

**Pius XII:
War, peace and the Jewish question**

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Abstract

This article deals with the response of Catholics to the Nazi threat in Germany in the years 1939 to 1945. In it I argue that Catholics, and in particular Pope Pius XII (1876–1958), did in fact respond to the Nazi racial policy that led to the extermination of Jews during the Holocaust (1939–1943). Documents such as the *Reichskonkordat* (Reich Concordat, signed on 20 July 1933) and *Mit brennender Sorge* (With Burning Concern, published on 10 March 1937) expressly criticised the Germans for their policy of racial superiority. Pius XII, who became pope in the year in which World War II began and died 13 years after it ended, his pontificate having continued into the Cold War period, played a significant role.

Aspects explored in this article include Vatican diplomacy and its impact on the Jews, a radio message read by Pius XII and the encyclical *Meminisse Juvat*, the defamation of Pius XII, and world peace in relation to Church freedom. It is hoped that a consideration of these aspects will illustrate the shortcomings of statements alone in effecting change within society. The question remains: Did Pius XII, as pontiff, do enough to stop the Holocaust? In this article I concentrate mainly on the World War II period, but in light of Pius XII's mistrust of communism in both Russia and Italy, I will also pay some attention to the Cold War period. Although I concentrate on Pius XII, I will also mention the initiatives of the Catholic Church in the period 1939 to 1958.

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Introduction

In this article I investigate part of the life of Eugenio Pacelli, Pope Pius XII, known because of his work during World Wars I and II and the Cold War as the architect of peace. I will consider three periods: pre-1939, 1939 to 1945, and post-1945. The question is whether Pope Pius XII and, by extension the Catholic Church, did enough to sue for peace during these periods, when countries in Europe were at war. Some people are of the view that during the periods under scrutiny, public statements could have changed the course of history, and that pressure should have been put on leaders, both political and ecclesiastical, to speak out against atrocities such as the Holocaust. Critical questions are asked about public statements and the signing of concordats and whether anyone takes heed of such statements or the terms of reference within concordats.

Biographical note

Eugenio Maria Giuseppe Giovanni Pacelli was born in Rome on 2 March 1876, and died on 9 October 1958. His parents were Filippo Pacelli and Virginia Pacelli (née Graziosi). The family attended mass at Chiesa Nuova. Eugenio Pacelli studied theology at Almo Collegio Capranica, philosophy at the Pontifical Gregorian University and canon law at Sant'Apollinaire. He also studied history and modern languages at the State University of La Sapienza. Pacelli was ordained to the ministerial priesthood on 2 April 1899.

In 1901 he entered the Papal Secretariat of State and worked with Pietro Gasparri in drawing up the Code of Canon Law. In 1911 he became the assistant Secretary of State and in 1912 Pro-Secretary of State. Pacelli was consecrated titular archbishop of Sardes by Benedict XV on 13 May 1917, and was at the same time appointed nuncio of Bavaria, representing the Vatican in its peace efforts involving Germany.² On 22 June 1920 he became the papal nuncio to Germany. He became a cardinal in 1929 and was made Secretary of State on 7 February 1930. On 5 June 1933 Pacelli signed a Concordat with Austria and on 20 July another Concordat was signed with the German Republic. A central issue appears to have been the prevention of government interference in the Catholic schools. These agreements were first encouraged by Hitler, and were also seen as necessary in light of the irreconcilable differences between the Catholic Church and the national socialism practised by Hitler's government. Catholic interests in Germany had to be protected, but unfortunately the terms of the concordat³ were

² R. Leiber and R. McNerny (editors), sv Pius XII, Pope, 2003. *New Catholic Encyclopedia*. Second Edition. Washington: Thomson Gale, 396.

