Leadership under Fire: Pope Pius XII and the Holocaust

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Abstract

This examination critically reviews the arguments scholars have directed towards the wartime papacy of Pope Pius XII concerning his leadership role during the Second World War and the Holocaust. Using careful analysis of the arguments and historical evidence a basis for understanding the Pope's actions during this time has been reached. In the end, the Pope performed to the best of his ability in the limits that were imposed on him by outside sources and also by his own self.

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Leadership under Fire: Pope Pius XII and the Holocaust

In 1964 the German Rolf Hochhuth produced a play entitled *The Deputy* which concerned the role of the Roman Catholic Church, and in particular Pope Pius XII, during the Second World War and the Holocaust. The play ignited a robust and scholarly debate about what action, or inaction, the Pope took to ameliorate the suffering of the Jews during this period in history. Following the appearance of Hochhuth’s play scholarly works appeared that were critical of the actions that the Church as a whole took at this time. *The Catholic Church in Nazi Germany* by Guenter Lewy, a scholar on the German Catholic Church, was released in 1964 and two years later Saul Friedlander’s *Pius XII and the Third Reich* was published. The basic premise of these works found that the Pope, and the Church in general, had not done enough in their power to denounce the racial ideology of Nazism and thus the ensuing mass extermination of Jews which was the inevitable fruit of this ideology. Yet, there were many actions undertaken by Pius XII and the Church that did, directly or indirectly, aid the Jews during their persecution under the Nazis. The question therefore that needs to be addressed and answered is whether or not the Church undertook enough action to relieve the plight of the Jews or whether more could have been done to halt, or even stop, the mass extermination of the Jewish people. Only through a careful examination of the critical arguments directed against the Church and Her handling of the Holocaust combined with an examination of what the Church actually undertook to aid the Jews can one hope to derive an answer to this question. Therefore, it is the aim of this paper to utilize a synthetic examination of both critical and
sympathetic sources in order to obtain a solution from which a conclusion on whether the Church did enough or could have done more to be of aid to the Jews can be drawn.

Examination of sources critical to the Church's role during the Holocaust establishes two main areas of contention where critics tend mostly to direct their attention, the Pope himself and the German episcopacy. It is these two areas and their functioning together as a whole combined with their own individual actions that critics make recourse to in their decision that the Church did not do everything in Her power to halt the destruction of the Jews. Thus, the action, or inaction, of these individuals must be addressed in light of these criticisms to discern whether these criticisms hold merit and, if so, what they suggest as to the answer of the overall question of this paper. Before any attention is given to Pope Pius XII it would be wise to first examine the German episcopacy since their action, or inaction, would have had the most direct effect on the Holocaust and also, as constituents of the Pope, the behavior of Pius XII. Then, in light of this action, or inaction, of the German episcopacy, consideration can be given to Pius XII and the decisions he made regarding the Jews and the Holocaust.

Any examination of the German episcopacy as concerns the Jews and the Holocaust must first begin with some background historical information so that the context of history may be properly represented in any conclusion. Prior to the rise of National Socialism in Germany the nation was under the leadership of the Weimar Republic. Many of the Church leaders in Germany at this time were concerned with the perceived parliamentary weaknesses and liberal shortcomings of this the first truly democratic republic in the history of that nation. Thus it was with varying degrees of support that these leaders agreed with the Nazis' position on the apparent drawbacks,
chief of which to the Nazis was the presence, in the government, of Jews, that the
Weimar government presented to the German people. That the Nazis practiced a rabid
form of anti-Semitism was not new to the leading Catholics in Germany at this time and
although they deplored racialism they concluded that it was "justified self-defense" to
ward off the rule of "an overly powerful Jewish capital".2 This line of thinking was not
limited to those in a leadership in the Church for many Catholic publicists agreed with
the Nazis on the importance of fighting "the destructive influence of the Jews in religion,
morality, literature and art, and political and social life" and only objected to the
extremist tone of the movement.3 Though some Church leaders at this time spoke out
against Hitler's glorification of race and blood there were those who expressed their
concurrence with the Nazis' "endeavor to maintain the purity of the German blood and
the German race".4 Thus, the Church in Germany, by concentrating her fire upon the
liberals in the Weimar government, many of whom were Jewish, and by not denouncing
the virulent anti-Semitic propaganda of the Nazis, did nothing to stop the anti-Semitism
that was making inroads into German life.5

The German Church witnessed in January 1933 the rise of Adolf Hitler and the
Nazi party with both uncertainty and celebration. Here represented not only a break from
the Weimar republic whose liberals and free thinkers had debased the German people and
society but also the ascension of a man and his party that were committed to a rabid anti-
Semitic policy. One of the first items on Hitler's agenda was the signing of a concordat
between his new government and the Vatican. The principal objective of this being to
"win international recognition from the Papacy and thereby to be acknowledged before
the world as the rightful government of Germany and not just a revolutionary clique
which had seized power”. Even with the concordat in place relations between the new German government and the Vatican quickly began to deteriorate. Catholic associations, press, and schools, all of which had been protected under the terms of the concordat, began to be attacked first on a local and sporadic level, but later on these attacks became incessant and were widespread throughout Germany. The Nazi government began to undertake an extreme policy of attacking anything and everything that was Catholic. Deputies and civil servants were dismissed, organizations and periodicals were stamped out, meetings were banned, property confiscated, religious education limited and schools destroyed.

