the land to support themselves with agriculture as an alternative to piracy. The money necessary to prepare the fortresses on the border and to pay a garrison of Germans for Senj could be had by selling trees from the forests of the Senj area to Venice for the use of the Arsenal. This would provide for the defense of the border, necessary to Venice as well as to the Habsburgs. Senj, "an asylum of thieves, of wicked and disreputable people, who have no other thought than plunder, violence and death, would become a mercantile city." 18

Diplomatic pressure from the Pope and a tightened Venetian blockade of the Croatian Littoral convinced Archduke Ferdinand that changes were indeed needed in Senj. A commissioner, Joseph Rabatta, was dispatched in 1600 to reach an agreement with the Venetians and to reform Senj, basically according to De Dominis's proposal. An important element of the plan failed however. No provision was made to prepare the new uskk outposts or to pay the Senj garrison. No agreement could be reached on the sale of the Senj forest. The Habsburg authorities asked for vast sums in hopes of filling their perennially empty coffers, but the Signoria was reluctant to spend such an amount with no guarantee of success. The uskoks were removed to the border, but were settled "in places where they have nowhere to live and nothing to defend themselves with" as De Dominis complained. De Dominis made various unsuccessful attempts to secure the money needed to provide for them, through both official and private channels, growing increasingly frustrated with the intransigence of both parties. Hungry and without arms, the uskoks in the outlying fortresses mutinied. Those in Senj rebelled against the harshness of Rabatta's rule, and murdered Rabatta. As the Habsburg court did little to continue the reform initiated under Rabatta, affairs in Senj slowly returned to the status quo.

After Rabatta's murder De Dominis did not return to Senj. Many of the uskoks had held him in respect, and had relied on him in the negotiations with the Venetians; they had kept to the terms of the peace imposed upon them by De Dominis and had trusted him to intercede for them with Rabatta. However, they held him responsible, too, for the lack of success of the reform. In 1598, in despair that the accomodation with Venice would not succeed, they threatened 'to cut the bishop in pieces if he has restrained them so long under a mockery of an agreement." When De Dominis' plans did indeed collapse, the furious uskoks threatened him with the same death as Rabatta. A contemporary English pamphleteer, John Sweet, used the tale of events in Senj as evidence of De Dominis' wickedness. He presented De Dominis as a false friend to the uskoks: "He had his part (if not his hand) in the prey with the soldiers of that place, became a pot-companion with them, and in bowsing and gormandizing nothing behind them." Having so gained their confidence he betrayed the uskoks into the hands of Venice, "of which bloudy treachery, this

audacious Prelate, being come to the profoundness of iniquity was so little ashamed, as he was accustomed to boast of his service therein done to the Commonwealth of Venice, saying that if the Iscocchi could lay hands on him, they would make a bagge of his skin (as they are accustomed to make of swine's skins for wine and oyle in these countries) and that he expected the first good bishopricke which might fall in the State of Venice, should be given to him for his desert."²¹

This notion that De Dominis exploited his position in the negotiations to betray his uskok flock to Venice in hopes of eccelsiastical advancement persists in current historiography²²-perhaps under the influence of August Šenoa's immensely popular novel Čuvaj se senjske ruke,²³ which established the uskoks as heroes of armed resistance to the national and political oppression of Croatia and pictured De Dominis as a venal Venetian hireling.

The Signoria placed a certain amount of trust in De Dominis as a Venetian subject, a fact mentioned repeatedly in Venetian diplomatic dispatches. Certainly De Dominis played on this Venetian attitude in order to facilitate his role as mediator, stressing his loyalty in speeches to the Senate. Yet he was by no means a blind partisan of the Republic's interests. He opposed the Serenissima's long-held plan of taking over the Croatian Littoral; he did not hesitate to castigate the Senate and its military representatives for shortsightedness and bloodthirstiness in pressing the uskoks in spite of their truce; he had no patience with Venetian collaboration with the Ottomans against the uskoks, "a thing truly reprehensible". De Dominis' demanded important concessions from the Republic, not only money for the garrisons but also recognition of the principle of free navigation of the Adriatic for the Habsburgs, something Venice had long opposed. Nor was De Dominis prepared to allow Vene-

tian commanders to take revenge on his uskok charges during Rabatta's reform of Senj, refusing — politely — to give up uskoks who were not Venetian citizens.²⁵