³ John Morley lists four issues secured by the concordat of 1933: (a) The existence and support of the Catholic schools was assured. (b) Hitler effectively removed the clergy from

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broken by Hitler almost as soon as these agreements had been signed. Pacelli wrote 60 memoranda urging Germany to be faithful to the concordat. The Reich Concordat was aimed at supporting the Catholic schools in Germany. In consequence, the hierarchy and clergy had to take an oath of loyalty to the government. The appointment of bishops included a veto by the government: this was a means for Hitler to remove the clergy from politics. Cardinal Pacelli was elected Pope on 2 March 1939, and inaugurated on 12 March of that same year.

On 3 May 1939, Pius XII engaged in a diplomatic initiative to hold a peace conference to be attended by Italy, France, Germany, Poland and Britain. Many thought this peace initiative to be premature, as Hitler considered it pointless. On 24 August 1939 Pacelli continued to work for peace, declaring: "Nothing is lost by peace; everything is lost by war."⁴ Pius XII kept up correspondence with the German resistance and the Allies so as to bring about an armistice and peace negotiations. Late in 1939 Pacelli held personal meetings with King Victor Emmanuel III and corresponded with Mussolini in an endeavour to keep Italy out of the war and to have Rome recognised as an open city by the warring nations. The fact that Pacelli remained in Rome throughout the war saved the city, and resulted in its being respected by the warring nations.

Vatican diplomacy and the Jews

Pius XII continued Pius XI's programme of assisting Jews, especially those in Germany. Jewish refugees received financial assistance, and Pius XII donated all his personal funds to the Jewish cause. In September 1943, when the Germans invaded Rome, Pius XII contributed 15 kilogrammes of gold to make up the 50 kilogrammes of gold demanded of the Jews in the city of Rome. The regulations in cloisters were lifted to accommodate 4 447 Jews. The Vatican information service handled 37 000 cases of Jews in need of help, especially those in Germany. Pius XII gave more than \$4 million in aid to the Jews, and condemned the extermination of the Jews on two occasions – for the first time on 24 December 1942 in a Christmas message, and for the second time on 2 June 1943 in a speech to the College of Cardinals. It is not clear what else he could have done to halt Hitler's programme of annihilating the Jewish people.

Pope Pius XII chose the path of diplomacy as a means to respond to the Nazi threat to the Jews in Europe: "Vatican diplomacy was the principal

politics. (c) The appointment of Catholic bishops was to be made with a government veto. (d) The Catholic hierarchy and clergy had to take an oath of loyalty to the government. Cf. J. Morley, 1980. *Vatican Diplomacy and the Jews during the Holocaust 1939–1943*. New York: KTAV, 103.

⁴ R. Leiber and R. McNemy (editors), *op cit*, 397.

instrument used by the Catholic Church in attempting to exert its moral authority during the Second World War.⁵ Vatican diplomacy includes the specific orders and instructions given to the representatives of the Catholic Church. John Morley researched this topic by means of a study of the correspondence between Rome and the various Catholic papal nuncios throughout Europe. But how effective was the effort at diplomacy in assisting the Jews, who were threatened with genocide in Hitler's final solution? It must be remembered that Jewish converts to Catholicism were also under threat, and did not receive assistance from Jewish organisations because they were considered apostates to the Jewish faith. Pius XII elected to negotiate with the heads of both the Axis and the Allied powers. He chose to criticise in terms of general principles of war and peace and to allow the press, mainly *The New York Times*⁶ and *The Tablet*,⁷ to assign blame – to Hitler, in this case. As head of an independent state, Pius XII wanted Rome to remain neutral, like Spain and Switzerland, and to achieve this he had to be on good terms with Benito Mussolini as well. It is important in a study of the Holocaust to pay attention not only to the victims and perpetrators, but also to the bystanders. Awareness of this lends greater importance to the actions of Pius XII and the Catholic community in Europe at the time of the annihilation of the Jews.

