



## Sounds of Silence: The Symbolic Persecution of Pius XII

One of the great singing duos of the 1960s was Simon and Garfunkel. Their classic *Sounds of Silence* still resonates through the echo chambers of popular music. For those Catholics who exist in a cocoon of passivity, silence can be deafening, especially when the slings and arrows of persecution maliciously assault the Church.

A good example of this is the 43-year long attack on the historical memory of Pope Pius XII. These virulent accusations allege that the Pope was not only silent during the Nazi Holocaust, but actively supported it. These charges have roared through the public consciousness like the vicious winds of the culture war, relentless and unyielding.

### A ROCK STAR

During his papacy, (1939-1958), Christians and Jews alike honored Pius XII for his consistent stance against the evils of Communism and Nazism as well as for his active support for the Jews during the Holocaust. At the time of his death in 1958 he enjoyed a hagiography of praise and respect that bordered on late 20<sup>th</sup> century rock star adulation. Virtually every Jewish organization from the Rabbinical Council of America to the National Council of Jewish Women praised Pius for his efforts in saving Jewish lives during the war. His charity and support during World War II so impressed the chief rabbi of Rome, Israel Zolli, that in 1944 he converted to the Catholic faith. As his baptismal name he chose *Eugenio*, in honor of Pius XII. After the Holy Father's death, conductor Leonard Bernstein tapped his baton at Carnegie Hall during a concert for a moment of silence out of respect for Pius's work on behalf of his Jewish people. Future Israel Prime Minister Golda Meir stressed how *the life of our times was enriched by a voice speaking out about the great moral truths above the tumult of daily conflict*.

### THE KREMLIN'S BACKDOOR

Since 1958 revisionists have smashed his accolades, savaging Shim with a fusillade of personal invective and calumny that has been unprecedented in modern times. The roots run deep and right up to the Kremlin's backdoor. After the war Stalin

feared the Pontiff's resolute opposition to Communism. For years, the Communists quietly planted rumors and innuendoes that would follow after the Pope was securely in his grave.

It was leftist writer Rolf Hochhuth's 1963 play *The Deputy*, which set the ball rolling in earnest. It emerged from a post-war trend *Documentary Theatre* or *Theatre of Fact*, which had emanated from a radical form of theater, popular in America during the Depression. Instead of employing playwrights, they used actual court transcripts or in the case of Peter Weiss' *The Investigation*, excerpts from testimony of Auschwitz survivors to promote social change and awareness.

Hochhuth's *Der Stellvertreter*, which is most likely a loose translation of *Vicar*, was cut from more traditional theatrical cloth. It was a wholly undocumented and fictional account. To discredit his anti-Communist fervor Pius was painted in broad strokes as a *cigarette-smoking dandy with Nazi leanings*, a cold and uncaring cynic, who would *sacrifice Jewish lives to stop the spread of Communism*. People were swayed by Hochhuth's characterization, not because it was believable, but because the world philosophy was turning toward a more favorable view of Marxist materialism.

Since the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there has been a wave of revisionist histories that have echoed Hochhuth's scandalous canard. Angry liberals or lapsed Catholics, like Gary Wills and his *Papal Sin*, and John Cornwell, who had the audacity to write *Hitler's Pope* are relentless in their attempt to undermine the Catholic magisterium and its teachings. James Carroll's *Constantine's Sword* sported a theory that attempted to link several medieval popes to death camps like Auschwitz. These disgruntled neo-Marxists have re-crucified the *Vicar of Christ* on a cross of ignorance and dialectical materialism.

According to Rabbi David Dalin's book, *The Myth of Hitler's Pope*, very few books are *actually about Pius XII and the Holocaust*. The first non-Catholic to teach at Ave Maria University in Naples, Florida, Dalin believes that the Holocaust is *the biggest club available for liberal Catholics to use... in their attempt to bash the papacy and therefore smash traditional Catholic teaching*.

## EUGENIO PACELLI

Eugenio Pacelli was born in Rome on March 2, 1876. His grandfather began *l'Osservatore Romana*, the Vatican newspaper that is still published today. His father was an important financial consultant to the Vatican. The future pope's scholarly brilliance and language facility surfaced very early in his schooling. He was ordained to the priesthood on Easter Sunday 1899. Three years later, he received a doctorate in Canon Law after his appointment to the Vatican's Secretariat of State.

