

# Mark Jordan: Silence of Sodom

*by Robert P. Lockwood*

*(7/2000)*

One of the striking points of anti-Catholicism in American culture – in addition to its persistence – is the sameness of it all. Down through the years, there is a tiresome repetition of old clichés about Catholics and Catholicism inherited from the Reformation in England. The difference in today's popular anti-Catholicism is that the religious language has been stripped away, leaving the clichés to be re-stated from a secular focus. This allows today's bigot to think that he is presenting some startling new thesis, when he is actually simply regurgitating canards hundreds of years old.

One such long-standing cliché of anti-Catholicism is to take contradictory swipes at the priesthood based on the practice of celibacy. On the one hand, it is argued that celibacy is the source of an unnatural prurience in Church teaching on sexual morality. Rather than being built on Scripture, natural law and a faith-based understanding of sexuality, the cliché argues that Catholic moral teaching comes from "old celibate males" who are anti-sex and concerned solely with imposing an unrealistic puritanical agenda. At the same time, however, all these old celibate males are portrayed as secretive sexual predators. Since celibacy is unnatural the anti-Catholic propagandist argues it can only lead to unnatural practices.

Such a self-contradicting attack on the priesthood was at the heart of 19th-century anti-Catholic literature, aptly described as "puritan pornography." It is also the underlying assumption of the Kansas City Star series on AIDS in the priesthood, where it was argued that the unnatural requirement of celibacy attracts the sexually dysfunctional to the priesthood, leading to unsafe and secret sexual activity.

It is also at the heart of a new book by Mark D. Jordan, a former Catholic seminary instructor who teaches religion at Emory University. In *The Silence of Sodom, Homosexuality in Modern Catholicism*. (The University of Chicago Press, 2000) Jordan argues that, "the most important theological facts about Catholicism and homosexuality are not the bureaucratic words that Catholic authorities speak. The truly significant facts concern the homosexuality of the Catholic Church itself – of members of its priesthood and its clerical culture, of its rituals and spiritual traditions." The Jordan argument is the old self-contradicting attack on the priesthood: the Church teaches against homosexual practices because it is at heart a clerical homosexual institution.

A self-described "openly gay man," Jordan drafted his book while on a paid fellowship from the John S. Guggenheim Memorial Foundation. He also identifies himself as Catholic: "The Catholic tradition is my Christian tradition."

In the first section of the book, Jordan simply dismisses recent Church statements on homosexuality as reminiscent of "European fascists of the 1920s and 1930s." He purposely presents no arguments to which one can reply as he finds such efforts simply being lured into wasteful Church bureaucratic language and thinking. Instead, he revels in bombast. He describes the 1986 letter of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons as filled with logic "by which the church could hand over or relax 'sodomites' to the secular arm for public execution."

He similarly dismisses the 1998 U.S. Bishops' statement, "Always our Children," which was generally considered a moderate pastoral approach to parents of homosexual children. Jordan says that if the parents are strange enough to be disturbed by a child's active homosexual lifestyle, the problem is caused by homophobic church indoctrination, not the lifestyle itself.

Jordan then arrives at his central thesis. He finds in Catholicism in general, and the priesthood in particular, a dominant "homoerotic" culture. It is central to liturgy, the sacraments, and the priesthood itself. Church teachings that condemn homosexual practices are vicious "efforts to keep the dreaded 'secret' from being spoken." That secret, he argues endlessly but with no factual support, is that most priests are either active or closeted gays. "Catholic clerical arrangements...produce rich articulations of male-male desire, both because of compulsory priestly celibacy and because of the enormous development of all-male religious orders."

It is an argument that would be familiar to 16th-century anti-Catholic propagandists and, in fact, Jordan cites reams of early hate literature that charged Catholic prelates, including popes, of engaging in homosexual activities. Though acknowledging that such charges were unfounded and most often grounded in political and theological agendas, such is unimportant to Jordan. "We need not consider the truth of papal sodomy, but it's usefulness," by which he means how useful it was as a charge against the Church. The whole Church was allegedly engaged in covering up the "secret" of a homosexual clergy. Such charges were therefore useful propaganda in undermining the Church in the eyes of the faithful. Truthfulness was never very important in the political or theological agenda. A similar agenda might be on Jordan's mind today. In fact, he acknowledges that "my writing only fuels anti-Catholic bigotry" and that "it can always be used by anti-Catholics to confirm their view of the 'whore of Babylon.'"

An old Catholic joke has a group of high school sophomores being told by their teacher that the average boy has a sexually related thought every 10 seconds. This shocks the boys, but one is more shocked than the rest. He asks: "What do they think about for the other nine seconds?"

Jordan's book will remind the reader of that sophomoric sex-obsessed boy. He sees homoeroticism everywhere in Catholicism. The seminary, spiritual direction, the liturgy, church art and architecture, vestments, rectory life, religious education: all are expressions of a clerical culture "deeply colored by gay tastes and gay fantasies." Though Catholics may want to define these things as part of living the faith, they are to Jordan "expressions of gay sensibilities.... the homosexuality of the Catholic ruling class." In his more offensive chapter, he describes clerical life as "gay camp" and speaks of "priests who don't think they are doing anything odd when they dress up in silks on Sunday morning to promenade, sing, act, and host a meal." He describes the sacramental act of consecration of the Eucharist as a homosexual fantasy of creating the Perfect Male. It is ugly stuff that speaks more of the path Jordan has taken in life and his own obsessions, rather than any kind of an honest view of the priesthood and the Catholic faith.

"The Silence of Sodom" stoops so low as to cite two classics of American anti-Catholicism in an allegedly legitimate academic work – Charles Chiniquy's 19th-century *Fifty Years in the Church of Rome*, most recently published by Jack Chick's rabidly anti-Catholic press; and *The Awful Disclosures of Maria Monk*, the 1835 classic soft-porn "nuns-in-sexual-slavery" fraud. Maria Monk's revelations were seen as fraudulent when it was discovered by a Protestant journalist that the convent she claimed to have escaped from had no hidden rooms as she wrote about, nor did the convent resemble in any way her description of it. Jordan sees Maria's story as having the value of a parable: just as she could not prove her story of "hidden rooms," you will not find the "secret" of male gay actions in the priesthood because there is "no suite of inner rooms sheltering all gay clergy. There is no well-established rituals or sweeping histories or even enduring networks of supports." Which might lead the unbiased reader to conclude that just as Maria's story had no basis in fact,

Jordan's charges are built on his own sexual ideology rather than any real facts.

Jordan's book is filled with the illogical argument that denial of his case proves his case. He states that "conservative" Catholics who are loyal to the teaching of the Church are closeted homosexuals. When a journalist charged without any substantiation that Pope Paul VI had engaged in homosexual activity, the papal denial was proof that the allegations must have been true. Priestly actions in the liturgy are "gay camp" and made even more so by priestly denial that they are anything of the sort. Rejecting his thesis of this immense Catholic homosexual culture is succumbing to denial of the "secret." In one of the oddest arguments in the book, Jordan links the reported cases of pedophilia by priests as one proof of this alleged homosexual culture even though it is generally understood that pedophilia is a severe psychological disease that is not directly linked with homosexuality. Certainly gay activists would be terribly distraught at such a linkage.

In an interesting sidebar to that discussion, Jordan writes that he knew Rudy Kos, the infamous pedophile from the diocese of Dallas. Jordan says that Koss was a student in his class on scholastic philosophy at Holy Trinity Seminary in Dallas. "I was too preoccupied with my own fierce combat against desires for men. *Like so many in Catholic education* (emphasis added), I was simply incapable of helping anyone with homoerotic secrets." Kos passed his course.

Jordan concludes with a call to gay and lesbian Catholics to consider alternative communities to live out their faith. "You must leave the Church," he writes, "to become a Catholic."

This is a book of opinion – outrageous opinion – based on little more than the author's own fantasy life. He ascribes to Catholicism, the Catholic priesthood, and the Catholic Mass itself a homoeroticism that exists solely in his own mind.

From its cliched assumptions, through its bigoted citations, and to its conclusion that people should leave the Catholic Church at once, the book is an exercise in anti-Catholicism.

I do not fault Jordan so much for the tired prejudices that come from his difficult life. One can't help wondering, however, about the motives of The University of Chicago Press for publishing such a profoundly anti-Catholic book, and the John S. Guggenheim Memorial Foundation for funding the author's fantasy life.

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## Deconstructing The Deputy

*by Robert P. Lockwood*

*(Catalyst 6/2000)*

For nearly 20 years after World War II, Pope Pius XII (1939-1958) was honored by the world for his actions in saving countless Jewish lives in the face of the Nazi Holocaust. His death on October 9, 1958 brought a moment of silence from Leonard Bernstein while he conducted at New York's Carnegie Hall. Golda Meir, future Israeli Prime Minister and then Israeli representative to the United Nations, spoke on the floor of the General Assembly: "During the ten years of Nazi terror, when our people went through the horrors of martyrdom, the Pope raised his voice to condemn the persecutors and commiserate with the victims."

Among the Jewish organizations in the United States alone that praised Pope Pius XII at the time of his death for saving Jewish lives during the horror of the Nazi Holocaust were the

World Jewish Congress, the Anti-Defamation League, the Synagogue Council of America, the Rabbinical Council of America, the American Jewish Congress, the New York Board of Rabbis, the American Jewish Committee, the Central Conference of American Rabbis, the American Jewish Committee, the Central Conference of American Rabbis, the National Conference of Christians and Jews and the National Council of Jewish Women.

Yet, four decades after the death of Pius XII he is condemned for his "shameful silence" in the face of the Holocaust. He is commonly accused not only of silence, but even complicity in the Holocaust. He is called "Hitler's Pope." When critics are reminded of the universal praise he received from Jewish organizations in life and death, such praise is dismissed as merely "political" statements, as if those Jews who had lived through the Holocaust would insult the memory of the millions killed for some ephemeral political gain.

When Pope John Paul II issued his historic apology for mistakes and errors in Christian history, he was savaged by pundits and news reports for his "silence" in regard to the alleged "silence" of Pope Pius XII. Lance Morrow in *Time* magazine, referred to the Church's "terrible inaction and silence in the face of the Holocaust" and described any defense of Pius or the Church as "moral pettifogging." He made such statements without bothering to substantiate them because the charges are simply accepted as "fact" and any disagreement becomes on a par with those who deny the reality of the Holocaust itself.

The historical reality of the pontificate of Pius XII has nearly been lost in the face of the strident campaign against him. Anti-Catholicism thrives on invented history that becomes part of the accepted cultural corpus. Conventional historical wisdom is more often the creation of propaganda than fact. Contemporary Catholics are witnessing the creation of a myth in regard to Pius XII, a propaganda campaign as relentless as any created by 19th century anti-Catholic apologists.

The view of Pius XII as Nazi collaborator did not begin as a case study of historical revisionism. It did not even begin within historical studies themselves or from available historical documentation, including transcripts of the Nuremberg trials, or government records made public. The myth of Pius XII began in earnest in 1963 in a drama created for the stage by Rolf Hochhuth, an otherwise obscure German playwright born in 1931.

Hochhuth was part of a post-World War II trend in theatre called "Documentary Theatre" or "Theatre of Fact." The trend grew out of an American form of theatre popularized during the Depression. The point was to adapt social issues to theatrical presentation by utilizing documentation. The documentation was more important than artistic presentation and provided the script for the play. It was seen in more recent times with Vietnam War morality plays that excerpted from the Pentagon Papers, or presentations where the dialogue was directly culled from the White House tapes of Richard Nixon.

Hochhuth, however, created a more traditional theatrical presentation without any documentary basis when it came to Pius XII. Though claiming to be part of the "Theatre of Fact," his presentation against Pius did not have the documentary sources for this style of drama. Turgid in length, in 1963's *Der Stellvertreter* (*The Representative* or *The Deputy*) Hochhuth charged that Pius XII maintained an icy, cynical and uncaring silence during the Holocaust. More interested in Vatican investments than human lives, Pius was presented as a cigarette-smoking dandy with Nazi leanings. (Hochhuth also authored a play charging Winston Churchill with complicity in a murder. No one paid much attention to that effort.)

*The Deputy*, even to Pius' most strenuous detractors, is readily dismissed. Even as vicious a critic of Pius XII as John Cornwell in *Hitler's Pope* describes *Der Stellvertreter* as "historical fiction based on scant documentation...(T)he characterization of Pacelli (Pius XII) as a money-grubbing

hypocrite is so wide of the mark as to be ludicrous. Importantly, however, Hochhuth's play offends the most basic criteria of documentary: that such stories and portrayals are valid only if they are demonstrably true."

Yet *The Deputy*, despite its evident flaws, prejudices and lack of historicity, laid the foundation for the charges against Pius XII, five years after his death. There was fertile ground. Pius XII was hated by certain schools of post World War II historians for the anti-Stalinist, anti-Communist agenda of both his pontificate, and the Catholic Church in general. In the heady atmosphere of leftist academic circles, particularly in Italy in the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s, the charge against Pius was that while he was not necessarily pro-Nazi during the war, but that he feared Communism more than Hitler. For the most part, this was based on the pope's opposition to the Allied demand for unconditional German surrender. He believed such a demand would only continue the horror of the war and increase the killing. That stand was later interpreted as a desire on the pontiff's part to maintain a strong Germany as a bulwark against communism. Hochhuth's charge of papal "silence" fit that revisionist theory.

The theory, of course, was as much fiction as Hochhuth's play. There was no documentary evidence to even suggest such a papal strategy. But it became popular, particularly among historians with Marxist sympathies in the 1960s. Even this theory, however, did not extend to an accusation that the Pope "collaborated" in the Holocaust, nor to any charge that the Church did anything other than save hundreds of thousands of Jewish lives. However, it did provide a mercenary rationale of "politics over people" in response to the Holocaust and applied such barbarous reasoning to the pope.

*The Deputy*, therefore, took on far greater importance than it deserved. Instead of Pius being seen as a careful and concerned pontiff working with every means available to rescue

European Jews, an image was created of a political schemer who would sacrifice lives to stop the spread of Communism. *The Deputy* was merely the mouthpiece for an ideological interpretation of history that helped create the myth of a “silent” Pius XII doing nothing in the face of Nazi slaughter.

There was also strong resonance within the Jewish community at the time *The Deputy* appeared. The Jewish world had experienced a virtual re-living of the Holocaust in the trial of Adolf Eichmann. A key figure in the Nazi Final Solution, Eichmann had been captured in Argentina in 1960, tried in Israel in 1961 and executed in 1962. For many young Jews, Eichmann’s trial was the first definitive exposure to the horror that the Nazis had implemented. At the same time, Israel was threatened on all sides by the unified Arab states. War would erupt in a very short time. *The Deputy* resonated with an Israel that was surrounded by enemies and would be fighting for its ultimate survival.

Despite the fact, therefore, of a two-decades-old acknowledgment of papal support and assistance to the Jews during the War, Hochhuth’s unfounded charges took on all the aspects of revelation. In a column after Pope John Paul II’s apology, Uri Dormi of Jerusalem described the impact: “*The Deputy* appeared in Hebrew and broke the news about another silence, that of Pope Pius XII about the Holocaust. The wartime Pope, who on Christmas Eve 1941 was praised in a *New York Times* editorial as ‘the only ruler left on the continent of Europe who dares to raise his voice at all,’ was exposed by the young, daring dramatist.”

It seems ludicrous that a pope praised for his actions throughout the war – and by all leading Jewish organizations throughout his life – could be discredited based on nothing more than a theatrical invention. Yet, that is what took place and has taken place since. A combination of political and social events early in the 1960s, biased historical revisionism, and an exercise in theatrical rhetoric, created

the myth of the uncaring pontiff in contradiction to the clear historical record. The myth thrives because people want to believe it rather than because it is believable.

Great strides had been made in Catholic-Jewish relations during the papacy of John Paul II. Yet the myth of the silence of Pius XII has helped to entrench anti-Catholicism within elements of the Jewish community, while creating in certain Catholic circles resentment that can only be harmful. Leaving this myth unanswered can only do great damage to what should be a deep relationship between Catholics and Jews, generated in part by the heroism of Pope Pius XII in saving Jewish lives during the Holocaust.

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# **Garry Wills: Papal Sin: Structures of Deceit**

*by Robert P. Lockwood*

*(6/2000)*

It is a sad phenomenon of modern America that too often self-identified Catholics display anti-Catholicism or anti-Catholic rhetoric in the public arena. Anti-Catholic statements from Catholics, or those with Catholic roots, may seem to be an oxymoron. But it exists and those Catholics that engage in such inflammatory rhetoric against their own faith rarely see it as bigotry. Influenced by the dominant secular culture, they see anti-Catholicism as a product of enlightened thought, rather than an inherited prejudice.<sup>1</sup> Worse still, by the very nature of their Catholic background, their remarks gain a certain cachet in secular circles that would otherwise ignore them if the source were non-Catholic.

Generally, anti-Catholicism from Catholics comes from three particular sources. We begin with the "Uncle Pats."<sup>2</sup> These are Catholics who find Catholic beliefs and practices embarrassing in an age of enlightened secularism. Usually they are converts to contemporary agnosticism who consider themselves far too learned to practice the faith, yet identify themselves by their Catholic heritage. They do their best to show the secular world that they have "grown" by taking visceral pleasure in publicly denigrating Catholicism. When challenged for mocking Catholicism, their response is that they are "Catholic," though their practice of the faith might be minimal or non-existent.

Then there are those raised Catholic who convert to fundamentalist sects. Not all, of course, but too many of these former Catholics find it necessary to publicly heap scorn on their heritage. They are often bitterly anti-Catholic. They adopt a literal interpretation of Scripture and fling epithets at Catholic beliefs worthy of a 19th-century nativist.<sup>3</sup> Curiously, one rarely finds Catholic converts from another Christian faith that behave in such a fashion toward their former denomination. For the most part, they have nothing but good things to say of their roots that they see as a positive part of their pilgrimage to Catholicism.

Finally, there are those Catholics who let their own vision of what the Church should or should not be poison their public comments. They often engage in the most shocking anti-Catholic rhetoric to push a particular agenda within the Church, with little interest in the impact such rhetoric might have on the image of the Church in the general culture. Their goal is to force change in the Church through assault. These are practicing Catholics who can come from any ideological perspective. However, they will engage in vicious and unfair attacks on the Church if they perceive that such attacks can bolster their particular viewpoint. In many cases, these attacks can be more vicious than that of the most engaged

secular anti-Catholic or fundamentalist. Worse, they carry greater weight because the source is Catholic.

In his study of news media treatment of priestly pedophilia, for example, Philip Jenkins found that many of the false and invalid assertions over the extent of the problem had been generated in the secular media by those within the Church. It was exaggerated to the media in order to advance a particular cause within the Church. The so-called right used it as a means to discredit what they perceived to be liberalism and laxity within the hierarchy and in seminary training; the so-called left used it to push an agenda that would eliminate priestly celibacy and allow for women's ordination within the Church. Both sides used the secular media to exploit and exaggerate the extent of the problem.<sup>4</sup>

All of which serves as an introduction to Garry Wills' new book *Papal Sin: Structures of Deceit*.<sup>5</sup> Wills seems to combine the worst features of all the above in a book that is both contrary to the teachings of the Church, and employs rhetoric against Catholicism that would never be utilized by a reputable publisher if the author did not identify himself as Catholic. If the author were not Catholic and prominent, *Papal Sin* would have only found a home in a far right fundamentalist publishing house or a small humanist press.

Garry Wills is certainly a prominent author. A Catholic, he currently teaches history at Northwestern University, though his public career goes back well into the early 1960s. Wills began as a protégé of William Buckley at *National Review*. He rather quickly had a change of ideological heart and became a well-known liberal author. He won the 1993 Pulitzer Prize for his book, *Lincoln at Gettysburg* and recently published a short study of the life and thought of Saint Augustine.

Wills has written a number of books on Catholicism, including *Politics and Catholic Freedom*.<sup>6</sup> Written in 1964 when he was still within the *National Review* orbit, that book was an

attempt by Wills to explain how Catholics in the context of American political life could legitimately dissent in the arena of the Church's social teachings as defined by the pope. The book was written as a reaction to the battle that raged over Pope John XXIII's social encyclical, *Mater et Magistra* (*Mother and Teacher*). Written in 1961 to commemorate the 70th anniversary of Pope Leo XIII's great social encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*, Pope John XXIII's encyclical stressed the importance of social justice and human rights, addressed political and economic inequalities among peoples and nations, and voiced the concerns of underdeveloped countries. In response, an issue of *National Review* proclaimed, "Mater si; Magistra no."

