

The persecution of Nazarenes in Yugoslavia 1918-1941

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Abstract

The government of the newly founded Kingdom of Yugoslavia severely persecuted the Nazarenes mostly for their refusal to swear an oath to take up arms. Thousands of them were prosecuted and sentenced to long prison sentences, while the government refused to make a special case for them. The only reason for the government's treatment was an unfounded fear that their "defeatism" was a national security threat. Some talks and attempts to help from abroad did not yield desirable results. The government also actively supported a split among the Nazarenes, showing favor to the side interested in cooperation.

Keywords Nazarenes, Yugoslavia, Serbia, religious persecution, conscientious objectors to arms, pacifism, prison sentences.

1. Introduction

The Kingdom of Yugoslavia existed from 1918-1941 (between the two world wars); it was established by joining territories that previously belonged to other countries. Among other things, it also inherited various religious groups and movements, one of them being the Nazarenes. The group existed in the Kingdom of Serbia since 1870 and in larger numbers in the southern part of Hungary called Vojvodina in the 1860s.

The Nazarenes emerged in Switzerland around 1830 under the influence of the UK Baptists regarding adult baptism and Swiss Mennonites' nonresistance. They were founded by a former Reformed minister, Samuel Fröhlich, and soon expanded to Central Europe. In Austro-Hungary and Serbia, they were known as Nazarenes and reached their highest influence and numbered more than 40,000 members in the late nineteenth century. They were heavily persecuted by each political system and state for their pacifist beliefs. The newly created Kingdom of Yugoslavia severely persecuted the Nazarenes and this also continued under the Socialist ruler, Tito,

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after the Second World War. The last recorded court cases against Nazarenes who refused to take up arms were reported in Serbia as late as the 1990s.

2. Ministry of religion prohibits Nazarene activities

In the newly founded state, the attitude worsened toward the Nazarenes as well as some other Protestant groups like the Lutherans, Seventh Day Adventists, and Methodists. Although the new state proclaimed that it would respect all legal documents and carry out the legal status of religious communities that were pertinent in the former states (mostly in Austro-Hungary), the situation deteriorated.

The Ministry of Religion was established at the end of 1918 and had supreme supervisory and administrative authority in all religious–political matters (Gardašević 1971:40). From the founding of the new country on 1 December 1918 until the declaration of the St. Vid Day Constitution in June 1921, all religious communities had retained their legal recognition which existed in the previous period.² The new Constitution listed only the Serbian Orthodox Church, Catholic and Greek-Catholic churches, Lutheran and Reformed churches, as well as the Islamic Religious Community and the Moses Faith Community (Jewish) as recognized and adopted religious communities. The Nazarenes and all other smaller Protestant communities were no longer legal.

A separate law introduced a religious oath in the judicial system, civil service and the army... A marriage ceremony was possible only if it was done as a religious rite. Marital issues and disputes were under the jurisdiction of confessional communities. They also maintained the Book of Records of births, deaths and marriages (Rakić 2002:22).

In 1921 the government also surveyed religious communities. They discussed the legal status of all recognized religious communities, the regulation of inter-confessional relations and material support for the clergy, the calendar, etcetera. On the Protestant side, only the Lutherans were present, also representing the Reformed. The situation was complicated. Although they were recognized, they faced numerous problems from the government.

At the end of a report a whole list of complaints was added, referring to the attitude of the public authorities toward evangelical pastors and schools. Schools belonging to a church were sequestered without consent and teachers released without

² According to the Treaty of Saint-Germaine (1919) Yugoslavia agreed to tolerate all Christian faith missions and organizations already existing in the former Austrian and Hungarian territories.

retirement. And then the buildings were also taken, so that the Lutheran church suffered damages of no less than 52 million crowns (Kušej 1922:30).

The first attempt to close all Nazarene houses of prayer came during 1923, but this order apparently was not carried out well, because there are documented complaints about it. Toward the end of 1923, there were changes in the government and a new Minister of Religion was appointed, Dr. Vojislav Janjić, who diligently approached the solving of the so-called “problem” of the Nazarenes.

A few months later, Janjić revoked all the temporary licenses and issued a new ruling that would, as will be seen later, bring a great deal of strife and trouble, especially to the Nazarenes. The Order 8765/1924, issued on 1 May 1924, requested the closing (“sealing up”) of all Nazarene houses of worship, listing of all of their members, and forbade further meetings and services under the threat of imprisonment. The ruling was to be executed by the police and army units, with support of all administrative personnel in the local communities.

