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## The Priorities of Pope Pius XII during the Holocaust

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**T**he summer of 2001 marked the most recent breakdown in relations between Jewish and Catholic officials. The International Jewish-Catholic Liaison Committee, formed two years ago to review the Vatican's activities during World War II, dissolved amid growing tensions among leading Jewish and Catholic scholars concerning access to still inaccessible archival materials in the Vatican. Jewish leaders lamented that the Vatican denied the commission full access to the archives, while the Vatican countered that the Jewish scholars on the committee were guilty of "irresponsible behavior" and a "defamatory campaign" (Perelman). At the heart of all the controversy stands one man: Pope Pius XII (1876-1958).

On the one hand are those who contend that Pius XII was silent during the Holocaust, and that if he had only spoken out publicly he could have saved many lives. On the other are those who believe that Pius was a benevolent man, and that he should be beatified by the Catholic Church, which is the first step toward eventual sainthood.<sup>1</sup> My goal here is not to argue for or against Pius' holiness, but rather to present evidence suggesting that many of his words and actions, sometimes explicitly and sometimes implicitly, were anti-Judaic and therefore lent themselves to the anti-Semitism of the day.<sup>2</sup> Intentionally or not, Pope Pius XII did, in fact, play a key role in Hitler's Final Solution.

*Christian Anti-Judaism and the Future Pope*

As pope, Pius XII was able to enjoy near-absolute control over German Catholics largely because of work he had done in the years preceding his papacy. During that time, he was still Eugenio Pacelli – a young Roman man born into a family with a history of close ties to the Church (Cornwell 4).<sup>3</sup> One of his first encounters with anti-Judaic sentiment may have occurred as a schoolboy in the late nineteenth century when, according to biographer John Cornwell, Pacelli's schoolmaster, Signore Marchi, ranted frequently about the "hard-heartedness" and "obstinacy" of the Jews

(Cornwell 16-17, 26). Later, as a young man, Pacelli attended the St. Apollinaris Institute where he studied canon law. The theme of his doctoral dissertation was the nature of concordats, that is, special treaties between nations or empires and the Holy See. It was also during his student years that the Jesuit journal *Civiltà Cattolica* was arguing the guilt of Alfred Dreyfus, as well as publishing articles accusing the Jews of blood libel and instigating the French Revolution (Cornwell 24, 28). Although Cornwell does not comment on Pacelli's personal views at this time, two things are clear: the future pope was very interested in papal authority, and he was growing up in close contact with anti-Jewish sentiment.

#### *Pacelli and Germany*

In 1917 Pope Benedict XV named Pacelli the papal nuncio to Munich (Cornwell 63). He later moved to Berlin, serving as nuncio there until 1929. Although Pacelli's years in Germany are mostly marked by his negotiating concordats with individual German states and eventually the Third Reich, instances of anti-Jewish feelings on his part do surface a few times in the years prior to his papacy.

In one instance, a rabbi in Munich approached the nunciature for help in obtaining palm fronds from Italy for the Feast of Tabernacles. The Jewish community had purchased the fronds already, but the Italian government had forbidden their exportation and was holding the fronds in the Italian city of Como (Cornwell 70). Pacelli's letter to his superior in the Vatican's Foreign Affairs Office indicates his stance on the request:

It seemed to me that to go along with this would be to give the Jews special assistance not within the scope of practical, arms<sup>2</sup>-length, purely civil or natural rights common to all human beings, but in a positive and direct way to assist them in the exercise of their Jewish cult [...]. (qtd. in Cornwell 70-71)<sup>4</sup>

Thus it appears that Pacelli did in fact think somewhat negatively of Jews in terms of their religion, and that he was not willing to help them in any way if it aided them in the practice of their "cult."

