

Hitler's Pope?

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Pius XII - Hitler's Pope?

The atrocities of World War II showed just what kind of unimaginable evil humanity is capable of, if lead by a heart filled with hate. Hitler manipulated the German people into believing they were a superior race destined to rule a vast empire, and that the inferior races, such as the Jews deserved to be eliminated. With his almost unchallenged authority and amazing military machine, Hitler set his heart upon destroying the Catholic Church, the Jews, and many others. Pius XII did much to save the Church, stop Hitler, and save Jews. Yet Pius XII is not without his critics.

Shortly after the death of Pius XII, forces have attempted to rewrite History. A man that perhaps should be recognized as a saint, critics have tried to portray as being nearly as bad as Hitler himself. Two such critics are Rolf Hochhuth with his play, *The Deputy*, and John Cornwell with his book, *Hitler's Pope: The Secret History of Pius XII*. In this paper, we will expose the fallacy of their main claims by holding their accusations up to the light of actual history.

The Deputy

The historical distortion of Pius XII begin five years after his death. A previously unknown playwright named Rolf Hochhuth, wrote a seven hour play called *The Deputy*. Staged in Berlin in February 1963, the play portrayed Pius XII in a negative light. The play was more psychological rather than historical, but claimed to be based on actual history, combined with a moral truth.¹

¹ Ronald J. Rychlak, *Hitler, the War, and the Pope*, Columbus, MS, Genesis Press, Inc., 2000, 250

Hochhuth was once a part of the Nazi Youth and was greatly influenced by Marxism.² Hochhuth gave his audience the impression that Pius XII was a power hungry man with pro-Nazi leanings, cold-hearted, and an anti-Semite.³ He is seen as indifferent to the plight of the Jews, even as they are loaded onto trucks at “the very door of the Vatican.” In the play, a clergyman accuses the pope of being a criminal for seeing with his very own eyes the evil being done to the Jews, and yet remaining silent.⁴ The audience is made to feel outrage at such injustice as it became assumed that the pope really was silent. Thus Hochhuth’s main objection to Pius XII was that he was silent in his words and actions, when he had a massive moral obligation to speak up. Yet this was not the Pius XII of history.

Long before being elected pope, Eugenio Pacelli was very vocal about his disapproval of Nazism, even from its earliest days. As the papal nuncio, Pacelli gave forty-four speeches in Germany between 1917 and 1929. Of these forty-four speeches, forty of them condemned “some aspect of the emerging Nazi ideology.”⁵

During the 1930’s he frequently used his pen for the cause of the Jews in a timely fashion. On April 1, 1933, Hitler’s government issued a major boycott against Jewish businesses. Just three days later, Cardinal Pacelli, at the appeal from Jewish leaders, he wrote the papal nuncio of Berlin, Monsignor Cesare Orsenigo, instructing him “to intervene with the government of the Reich on behalf of the Jews and point out

² Patrick J. Gallo, Editor, *Pius XII, The Holocaust and the Revisionists*, Jefferson, North Carolina, and London, McFarland & Company, Inc, 2006, 26

³ David G. Dalin, *The Myth of Hitler’s Pope*, Washington, DC, Regnery Publishing, Inc., 2005, 119

⁴ Gallo, 27

⁵ Dalin, 63

all the dangers involved in an anti-Semitic policy.”⁶ Also during the 30’s he also issued more than fifty-five formal protests to the Nazi regime, while he was the Vatican’s secretary of state.⁷

In 1935 Pacelli addressed a crowd of 325,000 pilgrims at Lourdes, France. He tells the crowd that “The Church will never come to terms with Nazis as long as they persist in their racial philosophy.” He further condemned the Nazi theories of “race and blood” as being “contrary to the Christian faith.”⁸ His frequent opposition to Nazi treatment of the Jews earned him the title of the “Jew-Loving” cardinal by the Nazi press.⁹

In March of 1937, Pius XI issued the document *Mit brennender Sorge* as a strong condemnation on racism, the neo-pagan theories of Nazism, and the persecution of the Church. Pacelli is credited as having drafted the document.¹⁰¹¹ This document was written in German, rather than the usual Latin to speed it into the hands of the Germans, and to further show the Church intended to condemn Hitler’s regime.¹²

The Church had to get the document in under the radar of the Nazis in order to get the message across, and they were successful. The Vatican smuggled thousands of copies of *Mit brennender Sorge* into Germany and were cleverly distributed by a team of motorcyclists. Copies were given to parish priests with instructions to be read from the

⁶ Dalin, 64

⁷ ibid

⁸ *Pope Pius XII’s Resistance of Hitler*, <http://www.catholicapologetics.info/apologetics/judaism/popepius.htm>

⁹ Dalin, 64

¹⁰ Rychlak, 92

¹¹ Dalin, 67

¹² Rychlak, 93

pulpit on Palm Sunday, March 12, 1937. Anyone hearing the message or reading the text would have certainly understood it to be a strong and clear rejection of Nazism.