The local communities also received a supplemental instruction: the Nazarene meetings should be banned, their books taken away, buildings locked, and all the members listed. A repressive apparatus started to function. However, the Minister was not satisfied with the initial results.

On 22 June 1925 minister Janjić sent a memorandum to the Minister of the Interior Maksimović, reminding him that the police were not yielding enough results.³ Minister Janjić found out that the local administrative authorities did not show enough zeal dealing with these “dangerous sects.”

If these sects would not have religious elements, they could be considered then a part of the Communist movement, to which they were closest, considering their propaganda methods and purposes. But, they represent some sort of belief system, which depends on a literal and lay interpretation of the Holy Scriptures connecting people in some sort of religious fervor, but in reality they have political tendencies. These tendencies are being spread by foreign agents with an aim to bring confusion...⁴

The zealous Minister Maksimović, in return informed the Minister of Religion that a Nazarene community was discovered in the city of Vršac that even managed to register their land and buildings. Since such a Nazarene community did not exist by law, but was an owner of the property, the local authority asked for clarification and

³ ASCG, Ministry of Religion. Confidential No. 104/1925 on 22 June 1925.

⁴ ASCG, No. 39684 on 16 April 1925.

how to proceed in liquidating the Nazarene property.⁵ During the first years after the war and using a temporary license, the Nazarenes purchased land and buildings in three locations and the local authorities did not know how to address this private property owned by the unregistered religious community.

3. Military against the Nazarenes

Paja Tordaj, a 21 year old Nazarene, was drafted into the military in February 1920. During the First World War he was in the Austro-Hungarian army, where he was permitted to serve without a weapon or an oath.⁶ Tordaj refused to take up arms again, but this time in the army of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. He served in the military for one and a half years, and an additional six months at the border post.

After he completed military service, and one month longer than the legally required time, his supervisor reported him for refusing to bear arms. He was sentenced to five years and eight months in prison and was released in July 1926. He was then ordered to report to a military unit stationed in Kriva Palanka. A commander there ordered him to use a rifle, and when Tordaj refused he got a slap in the face, then the orderly and officer of the day pointed their guns in his face in an attempt to force him to take up a rifle. He was then tied up, by an order of Lieutenant Milekić, and locked in a pantry with ten rifles hanged around his neck so that he almost died three times of suffocation.

During the next few days, two officers would fasten him to a machine gun, six times before noon and six times in the afternoon. He was forced daily to take an oath and when he refused, was beaten until he bled or lost consciousness. Officer Carić took his New Testament, tore it apart and spat on it.

In a desire to finally break his spirit, the officers set up a bed for Tordaj, with spikes being hammered in from the bottom so that he could not move or turn during the night. During an inspection, the regiment inspector forbade such a practice and ordered that Tordaj be sent to a court martial. Since this did not occur, the officers continued to beat and maltreat him.⁷

During the month of September 1924, all men between 20 and 50 in the Vojvodina province were drafted to military reserve exercises and to swear an oath to the new state. At this time 1,400 Nazarenes rejected the oath and all were sent to military court and then to prisons. Some of them were paraded through villages with chains on their legs. It was recorded that an officer stated: "Kill them, take them all, burn their houses... nothing will happen to you" (Stäubli 1928:12).

⁵ ASCG, Confidential No. 380/1925 on 30 August 1925.

⁶ Nazarenes were permitted to give a "promise" instead of swearing an oath.

⁷ This story was reconstructed from a petition his mother wrote on 22 July 1927. We are not aware of his destiny (Stäubli 1928:10).

The newspapers ran stories about such events. “In a camp where the Nazarenes are held there is perfect order, peace and love, it looks like a church. When they speak, the discussion is about Jesus, when they read, the literature is the Bible and when they sing, they sing the Psalms” (Czako 1925:61).

The authorities, however, managed to strike a deal with some of the elders, just about the time of the elections, so a temporary solution was found for the issue of an oath. The Nazarenes were released to go to their homes and the Radical party received more votes in the elections than ever before. Apparently, the elders gave their word to the parliamentarians that they would vote for them in the next elections. This promise in return helped the Nazarenes to be released early.

At one moment in history we voted. The king Alexander allowed us not to have to swear an oath, but only to give a solemn promise. In return, we had to promise that we would vote for such a political party that was suitable to the government at that moment. This kind of an agreement lasted until the Communists came to power.⁸

In spite of the agreement, in 1925 the police prevented Nazarene meetings and closed their houses of prayer, sending regular reports on their progress.⁹

4. Police closing houses of prayer

The Belgrade daily *Politika* reported that all “associations” of Nazarenes were being closed, that there were a fair number of Nazarenes in Obrenovac, and that in the town of Arandjelovac they even had their own building.¹⁰ The journalists published that the Ministry of Religion sent a new command to the police units to close all Nazarene meeting places, arrest preachers and missionaries and send them to court.