Pacelli wrote another letter to the same superior less than one year later, at a time when Communist revolutionaries were staging a violent coup in Munich. Pacelli, loathing Communists, had sent one of his subor-

ordinates to Max Levien, the head of the Munich soviet, to argue the nunciature's diplomatic immunity. Pacelli then described his subordinate's experience as follows:

[...] a gang of young women, of dubious appearance, Jews like all the rest of them, hanging around in all offices with lecherous demeanor and suggestive smiles. The boss of this female rabble was Levien's mistress, a young Russian woman, a Jew and divorcée, who was in charge [...], [t]his Levien is a young man, of about thirty or thirty-five, also Russian and a Jew. Pale, dirty, with drugged eyes, hoarse voice, vulgar, repulsive, with a face that is both intelligent and sly. (qtd. in Cornwell 74-75)<sup>5</sup>

Why did Pacelli find it necessary to mention repeatedly the (repulsive) Jewishness of these people? We know that many Germans at this time believed that Jews had instigated the Bolshevik revolution, and it appears that Pacelli's views were also of this nature.<sup>6</sup> But the fact that he used descriptions such as "lecherous demeanor", "suggestive smiles," and "intelligent and sly" – epithets commonly found in anti-Semitic racial folklore – suggests that his feelings toward Jews may have been more than just political in nature.

In December 1929, Pacelli returned to Rome as the newly appointed Cardinal Secretary of State, the most powerful post in the Vatican next to the Pope (Cornwell 104). His tenure in this position (1929-1939) was marked by his frequent negotiations for concordats between the Church and individual German states, culminating with the Reich Concordat of 1933 after heated debates with, among others, Hitler himself. Although such dealings appear purely political on the surface, the repercussions of the Reich Concordat on Jews as well as Pacelli's ambivalence toward the "Jewish question" are worth a closer examination.

The Baden Concordat of 1932 is an example of Pacelli's inadvertently lending support to anti-Semitism. In the months preceding the Concordat, the Baden government was engaged in an uneasy standoff between the ruling Catholic Center Party and the Social Democrats. Due to this volatile political climate, the Center Party's leader in Baden, Peter Fohr, urged Pacelli to postpone a concordat (Cornwell 125). Pacelli, wanting to further his own agenda of Church-State relations posthaste, then threatened to pull rank on the local church authorities and appoint a new arch-

bishop to Freiburg after the previous one had unexpectedly died. He carried out his threat in the spring of 1932, appointing, "without reference to the rights or wishes of the diocese," bishop Konrad Gröber, a Nazi sympathizer (Cornwell 126). Although Gröber would eventually disapprove of Nazi genocide, the move clearly demonstrates that Pacelli was willing to lend support to National Socialism if it served the purpose of "protecting" Catholicism in Germany.

Pacelli's ultimate victory as Secretary of State came with the passage of the Reich Concordat. Ever fearful that Communism might spread to Europe, Pacelli had begun pressuring the leadership of the Catholic Center Party to avoid collaborations with the Social Democrats and instead move closer to the National Socialists (Cornwell 116). His main impetus for so doing was, that while Lenin and Stalin had never hidden their "war on religion," the Nazis had vowed not to destroy Christianity (Cornwell 112). Pacelli, who did not like most Nazi policies, nevertheless saw National Socialism as the lesser of two evils.<sup>7</sup>

The Reich Concordat went into effect on July 20, 1933. While it guaranteed the Church certain freedoms associated with Catholic schools and the clergy, the Reich Concordat also effectively banned clergy and other members of Catholic associations from party political activities *as Catholics* (Cornwell 147). Interestingly, in the months leading up to the signing of the Concordat, Nazi officials had arrested ninety-two priests and shut down nine Catholic publications, while SA brownshirts had violently attacked sixteen Catholic youth clubs (McInerney 30). Furthermore, during a cabinet meeting on July 14, Hitler commented that the concordat would be "especially significant in the urgent struggle against international Jewry" (qtd. in Cornwell 152).