It became a curious debate, as one looks back with the advantage of hindsight. To oversimplify, certain conservative Catholics took issue with the focus of the encyclical and complained of its "anti-capitalist" slant in a world where Communism threatened everywhere. Liberal Catholics defended Pope John XXIII's social agenda and argued that, as a papal encyclical, it should be accepted with "filial respect."<sup>7</sup>

Wills' 1964 book gave the conservative response, focusing not so much on *Mater et Magistra* but on the Catholic right to dissent from papal teaching, particularly in areas that do not touch on central notions of faith and doctrine. Wills' essential message was that papal encyclicals can err, and intelligent Catholics can legitimately disagree particularly when encyclicals deal with application of faith to contemporary issues.

Of course, when Pope Paul VI issued *Humanae Vitae* in 1968 many flip-flopped. Conservatives argued the vital nature of papal teaching; liberals defended dissent. The difference, of course, was that the issue in 1968 involved matters of defined faith and morals. While Wills, for example, could argue in 1964 that many areas of *Mater et Magistra* did not involve clear and long-standing Church teaching, that argument could not be made in response to *Humanae Vitae*. Church teaching on

artificial contraception, though it had a convoluted history based on the weakness of scientific knowledge in prior centuries, could be traced directly back to the Church Fathers. Within the 20th century, Pope Pius XI had issued an encyclical in condemnation of the practice (*Casti Connubii*) and Pope Pius XII had reconfirmed that view in 1951.

That said, Wills was the rare bird in 1968 who was not caught having his own words thrown back at him. Wills had established a framework for dissent in 1964 that could be utilized again in 1968. His right-wing analysis in dismissing Pope John XXIII's social vision in *Mater et Magistra* had laid the foundation for his dissent from Paul VI's moral teaching in *Humanae Vitae* in 1968.

All of which serves as a lengthy introduction to *Papal Sin*. Wills had formally established a philosophy of dissent that moved from social teachings to moral theology, from interpretation of Catholic teaching on contemporary issues, to the level of assent granted to the exercise of the ordinary teaching authority of the pope in moral theology. In *Papal Sin* Wills takes the last steps in the pilgrimage by denying papal authority altogether and in questioning foundational Catholic belief. Unfortunately, it is a pilgrimage that too many Catholics have taken.

*Papal Sin* reads and argues at varying times as if its author can't decide if he is a Bible-thumping fundamentalist, a secular agnostic or a bitter ex-Catholic. But for the most part, Wills comes across as a Catholic with such a heavy-handed agenda that reasonableness or any attempt to accurately portray Church teaching has long since been abandoned for ideological zealotry. Wills states, for example, that the arguments for much of "what passes as current church doctrine are so intellectually contemptible that mere self-respect forbids a man to voice them as his own."<sup>8</sup> Such language would demand an immediate retraction and apology if its source were non-Catholic. Wills – and Doubleday – believe that it is

acceptable as long as the author of the statement claims Catholicism as his own.

The level of rejection of basic tenets of Catholic belief within this book is profound, considering that the author firmly claims his Catholic identity and describes himself as a practicing Catholic. There is the standard fare concerning active support for women's ordination, dismissal of celibacy, and embracing of artificial contraception. Wills goes further than many involved in Catholic dissent by also professing unqualified support for abortion rights.<sup>9</sup> But he does not stop there. In the course of the book he rejects the teaching authority of the Church if exercised without lay involvement and agreement,<sup>10</sup> the concept of papal infallibility and any possibility of divine guidance to papal teaching,<sup>11</sup> the ordained priesthood,<sup>12</sup> the doctrine of the Real Presence in the Eucharist<sup>13</sup> and that the priest has the sacramental power alone to consecrate the Eucharist.<sup>14</sup> Apostolic succession,<sup>15</sup> the Immaculate Conception and Assumption,<sup>16</sup> and Church teaching on homosexuality are dismissed as well.<sup>17</sup> For the most part, the right for the Church to teach at all in the area of sexual morality is generally dismissed if it involves the actions of consenting adults.

It will be left to others to expose the theological deficiencies in Wills' arguments. Wills' personal rejection of much of defined Catholic belief is his own sad business. The public difficulty, however, is that Wills' book will be utilized by those outside the Church with an anti-Catholic agenda to reinforce their prejudices. While Wills certainly sees his book as a call to arms within a certain cadre of Catholics, the greater impact will be to reinforce anti-Catholic prejudices and assumptions within the secular culture.

Though the title is catchy, *Papal Sin* is not a collection of anti-clerical tales from the dark ages meant to poke fun at the papacy. There is no reference here to the legend of Pope

Joan or the scandal of boy popes in the first millennium. Rather, "papal sin" refers to what Wills calls "structures of deceit" that he contends are inherent to the papacy. Wills charges that the Catholic Church exists in a system of lies, falsifications, and misrepresentations meant to prop up papal authority. And not only popes deceive. The whole structure and belief system of the Church, from sacramental and moral theology, to ecclesiology, Marian beliefs and the essential understanding of Christ's death as atonement for the sins of mankind, are part of a fabricated "structure of deceit."

The very title of the book – and the general thesis concerning "structures of deceit" – reflects classic themes of anti-Catholic post-Reformation propaganda. Much like Protestants in 17th Century England, or today's anti-Catholic fundamentalists, Wills is not content to merely argue that Catholic beliefs are wrong. He argues that they are consciously wrong. Church leaders know these teachings are wrong, yet they still attempt to impose such beliefs on the Catholic laity. Why would church leadership engage in such deceit? They do so solely in the name of power. "To maintain an impression that popes cannot err," Wills writes, "Popes deceive."<sup>18</sup> Again, this goes far beyond theological exploration, dissent or disagreement with Catholic teaching. Wills is accusing the Church of conscious deception in fundamental beliefs. The Church knows these teachings are wrong, Wills charges, but they are taught anyway. These "pressures of deceit," Wills writes, "are our most subtle modern form of papal sin."<sup>19</sup>

Wills also embraces the "ignorant Catholic laity" portrait common to post-Reformation literature, though he gives his own twist to it. In this early Protestant argument, which thrives in today's secular world, Catholic laity believe in Church teaching only until they are exposed to enlightened thought. In Wills' twist, Catholic laity have been so informed and now dismiss most Church teaching. The difference is that in the

past, the assumption would be that Catholics would depart from the Church when properly enlightened. Today, Wills argues, there is no necessity for that because they are simply rejecting a “structure of deceit” that maintains an unwarranted papal authority that is not true to Catholic tradition. Those Catholic laity who maintain orthodox Catholic positions – “papalotors” Wills calls them – are silently cooperating with the “structures of deceit.” Catholics who reject these “structures of deceit” have, of course, grown.

The difficulty, of course, is that Wills’ theory is based both on an inaccurate understanding of the teaching authority of the Church and of the papacy. Similar to anti-Catholic Protestants in the 19th century, Wills distorts Catholic understanding of papal authority and then proceeds to knock down that straw man: “The Pope alone...is competent to tell Christians how to live”<sup>20</sup>; defenders of orthodox Catholicism believe that “the whole test of Catholicism, the essence of faith, is submission to the Pope.”<sup>21</sup> Catholics, of course, recognize the difference between the ordinary magisterium and infallible Church teachings. They also understand the teaching role of the papacy and its essentially conservative nature, in the best sense of that phrase, in defending the deposit of faith. The difference is that Wills summarily rejects any papal authority to teach and, as such, it has led him down a road that moves from quiet dissent on social issues to outright rejection of fundamental Church teachings. Catholics know that once it is denied that the Church can teach authoritatively through its foundation in Christ and the guidance of the Holy Spirit in matters of faith and doctrine, one is reduced to a faith of his or her own creation.

Wills’ book is filled not so much with argument and documentation as with statements. He makes assertions and those assertions are the only substantiation for his positions. “Women,” he proclaims, were “censored out of the Last Supper,”<sup>22</sup> without giving any Scriptural or historical

proof for such an assertion. And, "It is clear that the Spirit's presence in the community is what consecrates" the Eucharist<sup>23</sup> His sources are primarily secondary, and based solely on interpretations and expositions from those that share his views. Most of the book cites opinions sanctified by secondary sources that are as biased as Wills himself. His major source on priestly pedophilia, homosexuality and heterosexual activity is A.W. Richard Sipe, whose research has been seriously questioned both in its methodology and studied bias. Wills also misstates even friendly sources, or fails to acknowledge that reputable scholars seriously dispute the facts cited. For example, he states as fact that today "80 percent of young priests think that the Pope is wrong on contraception, 60 percent of them think he is wrong on homosexuality, yet the Vatican keeps up the pressure to have them voice what they do not believe."<sup>24</sup> His cited reference for these statistics is *American Catholic*, by Charles Morris, page 293.<sup>25</sup> In checking Morris, one discovers first that Morris clearly identifies that these were opinions of young priests analyzed in the mid 1980s – 15 years ago. Wills presents them as contemporary viewpoints. More important, the analysis that generated even these old statistics was strongly challenged for its accuracy at the time, and nowhere is that acknowledged. (Even in the vapid *Kansas City Star* survey taken in late 1999 to find out if priests were opposed to Church teaching on homosexuality, not even 20 percent of the priests responding advocated any change in Church teaching.)

Wills slips into a biblical fundamentalism when it serves his purpose. At times, he sounds like the anti-Catholic comic book publisher Jack Chick. He attacks the consecrated priesthood as an invention of the Church in the Fourth Century as a means to limit the growing popularity of the desert hermits. He declares that women were Apostles, stating that the reference by Paul to "Junias" in Romans 16: 7 is a cleverly edited reference to a female apostle, "Junia." (While one could make an unprovable argument that Junias could be a woman, it is

clear anyway that the use of the term “apostle” is generic and not referencing the Twelve.) Wills’ essential argument is that women should be ordained priests because there was no mention of ordained priests in the New Testament. Women can be priests because Christ did not *not* ordain women. Like a good fundamentalist, if a teaching cannot be cited chapter and verse in Scripture – a male-only priesthood – it cannot be doctrinal. At the same time, he ignores Scripture that contradicts his position. When the Gospels speak of the Last Supper and the institution of the Eucharist, it is clear in Matthew, Mark and Luke that only the Apostles are present. Wills simply dismisses this as censorship of the reality of women in attendance without establishing any foundation for such a charge.

Again, with almost a fundamentalist perspective Wills displays little understanding of Sacred Tradition and the development of doctrine. He dismisses the Sacrament of Reconciliation as a power grab by the Church to make the clergy “a hydraulic system pumping grace back into souls...a substitution of human agencies for the free action of the Divinity.”<sup>26</sup> He concludes that “grace is made a stuff controlled by the papal system of spiritual aqueducts and storage tanks. In a new form of idolatry, the Pope becomes a substitute for the Spirit.”<sup>27</sup>

The Church has long understood the value of theological reflection and the necessity of forever growing in our understanding of the faith. Wills never sees any progression in the understanding of doctrinal truths and moral teachings. He responds to Church teaching on women’s ordination by refuting ancient arguments of ritual impurity. He attacks celibacy in a similar fashion with no expressed sense of the reasons for the historical development of that discipline. Every action of the Church is viewed from the prism of an insatiable papal power. One of the greatest sources of scandal historically within the Church – the control of the appointment of bishops by secular authorities – he simply

brushes aside. The desire to secure those appointments to the Holy See simply becomes another papal power grab.

While acknowledging at one point that Church teaching on artificial contraception is nearly as old as the Church itself and condemned by the Fathers of the Church, he states simply that we cannot “look for sanity” in their treatment of the issue. He condemns *Humanae Vitae*, Pope Paul VI’s encyclical that reasserted this traditional teaching as “truly perverse,”<sup>28</sup> while claiming that the only reason Pope Paul issued the encyclical was because he was “trapped by his predecessors.” *Humanae Vitae* “is about authority. Paul decided the issue on that ground alone. He meant to check the notion that church teaching could change.”<sup>29</sup> He offers no proof for that statement, of course, as the simple act of assertion is meant to make it fact.

In the discussion of abortion, he wanders off into the unanswerable issue of “ensoulment,” (at what point that God “infuses” the soul into unborn life). He then speaks of abortions in nature, when the body spontaneously “aborts” and snidely wonders if this means that God Himself aborts millions of souls to “Limbo.” Of course, the issue of ensoulment was debated in Church history to determine the stages of gravity of the sin but had nothing to do with the inherent evil in the killing of unborn life, acknowledged in the very earliest moral teachings of the Church (And it is foolish to equate Thomas Aquinas’ presentation of the issue of “ensoulment” and his understanding of fetal development in the 13th-century with contemporary science’s understanding in the third millennium). Of course, Wills knows that what we commonly refer to as “abortion” these days is the conscious choosing to abort life, not a natural miscarriage.

Wills berates pro-lifers that are willing to compromise on the issue in case of rape or incest, stating that this is proof of their fundamental dishonesty, rather than the realities that they face in combating legalized abortion within American

culture. Wills concludes his discussion on abortion by stating that he supports legalized abortion, but that "it is not a thing that can be proposed as an ideal and that women should not make the decision lightly."<sup>30</sup> He never states why he holds that position. If fetal life is not worthy of protection – if it is not "life" – then what possible difference could it make if women make the decision to abort lightly? And why would it not be "ideal"? If the fetus is nothing, issues of "ideals" are meaningless.

Wills moves into even shakier ground with his discussion of Vatican I and the definition of papal infallibility. Of course, he sees the definition of papal infallibility in the Vatican Council of 1870 as the ultimate power ploy by Pope Pius IX. He claims that Pius was attempting to establish a new doctrine and that the brave dissenters were silenced by papalotors in the Curia. Yet, as noted by Eamon Duffy, today's foremost Church historian, "Few nineteenth-century Catholics rejected out-of-hand the notion that the pope might teach infallibly. But many thought that it was dangerous to try to define just how and when that might happen. They thought it unnecessary, for the infallibility of the Church had never been defined, yet all Catholics believed it."<sup>31</sup> Wills portrays the Council as an argument for or against infallibility, and a minority in opposition with the deck stacked against them and virtually silenced by papal manipulation. In fact, debate was hot and heavy throughout the Council. As the conciliar fathers grew closer to consensus and understanding, a definition emerged that was far from ultramontane (that virtually every formal utterance of the Holy Father was infallible). The Council proclaimed no new teaching that extended papal authority beyond a point it had held for centuries. Wills seems to think so, even though the subsequent popes issued one *ex cathedra* statement (Pope Pius XII defining Catholic teaching on the Assumption of Mary in 1950) and did so only after extensive consultation with the world's bishops.

In his discussion of the first Vatican Council, Wills canonizes Sir John Acton, a British Catholic who had developed a loathing for Pius IX and politicked behind the scenes to undercut any definition of papal infallibility. A student of Ignaz von Dollinger, a German priest who would leave the Church over the definition of infallibility, Acton's primary contribution to the Council was his attempt to undercut it by convincing secular governments to interfere. He began "a campaign to whip up public opinion and British, French and German action to prevent the definition. There was talk of the English Cabinet sending a gunboat."<sup>32</sup> Acton actually managed to convince Otto von Bismarck's Prussian government to threaten to withdraw its ambassador from Rome, but the threat was never followed through. (Acton's rhetoric would eventually show its influence within the Prussian government. In 1871, the government launched the Kulturkampf against the Church, seeing Catholicism as an "alien" presence in Germany and the declaration of papal infallibility of Vatican I an internal threat because of alleged foreign loyalty. A series of vicious anti-Catholic laws were enacted and many clergy and prelates arrested.)

Wills sees his "structures of deceit" as an essential "dishonesty" in the Church over papal authority. He sees dishonesty in history and dishonesty in Catholic doctrine all to prop up papal authority. While his 1964 book was respectful in its dissent, *Papal Sin* has a distinct tone of viciousness that moves it from theological dissent to anti-Catholicism. Like an anti-Catholic polemicist, Wills slashes and burns, inventing evil motives, distorting doctrine and history, and resorts at last to ridicule. He refers to the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception as a teaching that would "muddy and confuse the nature of the Incarnation" and scoffed that Mary's "very flesh was a cosmic marvel, like kryptonite, unable to die."<sup>33</sup> Again reflecting the worst of fundamentalist rhetoric, he refers to Mary and Marian doctrine as creating "an idol-goddess"<sup>34</sup> that replaced the Holy Spirit as the object of

Catholic devotion.<sup>35</sup> Quoting Sipe, he calls devotion to Mary a sign of male immaturity rampant in the clergy and hierarchy, and that if one sees oneself as a "child of Mary" this can "infantilize spiritual life."<sup>36</sup>

Wills sees the canonization by martyrdom of Edith Stein as an historical dishonesty. Stein, a Jewish convert to Catholicism who became a Carmelite nun, was murdered by the Nazis in the Holocaust. As a Christian of Jewish descent in a convent in Holland, Stein had first avoided arrest at the hands of the Nazis. But when the Archbishop of Utrecht publicly denounced Nazi deportation of the Jews, the exemption was canceled and Stein was caught in the roundup. She died at Auschwitz. Wills scoffs at her canonization as a martyr. Stein died because she was a Jew, Wills argued, and her Catholicity had nothing to do with it. Her canonization was a cold-blooded attempt to claim victimhood for the Church in the Holocaust, Wills states. Such an argument is loathsome. First, Stein died because she was a Jew and a Catholic, the very specific reasons for her arrest. Second, that is the reason for the canonization, not some attempt to claim victimhood for the Church. Pope John Paul II has worked tirelessly for improved Christian-Jewish relations. The canonization of Stein recognized both her heroic Catholic witness, and her Jewish heritage. In any case, Wills can cite nothing but second-rate charges by unfriendly sources to make a claim of the Church grasping for victimhood, rather than documented proof of any such strategy.

Wills' book proceeds in a similarly mean-spirited vein. He states that the Concordat that Pope Pius XI concluded with the German government in 1933 would prevent the Church from protesting against Nazi actions against Jews. First, the Church had no choice but to conclude such a Concordat, or face draconian restrictions on the lives of the faithful in Germany. Second, the Concordat gave the Holy See the opportunity to formally protest Nazi action in the years prior to the war and after hostilities began. It provided a legal

basis for arguing, for example, that baptized Jews in Germany were Christian and should be exempt from legal disabilities. The first official protest by the Vatican under the terms of the Concordat dealt with the government-initiated boycott of Jewish businesses. Though the Concordat was routinely violated before the ink was dry, its existence allowed for Vatican protest, and it did save Jewish lives. Wills also claims that the Vatican wanted a strong Nazi Germany as a bulwark to the communist Soviet Union, though there is no evidence that the Vatican ever entertained such a policy. In fact, Pius XII intervened with the hierarchy of the United States to assure assistance to the Soviet war effort against Nazi Germany.

Wills tells the story of a "hidden encyclical," buried after the death of Pius XI, that would have condemned anti-Semitism. He concludes that the encyclical was killed because of that condemnation. However, he then quotes from the encyclical statements that are clearly anti-Semitic and bad theology as proof of how anti-Semitic the Church was at the time. It was this weakness of the encyclical draft that was the real reason it was never published, not some lurking anti-Semitism. Pius XII, an outspoken critic of anti-Semitism along with his predecessor Pius IX, would never have allowed such a poorly drafted encyclical to be released. But Wills does not accept that. The real reason, according to Wills, was that even though it was a terrible work, it still maintained a condemnation of anti-Semitism that the Vatican was loath to make. Wills' arguments are not only self-contradicting. They also fly in the face of an encyclical that already condemned Nazis and their treatment of the Jews (*Mit Brennender Sorge*, 1937), and additional written and public statements that would be issued by Pius XII and the Vatican throughout the war years, including his own 1939 encyclical, *Summi Pontificatus*, on the unity of human society.

Wills states that the document on the Holocaust (*We Remember*, 1998) denied that some priests and bishops supported the

Nazis. It did not. Wills then goes on to argue that since the Church is the People of God, if any members of the Church took an active role in the Holocaust, then the Church is "sinful." It's a curious theology that argues that any sin committed by any member of the Church becomes part of a collective guilt of the Church as the theological Body of Christ.