The issue of jurisdiction was a crucial factor with regard to the fate of Jews in Germany. During the Third Reich the Jews in Germany were not considered Germans. This meant that the papal nuncio in Berlin, Archbishop Cesare Orsenigo, could not petition on their behalf, since they were not Catholic and they were not regarded as Germans. This might also be considered a side issue, as Orsenigo was pro-Nazi.⁸ The aims of Vatican diplomacy were four-fold and served to protect the interests of the Catholic Church as well as to take up humanitarian issues in those countries to which nuncios were sent to represent the Vatican. The nuncios had to ensure that reason prevailed over force, as they guided civil diplomacy. They were also responsible for the collaboration of the local people in the pursuit of peace and progress. The Catholic Church did speak out concerning the welfare of

⁵ J. Morley, *op cit*, 6.

⁶ In *The New York Times* of 28 October 1939 it was reported: "It is Germany that stands condemned above any country and any movement in this encyclical – the Germany of Hitler and National Socialism." Cited in R. McNemy, 2001, *The Defamation of Pius XII*. St. Augustine's Press: South Bend, Indiana, 161.

⁷ *Ibid*, 163. McNemy goes on to quote *The Tablet* of 24 October 1942: "The extreme Nazi organs in Germany have been expressing great dissatisfaction at concessions made to the Vatican during the past two months which have enabled about 300 Jews to leave Nazi-occupied countries, including the ghettos of Poland, and to go to Spain and Portugal. The Vatican appears to have obtained Spanish and Portuguese visas for these Jews."

⁸ J. Morley, *op cit*, 104. "There is little doubt that Orsenigo's sympathies lay with the Nazis, at least in the sense that the popularity of the regime demanded some support from the clergy and from Catholics."

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baptised Jews⁹ and Jews of mixed gentile and Jewish ancestry.¹⁰ The correspondence of the German bishops with the Vatican went directly to Pius XII, thereby bypassing Orsenigo.

The Nazis implemented legislation to segregate the Jews and then to deport them to labour and concentration camps. On 15 October 1942 Orsenigo asked for information about the condition and whereabouts of the deported Jews.¹¹ This was not a clear protest at the treatment of the Jews, and one is led to deduce that he could even have been sympathetic to the Nazis in their discrimination against the Jews. When the Jews were required to wear the Star of David as a distinguishing sign, some Catholic Churches insisted that the Jewish Catholics be seated in a separate part of the Church. John Morley,¹² in his concluding notes on the situation of the Jews in Germany, mentions three salient points that could indicate what hampered Orsenigo in his intentions. First, the confusion and propaganda of wartime made it difficult for the sources of information to be verified. Second, the autocratic tendencies of Pius XII and his close interest in Germany weakened Orsenigo's position. Third, with a single exception, the instructions that came from Cardinal Luigi Maglione, the Secretary of State in Rome, never once expressed concern for the welfare of the Jews. The Secretary of State had received information from numerous sources, and could have verified the facts to acknowledge that the situation of the Jews in Europe was dire, and therefore have expressed concern for their future welfare. Further blame can be heaped on Maglione, who did not send clear instructions from Rome that intervention on behalf of the Jews was necessary. Responsibility for the fate of the Jews was laid on the shoulders of the Jewish aid organisations.

Cardinal Maglione, the Secretary of State, and Pope Pius XII were in daily contact to follow the developments of the war and the Jewish question in particular. Despite placing considerable emphasis on diplomacy as a means to address the various crises during the war, Pacelli nevertheless failed to use diplomacy to the fullest in assisting the Jews in the catastrophic situation in which they found themselves. He maintained the Catholic Church's network of nuncios throughout the period of the war, yet applied himself with reserve and prudence in his diplomatic initiatives. Although Pacelli and Maglione did much for the Jews during World War II, they could have done more if they

⁹ *Ibid*, 108. Morley points out: "In May 1939 he [Orsenigo] indicated that there was a Catholic office in Vienna which was aiding baptized Jews to emigrate."

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 121. There was a category of people in Germany referred to as the *mischlinge* (people of mixed gentile and Jewish descent). "Many of them [*mischlinge*] were married to Germans and often had been raised as Christians themselves."