And yet Pacelli proceeded with concordat negotiations. When Ivone Kirkpatrick of the British Legation in Rome asked Pacelli why he had acquiesced in the midst of Nazi violence, Pacelli replied, "I had to choose between an agreement on these lines and the virtual elimination of the Catholic Church in the Reich" (qtd. in McInerney 30). This statement highlights the future Pontiff's central objective – to preserve the Catholic Church in the German Reich, even if concessions had to be made. Additionally, he believed the Concordat could be used as a basis for protesting future violations. But most important, as Hitler's quote demonstrates, was the Reich Concordat's prohibition of Catholics partaking in political action as Catholics. According to Cornwell, "[S]ince the persecution and

elimination of the Jews in Germany was by now a stated policy, the treaty had legally bound the Catholic Church in Germany to silence on outrages against the Jews" (153).

#### *Further Evidence of Pacelli's Anti-Judaism: 1938 and 1939*

In the year before he was to be elected pope, Eugenio Pacelli twice demonstrated anti-Jewish feelings, once in word and once in deed. In May 1938, Pacelli opened the thirty-fourth International Eucharistic Congress in Budapest, Hungary. Anti-Semitism was on the rise in Hungary, and at the very moment when Pacelli delivered his address the Hungarian parliament was discussing (and would eventually pass) anti-Semitic laws (Phayer 4). Rather than take advantage of the chance to condemn Hungarian anti-Semitism at this very large and public forum, Pacelli instead made reference to the Jews "whose lips curse [Christ] and whose hearts reject him even today" (Phayer 5). These words, though not overtly anti-Semitic in a political sense, nevertheless contained an anti-Jewish religious tone and were very likely meant as an appeasement to the new, virulently anti-Semitic prime minister of Hungary-Béla Imrédy (Cornwell 185).

The other moment of Pacelli's ambivalence toward Jews came very shortly before Pius XI's death in February 1939. Toward the end of his life, Pius XI had become increasingly disgusted by Nazi treatment of European Jews and felt moved to commission an encyclical on anti-Semitism, *Humani generis unitas*, in late summer 1938 (Cornwell 189). Later in the same year he would issue a statement in which he noted, "[A]nti-Semitism is inadmissible; spiritually we are all Semites" (qtd. in Cornwell 190). Cornwell points out that neither the Vatican's daily newspaper *L'Osservatore Romano*, which Pacelli controlled, nor *Civiltà Cattolica* published the Pope's words. They appeared instead one week later in a Belgian newspaper.

In February 1939, Pius XI was awaiting the first draft of the encyclical. He received it days before his death on February 9, but Pacelli, according to Cornwell, buried the document "deep in the secret archives" (192). Pacelli, knowing in all likelihood he was to be the next pope, was apparently more interested in maintaining diplomatic relations with the Nazi regime than confronting Catholic Germans with a question of moral conscience. Such a moral dilemma could have potentially risked the lives of Catholics as well as weakened those nations combating the specter of

Communism.

*Pius' XII Ambivalence toward the Jews, 1939-1943*

Pacelli was, indeed, Pius' XI successor. He also chose the name Pius as his papal moniker, and on March 12, 1939, the Vatican formally installed him as Pope Pius XII. One of his first actions as pope was to send a conciliatory letter to "the Illustrious Herr Adolph Hitler," with the implicit intent that such a letter would help keep the Reich Concordat in place. Pius even directed his nuncio in Berlin, Cesare Orsenigo, to arrange a gala reception for Hitler's fiftieth birthday (208-210).