Such is the standard of reasoning throughout Wills book that he becomes so ludicrous as to proclaim that "Truth is a modern virtue."<sup>37</sup> That is stated about a Western culture that has as its bedrock value today that objective truth does not exist. Wills writes that the Church is "an institution that claims never to have been wrong, never to have persecuted, never to have inflicted injustice."<sup>38</sup> He does not state when the Church ever made such a claim, but certainly a hasty re-write will be necessary in light of the papal apology in March, 2000. But, once again, Wills makes these charges without ever documenting what clearly cannot be documented. Like a sidewalk evangelist in the old South, he asserts beliefs for Catholics that Catholics do not hold, then refutes them.

Wills' book is an exercise in anti-Catholic rhetoric. He tosses out offensive phrases and charges that would never see the published light of day if he did not hide under the cloak of his Catholicity. He calls *Humanae Vitae* "truly perverse teaching on contraception."<sup>39</sup> He decides that Vatican II was simply another Church exercise undertaken "within a structure of deceit."<sup>40</sup> He cynically states that Pope John Paul II "makes sex so holy that only monks are really worthy of it"<sup>41</sup> and that his teaching is rooted in a "total devotion...to the virginity of Mary" so that "one man's devotion poses as the measure of divine truth. The rest of the Church must live in structures of deceit because this one man is true to his intensely personal devotion."<sup>42</sup>

Wills takes delight in calling priests "the peoples eunuchs" and notes that a man considering the priesthood must question if he is "to become a eunuch, not for the heavenly reign, but

for the Pope's dominion."43 In a book sorely offensive to Catholics, Wills reserves his most offensive language toward the priesthood. Not only does he refer to priests as "eunuchs," but constantly calls the Eucharistic prayer of consecration at the Mass "magic." Even a Jimmy Swaggart at his most anti-Catholic bombastic would not stoop to such a level of pure insult to sacred Catholic belief. In one of the saddest sections of the book, Wills makes fun of an old priest for whom he used to serve at the altar. The priest would carefully and piously pronounce Latin words of consecration over the Eucharist (Wills calls them "the purported words of consecration"). He chuckles that the priest was "making sure the magic formula was given all its force."44 One wonders if he has lost all sense of decency.

Wills states without any documentation that priestly celibacy has chased out heterosexual priests and created a gay clergy. He also cites the practice of celibacy as a primary reason for cases of priestly pedophilia, this despite absolutely no clinical evidence to support such a monstrous charge, and the simple fact that pedophiles are very often married. He twists John Cardinal Newman's theological insight on the development of doctrine to mean moving from untruth to truth – or vice-versa – rather than to a richer understanding of the initial truth. He takes the concept of the "sense of the faithful" – an essentially conservative doctrine that recognizes the beliefs held by the laity for centuries have a role in doctrinal understanding – to mean that anything burped out in a contemporary survey has an equivalency to the deposit of faith. He concludes by calling the Church "a victimizer with Satan,"45 a perfect coda for a perfectly awful anti-Catholic diatribe.

Wills certainly considers his book some kind of affirmation for a small subset of Catholics who see the pope as the enemy and Church doctrine as a relic of the past. Unfortunately, Wills goes so far out that even the most liberal of Catholics

will find this a distasteful exercise. In the end this book will only be supported by those who already actively hate the Catholic Church.

## SUMMARY POINTS

\*Anti-Catholic remarks by Catholics gain a certain cachet in secular circles that would otherwise ignore them if the source were non-Catholic.

\*There are Catholics who let their own vision of what the Church should or should not be poison their public comments. They often engage in the most shocking anti-Catholic rhetoric to push a particular agenda within the Church, with little interest in the impact such rhetoric might have on the image of the Church in the general culture.

\*If Garry Wills were not Catholic, *Papal Sin* would have only found a home in a far right fundamentalist publishing house or a small humanist press. It would hardly have been taken seriously without the legitimacy conferred by its prominent author being Catholic.

\*In *Politics and Catholic Freedom* in 1964, writing from a conservative perspective, Wills focused on the Catholic right to dissent from papal teaching, particularly in areas of social doctrine that do not touch on central notions of faith and doctrine. Wills' essential message was that papal encyclicals can err, and intelligent Catholics can legitimately disagree particularly when encyclicals deal with application of faith to contemporary issues.

\*Wills had formally established a philosophy of dissent that moved from social teachings to moral theology, from interpretation of Catholic teaching on contemporary issues, to the level of assent granted to the exercise of the ordinary teaching authority of the pope in moral theology. In *Papal Sin* Wills takes the last steps in the pilgrimage by denying papal authority altogether and in questioning foundational Catholic

belief.

\*The anti-Catholic sentiments and language used by Wills would demand an immediate retraction and apology if its source were non-Catholic. Wills – and Doubleday – believe that it is acceptable as long as the author of the statement claims Catholicism as his own.

\*Wills exhibits the ordinary elements of dissenting Catholicism: active support for women's ordination, dismissal of celibacy, and embracing of artificial contraception. \*Wills goes further by also professing unqualified support for abortion rights. But he does not stop there. In the course of the book he rejects the teaching authority of the Church if exercised without lay involvement and agreement, the concept of papal infallibility and any possibility of divine guidance to papal teaching, the ordained priesthood, the doctrine of the Real Presence in the Eucharist and that the priest alone has the sacramental power to consecrate the Eucharist. Apostolic succession, the Immaculate Conception and Assumption, and Church teaching on homosexuality are also subverted.

\*Wills' book will be utilized by those outside the Church with an anti-Catholic agenda to reinforce their prejudices. While Wills certainly sees his book as a call to arms within a certain cadre of Catholics, the greater impact will be to reinforce anti-Catholic prejudices and assumptions within the secular culture.

\*Wills charges that the Catholic Church exists in a system of lies, falsifications, and misrepresentations meant to prop up papal authority.

\*Wills is accusing the Church of conscious deception in fundamental beliefs. The Church knows these teachings are wrong, Wills charges, but they are taught anyway.

\*His sources are primarily secondary and based solely on

interpretations and expositions from those that share his views. Most of Wills' book cites opinions sanctified by secondary sources that share his opinions.

\*Wills' essential argument is that women should be ordained priests because there was no mention of ordained priests in the New Testament. Women can be priests because Christ did not *not* ordain women. Like a good fundamentalist, if a teaching cannot be cited chapter and verse in Scripture, it cannot be doctrinal. At the same time, he ignores Scripture that contradicts his position. When the Gospels speak of the Last Supper and the institution of the Eucharist, it is clear in Matthew, Mark and Luke that only the Apostles are present. Wills simply dismisses this as censorship of the reality of women in attendance without establishing any foundation for such a charge.

\*Every action of the Church is viewed from the prism of an insatiable papal power. One of the greatest sources of scandal historically within the Church – the control of the appointment of bishops by secular authorities – he simply brushes aside. The desire to secure those appointments to the Holy See simply becomes another papal power grab.

\*Wills speaks of abortions in nature, when the body spontaneously “aborts” and snidely wonders if this means that God Himself aborts millions of souls to “Limbo.” Of course, “abortion” refers to the conscious choosing of action to terminate a pregnancy, not a natural miscarriage.

\*Wills states that he fully supports legalized abortion, but that “it is not a thing that can be proposed as an ideal and that women should not make the decision lightly.” If fetal life is not worthy of protection – if it is not “life” – then what possible difference could it make if women make the decision to abort lightly? And why would it not be “ideal”? If the fetus is nothing, issues of “ideals” are meaningless.

\*Wills portrays Vatican Council I as an argument for or against infallibility, and a minority in opposition with the deck stacked against them. In fact, most 19th century Catholics clearly accepted the infallibility of the pope and the divisions at the Council concerned the necessity and extent of a formal definition.

\*Those opposed to a formal definition at the Council were hardly silenced, as Wills charges. Debate was hot and heavy throughout the Council. As the conciliar fathers grew closer to consensus and understanding, a definition emerged that was not ultramontane (that virtually every formal utterance of the Holy Father was infallible).

\*Like an anti-Catholic polemicist, Wills slashes and burns, inventing evil motives, distorting doctrine and history, and resorts at last to ridicule. He refers to the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception as a teaching that would “muddy and confuse the nature of the Incarnation” and scoffed that Mary’s “very flesh was a cosmic marvel, like kryptonite, unable to die.”

\*Wills states that the canonization by martyrdom of Edith Stein was a cold-blooded attempt to claim victimhood for the Church in the Holocaust. Stein died because she was a Catholic and a Jew, the very specific reasons for her arrest. That is the reason for the canonization, not some attempt to claim victimhood. Pope John Paul II has worked tirelessly for improved Christian-Jewish relations. The canonization of Stein recognized both her heroic Catholic witness, and her Jewish heritage.

\*Wills states that the Concordat that Pope Pius XI concluded with the German government in 1933 would prevent the Church from protesting Nazi actions against Jews. The reality is that the Concordat gave the Holy See the opportunity to formally protest Nazi action. The first official protest by the Vatican under the terms of the Concordat dealt with the government-

initiated boycott of Jewish businesses. Though the Concordat was routinely violated before the ink was dry, its existence allowed for Vatican protest, and it did save Jewish lives.

\*Wills calls priests “the peoples eunuchs” and notes that a man considering the priesthood must question if he is “to become a eunuch, not for the heavenly reign, but for the Pope’s dominion.” Wills reserves his most offensive language toward the priesthood. He calls the Eucharistic prayer of consecration at the Mass “magic.”

\*Wills states without any documentation that priestly celibacy has chased out heterosexual priests and created a gay clergy. He also cites the practice of celibacy as a primary reason for cases of priestly pedophilia, this despite absolutely no clinical evidence to support such a monstrous charge, and the simple fact that many pedophiles are married.

\*Wills twists John Cardinal Newman’s theological insight on the development of doctrine to mean moving from untruth to truth, rather than to a richer understanding of the initial truth.

\*Wills takes the concept of the “sense of the faithful” – an essentially conservative doctrine that recognizes the beliefs held by the laity for centuries has a role in doctrinal understanding – to mean that anything burped out in a contemporary survey has an equivalency to the deposit of faith.

\*Wills goes so far out that even the most liberal of Catholics will find this a distasteful exercise. In the end this book will only be supported by those who already actively hate the Catholic Church.

## FOOTNOTES

1See *Anti-Catholicism in American Culture*, edited by Robert P. Lockwood (Our Sunday Visitor, 2000), chapter one, for an

historical outline of how anti-Catholicism remains an acceptable bigotry.

2A term first coined by Michael Schwartz in *The Persistent Prejudice* (Our Sunday Visitor). An excellent, if dated, review of anti-Catholicism, the work is currently out of print.

3There are any number of former Catholic anti-Catholics who could be quoted as representative. Bart Brewer, founder of "Mission to Catholics International" is a suitably hysterical example. Brewer, a former priest, was recently quoted as saying that the papal apology for past sins was part of a dark conspiracy "to rejoin separated brethren outside of Rome's control. Rome's mask will change, but the face remains the same. Catholicism is a political system." Quoted in the *Five Cities Gazette*, April 6, 2000.

4*Pedophiles and Priests*, by Philip Jenkins (Oxford University Press). Jenkins summarized his study in an article in the February, 1996 edition of *First Things*.

5*Papal Sin, Structures of Deceit* by Gary Wills (Doubleday, June 2000). All further references to Wills' book will give page number alone. Page numbers and content are from the bound galley edition provided by the publisher for review purposes.

6*Politics and Catholic Freedom* by Gary Wills (Henry Regnery Company, 1964).

7*America*, August 12, 1961.

8p. 5.

9p. 230.

10pp. 269-270.

11pp. 161-162.

12pp. 132-148.

13 "It is more the faithful who become the body and blood of Christ than bread and wine do." p. 140.

14 "The validity of the sacrament (is) in the recipient's unity with God, not in any preceding words of magic of the priest." p. 140.

15pp. 159-168.

16pp. 205-220.

17pp. 200-201.

18p. 7.

19p. 9.

20p. 163.

21p. 6.

22p. 118.

23p. 140.

24p. 6.

25 *American Catholics*, by Charles R. Morris (Times Books, 1997).

26p. 173.

27p. 173.

28p. 7.

29p. 74.

30p. 230.

31 *Saints and Sinners, A History of the Popes*, Eamon Duffy (Yale University Press, 1997) p. 230 ff.

32*Ibid.*, p.231.

33p. 212.

34p. 212.

35p. 207.

36p. 213.

37p. 8.

38p. 45.

39p. 7.

40p. 85.

41p. 101.

42p. 102.

43p. 128.

44p. 136.

45p. 311.

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## **“60 Minutes” on Pope Pius XII**

*by Ronald Rychlak*

*(Catalyst 5/2000)*

The March 19 broadcast of CBS Television’s “60 Minutes” profiled *Hitler’s Pope: The Secret History of Pius XII*, by John Cornwell (Viking Press, 1999). As the title suggests, that book presents a very cynical portrait of Pope Pius XII.

Like many print reviews, "60 Minutes" started by discussing Cornwell's claim that he was convinced of Pius XII's evident spirituality and thought that the full story would vindicate him. So, assuring Church officials that he was on the Pope's side, Cornwell claims to have obtained special permission to look at the Vatican's archives.

By the middle of 1997, after having worked on the project for five years and having studied the Vatican files, Cornwall claims to have found himself in a "state of moral shock." He was now convinced that Pius XII had a soaring ambition for power and control that had led the Catholic Church "into complicity with the darkest forces of the era." He concluded that Pacelli was "an ideal Pope for the Nazis' Final Solution."

Crucial to his self-promotion is Cornwell's claim to have been a good, practicing Catholic who set out to defend his Church. His earlier books, however, were marketed as having been written by someone who had left the Church. According to a 1989 report in the *Washington Post*, Cornwell "was once a seminarian at the English College in Rome and knows the Vatican terrain, [but] he has long since left the seminary and the Catholic faith, and thus writes with that astringent, cool, jaundiced view of the Vatican that only ex-Catholics familiar with Rome seem to have mastered." At that time Cornwell described himself as a "lapsed Catholic for more that 20 years."

In *The Hiding Places of God* (1991) he declared that human beings are "morally, psychologically and materially better off without a belief in God." He also said that he had lost his "belief in the mystery of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist." Reviews of that book called Cornwell an agnostic and former Catholic. As late as 1996, when he was supposedly trying to vindicate Pius XII, Cornwell called himself a "Catholic agnostic," who did not believe in the soul as an immaterial substance.

Perhaps more revealing are Cornwell's prior comments about Pope Pius XII. In his 1989 book, *A Thief in the Night*, Cornwell mentions the "alleged anti-Semitism" of Pius without offering any explanatory comment. Then, on page 162, he mocks Pius, saying that he was "totally remote from experience, and yet all-powerful-a Roman emperor." He goes on to call Pius an "emaciated, large-eyed demigod." In 1995 in London's *Sunday Times*, Cornwell described Pius as a diplomat, a hypochondriac and a ditherer. The next year, when he was supposedly working on his defense of Pius XII, Cornwell wrote in the *New York Times* of Pius XII's silence on Nazi atrocities" as an example of a failing by the Catholic Church. In light of this evidence, his claim to have had nothing but the slightest regard for Pius XII up until 1997 is simply not believable.

As to his claim to have received special assistance from the Vatican due to earlier writings which were favorable to the Church, a simple call to the Vatican would have revealed that he received no special treatment. Any competent scholar can obtain access to the archives that he saw without promising to be "favorable" to the Church. Moreover, a quick consultation of Cornwell's earlier books (or easily-available reviews thereof) reveals that he has never been friendly to the Holy See.

In *A Thief in the Night*, Cornwell rejected rumors of a Vatican conspiracy to poison Pope John Paul I, but his conclusion that a cold-hearted bureaucracy let the Pope die was almost as bad. Cornwell, voicing sentiments that sound exactly like what he now says about his new book, wrote: "The Vatican expected me to prove that John Paul I had not been poisoned by one of their own, but the evidence led me to a conclusion that seems to me more shameful even, and more tragic, than any of the conspiracy theories."

Cornwell's 1993 novel, *Strange Gods*, is about a Jesuit priest who keeps a mistress on whom he lavishes caviar and champagne, goes on golfing holidays in Barbados, and takes lithium for

manic-depressive swings. He supports his lifestyle by absolving a wealthy Catholic benefactor from his own sins of the flesh. *The Independent* (London) called the priest "a cut-out model of a sexually tortured Catholic." Driven by fear and desperation, the priest deserts his pregnant mistress in favor of a dangerous, immoral venture in an obscure part of Latin America. When he returns to England, his faith is transformed into what one reviewer called "a soggy Christian humanism."

In *The Hiding Places of God* (1991) Cornwell wrote of his days in the seminary: "I took delight in attempting to undermine the beliefs of my fellow seminarians with what I regarded as clever arguments; I quarreled with the lecturers in class and flagrantly ignored the rules of the house."

"60 Minutes" skipped over these matters even though they were contained in the April issue of *Brill's Content* magazine, which was on newsstands at the time of the broadcast. Instead they interviewed Gerhard Riegner, who complained about Pope Pius XII's "silence."

Riegner wrote a memorandum to the Holy See, dated March 18, 1942, describing Nazi persecution. Cornwell describes this memo in his book and leaves the impression that the Vatican failed to take any action in response to it. Cornwell fails, however, to note the letter of thanks that Riegner himself sent on April 8, 1942. In that letter, Riegner, on behalf of the World Jewish Congress, states:

We also note with great satisfaction the steps undertaken by His Excellence the Cardinal Maglione, with authorities of Slovakia on behalf of the Jews of that country, and we ask you kindly to transmit to the Secretariat of State of the Holy See the expression of our profound gratitude.

We are convinced that this intervention greatly impressed the governmental circles of Slovakia, which conviction seems to be confirmed by the information we have just received from that

country...

In renewing the expressions of our profound gratitude, for whatever the Holy See, thanks to your gracious intermediation, was good enough to undertake on behalf of our persecuted brothers, we ask Your Excellency to accept the assurance of our deepest respect.

Ed Bradley asked about the numerous letters sent from various Jewish groups following the war, but there was no mention of Riegner's own letter of thanks.

In fact, the recently-released memoirs of Adolf Eichmann, chief of the Gestapo's Jewish Department, reveal the Nazis' knowledge that Pius was deeply offended by these arrests and that he worked hard to prevent the deportations. (Ironically, given complaints about secrecy within the Vatican, this important piece of evidence was suppressed by the Israeli government from 1961 until March 2000.)

On a different matter, Bradley said that Pius objected to having black soldiers garrison the Vatican following Rome's liberation because the Pope had heard reports of rape being committed by African-American troops. This clearly offended Bradley, and he used it to raise questions about the canonization effort.

Actually, confusion about this situation stems from a report the Pope received about French Algerian troops. The report said that these troops had raped and pillaged in other areas where they were stationed, and the Pope did not want these specific soldiers stationed in Rome. Pius expressed his concerns about these specific men to British Ambassador Osborne who broadened the statement in his cable back to London, saying that the Pope did not want "colored troops" stationed at the Vatican. Bradley said that Pius was talking about African-American troops, which is clearly not correct.

Cornwell expressed the opinion in the "60 Minutes" segment

that things could not possibly have been worse for the Jews than they were. To say this is to ignore the hundreds of thousands (if not millions) of Jewish men, women, and children who were saved by Pius XII and those who were working at his direction. Those Jewish victims, however, were very thankful during and after the war.

Gerhard Riegner said that the numerous offers of thanks and praise at the end of the war were merely political maneuvers, designed to restore good relations between Jewish and Catholic people. However, 13 years later, at the time of his death, Pius XII efforts to save Jews from the Nazis was still the primary focus of attention. The Anti-Defamation League, the Synagogue Council of America, the Rabbinical Council of America, the American Jewish Congress, the New York Board of Rabbis, the American Jewish Committee, the Central Conference of American Rabbis, the National Conference of Christians and Jews, and the National Council of Jewish Women all expressed sorrow at his passing and thanks for his good works. *The Jewish Post* (Winnipeg) explained in its November 6, 1958 edition:

It is understandable why the death of Pius XII should have called forth expressions of sincere grief from practically all sections of American Jewry. For there probably was not a single ruler of our generation who did more to help the Jews in their hour of greatest tragedy, during the Nazi occupation of Europe, than the late Pope.