For the next move, the government informed the local authorities that they were no longer obliged to maintain registry books of births, deaths and marriages of members of the Nazarene community (which had been the practice since 1895). This decision created tremendous administrative problems.¹¹

There was a new development during April of 1925. The Ministry of the Interior permitted the reopening of the Nazarene houses of prayer. Learning about this

⁸ From the interview with Karlo Hrubik, considered to be the leader of Nazarenes in Serbia (Stankovi 2007:40-57).

⁹ According to the Order of the Ministry of the Interior for Banat, Ba ka and Baranja No. 25320/1924 on breaking of the Nazarene sect. Also in ASCG, fund 63/144 Confidential 528/1925 on 14 September 1925 – where the Great Captain of Novi Sad advised about the closing of Nazarene prayer houses and churches.

¹⁰ “Borba protiv novoveraca” [A battle against new believers], *Politika*, 18 February 1925, page 5.

¹¹ AV, F 126 II D.Z. No. 7976 on 1 October 1926.

change, the Ministry of Religion reacted in June of the same year, asking for such an Order to be cancelled immediately. It appeared that the delay took place mostly due to political reshuffling.¹²

In a memo from a prefect of the Bačka region in 1929, in which a detailed report was given about the closing, then opening, then closing again of the Nazarene houses of prayer, the reason can be seen for the 1925 decision (reopening) and additional problems arising with the new dictatorial rule established by the king in 1929.

...The houses of prayer and bookshops had been opened again, at the expressed requests of the parliamentarians, just before the elections... However, since this King's decision to revoke the Constitution, and thereby all constitutional provision for freedom of religion, we ask for an urgent directive as to how to proceed in the future...¹³

5. Ministry of Education and forced baptisms

Regarding the scope of “concern” on the side of the state, this Order from the Ministry of Education from March 1926 testifies about what to do with children whose parents are Nazarenes. The state-run high school director in Veliki Bečkerek (Zrenjanin) wrote about his problems to the Ministry:

Since the Nazarene church is not a recognized faith and we do not teach about it in school, such children do not have any grades in these classes... How do we treat such pupils, the Nazarenes, since they do not study the Science of Religion, and besides they do not perform any other activities: attend a church, take part in a confession, communion, and above all they are not even baptized?¹⁴

In Plavna, a local Catholic priest reported that Nazarene children were obliged to attend his religion class on the basis of the Hungarian law from 1895, according to which children were to attend religious education in the confession of their parents before they left to become Nazarenes. The priest asked the school authorities to organize a baptismal service for the Nazarene children to be baptized as Catholics. The school refused to conform to this request, as it “supersedes their educational competencies.” Even the school inspector commented that the school could not

¹² The Ministry of Religion is informing its Catholic Department about the measures taken, saying that as yet no response came from the Ministry of the Interior – ASCG, No. 11797 on 27 August 1925.

¹³ ASCG, No. 157-B on 20 March 1929. A response came from the Ministry of Justice, No. 8898/29 on 27 April 1929.

¹⁴ ASCG, No. 19207/II on 6 March 1926.

force children to be baptized in their parents' former confession; the school was, after all, offering the Science of Religion classes for them.

However, the Ministry of Education later ordered the performance of such an activity (i.e. baptism) at the beginning of the next school year. All the Nazarene children were to be baptized into the Catholic faith. The explanation was that since the parents had not made any choice to join any other accepted and legally recognized faith community, their children were to be sent to Catholic religious instruction and forced to be baptized, and in doing so, "the school system is not denying their right to change their church once they reach an age for self-determination."¹⁵ So, forced baptisms and the religious education of Nazarene children continued. In March 1928, the Ministry of Religion ordered as follows:

...It is a responsibility of a local administration to discuss first the confessional affiliation of a child... then come to a final decision... and order the parents, or a tutor, to baptize a child in a given period of time according to the confessional affiliation... under the threat of punishment.¹⁶

The Ministry of Justice issued similar instructions in 1931. In a memorandum discussing the case against the Nazarenes who "forbid their children to perform religious duties," a Minister of Justice explained that children born "whether before or after" their parents converted to the Nazarene faith, were to be considered members of the legally recognized religious community to which their parents belonged until the age of 18. The Minister further explained that such children were to be baptized, attend church services, receive religious education, have confession and communion, and also be buried in line with the same confession.¹⁷

6. Long term imprisonments

Because of the meeting held between the Nazarene elders and state authorities toward the end of 1924, all imprisoned Nazarenes were released, but only after they were assembled in the prisons and had declared their loyalty to king and country. For several months, it appeared that both parties were holding to the agreement.