Hitler invaded Poland on September 1, 1939, and a wave of persecution against all Poles, Catholic and Jewish, started immediately. By 1941, some 500 priests were in concentration camps and by the end of the war the Nazis had killed 2600 Polish clergy (Phayer 22). In spite of repeated pleas from Polish bishops, Pius XII continually refrained from openly condemning the Nazis "out of consideration for repercussions on Roman Catholics of the Reich (qtd. in Phayer 24)".<sup>8</sup> Early into the war, the Vatican radio and press did inform the world of the suffering of the Polish people, and Pius XII addressed the maltreatment of the elderly, women, and children before the College of Cardinals in December 1939 (Phayer 24-25). After 1941, however, Pius kept relatively silent on the issue, and when he did make public statements, they were vague and avoided naming the Nazis as perpetrators. This theme of silence and clouded statements is important because it would occur again repeatedly after the Holocaust began in earnest in 1942.

*Deafening Silence*

Even prior to 1942, the Nazis had established a program of anti-Semitism in each country they occupied, and the Vatican was largely aware of these measures. For example, beginning in 1941, the Vichy government of France passed a series of anti-Semitic decrees, the first of which banned Jews from public service (Phayer 5). Several members of the clergy in France made pleas to the Pope for intervention, but, as Günter Lewy points out, "The Holy See merely counseled that no provisions on marriage be added to the statutes and 'that the precepts of justice and charity be considered in the application of the law'" (143).

The lack of concern for Jews unless the issue in question somehow involved Catholics surfaced again in 1941, this time in Slovakia. The new anti-Semitic code in this largely Catholic country prohibited marriage between Jews and non-Jews (Phayer 5). Michael Phayer notes that this time the Holy See took notice and voiced its disapproval (5). The difference between the incidents in France and Slovakia seems to indicate that the Vatican was certainly concerned with what it considered one of its own sacraments – marriage – but not with Nazi racist policy.

The situation for Jews in Croatia was worse. Under the leadership of Ante Pavelic, the fascist and pro-Catholic head of the Ustasha government in Croatia, Jews were deprived of their citizenship and forced to wear the Star of David beginning in May 1941 (Phayer 33). By the end of the year, the Vatican had received the first reports of the persecution. On August 14, the president of the Union for the Israelite Community of Altari wrote to Vatican Secretary of State Luigi Maglione pleading for Croatia's Jews, but Cornwell notes there is "no record of a response or action on the part of the Holy See" (256-7). In April of 1942 Bishop Alojzije Stepinac delivered a nine-page account of Ustashi misdeeds to the Vatican, which was later omitted from the Vatican's collection of World War II documents. The Holy See remained silent on the issue, in spite of the fact that the Croat fascists, unlike their Nazi counterparts, made no secret of their murderous policies.

In August 1942, Pius again received news of the genocide, this time from the Croatian rabbi Miroslav Shalom Freiburger, who implored the pope to help save his country's Jews. Phayer writes that Pius then instructed Apostolic Visitor Marcone "to thank [the rabbi] for his letter, but to do so prudently and tactfully." Rabbi Freiburger died in Auschwitz a few months later, along with 6000-7000 other Croatian Jews (37-38).<sup>9</sup> The Vatican was simply not willing to condemn the Croatian government publicly because it wanted to maintain diplomatic ties, and because it hoped that the violence represented only a sort of "growing pain" that the fledgling Catholic state was going through.

In December 1941, the first death camp had been established near Lodz, Poland (Lewy 137). Sobibor, Treblinka, and Auschwitz began operations in 1942. Owen Chadwick notes that "everyone" knew by 1941 that Jews were being deported to the East, but no one believed they would be murdered there (204-5). Chadwick goes on to point out that people should have had an idea, given that in January 1942 Hitler delivered a

series of speeches in which he ranted against the Jews and implied their liquidation (205).