Father Pacelli's relationship with Germany began in 1917 when he was consecrated a bishop and became the papal representative to Bavaria. It was in Munich that he was nearly killed by Bolsheviks during a communist-inspired uprising. He saw his job as that of peacemaker and was at the forefront of Pope Benedict XV's valiant attempt to silence the bloody *Guns of August*. In 1925, the future pope was sent to Berlin. By this time, he was extremely concerned about Nazi inroads among the German people. He reported to Rome that Adolph Hitler *would walk over corpses* to achieve his goals. Based on his warnings, in 1928 the Holy See issued a strong condemnation of the anti-Semitism foundation of Nazism and specifically condemned the *unjust vexations* inflicted on the Jewish people. The Papacy condemned Nazism as inimical to Catholic principles and Catholics were instructed not to join the party.

In 1929, the now Cardinal Pacelli returned to Rome to serve as the Secretary of State under Pius XI. Four years later everything changed. Hitler became the Chancellor and signed agreements with many Protestant churches. The Church was forced to negotiate a Concordat with Berlin to secure an equal legal footing for its members.

Some have alleged this agreement as proof of the Church's allegiance with Nazism. As long as the German government guaranteed, at least on paper, the Church's freedom of religion, the Catholic Church could register its opposing point of view. Cardinal Pacelli repeatedly denounced Nazis and its religion of *Blut und Land*. Pius XI explained that concordats are made with nations, not regimes. The Concordat actually helped save countless Jews in that it provided a legal basis for arguing that baptized German Jews were Christian and should be exempt from legal restrictions.

## WITH BURNING CONCERN

In a letter dated March 12, 1935 to Cardinal Schulte of Cologne, Pacelli attacked the Nazis as *false prophets with the pride of Lucifer*. He labeled them as *bearers of a new faith and a new gospel*, which was contradictory to the words of Jesus. In March of 1937, Pius XI issued his encyclical, *Mit Brennender Sorge* (*With Burning Concern*), written in German by Cardinal Pacelli. It was secretly distributed to all German parishes throughout the country. It condemned Nazism and the slavish worship of the state.

The Nazi press condemned *the Jew-God and his deputy in Rome*, while the Nazis threatened to cancel the concordat. In a Europe still committed to the appeasement policies of British Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, the Catholic Church was the only voice speaking out strongly against the Nazis. In January of 1939, Cardinal Pacelli wrote to archbishops throughout the world to open their borders to Jews fleeing Nazi persecution. With the death of Pius XI in the following February, the Nazi government feared a Pacelli papacy. They issued a veiled warning to the Vatican, not to elect him. The Cardinals ignored Hitler and he became Pope Pius XII on March 2.

## A LONELY VOICE

After the outbreak of hostilities in September, the new Pope wrote his first encyclical, *Summi Pontificatus*, (*On the Unity of Human Society*), dated October 20, 1939, in which he lashed out at the dictators of Europe. He singled out those governments whose chauvinism imperiled the spirit of humanity, especially the Nazis who had abandoned the cross of Christ for the *Swastika*, the twisted cross of hate.

While Pius publicly maintained a neutral stance, he secretly worked behind the scenes to undermine the Nazis. He relayed messages between anti-Hitler conspirators and the British government. He received information on German war plans that were forwarded to the British. In March of 1941, Vatican Radio consistently denounced the Nazis for their racial hatred. When Hitler invaded Communist Russia, Pius settled the moral quandary of helping one atheist dictator against another by proclaiming that the Allies were not helping the Communists but aiding the Russian people.

In his 1941 Christmas messages, Pius XII again condemned the atrocities of war, especially those inflicted on civilian populations. *The New York Times* praised the Pope as *the only ruler left on the Continent of Europe who dares to raise his voice at all*. The following Christmas Pius XII condemned totalitarian regimes and mourned the victims of the war. He called on Catholics to shelter refugees. The Nazis responded by calling Pius *the mouthpiece of the Jewish war criminal*. *The New York Times* opined that the Pope was a *lonely voice crying out of the silence of a continent...*

## HIGH-WIRE ACT

After the snowy conference in the Wannsee suburb of Berlin in early 1942, the Nazis began effecting their *Final Solution* with German precision and speed. Only then did the Vatican become aware of the severity of the dangers for European Jews. Given the apparent dangerous circumstances for European Catholics, Pius had to walk a delicate tightrope over the Jewish and Catholic perils without a safety net.

With several years of hindsight, the most persistent charges leveled against Pius have been that he should have loudly spoken out against the Nazis. There was a dangerous precedent

for such overt pronouncements. In 1942, the Dutch archbishop of Utrecht issued a letter to all Catholic churches, protesting the deportation of the Jews. The Gestapo revoked the baptismal exception that had been allowed for Jewish converts and started rounding up all ethnic Jews, no matter what their religion. One baptized Jew caught in the deadly web was Edith Stein who had become a Carmelite nun. Later canonized by the Church, Saint Teresa Benedicta a Cruce, her sister, and 600 other Jewish Catholics perished in Auschwitz.