¹¹ J. Morley, *op cit*, 124. "On October 15, 1942, at a meeting with Ernst Woermann, director of the Political Department of the German Foreign Ministry, he [Orsenigo] asked about the Jews deported from France. The only reply he received was a simple denial of knowledge of the situation."

¹² J. Morley, *op cit*, 126–128.

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had chosen to. The Pope and the Vatican could have excommunicated all Nazis from the Catholic Church. There could have been a clear statement condemning the Holocaust, of which sufficient evidence was presented by the papal nuncios in the German-controlled regions of Europe. Vatican diplomacy could have done more from a humanitarian point of view to alleviate the suffering of the victims of the war.¹³ In short, Vatican diplomacy failed the Jews in particular, as the Vatican did not do all that was possible to rescue more Jews from the concentration camps and Hitler's final solution for the Jews. Despite knowledge of the death camps, the Vatican assisted only those Jews who were baptised, and even limited assistance to those who had been baptised for a long time.

The Five Peace Points¹⁴

On Christmas Eve in 1942, Pope Pius XII read a message over the radio in which he set out the Five Peace Points. These were:

1. Dignity and rights of the human person.
2. Defence of social unity and especially the family.
3. Dignity and prerogatives of labour.
4. Rehabilitation of juridical order.
5. Conception of the State according to the Christian spirit.

Pius XII began by pointing out that Jesus is a light that shines in the darkness, and that the world is plunged into the darkness of fatal errors.

She [The Church] does not intend to take sides for or against either of the particular forms of which the several peoples and States strive to solve the gigantic problems of domestic order or international collaboration, as long as these forms comply with the law of God.¹⁵

Thus the Catholic Church strove to be a neutral pillar of truth with the capacity to guide nations during the strife of World War II. The Holy Pontiff spoke in general rather than mentioning specific countries and their policies. It was clear that the Pope could not change the mind of Hitler through words

¹³ There were two sides to Vatican diplomacy: the protection of the interests of the Catholic Church world-wide, and also the concern for the local people in countries where there were papal nuncios. The Vatican failed in the latter, since the Jewish problem was seen to be limited to Jewish solutions. This was due to the view that the Catholic Church had no jurisdiction over Jews, as they are not Catholic.

¹⁴ These five Peace Points form part of primary sources, as they are the actual words of Pius XII during the Christmas Eve broadcast in 1942.

¹⁵ Pius XII. 1942. *The Five Peace Points*, Johannesburg:McPherson, 2.

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or carrying out a few gestures. Nor was it Pacelli's plan to draw attention to what was being done clandestinely to assist Jews by giving them shelter in cloisters, collecting money for their cause and providing visas for them to immigrate to other countries. Instead, the Pope pointed out that by each nation achieving peace within its own boundaries, peace could be attained at international level.¹⁶

Pacelli then went on to elaborate on the dual elements of social life, namely living together in order and living together in tranquillity. Every society, he said, began with a desire for peace. Order is a part of the internal workings of a society. Only order can overcome disorder or false ideas within society. People need to know that there is a spiritual and divine origin to social life. From individual and social life we should rise to God,¹⁷ since through the incarnation God elevated human nature. God is an intrinsic part of human society. Reason enlightened by faith has an exalted place for individuals and societies. However, social life needs juridical order to defend and protect it. Since life changes with the passage of time, people must strive for a juridical order that serves the common good in society. There is a vital connection between the juridical and social orders.¹⁸ Nevertheless, every human society strives for tranquillity. This is achieved when members of society strive to uphold the eternal laws of God and the human dignity. Just prior to discussing the Five Peace Points, the Pope states that the Church condemns the various forms of Marxist socialism. He goes on to say that people have a right to use the goods of the earth, and that the right to private ownership of property should be respected.¹⁹