Throughout the summer of 1942 the BBC and London's *Daily Telegraph* released reports about the deportations to and murders in the camps of Eastern Europe (Chadwick 208). Furthermore, three Jewish inmates of the Polish camps escaped to the West and told their story in American newspapers (Chadwick 284). And yet Pius XII remained silent on the subject. Meanwhile, the Vatican was receiving its own internal accounts of these atrocities – accounts it chose either to ignore or to downplay as propaganda or exaggeration. Three of the earliest reports are as follows:

1. In October 1941, Chargé d'Affaires Giuseppe Burzio of Slovakia sent reports to the Vatican of Jews being immediately shot by Germans.
2. Gerhart Riegner of the World Jewish Congress sent a memo in March 1942 to the nuncio in Bern, Monsignor Filippi Bernardini, stating that there was sufficient information from a number of sources to verify Jewish extermination. (Document omitted from Vatican collection *Actes et Documents*).
3. Ambassador Kazimierz Papée (Poland) and Envoy Myron C. Taylor (U.S.) sent memos dated September 26, 1942, to Secretary of State Maglione reporting on the liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto, mass executions at special killing centers, and mass deportations of Jews from various European countries. (Phayer 48-49)<sup>10</sup>

Additionally, the Vatican received an account in mid- to late 1942 from SS officer Kurt Gerstein about how he had witnessed the torture and gassing of 700 to 800 Jews at the Belzec death camp. After nuncio Orsenigo refused to see him, Gerstein told his story to an anti-Nazi bishop in Berlin who relayed the information to the Vatican. As Phayer points out, Gerstein's report "died" in the Vatican and was not relayed to other countries, such as France, where the deportations had not yet started (46). The Holy See neither made such reports public nor released them privately to other church leaders in Europe.

According to one account, Pius XII made up his mind to be silent on the fate of the Jews once and for all after the Nazis initiated a policy of deportation in the Netherlands (Cornwell 286-87).<sup>11</sup> Once the deportations got under way, Catholic and Protestant churches threatened a wide-

spread Christian protest if they did not cease. The Nazis then responded that they would exempt those Christian Jews who had converted before 1941 if the churches remained silent. The Catholic archbishop of Utrecht rejected the offer and issued a public letter of denunciation to local churches. As a result, the Nazi soldiers rounded up all the Jews they could find and deported them. Upon hearing the news, Pius reportedly made up his mind resolutely that silence was better, because if the protest of one archbishop had caused such a terrible tragedy, then a public denunciation from the Holy See potentially would have caused even more death – for Jews, converted Jews, and Christians alike. In a recent article, Daniel Goldhagen rejects such an alibi for two reasons. First of all, he notes that "it is disingenuous to present this as an instance of a Church attempt to help Jews that [in turn] led the Germans to kill Jews whom they would otherwise have not killed. Quite simply, in the eyes of the Church, these people were not Jews but Catholics" (26). Furthermore, Goldhagen points out, the Church quickly learned that these Catholics were doomed anyway when the Nazis began deporting Protestants who had converted from Judaism, although Dutch Protestant churches had not protested publicly (26).<sup>12</sup>

As deportations in the Netherlands and France began in full force, foreign diplomats in the Vatican decided they would have to confront the Pope about his silence. One of the first to do so was Hugh Montgomery, assistant to the British minister to the Holy See. Montgomery explained to Pius that "the Poles had hoped for some further expression of sympathy from the Holy See," to which Pius replied, "But I have already done so much!" He cited his Easter broadcast of 1941 which had been suppressed in Germany because the Nazi regime knew its real message, and he went on to note that correspondence from the Vatican to Poland was intercepted by the Germans. If such correspondence were to contain names and details, it would only harm the victims more (Chadwick 212).

By December 1942 British minister Francis D'Arcy Osborne was so appalled by the atrocities of the war that he felt he had to encourage the Pope as forcefully as possible to speak out against the Nazis. Diplomats from the United States, France, Poland and Brazil had also requested a denunciation of genocide (Cornwell 288). Jewish communities from around the world beseeched the Pope to do what he could. Osborne was convinced that the Vatican was being silent because Pius was not yet sure which side would win the war, and because he was highly fearful of an Allied bombardment.

