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Recommended Citation

Smalarz, Matthew () "Pius XII and the Holocaust Under His Very Windows," *The Histories*: Vol. 2 : Iss. 1 , Article 6.
Available at: https://digitalcommons.lasalle.edu/the_histories/vol2/iss1/6

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Pius XII and the Holocaust Under His Very Windows
Matthew Smalarz

The Holocaust was one of the worst atrocities committed in all of human history. Nazi propaganda was devoted to the destruction of Jewish communities and culture during the 1930s and 40s. In January 1942, Hitler began his Final Solution with every intention of wiping out every last remnant of Jewish life. From that point on, the Nazis systematically murdered six million of the Jewish faith. While this occurred, Pope Pius XII waited out the war in the Vatican. As Jews were butchered in concentration camps, the Pope failed to intercede on their behalf. This is the problem addressed in this paper. Did Pius XII attempt to save the Jewish population in Europe or were his inactions responsible for the murders of six million Jews? The purpose of this paper is to show Pius XII's unwillingness to speak out against the Holocaust. By failing to condemn the ongoing killings, Pius XII aided Nazi Germany in its plan to extinguish European Jewry. In the final analysis, this paper hopes to give an honest interpretation of the hidden truth of Pius XII's irresponsibility and anti-Semitic tendencies during the Holocaust.

For the first three years of World War II, the Final Solution was an idea Nazi Germany was planning in secret. On January 3, 1939, Hitler delivered an address about the Final Solution, an idea that would take two years to implement. By June 1941, Reinhold Heydrich was asked to prepare for the Final Solution. In other words, Hitler intended to arrest all European Jews and then send them off to concentration camps. On January 20, 1942, the proposal was officially adopted and by March the deportations began. This was the beginning of the end for six million innocent Jews. (McInerny, 74)

During this time of human suffering, many turned to religion to cope with the killing. The one person many Catholics turned to for answers about the extermination of the Jews was Pope Pius XII. During 1942, Pius XII received a constant flow of information concerning the Jewish deportations. The world anxiously awaited a statement of condemnation from the Pope concerning the European Jews. Instead, Pius remained silent. (Goldhagen, 24) To say that all Catholics were anti-Semitic, however, is an incorrect statement. For example, Pius XII's papal nuncio to Germany, Orsenigo, tried desperately to prevent further deportations. (McInerny, 74) Yet the Pontiff was indifferent to the demands made by world leaders to issue a condemnation. It was believed only diplomatic pressure from the British and United States would force the Pope to open up. Francis D'Arcy Osborne, the British Foreign Officer in the Vatican, attempted repeatedly, without success, to get Pius to speak out. (Cromwell, 281) Osborne noted the British public's aggravation at Pius XII's reluctance to condemn the Holocaust. (Cromwell, 282) Likewise, Osborne's counterpart, Harold Tittman, the American envoy from the United States, tried

repeatedly to get Pius to formally condemn the atrocities, but with no success. In both men's conversations with one another, Osborne and Tittman complained that Pius XII was staying quiet because he either wanted the Axis to win or he was too afraid to speak out on secular matters. (Cromwell, 283)

As the diplomatic pressure continued, news reports began to filter in about the mass slaughtering of Jews. For example, on July 17, 1942, Apostolic Visitor Giuseppe Ramiro Marcone informed the Vatican that 2 million Jews had already been exterminated. (Zuccotti, 102) Reports were also being consistently filed from Hungary, Switzerland, and Slovakia that Jews were being rounded up and then sent off to the camps. (Phayer, 48) In the Summer of 1942, hundreds of thousands of Jews were deported from France, Belgium, and the Netherlands. On August 7, the papal nuncio to Vichy, Valerio Valeri, sent a report to the Vatican that Jews were being carried away on trains to Poland and the Ukraine. (Zuccotti, 103) In September 1942, Myron C. Taylor, Franklin D. Roosevelt's special envoy to the Vatican, was asked to deliver an important communique to the Pope regarding the fate of European Jews. (Zuccotti, 104) There were two important proposals within this message. First, the United States wanted to delay the Pope's inclinations towards a peace proposal with the Axis powers. (Cromwell, 289) Secondly, and most importantly, was the Pope's formal denunciation of the mass deportations and killings of European Jews. Given the information the Vatican received, the pressure to declare the killings morally unjust overwhelmed Pius XII. If Pius had been more forthcoming, chances are the Allies' reports about the Jewish deportations may have been taken more seriously. (Cromwell, 286) Rather, Cardinal Maglione, Secretary of State for the Vatican, stated his belief that, "it has not been possible to verify the accuracy" of these sources. (Phayer, 48) However, Pius XII decided to make a half-hearted effort by saying, "no year has passed that We have not appealed in Our public utterances to all the belligerents ... to show some feeling of pity and charity for the sufferings of civilians." Nowhere in this statement does Pius condemn the atrocities committed by Nazi Germany against the Jews. (Cromwell, 290) The American envoy, Harold Tittmann even said that he, "called attention to the opinion that the failure of the Holy See to protest publicly against Nazi atrocities is endangering its moral prestige and undermining faith both in the Church and in the Holy Father himself." (Friedlander, 118) The pope's intransigence was now being perceived as a fatal blow to the papacy's prestige.