Despite promises made by the Nazi government to curb oppression aimed at Catholics, members of the Church were faced with a steady increase in burdens all of which were in direct violation of the concordat. Nor were the sacraments safe from being assaulted by the Nazis for in 1935 the government passed the so-called Nuremberg laws which forbade two Catholics from marrying if one of them was considered racially "non-Aryan". The Nuremberg laws and the Reich Citizenship law of 1935 deprived the full Jews of citizenship and defined a full Jew as having three Jewish grandparents, irrespective of religion; a Mischling had one or two, was non-Jewish in religion and not married to a Jew; a Mischehen was a Jew married to an Aryan. The timing of these new racial laws coincided with a period when many Jews were converting to Catholicism to avoid persecution at the hands of the Nazis so marriages of this type were undoubtedly on the rise. On top of all of this came the infamous foreign currency and morality trials against the Catholic clergy instituted in 1935 and 1936. These trials were aimed primarily at monastic orders but the secular clergy were not exempt from their injustice.
Even with all of these assaults on the Catholic faith and its adherents in Germany, many of the bishops and their subordinates grew increasingly oblivious to the violations of civil rights and liberties, and virtually ignored the Nazis drive against the Jews. The German Catholic leadership even adopted a nationalist posture due to the successes Hitler was initially enjoying in his domestic and foreign policies. As Cardinal Faulhaber expressed in his Advent sermon of 1933 the Church did not have “any objection to the endeavor to keep the national characteristics of a people as far as possible pure and unadulterated, and to foster their national spirit by emphasis upon the common ties of blood which unite them.”

The Archbishop of Freiburg Conrad Grober even went so far as to reject the external accusations of Nazi abuse as being “slanderous”. Furthermore, many demonized the Jews in sermons and writings which bore the Imprimatur, the Jews were identified as “harmful to the German people” and reference was made to the Jews as Christ killers who “in their boundless hatred of Christianity were still in the forefront of those seeking to destroy the Church”. Yet, in the face of all of this, the Church stressed that any measures aimed at purging the nation, which meant removing the Jews from positions of prominence, should be done in a worthy manner for “the Christian conscience must insist that these legal ordinances be implemented in a spirit of justice and love”.

There was one issue, however, that concerned both the Church and the Jews that the Church vigorously protested and this was the decision by the Nazi government to forbid the marriage of two Catholics if one of them was considered “non-Aryan”. As already mentioned above the Nazi government had strict definitions of what “non-Aryan” meant and since there was a rise in these types of marriages at this time the Church
necessarily felt obliged to defend its sovereignty and the rights of its constituent members. The Concordat of 1933 had agreed to the provision that a civil marriage ceremony normally had to precede the ceremony conducted by the priest even though the Church had exclusive jurisdiction over the marriage of Catholics.\textsuperscript{20} The following year the Catholic Church made it clear to the government that the enactment of any legislation forbidding racially mixed marriages, which would be an infringement on the Church's ecclesiastical authority, would present a difficult situation to both parties.\textsuperscript{21} The German bishops expressed to the government that every Catholic, whether born to a pure German or to a racially mixed marriage, whether baptized as a child or as an adult, was equally entitled to the sacraments.\textsuperscript{22} Therefore, the Church had the right to marry two people of mixed racial stock even in the face of government prohibition for it was the duty of the Church to watch over Her members. Yet, in 1935 the Nazi state passed the Nuremberg laws which made it illegal for racially mixed marriages to occur and thus set itself up for direct confrontation with the Catholic Church.