Dignity and human rights

Human beings were given dignity by God at creation. People should no longer be herded as though they were an anonymous mass; each person is an individual with a soul. Institutions must guarantee and ensure personal responsibility.²⁰ The following rights are to be assured within society: religious formation and education, the worship of God in private and in public, religious works of charity, to marry and raise a family, conjugal and domestic society, work, to choose one's vocation and to use material goods.²¹ These points were raised as a means to acknowledge the individuality of every person, so that human beings will no longer be treated by governments and occupying forces during the war as a nameless and faceless mob. In his

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁷ Pius XII. *The Five Peace Points. op cit.*, 3.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

²¹ Pius XII. 1942. *The Five Peace Points*, 11.

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usual fashion, Pope Pius XII does not name and shame particular governments and countries: he sought to be neutral, and wanted the various societies, especially in Europe, during the war to regard his message as a guiding light.

Defence of social unity and especially the family

The individuals making up society are to be valued and not just lorded over by a few individuals in power. Society is a complex entity. From the point of view of the Catholic Church, the indissolubility of marriage must be upheld.²² Within the context of the family, married couples live out their mission by supporting life and raising a family. Working conditions should not be such that families are separated due to migrant labour. There must be a bond between the family and the public school.²³ If one reflects on the Reich Concordat, the major concession for the Catholic Church was the acceptance of the presence of Catholic schools. In return, however, the German government could veto the appointment of bishops, and the Catholic priests had to take a vow of allegiance to the government. This did not turn out well for the Catholic Church, as the Nazi government reneged on the concordat, whereas Pius XII did all in his power to honour his side of the contract.

Dignity and prerogatives of labour

The Pope emphasised that all work was of value and was linked to human dignity.²⁴ He stated that the Catholic Church acknowledged the moral nobility of work, and that a system for the payment of fair wages was needed.²⁵ In addition to this, the preservation of a social order was necessary that allowed all classes of people to own property privately. Within society itself, there needed to be a generous sharing between the strong and the weak.²⁶ It was the conviction of the Church that with God's assistance, many persons of good will would be victorious in overcoming the trials and tribulations of life. The Pope told listeners that he was doing his best to be optimistic despite the effects on people of the ravages of war.

²² *Ibid.*, 11.

²³ *Ibid.*, 11.

²⁴ Pius XII, 1942, *The Five Peace Points*, 12.

²⁵ Pius XII was afraid that worker unrest would become a fertile ground for Marxism and communism to gain support in Europe.

²⁶ Pius XII, 1942, *The Five Peace Points*, 12.

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Rehabilitation of juridical order

Pacelli believed that the juridical order was affected by positivism and utilitarianism, which gave rise to changes in legislation. What was preferred was a juridical order based on the supreme dominion of God. In his Christmas Eve radio message, Pius XII went on to say: "From the juridical order, as willed by God, flows man's inalienable right to juridical security and by this very fact to a definite sphere of rights, immune from all arbitrary attack."²⁷ He articulated the need for a firm juridical foundation based on the authority of the courts, which presupposed: (a) tribunals and judges that make decisions based on a well-defined body of laws, (b) juridical norms that cannot be overturned by popular sentiment and utilitarian considerations, (c) that the State, organisations and functionaries should withdraw measures harmful to property, liberty, honour, progress and the health of the individuals within society.²⁸

Conception of the State according to the Christian spirit

The pope went on to recommend that reasonable discipline and the Christian spirit constitute the foundation on which the State is built. This implies that the State is there to serve human society. There needs to be an inherent respect for human beings and the aspirations of humanity to reach its eternal destiny. Those in power need to be aware that it is the duty of those governing society to serve its members.