Then Israeli representative to the United Nations and future Prime Minister of Israel, Golda Meir, said: "During the ten years of Nazi terror, when our people went through the horrors of martyrdom, the Pope raised his voice to condemn the persecutors and to commiserate with their victims." Nahum Goldmann, President of the World Jewish Congress, said: "With special gratitude we remember all he has done for the persecuted Jews during one of the darkest periods of their entire history."

Unfortunately, these voices were not heard on “60 Minutes,” nor are they to be found in Cornwell’s book.

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# Frequently Asked Questions about Pope Pius XII and the Holocaust

*by Robert P. Lockwood*

*(4/2000)*

***The general charge against Pope Pius XII is that he maintained a “continued attitude of silence” in the face of Nazism and the horror of the Holocaust. Was the Pope silent?***

Pope Pius XII was not silent in the face of Nazism, either before he was elected pope in 1939 or during the war years. As Golda Meir, future Israeli Prime Minister and then Israeli representative to the United Nations, said on the floor of the General Assembly at the Pope’s death in 1958: “During the ten years of Nazi terror, when our people went through the horrors of martyrdom, the Pope raised his voice to condemn the persecutors and commiserate with the victims.” Some of the Jewish organizations that praised Pope Pius XII at the time of

his death for saving Jewish lives during the horror of the Nazi Holocaust were: the World Jewish Congress, the Anti-Defamation League, the Synagogue Council of America, the Rabbinical Council of America, the American Jewish Congress, the New York Board of Rabbis, the American Jewish Committee, the Central Conference of American Rabbis, the American Jewish Committee, the Central Conference of American Rabbis, the National Conference of Christians and Jews and the National Council of Jewish Women. Were all these simply lying or playing politics? Would these organizations insult the memory of the millions killed for some ephemeral political gain?

While stationed in Germany in the 1920s, Eugenio Pacelli, the future Pope Pius XII, was deeply concerned about the nascent Nazi party in Germany. As early as 1925, Pacelli expressed fears about the Nazi threat. He reported to Rome that Hitler was a violent man who "will walk over corpses" to achieve his goals. In 1928, with Pacelli's assistance, the Holy office issued a strong condemnation of the anti-Semitism foundational to the Nazis: "(T)he Holy See is obligated to protect the Jewish people against unjust vexations and...particularly condemns unreservedly hatred against the people once chosen by God; the hatred that commonly goes by the name anti-Semitism."

As the Holy See's Secretary of State in the 1930s, Pacelli lodged nearly 60 formal protests with the Nazis over their treatment of the Jews. He wrote most of the 1937 encyclical of Pope Pius XI *Mit Brennender Sorge* that was a strong denunciation of Nazism. The encyclical, written in German, was published and distributed throughout Germany at the risk of life. In 1938, Pacelli had spoken at the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris against the Nazi "pagan cult of race," as well as the "vile criminal actions" and "iniquitous violence" of the Nazi leadership. In 1939, immediately after the death of Pius IX, the German government issued a veiled warning to the College of Cardinals not to elect Pacelli as he was known to be an enemy of Nazism. In the very first encyclical of his

papacy, issued on October 20, 1939 (Summi Pontificatus), Pius XII warned of the dictators of Europe – “an ever-increasing host of Christ’s enemies” – and called for St. Paul’s vision of world that was neither Gentile or Jew. The Gestapo labeled the encyclical a direct attack, while the French had copies printed and dropped by air over Germany. The New York Times summarized the encyclical as an uncompromising attack on racism and dictators.

During the war, the New York Times called Pius XII “the only ruler left on the Continent of Europe who dares to raise his voice at all...the Pope put himself squarely against Hitlerism...he left no doubt that the Nazi aims are also irreconcilable with his own conception of a Christmas peace.” In major Christmas messages in 1941 and 1942 Pope Pius XII condemned the racial hatred of the Nazis. Vatican Radio and the Vatican newspaper, L’Osservatore Romano, both under the direction of Pope Pius XII, issued numerous statements against the Nazi actions. In written letters to world leaders – even to those leaders in Nazi satellite countries – Pius XII expressed his horror of the persecution of the Jews. He reminded Catholics of Europe that it was their duty to protect victims of Nazism. He begged allied countries to accept Jewish refugees and would fight through his nuncios to prevent forced Jewish deportations to work camps.

The record goes on and on. Pius XII and the Church were neither silent nor complacent in the face of the Nazi horror.

***At what point do you think the Pope should have stepped up and said: “Nazism is morally sinful and to be a subscriber to the theories of Hitler is to be anti-Catholic”? What prevented the Vatican from de-legitimizing the Catholicism of practicing Nazis, refusing them communion, and excommunicating them?***

First, remember that Pius XII and his predecessor Pius XI, to whom he served as Secretary of State, made it fundamentally clear that cooperation with the Nazi racial agenda and Jewish

persecution could not be allowed. One cannot suggest that Catholics did not understand that as papal teaching at the time. Far too many Catholics, however, out of either ideological agreement or pure fear, chose instead to follow the nationalistic goals of their homeland than listen to the entreaties of the Popes.

Second, while formal proclamations of excommunication and interdict would provide stirring reading today, what could they have possibly accomplished at the time? It could hardly be argued that it would have caused Hitler and his Nazi goons to suddenly come to a conversion of heart and to re-think the "Jewish question" or their war aims. It would be even more foolish to think that any kind of "Catholic uprising" in Nazi Germany would have ensued. Catholics who cooperated with the dictatorships had already chosen to ignore papal statements.

Once the war began and, in 1942, the "Final Solution" began in earnest, the primary goal of Pius XII was to save lives. That could best be accomplished, he believed, through the effective work of the papal nuncios on the scene, public statements challenging Nazi beliefs, quiet negotiations for immigration, and stealth tactics of hiding Jewish refugees, baptizing when necessary, and issuing false papers. This was, after all, occupied Europe with the Vatican existing on a few acres within an Axis state. Preserving Vatican neutrality, and the capability of the Church to continue to function where possible in occupied Europe and Nazi-allied states, was a far better strategy to save lives than Church sanctions on a regime that would have merely laughed at them.

When 60,000 German soldiers and the Gestapo occupied Rome, thousands of Jews were hiding in churches, convents, rectories, the Vatican and the papal summer residence.

***Would excommunications and lightening bolts from the Chair of St. Peter have been more effective in saving their lives?***

Issuing such thunderbolts would have done nothing to end the "Final Solution" and would have severely limited, if not ended altogether, the Church's capacity to save Jewish lives.

Pinchas Lipade, Israeli consul in Italy after the war, estimated that the tactics adopted by Pius XII in the face of the Nazis saved over 800,000 Jewish lives during World War II. If that were an exaggeration by half, it would still record more Jewish lives saved by any other entity at the time. It is hard to argue against the effectiveness of the Pope's strategy.

***Why did Pacelli as Secretary of State under Pius XI, sign an agreement – a "concordat" – with the Nazis in 1933? Didn't this just serve to give legitimacy to the Nazi government?***

Despite vocal opposition from the Catholic Church in Germany where National Socialism's racist views were routinely condemned as contrary to Catholic principles and Catholics were ordered not to support the party, by 1933 Hitler had become German chancellor. Pacelli was dismayed with the Nazi assumption of power and by August of 1933 he expressed to the British representative to the Holy See his disgust with "their persecution of the Jews, their proceedings against political opponents, the reign of terror to which the whole nation was subjected." When it was stated that Germany now had a strong leader to deal with the communists, Archbishop Pacelli responded that the Nazis were infinitely worse.

At the same time, however, the Vatican was forced to deal with the reality of Hitler's rise to power. In June 1933 Hitler had signed a peace agreement with the western powers, including France and Great Britain, called the Four-Power Pact. At the same time Hitler expressed a willingness to negotiate a statewide concordat with Rome. The concordat was concluded a month later. In a country where Protestantism dominated, the Catholic Church was finally placed on a legal equal footing with the Protestant churches.

***Did the concordat negotiated by Pacelli give legitimacy to the Nazi regime?***

No. Forgotten is the fact that it was preceded both by the Four-Power Pact and a similar agreement concluded between Hitler and the Protestant churches. The Church had no choice but to conclude such a concordat, or face draconian restrictions on the lives of the faithful in Germany. Pacelli denied that the concordat meant Church recognition of the regime. Concordats were made with countries, not particular regimes, he stated. Pope Pius XI would explain that it was concluded only to spare persecution that would take place immediately if there was no such agreement. The concordat also gave the Holy See the opportunity to formally protest Nazi action in the years prior to the war and after hostilities began. It provided a legal basis for arguing that baptized Jews in Germany were Christian and should be exempt from legal disabilities. Though the Concordat was routinely violated before the ink was dry, it did save Jewish lives.

The Vatican began to formally protest Nazi action almost immediately after the concordat was signed. The first formal Catholic protests under the concordat concerned the Nazi government's call for a boycott of Jewish businesses. Numerous protests would follow over treatment of both the Jews and the direct persecution of the Church in Nazi Germany. The German foreign minister would report that his desk was stuffed with protests from Rome, protests rarely passed on to Nazi leadership.

***Were there Catholics – including priests and bishops – who cooperated with the Nazis?***

Certainly, individual Catholics – including some in leadership positions – cooperated with Nazism and even turned a blind eye toward the Final Solution. The Church has always included sinners whose wrongs create scandal. Yet, they did so not with

the support of either Pope Pius XI or Pope Pius XII. For example, on March 12, 1938, Hitler's troops moved into Austria to force the "Anschluss" – "union" – of Austria with Germany. The archbishop of Vienna, Cardinal Theodor Innitzer, issued a statement welcoming the Anschluss that was generally popular in Austria at the time. The Austrian bishops also issued a statement in praise of the German government.

The Holy See had strongly opposed the German annexation and was horrified at the local Church's statements of support. Vatican Radio immediately broadcast a strong denunciation of the statement and Pacelli, as Secretary of State, summoned the archbishop of Vienna to Rome. Pacelli met with Cardinal Innitzer and told him that the statement of support had to be withdrawn publicly. A new statement was issued, in the name of the Austrian bishops: "The solemn declaration of the Austrian bishops on 18 March of this year was clearly not intended to be an approval of something that was not and is not compatible with God's law."

Often times, it should be understood, accusations of cooperation by certain Church leaders are a misreading of the historical record. In the recent Vatican document on the Holocaust, a number of prominent Church leaders are singled out for their brave work at the time. One name mentioned is Cardinal Faulhaber of Munich for his early pastoral statements in 1931 condemning Nazism; and his series of Advent sermons in 1933 that were a theological defense of the Jews and the Old Testament.

Some have taken issue with praise for Cardinal Faulhaber, accusing him of advocating that the German bishops ignore the atrocities of the Nazi leadership. That accusation is based on a quote from the minutes of a meeting between the cardinals of Germany and Pope Pius XII just after his election as pope in March 1939 and before the onslaught of World War II. The meetings specifically concerned the status of the Catholic Church in Germany, where a virtual state of "war" existed

between the Church and the Nazis. Pius XII had called the meetings to discuss with the prelates if a new papacy could possibly lead to better relations. Most of the German prelates had been in the middle of these battles with the Nazis, and Cardinal Faulhaber agreed that it might be best if the new Pope take the lead in discussions.

The full quote of Cardinal Faulhaber from the minutes of this first meeting is: "There are times when we doubt that the upper echelons of the party in general desire peace. The (leaders) want to be combatants to such an extent that they would love nothing more than to be given a reason for fighting, especially when it concerns the church. But I likewise believe that *we, the bishops, should act as if we see nothing* (emphasis added). This is why we are respectfully grateful to your Holiness for the steps which will be taken on behalf of peace."

Clearly, the "peace" that Cardinal Faulhaber refers to concerns the ongoing battles of the Nazi leadership with the Church in Germany, obviously not to war itself which would not begin until August of that year. And just as clearly, when he is stating that the "bishops should act as if we see nothing," he is referring to the strategy that the Pope has suggested in dealing with the Nazis over persecution of the Church in Germany. The statement had nothing to do with general policy toward Nazi atrocities past, present or future, but rather a tactic on how to deal with specific Church-related issues at that moment.

Again, individual Catholics did cooperate with the Nazi regime. In the document on the Holocaust cited below, the Church has condemned any such cooperation by its "sons and daughters." But it is neither logical nor historically accurate to therefore extend a charge of cooperation with Nazism to the Church in general or Pius XII specifically. Rather, certain Catholics acted in such a fashion despite the Church and despite the clearly stated teaching of the Pope.

***Would traditional Christian anti-Semitism account for the fact that some Catholics cooperated with the Nazis?***

After acknowledging the sad legacy of anti-Jewish bigotry in Christian Western Europe, and the rise in anti-Jewish racial theories that would find its ultimate horror in pagan Nazism, the Vatican statement on the Holocaust addresses this issue:

*But it may be asked whether the Nazi persecution of the Jews was not made easier by the anti-Jewish prejudices imbedded in some Christian minds and hearts. Did anti-Jewish sentiment among Christians make them less sensitive, or even indifferent, to the persecutions launched against the Jews by National Socialism when it reached power?*

*Any response to this question must take into account that we are dealing with the history of people's attitudes and ways of thinking, subject to multiple influences. Moreover, many people were altogether unaware of the "final solution" that was being put into effect against a whole people; others were afraid for themselves and those near to them; and still others were moved by envy. A response would need to be given case by case. To do this, however, it is necessary to know what precisely motivated people in a particular situation.*

*At first, the leaders of the Third Reich sought to expel the Jews. Unfortunately, the governments of some Western countries of Christian tradition, including some in North and South America, were more than hesitant to open their borders to persecuted Jews. Although they could not foresee how far the Nazi hierarchs would go in their criminal intentions, the leaders of these nations were aware of the hardships and dangers to which Jews living in the territories of the Third Reich were exposed. The closing of borders to Jewish emigration in those circumstances, whether due to anti-Jewish hostility or suspicion, political cowardice or*

*shortsightedness, lays a heavy burden of conscience on the authorities in question.*

*In the lands where the Nazis undertook mass deportations, the brutality which surrounded these forced movements of helpless people should have led to suspect the worst. Did Christians give every possible assistance to those being persecuted, and in particular to the persecuted Jews?*

*Many did, but others did not. Those who did help to save Jewish lives as much as was in their power, even to the point of placing their own lives in danger, must not be forgotten...Nevertheless, as Pope John Paul II has recognized, alongside such courageous men and women, the spiritual resistance and concrete action of other Christians was not that which might have been expected from Christ's followers. We cannot know how many Christians in countries occupied or ruled by the Nazi powers or their allies were horrified at the disappearance of their Jewish neighbors and yet were not strong enough to raise their voices in protest. For Christians, this heavy burden of conscience of their brothers and sisters during the Second World War must be a call to penitence.*

*We deeply regret the errors and failures of those sons and daughters of the church...(we) appeal to our Catholic brothers and sisters to renew the awareness of the Hebrew roots of their faith. We ask them to keep in mind that Jesus was a descendant of David; that the Virgin Mary and the Apostles belonged to the Jewish people; that the Church draws sustenance from the root of that good olive tree on to which have been grafted the wild olive branches of the gentiles (cf. Rom 11: 17-24); that the Jews are our dearly beloved brothers, indeed in a certain sense they are "our elder brothers..."*

**The Church canonized Edith Stein, a Jewish convert who became**

***a nun and was killed in the Holocaust. Stein actually was killed because she was Jewish. Isn't this just a means for the Church to try to claim "victimhood" in the Holocaust?***

When Pope John Paul II canonized Edith Stein – with the very real intent of seeing her as a unifying individual among Catholics and Jews – he was vilified. Her canonization was subject to strong attack, something that should never be done to the memory of any victim of the Holocaust.

In Holland in 1942, the Catholic archbishop of Utrecht released a forceful letter to all the Catholic churches protesting the deportations of the Jews to "work camps." The Gestapo responded by revoking the exception that had been given to Jews who had been baptized and a round up was ordered. Caught in the web was Edith Stein, a Jewish convert who had become a nun. As a Christian of Jewish descent in a convent in Holland, Stein had first avoided arrest at the hands of the Nazis. She, her sister, and 600 Catholic Jews were transported to Auschwitz, where she died.

Some have claimed that she did not die a martyr. Stein died, they say, because she was a Jew. Her Catholicity had nothing to do with it. Her canonization was an attempt to claim victimhood for the Church in the Holocaust. But this simply does not square with the facts. Stein died because she was a Jew and a Catholic, the very specific reasons for her arrest. Her arrest was retaliation against Christians of Jewish ancestry because of the outspoken criticisms of the Nazis by the Catholic archbishop of Utrecht.

Second, the reason for the canonization is not some attempt to claim an equivalent victimhood for the Church in the Holocaust. Pope John Paul II has worked tirelessly for improved Christian-Jewish relations. The canonization of Stein recognized both her heroic Catholic witness, and her Jewish heritage.

Numerous Catholics were killed in the Holocaust. The Church in Poland suffered tremendously and many priests, religious and laity died in the death camps along with their Jewish brothers and sisters. Certainly, the Nazi "reasons" for slaughtering Catholics may have been different, and not purely genocidal as in the case of the Jews. Priests in Poland, for example, were killed because of their positions of leadership and because of Church opposition to the Nazis they were viewed as "enemies of the Reich." To acknowledge this historical reality is not to claim "victimhood" or an equivalency to what the Jews suffered in the Holocaust. Rather, the intent is to remind Catholics of this brave witness and the constant need to resistance to evil. It also serves to promote Catholic-Jewish solidarity, as no one can ever say again that it could be legitimate to be Catholic and anti-Semitic.

***Didn't the Holy See – and Pius XII – believe that a strong Germany under the Nazis could serve as a bulwark for preventing the spread of communism from the Soviet Union?***

While there may have been Catholics who held such a belief, particularly in the years prior to the War, there is no evidence that this was ever a policy of Pope Pius XII. All his actions were to the contrary. As noted in an earlier question, when it was suggested to Archbishop Pacelli in August, 1933 that Germany now had a strong leader to deal with the communists, Archbishop Pacelli responded that the Nazis were far worse.

Pius XII was unpopular with certain schools of post World War II historians for the anti-Stalinist, anti-Communist agenda of his later pontificate. That was the primary source for this charge. Particularly in Italy in the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s, the general charge against Pius was that while he was not pro-Nazi during the war, he hated Bolshevism more than he hated Hitler. For the most part, this charge was based solely on the Pope's opposition to the Allied demand for unconditional German surrender. He believed such a condition

would only continue the horror of the war and increase the killing. That stand was later interpreted as a desire on the pontiff's part to maintain a strong Germany as a bulwark against communism. The theory was fiction. There was no documentary evidence to even suggest such a papal strategy. But it became popular, particularly among historians with Marxist sympathies in the 1960s. Even this theory, however, did not extend to an accusation that the Pope "collaborated" in the Holocaust, nor to any charge that the Church did anything other than save hundreds of thousands of Jewish lives. The evidence was simply too clear on that saving work for refutation. However, it did provide a mercenary rationale of "politics over people" in response to the Holocaust and applied such barbarous reasoning to the pope.

There are simply no strategies that the Pope undertook that would support such a charge. For example, after Hitler ordered the invasion of the Soviet Union in June, the question quickly arose over aiding communists in the war against the Nazis. A 1937 encyclical of Pius XI appeared to ban any such cooperation. The issue became particularly important in the United States where aid was routinely supplied to the Allies and was to be extended to the Soviet Union. A number of bishops raised the issue and, very quickly, Pius XII settled the affair noting that aid to the "people" of the Soviet Union was not aid to communism. Despite later propaganda, it was clear that even an anti-religious Stalinist Soviet Union was viewed by the pontiff as far less an immediate enemy than the German Third Reich.

### ***Why didn't Pope Pius XII join in Allied statements condemning the Axis nations?***

In September 1942, Pius XII was approached by the Allies to join in a statement condemning the Nazi atrocities. This was to be an official statement of the Allied governments and, as such, it was impossible for Pius XII to join the effort. However, in his annual Christmas message of 1942, Pius XII

would speak out once again forcefully. Pius condemned totalitarian regimes and mourned the victims of the war: "the hundreds of thousands who, through no fault of their own, and solely because of their nation or race, have been condemned to death or progressive extinction." He called on Catholics to shelter any and all refugees. The statement was loudly praised in the Allied world. In Germany, it was seen as the final repudiation by Pius XII of the "new order" imposed by the Nazis. The Gestapo reported that Pope Pius XII "is virtually accusing the German people of injustice toward the Jews, and makes himself the mouthpiece of the Jewish war criminal."