Now that the Nazi government had officially made it illegal for the Church to marry two individuals having mixed racial heritage it became time for the Church to take action and arise to confront this infringement on its basic affairs. Sadly, this was not the case for while in some instances priests did circumvent the law citing a provision of the Concordat that permitted marriages without a civil ceremony in cases of "great moral emergency" the great majority did not. Many Church leaders bowed to the law, a law that earlier they had assaulted as being an infringement on the jurisdiction of the Church.\textsuperscript{23} Few denounced the Nuremberg ordinances as violations of natural law and of the moral teachings of the Church, and even less went so far as to declare that they were
“only a stage on the way toward the complete physical destruction of the Jews”\textsuperscript{24} The only major criticism against the racial legislation of the Nazis came not from the German bishops themselves but from Pope Pius XI. In his famous encyclical \textit{Mit brennender Sorge} (With Burning Anxiety) the Pontiff clearly condemned the brand of racism that the Nazis employed. He expressed that "with deep anxiety and with ever growing dismay" he had watched for a considerable time both an open and a secret persecution of the Church in Germany and that the experience of the past years had divulged "intrigues which from the beginning had no other aim than a war of extermination."\textsuperscript{25} Pius XI also denounced the divinization of race and state which perverted the order planned by God for “God’s sun shines on every human face, so his law knows neither privilege not exemptions”.\textsuperscript{26} This encyclical marked the most powerful protest ever issued against the Nazi government during its existence.\textsuperscript{27} Many bishops, however, were fearful of communicating this message to the members of the Church because of its strong condemnation of racism, which the bishops feared would elicit a negative response from the government.\textsuperscript{28} The bishops were correct in fearing the release of this encyclical for in its wake the Nazi government seized copies of the encyclical, forbade its reproduction and reinstated the trials against the clergy.\textsuperscript{29}

The German bishops themselves were quite divided on what course of action to take in dealing with Hitler, the Nazi government and the treatment of the Jews. Beginning in 1938 the issue of tactics – to negotiate and yield or to speak out in open conflict – was the major divisive factor among the bishops and it remained so until 1944.\textsuperscript{30} It was during this crucial period from 1938-1944 that the German episcopate needed to have consensus and a clear direction, yet it possessed neither and was too
involved in in-fighting to weigh in with its moral authority on the destruction of the Jews by the Nazis. The leading Church figure in Germany at the time, Cardinal Bertram, although personally not wishing to negotiate with Hitler and believing that negotiations would not yield results nevertheless urged a policy of negotiations. This policy was not shared by every bishop in Germany but because most of the bishops supported Bertram this was the generally accepted means of dealing with the Nazi government. There were many reasons why the German episcopate remained silent about the elimination of the Jews and tended towards a policy of negotiation instead of confrontation.

The German episcopate felt that any intervention on behalf of the Jews would probably be unsuccessful and might bring “an evil interpretation”. Furthermore, the German bishops felt that they had more pressing matters to attend to: schools, the existence of Catholic organizations, and sterilization. Sadly, not one bishop expressed any opposition to the events of the Kristallnacht pogrom of November 1938, which resulted in the destruction of Jewish properties, synagogues, and cemeteries, even though hostility between the Church and Nazi Germany was on the rise. Only Provost Bernard Lichtenberg, a priest from Berlin, made any mention of what had happened to the Jews. He prayed for the victims of the violence adding, “What took place yesterday, we know; what will happen tomorrow, we do not know; but what happened today, we have witnessed; outside [this church] the synagogue is burning, and that also is house of God.” For his courage in speaking out against the Nazi persecution of the Jews and his daily prayers for them Provost Lichtenberg was arrested and would later die en route to the concentration camp at Dachau. Before he died though he informed his captors that the deportation of Jews as part of the Final Solution was irreconcilable with the Christian
moral law. The example of this priest and his moral actions should have been a call to his superiors to speak out against the deportation of Jews “to the East” which most certainly entailed for them their death. At the very least though, this man’s very words should have been inspiration for his superiors to act. For when the Nazis disseminated anti-Semitic literature in 1941 Provost Lichtenberg ordered the following declaration read from all the churches in his diocese:

"An inflammatory pamphlet anonymously attacking the Jews is being disseminated among the houses of Berlin. It declares that any German who, because of allegedly false sentimentality, aids the Jews in any way, be it only through a friendly gesture, is guilty of betraying his people. Do not allow yourselves to be confused by this un-Christian attitude, but act according to the strict commandment of Jesus Christ: 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.'"36

If the German episcopate had treated the Jews in light of these words of the Provost, which he borrowed from Christ, then more would definitely have been done to ameliorate the suffering of the Jews.

The exact actions of the German episcopate towards the Final Solution are rather distressing because of their lack of action but certain factors must be considered in order to get a fuller understanding of their position and what could or could not be rightly expected from them. One thing is clear though, that the German bishops and others in the Church knew what was happening to the Jews as part of the Final Solution even though they may not have been fully aware of the totality of the extermination efforts. Rumors had begun to spread in the early 1940s that thousands of Jews who had been resettled to the east had in fact been transported to conquered German territory and executed. These rumors were substantiated by fact when in August 1942 Colonel Kurt Gerstein, a member of the SS, revealed to the Papal Nuncio in Berlin a gassing he had witnessed. Further reports were to come in from other Catholic officers in the field about the extermination
of the Jews that it is relevant to believe that by 1942 the German episcopate had a high
degree of knowledge concerning the Final Solution. Yet, the German episcopate seems
not to have utilized the opportunity afforded to them to speak out to the world about the
crimes that the Nazis were perpetrating against the Jews. The question then remains as
to what kept the bishops from doing more than what they did.