The Pope's failure to *excommunicate* Hitler and his Nazi cohorts is another frequent allegation. Since most were no better than nominal Catholics, excommunication would have been merely symbolic and have served little purpose. The excommunication of the Nazi madmen might have led to greater bloodshed among Catholics and Jews.

In the summer of 1943, 60,000 German troops invaded Rome. This prompted the Pope to start what has been called *the greatest Christian program in the history of Catholicism*. Pius sent letters by hand to all Roman bishops instructing them to open all convents and monasteries throughout the city and its surrounding areas, including Vatican City. There were a total of 150 such sanctuaries that were in operation throughout the rest of the German occupation. Castel Gondolfo the Pope's regular summer home was used to shelter over 500 Jews. About 5,000 Jews, a third of Rome's Jewish population, were hidden in Church buildings.

Rabbi Dalin reports that at one point Hitler planned to kidnap the Pope and imprison him in Upper Saxony. Hitler discussed his frustrations with Pius at a meeting on July 26, 1943. Hitler seriously considered an invasion of the Vatican to silence the Pope and also to steal its rich art treasures. Otto Wolff, the SS chief in Italy, testified at the end of the war that he was able to talk Hitler out of this desperate act.

### HITLER'S MUFTI

The Nazi leader did have a fruitful relationship with a Muslim cleric, the red-haired, blue-eyed, Hajj Amin al-Husseini, who became a terrorist in earnest in 1920. His gang began a murderous rampage that killed scores of Palestinian Jews. Al-Husseini's elimination of many moderate rivals created a power vacuum in Palestine that his anti-Jewish fundamentalism readily filled. In 1922 he became the *grand mufti of Jerusalem*, a combination religious and political leader of the Palestinian Arabs.

During the 1930s al-Husseini continued to incite violence against Jews while at the same time cajoling the Nazi consul general in Jerusalem. Al-Husseini wanted to prevent the Jewish settlement in Palestine and help effect the Final Solution. While Pius was busy saving lives in Rome, *Hitler's Mufti* was using German radio to call for the destruction of European Jewry. According to law professor and historian Ronald J. Rychlak, al-Husseini helped the Nazis form an Arab Muslim Legion, an Arab Brigade, which Hitler drew on to recruit *Jihad Warriors*

*into the Waffen SS*. They reportedly killed thousands of Jews in Bosnia and Serbia.

Al-Husseini became a good friend of Adolph Eichmann, one of the architects of the Holocaust. On a trip to Auschwitz he urged the guards to *work more diligently* in their extermination of Jews. According to Rabbi Dalin, he continued his anti-Semitic activities by mentoring Yasser Arafat. The young Arafat quickly became the devoted protégé of Husseini. In 1985 Arafat opined that the PLO with its suicide bombers and its legacy of violence and terror was *continuing the path* that Husseini had set.

### CATHOLIC SENSITIVITIES

Catholics should eschew any type of mea culpa for the *alleged* *Csins* of Pope Pius XII. The truth, according to Israeli consul, Pinchas Lapide in his 1967 book *Three Popes and the Jews*, is that Pius XII was instrumental in saving nearly 860,000 Jews from the Nazi death camps. Catholics should clearly find the truth of their history, echoed in the words of Albert Einstein, in the December 23, 1940 issue of *Time Magazine* that *only the Church stood squarely across the path of Hitler's campaign for suppressing truth*. They must throw off the yoke of continued silence, which in the face of such calumny is neither golden nor virtuous. They must see Pius' post-mortem persecution in terms of *the Culture of Death* and assume the lonely mantle of *Fidei Defensor*.

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### 2 JOHN 1:3

*"Grace, mercy, and peace be with us from God the Father and from Jesus Christ the Father's Son in truth and love." Amen*

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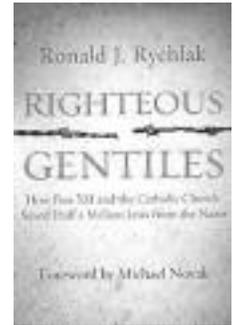
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*Author: Ronald Rychlak*



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**Fr. Peter Gumpel, S.J.,** postulator of the cause for beatification of Pope Pius XII

Ronald J. Rychlak, a professor at the University of Mississippi School of Law, is the author of the acclaimed book, *Hitler, the War, and the Pope*. He has written for the *Washington Post*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and the *Times Literary Supplement*, among other legal, political, and historical journals. He is a member of the Vatican's delegation to the United Nations.

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