

Croatia

POPULATION	4,284,889
ROMAN CATHOLIC	86.3 percent
EASTERN ORTHODOX	4.4 percent
MUSLIM	1.7 percent
PROTESTANT	0.3 percent
OTHER	0.3 percent
NOT AFFILIATED	7 percent



Country Overview

INTRODUCTION A predominantly Catholic country, Croatia is located in southeast Europe. It borders Slovenia and Hungary to the north, Serbia to the east, and Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro to the south. To the west is the Adriatic Sea, which separates Croatia from Italy. Although most of the country is lowlands, the Republic of Croatia is geographically diverse, with low mountains and high plains near the Adriatic coastline. Its total land area is 21,851 square miles (56,594 square kilometers).

The land that makes up the territory of contemporary Croatia has been under the reign of various occupiers throughout history, including Hungary, Austria, the Ottoman Empire, France, Italy, and, most recently, Yugoslavia. The so-called first Yugoslavia was a unitarian regime known officially as the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes from 1918 until 1929; at this point the name was changed to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. The second Yugoslavia, the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia, was formed in 1945 after World War II. Croatia was one of the six member republics of the second, socialist Yugoslavia.

In 1991 Croatia seceded from Yugoslavia to become an independent country. Along with language, religion has played a large part in the preservation of a Croatian national identity. Roman Catholicism served to identify Croats in the multinational Yugoslavia, in which Eastern Orthodoxy and Islam were also dominant religions. The connection between national and religious identification was strengthened by the fall of Communism, the dissolution of Yugoslavia, and the independence of Croatia in the early 1990s because of the support the Croats received from the Catholic Church during the Communist period. The war for Croatian independence (1991–95), as well as wars and political upheavals in other parts of former Yugoslavia, contributed to large migration (in many cases politically planned and forced) as many Serbs (predominantly Eastern Orthodox) left Croatia, and many Croats from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, and Montenegro (predominantly Catholic) immigrated to Croatia. The movement of both groups increased the already large number of Catholics in Croatia.

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Although Croatia is religiously diverse, Catholicism is the country's predominant faith. Other religions include the Serbian Orthodox Church, Islam, and various Protestant denominations. In Croatia religious affiliation is strongly connected to ethnicity. Consequently, members of the Serbian Orthodox Church, who tend to be ethnic Serbs, typically live near areas that border Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Those affiliated with other minority religious groups tend to live in urban areas. As of the early 21st century, Croatia was not exhibiting strong trends toward secularism.

RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE According to its constitution, Croatia is a secular country in which all religious communities are separate from the state, equal before the law, and free in their public action. The Roman Catholic Church is the most visible and dominant religion in Croatia. Its position and role have been regulated by four agreements that Croatia signed with the Holy See in 1996 and 1998. These include an Agreement on Legal Issues, an Agreement on Cooperation in the Fields of Education and Culture, an Agreement on Spiritual Care in the Military and Police Forces, and an Agreement on Economic Issues. Together these agreements guarantee the Catholic Church freedom in all its activities and internal autonomy in all aspects. They also grant a range of additional rights, including the right to have religious instruction in public schools, to establish chaplaincy in the military and in police forces, to perform spiritual care in hospitals, and to receive regular financial support from the state.

A 2002 law on the legal position of religious communities regulates the rights and freedoms of other religious groups. On the basis of this law, the Croatian government signed seven agreements on issues of mutual interest to 16 mainly traditional religious communities active in the country, including the Serb Orthodox Church, the Islamic Community of Croatia, and the Evangelical Church. These agreements gave these groups rights that the Catholic Church had already enjoyed, including the right to offer religious instruction in public schools, to provide police and military chaplaincy, to have church marriages recognized by the state, and to receive state financial support.

Other religious communities that register with the state are allowed to operate freely, but they are not afforded these additional rights. In 2002 and 2003 three of these other religious communities—the Protestant Reformed Christian Church in the Republic of Croatia,

the Full Gospel Church, and the Word of Life Church—submitted applications with the government for these additional rights. The government declined their applications, and Croatia's Constitutional Court proclaimed itself unauthorized to rule on the issue. As a result, these groups brought their case to the European Court of Human Rights, which ruled in their favor in December 2010. Despite this favorable ruling, the Croatian government did not implement the changes, and the matter remained unresolved.