While the papacy continued its silence, one significant report revealed convincing evidence of the Papacy's denial of the events that were occurring. Kurt Gerstein, a committed Protestant who sided with the Waffen SS to discover the cover-up of Nazi atrocities, was turned away by the Papal Nuncio in Berlin. After this failed attempt, Gerstein gave the report to a Dr. Winter, who

then handed it off to the Pope's good friend, Bishop von Preysing of Berlin. It was then sent to the Vatican. Meanwhile, two German Catholic spies, Dr. Hans Globke and Dr. Josef Muller, handed over further evidence about the Jews to German bishops. (Zuccotti, 108) In these reports, most specifically Gerstein's, they provided first hand accounts of mass executions of Jews in gas chambers. How could the Papacy believe the accounts of gassings by a Waffen S.S. officer, let alone from two German Catholic spies? (Friedlander, 129) The Vatican immediately dismissed the fallacious accounts; it was becoming apparent that the Vatican felt no sympathy for the Jewish people. (Phayer, 46)

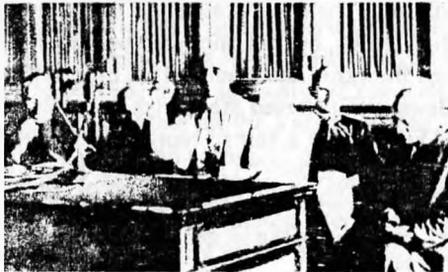
What can be said for Pius XII's reluctance to issue a formal statement denouncing the Holocaust? First, we must look briefly into Pius XII's past to see why he acted the way he did. During the 1920s and 30s, Pius XII commanded two of the most important diplomatic posts the Vatican had to offer; they were Papal Nuncio to Germany and Secretary of State for the Vatican, respectively. (McInerney, 20-21) Pius XII's correspondences to the Vatican during this time indicates his hatred of Jews. He even went so far as to associate the Jewish race with Bolshevik ideology. (Goldhagen, 37) As an envoy, Pius XII never attempted to sanction the German Catholic Church from issuing anti-Semitic statements. (Cromwell, 296) Finally, Pius XII, in 1937, was responsible for writing the encyclical *Mit brennender Sorge*. In this encyclical, the Church formally condemned Nazi Germany's policies. The encyclical reprimanded the Nazis for its intolerance towards the Catholic Church, but not one word was uttered on behalf of the Jews. What can be inferred from this document is that Pius, while not foreseeing the destruction of the Jews, still believed the Jewish race was not worth saving. (Goldhagen, 25) How can God's human representative on Earth belittle a race which had done no injustice to him? Quite simply, Pius's anti-Semitism was more forthright than initially thought. And for that reason, his pre-Papal background laid the groundwork for some of the larger mistakes that he was about to make involving the Jewish Holocaust.



Pacelli presides over the signing of the Reich Concordat at the Vatican on July 20, 1933.

After Taylor's failed mission and the dismissal of Gerstein's report, Pius XII's concern now laid with Rome's security. Osborne, the British envoy, wrote in his diary in December 1942 that he was utterly disgusted by the Pope's concern for Rome, when so many Jews were being slaughtered. Pius XII hoped the Allies would not bomb Rome, but if they did, "the pope would protest publicly." (Phayer, 62-3) Pius never responded in such a manner about the Jews. At the same time, Jewish organizations from around the globe lobbied the Vatican to save its people. Montini, the Secretary of State for the Vatican, informed these groups that the Vatican "was doing all that it could." (Cromwell, 291) Yet these statements flew in the face of reality.

Before 1942 ended, one last attempt was made by Osborne to get the Pope to denounce the killings. He asked the Pope to condemn the mass murders of Jews in his Christmas Eve address to the world. Domenic Tardini, the pope's intermediary, told Osborne that "the Pope could not take sides." The Allies resorted to their last plan of action. The United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union decided to issue a statement denouncing the extermination of the Jews. The Pope was asked to sign. Even now, the Pope was afraid he might betray the neutrality he believed in. (Chadwick, 217)



Pacelli broadcasts to the world with Giovanni Mantini, the future Paul VI, at his left shoulder. His 1942 Christmas Eve broadcast was perceived as a weak and hallow statement regarding the Nazi Final Solution.