Certainly, the bishops feared that by making any negative pronouncements about
the war and the treatment of the Jews they might endanger their reputation and draw
criticism from the government and the people about such an unpatriotic attitude. It has
already been seen that the bishops feared the release of the encyclical *Mit brennender
Sorge* out of worry that the government might unleash some backlash on the Church for
its stance against the Nazis' policy of racism. Also, it has been noted that following the
release of this encyclical the government stepped up its campaign against the Catholic
Church with renewed vigor and energy. The bishops also were anxious about the effect a
public statement might have on the clergy itself. They already were well aware of the
situation that Provost Lichtenberg faced when he made comments critical of the Nazis’
treatment of the Jews and how his comments ultimately led to his death. Furthermore,
the Church leaders possessed information about the number of priests executed in Nazi
827.37

Another factor that most definitely influenced the bishops was the events that
unfolded in Holland in the summer of 1942. During July of that year the Catholic Church
in Holland along with the Dutch Reformed Church protested to the Reichskommissar
against the deportation of Dutch Jews and threatened to go public with their protest if this
action was not halted. In reply the German sources said that if the Churches remained silent then they would overlook the Jews who had been baptized and would not take them as part of the deportation. The Dutch Reformed Church leaders agreed to these conditions and decided to remain silent but the Catholic bishops in Holland refused to keep silent in the face of such blatant evil. In May 1943 the Dutch Catholic bishops issued a pastoral letter, read in all the Catholic churches, which condemned the actions of the Germans. The bishops expressed that "deportation on such a scale has never been seen before in the Christian era. To find a parallel one must go back to the Babylon captivity, when God's Chosen People were led into exile ... This deportation, my Brethren, is not only a calamity, it is an injustice to Heaven..."[38] In retaliation the Germans arrested and deported all baptized Catholic Jews and sent them off to the death camps in the east whereas the Protestant converts were free to remain in Holland. Thus, the German bishops probably feared that if they spoke up they risked putting their own baptized Jews in danger, or even worse a situation that would lead to their deportation and subsequent death.

Examination of the German episcopate therefore reveals a perceived lack of action on the part of the German Church hierarchy in regards to the fate of the Jews during the Holocaust. Yet, investigation of the possible reasons for the German bishops performing the way they did presents a formidable argument that these Church leaders did all that they were capable of doing for the plight of the Jews. Furthermore, it is difficult to gauge the thoughts of these men and therefore to really understand the situation from their point of view. The question that necessarily follows from this
examination of the German episcopate is what effect did their action, or lack there of, contribute to the action taken by Pope Pius XII himself.

In light of the apparent lack of action taken by the German episcopate to ameliorate the plight of the Jews much criticism has been attributed to Pius XII for not being more vocal in a protestation of the Holocaust. Critics, including Lewy and Friedlander, have accused the Pope of being more concerned with the affairs of the Church and of being too pro-German to really mount an effective defense of the Jewish people. Yet, these critics fail to take into consideration the many private actions that the Pope took on behalf of the Jews for their main focus in on what the Pontiff did publicly. Pius XII, however, was restrained from lending too strong a vocal protest to the Holocaust for he was limited by a need to remain diplomatic in the event that a solution to the Second World War could be found. This would thus allow him to act as a fair and just mediator between the two warring sides, especially Nazi Germany whose behavior one could best describe as erratic. Furthermore, Pius XII was limited by not knowing what reaction would follow any strong public protest on his part concerning the Nazis' treatment of the Jews. He was uncertain as to what consequences, both in Germany and German occupied territory, might await such an objection raised from him. Lastly, a high degree of uncertainty existed as to what effects might result in Germany had Pius XII discharged a remonstrance against the Nazis themselves. Therefore, the single most important determinant concerning the action Pius XII took on behalf of the Jews was the Nazi government itself because it was unknown in what manner the government would react in the event of a protestation lodged against it by the Pope.
Before being elected Pope, Pius XII understood the type of government he would be dealing with in Berlin for he had led the delegation, as then Vatican Secretary of State to Pius XI, which had negotiated the Concordat of 1933 with the German government. In a conversation with British diplomat Ivone Kirkpatrick in August 1933, Pius XII made it clear that he understood the character of the government he was dealing with:

"His eminence was extremely frank and made no effort to conceal his disgust at the proceedings of Herr Hitler's Government. The Vatican usually professes to see both sides of any political question, but on this occasion there was no word of palliation or excuse ... Cardinal Pacelli equally deplored the actions of the German Government at home, their persecution of the Jews, their proceedings against political opponents, the reign of terror, to which the whole nation was subjected."39

Therefore, at this early stage in his dealings with Nazi Germany, Pius XII already had the impression that this state, which he would be deal with for its entire existence, harbored disgust towards its Jewish population and forced its citizenry to live in a constant state of fear. He also witnessed how the Nazis abused and neglected the very Concordat he had so strongly negotiated. For it was at this time that he served the Church in relaying messages between the Vatican and the Nazi government. By means of his diplomatic efforts, Pius XII gained firsthand knowledge of how the Nazi government worked and that this was a government which in any way, shape or form could not be trusted to keep its word. Thus, in the face of overwhelming opposition did Pius XII firmly strive to maintain the correct legal position of the Church against the radical illegality of the Nazi Party.40

Throughout the years of his diplomacy towards the Nazi government, Pius XII bore witness to the escalation in violence that that government was enacting upon its Jewish citizenry. When Pius XII was elected Pope many regarded him as the
"diplomatic" Pope, a man both reticent and cautious, who knew how to conciliate if necessary. The Nazis, however, did not view his ascension to the chair of St. Peter very favorably given the fact that the new Pope intensely disliked Hitler whom he considered an upstart revolutionary and who labeled Nazism an infectious disease. The new Pope, however, had a deep affection for the German people stemming from his many years spent in that country as papal nuncio and this deep bond enabled him to have a valuable insight and closeness to the German clergy and to know the aspects of German life under Hitler. With his election Pius XII attempted to usher in a new period of relations between the Vatican and Germany influenced to a degree by his affection for the German people and their culture but even more so by the necessity to maintain stability in Europe. The state of affairs in Europe as a whole, at this time, was quite unfavorable for many of the European nations bore witness to upheaval stemming from the Great Depression and this unrest manifested itself in the rise of totalitarian and fascist regimes. Therefore, it was the desire of Pius XII to maintain cordial relations with Germany in these troubled times since she represented quite possibly the most dominant and stable power in central Europe.

The inclination of Pius XII to maintain friendly relations with Germany can be expressed in a speech he made to a group of German pilgrims visiting Rome for he remarked:

"We have always loved Germany, where We were able to spend many years of Our life, and We love Germany even more today. We rejoice in Germany's greatness, rise, and well-being and it would be false to assert that We do not desire a flourishing, great, and strong Germany. For this very reason, however, We desire that the rights of God and the Church be always recognized, for every greatness is the more firmly established the more these rights are esteemed and made the foundation for the edifice."
As evidenced by this amicable gesture the Pope clearly wished to maintain harmonious relations with Germany not only to foster a sense of stability but also to protect the rights of German Catholics. The Nazi government, however, did not reciprocate the friendliness displayed by the Pope for it continued its persecution of the Church in Germany as evidenced through its actions aimed at the German episcopate. With the advent of war in 1939 the government even began a new round of attacks aimed at Catholics residing in freshly conquered Poland. Vatican Radio reported daily the atrocities committed in Poland and on the 22\textsuperscript{nd} of January announced that Jews and Poles were being sealed off in ghettos that were pitifully inadequate for their survival.\textsuperscript{45} The Pope, for his part, vigorously protested these actions to the German government but all of the Pontiff’s pleas were met with silence and an even more intense drive of violence from the Nazis. This refusal of the German government to cease their actions in the conquered territories illustrated the impossible situation the Pope faced in determining whether or not to condemn their actions.\textsuperscript{46} The same assaults that Pius XII, along with the German episcopate, had observed happening in Germany were now being made against the populace of Poland and the Pope was restricted in what action he could take out of fear of reprisals from the Nazis.

The Pontiff also feared that any action specifically aimed at the Nazis might in some way endanger his neutrality and any ability he may have in seeking a diplomatic solution to the war. From the moment the conflict began the Pope had become preoccupied with ascertaining a diplomatic means of bringing the war to an end. However, he felt that the only way he could achieve this goal was if he were to have undisputed neutrality towards all parties involved in the fighting. This in turn caused
Pius XII to adopt a position whereby he would retain his neutral reputation but in the process forfeit his ability to actively criticize any side for actions committed during the course of the conflict. Neither could the Pope express sympathy for the victims of the fighting or endorse claims by both sides accusing the other of unspeakable acts of inhumanity. This desire on the part of the Pope can in some way account for why, during the course of the war and the Final Solution, he did not speak out even when numerous religious leaders and diplomats approached him to do so. In his mind the Pope felt that by remaining neutral he could develop a solution to the crisis and also prevent the kind of reprisals the Nazis unleashed on those who openly disobeyed or spoke out against them. The Pope had already by this time been witness to many such reprisals as these and he in no way wanted to see more of them inflicted upon the Church or others.