Shortly before Christmas 1942, Osborne delivered a declaration on the persecution of the Jews to Pius, drafted by Great Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union. Osborne pleaded with the Pope to simply endorse it, but was soundly rejected. Cornwell notes of the reason, "The Pope could not condemn 'particular' atrocities, neither could he verify the Allies' reports on the number of Jews murdered" (291). The Pope decided instead to address the violence of the war in his annual Christmas broadcast. During the radio address, Pius condemned war, killing, and displacement, but not once did he use the words "Nazi" or "Jew" (293). The address was sweeping and ambiguous, and one very well could have interpreted it as applying to either the Axis or to the Allies.

#### *Liquidation of the Roman Ghetto*

By the summer of 1943, the Allies had gained control of Sicily and were pushing northward toward Rome. As the fighting got underway in Italy, the Pope's fears of an aerial bombardment of Rome increased. Although Pius XII would not speak out publicly against the Holocaust, the Holy See did communicate with Envoy Taylor and American Chargé d'Affaires Harold Tittman at least thirty-four times between the summer of 1943 and the summer of 1944 in an effort to forestall the bombing of Rome (Phayer 61). The Allies, however, were apparently not too concerned about the Pope's pleas. This was due in large part to the fact that Pius had been quick to condemn Allied bombings of German civilians and churches, but, back in 1940 and 1941, he had failed to denounce the German bombings of England. When President Roosevelt stated that "war is war," and that he could not guarantee the safety of Vatican property, the Holy See responded with a threat of public denunciation should the Allies bomb the Vatican (Phayer 62). Phayer points out that, "[n]o such threat was ever made regarding the murder of the Jews" (62).

By September 1943, Hitler had made the decision to extend the Final Solution to all parts of occupied Europe. The chief of German security police in Rome, SS Lieutenant Colonel Herbert Kappler, was told by his superiors in Berlin to prepare a surprise roundup of Rome's Jews and to do so as clandestinely as possible. On September 26, Kappler summoned two of Rome's most prominent Jewish leaders, Dante Almansì and Ugo Foà, whom he told that if Rome's Jews could not produce for him fifty kilograms of gold in thirty-six hours, then the Nazis would take two

hundred Jews and deport them to Germany. If the Jewish community could provide the gold, then Kappler could guarantee no harm would come to any of them (Zuccotti 153).

With such a threat facing the Roman Jews, Pius XII did finally act directly on their behalf. The community in Rome was small, numbering about 8000, and it was only able to generate thirty-five kilograms of gold after the deadline had been extended by a few hours (Zuccotti 153-4). Approached by Jewish leaders for help, Pius approved a loan from the Vatican treasury to cover the balance. The transaction was made to the Germans' satisfaction, and Rome's Jews felt a sense of security.

The pope's benevolence is, however, thrown into question when one considers that he knew of the impending roundup of the Jews at least one week before it started on October 15 but apparently failed to warn anyone (Phayer 98). In the weeks leading up to October 15, Berlin had informed its ambassador to the Vatican, Ernst von Weizsäcker, that he should exact a public statement from the Vatican that the German army's behavior in Rome had been proper. With the statement still pending, it appeared to Weizsäcker that the Vatican was in a position to put behind the scenes pressure on the German authorities to delay or prevent the scheduled SS seizure of the Jews, which he had learned was now imminent (Phayer 98).

Weizsäcker informed the Vatican of what he knew about one week before the Jewish arrests commenced. The Vatican, however, did not inform Jewish community leaders. Instead, it was Weizsäcker's deputy, Albrecht von Kessel, who attempted to warn Rome's Jews of the impending "resettlement" plans (Phayer 99). He failed for the most part. Most of the people he warned did not believe that they could actually be exterminated. One can only speculate if a warning from the Pope would have helped more, but, coupled with Kessel's warnings and endorsed by prominent Jewish leaders, such a warning could very well have encouraged more Jewish families to go into hiding or flee. At any rate, one thing is clear – it was a few Germans, not the Vatican, who attempted to warn Roman Jews of their impending doom.