The Pope's Christmas Eve address is the only legitimate statement His Holiness made condemning war atrocities. It is obvious that his objective was to keep the statement as vague as possible for fear he might be portrayed as taking sides. In the address, Pius says that, "the hundreds of thousands who, through no fault of their own, only because of their nationality and descent, are condemned to death." (McInerny, 95) In this twenty-six page statement, only twenty-seven words actually make reference to the Holocaust. Yet in those twenty-seven words,

not one directly refers to the Jews. In an interview with Harold Tittmann, the American envoy to the Vatican, he says Pius, "thought it was plain to everyone that he was referring to the ... Jews ... when he declared that hundreds of thousands of persons had been killed ... sometimes because of their race or nationality." Yet later on Tittmann admitted he was still confused by the vagueness of the statement. (Friedlander, 133-34) In early 1943, Pius XII wrote to Bishop Preysing in Berlin informing him that his message was clear, concise, and to the point. In reality, his words failed to instruct the world about the Holocaust. And for that matter, the most important group he tried to reach, the Jews, did not view it as a condemnation. (Phayer, 49)



Pacelli tries to calm the Italian crowds during the bombing of Rome, August 13, 1943.

In July 1943, the Allies began their assault up the Italian peninsula. Rome was now under attack and there was little Pius could do. Mussolini's government had fallen from power, and Italy reverted back to a constitutional monarchy. (Friedlander, 183) On September 11, German forces occupied the city and declared martial law. Reports were coming in from across Italy that Italian Jews were being deported to camps. (Zuccotti, 150) During this crisis, Pius was more or less responsible for Rome's inhabitants and its Jewish community. (Cromwell, 299) The Jewish community in Rome, however, could not depend on the Pope's protection. Instead, the Germans intended to deport all the Jews in Rome. S.S. Lieutenant Colonel Herbert Kappler, chief of the German security police in Rome, was responsible for carrying out these orders. On September 26, however, Kappler asked to meet with Rome's Jewish leaders for an important meeting. Dante Almansi (president of Union of Italian Jewish Communities) and Ugo Foa (president of the Jewish Community in Rome) were given an ultimatum. Kappler was willing to broker a deal that gave the Jews their lives; the Jews, however, had to hand over

all their gold possessions for the sake of the German war effort. (Zuccotti, 153) This seemed to solve the Jews' problem, but they still had to muster 50 kilograms of gold. As word spread, Jews from across the city brought their gold to Rome's synagogue on the banks of the Tiber. (Cromwell, 301) A great debate has ensued as to Pius's role throughout this episode. Defenders of Pius XII have said that he was so disturbed by the German demand that he offered a gift of fifty kilograms of gold. (McInerney, 116) This, however, is a lie. It was meant to be a loan and nothing more. For that reason, it gave the Jewish community in Rome a sense of security from the Pope that had never existed. The community continued to believe that the fifty kilograms and the Pope's assurances would save them from deportation. (Zuccotti, 154)

The Germans, however, also lied about the safety of the Jews in Rome. After the Jews had delivered the gold on September 28, the Germans entered the Jewish officials' offices in Rome. They proceeded to steal 2 million lire as well as the names and addresses of the Jewish community of Rome. (Zuccotti, 155) Unfortunately, the Jews would be in for a greater shock on October 16. Adolf Eichmann, chief of the Gestapo forces in Rome, ordered that the Jews of Rome be rounded up. Under the command of SS officer Theodor Dannecker, the 365 S.S. and the Waffen S.S. entered the Jewish ghetto. (Cromwell, 303) By 2:00 P.M., over 1,200 Jews had been detained and sent to the Italian Military College, a little less than a half a mile away from the Vatican. (Zuccotti, 155) Pius was immediately informed of the roundup by Principessa Enza Pignatelli-Aragona, who ran to the Vatican to inform the Pope. The Pope instantly contacted the German ambassador to the Holy See, Ernst von Weizsacker. Weizsacker immediately went to meet with Secretary of State Maglione about the roundups. At this meeting, Maglione explicitly asked the German ambassador to take every measure necessary to stop the roundups. But then Weizsacker asked Maglione, "What would the Holy See do if the events continued?" Maglione replied, "the Holy See would not want to be put into the necessity of uttering a word of disapproval." In other words, Maglione believed the Germans should handle the roundups and allow the Vatican to remain silent on the issue. (Cromwell, 305)