However, as early as 1 August 1926, the military district of Veliki Bečkerek (Zrenjanin) called all Nazarenes to military reserve exercises. Fifty-six of them responded and appeared at a gathering place. The officers ordered them to take up arms and swear an oath to the king, although almost all of them had already made

¹⁵ ASCG, Ministry of Religion, Catholic Department, No. 6460/236 on 18 February 1927.

¹⁶ ASCG, Ministry of Religion, No. 3236 on 9 March 1928.

¹⁷ ASCG, fund 63/144 - No. 21616/31-XV.

their “promise” to the king in 1924. Newspapers, particularly *Zastava* and *Rad*,¹⁸ followed these cases closely.

Because they rejected the oath, all were arrested for “insubordination” and refusing to act as commanded. So, because of belonging to a sect, fifty of them were sentenced in Belgrade to severe prison time, some up to ten years. Some of these Nazarenes had already served prison time in the past, in Austro-Hungary. The daily *Zastava* on 18 September 1926 reports:

The military authorities have plenty of problems with conscripts, who are stranded or seduced by their “peaceful” preachers and “apostles,” so that they do not want to exercise or to take up weapons... By the order of the Minister of War all new believers of the older draft age are being invited to give a public statement on these issues. There will be a legal process against those who refuse arms.

Roughly 300 Nazarenes responded to a military reserves call and each one of them was sent to a military court. Only a few accepted weapons while the rest were tried and sentenced to ten years imprisonment. In March of 1927, a number of them were released, under the condition that they subjugate themselves to the king the same way that their colleagues did two years before. However, 109 of them still remained in prison (Stäubli 1928:21).

In the military district of Stari Bečej, military reserve training was organized for 10 September 1926, and 176 Nazarenes from this area were arrested. As in Zrenjanin, the draft calls were issued only to the known Nazarenes; others did not have to have “training.”

To understand the simple and open Nazarene attitude better, the case of Jovo Đukić from Gospo inci is quite educational. Đukić had received a military reserve call to report to his military regiment in Subotica along with 68 other Nazarenes in his area. Djuki was already gray haired and it was three days before his 50th birthday (military and reserve service were to be served until the age of 50). Instead of hiding for a few days, Jovo reported in as called and then refused to take up arms. He was sent to court.

The sentences pronounced were from four to eight years in prison, mostly to be served among actual criminals. A younger person from Sremska Mitrovica was medically discharged from the army four times and each time, a local commandant would cancel such a finding and send him to be drafted again. Finally, the commandant took away his file and medical reports and marshaled him to a unit under guard.

¹⁸ *Zastava* on the 18th, 21st and also on 25 September 1926; *Rad* on 16 November 1926 and 1 February 1927.

The following tragic story was published in a daily *Politika* speaking about three Nazarenes who in 1921 were sentenced to five years and eight months and then to a loss of all civic rights after release. They served their full prison term and in March 1927, they were included in the royal amnesty. They were given back their civic rights and, since one of these rights is military service, they were drafted to the army again and were again tried and sentenced.¹⁹

The newspapers of the day were filled with stories and court reports, some even protesting against such harsh treatment of these peaceful and otherwise law-abiding citizens. Some of the titles appeared in *Politika* from 18 February 1925; *Rad* 16 September 1926; *Vidovdan* 19 September 1926, *Zastava* 25 September 1926, *Politika* 3 October 1926, etcetera. One reporter commented: "All Nazarenes tried proved to be real Nazarenes."

The military regularly reported to the high command about the number and status of the Nazarenes in their areas of responsibility and plans were made for this "harmful sect" to be systematically discovered and destroyed. Particular attention was given to making lists of the Nazarene families with young men old enough for the draft, so that the government knew where "problems" might arise.

7. Visits from Switzerland

There were 17,000 Nazarenes in Yugoslavia at the time, but there were only 40 young men who were drafted annually as new recruits. A much larger issue was the question of the reserve army – there were around 3,000 Nazarenes in the 20-50 age group and they were all eligible for service.