The roundup began on October 15-16, 1943. On October 18, approximately 1,023 detained Jews were transported out of the city via freight cars to Auschwitz. Within a week, all but 196 had been gassed (Zuccotti 155-6). Of the remaining 196, only 17 would survive. During and immediately following the roundup, Pius XII remained silent, even

though the events described here happened in the immediate vicinity of the Vatican.

Two main reasons have been cited as to why he refused to issue a public condemnation. The first is that approximately 4000-5000 Jews had gone into hiding, and the Pope feared that a public outcry would only encourage the Nazis to seek them out, too. The second reason hinges on the first. If the Nazis became too outraged or doubtful of the Vatican's neutrality, then Hitler could very well have given the order to invade Rome and use it as a base of operations in Italy. Such a circumstance would have increased greatly the risk of an Allied bombardment over Rome, which the Pope wanted to avoid at all costs (Phayer 100).

Although publicly silent, it is important to know that the Vatican did aid the Jews privately during the liquidation of the Roman ghetto. For example, many of Rome's remaining Jews found safe refuge in the Vatican's various properties around the city. Pius had given an order to church superiors in these properties to open their doors to Jews, although many monks, nuns, and others had been doing so already even before the Vatican's instructions. It is also possible that a small number of Jews were able to find shelter in the Vatican itself, although recent scholarship has not been able to confirm it (Phayer 102).

In December 1943, Italy's fascist puppet regime threatened to send all remaining Italian Jews to concentration camps.<sup>13</sup> The Vatican newspaper *L'Osservatore Romano* protested vehemently this time, calling the order un-Christian with regard to all Jews, converted and non-converted, asserted that Italian Jews were rightful citizens, and that the fascists must obey public law (Phayer 103). Why did the Vatican protest this time but not two months earlier? The answer lies in whom the Vatican directed its charges against. The Vatican knew that leveling charges against the native-born fascists in staunchly pro-Catholic Italy posed a great threat neither to its integrity nor to its physical property. The Germans were not directly involved in this instance. Furthermore, the anti-Jewish policies of the puppet government had never been popular among Roman citizens, thus the Vatican probably knew its readers would appreciate such comments (Lewy 146).

### Conclusion

No current research seems to indicate that Pius XII was an overt anti-Semite, nor do I believe he was. He definitely felt a special affection for Germany and its people, but he was not a fan of Hitler. Pius was outraged, for example, over Hitler's 1942 implication that the Reich Concordat would be key to the "struggle against international Jewry." In *L'Osservatore Romano* Pius emphatically denied that the concordat was an endorsement of National Socialism. He viewed the concordat, rather, as a victory for Catholicism because it ensured the Reich's total recognition and acceptance of the Church's law (Cornwell 130-31).

Furthermore, Pius XII did speak out at times against wartime atrocities. For example, he had voiced his concern publicly on a few occasions, as in his Christmas 1942 address, even though he failed every time to name "Jews" and "Nazis" explicitly. And the Vatican had aided many people, including Jews, in their efforts to leave Nazi-occupied countries for safe havens elsewhere (Zuccotti 300-1).

The Church was particularly interested in the well-being of members who had converted from Judaism, and this issue represents a clear division between Nazi anti-Semitism and religious anti-Judaism. Since the Church's official stance was religious and not racial on questions of faith, Catholicism had no problem with persons who had converted and been baptized. Baptism basically "erased" one's Jewishness. For the Nazis, however, this was not the case. A person's religion could change, but an inherent Jewish essence was still present. On this touchy subject the Church came into conflict with Nazi policy time and again. However, a divisive issue like converts was an exception to the otherwise peaceful coexistence of Catholic prejudices and anti-Semitic dogma.