Pope Pius XII did not join in with official Allied government statements attacking the Axis nations for obvious reasons. To maintain Vatican neutrality – an absolute necessity if the Holy See was to have any capability to save lives and protest Nazi action – it could not be viewed as a signature to Allied propaganda statements. As Pulitzer-prize winning historian John Toland, no friend of Pius or the Church, noted: "The Church, under the Pope's guidance...saved the lives of more Jews than all other churches, religious institutions and rescue organizations combined...the British and Americans, despite lofty pronouncements, had not only avoided taking any meaningful action but gave sanctuary to few persecuted Jews."

***If Jews could be disguised as Catholics, they were more capable of escaping Nazi persecution. Did the Church do enough in this regard? Could the Church have distributed more widely false baptismal certificates and thus save more Jews?***

The Holy See never attempted to limit in any way Jewish baptisms or to forbid supplying false papers of Christian identity to Jews wherever possible. Untold numbers of lives were saved in this fashion. In Italy there were Religious orders that worked around the clock providing false documents. Numerous clergy gave brief catechism lessons so that Jews could pass as Catholics. Some were even taught the rudiments of Gregorian Chant. However, it must be remembered that

often this simply did not work. In case after case, Nazi authorities – and the Gestapo in occupied countries – paid no attention to such paperwork or any such claims as their antipathy to Jews was racial and their religious “conversion” deemed unimportant.

In addition, Nazi-allied governments were wary of such conversions and, at times, the Church had to be careful in these matters. This became a serious issue, for example, in Romania. Romania was an Axis ally that had introduced anti-Semitic legislation prior to the war. Though Romania was primarily Orthodox in faith, the Vatican had a concordat with the government which allowed the Holy See a formal avenue of protest over treatment of Jews in general, as well as Jewish converts. In March 1941, the Romanian government was planning to forbid Jews to change their religion. Following instructions from Cardinal Maglione, Secretary of State under Pius XII, Archbishop Cassulo, papal nuncio in Romania, told the government’s foreign ministry that the Vatican would protest any attempt to tie the Church’s hand in this regard. In a May 12 follow-up to the telegram, Archbishop Cassulo told Cardinal Maglione that he had written assurances from the government that freedom of worship would be guaranteed. On May 16, the secretary of the Holy Office sketched out for the nuncio norms to be followed in this regard to avoid a government crack down. He advised that no one sincerely seeking baptism be refused because of Romanian racial laws. Under the circumstances, however, precautions were necessary since there could be those who would be baptized, then simply withdraw from any practice of the faith. This would provide further ammunition to the government. Where reasonable doubt existed, baptism should be delayed.

This was certainly not an effort to limit Jewish baptisms, or a statement of general Church policy in occupied or Axis-allied Europe, or even in Romania itself. Specific to Romania and as noted in Father Pierre Blet’s documentation from the

Vatican archives in the book "Pius XII and the Second World War" (Paulist Press): "(B)aptizing Jews caused problems. The number of Jews requesting baptism had increased considerably, and it was rumored that the Holy See, 'confronted with the danger in which the Jews were placed, ordered that they were to be baptized en masse after receiving a short preparation, with further instruction being delayed until a later time.' On 18 April 1942 the Romanian minister to the Holy See told Cardinal Maglione that the number of conversions was high, too high and thus was suspect. Consequently the government was suggesting that the pope suspend admission into the Catholic Church for the duration of the war, a proposal that was, of course, rejected."

***Didn't Pope Pius XII, shortly after his election, refuse to release an encyclical drafted under Pius XI that would have forthrightly condemned anti-Semitism? What is the story behind this "hidden encyclical"?***

An encyclical was drafted toward the end of the reign of Pope Pius XI that was to have condemned anti-Semitism in general. It is argued that Pope Pius XII killed the encyclical because of that condemnation. However, it is clear that Pius killed the encyclical because it was a weak effort with a variety of bad sections that could only have encouraged, rather than discouraged anti-Semitism. It was this weakness of the encyclical draft that was the real reason it was never published not some lurking anti-Semitism. Pius XII, an outspoken critic of anti-Semitism along with his predecessor Pius IX, would never have allowed such a poorly drafted encyclical to be released. If Pius XI had been healthy, he would never have allowed the draft of such a weak encyclical to be issued as well.

To argue that the Holy See was unwilling to condemn anti-Semitism is to fly in the face of an encyclical that already

condemned Nazis and their treatment of the Jews (*Mit Brennender Sorge*, 1937). There are also all the additional written and public statements that would be issued by Pius XII and the Vatican throughout the war years, including his very first encyclical in 1939, *Summi Pontificatus*, on the unity of human society. That encyclical can rightly be seen as the papal “testament” against anti-Semitism, rather than the flawed “hidden encyclical.”

***Do Catholics go too far in the defense of a beloved spiritual leader in Pius XII? Isn't further research necessary in this area, particularly in secret Vatican archives?***

The assumption is that Catholics defend Pope Pius XII because he was a “beloved spiritual leader.” Catholics defend Pope Pius XII because he is unjustly attacked as a “silent collaborator” in the Holocaust. This charge is false and flies in the face of the clear historical record. That said, no one would oppose honest research and investigation of the papacy of Pope Pius XII. Such is now necessary in light of the campaign of vilification aimed at him. In reporting and editorials on the Holocaust, it is routinely presented as historical fact that Pius XII and the Church were, at best, stonily silent, or, at worst, aided and abetted the Nazi killing machine. Many simply accept these false charges without any real knowledge of the past. The historical reality of the pontificate of Pius XII has nearly been lost in the face of the strident campaign against him. Contemporary Catholics are witnessing the creation of a myth in regard to Pius XII. This campaign, triggered by Rolf Hochhuth's libelous 1963 play *The Deputy*, thrives on false history. Competent, objective historical scholarship will do nothing but lead to a renewed appreciation of his pontificate and what he accomplished in saving lives during the Holocaust.

The question is raised concerning “secret documents” in the Vatican. Under the direction of Pope Paul VI after the controversy caused by Rolf Hochhuth's play, 11 volumes of the documents were sorted and released from the Vatican archives. There is no foundation to any charge that there are “secret” documents that the Vatican is hiding in regard to the Holocaust and the Church's relations with Nazi Germany.

***Could Jewish opposition to the beatification of Pope Pius XII lead to an increase in anti-Semitism among Catholics?***

There is no way that Jewish opposition to the beatification of Pope Pius XII could lead to any “increase in anti-Semitism” among Catholics. As stated in the document on the Holocaust: “To remember this terrible experience is to become fully conscious of the salutary warning it entails: the spoiled seeds of anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism must never again be allowed to take root in any heart.” One cannot be properly Catholic and be anti-Semitic at the same time. As Pius XI boldly proclaimed: “We are all spiritual Semites.”

However, this ongoing campaign against Pius XII – and the heated rhetoric it has engendered against the Church – could have a negative impact on Catholic-Jewish relations. Beginning with the papacies of Pius XI and Pius XII, proceeding through the Vatican Council and Paul VI, great strides had been made in Catholic-Jewish relations. The papacy of John Paul II has seen one historic event after another, celebrating the Church’s understanding that all Christians are “spiritual Semites.” Yet the myth of the silence of Pius XII has overshadowed these historic developments. It has helped to entrench a persistent anti-Catholicism within elements of the Jewish community, while creating in certain Catholic circles a deep resentment that can only be harmful for all. While nothing can fully destroy the enormous strides taken by Pope John Paul II, leaving this myth unanswered and accepted can only do great damage to what should be a deep and close relationship between Catholics and Jews, generated in part by the heroism of Pope Pius XII in saving Jewish lives during the Holocaust.

***What is the source for the attacks on Pope Pius XII? If he were not guilty of silence, what would be the reason for making such a claim?***

The myth of Pius XII began in earnest in 1963 in a drama

created for the stage by Rolf Hochhuth, an otherwise obscure German playwright born in 1931. Turgid in length, in 1963's *Der Stellvertreter* (*The Representative* or *The Deputy*) Hochhuth charged through an allegedly "documentary" presentation that Pius XII maintained an icy, cynical and uncaring silence during the Holocaust. More interested in Vatican investments than human lives, Pius was presented as a cigarette-smoking dandy with Nazi leanings.

*The Deputy*, even to Pius' most strenuous detractors, is readily dismissed. John Cornwell in *Hitler's Pope* describes *Der Stellvertreter* as "historical fiction based on scant documentation...(T)he characterization of Pacelli (Pius XII) as a money-grubbing hypocrite is so wide of the mark as to be ludicrous. Importantly, however, Hochhuth's play offends the most basic criteria of documentary: that such stories and portrayals are valid only if they are demonstrably true."

Yet *The Deputy*, despite its evident flaws, prejudices and lack of historicity, laid the foundation for the charges against Pius XII, five years after his death. As noted earlier, Pope Pius XII was unpopular with certain Marxist-leaning schools of post World War II historians for the anti-Stalinist, anti-Communist agenda of his later pontificate. Hochhuth's charge of papal "silence" fit perfectly with the campaign to destroy the reputation of Pope Pius XII. *The Deputy*, therefore, took on far greater importance than it deserved. Leftists used it as a means to discredit an anti-Communist papacy. Instead of Pius being seen as a careful and concerned pontiff working with every means available to rescue European Jews in the face of complete Nazi entrapment, an image was created of a political schemer who would sacrifice lives to stop the spread of Communism. *The Deputy* was merely the mouthpiece for an ideological interpretation of history that helped create the myth of a "silent" Pius XII doing nothing in the face of Nazi slaughter.

There was also strong resonance within the Jewish community at the time *The Deputy* appeared. The Jewish world had experienced a virtual re-living of the Holocaust in the trial of Adolf Eichmann. A key figure in the Nazi Final Solution, Eichmann had been captured in Argentina in 1960, tried in Israel in 1961 and executed in 1962. For many young Jews, Eichmann's trial was the first definitive exposure to the horror that the Nazis had implemented. At the same time, Israel was threatened on all sides by the unified Arab states. War would erupt in a very short time. *The Deputy* resonated with an Israel that was surrounded by enemies and would be fighting for its ultimate survival.

It seems ludicrous that a pope praised for his actions by all leading Jewish organizations throughout his life could be discredited based on nothing more than a theatrical invention. Yet, that is what took place and has taken place since. A combination of political and social events early in the 1960s, biased historical revisionism, and an exercise in theatrical rhetoric, created the myth of the uncaring pontiff in contradiction to the clear historical record.

Today, that myth serves its own ideological purposes as certainly, the campaign against Pope Pius XII is used for anti-Catholic purposes. Like many of the anti-Catholic canards rooted in the culture, the myth of Pius XII is raised to attack a host of Catholic positions on issues and the Church itself. It feeds anti-Catholic rhetoric.

***In light of Pope John Paul II's visit to Israel and his statements at Yad Vashem and at the Western Wall, what is foreseen as the future of Catholic-Jewish relations?***

The papacy of Pope John Paul II, building on the foundation of his 20<sup>th</sup> century predecessors and the Second Vatican Council, has taken enormous strides in the development of Catholic-Jewish relations. This is much more than simply dialogue, symbolic acts, or ecumenical gestures. It has promoted a deep

Catholic sense and appreciation of our “elder brothers” in faith, as well as – it is hoped – a Jewish understanding of Catholics as people of the Book. The Pope has also called Catholics to a penitential understanding of the sins of the past in regard to the Jews, and the incompatibility of Catholicism with anti-Semitism.

At the same time, the pope’s actions have allowed Jews to see not only the terrible sin of certain so-called Christians who cooperated with the Holocaust, but those Christians who heroically saved lives, and lost their own. By the canonization of Edith Stein, he has raised up the example of a Christian and a Jew who died as both in the horror of the Holocaust. She is a living sign – a martyr if you will – for the betterment of Catholic-Jewish relations.

Eventually, this propaganda campaign against Pius XII will collapse. Without any basis in fact, this will vanish from the scene. And as that happens, one can foresee only a deeper growth in understanding between Catholics and Jews.

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# Galileo and the Catholic Church

*by Robert P. Lockwood*

*(3/2000)*

In October, 1992 Cardinal Paul Poupard presented to Pope John Paul II the results of the papal-requested Pontifical Academy study of the famous 1633 trial of Galileo.<sup>1</sup> He reported the

study's conclusion that at the time of the trial, "theologians... failed to grasp the profound non-literal meaning of the Scriptures when they describe the physical structure of the universe. This led them unduly to transpose a question of factual observation into the realm of faith...(and) to a disciplinary measure from which Galileo 'had much to suffer.'"2 The headlines that followed screamed that the Church had reversed itself on the seventeenth century astronomer and commentators wondered about the impact of the study on papal infallibility. *The New York Times* snickered that the Church had finally admitted that Galileo was right and the earth did revolve around the sun. Others proclaimed that the Church had surrendered in the alleged war between faith and science.

For over three and a half centuries, the trial of Galileo has been an anti-Catholic bludgeon aimed at the Church. In the 18th, 19th and early 20th century, it was wielded to show the Church as the enemy of enlightenment, freedom of thought and scientific advancement, part of a caricature of an institution dedicated to keeping mankind in a theocratic vice. In the cultural wars of our own day, Galileo is resurrected as a martyr of an oppressive Church, a Church that is the enemy of so-called reproductive advances that would prove as right as Galileo's science and the Church as backwards in opposing them. Galileo has become an all-encompassing trump card, played whether the discussion is over science, abortion, gay rights, legalized pornography, or simply as a legitimate reason for anti-Catholicism itself.3

The story of Galileo and the Church is re-told in *Galileo's Daughter*4 by Dava Sobel. Throughout the account of Galileo's life, scientific studies, and his difficulties with the Church, Sobel weaves surviving letters to him from his illegitimate daughter, Sister Maria Celeste, a Poor Clare nun. The breathless jacket copy describes the book as the story of "a mythic figure whose seventeenth-century clash with Catholic

doctrine continues to define the schism between science and religion." The book itself, however, is a straightforward account of the life of Galileo Galilei that gains poignancy through his daughter's descriptive and loving correspondence. It provides a balanced presentation of the conflict that evolved between Galileo and Church authorities, as well as Galileo's own deep Catholic faith. The austere and devout life of Sister Maria Celeste's small and nearly indigent Poor Clare convent in the seventeenth century, as well as the depth of her piety and intelligence, stand in marked contrast to the bleak portrait often painted by prejudiced observers of the Church on the eve of the so-called European Enlightenment. Readers who expected an anti-Catholic, ultra-feminist manifesto from *Galileo's Daughter* will be disheartened, or pleased.

If Galileo had never lived, the anti-Catholic culture would have had to invent him. The myth of Galileo is more important than the actual events that surrounded him, much as the famous quote attributed to him was never spoken. After recanting his view of the earth orbiting the sun, he was said to have defiantly muttered aloud as he left the trial chamber, *Eppur si muove!* ("And yet it does move"). It was a quote known by every school child in Protestant America in the nineteenth century, though it was a legend created nearly 125 years after his death.<sup>5</sup> As the jacket cover for *Galileo's Daughter* confirms, the legend of Galileo became part of the anti-Catholic baggage of Western, particularly English-speaking culture. Galileo represents the myth of the Church at war with science and enlightened thought.

## The World of Galileo

Galileo Galilei was born in Pisa on February 18, 1564,<sup>6</sup> the same day that Michelangelo died. If Michelangelo represented the last of the Renaissance, Galileo was born to the world of the Reformation. The Council of Trent, which confirmed the Church's formal response to Martin Luther's revolt of 1517,

had ended the year prior to his birth. In England, Elizabeth I had assumed the throne six years before his birth to radicalize – and formalize – Henry VIII's schism with Rome. It was a world where the Bible had become a source for a thousand different theologies that would be the pretext for the Thirty Years War in Galileo's lifetime, a universal European conflagration seen by its greatest historian as the first war of modern nationalism, fought under the guise of religion.<sup>7</sup> It was a Europe where witches were burned, the deadly plague still erupted, and the glories of the Renaissance had succumbed to an "unhappy desolation"<sup>8</sup> brought on by the breakdown in the unity of Christian culture through Luther's Reformation. Even the flowering of learning that was the Renaissance had been reduced to a rigid slavery to all things ancient.

In the midst of this "unhappy desolation," the era would see the beginnings of modern science, developed from those very same Greek and Roman studies encouraged and supported by the Church in the Renaissance. Contrary to the assorted black legends that have come down to us, most of the early scientific progress in astronomy was rooted in the Church. Galileo would not so much discover that the earth revolved around the sun. Rather, he would attempt to prove with his studies and propagate through his writings the theories of a Catholic priest who had died 20 years before Galileo was born, Nicholas Copernicus.

It was also the Church, under the aegis of Pope Gregory XIII, that introduced the "major achievement of modern astronomy"<sup>9</sup> when Galileo was in his teens. The Western world still marked time by the Julian calendar created in 46 B.C. By Galileo's day, the calendar was 12 days off, leaving Church feasts woefully behind the seasons for which they were intended. A number of pontiffs had attempted to correct the problem, but it was Pope Gregory XIII who was able to present a more accurate calendar in 1582. Though Protestant Europe fumed at

the imposition of “popish time,” the accuracy of Gregory’s calendar led to its acceptance throughout the West and, essentially, throughout the world by the 20th century.

Copernicus was born in 1473. Ordained to the priesthood, he studied in Italy where he became fascinated with astronomy. The world generally accepted what the senses told and had been taught since Ptolemy (2nd century A.D.), that the earth is fixed and the suns, stars and planets revolve around it. Through mathematical examination Copernicus came to believe that the sun is the center of the universe and the planets, earth included, revolve around it. He never published his studies in his lifetime, though excerpts of his manuscript would circulate in scholarly circles. (His book – *De revolutionibus* – appeared as he was on his deathbed in 1543.) Pope Leo X (1513-1521) was intrigued by his theories and expressed an interest in hearing them advanced. Martin Luther, calling Copernicus a fool, savaged his theory, as did John Calvin.<sup>10</sup>

Copernicus died in 1543 and for the most part the Church raised no objections to his revolutionary hypothesis, as long as it was represented as theory, not undisputed fact. The difficulty that both the Church – and the Protestant reformers – had with the theory is that it was perceived as not only contradicting common sense, but Scripture as well where it was taught that Joshua had made the sun stand still and the Psalmist praised the earth “set firmly in place.”<sup>11</sup> The theory also could not be proven by current scientific technology. This is where Galileo would falter, and would “have much to suffer” as a result, “treading a dangerous path between the Heaven he revered as a good Catholic and the heavens he revealed through his telescope.”<sup>12</sup>

### Galileo and Copernican Theory

The myth we have of Galileo is that of a “renegade who scoffed at the Bible and drew fire from a Church blind to reason.”<sup>13</sup>

In fact, "he remained a good Catholic who believed in the power of prayer and endeavored always to conform his duty as a scientist with the destiny of his soul."<sup>14</sup> Galileo Galilei was raised in Pisa where his father dabbled in business and taught music out of his home. The young Galileo hoped to become a monk but instead studied medicine at the University of Pisa at his father's direction, where he became enthralled with mathematics. He would return to Pisa as a teacher of mathematics and moved on to the University of Padua in the Republic of Venice, where he would eventually secure a high post with the ruling Medici family.

While at Venice, Galileo heard of the invention of a spyglass that allowed one to see objects that were far away. From this spyglass, Galileo would develop the telescope and turn his eyes toward the exploration of the heavens. He produced his first book – *The Starry Messenger* – detailing his observations in 1610, describing the moons of Jupiter, the location of stars, and that the moon was not a perfect sphere. Galileo had overthrown contemporary astronomy and, while being carved up by fellow scientists, became a controversial celebrity. In 1611 he was celebrated in Rome for his work, receiving a favorable audience with Pope Paul V, and became friends with Cardinal Maffeo Barberini, the future Pope Urban VIII, who would honor the astronomer with a poem.

Galileo had begun his teaching career expounding the earth-centered universe, but his observations through his telescope quickly moved him toward support of the Copernican theory. In the *Sunspot Letters* (1613) Galileo forcefully argued for a Copernican understanding of the universe and, by his bombast, alienated much of the scientific community that upheld the Ptolemaic principles, particularly many within the Church. Tact and diplomacy were never Galileo's strong points, and his acerbic personality, particularly in scientific debate, made him few friends. His personality would be of little help when his views came under question.