The penultimate section of the pope's Christmas Eve message deals with the considerations of the World War and the rebuilding of society. These reflections, he says, are intended as an appeal to the conscience of the world. The war was a universal disaster, and many Christians were responsible for the errors that caused the war in the first instance. The war had seen Europe destroyed due to the greed of some individuals and groups: did society intend to stand by helplessly and watch the world overtaken by disaster? Those who died during the war gave their lives for a new and better social order. There was still work to be done in comforting the bereaved and assisting those exiled by the war. Pius XII goes on to say:

Mankind owes that vow to the hundreds of thousands of persons who, without any fault on their part, sometimes only because of their nationality or race, have been consigned to death or to a slow decline.²⁹

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 13.

²⁹ Pius XII, *The Five Peace Points*. *op cit.*, 15.

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Many non-combat victims suffered during the war simply through being in the wrong place at the wrong time. The suffering caused by the war had caused a great wave of tears and bitterness. Pacelli had himself wept publicly on learning about some of the atrocities that occurred during World War II, and especially in response to the fate of the Jews under the Nazi regime in Germany. However, his insistence on taking the line of diplomatic prudence did not help the Jews of Europe. Many baptised Jews were assisted by the Catholic Church, as the Church had jurisdiction over them as Christians.³⁰ The message ends with an invocation of the Redeemer of the World, and a call to Christ to continue the work of redemption and reconciliation.

In his message on Christmas Eve of 1942, Pope Pius XII was wise to consider the macro-environment in which World War II took place. He reflected on a type of society in which war would become superfluous. Pacelli drew attention to the ideals of respecting human dignity and ordering society in such a way that contentment in every country would lead to world peace. Christianity was viewed as a model on which society could be based. Considering that European society has Christian roots, it made sense to suggest that the Christian ideals that Pacelli drew attention to should be part of the vision that should shape Europe and the world, both during the war and in times of peace.

World peace during the Cold War

After World War II had ended, Pius XII was very concerned that the Germans who had committed atrocities during the war receive forgiveness and amnesty. He was also very much affected by the Cold War, which arose as a result of tension between the United States and Russia. Pacelli had a deep fear of communism – some would say that he was more afraid of the Bolsheviks than the Nazis.³¹ However, with the advent of nuclear warfare, all were consumed with anxiety about the “monstrous weapons” that threatened the existence of the entire planet. Against this backdrop, Pius XII promulgated the encyclical *Meminisse Juvat*³² on 14 July 1958 in Rome on the theme “World Peace and Church Freedom”. The document is divided into three parts: Part 1: Present-day Evils, Part 2: Call to Prayer and Part 3: Practical Co-operation of the Faithful.

³⁰ A good example of this is the Brazil Visa Affair, initiated by the Vatican: visas were issued to allow Catholics of Jewish descent to go and settle in Brazil.

³¹ Pius XII excommunicated all Communists from the Catholic Church. This makes one wonder why he did not likewise excommunicate Hitler and the members of the Nazi Party.

³² This encyclical is a primary source, as it records Pope Pius XII's thoughts on peace during the period of the Cold War and gives an indication as to why he earned the title “Architect of Peace.”

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In Part 1, the causes of crises and their remedies are discussed, under the following headings: The cause is the neglect of God's authority; Truth, justice and charity are maintained by Christianity; and Nations need the Christian faith. This section deals with the fact that the supreme majesty of God is not accorded its proper place within society, and is often left out of the picture completely. Those who ignore the Christian faith are draining civil society, and therefore cannot support human dignity, freedom and prosperity within it. To be just, solid and equitable, the social system should be based on Christian precepts. In section 2 of Part 1, two obstacles to the right solution are pointed out. These are bad press and publicity against the Catholic Church and the persecution of the Church in areas already claimed for Christ. In section 3 of Part 1, the faithful and the bishops are exhorted to display courage and unity. Pius XII goes on to quote St Ignatius the Martyr:

Please him under whom you serve ... Let no man among you be found a deserter. Let your baptism be ever your shield, faith a helmet, charity a spear, patience a suit of armour. Let your work be your bank deposit, so that you may draw out the full sum accrued.³³

In Part 2, we have a call to prayer. There are four sections: Tradition, Public Novena before the Assumption, Address to the Bishops and the Intentions of the Novena. Pacelli reminds us that the Church has always prayed for brethren in distress. At that time it was important to pray for the faithful in Eastern Europe and Asia, who had been affected by disorder and conflict.³⁴ Specific intentions included: to pray for dioceses that did not have bishops, to pray that Christian precepts spread to all countries, to pray for the youth that they may not fall into error, and to pray for the truth to be spread everywhere and that missionaries return to lands once won for Christ.