However, the German diplomatic staff in Rome found the "resettlement" of the Jews of Rome distasteful. The German ambassador to Italy, Eitel Friedrich Mollhausen, decided that they needed to prevent the roundups. They decided to write a letter to the German occupying forces in Rome through the hand of Bishop Hudal, rector of the Collegia del Anima. In this letter, Hudal wrote that the Vatican requested that the Germans discontinue the roundup of Jews. The interesting thing is that the Vatican never informed Hudal to do such a thing. (Phayer, 99-100) It was sent that evening of October 16 at 11:30. (Cromwell, 306) As a last resort, Weizsacker also wrote a letter to the Foreign Office in Berlin,

which stated that, "the Curia is dumbfounded, particularly as the action took place under the very windows of the pope, as it were." Weiszacker was trying to convince the ministry that the Vatican would protest the further roundup of Jews. Lastly, he requested that the Jews be kept to work in Italy. His pleas went unheeded. (Zuccotti, 163)

By Monday, October 18, 1943, the deportations had already taken place. The trains left Rome and headed out to the Apennine mountains, where frigid temperatures swarmed the train cars. The Jews were treated horribly, receiving little food or water. While this went on, the Vatican was updated frequently about the Jewish prisoners. As the Jews were led to their deaths, Pius's concern now rested with the fear of an eventual Communist takeover in Rome. (Phayer, 101) In Pius's opinion, the Germans should make a concerted effort to prevent the Communists from tearing Rome apart. Pius conveyed his feelings about the Germans to the American and British envoys. To Harold Tittman, Pius said, "Germans had respected the Vatican City and the Holy See's property in Rome. When speaking to Osborne, the British envoy, Pius thanked the German army for assuring the neutrality of the Vatican. In the end, Pius overshadowed the plight of the Jews with his concern for the security of Rome. Five days after the Jews left Rome, 1,060 of Rome's Jews were gassed at Auschwitz. Some 149 men and 47 were forced into servile labor. At the war's end, only 15 of Rome's Jews had survived. In later roundups, another 1,084 would be sent to Auschwitz and Italian concentration camps, where few managed to escape with their lives. (Cromwell, 309-310)

On October 25-26, 1943, an article in *L'Osservatore Romano*, otherwise known as the "Voice of the Holy See" recognized Pius XII for his "paternal charity ... it might be said, ever more active; it knows neither boundaries nor nationality, neither religion nor race." (Friedlander, 208) These words did not convey the feelings, however, of many of the diplomatic envoys to the Vatican. Osborne, the British envoy, believed the Pope had failed to take a "strong line." Likewise, the Jesuit rescuer of Jews, Tacchi-Venturri, despised the Vatican for its failure to approach the deportations in a more open and candid light. (Phayer, 101-102) How could the Holy Pontiff, with his detractors so close to him, not feel shame for his cowardly acts? As we are about to find out, Pius's reluctance to save hundreds of innocent Jews would come back to haunt him again in 1944.

By March 1944, the Final Solution had taken millions of Jewish lives. The Germans continued to find pockets of Jewish populations that still needed to be exterminated, such as the 670,000 Hungarian Jews. Eichmann, who had been put in charge of rounding up the Italian Jews, now began his roundups in Hungary. (Zuccotti, 293) The papal nuncio to Hungary, Angelo Rotta, made an appeal on behalf of the Hungarian Jews to the newly appointed Hungarian ministry. Cromwell points out that no Vatican representative had officially

lobbied a protest during the war until now. (Cromwell, 325) Pius was receiving pressure from the Allied Powers to denounce the deportation of Hungarian Jews. Pius, however, only protested to the Hungarian dictator, Miklos Horthy, on June 25. Horthy finally complied with the Pontiff's protest on July 9, at which point Hungary had already been emptied of its Jewish population. If Pius XII had taken notice earlier, he may have been able to save 437,000 Jewish victims from deportation and execution. Instead, His Holiness only conformed to Ally pressure after he had been informed that the Germans were losing the war. Pius, was more or less, waiting on the sidelines to see which side he could align himself with. By becoming a political pawn, he neglected the dire circumstances the Hungarian Jews had been placed in. (Goldhagen, 24)

What can be said for Pope Pius XII and his lack of compassion for the Jews of Europe? Based on the facts gathered, it is hard to refute the true nature of Pius XII's anti-Semitic tendencies. His inability to act as an honest arbiter on behalf of all European Jews resulted in the loss of many innocent lives. How can any God-loving Catholic believe their Holy Father to be so dishonest? As any Catholic or good hearted religious person should know, we all sin. But some in the Catholic faith tend to take the dogma of papal infallibility too far. Garry Wills points out, "Catholics have fallen out of the healthy old habit of reminding each other how sinful popes can be. Authoritative as a Pope may be by his office, he is not impeccable as a man - he can sin, as can all humans." (Wills, 1) Pope Pius XII was a sinful pope. All popes have sinned. But does that make Pius XII any less responsible for the deaths of those Jewish victims of the Holocaust, especially those that were "under his very windows?" Sadly, there will be those that say Pius did more than his part in saving Jewish lives, while his detractors will continue to vilify the true nature of his actions. In the end, however, Pius XII must not answer to us, but to the one true God he was meant to represent here on Earth.

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