

The help of the Slovenian Catholic Church

Various secular and religious subjects entered the scene in support of the prisoners. According to historiographical tradition, in Treviso camp there was a military chaplain who spoke Slovenian. The reality is more complex, in fact there were several priests. The first one was Father Attanasio Kocjančič (the Italianized surname was Cociani), born on 20th April 1911 in Hrastovlje. He belonged to the order of the Friars Minor and was made priest in Venice. On 20 September 1942 he was sent to the Chiesanuova camp, by the Military Ordinariate in Rome, because he understood and spoke the Slavic languages. From there he was sent to Monigo for a short time (from 23 September to 12 October). Later, the military authorities dismissed him, as "not suitable for the office he held": in fact, he had written, also as an officer of the Red Cross, to the Ljubljana Bishop, Gregorij Rožman, denouncing the situation of the internees of the Kočevska Reka region, particularly afflicted by disease and mortality¹.

Another Franciscan, Father Engelhard Štucin, was sent to the camp to ensure religious assistance to the devotees, in their natural language. In fact, on 11st September 1942, General Robotti had authorized the dispatch of some catechists to Italian fascist camps, following the request of the Bishop Rožman², and the friar was one of them. He sent regular reports to update the Slovenian curia about baptisms and funerals. The documents were notified to the curia of Ljubljana from November to December³ 1942: then Štucin was removed⁴.

Next, until September 1943, in Monigo there was another friar, but we do not know his name. Ivan Gulič, a witness from Trst, defined him "absolutely devoid of any charity and Christian goodness"⁵. Then, between 5th and 7th October, there was the religious inspection of Dr. Guglielmo (Vilko) Fajdiga, theologian, appointed by the Apostolic Nuncio. Dr. Fajdiga wrote to Treviso Bishop Antonio Mantiero that he had found the camp well organized, but urgently raised three questions concerning: the innocent people, the infants who died because they lacked milk, the relationships of the prisoners with their families at home. All the prisoners suffered from poor nutrition and inadequate clothing for the cold. In addition, Fajdiga expressed appreciation for "a good priest" (Štucin?) who acted as a catechist and played a positive role.⁶

¹ About Kocjančič, see Ivo Jevnikar-Apollonio Tottoli *Bozza di relazione* on the documents relating to aid provided by father Placido Cortese to the inmates in the Italian concentration camps, preserved in the Vatican Secret Archive, prepared on 2nd December 2009 for the beatification process of P. Cortese. I take this opportunity to thank both of them, especially Ivo Jevnikar, to whom I owe a lot of help. See also Ivo Dalla Costa, *Monigo: un campo di concentramento per slavi. Luglio 1942-settembre 1943*, Treviso 1988.

² Provincialni arhiv frančiškanske province sv. Križa - FFA, Vojne in povojne zadeve; Štucin was in Treviso from 5th November to 3rd December 1942 and from 23rd December 1942 to 19th January 1943, then the permit was not renewed. I thank Ivo Jevnikar for this report.

³ Archivi storici della Chiesa di Treviso (from now on: ASCTV), Mantiero, b.7 e Nadškofija Ljubljana, Nadškofijski Arhiv (from now on: NŠAL), 332, Gregorij Rožman, Prezidialni Arhiv n. 124/p; ivi: 37, Škofijska dobrodelna pisarna, b. 3. Štucin ordained a theologian in 1937, he ended up in Dachau but he came out alive. See: <https://www.dlib.si/details/URN:NBN:SI:doc-UCG5X5VJ>; http://sloveniji1.rssing.com/chan-7938702/all_p90.html.

⁴ See footnote 3.

⁵ Ivan Gulič, *Številka 141451*, SKD Tabor-ANPI, Opčine-Trst 2010.

⁶ Born on 22nd June 1903 in Radovljica, and died in Ljubljana in 1984 (his real name is Viljem Alojzij). He studied theology in Ljubljana and Paris, becoming a teacher, first at the royal high school (1933-1943), then, until 1973, at the

Overall, Slovenian and Croatian Churches did everything they could to safeguard the internees, despite having demonstrated an initial sympathy for the Italian occupation. Here we have no space to go deeper into the relations between the Ljubljana Bishop and Fascism: complex, contradictory relations and subject to opposing historical evaluations. However, it is important to remember some positive actions by Rožman.

On 20th November 1942, Rožman personally went to see Pope Pius XII, together with Monsignor Srebrnič Bishop of Krk, with a memorial, in which great concerns were expressed, especially about Rab, which risked to become a camp of death and extermination⁷.

Rožman also wrote to the Bishop of Treviso Mantiero and then sent a report to the Holy See which forwarded it to the Italian embassy at the Vatican; the report reached the highest Italian, military and civil authorities in the province of Ljubljana⁸.

The initiative of the Slovenian church had an impact on the Vatican. In fact, the Apostolic Nuncio to the Italian state, Francesco Borgongini Duca, commissioned by the Secretary of State Maglione, visited several camps bringing to the internees sums of money, "which had been collected among the Slovenes in America and sent back to the Pope by "former Minister Snoj, to be used in favor of the anti-communist struggle".

The quotation is by Grazioli, High Commissioner of Ljubljana, who wrote these words on 28th December 1942 to the Ministry of the Interior. We do not really know whether the main objective was the support of anti-communism or the salvation of internees⁹. The Bishop of Ljubljana also acted on another more personal level with the collaboration of his secretary, Stanislav Lenič (born in 1911, theologian, later bishop, died in Ljubljana in 1991). Lenič wrote in his memoirs that at certain times Rožman wrote up to fifty requests a day for the release of internees, without any political distinctions, and that the bishop had come to the conclusion that "perhaps it would be really better to break all ties with the Italians".

The Slovenian Church, as we have seen, acted in different ways in fascist camps; the energies mobilized, in the upper and lower clergy, were many, the same can be said for the Italian Church. This subject is dealt with in the book *Di là del muro*. There we also mention two people: Don Antonio Serafin, a humble and not-recognized chaplain in Monigo, who with his generosity was the center of an Italian solidarity network, and Placido Cortese. The latter showed great charity in the Chiesanuova-Padua camp, which continued even after 8 September 1943, in favor of other persecuted people, Jews and escaped POWs above all, to the point of bringing him to martyrdom.

faculty of theology, for apologetics. He wrote several books. ASCTV, Mantiero, b. 7 e NŠAL 37, Škofijska dobrodelna pisarna, 3, 26th October 1942.

⁷ Carlo Spartaco Capogreco, *I campi del duce. L'internamento civile nell'Italia fascista (1940-1943)*, Einaudi, Torino 2004, p. 145.

⁸ ASCTV, Mantiero, b.7 (in typescript) and NŠAL, 332, Gregorij Rožman, Prezidiálni Arhiv n. 124 / pr (in handwritten paper, with small misprints then corrected and with sentence deleted).

⁹ In his memoirs, published posthumously by the daily Delo of Ljubljana in 1998, Snoj recalls a memorandum on interned persons sent to the Holy See through the Apostate delegate in the USA, Monsignor Cicognani and money collections both among Slovenian emigrants and through the American bishops' conference.