There were many who believed that embracing the Copernican theory was tantamount to heresy and charges of such began to swirl around Galileo. Galileo considered heresy “more abhorrent than death itself”<sup>15</sup> and was quick to defend himself. Unfortunately, Galileo would not bow to the temper of his times. Instead of keeping the debate on a theoretical plane involving mathematics, astronomy and observation, Galileo would enter the uncharted waters of theology and Scriptural interpretation. He attempted to explain to a student of his, in response to Christina d’ Medici, the grand duchess of the Medici family, how the Copernican theory would not contradict the evidence of Scripture. In a long letter he delved into the relationship of science and Scripture. His essential theory – clear to Catholic understanding today – is that while Scripture cannot err, we can err in our understanding of it. Nature cannot contradict the Bible, and if it appears to do so, it is because we do not adequately understand the deeper Biblical interpretation. Reading astronomical interpretations into Bible passages is a fundamental misuse of the Bible. Scripture serves a more important purpose. As it has been said, the Bible teaches one how to go to Heaven, not how the heavens go.

Essentially, Galileo was slipping into trouble on three accounts. First, despite feeble objections to the contrary, he was teaching Copernican theory as fact rather than hypothesis. Second, the popularity of his writings brought an essentially “philosophical discussion” into the public arena, requiring some sort of Church response. Third, by elevating scientific conjecture to a theological level, he was raising the stakes enormously. Instead of merely philosophical disputation that many in the Church viewed more as an intellectual game, Galileo – an untrained layman – was now lecturing on Scriptural interpretation.

On December 21, 1614, a young Dominican priest denounced Galileo from a Florence pulpit as an enemy of true religion.

Though the Dominican was forced to apologize, the issue was out in the open and began to be discussed in the highest circles in Rome. Pope Paul V, uninterested in scientific debates, passed the matter on to the Holy Office to determine if there were doctrinal issues involved. In 1616, Galileo traveled to Rome to defend himself and continued to forcefully write and argue both on the truth of the Copernican hypothesis, and on proper Scriptural interpretation in the light of scientific developments.

Pope Paul V's theologian was the Jesuit Cardinal Robert Bellarmine. Cardinal Bellarmine was a leading figure in the Catholic Counter Reformation. Though he had the sobriquet "hammer of heretics," Cardinal Bellarmine was a calm, educated, reasonable and saintly prelate. (He would be canonized a saint of the Church.) In 1615, Cardinal Bellarmine had addressed the Copernican debate in a nuanced fashion. He stated his personal belief that the Copernican theory was not viable as it defied human reason. However, he found no reason for it not to be treated as a hypothesis. More important, he noted that if the Copernican theory was ever proven – which he doubted could ever be accomplished – then it would be necessary to re-think the interpretation of certain Scriptural passages. It was a vital point that would be forgotten in 1616 and in the trial of Galileo in 1633.<sup>16</sup>

In February 1616, a council of theological advisors to the pope ruled that it was bad science and quite likely heresy to teach as fact that the sun was at the center of the universe, that the earth is not at the center of the world, and that it moves. Galileo was not personally condemned, but Cardinal Bellarmine was asked to convey the news to him. Cardinal Bellarmine knew and respected Galileo. He met with Galileo, advised him of the panel's ruling, and ordered him to cease defending his theories as fact. He also asked him to avoid any further inroads into discussion of Scriptural interpretation. Galileo agreed.

When the edict was formally announced, however, Galileo's name or his works were never mentioned, nor was the word "heresy" ever employed. This, along with Cardinal Bellarmine's statement to him, led Galileo to believe that he could still consider the theory as a hypothesis, and to hope that the edict might eventually be reversed. In March, he had a private audience with the pope in which, Galileo reported, he was assured of the pontiff's high esteem and protection. The stain of heresy continued to plague Galileo, however, and he requested and received from Cardinal Bellarmine a letter stating that he had not been made to perform penance for his views, nor forced to recant. He was simply informed that the teachings of Copernicus were found to be contrary to Scripture and should not be defended as truth. With that letter in hand, Galileo moved on to other studies.

In 1623, Cardinal Barberini was elected Pope Urban VIII. With the election of his friend and supporter, Galileo assumed that the atmosphere could be ripe for a reversal of the 1616 edict. In 1624 he headed off to Rome again to meet the new pope. Pope Urban had intimated that the 1616 edict would not have been published had he been pope at the time, and took credit for the word "heresy" not appearing in the formal edict.<sup>17</sup> Yet, Urban also believed that the Copernican doctrine could never be proven and he was only willing to allow Galileo the right to discuss it as hypothesis, but not as fact. Galileo was encouraged and would proceed over the next six years to write a "dialogue" on the Copernican theory. It would be that book which resulted in Galileo's famous trial.

## The Trial of Galileo

On Christmas Eve, 1629, Galileo finished his manuscript and proceeded to secure permission to publish and review by Church censors. An outbreak of bubonic plague, printing set backs and reviews by the censors delayed final publication of the *Dialogue* until February 1632. The book was received with massive protest. Galileo had so weighted his argument in favor

of Copernican theory as truth – and managed to insult the pope's own expressed view that complex matters observed in Nature were to be simply attributed to the mysterious power of God – that a firestorm was inevitable. His scientific enemies were infuriated with Galileo's often snide and ridiculing dismissal of their views. The *Dialogue* could also certainly be read as a direct challenge to the 1616 edict.

It is important to understand the mindset of Galileo's tribunal judges, most scientists of the day, and theologians. In its simplest terms, the Ptolemaic construct of a motionless earth at the center of the world made perfect sense. It was the cosmology of the times. First, it was logical to the senses. The sun appeared to rise in the east and set in the west. Mankind could not "feel" the motion of the earth, nor could any experiments known prove such a motion so contrary to the senses. Second, the Ptolemaic system was the teaching of the ancients, and confirmed by the greatest minds of the past, including Aristotle, and the present. A learned man knew the ancients, and the ancients remained the fountainhead of scientific knowledge. Finally, and most important, they read certain passages in Scripture that seemed, by their interpretation, to affirm this science. Unlike Cardinal Bellarmine, they never went deeper into the question of the possibility that Galileo's theory could be proven, and that their interpretation of the Scriptural passages – not Scripture itself – could be wrong.

The difficulty that Galileo encountered with Church authorities, then, was that he appeared to attack the veracity of Scripture by teaching Copernican theory as truth, rather than hypothesis. He had no acceptable proof for his belief that the earth revolved around the sun. He had attempted to make such proofs through an argument based on the earth's tides (a scientifically incorrect one) but 17th century science simply was incapable of establishing that the earth did, in fact, orbit the sun.<sup>18</sup> And, finally, he appeared to be

openly challenging a Church edict to which he had earlier agreed.

Galileo was told to come to Rome to explain himself and publication of his book was suspended. Due to ill health – Galileo was by now 66 years old – he did not arrive in Rome until February 1633. He was allowed to stay in the comforts of the Florentine embassy. It was at this point that a fearful document emerged from the files of Galileo's dossier in 1616. It purported to prove "that Galileo had been officially warned not to discuss Copernicus, ever, in any way at all. And so, when Galileo had come to Urban in 1624, testing the feasibility of treating Copernican theory as hypothetical in a new book, he had in fact been flouting this ruling. Worse, it now appeared he had intentionally duped the trusting Urban by not having had the decency to tell him such a ruling existed. No wonder the pope was furious."<sup>19</sup> Galileo's understanding, based on his conversation with Cardinal Bellarmine, was that the topic could be treated hypothetically and he approached Urban in that spirit.

Galileo's trial did not take place before 10 cardinals as it is often pictured. Participants were Galileo, two officials, and a secretary. Galileo's defense was his letter from Cardinal Bellarmine, and the claim that the *Dialoguedid* not, in fact, support the Copernican theory. His first defense was probable. He was certainly not aware of the more restrictive notice in his file and in all likelihood an enemy had placed it there. It is doubtful that Galileo was being duplicitous in his understanding that he could discuss the Copernican theory as hypothesis, or that he had purposely misled the pope. Either would have been out of character for a man who was essentially a loyal son of the Church. His second defense, however, does not stand much scrutiny. The *Dialogue* was clearly a presentation and defense of the Copernican hypothesis as truth, though Galileo would certainly respond that he thought of it as scientific truth, not theological

truth. In his subsequent meetings with the tribunal, he confessed that ambition and poor writing might have conveyed an intent he did not mean and promised that he would make any correction to the book that was deemed necessary.

Seven of the 10 tribunal cardinals signed a condemnation of Galileo. The condemnation found Galileo “vehemently suspected of heresy” in teaching as truth that the Earth moves and is not the center of the world. He was found guilty in persisting in such teaching when he had been formally warned not to do so in 1616. His book was prohibited, he was ordered confined to formal imprisonment, to publicly renounce his beliefs, and to perform proper penance. Two additional articles – claiming he had fallen away from Catholic practice and that he had obtained an imprimatur for the *Dialogue* deceitfully – Galileo refused to admit and they were withdrawn. Galileo signed a handwritten confession.

The finding against Galileo was hardly infallible. Though certainly an irate pope had been consulted in the condemnation, the document had little to do with defining doctrine. It was the finding of one canonical office, not a determination by the Church that set out a clear doctrinal interpretation. Rene Descartes, the French philosopher and friend of Galileo, noted the censure was not confirmed by a Council or the pope but “proceeds solely from a committee of cardinals.”<sup>20</sup> This was disciplinary action, not doctrinal definition in intent. Three of the cardinals avoided signing it altogether. Galileo would continue to have friends and supporters within the Church, including the archbishop of Sienna who would provide him with his residence for part of his “house arrest.” At the same time, however, the condemnation was also unjust. Clearly, the Church tribunal had handled a bad situation badly, and the personal umbrage of Pope Urban VIII over being “duped” by Galileo had its impact as well. Galileo’s subsequent imprisonment was little more than house arrest at the Florentine embassy and later at the

residence of the Archbishop of Sienna and finally at a house in Acetri. While Galileo would continue to conduct important scientific studies – and publish books on those studies – the fact remains that his condemnation was unjust. And even a comfortable imprisonment is still imprisonment. Most of all, Galileo personally suffered by the condemnation that seemed to mean that his faith was lacking and his reputation ruined because of it. The theologians who interrogated him acted outside their competence and confused the literary nature of Scripture with its theological intent.<sup>21</sup>

Galileo died in 1642 and Pope Urban VIII two years later. In 1741, Pope Benedict XIV granted an imprimatur to the first edition of the complete works of Galileo. In 1757, a new edition of the Index of Forbidden Books allowed works that supported the Copernican theory.

### The Myth of Galileo

“There was only one trial of Galileo, although legends – even experts and encyclopedias – often speak of two, erroneously counting Galileo’s 1616 encounter with Cardinal Bellarmine as a preliminary trial, leading up to the second, more sustained interrogation of 1633 that left Galileo kneeling before his inquisitors, or in a dungeon by some accounts, or even in chains...There was only one trial of Galileo, and yet it seems there were a thousand – the suppression of science by religion, the defense of individualism against authority, the clash between revolutionary and establishment, the challenge of radical new discoveries to ancient beliefs, the struggle against intolerance for freedom of thought and freedom of speech. No other process in the annals of canon or common law has ricocheted through history with more meanings, more consequences, more conjecture, more regrets.”<sup>22</sup>

Galileo’s trial came to mean far more than it did when it actually took place. As his contemporary Descartes realized, it could even be argued that it was a small victory for

science. Despite the ire with Galileo, the earth as the unmoving center of the universe was not set forth as Catholic doctrine infallibly defined, "either by Council or pope." While there is no doubt that Galileo suffered personally, the Church continued to support scientific studies. Prior to and during Galileo's time, as well as after, the Church remained in the forefront of the new sciences. (Part of the reason for Galileo's fall was the animosity his style and beliefs engendered among competitive scientists within the Church, particularly among the Jesuits. While Galileo had been feted by Jesuit scientists early in his career, he had soon locked horns with any number of them, which made him a target for competitive jealousies.)

The Galileo affair soon entered the mythological corpus of Western Protestantism and secularism as symbolizing the Church as anti-intellectual, anti-science and anti-freedom. By the 18th century enlightenment, Galileo provided "unequivocal evidence of the conflict between truth and superstition."<sup>23</sup> In the 19th century, "scientism" had become its own religion, much as it lingers today. In an era where intellectuals viewed science and scientific method as the only means to attain truth, Galileo was resurrected and canonized a martyr. "By the second half of the 19th century the condemnation of Galileo had come to be seen in messianic terms. The figure of Galileo took on an almost divine role in the redemption of mankind from the dogmatism of the past...The legend of Galileo came to be considered a central chapter in a long history of warfare between science and religion. Increasingly, this metaphor of warfare served as an important tool for the modern world's understanding of its own history."<sup>24</sup>

The trial of Galileo is most often portrayed in terms that it clearly was not: Galileo the scientist arguing the supremacy of reason and science over faith; the tribunal judges demanding that reason abjure to faith. The trial was neither. Galileo and the tribunal judges shared a common view that

science and the Bible could not stand in contradiction. If there appeared to be a contradiction, such a contradiction resulted from either weak science, or poor interpretation of Scripture. This was clearly understood by Cardinal Bellarmine. The mistakes that were made came from Galileo's own personality and acerbic style, the personal umbrage of the Holy Father, jealous competitive scientists, and tribunal judges who erroneously believed that the universe revolved around a motionless earth and that the Bible confirmed such a belief.

## Conclusion

The Galileo case had, of course, been long settled when in 1981 Pope John Paul II asked that a pontifical commission study the Ptolemaic-Copernican controversy of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. What was the purpose of revisiting the controversy? As Cardinal Poupard explained in the commission's report to the Holy Father, "It was not a question of conducting a retrial but of undertaking a calm, objective reflection, taking into account the historical and cultural context."<sup>25</sup>

In his report, Cardinal Poupard briefly summarized the findings. Referring to Cardinal Bellarmine's letter of 1615, if the "orbiting of the Earth around the sun were ever to be demonstrated to be certain, then theologians...would have to review biblical passages apparently opposed to the Copernican theories so as to avoid asserting the error of opinions proven to be true." The difficulty in 1616 – and 1633 – was that "Galileo had not succeeded in proving irrefutably the double motion of the Earth.... More than 150 years still had to pass before" such proofs were scientifically established.<sup>26</sup>

"The philosophical and theological qualifications," Cardinal Poupard concluded, "wrongly granted to the then new theories about the centrality of the sun and the movement of the earth were the result of a transitional situation in the field of

astronomical knowledge and of an exegetical confusing regarding cosmology...(T)heologians...failed to grasp the profound, non-literal meaning of the Scriptures when they describe the physical structure of the created universe. This led them unduly to transpose a question of factual observation into the realm of faith."27

In his response to these conclusions, Pope John Paul II reminded the audience that in the relationship of science and religion "the distinction between the two realms of knowledge ought not to be understood as opposition... Humanity has before it two modes of development. The first involves culture, scientific research and technology, that is to say, whatever falls within the horizontal aspect of man and creation, which is growing at an impressive rate. In order that this progress should not remain completely external to man, it presupposes a simultaneous raising of conscience as well as its actuation. The second mode of development involves what is deepest in the human being when, transcending the world and transcending himself, man turns toward the One who is the Creator of all. It is only this vertical direction that can give full meaning to man's being and action because it situates him in relation to his origin and end...The scientist who is conscious of this twofold development and takes it into account contributes to the restoration of harmony."28

If there is a war between science and religion, it is not a battle based on any denial from the Church of the need for scientific progress. Rather, it is a philosophy of science that has adopted "scientism," a "religion of science" that scornfully disregards faith. It is far more common today for science to declare war on faith, than faith to object in any way to true science and its search for truth. "I am in favor of a dialogue between science and religion, but not a constructive dialogue. One of the great achievements of science has been, if not to make it impossible for intelligent people to be religious, then at least to make it possible for

them not to be religious...(G)ood people can behave well and bad people can do evil; but for good people to do evil – that takes religion.”<sup>29</sup> Thus spoke Steven Weinberg, Nobel Prize winner for his work on the theory of particles and fields. His sentiments would have horrified Galileo.

## SUMMARY POINTS

\*The trial of Galileo in 1633 has been an anti-Catholic bludgeon aimed at the Church. Galileo has become an all-encompassing trump card, played whether the discussion is over science, abortion, gay rights, legalized pornography, or simply as a legitimate reason for anti-Catholicism itself.

\*The myth of Galileo is more important than the actual events that surrounded him. Galileo represents the myth of the Church at war with science and enlightened thought.

\*Most of the early scientific progress in astronomy was rooted in the Church. Galileo would attempt to prove the theories of a Catholic priest who had died 20 years before Galileo was born, Nicholas Copernicus. Copernicus argued for an earth that orbited the sun, rather than a fixed earth at the center of the cosmos.

\*Copernicus died in 1543 and the Church raised no objections to his revolutionary hypothesis as long as it was presented as theory. The difficulty that both the Church – and the leading Protestant reformers – had with the theory is that it was perceived as not only contradicting common sense, but Scripture as well.

\*The myth we have of Galileo is that of a renegade who scoffed at the Bible and drew fire from a Church blind to reason. In fact, he remained a good Catholic who believed in the power of prayer and endeavored always to conform his duty as a scientist with the destiny of his soul.

\*In 1615, Cardinal Robert Bellarmine noted that if the

Copernican theory was ever proven then it would be necessary to re-think the interpretation of certain Scriptural passages.

\*In February 1616, a council of theological advisors to the pope ruled that it was bad science and quite likely contrary to faith to teach as fact that the sun was at the center of the universe, that the earth is not at the center of the world, and that it moves. \*Galileo's name or his works were never mentioned in the edict, nor was the word "heresy" ever employed. This led Galileo to believe that he could still consider the Copernican theory as hypothesis.

\*Galileo met with Pope Urban VIII and believed he had permission to re-visit the Copernican debate.

\*In 1632, Galileo published the *Dialogue*. The *Dialogue* could be read as a direct challenge to the 1616 edict, as it forcefully argued the truth of the Copernican system. It was greeted with skepticism from the Church and the scientific community of the day.

\*In his trial in 1633, Galileo was found "vehemently suspected of heresy" in teaching as truth that the earth moves and is not the center of the world. He was found guilty in persisting in such teaching when he had been formally warned not to do so in 1616. His book was prohibited, he was ordered confined to formal imprisonment, to publicly renounce his beliefs, and to perform proper penance.

\*The finding against Galileo was hardly infallible. The condemnation had little to do with defining doctrine. It was the finding of one canonical office, not a determination by the Church, that set out a clear doctrinal interpretation.

\*While Galileo would continue to conduct important scientific studies – and publish books on those studies – the fact remains that his condemnation was unjust. The theologians who interrogated him acted outside their competence and confused the literary nature of Scripture with its theological intent.

\*Galileo died in 1642. In the 19th century, "scientism" became its own religion. In an era where intellectuals viewed science and scientific method as the only means to attain truth, Galileo was resurrected and canonized a martyr.

\*The trial of Galileo is most often portrayed in terms that it clearly was not: Galileo the scientist arguing the supremacy of reason and science over faith; the tribunal judges demanding that reason abjure to faith. The trial was neither. Galileo and the tribunal judges shared the view that science and the Bible could not stand in contradiction.

\*The mistakes that were made in the trial came from Galileo's own personality and acerbic style, the personal umbrage of Pope Urban VIII who believed Galileo had duped him, jealous competitive scientists, and tribunal judges who erroneously believed that the universe revolved around a motionless earth and that the Bible confirmed such a belief.

\*Galileo had not succeeded in proving the double motion of the Earth. More than 150 years still had to pass before such proofs were scientifically established.

\*"Theologians...failed to grasp the profound, non-literal meaning of the Scriptures when they describe the physical structure of the created universe. This led them unduly to transpose a question of factual observation into the realm of faith." (Cardinal Paul Poupard in his presentation to Pope John Paul II on the results of the papal-requested Pontifical Academy study of the Galileo trial.)

\*If there is a war between science and religion, it is not a battle based on any denial from the Church of the need for scientific progress. Rather, it is from certain segments of the scientific community that have adopted a religion of science that scornfully disregards religious faith. It is far more common today for certain scientists to declare war on faith, than faith to object to science and its search for

truth.