Major Religion

ROMAN CATHOLICISM

DATE OF ORIGIN Seventh–ninth centuries CE

NUMBER OF FOLLOWERS 3.7 million

HISTORY Croatians gradually embraced Roman Catholicism between the seventh and ninth centuries. Pope John VIII first officially recognized Croatia in a letter to the Croatian ruler Branimir in 879. The term “bishop of Croats” was recorded as early as the 10th century. Croatian ecclesiastical independence was furthered by the foundation of the Diocese of Zagreb in 1089–91 and by its promotion to the rank of an archdiocese in 1852. Until the 20th century, however, it was events in neighboring countries that most influenced the history of Catholicism in Croatia, and Croatians shared the most important church events of the period with other nations. Ottoman invasions and the occupation of a large part of contemporary Croatia resulted in an emphasis on the differences between Christianity and Islam.

After the dissolution of Austria-Hungary and the formation in 1918 of what later became Yugoslavia, the Catholic Church ceased to be the dominant religion in the larger state. In 1935 Yugoslavia and the Holy See signed a concordat on the position of the Catholic Church, but because of strong resistance it was never ratified by the Yugoslav parliament. After World War II, the Communist government, led by Josip Broz Tito (1892–1980), implemented hostile policies toward religion. Church-owned land and property were nationalized, and the government imprisoned a few church leaders who criticized Communist rule. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, as part of the atheist ideology of Communism, the government tried to minimize the influence of religion through political oppression. As a

result of these efforts, Yugoslavia ended diplomatic relations with the Holy See in 1952. During the 1950s and 1960s, Tito gradually allowed the limited liberalization of the Yugoslav political system. As a consequence, political relations with the Holy See were reestablished in 1966, and religious life gradually became more normal.

With Croatia's independence in the early 1990s, the Catholic Church once again became the dominant religious community in Croatia. The wars and political upheavals that accompanied the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia strengthened the relations between national and religious identification because the Catholic Church supported Croatia in its bid for independence. This growth of religious nationalism, together with the introduction of political freedoms in independent Croatia, resulted in the Catholic Church's increased visibility and activity in the public sphere.

EARLY AND MODERN LEADERS Josip Juraj Strossmayer (1815–1905), bishop of Đakovo (a city in Croatia), was one of the major historical leaders of the Catholic Church in Croatia. He was known for his openness to ecumenism. A participant in the First Vatican Council (1869–70), Strossmayer was a prominent opponent of the dogma of the infallibility of the pope. Alojzije Stepinac (1898–1960) served as the archbishop of Zagreb (the capital city of Croatia) from 1937 to 1960. After World War II, the Communist government condemned Stepinac to 16 years in prison for his alleged cooperation with the fascist Ustaša state that persecuted Jews and Serbs in the war's aftermath. In 1951 he was moved to house arrest and was elevated to cardinal in 1953. He was beatified by Pope John Paul II in 1998. Although Stepinac is promoted by the church of the early 21st century as a prominent symbol of resistance to oppression during the Communist time, he remains for some a controversial figure for his role in the Ustaša state. Stepinac's successor was Cardinal Franjo Šeper, who participated in the Second Vatican Council (1962–65) and, beginning in 1968, served as head of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

Cardinal Franjo Kuharić (1919–2002) was the archbishop of Zagreb and the president of the conference of Yugoslav bishops for many years. Josip Bozanić (1949–) became the archbishop of Zagreb in 1997 and was named a cardinal in 2003. As the only cardinal in Croatia, Bozanić served as president of the Croatian Bishops' Conference (1997–2007) and as vice-president of the Council of European Bishops' Conference (2001–

Josip Juraj Strossmayer

Josip Juraj Strossmayer (1815–1905), the bishop of Đakovo, was a theologian, politician, and cultural worker who is remembered for his promotion of science and culture in the 19th century. In 1866 Strossmayer founded the Yugoslav Academy of Science and Arts (now the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts) in the Croatian capital of Zagreb. He also helped establish Zagreb University in 1874, including creating a foundation for students in need of financial assistance.