Hitler's Germany was greatly threatened by the document and said "it calls upon Catholic citizens to rebel against the authority of the Reich."¹³ They reacted strongly by confiscating copies, arresting anyone that printed or distributed the document, and making even the mention of it a crime. They also stepped up the persecution of the Church. In Koblenz, 170 Franciscans were accused of molestation and prosecuted. In Berlin, the Nazis put 1,000 monks on trial. Hitler himself went on to threaten that any challenge to the Reich's authority will not be tolerated and sent a letter to the Pope complaining that they had bypassed him and went directly to the German people. Pacelli noted that the German government had not been cooperative with other complaints and rebuked Hitler's protest.¹⁴

It must be stressed that *Mit brennender Sorge* was a giant megaphone of condemnation of Hitler's regime and that it was drafted by Pacelli, the very man some claim was silent! As pope, Pius XII would continue to speak out against Nazism. Shortly after Hitler invaded Poland, Pius XII repeatedly condemned the invasion, calling the invasion "an immeasurable catastrophe."¹⁵

Pius XII also condemned racists, dictators, and treaty violators, and included Jews in the family of God in his first encyclical, *Summi Pontificatus* (Darkness over the Earth). While not mentioning Hitler or Germany by name, his message was clear and Nazis knew it was directed at them. For example, Heinrich Mueller, the head of the

¹³ Rychlak, 94

¹⁴ *ibid*

¹⁵ Rychlak, 125

Gestapo, said that the encyclical was directed against Germany, regarding ideology and the invasion of Poland, and would be harmful to Germany's foreign relations and domestic affairs.¹⁶ Germany was so threatened by the encyclical that it issued its own version so Germany would not look so bad.¹⁷ Because Pius XII and the Church were such a powerful voice against Nazism, Germany harshly persecuted the Church. Within just three months after Germany had taken Poland, 85% of priest had been killed or expelled.¹⁸

The western world also viewed *Summi Pontificatus* as a condemnation of Germany's philosophy and actions. The headline in the London *Daily Telegraph* on October 28, 1939, said, "Pope condemns Nazi theory," *The American Israelite* issued a report of the Pope's condemnation of Nazism,¹⁹ and the New York Times had the front page headline, "Pope Condemns Dictators, Treaty Violators, Racism."²⁰ Finally, France liked the encyclical so much that it dropped thousands of copies over western Germany.²¹

Shortly after Germany took over France, Pius XII sent a secret letter titled *Operere et Caritate*, to all the Catholic bishops of Europe. Pius instructed the bishops to help anyone suffering racial discrimination by the Nazis. They were also asked to read the letter in their churches so the faithful could be instructed as well.

¹⁶ Rychlak, 125

¹⁷ Rychlak, 126

¹⁸ Rychlak, 155

¹⁹ Rychlak, 126

²⁰ Dalin, 73

²¹ Rychlak, 126

Throughout the war, Pius XII continued a loud and cautious condemnation of injustice of all kinds. He was also one of the only moral voices standing up for what was right. After the pope's explicit condemnation of Nazism in his Christmas address of 1941, the editors of the New York Times describe Pius XII as a "lonely voice in the silence and darkness enveloping Europe this Christmas."²² On August 2, 1943, the World Jewish Congress sent Pius XII a message thanking him profusely saying, "Our terror-stricken brethren look to Your Holiness as the only hope for saving them from persecution and death." Later that same month, Time magazine said, "it is scarcely deniable that the Church Apostolic, through the encyclicals and other Papal pronouncements, has been fighting totalitarianism more knowingly, devoutly, and authoritatively, and for a longer time, than any other organized power."²³ Finally, in 1940 Albert Einstein expressed his disappointment with the universities and media for not standing up to Hitler saying that "Only the Catholic Church stood squarely across the path of Hitler's campaign for suppressing the truth."²⁴

Pius' support of the Jews did not end with words and his pen, he also acted aggressively to save the lives of as many Jews as possible. He instructed Catholics to risk their own lives to save Jews, and had convents, churches, and monasteries open their doors to Jews. In Rome alone, the Church gave refuge to 5,000 Jews, including 3,000 at the Pope personal summer residence, Castel Gandolfo.²⁵ Such heroic