A sense of horror and dismay was a reasonable reaction to some of the excesses committed by the uskoks — and in addressing the Venetian Senate De Dominis used the same epithets used by generations of Venetians for the uskoks: "wicked, misfortunate, barefoot rogues."26 But he realized that these excesses were the result of their hopeless situation: no means of livelihood but plundering Ottoman territory; penned up and persecuted by Venetian commanders who were prepared to take excessive measures in turn-including one plan of this period to poison a cargo of wine and send it to them.²⁷ De Dominis' plan to remove the uskoks to the fortresses of the hinterland would have offered an alternative to the circle in which they were trapped. They would have escaped the inevitable and futile conflict with Venice, and been able to concentrate all their strength against the Turk. Like so many Croatian writers, from Janus Pannonius on, De Dominis deeply feared the Turk and despaired at the advances made by the Ottoman conqueror in Europe while the Western powers wasted their strength in useless strife. This is one of the threads that runs through his negotiations over the uskoks and would recur in his late works. Though the conflicts between Venice and the Habsburgs over the uskoks were not expressed in terms of religious differences, but rather political and economic ones, still they had the same effect, for as "the climax and crown of all secular misfortune, they incite the Turk to devour and absorb the whole of this remnant of our Europe, which he desires so fiercely".28

Why did De Dominis' plans for resolving the uskok problem fail? He had conceived an elegant solution, rationally framed. The concerns of all parties in regard to the uskoks were provided for: Venice would be able to preserve peace with the Porte; the Habsburgs would retain their border soldiers; the uskoks themselves would find an honest livelihood. All of the parties, too, were required to make concessions-the burden was spread equally. Such a plan, De Dominis may have felt, need only be explained to be accepted. But De Dominis did not allow enough for the political realities of the situation. Venice would not pay without a real guarantee that uskok raiding and provocation would stop-the Republic had been taken in too many times before by empty promises. Furthermore, the Serenissima, so intent on maintaining her hegemony of the Adriatic, would not make any real concessions to free navigation, particularly to her Habsburg rivals. In turn, the advantages to the Habsburgs of removing the uskoks under these conditions barely outweighed the disadvantages. The uskoks in Senj provided a convenient means of putting pressure on Venice; gave the Habsburgs a pretext for demanding rights in the Adriatic; and acted as a point of discord between

the Republic and the Ottomans. The uskoks, finally, could not be restrained if they were not supplied. It was this final point around which the whole project collapsed, and the reform failed. But the failure to provde adequately for the uskok was merely an indication of the reluctance of the parties to this project to cooperate wholeheartedly. De Dominis' belief in a rational solution was no proof against the selfish interests of the powers.