## FOOTNOTES

10 *Origins* v.22, n 22, 374-375 Galileo: Report on Papal Commission Findings, Cardinal Poupard

2(Ibid. No. 5)

3Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, *Annual Report* (1999). Citation of letter published in the *New York Daily News*, October 15, 1999: "Frankly, the Catholic Church needs to be bashed! Lest we forget, these are the folks who brought you the Crusades, the Inquisition, the trial of Galileo...."

4*Galileo's Daughter*, Dava Sobel (Walker & Company, New York, NY, 1999)

5 This famous declaration of Galileo first was attributed to him a little over a century after his trial by a French writer.

6For biographical information on Galileo, the best current resource is Sobel's *Galileo's Daughter*. See above.

7*The Thirty Years War*, C.V. Wedgwood (Random House, 1938; Book of the Month Club edition, 1995)

8*The Renaissance*, Will Durant (Simon & Schuster, 1953; Easton Press edition, 1992) p. 728

9*The Age of Reason Begins*, Will and Ariel Durant (Simon & Schuster, 1961; Easton Press Edition, 1992) p. 594

10Sobel, p. 5

11Joshua 10: 12-13; Psalm 93: 1

12Sobel, p. 5

13Ibid, p. 11

14Ibid, p. 12

15Ibid, p. 60

16*Origins*, Cardinal Poupard, No. 2

17Sobel, p. 137

18It would not be until 1851, over 200 years later, that the rotation of the earth was scientifically verified.

19Sobel, p. 235

20Cited in Sobel, p. 286

21Lessons of the Galileo Case, Pope John Paul II Address to the Pontifical Academy of Science, October 31, 1992. No. 2

22Sobel, pp. 231-232

23*Catholic Dossier*, July-August, 1995. "The Legend of Galileo: The Warfare Between Science and Religion," William A. Carroll, p. 16. (It is one of the ironies of our own time that the Church is now portrayed as "unenlightened" because it teaches that there are universal truths that can be known.)

24Ibid. p. 16

25*Origins*, Cardinal Poupard, No. 1

26Ibid, No. 3

27Ibid, No. 5

28Pope John Paul II, No. 14

29Cited in *First Things*, February 2000, p. 92

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# The Jubilee Year “Request for Pardon”

by Robert P. Lockwood, Catholic League Director of Research

(3/2000)

On Sunday, March 12, 2000 Pope John Paul II made a unique and historic “request for pardon” for the sins and errors of Christians both throughout the centuries and in the present. The Holy Father saw this as the culmination of the Church’s “examination of conscience” for the Jubilee Year. The goal of such a public act of repentance is a “purification of memory.” As the Holy Father explained in his Apostolic Letter *Tertio millennio adveniente* the Jubilee Year should be the occasion for a purification of the memory of the Church from all forms of “errors and instances of infidelity, inconsistency and slowness to act” in the past millenium.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, the responsibility of Christians for the evils that exist within our own time must be acknowledged as well.

The “request for pardon” is made in the understanding that “all of us, though not personally responsible and without encroaching on the judgement of God, who alone knows every heart, bear the burden of the errors and faults of those who have gone before us.”<sup>2</sup> This papal act of atonement for past sin is an intensely spiritual act, meant to seek forgiveness from God and allow Christians to enter the new millennium better prepared to evangelize the Truth of faith.

Unfortunately, we live at a time where Truth is rarely recognized, and where the spiritual nature of this public confession made by the pope for the entire Church was misconstrued, misunderstood and twisted to meet political or

ideological agendas. Particularly when events in history are raised, "the simple admission of faults committed by the sons and daughters of the Church may look like acquiescence in the face of accusations made by those who are prejudicially hostile to the Church."<sup>3</sup> There have been public responses to the papal apology that confuse repentance for wrong actions with accusations of doctrinal error, or make demands for apologies not required in the historical or cultural context of the events of the past.

### The Papal Atonement

At the special Jubilee Mass for the first Sunday of Lent, Pope John Paul II, gave his expression of regret for the entire Church for the following<sup>4</sup>:

1. "Even men of the church, in the name of faith and morals, have sometimes used methods not in keeping with the Gospel in the solemn duty of defending the truth."

The pope explained that "in certain periods of history Christians have at times given in to intolerance." He asked that we "seek and promote truth in the gentleness of charity, in the firm knowledge that truth can prevail only in virtue of truth itself."

"Recognition of the sins which have rent the unity of the Body of Christ and wounded fraternal charity." The pope asked forgiveness for the breakdown in Christian unity and that "believers have opposed one another, becoming divided, and have mutually condemned one another and fought against one another."

3. "In recalling the sufferings endured by the people of Israel throughout history, Christians will acknowledge the sins committed by not a few of their number against the people of the covenant." The pope acknowledged that we are "deeply saddened by the behavior of those who in the course of history have caused these children of yours to suffer."

4. "Repent of the words and attitudes caused by pride, by hatred, by the desire to dominate others, by enmity toward members of other religions and toward the weakest groups in society." Pope John Paul II asked forgiveness because "Christians have often denied the Gospel; yielding to a mentality of power, they have violated the rights of ethnic groups and peoples, and shown contempt for their cultures and religious traditions."

5. "Offenses against...human dignity and...rights (that) have been trampled; let us pray for women, who are all too often humiliated and emarginated." At times, the pope explained, "the equality of your sons and daughters has not been acknowledged, and Christians have been guilty of rejection and exclusion, consenting to acts of discrimination on the basis of racial and ethnic differences."

6. "Especially for minors who are victims of abuse, for the poor, the alienated, the disadvantaged; let us pray for those most defenseless, the unborn killed in their mother's womb or even exploited for experimental purposes by those who abuse the promise of biotechnology and distort the aims of science." How many times, the pope asked, "have Christians not recognized (Christ) in the hungry, the thirsty and the naked, in the persecuted, the imprisoned and in those incapable of defending themselves, particularly in the first stages of life." He asked forgiveness for "all those who have committed acts of injustice by trusting in wealth and power and showing contempt for the 'little ones.'"

### Reaction and response

For the most part, reaction to the papal request for pardon was positive, if one-sided. Most secular editorials – and commentators from various faiths and denominations – commended the Pope for acknowledging the "errors of the Roman Catholic Church over the last 2000 years." Yet, they failed to see that at the heart of these errors is the fact that Catholics have

faltered when they have become caught up in the culture of their day. Failing to see the world through the eyes of faith, they were caught up in the spirit of their times. The errors that the pope acknowledges are sins that come from the culture, not from a faith lived in unity with the Gospels. Too many commentators seek to imply that the derivation of these errors is the faith itself, rather than a failure of living up to the demands of faith. These sins are the errors Christians share with all mankind that find their roots in society, history and the culture, not in the Gospels: violence in defense of belief, corrosive divisiveness, anti-Semitism, intolerance, racial, gender and ethnic discrimination, and oppression of the poor and defenseless.

The negative secular response to the papal apology can be summed up from an editorial in the March 14, 2000 *New York Times*. "As long as (the Church) was burdened by its failure to reckon with passed misdeeds committed in the name of Catholicism, the Church could not fully heal its relations with other faiths. John Paul has now made it easier to do that. Some of the things (the pope) did not say bear note. The apology was expressed in broad terms. It was offered on behalf of the church's 'sons and daughters' but not the church itself, which is considered holy. Nor did John Paul directly address the sensitive issue of whether past popes, cardinals and clergy – not just parishioners – also erred. The pope's apology for discrimination against women is welcome but difficult to square with his continued opposition to abortion and birth control, and to women in the priesthood. Regrettably, he made no mention of discrimination against homosexuals. Another noted omission was the lack of a specific reference to the Holocaust...(and) the failure of Pope Pius XII to speak out against the Nazi genocide."

These charges should be reviewed individually:

\*As long as it was burdened by its failure to reckon with past misdeeds committed in the name of Catholicism, the Church

could not fully heal its relations with other faiths.

This is a misunderstanding of the purpose of the papal apology. It is also a failure to see the wider benefits to all faiths, and non-faiths. The purpose of the papal atonement for past sin is to allow Christians to enter the new millennium better prepared to evangelize the Truth of faith. In the *Times* statement there is a direct implication of a one-sided nature to the wrongs of the past, an acceptance of an anti-Catholic interpretation of history rooted in post-Reformation and Enlightenment propaganda rather than an accurate and objective understanding of the past. Additionally, while the papal apology is certainly given without equivocation, "it is hoped that they will be carried out reciprocally, though at times prophetic gestures may call for a unilateral...initiative."<sup>5</sup> In regard to other religions, "it would also be desirable if these acts of repentance would stimulate the members of other religions to acknowledge the faults of their own past."<sup>6</sup>

\*The apology was expressed in broad terms.

The *Times* and other commentators failed to note that the pope has specifically addressed many of the issues to which the apology referred in general. In 1982, the pope referred to the "errors of excess" in the Inquisition; the 1998 Vatican document on the Shoah made clear the moral shortcomings within Christians that contributed to the Holocaust; in 1995, the pope, in discussing the Crusades, outlined errors and expressed thanks that dialogue has replaced violence; in 1987 the pope acknowledged that Christian missionaries too often helped carry out the cultural oppression of native peoples; the pope decried in a 1995 letter the historical discrimination against women and expressed regret that "not a few" members of the Church shared in the blame.<sup>7</sup> The *Times* and other commentators demanded a laundry list of apologies based on prejudicial interpretations of history. While the pope "forgives and asks forgiveness," there is no acknowledgment on

the part of these commentators of the biases, conceits and hatreds that have often driven their commentaries on the Church. While the pope's apology asks for no reciprocity, it would do well for institutions such as the *Times* to examine objectively their own motivations in their attacks on the Church and the historical prejudices in which they are rooted.

\*(The apology) was offered on behalf of the church's 'sons and daughters' but not the church itself, which is considered holy. Nor did John Paul directly address the sensitive issue of whether past popes, cardinals and clergy – not just parishioners – also erred.

This is a two-fold misunderstanding. First, there is a real distinction between a theological understanding of the Church as the Body of Christ, which is holy, and its members that are sinners. Second, the *Times* and other critics are making the common mistake of identifying "the Church" with the hierarchy. "Sons and daughters" of the Church refers to all baptized members of the Church, not "just parishioners."

\*The pope's apology for discrimination against women is welcome but difficult to square with his continued opposition to abortion and birth control, and to women in the priesthood.

The papal apology dealt with errors and faults of Christians in their actions in the past and present. These errors were most often rooted in failure to live out the demands of the Gospels in particular historical circumstances. The *Times* and other critics are confusing repentance for certain wrong actions in history with admissions of doctrinal error. The *Times* uses the papal apology as an opportunity to demand that the Church change doctrinal truths for a secular agenda. What the apology could not be, and was not intended to be, was an apology for Church doctrine. The apology that the pope did issue, however, was for any inadvertent cooperation Christians may have given that contributed to the persistence in our own time of a culture of death that allows the weak and

defenseless, particularly the unborn, to be abused at the hands of the powerful.

\*Regrettably, he made no mention of discrimination against homosexuals.

The papal apology was not meant as an endorsement of a contemporary ideological agenda. The apology makes clear that "Christians have been guilty of rejection and exclusion, consenting to acts of discrimination on the basis of racial and ethnic differences." No person should be subject to discrimination and if any in the Christian community cooperate in discrimination, they are in error. However, the Church has always taught that homosexual acts – not homosexuals – are inherently sinful. The *Times* implied that such teaching involves "discrimination against homosexuals." It does not. Again, the *Times* demanded admission of doctrinal error and that Church teaching succumb to an ideological agenda. Such is neither the sum nor substance of the papal apology.

\*Another noted omission was the lack of a specific reference to the Holocaust...

As the recent document on the Shoah made clear, the Holocaust was "the result of the pagan ideology of Nazism, animated by a merciless anti-Semitism that not only despised the faith of the Jewish people, but also denied their very human dignity. Nevertheless, it may be asked whether the Nazi persecution of the Jews was not made easier by the anti-Jewish prejudices imbedded in some Christian minds and hearts."<sup>8</sup> That document made clear the need for repentance among Christians for anti-Semitic attitudes that contributed in any way to the Holocaust. The papal apology strongly asserts that "Christians will acknowledge the sins committed by not a few of their number against the people of the covenant." However, it would be an unhistorical leap for the pope to assent to contemporary anti-Catholic propaganda that attempts to identify the Church with the Holocaust. It is a historical fallacy – an insult to

the memory of the Holocaust – to utilize this ultimate 20th century evil as a tool against the Church and to thereby mitigate the evil that was pagan Nazism.

\*...(and) the failure of Pope Pius XII to speak out against the Nazi genocide.

The alleged “failure” of Pope Pius XII “to speak out on Nazi genocide” is a faulty interpretation of both the historical reality and a papacy that saved hundreds of thousands of Jewish lives. The actions and tactics of Pope Pius XII and the Church saved far more Jewish lives than the Allied armies, Allied governments, the Resistance, the Red Cross, other churches and other religions, or any other then-existing agency of any kind worldwide combined during the war. The actions of Pius XII hardly need an apology.

## Conclusion

The difficulty in such an unprecedented event by Pope John Paul II is that too often history is clouded with the prejudices and presumptions of those commenting and reporting on it. As evidenced in the *Times* editorial on the papal apology, history has often been twisted and reinterpreted for ideological purposes. What is assumed to be objective historical understanding of events is often 19th century – and 20th century – anti-Catholic propaganda that has been sanctioned over time as objectively correct. It is conventional wisdom, not historical fact. Careful and objective historical analysis – free from the prejudices of the past and present – needs to guide our understanding of the past. The Church is “not afraid of the truth that emerges from history and is ready to acknowledge mistakes whenever they have been identified, especially when they involve the respect that is owed to individuals and communities. She is inclined to mistrust generalizations that excuse or condemn various historical periods. She entrusts the investigation of the past to patient, honest, scholarly reconstruction, free from

confessional or ideological prejudices, regarding both the accusations brought against her and the wrongs she has suffered.”<sup>9</sup>

Pope John Paul II’s historic act of atonement is a witness to guide Catholics into the third millennium. Bigoted commentary, historical distortion, demands for doctrinal abandonment, and anti-Catholic prejudice will not detract from this unprecedented jubilee “request for pardon.”

## SUMMARY POINTS

\*The Holy Father saw this “request for pardon” as the culmination of the Church’s “examination of conscience” for the Jubilee Year. The goal of such a public act of repentance is a “purification of memory.”

\*This papal act of atonement for past sin is an intensely spiritual act. It is meant to seek forgiveness from God and allow Christians to enter the new millennium better prepared to evangelize the Truth of faith.

\*Particularly when events in history are raised the admission of faults committed by the sons and daughters of the Church may look like acquiescence in the face of accusations made by those who are prejudicially hostile to the Church.

\*There have been responses to the papal apology that make demands for apologies not required in the historical or cultural context of the events of the past.

\*Many secular commentators have failed to see that at the heart of many of these errors is the fact that Christians have faltered when they have become caught up in the culture of their day.

\*These sins are the errors Christians share with all mankind and find their roots in society, history and the culture, not in the Gospels.

\*There is a direct implication in some commentary on the papal apology of a one-sided nature to the wrongs of the past, an acceptance of an anti-Catholic interpretation of history rooted in post-Reformation and Enlightenment propaganda rather than an accurate and objective understanding of the past.

\*While the pope “forgives and asks forgiveness,” there is no acknowledgment on the part of secular commentators on the biases, conceits and hatreds that have often driven their comments on the Church.

\*Critics are confusing repentance for certain wrong actions with admissions of doctrinal error. What the apology could not be, and was not intended to be, was an apology for Church doctrine.

\*The papal apology was not meant as an endorsement of a contemporary ideological agenda.

\*It would be an unhistorical leap for the pope to assent to contemporary anti-Catholic propaganda that attempts to identify the Church with the Holocaust. It is a historical fallacy – an insult to the memory of the Holocaust – to utilize this ultimate 20th century evil as a tool against the Church and to thereby mitigate the evil that was pagan Nazism.

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#### FOOTNOTES

1*Memory and Reconciliation: The Church and the Faults of the Past* (December, 1999) International Theological Commission.

2*Incarnationis mysterium* (November, 1998) Bull of Indiction of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000

3*Memory and Reconciliation* (Introduction)

4Summarized and excerpted from Catholic News Service, *Text Forgiveness* (March 13, 2000)

5*Memory and Reconciliation* (6.3)

6Ibid.

7Summarized from Catholic News Service, “Mea culpa, tua culpa: Vatican hopes others inspired by apologies,” John Thavis (March 10, 2000).

8*Memory and Reconciliation* (5.4)

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## John Cornwell: Hitler’s Pope

by Ronald Rychlak

(*Catalyst* 12/1999)

John Cornwell’s new book, *Hitler’s Pope: The Secret History of Pius XII*, turns out to be a deeply flawed attack on Pope John Paul II. That’s right, the final chapter is actually an attack

on the current plaintiff. Cornwell is disturbed by John Paul's "conservative" positions on celibate clergy, women priests, artificial contraception, and abortion. He is especially concerned about the Pope's opposition to direct political activity by the clergy.

Cornwell apparently decided that the easiest way to attack the Pope of today was to go after Pius XII. If he can prove that Pius was flawed, then he establishes that popes can be wrong. If that is the case, then he can argue that John Paul II is wrong about the whole catalogue of teachings that tend to upset many modern Catholics.

Cornwell's thesis is that Eugenio Pacelli—Pope Pius XII—was driven by the desire to concentrate the authority of the Church under a strong, central papacy. Cornwell argues that as Pacelli worked toward that end, he created a situation that was easy for Hitler to exploit. Cornwell denies that Pacelli was a "monster." In fact, he recognizes that Pacelli "hated" Hitler. His theory, deeply flawed though it may be, is that Hitler exploited Pacelli's efforts to expand Roman influence. Unfortunately, many reviews, like those in the *New York Post* and the *London Sunday Times*, missed that point. They simply reported that "Pius XII helped Adolf Hitler gain power," as if the two worked together. That is certainly not Cornwell's point.

Some of the mistakes reported in the press are obvious to anyone who read Cornwell's book. For instance, *The Indianapolis News* reported that Pius knew of Hitler's plan for the Final Solution "in 1939 when he first became involved with the German leader." First of all, the Nazis did not decide on the course of extermination until 1942. Perhaps more telling, this statement is at odds with two things in the book: 1) Cornwell argues that Hitler and the future Pope Pius XII first "became involved" in the early 1930s, and 2) Cornwell expressly notes that Pius XII's first reliable information concerning extermination of the Jews came in the spring of

1942, not 1939.

Similarly, the *New York Post* reported in a couple of different editions that “Pacelli... met with Hitler several times.” This is not true. The two men never met, and Cornwell does not claim that they did. The most common error by made reviewers was that of accepting Cornwell’s assertions without checking out the facts. On some of these points, the reviewer’s oversight might be forgiven. For instance, Viking Press has marketed this book as having been written by a practicing Catholic who started out to defend Pius XII. One is always reluctant to say what another person’s beliefs are, so reviewers could be forgiven had they simply remained silent about that issue. Instead, the vast majority took delight in calling Cornwell a good, practicing Catholic.

Having decided to report on Cornwell’s religious beliefs, the reviewers might have noted that his earlier books were marketed as having been written by a “lapsed Catholic for more than 20 years” and that reviewers said he wrote “with that astringent, cool, jaundiced view of the Vatican that only ex-Catholics familiar with Rome seem to have mastered.” They might also have reported that during the time he was researching this book he described himself as an “agnostic Catholic.” Finally, it might have been worth noting that in a 1993 book he declared that human beings are “morally, psychologically and materially better off without a belief in God.” Instead, they presented only that side of the story that Cornwell and his publisher wanted the public to hear.

The Vatican had not yet spoken, so a reviewer might be excused for not knowing that Cornwell lied about being the first person to see certain “secret” files and about the number of hours that he spent researching at the Vatican. When, however, he claimed that a certain letter was a “time bomb” lying in the Vatican archives since 1919, a careful reviewer might have mentioned that it had been fully reprinted and discussed in *Germany and the Holy See: Pacelli’s Nunciature between the*

*Great War and the Weimar Republic*, by Emma Fattorini (1992).