In Part 3, we are reminded that the prayers of the faithful should be paired with good works. The Letter of Diognetus is quoted: "Christians are in the flesh, but they are not of the flesh."³⁵ It is hoped that through the efforts of the Blessed Virgin Mary we may attain an era of true peace and greater happiness. The encyclical concludes with an Apostolic Blessing.

In this encyclical Pacelli speaks of the conflict caused by the Cold War. However, the encyclical also mentions how the Catholic Church is under siege. He points out that dioceses have been abandoned through clergy being removed from areas where the message of Christ once was preached. He also points out how the Catholic Church has suffered due to bad publicity in the international press. The document is inward-looking, and reflects on

³³ Pius XII, 1958, *World Peace and Church Freedom*. London: Catholic Truth Society, 11.

³⁴ Pius XII, 1958, *World Peace and Church Freedom*. London: Catholic Truth Society, 12.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 15.

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the struggles of the Catholic Church. In it he emphasises the importance of prayers to Mary to end the perilous circumstances that the Catholic Church finds herself in, within the context of the Cold War.

The defamation of Pius XII

Michael Novak, in an article entitled “Pius XII as Scapegoat,” points out that Pius XII received many accolades from the Jewish community internationally for his efforts in assisting the Jews during World War II. In Novak’s words:

Golda Meir was uncommonly effusive in her praise of him. Trees were planted in Israel in his honour. In 1955, the Israeli Philharmonic Orchestra flew to the Vatican to give a special concert to show the nation’s gratitude. In 1940, Albert Einstein wrote a tribute in [the] *Time [Magazine]*. At his death, tributes were universal and eloquent, especially by those Jewish groups closest to his efforts.³⁶

A generation later, attitudes had changed, and people were more critical of Pius XII. What caused this? Why was this holy and saintly man, who had helped 860 000 Jews escape the gas chambers, subsequently accused of assisting Hitler in the demise of the Jews in Europe? When one considers that approximately 2 million Jews escaped death at the hands of the Nazis, one realises that Pius XII and his Catholic network helped save the lives of about half the Jews who survived.³⁷

In 1963, with the advent of the play *The Deputy* by Rolf Hochhuth, the practice of distorting the truth and portraying Pius XII as a “secret sharer of Nazi anti-Semitism if not an actual participant in the Holocaust” began.³⁸ (Another work with a similar message was John Cornwell’s novel *Hitler’s Pope*.) Hochhuth had been a member of the Hitler youth movement and suffered a type of corporate guilt for what had transpired during World War II, especially as regards the fate of the Jews in the death camps. The Nazi party was a hierarchy, and so is the Catholic Church, which caused Hochhuth to believe that Pius XII could have saved the Jews from the Holocaust.

A response to these criticisms is offered in the play *The Last Three Popes and the Jews* (1967), by Pincas Lepide. Lepide articulates what Pius XII actually did for the Jews, but the question of whether Pius XII could have or should have done more on their behalf remains unanswered. On a

³⁶ M. Novak, Pius XII as Scapegoat, *First Things*, August/September 2000, 20. Downloaded from ATLA Serials Database on 25 April 2014.

³⁷ R. McInerney, 2001. *The Defamation of Pius XII*, South Bend, Indiana: St Augustine’s Press, 168.

³⁸ R. Leiber *et al. op cit*, 398.