Strossmayer believed that a political union of Slavic nations was a precondition for the development of their ethnic and cultural identity in response to the dominance of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In addition, he was devoted to ecumenical ideas of cooperation among Roman Catholics, members of the Eastern Orthodox Church, and Protestants. As a participant of the First Vatican Council in Rome (1869–70), he was a prominent opponent of the dogma of the infallibility of the pope, despite remaining a faithful Catholic bishop. He also promoted many reforms for the church, ideas that were realized only a century later at the Second Vatican Council (1962–65).

2006). He was also a member of other prominent institutions within the Roman Curia. In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, he was considered the most prominent and influential leader of the Catholic Church in Croatia.

MAJOR THEOLOGIANS AND AUTHORS During the Middle Ages and after, the reputations of such Croatian theologians as Ivan Stojković, Marko Marulić, Juraj Križanić, and Josip Rudjer Bošković extended throughout Europe. Ivan Stojković (1395–1443) promoted ecumenism in Europe and was engaged in ecumenical talks with the Ottomans between 1435 and 1436. He also participated in theological discussions about the Reformationist theologian Jan Hus (1372–1415), who was burned at the stake for committing heresy against the Catholic Church. A few centuries later, Stojković's views were furthered by Juraj Križanić (1618–1683), who promoted pan-Slavist ideas and

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pushed for union between the Roman Catholic Church and the Russian Orthodox Church.

Marko Marulić (1450–1524), author of the poem “Judith” (1521), was known as a “father of Croatian literature,” though he also wrote extensively in Latin. His work was translated into many other European languages during the 16th and 17th centuries. Josip Rudjer Bošković (1711–1787) was a Jesuit priest and theologian as well as a prominent scientist who made significant contributions to astronomy (among other things, he discovered the absence of atmosphere on the moon), mathematics, physics, and other sciences.

The central religious figure in 19th-century Croatia was Josip Juraj Strossmayer, who was not only a bishop but also a theologian, politician, and cultural worker. In spite of difficult circumstances during the Communist period, theologians such as Tomislav Sagi-Bunić, Vjekoslav Bajsić, and Bonaventura Duda attempted to revise religious thought in Croatia on the basis of the Second Vatican Council.

HOUSES OF WORSHIP AND HOLY PLACES Some very old Croatian churches are protected monuments of culture. Among the seven UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Croatia, two are churches. The first, the Episcopal Complex of the Euphrasian Basilica in Poreč, dates from the sixth century and is renowned for its early Byzantine art. The second, the Cathedral of Saint James in Šibenik, dates from the 15th and 16th centuries, and it is an important Renaissance monument.

The government’s suppression of religion during the Communist period meant that only a few new churches were built between 1945 and 1991. Then, during the war for Croatian independence, many extant churches were damaged or demolished. According to the data from the Croatian Bishops’ Conference, 1,426 churches and other church buildings were damaged or destroyed during this period. After Croatia achieved independence in 1991, church building intensified as the church attempted to make up for lost time and lost structures. Post-independence building includes the Church of Croatian Martyrs, which opened in 2010 in the town of Udbina, and seeks to commemorate Croatian martyrs.

WHAT IS SACRED Apart from sacred places such as churches, cemeteries, and sanctuaries, the locations of relics of the saints were popular religious sites in Croatia in the past. Although Croatians are still very religious, modernization has led to the decline in certain traditional

ways of demonstrating religiosity, including the worship of relics. The cult of the Virgin Mary, however, is highly developed, and frequent prayers are devoted to her. In addition, cities in Croatia celebrate their patrons’ saints’ feast days with processions and church ceremonies. For instance, the patron of Dubrovnik (a city located on the coast of Croatia) is St. Blaise. His feast day is celebrated on February 3. Since 1990 the custom of marking the day of a profession on the feast day of its patron saint has been reintroduced. This has been part of a larger effort to increase public visibility of religion in the wake of the Communist era. Thus, police, for example, celebrate on the feast day of St. Michael.