The actions that the Nazis took against those in the German Church, like Provost Lichtenberg, who criticized their policies and methods was met with similar circumstances in France following that nation’s surrender in June of 1940. Whereas their German counterparts for the most part remained silent, a large segment of the French hierarchy actively protested the treatment and deportation of Jews from their country. In a statement directed to Marshal Petain, leader of Vichy France, the French episcopate made known their views:

"Profoundly moved by the reports of massive arrests of Jews... and of the harsh treatment inflicted on them,... we are unable to suppress the cry of our conscience.... In the name of humanity and of Christian principles we lift our voice to protest in favor or the inalienable right of the human conscience."
More condemnations of the Nazis' attitude towards the Jews by the French hierarchy followed. Bishop Pierre Theas of Montauban stated, "I say that all men, Aryan or non-Aryan, are brothers because they are created by God."\(^{50}\) Archbishop Jules-Gerard Saliege of the diocese of Toulon stated in reference to the Jews that:

"children, women and men, fathers and mothers, should not be treated like a vile herd of cattle, that members of the same family should be separated from each other and sent to an unknown destination -- to live through this horror, is that what is reserved for us today? In the concentration camps of None and Recebedon disgraceful scenes have taken place. Jews are men too! Jewesses are women too! They too belong to the human race, they are our brothers and sisters. Let no Christian ever forget this!"\(^{51}\)

The French bishops followed up Archbishop Saliege's denunciation by issuing an even more broad protest to Petain:

"The mass arrest of the Jews last week and the ill-treatment to which they were subjected, particularly in the Paris Velodrome d'Hiver, has deeply shocked us. There were scenes of unspeakable horror when the deported parents were separated from their children. Our Christian conscience cries out in horror. In the name of humanity and Christian principles we demand the inalienable rights of all individuals. From the depths of our hearts we pray Catholics to express their sympathy for the immense injury to so many Jewish mothers and children. We implore you, M. le Marechal, to see that the laws of Justice and Right are not debased in this way!"\(^{52}\)

Impassioned pleas such as these from the French hierarchy to the Nazis were only met with an even more stringent assault on the Jews and an increase in violence aimed at the Catholic Church. Pius XII then knew firsthand what the results were if the Church were to openly criticize the Nazi regime because he knew what they did to those in their own country, those in France and even those bishops in the Netherlands who dared to have their voices heard.

It was with this knowledge in mind and also his strong desire to remain neutral that essentially confined Pius to what action he did undertake to assist the Jews during the
Holocaust. A letter the Pope wrote to Bishop von Preysing of Berlin is indicative of the fact that the Pope knew what was happening to the Jews in Europe at this time but that he was powerless to condemn the Nazis outright. In his letter the Pope states that, "it was for us a great consolation to learn that Catholics, in particular those of your Berlin diocese, have shown such charity towards the sufferings of the Jews. We express our paternal gratitude and profound sympathy for Msg. Lichtenberg who asked to share the lot of the Jews in the concentration camps, and who spoke up against their persecution in the pulpit." The Pope would go on in this letter to make remarks concerning his inability to act on the situation:

"As far as episcopal declarations are concerned, We leave to local bishops the responsibility or deciding what to publish from Our communications. The danger of reprisals and pressures -- as well perhaps of other measures due to the length and psychology of the war -- counsel reserve. In spite of good reasons for Our open intervention, there are others equally good for avoiding greater evils by not interfering. Our experience in 1942, when We allowed the free publication of certain Pontifical documents addressed to the Faithful justifies this attitude. In Our Christmas message, We said a word concerning the Jews in the territories under German control. The reference was short, but it was well understood. It is superfluous to say that Our love and paternal solicitude for all non-Aryan Catholics, children of the Church like all others, are greater today when their exterior existence is collapsing, and they know such moral distress. Unhappily in the present state of affairs, We can bring them no help other than Our prayers."

In this letter the Pope addresses the actions that are being carried out on the Jews and acknowledges that attempts so far to openly excoriate the Nazis have only brought reprisals that it is necessary not to pursue any further intervention in order to avoid "greater evils". This fear of bringing upon the Church and the Jews "greater evils" left the Pope, in his opinion, unable to actively take a stand on the Holocaust. Therefore, it was the decision of the Pope to leave it in the hands of the local Church to make their
own form of protest against the Nazis. The Pope also expressed concern to these local Churches that if they did make public pronouncements they risked the possibility of retaliation.