Simply put, Pius XII embodied the historic Christian anti-Judaism that had existed since approximately 100 C.E. The actions and comments from his days as nuncio in Munich and Berlin attest to this. Such an anti-Jewish sentiment, even if purely religious in nature, could only have complemented a Christian and National Socialist country like Germany with a radical anti-Semite as absolute ruler.

The centuries-old tradition of blaming the Jews for the death of Christ is therefore at the heart of Pius' complacency on issues of genocide. His allegiance was to his Church and his religion. His interest in those who did not accept the divinity of Jesus Christ was necessarily secondary

at best. At some point he must have realized the serious nature of such anti-Judaism, because he stopped issuing defamatory statements like the one he had made in 1938 in Budapest and instead adopted a policy of silence. This policy of silence is what has fueled an ongoing debate and is the reason why Catholic and Jewish scholars saw the necessity to form the now defunct International Jewish-Catholic Liaison Committee mentioned at the beginning of this essay.

Central to Catholic theology is the belief that all human life has value and is to be respected. Historically central to the Church is also the conviction of its spiritual supremacy, as evidenced by a passage from the Nicene Creed and still recited at Catholic mass: "We believe in one holy, Catholic and apostolic Church" (Kelly). It appears then that Pius XII placed greater emphasis on maintaining Church authority than on valuing *all* human life. This ordering of priorities – coupled with fears of Nazi reprisal, Communism, and the desire to be a peace negotiator – is what contributed to his silence concerning the plight of Europe's Jews. Whether or not he could have handled matters differently and thus saved lives is the subject of many scholarly works and no doubt will continue to be for some time to come.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> The Reverend Peter Gumpel of the Jesuits has been the coordinator of the Pius XII beatification process since 1983.

<sup>2</sup> The tradition of Catholic anti-Judaism and its implications is the subject of David I. Kertzer's book *The Popes Against the Jews*. New York: Knopf, 2001.

<sup>3</sup> Pacelli was born on March 2, 1876. The rest of the information in this paragraph also comes from Cornwell.

<sup>4</sup> Quotation taken from: Vatican SRS, Germania, 1917, Fasc. 852, folio 4.

<sup>5</sup> Quotation taken from: Vatican SRS, Baviera, letter from Pacelli to Gasparri, April 18, 1919. Folio 37.

<sup>6</sup> According to Kertzer, Pacelli's predecessor, Pope Pius XI, also believed the Jews to be at least partly responsible for the Bolshevik Revolution and voiced his concerns about Jewish threats in a 1932 conversation with Mussolini (263).

<sup>7</sup> A similar situation existed in Italy between the Church and Italian fascists. Denis Mack Smith notes in his book *Mussolini* that, although the Church did

not support all tenets of fascism, the papacy nevertheless did not want Italy's government to be agnostic and liberal as in the past, and it preferred to see Italian Catholics allying themselves with fascism rather than with socialism (80-81).

<sup>8</sup> Even some of the *Volksdeutsche*, or ethnic German, priests in Poland wrote letters to the Vatican pleading for help.

<sup>9</sup> By war's end, 50,000 Croatian Jews had been either murdered or deported. Between 300,000-400,000 Serbs were also murdered.

<sup>10</sup> I am also indebted to Phayer for the information about Kurt Gerstein. Gerstein had made his initial report in late 1941 or early 1942 (45-46).

<sup>11</sup> The account comes from Pius' housekeeper of forty years, Sister Pasqualina, who narrated her information to the tribunal supporting Pius' beatification. Cornwell provides the details, and also casts doubt on Sister Pasqualina's story.

<sup>12</sup> Goldhagen's new book, *A Moral Reckoning: The Catholic Church During the Holocaust and Today*, is scheduled to be published by Knopf in Fall 2002.

<sup>13</sup> According to Denis Mack Smith, Mussolini, like many Italians, had never really bought into Nazi ideas of racial purity. But he was opportunistic and afraid of his ally Hitler, and therefore issued anti-Semitic decrees to show solidarity with Nazism (221, 312).

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