HOLIDAYS AND FESTIVALS During the Communist period church holidays were not officially recognized in Croatia, although they were celebrated privately among families. In contemporary Croatia, public holidays include days that are traditionally considered religious, such as Christmas and Easter. These days are celebrated by many as a part of national culture and tradition rather than for religious reasons. Other state holidays include Epiphany, Corpus Christi, Feast of the Assumption, and All Saint’s Day.

MODE OF DRESS Churchgoing in Croatia is no longer marked by formal dress, and there is no religious influence on the mode of dress. Apart from the prescribed clerical dress, which prelates are required to wear for all liturgical celebrations, priests often wear civilian clothes in everyday life, although this is rare among nuns.

DIETARY PRACTICES Most Croatians honor the traditional Catholic practice of abstaining from meat on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. It is a widespread custom in Croatia to eat fish rather than meat on Christmas Eve. To a lesser extent, Croatians fast on Fridays, especially during Lent. The major church holidays, especially Christmas and Easter, are traditionally marked by formal family meals.

RITUALS Sunday Mass is the central event of religious life for Catholics in Croatia. Although attendance at weekly Mass has decreased slightly in the early 21st century, about 25 percent of Catholics in Croatia attend worship at least once a week, according to European Value Survey data from 2008. In addition, 15 percent of Croatians attend Mass at least once a month. Thirty-three percent pray every day outside religious ceremonies, and 23 percent pray once a week or more. A significant

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Among the state holidays in Croatia is All Saint's Day. Here, the holiday is being observed at a cemetery in Zagreb, Croatia. © PAUL PRESCOTT/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM.

number of Croatians undertake pilgrimages—36 percent claimed they had gone on pilgrimages several times in the last year, according to sociological research from 2006—with one of the most popular sites in Croatia being the sanctuary of the Virgin Mary in Marija Bistrica. Since the 1980s a Marian sanctuary in Medjugorje, a town in a predominantly Croatian area of neighboring Bosnia and Herzegovina, has been a popular pilgrimage site.

For many people church marriages and funerals are an important part of tradition and national identity. Based on an agreement between Croatia and the Holy See, church marriages are recognized as if they were contracted by state officials.

rites of passage The process of Catholic initiation begins with infant baptism. Children typically make their First Communion at age nine and their confirmation around age 14. These sacraments are connected to

attendance at religious education classes. Baptism, First Communion, and confirmation are prescribed by the Catholic Church as important parts of raising a religious person. However, because Catholicism has historically been tied to Croatian identity, some parents and children see these rites of passage as symbols of the national culture.

During the Communist period, religious education classes were organized exclusively by the church. Since 1991, however, religious education has been an elective subject in public schools, with approximately 90 percent of all children attending Catholic religious classes in primary schools and 75 percent in secondary schools. Attending classes in the parish is also required for receiving Communion and for confirmation.

In order to be married in the Catholic Church, a man and woman must attend a course organized by the church. There also are catechism classes for adults.

MEMBERSHIP Data on church membership in Croatia is recorded only at the parish level and is not publicly available. However, the 2011 Census estimates published by the Croatian Bureau of Statistics indicates a strong national identification with the Catholic Church, with 86.28 percent identifying as Catholic. Membership in the church is widely viewed as an integral part of belonging to the Croatian nation. Due to the fact that Croats are overwhelmingly Catholic and most conflate the two identities, methods of evangelization have not been developed. Nonetheless, the church has a presence in the media and owns several radio stations that broadcast Masses and other religious programming, though their public visibility and influence are limited.

social justice The social teachings of the Catholic Church have become more important in Croatia since the country gained its independence, particularly in light of the greater economic inequalities that have developed as a result of privatization, large refugee populations, and disruption of economic ties. Although Caritas, the primary Catholic charity organization, was forbidden during the Communist era, it was reestablished after Croatian independence in all dioceses, archdioceses, and parishes as a means of enacting the church's social mission to aid the poor and marginalized. The church's social teachings have been used to question the course of Croatia's social development in the post-Communist era. Cardinal Josip Bozanić, the archbishop of Zagreb, has spoken on several occasions about Croatian politics and practices that negate basic Catholic values of solidarity and public good. The

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The sanctuary of the Virgin Mary in Marija Bistrica, Croatia, is one of the most popular pilgrimage destinations among Catholics in Croatia. © ZVONIMIR ATLETIC/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM.

same idea has been expressed by other church leaders and institutions, including the Croatian Bishops' Conference Commission, which is known as "Iustitia et Pax" ("Justice and Peace").