His inability to openly criticize the Nazis and their policies greatly troubled Pius XII for in that same letter to Bishop Preysing he states:

"Seldom has the Holy See had to undergo such trials as at the present time. Our honest attempt has been to meet all the terrible conflicts which are engulfing the powers of the world with complete neutrality and yet at the same time to defend carefully the needs of the Church. And, as you rightly said, this trial is only made the more difficult by the terrible atrocities and sins which the war has brought about. The seemingly limitless cruelty of the war machines makes the thought of a long drawn-out period of mutual slaughter unbearable. And what we have heard, day in and day out, of atrocities which are far beyond anything which could be ascribed to the necessities of war, is even more horrifying and shocking."

This statement from the Pope evidentially shows that he wished he could do more to alleviate the suffering of the Jews but that he had to be careful so as to remain neutral and unbiased. The very last sentence of this statement indicates that the Pope did indeed know the extent of the Holocaust and this knowledge only made the situation all the more worse to him. Pius XII understood that the only way the suffering of the Jews could be relieved was if he made a public pronouncement openly denouncing the Nazis and their practices but to do this would most assuredly destroy the neutral stance of the Church and that would endanger any hopes of acting in the role of a mediator.

Yet, even though Pius XII desired to refrain from open criticism aimed at the Nazis and their Final Solution he did make many private pleas to individuals and governments enjoining them to defy the Nazis. In his Christmas address of 1942, mentioned in the letter to Bishop Preysing, the Pope made clear reference to the Jews when he declared that, "hundreds of thousands of persons who, through no fault of their
own and solely because of their nation or their race, have been condemned to death or progressive extinction."56 A German report commissioned to comment on the Pope's address noted that:

"In a manner never known before the Pope has repudiated the National Socialist New European Order... It is true, the Pope does not refer to the National Socialists in Germany by name, but his speech is one long attack on everything we stand for... God, he says, regards all peoples and races as worthy of the same consideration. Here he is clearly speaking on behalf of the Jews... he is virtually accusing the German people of injustice towards the Jews, and makes himself the mouthpiece of the Jewish war criminals."57

Thus, the Pope did speak out on behalf of the Jewish people and his message was indeed heard by the authorities in Germany as evident by the reporter's statement. Other instances also existed where the Pope officially protested the treatment of the Jewish population in predominantly Catholic countries. In 1942 the deportation of Jews from Slovakia commenced and this immensely troubled the Vatican for the Slovakian leader, Monsignor Tiso, was a Catholic priest. Pius XII personally wrote a letter to the Slovakian government in which he stated:

"The Holy See has always entertained the firm hope that the Slovak government, interpreting also the sentiments of its own people, Catholic almost entirely, would never proceed with the forcible removal of persons belonging to the Jewish race. It is therefore with great pain that the Holy See has learned of the continued transfers of such a nature from the territory of the Republic. This pain is aggravated further now that it appears, from various reports, that the Slovak government intends to proceed with the total removal of the Jewish residents of Slovakia, not even sparing women and children. The Holy See would fail in its Divine Mandate if it did not deplore these measures, which gravely damage man in his natural right, merely for the reason that these people belong to a certain race. The pain of the Holy See is even more acute, considering that such measures are carried out among a people of great Catholic traditions, by a government which declares it is their follower and custodian."58

In reply to the Pope's plea the Slovakian government ceased the deportation of Jews from that country. A German diplomatic report at the time noted the cessation of deportations
of Jews from Slovakia and attributed this fact to the pressures exerted on Monsignor Tiso by the Pope. As a result of this cessation nearly twenty-five percent of the Slovakian Jewish population was spared.

Although his critics present Pius XII as not actively engaging in protest against the Nazis and their Final Solution it is evident from examination of the German Catholic Church and the action of the Pope himself that there were a great number of mitigating factors which contributed to their response. There existed amongst all parties an ever-present fear of reprisal from the Nazis should anyone deftly defy their policies. This fear only became all the more intense when it became clear how the Nazis would retaliate to such criticism. Historical evidence, as in the case of Provost Lichtenberg, shows that when an individual went up against the Nazis he or she most oftentimes paid with their own life and that in no way did their protest truly amount to much. Furthermore, the Nazis would only intensify their assault on the Jews and the Church should any member of the clergy speak out. This was all too apparent in the episode with the Dutch Catholic Church where the bishops there spoke out in moral defiance only to have a segment of their congregation, those baptized Jews, taken away and murdered.