²² Dalin, 75

²³ Rychlak, 197

²⁴ Dalin, 99

²⁵ Dalin, 82-83

generosity on the part of the Vatican, not only incurred risk from the Nazis, but also greatly increased the risk of starvation, as the food supply became very low.²⁶

The pope also ordered the fabrication of baptismal records, so Jews could claim to be Catholic if stopped, and to help travel out of dangerous areas.²⁷ What is also remarkable is the the Pope demanded that Jews be respected as a Jew. They were not pressured to actually become Catholic and deny their Judaism in exchange for shelter and baptism certificates. There were even efforts made to allow the Jews to worship as Jews and to observe their dietary laws.²⁸

While many lives were lost to the Nazis, many were also saved. In Italy alone, the Catholic Church, at the direction of the Pope, some 85% of Italian Jews were saved.²⁹ According to the Jewish scholar Pinchaes E. Lapid, the sacrifice of the Catholic Church is credited to have saved between 700,000 and 860,000 Jewish lives.³⁰ Such sacrifices were done at the direction of the Pope. It is truly incredible that Pius XII has been so falsely labeled. History clearly shows that *The Deputy's* claim that the Pope was silent and did nothing are complete fabrications.

John Cornwell's: Hitler's Pope

The Deputy's depictions of Pius XII as greedy, indifferent, and silent paved the way for John Cornwell to author his scandalous book, *Hitler's Pope: The Secret History*

²⁶ Robert A. Graham, S.J., Pius XII's Defense of Jews and Others: 1944-45, Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 12

²⁷ Rychlak, 121

²⁸ Dalin, 86

²⁹ Dalin, 81

³⁰ Pinchas E. Lapid, *Three Popes and the Jews*, Hawthorn, New York, 1967, 133

of Pius XII. The book is actually deceptive before it is even opened. If a picture says a thousand words, this book's cover says many lies. The cover features a photo of what is assumed to be Pius XII leaving a building. Pius appears in sharp focus and almost floating like a ghost. Out of focus appears to be a Third Reich guard watching the pope, and a Nazi Officer saluting the pontiff. One is left with the impression that Pius just left a meeting with Hitler. This combined with the title of the book implies that Pius was in lockstep with Hitler. Furthermore, the British edition claimed the photo was taken on March 1939, giving the impression that around the time Pacelli was elected pope, he paid a personal visit to Hitler.³¹

The photo was actually taken in 1927 of Pacelli, as the papal nuncio, leaving a reception for the president of Germany, Paul von Hindenburg.³² The guard is not a Nazi, but rather a soldier of the Weimar Republic, and what appears to be a Nazi Officer, is actually a chauffeur in a very nice uniform, holding open the door. The guard and chauffeur have been intentionally blurred, with the authors knowledge, so the observer thinks of them as Nazis.³³

Before presenting Cornwell's objections to Pius XII, it should first be noted that Cornwell did not believe that Pius actually liked Hitler or that he was expressly anti-Semitic. Rather Cornwell calls Pius XII "Hitler's Pope" because he possessed the personal defects that allowed Hitler to use Pius like a pawn.³⁴

³¹ Rychlak, 284-285

³² Dalin, 62

³³ Rychlak, 285

³⁴ John Cornwell, *Hitler's Pope: The Secret History of Pius XII*, New York, NY, 2008, xii

Cornwell puts forth many complaints about Pius XII but his main argument centers around the negotiations Pacelli had with Hitler. Before he was pope, Pacelli signed the Reich Concordat with Germany in July of 1933. Pacelli hated having to negotiate the Concordat as he felt like he was negotiating “with the devil himself” and had a pistol to his head. He “had to chose between an agreement and the virtual elimination of the Catholic Church in the Reich.”³⁵ Cornwell has three main problems with the Concordat, which he describes as the “crucial narrative center of my account of Pacelli’s life.”³⁶:

1. According to Cornwell: The signing of the Concordat showed Pacelli’s “collusion with, if not intentional endorsement of, Jewish persecution”³⁷ and other Nazi policies. In a way, this was said to legitimize Hitler and the Nazi regime. Catholics could now feel more comfortable in joining the Reich now that there was the “impression of Catholic endorsement of Hitler in the eyes of Germany and the world.”³⁸

There are several problems with this argument. First is that the Church was emphatic that the Concordat was not an endorsement of Nazi policies³⁹, and obviously and publicly condemned Nazism. Second, the Church had a long made similar agreements with governments, as a way to guarantee the rights of Catholics.⁴⁰ Third, it could even be argued that because the Church had some written protection, it was more able to assist Jews than would have been possible without the Concordat. Fourth,

³⁵ *Pope Pius XII's Resistance of Hitler*, <http://www.catholicapologetics.info/apologetics/judaism/popepius.htm>

³⁶ *ibid*

³⁷ Cornwell, xiii

³⁸ *ibid*

³⁹ Rychlak, 59

⁴⁰ Rychlak, 58

Other nations also tried to have agreements with Germany that did not endorse his policies. For example, Neville Chamberlain signed the Munich Agreement with Hitler in September of 1938, as way of trying to have peace. Yet clearly he did not endorse Hitler's Germany and is not called "Hitler's Prime minister."⁴¹ Finally, as part of the agreement, a Jew that was baptized Catholic, would be regarded as Catholic and not Jewish.⁴² This allowed the Church to issue thousands of phony Baptismal Certificates that protected countless Jews.