During the early 21st century, the church's involvement in social justice issues produced mixed results. It was active in lobbying, unsuccessfully, for a ban against work on Sundays but received support from trade unions on this effort. The church also advocated against the privatization of natural resources, such as water, which helped create public consensus that natural resources should not be privatized.

Despite these instances of social engagement, the Catholic Church is perceived as being preoccupied with retaining its own position of power and with prioritizing its moral stance on issues such as abortion and gay marriage, both of which the church opposes. In addition, the

extent to which the church should interest itself in matters of social justice or influence social policies has itself been debated. In education the church tries to exert influence mainly through religious education classes in the schools and through a small number of Catholic schools.

SOCIAL LIFE Birth rates have declined in Croatia since 1990. According to demographic projections between 2000 and 2050, the population of young people will decline by 15 percent, whereas the elderly population will increase by 80 percent. This trend has become a primary concern of the Catholic Church, which seeks to promote the growth of the world Catholic population. The church is also concerned about the large number of single-parent families in Croatia. The church believes that the two-parent family is an integral factor in the religious upbringing of children. However, the divorce rate is increasing as marriages are freely dissolved according to state regulations

Since the late 1990s domestic violence has also become a public issue in Croatia. The church has supported victims of domestic violence and has opened several shelters for them. With respect to issues of equality between women and men, the church remains more or less silent. However, the church has opposed the term "gender" and so-called "gender ideology," which have been used to negate biological sex difference and to introduce gay marriage.

POLITICAL IMPACT Although the Catholic Church has no formal role in Croatian politics, its past political impact was significant. Croatia's long period as a member of a multinational, multi-religious, and Communist Yugoslavia strengthened the political aspects of the church, which had to negotiate the hostile atheism of government authorities.

In the early 1990s war broke out in Croatia and neighboring Bosnia and Herzegovina. Although this conflict was not explicitly religious, the warring factions were divided along religious lines. Soldiers frequently wore religious symbols in order to express their identity as a Croatian (Catholic), Serbian (Orthodox), or Bosniak (Muslim). The destruction of houses of worship and the banishment of clerics were sometimes part of military strategy.

Today the nature of the church's involvement in different social issues is often publicly debated. Some have criticized the church for engaging in inappropriate political and social involvement, and the appropriate role

of the church in contemporary society has been widely debated in contemporary Croatia. Questions about whether the church should criticize the government or make public statements about, for example, inadequate social programs or the economic situation have come up often in the post-Communist era. Although many argue that the church should become more actively involved in social and political concerns, others believe that the church should preach only inside church buildings.

CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES In present-day Croatia the Catholic Church has only limited influence on its followers in such matters as birth control, abortion, and divorce. Liberal laws on abortion were passed in 1978; this legislation remains in force and allows women to freely obtain abortions in public hospitals up to the 12th week of pregnancy. Research has shown that a majority of Croatians oppose legal restrictions on abortion even though they may share the church's moral opposition to the procedure. In opposing free abortion, the church has cooperated with other religious communities.

The church has taken an active stance against gay rights. It opposed, albeit unsuccessfully, an anti-discrimination law of 2008 that Croatia was obliged to pass as a part of the European Union accession process. The law was seen by the church as a potential basis for granting homosexuals rights to marry or to adopt children.

During the 2012–13 school year, the church also vehemently opposed the introduction in public schools of health education classes that included discussions of homosexuality. This opposition prompted heated debates about the relation of the church to public schools and about the rights of parents to decide the moral education of their children. The role of religion in public schools is another issue that is frequently debated in Croatia. Some believe that religious instruction in public schools violates the constitutional provision of church-state separation.