There also existed, at least on the part of the Pope, a necessary sense to refrain from open confrontation in order to maintain a degree of neutrality. This neutrality would be essential if the case ever arose where the Pope might act as a mediator in the hopes of bringing the war to an end. The best documentation that can, to a degree, explain the reasoning behind the Pope’s decision not to do more to aid the Jews comes from the Vatican itself. (For the sake of space this information has been presented in Appendix A) In 1942 the Vatican released a series of considerations in support of the
Pope's attitude and they exhibit the fact that the Pope was limited in scope in what action he could or could not take. Pius XII, according to these considerations, had to restrict his pronouncements on the war so that he would not compromise the neutrality of the Church. The Vatican also wished to make it clear that any action taken by members of the Church hierarchy had to first be met with approval by the Pope since the Church wished to resound with only one voice and not several. This consideration demonstrates that the Pope had prior knowledge of what statements and actions the Dutch and French bishops undertook and that he supported them. Furthermore, these considerations show that the Pope truly feared that any statements made on the behalf of the Jews, by himself or any member of the clergy, would only worsen their already horrible condition.

The Pope did exhibit to his critics a sense that he did not do everything in his power to directly engage the Nazis and protest their actions. His critics, however, do not take into consideration the tremendous difficulties the Pope had to surmount in order to confront the Nazis. They fail to see that there existed a real and intense fear for the safety not only of members of the Church but also the Jews should any clergy member actively excoriate the policies of the Nazis. Consequently, they miss the fact that this fear created a situation whereby the Pope basically had his hands tied behind his back by the sheer notion that any protest would face harsh reprisals from the Nazis. One cannot even begin to fathom the enormous pressures that Pius XII must have faced in having to go through events like these and the weight that they placed upon his soul. It is true that there were opportunities on the part of the German episcopate and the Pope to take a stand and raise their moral voices but sadly these were either squandered or never even given a chance. For all the ammunition that his critics volley at him, the Pope did perform to the utmost
of his abilities even though those abilities were severely limited by perceived fears. These fears, however, were real and ever present as historical evidence shows. Thus, the Pope did all that he could do to help the Jews and though he wanted to do more as expressed in his letter to Bishop von Preysing he was unable to given the circumstances of war and the situation he was in.
APPENDIX A

In 1942 the Vatican released the following considerations in support of the Pope's attitude:

"(1) There is constant pressure on the Holy See from the Axis powers to denounce alleged Allied atrocities and, because of its silence, the Holy See is often accused of being pro-Ally. The Holy See could not very well, therefore, condemn Nazi atrocities on the one hand without saying something, for instance, about Russian cruelties on the other. Many of these alleged atrocities, it is admitted, are insignificant when compared to those perpetrated by the Nazis. However, it is pointed out that it would not be an easy matter for the Holy See to distinguish degrees of violation against the moral and natural laws and, in all probability, cognizance would have to be taken of all reported violations, however great or small.

(2) If the Pope should once embark upon a policy of denunciation of all violations or the moral and natural laws in war time wherever and by whoever committed, the Holy See would be obliged to spend a great deal of its time, first in investigation and then in denunciation; it would, in fact, tend to develop into an organization whose major activity might well be the determination of facts and the adjudging of the guilty.

(3) The difficulties in assembling supporting evidence of reported violations in order to establish grounds for condemnatory action would be enormous.

(4) The public pronouncements of the Pope on the moral law must stand the test of time. The danger of error involved in descending to the particular amidst the heat of war passions is obvious.

(5) The Pope has, on a number of occasions, openly condemned major offenses against morality in war time. The terms used have, it is admitted, been general, but the world knows very well to whom these words of condemnation were addressed.

(6) When members of the hierarchy [who, after all, are the representatives of the Pope] speak out, as they have already done in Germany and other countries, it should be realized that it is the voice of the Pope speaking and that this should be sufficient. It is common knowledge that when bishops make public statements on important subjects they do so with the prior approval of the Pope.

(7) The Holy See is firmly convinced that any public statement by the Pope at this time condemning Nazi activities in occupied countries, far
from doing any good, would greatly worsen the already precarious situation of Catholics obliged to reside in those areas. No lives would be saved thereby, but instead, many more lost. The Vatican claims to be better informed on this phase of the matter than the Governments in exile who may wish the Pope to speak out.\textsuperscript{61}
ENDNOTES

2. Lewy, Guenter. "Pius XII, the Jews, and the German Catholic Church," *The Storm over "The Deputy."
32. Tinnemann, "German," p. 56.
33. Tinnemann, "German," p. 57.
42. Conway, "Silence," p. 84.
44. Kent, "Pope Pius XII," p. 65.
48. DeCelles, Charles, "Pius XII: Guilty as Charged?"
   http://www.cfppeople.org/Apologetics/page51a010.html
59. DeCelles, "Guilty," p. 5
60. DeCelles, "Guilty," p. 5
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