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theoretical level, even though Pacelli did a great deal to rescue Jews from the Nazi threat, it is possible that he could have done more. However, it is Hitler who is ultimately responsible for the choices made by the Nazi party under his leadership. Should the pope of the day have excommunicated Catholics who belonged to the Nazi party, or perhaps been more forceful in denouncing the Nazi programme of extermination of the Jews? Would that approach not perhaps have been a type of kamikaze³⁹ diplomacy, which in due course could have caused more discord and death? Pope Pius XII was a diplomat by nature and by training, and was unlikely to take risks that would have incurred the anger of and retaliation by the Nazis.

Ralph McNery states: "It is, accordingly, demonstrable nonsense to say that Pius XII remained silent about the fate of the Jews. What he said was widely reported, was welcomed by many, and was resented by the Nazis and Fascists."⁴⁰ McNery corroborates his conclusions by quoting from *The New York Times*,⁴¹ *Izvestia*,⁴² *The Tablet*⁴³ and the *Times*⁴⁴ of London. Pius XII had condemned totalitarianism and all that it gave rise to. He had also commented on the wrongness of racism, stating that no group of people could be considered an inferior race, and therefore exterminated. Pacelli was in fact critical of the racism practised by the Nazis against the Jews.

Conclusion

At first glance it might appear that Pius XII could have done more to stop the Holocaust. However, if we consider that at the outbreak of World War II Pius XII called for a peace conference and was ignored, we recognise that many who feel that he should have been more outspoken about Nazi atrocities are among those who do not take papal pronouncements seriously. One also needs to consider the personality and training of Pacelli within the Secretariat of State. He was by nature a prudent and cautious man who weighed up the various consequences of his actions, and so did not make decisions lightly. His instrument of defence during World War II was diplomacy. He considered that what the bishops did and said locally represented the Pope in Rome. However, without a clear instruction from Rome, the bishops, those in

³⁹ Kamikaze refers to the Japanese pilots who attempted to attack American warships by flying into them and committing suicide in consequence. It therefore refers to risky attempts to solve problems and an abandonment of the line of caution as adopted by diplomats.

⁴⁰ R. McNery, *op cit*, 167.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 161, 162 and 166. Reported on the following dates in *The New York Times*: 14 March 1940; 25 December 1941; 6 and 27 August 1942, 3 June 1943 and 17 October 1943.

⁴² *Ibid*, 161. Reported in *Izvestia* on 23 January 1940.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 161–163 and 165. Reported in *The Tablet* on the following dates: 5 April 1941; 24 October 1942; 3 April 1943; 12 June 1943; 3 July 1943; 25 December 1943 and 16 January 1965.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 162. Reported in the *Times* of London on 11 October 1942.

Germany in particular, did not say much about the Nazi programme of exterminating the Jews. The Catholic bishops and papal nuncios in Germany did know about the death camps, as they had received various reports about them. Nevertheless, if we compare what was done by Pacelli with what was done by others, then we realise that in rescuing almost 1 million Jews from the clutches of the Nazis, he did a great deal.⁴⁵ Who else did as much? Perhaps those individuals who lost their lives while helping Jews to escape the Nazi authorities. Perhaps, if Pius XII had made a statement condemning the Holocaust, fewer Jews might have died. In considering the play *The Deputy*, which started the process of the defamation of Pius XII, it is one thing to say that Pacelli was a symbol of the world's silence as Jews were taken to the concentration camps, but quite another to accuse Pius XII of being responsible for the death of six million Jews. In all fairness, there are some contradictions in assessing the role played by Pius XII in responding to World War II, the Jewish question and the Cold War, for that matter. Despite all that he did, given his position as Pope, he could always have done more. If Pius XII had made a specific statement condemning the Holocaust, could he perhaps have saved the lives of many more Jews? That question remains unanswered to this day. Pacelli served the Catholic Church and the world well as a diplomat, but poorly as a prophet.

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⁴⁵ Ralph McInerny, 2001, *op cit*, 168.