That letter at issue reports on the occupation of the royal palace in Munich by a group of Bolshevik revolutionaries. Pacelli was the nuncio in Munich and a noted opponent of the Bolsheviks. The revolutionaries sprayed his house with gunfire, assaulted him in his car, and invaded his home. The description of the scene in the palace (which was actually written by one of Pacelli's assistants, not him) included derogatory comments about the Bolsheviks and noted that many of them were Jewish. Cornwell couples the anti-revolutionary statements with the references to Jews and concludes that it reflects "stereotypical anti-Semitic contempt." That is a logical jump unwarranted by the facts. Even worse, however, is the report in *USA Today* that Pacelli described Jews (not a specific group of revolutionaries) "as physically and morally repulsive, worthy of suspicion and contempt." Again, it is a case of the press being particularly anxious to report the worst about the Catholic Church.

Cornwell claims that he received special assistance from the Vatican due to earlier writings which were favorable to the Vatican. Many reviewers gleefully reported this and he asserted "moral shock" at what he found in the archives. A simple call to the Vatican would have revealed that he received no special treatment. If the reviewer were suspicious about taking the word of Vatican officials, a quick consultation of Cornwell's earlier works (or easily-available reviews thereof) would have revealed that he has never been friendly to the Holy See.

Cornwell stretched the facts to such a point that any impartial reader should be put on notice. For instance, Cornwell suggests that Pacelli dominated Vatican foreign policy from the time that he was a young prelate. One chapter describes the young Pacelli's hand in the negotiation of a June 1914 concordat with Serbia (he took the minutes), and leaves the impression that he was responsible for the outbreak

of World War I.

Certainly Cornwell, who describes Pope Pius XI as “bossy” and “authoritarian,” knows that Pacelli was unable to dominate Vatican policy as Secretary of State, much less as nuncio. Any fair reviewer should have at least questioned this point.

Another point that would be a tip-off to any critical reviewer is Cornwell’s handling of the so-called “secret encyclical.” The traditional story (and the evidence suggests that it is little more than that) is that Pius XI was prepared to make a strong anti-Nazi statement, and he commissioned an encyclical to that effect. A draft was prepared, but Pius XI died before he was able to release it. His successor, Pius XII, then buried the draft.

One of the problems that most critics of Pius XII have with this theory is that the original draft contained anti-Semitic statements. These critics are reluctant to attribute such sentiments to Pius XI. Cornwell resolved this problem by accusing Pacelli of having written the original draft (or of having overseen the writing) when he was Secretary of State, then burying it when he was Pope. It is really such a stretch that any good reviewer should have questioned it. Instead, most merely took Cornwell at his word and reported that an anti-Semitic paper was written by Pacelli or under his authority. (In actuality, there is no evidence that either Pope ever saw the draft.)

Perhaps more startling than anything else is the way reviewers avoided any mention of the last chapter of Cornwell’s book, entitled “*Pius XII Redivivus*.” In this chapter, it becomes clear that the book is a condemnation of Pope John Paul II’s pontificate, not just that of Pius XII. This chapter also reveals a serious flaw in Cornwell’s understanding of Catholicism, politics, and the papacy of John Paul II.

Cornwell argues that John Paul II represents a return to a

more "highly centralized, autocratic papacy," as opposed to a "more diversified Church." The over-arching theory of the book, remember, is that the centralization of power in Rome took away the political power from local priests and bishops who might have stopped Hitler. Accordingly, Cornwell thinks that John Paul is leading the Church in a very dangerous direction, particularly by preventing clergy from becoming directly involved in political movements, including everything from liberation theology to condom distribution.

Cornwell, of course, has to deal with the fact that John Paul II has played a central part in world events, including a pivotal role in the downfall of the Soviet Union. Cornwell's answer is that John Paul was more "sympathetic to pluralism" early in his pontificate, but that he has retreated into "an intransigently absolutist cast of mind" and has hurt the Church in the process.

Cornwell misses the important point that is so well explained in George Weigel's new biography of John Paul II, *Witness to Hope*. John Paul's political impact came about precisely because *he did not primarily seek to be political, or to think or speak politically*. The pontiff's contribution to the downfall of Soviet Communism was that he launched an authentic and deep challenge to the lies that made Communistic rule possible. He fought Communism in the same way that Pius XII fought Nazism: not by name-calling but by challenging the intellectual foundation on which it was based.

John Paul has recognized the parallels between his efforts and those of Pius XII, perhaps better than anyone else. He, of course, did not have a horrible war to contend with, nor was he threatened with the possibility of Vatican City being invaded, but given those differences, the approach each Pope took was similar. As John Paul has explained: "Anyone who does not limit himself to cheap polemics knows very well what Pius XII thought of the Nazi regime and how much he did to help countless people persecuted by the regime." The most

disappointing thing is that the modern press seems unable to recognize cheap polemics, at least when it comes to the Catholic Church.

*Ron Rychlak is a Professor of Law and the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs at the University of Mississippi School of Law. His is the author of Hitler, the War, and the Pope.*

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## John Cornwell: Hitler's Pope

*by Ronald Rychlak*

*(Catalyst 12/1999)*

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Cornwell apparently decided that the easiest way to attack the Pope of today was to go after Pius XII. If he can prove that Pius was flawed, then he establishes that popes can be wrong. If that is the case, then he can argue that John Paul II is wrong about the whole catalogue of teachings that tend to upset many modern Catholics.

Cornwell's thesis is that Eugenio Pacelli—Pope Pius XII—was driven by the desire to concentrate the authority of the Church under a strong, central papacy. Cornwell argues that as Pacelli worked toward that end, he created a situation that

was easy for Hitler to exploit. Cornwell denies that Pacelli was a "monster." In fact, he recognizes that Pacelli "hated" Hitler. His theory, deeply flawed though it may be, is that Hitler exploited Pacelli's efforts to expand Roman influence. Unfortunately, many reviews, like those in the *New York Post* and the *London Sunday Times*, missed that point. They simply reported that "Pius XII helped Adolf Hitler gain power," as if the two worked together. That is certainly not Cornwell's point.

Some of the mistakes reported in the press are obvious to anyone who read Cornwell's book. For instance, *The Indianapolis News* reported that Pius knew of Hitler's plan for the Final Solution "in 1939 when he first became involved with the German leader." First of all, the Nazis did not decide on the course of extermination until 1942. Perhaps more telling, this statement is at odds with two things in the book: 1) Cornwell argues that Hitler and the future Pope Pius XII first "became involved" in the early 1930s, and 2) Cornwell expressly notes that Pius XII's first reliable information concerning extermination of the Jews came in the spring of 1942, not 1939.

Similarly, the *New York Post* reported in a couple of different editions that "Pacelli... met with Hitler several times." This is not true. The two men never met, and Cornwell does not claim that they did. The most common error by made reviewers was that of accepting Cornwell's assertions without checking out the facts. On some of these points, the reviewer's oversight might be forgiven. For instance, Viking Press has marketed this book as having been written by a practicing Catholic who started out to defend Pius XII. One is always reluctant to say what another person's beliefs are, so reviewers could be forgiven had they simply remained silent about that issue. Instead, the vast majority took delight in calling Cornwell a good, practicing Catholic.

Having decided to report on Cornwell's religious beliefs, the

reviewers might have noted that his earlier books were marketed as having been written by a "lapsed Catholic for more than 20 years" and that reviewers said he wrote "with that astringent, cool, jaundiced view of the Vatican that only ex-Catholics familiar with Rome seem to have mastered." They might also have reported that during the time he was researching this book he described himself as an "agnostic Catholic." Finally, it might have been worth noting that in a 1993 book he declared that human beings are "morally, psychologically and materially better off without a belief in God." Instead, they presented only that side of the story that Cornwell and his publisher wanted the public to hear.

The Vatican had not yet spoken, so a reviewer might be excused for not knowing that Cornwell lied about being the first person to see certain "secret" files and about the number of hours that he spent researching at the Vatican. When, however, he claimed that a certain letter was a "time bomb" lying in the Vatican archives since 1919, a careful reviewer might have mentioned that it had been fully reprinted and discussed in *Germany and the Holy See: Pacelli's Nunciature between the Great War and the Weimar Republic*, by Emma Fattorini (1992).

That letter at issue reports on the occupation of the royal palace in Munich by a group of Bolshevik revolutionaries. Pacelli was the nuncio in Munich and a noted opponent of the Bolsheviks. The revolutionaries sprayed his house with gunfire, assaulted him in his car, and invaded his home. The description of the scene in the palace (which was actually written by one of Pacelli's assistants, not him) included derogatory comments about the Bolsheviks and noted that many of them were Jewish. Cornwell couples the anti-revolutionary statements with the references to Jews and concludes that it reflects "stereotypical anti-Semitic contempt." That is a logical jump unwarranted by the facts. Even worse, however, is the report in *USA Today* that Pacelli described Jews (not a specific group of revolutionaries) "as physically and morally

repulsive, worthy of suspicion and contempt." Again, it is a case of the press being particularly anxious to report the worst about the Catholic Church.

Cornwell claims that he received special assistance from the Vatican due to earlier writings which were favorable to the Vatican. Many reviewers gleefully reported this and he asserted "moral shock" at what he found in the archives. A simple call to the Vatican would have revealed that he received no special treatment. If the reviewer were suspicious about taking the word of Vatican officials, a quick consultation of Cornwell's earlier works (or easily-available reviews thereof) would have revealed that he has never been friendly to the Holy See.

Cornwell stretched the facts to such a point that any impartial reader should be put on notice. For instance, Cornwell suggests that Pacelli dominated Vatican foreign policy from the time that he was a young prelate. One chapter describes the young Pacelli's hand in the negotiation of a June 1914 concordat with Serbia (he took the minutes), and leaves the impression that he was responsible for the outbreak of World War I.

Certainly Cornwell, who describes Pope Pius XI as "bossy" and "authoritarian," knows that Pacelli was unable to dominate Vatican policy as Secretary of State, much less as nuncio. Any fair reviewer should have at least questioned this point.

Another point that would be a tip-off to any critical reviewer is Cornwell's handling of the so-called "secret encyclical." The traditional story (and the evidence suggests that it is little more than that) is that Pius XI was prepared to make a strong anti-Nazi statement, and he commissioned an encyclical to that effect. A draft was prepared, but Pius XI died before he was able to release it. His successor, Pius XII, then buried the draft.

One of the problems that most critics of Pius XII have with this theory is that the original draft contained anti-Semitic statements. These critics are reluctant to attribute such sentiments to Pius XI. Cornwell resolved this problem by accusing Pacelli of having written the original draft (or of having overseen the writing) when he was Secretary of State, then burying it when he was Pope. It is really such a stretch that any good reviewer should have questioned it. Instead, most merely took Cornwell at his word and reported that an anti-Semitic paper was written by Pacelli or under his authority. (In actuality, there is no evidence that either Pope ever saw the draft.)

Perhaps more startling than anything else is the way reviewers avoided any mention of the last chapter of Cornwell's book, entitled "*Pius XII Redivivus*." In this chapter, it becomes clear that the book is a condemnation of Pope John Paul II's pontificate, not just that of Pius XII. This chapter also reveals a serious flaw in Cornwell's understanding of Catholicism, politics, and the papacy of John Paul II.

Cornwell argues that John Paul II represents a return to a more "highly centralized, autocratic papacy," as opposed to a "more diversified Church." The over-arching theory of the book, remember, is that the centralization of power in Rome took away the political power from local priests and bishops who might have stopped Hitler. Accordingly, Cornwell thinks that John Paul is leading the Church in a very dangerous direction, particularly by preventing clergy from becoming directly involved in political movements, including everything from liberation theology to condom distribution.

Cornwell, of course, has to deal with the fact that John Paul II has played a central part in world events, including a pivotal role in the downfall of the Soviet Union. Cornwell's answer is that John Paul was more "sympathetic to pluralism" early in his pontificate, but that he has retreated into "an intransigently absolutist cast of mind" and has hurt the

Church in the process.

Cornwell misses the important point that is so well explained in George Weigel's new biography of John Paul II, *Witness to Hope*. John Paul's political impact came about precisely because *he did not primarily seek to be political, or to think or speak politically*. The pontiff's contribution to the downfall of Soviet Communism was that he launched an authentic and deep challenge to the lies that made Communistic rule possible. He fought Communism in the same way that Pius XII fought Nazism: not by name-calling but by challenging the intellectual foundation on which it was based.

John Paul has recognized the parallels between his efforts and those of Pius XII, perhaps better than anyone else. He, of course, did not have a horrible war to contend with, nor was he threatened with the possibility of Vatican City being invaded, but given those differences, the approach each Pope took was similar. As John Paul has explained: "Anyone who does not limit himself to cheap polemics knows very well what Pius XII thought of the Nazi regime and how much he did to help countless people persecuted by the regime." The most disappointing thing is that the modern press seems unable to recognize cheap polemics, at least when it comes to the Catholic Church.

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# Religious Liberty and the

# Public Schools

by Robert P. George

(Catalyst 10/1999)

*The following is an edited version of a statement made by Robert P. George before he left his post on the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights last year. It is an important commentary on the state of religious liberty in our public schools and it is one that deserves a wide audience. Dr. George is McCormick Professor of Jurisprudence at Princeton University and is a member of the Catholic League's board of advisors.*

On July 12, 1995, President William Jefferson Clinton publicly directed the Secretary of Education, Richard Riley, and the Attorney General, Janet Reno, to provide each school district in America with a copy of the "Guidelines on Religion in the Public Schools." The president emphasized that it was important for everyone, including school administrators, to realize that "the First Amendment does not convert our schools into religion-free zones."

The hearings which the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights has held on this issue

were designed to examine whether the religious liberty rights of students and teachers were, in fact, being protected. Sadly, we found that in many respects our public schools have, indeed, been converted into "religion-free zones."

The problem is not merely one of lack of information. The Guidelines have been sent, on two occasions, to every school district in America. The problem is one of commitment—a lack of commitment to respect the religious civil rights of students and teachers as seriously as we respect other civil rights.

For instance, while I applaud the Secretary of Education for distributing the Guidelines, I must note that very little has been done to make sure the Guidelines actually reach teachers, students and their parents. The Department of Education (DOEd) has not gathered statistical or other information regarding even, the preliminary question whether the Guidelines have been distributed by the school superintendent, nor have they gathered information about the more important question whether the public schools are, or are not, complying with the Guidelines.

I have heard no credible excuse for this from the DOEd. Surely, such a massive bureaucracy, which reaches into public schools in numerous ways to protect other civil rights, could undertake this simple task without undue exertion or expense. Nor have I heard credible reasons why the DOEd does not undertake additional steps. Why does it fail to offer in-service training, or training videos, done by a balanced panel of experts, on the Guidelines?

Again, while both the president and Secretary Riley noted the importance of every school district using the Guidelines to develop its own district-wide policy regarding religious expression, what has been done, beyond mere exhortation, to encourage this? So far as I can tell, nothing has been done, except for the holding of three "summits" by Secretary Riley. I would say this hardly evidences a serious, sincere commitment to promote the distribution and usage of the Guidelines in developing district-wide policies in school districts across America.

This is all the more a shame because both the Secretary and the President note that using the Guidelines to develop a district-wide plan will also serve to build consensus and to identify common ground among members of the community before rancorous disputes erupt. One of our witnesses, Charles Haynes of the First Amendment Project of the Freedom Forum, testified in detail about how this process can, and has, worked

successfully, particularly in Utah and California, to bring communities together and to help the entire local community understand and respect one another and their First Amendment religious liberty rights.

Mr. Haynes and other witnesses also helped us identify one area in which there are still very serious problems, which go far beyond a lack of information. That area is the curriculum. As we learned, public school curricula across America do not, by and large, take religion seriously. Apart from brief treatment in the "history" portion of the curriculum, religion, and religious viewpoints, are simply ignored.

As one of experts, Warren Nord, told us, this is often the result of hostility to religion, not of mere ignorance. Indeed, as Mr. Haynes said, a truly "liberal" education would inform students about the full range of viewpoints and let them choose among them. In many schools, in the name of "neutrality," religious understandings of the world are simply excluded, while materialistic views are the norm. This simply must be changed, for if "neutrality" has any constitutional meaning, it surely means "fairness," and a fair presentation of religion and religious points of view in the curriculum is what is lacking.

Returning to the Guidelines, I must note strong disagreement with one portion of them. By saying only that, in light of the *City of Boerne v. Flores* case, students do not have a federal right to "opt out" of classes which students or their parents find objectionable for religious reasons, the Guidelines leave the misleading impression that no such right exists. However, such rights may, and probably do, exist under state law. And such a right is undoubtedly also protected under doctrines of parental rights, which were conspicuously left unaffected in the area of education by the 1990 Supreme Court decision in *Employment Division v. Smith*.

The right to “opt-out” is highly important because, in my opinion, nothing plays a bigger role in driving students away from the public schools than a failure to recognize such a right. If the Secretary is correct that the right to “opt-out” is no longer protected by federal law, then I think it is imperative that Congress act to make it so.

As noted above, the Guidelines were issued by D0Ed in consultation with the Attorney General. As our nation’s highest law enforcement official, the Attorney General has, among many other things, the responsibility to enforce the law protecting religious freedom in the public schools. Yet, so far as we were able to determine during these hearings, there is NO ONE at the Justice Department (DOJ) who is charged with overseeing enforcement of the Equal Access Act. This Act, which is a prominent part of the Guidelines, guarantees that student “bible clubs” are given the same access to school facilities as are other non-curriculum clubs.

So far as we were able to determine, NO ONE in DOJ is responsible for apprising other federal agencies, including, significantly, D0Ed, about legal developments regarding equal access. Finally, in those places in which the federal government has the fundamental responsibility for education (for instance, on military bases), we have received no information that DOJ is ensuring that the Guidelines are being followed.

The point is sometimes made that the Equal Access Act provides for a private cause of action. But so do the federal securities laws; yet DOJ is active in ensuring that they are not violated. Why has DOJ failed to institute a single case against a school district where non-compliance with the Equal Access Act has been widespread? My point is this: other civil rights are not left solely to the resources of private citizens to protect and defend. DOJ has the resources; it simply chooses to spend them otherwise.

One place where DOJ could start is the public school system in the state of New York. Problems, particularly concerning equal access, arise there regularly. Yet, so far as our witnesses told us, it does not appear that the school system has followed the recommendations of Secretary Riley and the President to make sure that the Guidelines are distributed beyond superintendents to teachers, students, and parents, and to encourage the development of district-wide plans based on the Guidelines.

Nor is in-service training provided. The New York State School Board Association, while filing briefs alleging establishment violations on several occasions, has not, so far as I could determine, even once filed a brief supporting a claim that religious free exercise is being denied.

I believe these hearings demonstrated that the Equal Access Act, where it has been observed, has been a success—all of our witnesses in Washington, for instance, agreed on this. Those witnesses were also unanimous, save one, in supporting the position that a religious club has the right to require that its officers espouse its beliefs. This is just plain common sense.

An organization which cannot insist that its officers espouse its constituting principles has ceased meaningfully to exist. I encourage Congress to make this right explicit in the statute. Also, given that all our witnesses agreed that the Act has worked well in high schools, Congress should consider making it explicit that it extends to “middle schools” and “junior high schools” as well.

The hearings did not, in my opinion, enable the Commission to examine in sufficient detail the problems faced by teachers regarding their own rights to religious freedom. We are not speaking, obviously, of a teacher indoctrinating a student in the teacher’s beliefs, but of a teacher having his own rights violated by the school system. In our Seattle hearing, we

heard sufficient testimony to convince me that this is a significant problem, one which merits concern and examination.

In the years since the Guidelines were originally issued, it is clear to me that the federal government has failed to do enough to make sure that we move from rhetoric to implementation. In fact, so little has been done, that it encourages cynics who see the issuance of the Guidelines, far from being an attempt to ensure that religious rights are respected and religion is taken seriously, as a ploy to avoid a Constitutional amendment. One hopes the cynics are mistaken. However, the only way we will know is if the federal government takes serious steps to follow through on the statement of the President and Secretary Riley.

One thing our hearings surely demonstrated was that religious liberty currently is not sufficiently secured in our public schools, and that the public school culture has for too long regarded religion, contrary to the Constitution and to common sense, as an enemy. The opportunity to build common ground and to reach the mutual understanding has too often been squandered. I encourage public school officials to take the right to free exercise of religion as seriously as they take other civil rights, and to no longer treat it as a forgotten child of our Constitution.