2. According to Cornwell: The Reich demanded the Vatican dissolve the Catholic Center Party before Germany would agree to the Concordat. The Catholic Center Party was the last democratic parliamentary party in Germany and would not have been dissolved if Pacelli had not so badly wanted the Concordat.⁴³ With the Center Party gone, Pacelli had unintentionally given Hitler a smooth road on his journey to power.

This argument ignores what really happened. The Catholic Center Party had been very weak and actually voluntarily dissolved two weeks before the Concordat was signed.⁴⁴ It is clear that Pacelli did not want it to be dissolved before the signing, as he expressed his disappointment when he found out.⁴⁵ The Concordat did forbid clergy from belonging to political parties, but placed no such restriction on the laity.⁴⁶ This agreement with Germany actually gave Catholic Priests an excuse not to be forced into the Nazi party. Such was not the case with Protestant clergy, of which many joined the

⁴¹ Dalin, 62

⁴² Rychlak, 60

⁴³ *ibid*

⁴⁴ Rychlak, 295

⁴⁵ Rychlak, 61

⁴⁶ Rychlak, 62

Nazi cause.⁴⁷ Had this agreement not been in place, it would have been even more difficult for Catholic clergy to have spoken out against Nazism.

3. According to Cornwell: Pacelli wanted the Concordat because he was blinded by his own desire for power and wanted to advance the authority of the papacy in order to impose absolute Church Law on others.⁴⁸ He “had been bent for years on securing from the German state crucial advantages for the Holy See... Pacelli had been seeking to impose greater Vatican authority over the German Catholic Church.”⁴⁹ He saw the Concordat as a way to increase the papal power.

This argument is based upon slander of Pacelli’s good name and bears no historical reality. Germany had suggested the deal and Pacelli only had one week to work out the terms. If he refused, the consequences could have been disastrous.⁵⁰ By signing the Concordat, the Church would have a legal basis for protests when Germany would not live up to its agreement. For example, between April 1, 1933 and June 1936, the Vatican submitted more than fifty protests against the Nazis for term violations.⁵¹

The real problem that Cornwell has with Pius XII is that he was a strong pope on dogma. He also levies criticisms of John Paul II, who had nothing to do with Hitler. As Cornwell begins to wrap up *Hitler’s Pope*, it becomes apparent that he has issues with the Church’s teachings on abortion, contraception, homosexuality, original sin, and divorce⁵² and accuses Pius XII and John Paul II of having a “papal autocracy” that

⁴⁷ Rychlak, 296

⁴⁸ Cornwell, xiv

⁴⁹ Cornwell, xiii

⁵⁰ Rychlak, 58

⁵¹ Rychlak, 63

⁵² Cornwell, 367-368

“rejects the historic wisdom and authority of the conciliar Church.”⁵³ He concludes his book by saying, “It has been the urgent thesis of this book, however, that when the papacy waxes strong... the Catholic Church declines in moral and spiritual influence to the detriment of us all.”⁵⁴ Pius XII was not blinded by ambition, but it is clear that Cornwell is blinded by his rejection of papal authority, and he seeks to destroy a righteous man in order not to feel convicted in his moral views.

While some have been critical of Pius XII, history will show that he was in fact a great pope. God grants to the Church what she needs, when she needs it. During the terror of Hitler’s reign, the Church needed a strong moral authority, and God provided just that in the person of Pius XII.

The moral voice of Pope Pius XII, greatly helped to prevent Hitler from being ultimately successful. Pius XII was not Hitler’s Pope, rather he was God’s Pope. Although he had no real army, with his voice, his actions, and his pen, Pius XII, inspired men and women with the love and courage to stand up to Hitler’s unimaginable evil, and show the world what selfless love humanity is also capable of. Such virtuous actions frustrated Hitler’s actions in ways that bombs and machine guns never could. Pius’ leadership literally helped stop the worst war in history. His encyclicals held an incredible power, proving once again that the pen is mightier than the sword.

⁵³ Cornwell, 370

⁵⁴ Cornwell, 371

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