After hearing about the situation, the Swiss delegation (representatives of *Evangelische Täufergemeinde*) came in January 1927. They first established the facts and found them to be true. In February, Prof. Bovet from Switzerland appealed to a Yugoslav delegation at the League of Nations meeting and, as it was noted elsewhere, more than 200 Nazarenes were pardoned by the King.

In the fall of 1927 the Swiss believers met with two Yugoslav army generals, Mihajlović and Jovanović, but did not come to any solution. The generals advised the Swiss to instruct the Nazarenes to finally accept taking up arms as the only satisfactory solution for the army (Stäubli 1927:37). One document from late 1927 shows that the Order 8765/1924 was still valid instruction on how to deal with the Nazarenes.²⁰

¹⁹ *Politika*, in the 5 August 1927 issue brings a report from the military court proceedings to the people who were found to be repeated offenders, being Nazarenes. Two were sentenced to 11.5 years, ten years for refusing to bear arms, and an additional year and a half for being a Nazarene. One was sentenced to a total of ten years, and one young recruit received six years.

²⁰ ASCG, Letter from the Ministry of Religion to the Seat of the Royal Court in Varaždin, No. 16,919 on 30

Certain Nazarene families with more than eight children tried to solve this situation with the authorities by asking for permission and documentation to emigrate, mostly to Canada and a smaller number to Argentina. Only a small number of requests were accepted.

During the May 1928 League of Nations meeting in Brussels, three Swiss delegates came into a confrontation with the Yugoslav delegation. The Yugoslav delegates were adamant that there was no persecution on religious grounds. The Swiss delegates then circulated a secret army document from 1926 which led to great dissatisfaction at the plenary meeting. However, this also did not affect the situation.

In 1928, there were 72 court decisions in which Nazarenes, who were already imprisoned for five years and serving, were sentenced to an additional ten years. Some of these died in prison.

8. The new constitution

In spite of all attempts in the country and from abroad, there was no relief of the situation. The new constitution continuously supported the state stand: "Civil and political liberties are independent of a confession of faith. No one can be released from citizens' and military responsibilities and duties which invoke regulations within one's own faith."²¹

Although there is no record of the success of such appeals, in 1930 the Danube prefecture made a revision of the sentences made by district superintendents and some lower level courts. All sentences were relatively minor: short detentions (40 days), fines and forced labor, and they were all proclaimed invalid on technicalities and cases returned for revisions. They affected 62 Nazarenes in Ilok, 40 Nazarenes in Kula and 31 Nazarenes in Novi Bečej.²²

The state found it acceptable to admit technical and administrative errors of the lower courts and to cancel detentions, forced labor and fines, but complaints about Nazarenes being sentenced to long-time imprisonment did not produce any effect and their sentences were not altered.

The WRI Archive contains three listings of the Nazarene prisoners in Yugoslavia, one from 1934 with 31 names and the second with 28 names. The third listing is from 1936 and has 251 names, their sentence, number of children they had and the prison where they were detained. The shortest sentences were seven years while

December 1927.

²¹ Constitution of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia 1931.

²² AV F-126.II-6145/1931. Pov. K. No.: 278/30 on 13 January 1931. Further correspondence shows that the local administration consistently asked for explanations and answers to these questions, up until the end of May 1931, with no response being archived.

the majority were serving ten years²³ in the following prisons: Sremska Mitrovica, Požarevac, Zenica, Petrovgrad (Zrenjanin), Sombor, Zagreb, Vinkovci, Lepoglava, Pančevo, Beograd, Zemun, Šabac, Valjevo, Niš and Skoplje.²⁴

9. The New-Nazarenes

As soon as the formal prohibition of this activity was proclaimed in 1924, some individuals had second thoughts as to whether Nazarenes should still serve in the army to prevent severe prison sentences. In 1927, the government informed the lower authorities that the movement of the division among the Nazarenes was gaining momentum and that Nazarenes were fighting internally over issues of buildings and followers. The state should, it emphasized, support the so-called New-Nazarenes by tolerating their activities and allowing them to use the previously closed buildings for church services.

The first Nazarenes who yielded on the issue of an oath and the taking up of arms were young recruits from Beška, Nova Pazova and Stara Pazova. When they saw their elders trying to find the best solution for the issue of an oath to the new state, they realized that this was actually a matter that could be resolved locally and decided not to remain in prison for years and, instead, accept military duty.