Though his agile diplomacy in the end came to nothing in Senj, De dominis may well have had high hopes for his future. And indeed, being relieved of his bishopric, he was advanced to the see of the Archbishop of Split. This was the most distinguished see of Dalmatia, carrying with it the title of Primate of Croatia and Dalmatia, but at the same time it was one of the poorest, as the lands which provided its revenues had been swallowed up by the conquests of the Ottomans. Even in 1602 the aftermath of the attempt to take Klis was still felt in Slit, which had been a center of agitation on behalf of this operation, in spite of grave Venetian prohibitions. The strongly anti-Ottoman population of Dalmatia, particularly of Split, saw the Habsburgs, the wearers of the Hungarian-Croatian crown, as the only hope of pushing the Turk out of their hinterland. But after the debacle at Klis the courts in Graz and Prague paid little attention to the conspirators from Dalmatia and Bosnia who sought aid for a Christian rising in the Balkans. The Habsburgs were now more concerned with advancing against the Protestants and the Emperor and the archdukes were little disposed to move decisively against the Turk. De Dominis was far from disapproving of the Klis conspiritors, whose acts he praised to unsympathetic Venetian ears as being "to the common benefit of Cristianity."²⁹ Nor was he unmindful of the need to stand against the Ottomans. Yet De Dominis saw no hope of aid for a renewed crusade against the Ottoman Empire from the divided powers of the West. Instead De Dominis concentrated in Split on consolidating his ecclesiastical organization, giving new life to the faded title of Primate of Croatia and Dalmatia. He attempted to restore the authority of the Primate in areas that had been overrun by the Ottomans, by proposing that several bishoprics in the hinterland long without administrators, be attached to the Split Archbishopric. This would have reunited Catholic subjects of the Porte and Dalmatian Catholics in a single ecclesiastical unit under the Archbishop. This and similar proposals to expand the authority of the Primate and exercise the perogatives of the archbishop brought De Dominis into conflict with his chapter, jealous of their limited rights; with Dalmatian bishops, whose first loyalites were with Rome; with Venetian administrators, who brooked no challenge to their authority; and with the Roman Curia. Since De Dominis joined the Venetians in preaching and writing against the Pope's secular preogatives when, in 1606, Pope Paul V placed the Republic under interdict,³⁰

Rome had looked on De Dominis with suspicion, and had meddled in many of his decisions and proposals. De Dominis' later assertion of the independence of the members of the church from the supreme authority of the Pontiff was based on personal experience of that authority, used arbitrarily and against what De Dominis saw as the interests of the church.

Among the interests of the church in De Dominis' eyes was the importance of nurturing the Croatian Slavic liturgy in Dalmatia. In 1609, of all the bishops of Dalmatia, only De Dominis and the bishop of Krk supported a proposal to reform and reprint missals and breviaries "in lingua illirica" for the use of the glagolitic priests. (These books were in short supply, and had not been reformed since the Council of Trent.) De Dominis went so far as to propose a National Synod to reform the texts, and offered to find scholars to produce a preliminary version (proposals, like so many by De Dominis, that were rejected by the Curia).31 De Dominis believed that not only were the interests of the church served in preserving the Slavic liturgy and the glagolitic priests that spread it among the people, but also that the bishops of Dalmatia should not be foreigners, who would not know the language or the customs of their sees. In a letter to the Split chapter he stressed that such bishops have no place in Dalmatia: "And in truth if the bishop is foreign, if he is of an alien people, if he does not understand the language of those over whom he presides, how can he comly with the decree . . . wherby the bishops are advised to strive to preach according to the peculiarities of the language, so that everyone can understand? How can he use that saying of Christ: Let my lambs hear my voice? "32

Senoa, and patriotic historians in his tradition, projecting the struggles of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries back onto the seventeenth, have criticized De Dominis for not thinking and acting as a Croatian national romantic. De Dominis was a loyal Venetian subject-though he was conscious of belonging to the Croatian nation, it does not seem, from his writings, to have been a major preoccupation. Yet he did no disservice to his Croatian nation in Senj or in Split. De Dominis was not entirely the ambitious opportunist he has been pictured. In both Senj and Split he was willing to risk himself for his ideas, consistently stressing, as he would in his later works, reconciliation and unity in the face of a common enemy. But his attempts at negotiating such a reconciliation demanded a flexibility, a willingness to make concessions on all sides that De Dominis would not find, either on the secular or the ecclesiastical plane. Wrapped up in his vision of a rational path to peace, De Dominis would underestimate the influence of political considerations: first in Senj; then in London in his attempts to reunite the Roman and the Anglican Churches; and again, fatally, in his readiness to return to Rome to preach his ideas of unity. In De Republica Ecclesiastica De

Dominis wrote: "It is dangerous, I admit, to get between those who are in bitter conflict. Many who could advance union will be dissuaded by this danger on the one side or the other, and will not seize this splendid task". De Dominis was never dissuaded from seizing such a task, yet in London and Rome, as in Senj, the dangers of political reality would prevent the realization of his utopian dreams of reconciliation, unity and tolerance.

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