CULTURAL IMPACT The cultural impact of the Catholic Church, especially on Croatian art and architecture, has been exceptionally important historically. The remains of such pre-Romanesque buildings as Prince Višeslav's font and Archbishop Ivan's sarcophagus from the eighth and ninth centuries are significant symbols of both Croatian national and religious history. The first Croatian university dates to 1495, when a Dominican institution in Zadar, then in Dalmatia, was promoted to the rank of a general European university.

A special script called Glagolitic was used in Croatia until the middle of the 19th century, and a number of priests employed both the Glagolitic script and the Old Slavic and Latin languages in liturgy, practices that contributed to the development of a national language and literature.

In the 20th century, however, the arts in Croatia were almost entirely secularized and separated from ecclesiastical influence. In popular culture especially, the influence of the West rather than of the church has become important, and this influence has only increased during the early 21st century.

Other Religions

Eastern Orthodox churches, particularly the Serbian Orthodox Church, have the second largest following in Croatia. The arrival of Serbs in the territory of contemporary Croatia was linked with their flight from Ottoman rule, with the Venetian and Austrian governments often settling them in unsafe lands near the borders with the Ottomans. In the 17th century some of the Orthodox who settled in Croatia accepted unification with the Catholic Church, and the Greek Catholic Church (with Byzantine, or Eastern, rites but in union with Rome) still exists in Croatia today. After World War II, between 11 and 12 percent of all Orthodox in Yugoslavia lived in Croatia.

Throughout history relations between Roman Catholics and Orthodox Serbs have undergone various changes. For a long period of Croatian history, there was widespread interest in pursuing the unification of these two Christian groups. With the formation of Yugoslavia, however, political and national conflicts were linked to religious differences between the Croatians and Serbs, and animosity increased. Serbs opposed Croatian independence and joined in armed rebellion to occupy parts of Croatia. The Serbian Orthodox Church supported rebel Serbs, and this increased tensions between Catholic and Orthodox believers.

After the government retook these occupied lands in 1995, a majority of the Serbs living in the affected areas left. The postwar return of Serbs has been slow, and the Serb population had declined to 4.4 percent by 2011. In addition, tension between Catholic Croats and Orthodox Serbs has gradually given way to cooperation and peaceful coexistence, despite some examples of isolated conflicts between the two groups.

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Croatia also has a small Islamic population of approximately 1.5 percent. Islam was first introduced in Croatia during the period of Ottoman rule. Official recognition of Islam dates to 1916, when Croatia was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The Muslim community grew between 1878 and 1991, when Croatia was joined with neighboring Bosnia and Herzegovina, a predominantly Islamic country.

After 1967, in the former Yugoslavia, the designation “Muslim” was used to denote the national and cultural identity of the Bosnian people, whereas the designation “muslim” (lower case) was used to identify the Islamic religion. A revitalization of Islamic religious life occurred in the 1980s, when a large Islamic center with a mosque was built in Zagreb, the first such building in Croatia. Today the Islamic community is fully integrated in Croatian society and enjoys equal rights with other religious communities.

As early as the first century BCE, Jews settled in what is now Croatia, and in the Middle Ages there were Jewish communities in the large cities. During World War II approximately 80 percent of the Jews in Croatia were victims of the pro-fascist Ustaša regime, established when the Germans defeated Yugoslavia. After the war many of the surviving Jews left. The synagogue in Zagreb, which was demolished in 1941, has not been rebuilt.

There are numerous Protestant churches in Croatia, but they are small. The introduction of Protestantism occurred in the 16th century on the borders of Croatia. In an effort to oppose German and Hungarian influences, the Croatian parliament long resisted Protestant activities. Only after World War I, with the formation of Yugoslavia, did Evangelic and Calvinistic churches in Croatia become independent of Austrian and Hungarian control. Today these churches have only small numbers of believers. The situation is similar with other Protestant communities, such as Baptists, Pentecostals, Mormons, and Seventh-day Adventists.

Only Jehovah’s Witnesses, because of their manner of evangelization, attract public attention. Jehovah’s Witnesses have been officially present in Croatia since 1953, and during the Communist period some were incarcerated because they refused to serve in military forces.

Siniša Zrinščak

See Also Vol. I: *Christianity, Eastern Orthodoxy, Islam, Roman Catholicism*

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