In a 1936 book published in Belgrade by an anonymous author "Hadžija", the high moral ground of some of the elders was questioned; they were, apparently, involved in moral disputes and suspicious decisions themselves. A number of cases listed show the unscrupulous behavior of some individuals, ranging from financial dishonesty to sexual misconduct, lying and hiding the truth. Some cases testified about the power struggle amongst the elders. In addition to the above, the author also criticized the then recent desire to have a better, more comfortable life, which sprang up after the end of the Great War.

The reason for this book was most likely the excommunication of a number of young Nazarenes who swore an oath. The author further criticized the older elders who allowed young recruits to be sentenced to long prison terms, even encouraging them to do so while they themselves found excuses and continued to live uninterrupted lives, remaining in authority. At a meeting with the military, even the officers wanted to learn why the Nazarenes were punishing those among them who swore an oath and took up arms (Hadžija 1936:3).

²³ In an article published in 1990, one of the old Nazarenes, born in 1907, spoke about his prison time in pre-war Yugoslavia. Because he refused to serve in the army, Ranko Nedeljko served nine years in prison (Jeftić 1990:83).

²⁴ AWRI, folder 420 - "Verzeichnis," "Letter to General Pera Zhivkovitch on 29 November 1930," "Letter from H. Ruhnam Brown to a 'Dear Friend' on 19th November 1930."

10. After the King's death

After the assassination of King Alexander in 1934 in Marseille, France, the Yugoslav government asked its subjects to swear an oath of allegiance to the new king, under-aged Peter II. This created a host of problems for the Nazarenes and trials and persecution began again. The New-Nazarenes, however, decided to take the oath and this brought new divisions among the brethren, this being only several years since the 1924 shift had been silenced. This group of Nazarenes contacted the Ministry of War in October 1935 promising that their recruits would swear the new oath.

The New-Nazarenes served in the military and, as a result, were expelled from their religious communities. When they would return and repent, they would be baptized again and accepted back in local churches. This praxis caused a sharp reaction from the Nazarenes who spent many years sitting in prisons in defiance of the authorities. While they were still in jail, the repented New-Nazarenes were living freely among the faithful, working and raising families.

However, many of the New-Nazarenes, when they returned from army service and learned that they were expelled from churches and could not be accepted back in a "full member capacity" insisted that the authorities return them back to the churches, even by force. Using such cases as a reason, the state closed a number of Nazarene churches (Nenadov 2006:8-9).

In 1936, Danilo Velker, a New-Nazarene elder wrote to the Ministry of the Interior asking that Nazarene churches be closed, "since they freely meet and judge us who are subjugated to the authorities and permit our young men to accept arms. They mock us and cause us much grief and damage. We, who accepted the military and civic laws, have to report each of our meetings to the local police and pay a tax of five dinars to the state and five dinars to the municipality, while the old Nazarenes pay nothing to anyone and freely meet."²⁵

Using such an opportunity and correctly evaluating its effects, the Ministry of the Interior wished to assist the situation in such a way that would permit the New-Nazarenes to meet and open their houses of prayer. The New-Nazarenes had a right to meet at private homes and only if such a meeting was previously reported to the police. Only existing members were allowed to attend. Although restrictive, this decision was a step forward in permitting Nazarenes to act, if only within their communities. For all others, the old Order 8765/1924 was still valid.²⁶

Many such pressures from the state, from the general public, and the mistakes of the Nazarene elders brought individuals to turn to other religious communities and others to return to their original confessional communities. During the 1920s and

²⁵ AV, F-126.II-6145/931. Document 39,292 on 31 December 1935.

²⁶ ASCG, Ministry of Interior. Department of State Security. Pov. I No. 1647 on 24 January 1938.

1930s, many of them became Adventists or Pentecostals, as was the case with one new group founded by two brothers from a Nazarene family (Steele 1995:25-40).

11. Conclusion

The Nazarene movement remained a secret to the state, which did not make an effort to understand this religious community and its faith system. In each case, repressive measures were employed and the state used the school system as well as its military and judicial networks to try to make Nazarenes cease their dissent.

In order to stop and destroy the Nazarene movement, the state authorities created a joint effort. The Ministry of Religion would make decisions, some even illegal and with no foundation in law, and then ask the lower authorities to put them into effect. These regional offices, superintendents, prefects and mayors, used the local police and gendarmerie. In all that, the Army had a say, particularly concerning court cases and other forms of punishment. The Ministry of Justice also played a role.

A split among the Nazarenes left marks not only on their internal relations, but on their growth and development as a religious community. In some cases, there were departures and disappointments, with the state accomplishing what it intended in the first place. The Nazarene movement lost in this unfair struggle with the state.

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