

WAS CHURCH “SILENT” DURING HOLOCAUST?

This is the article that appeared in the October 2023 edition of Catalyst, our monthly journal. The date that prints out reflects the day that it was uploaded to our website. For a more accurate date of when the article was first published, check out the news release, [here](#).

The day after it was reported that new documents were found showing that the Catholic Church saved over 3,000 Jews during the Nazi occupation of Rome, the *New York Times* ran an article on this story noting that during this time Pope Pius XII “remained publicly silent.”

In other words, we are to believe that all those Jews who were saved by priests, nuns and lay people—which even the *Times* admits were in the “tens of thousands”—did so without ever heeding instructions from the Vatican. This is a remarkable conclusion: The “hyper-centralized” and “highly hierarchal” Vatican sat by idly without ever giving marching orders to the faithful. Perhaps they were just nice Catholic boys and girls.

But that is contradicted by the world’s foremost Holocaust scholar, Sir Martin Gilbert. His assessment led him to conclude that Catholics who sheltered Jews did so “on his [the pope’s] direct authority.”

If the pope was silent, then how could the *New York Times* have concluded at that time that he was *not silent*!

Here is what a *New York Times* editorial said on Christmas Day, 1941: “The voice of Pius XII is a lonely voice in the silence and darkness enveloping Europe this Christmas.”

Here is what a *New York Times* editorial said on Christmas Day, 1942: “This Christmas more than ever he [the pope] is a lonely voice crying out of the silence of a continent.”

Now how can it be that those closest to the events at that time, such as the editorial board of the *New York Times* in the early 1940s, were wrong, and today's reporters for the newspaper are right?

To be sure, the pope was not screaming from the rooftops in public about Hitler. He was indeed concerned about antagonizing him. So were Jews at that time.

In 1942, Gerhard Riegner of the World Jewish Congress notified his colleagues in London and New York of an "alarming report" about plans to exterminate Jews. And what did they do? They failed to lobby on behalf of a bill by Rep. Emanuel Celler that would have eased restrictions on Jews emigrating from France to the United States.

This came after Kristallnacht, November 9-10, 1938, the "Night of Broken Glass," when the American Jewish Congress, the American Jewish Committee, B'nai B'rith, and the Jewish Labor Committee concluded that the best course of action was to do nothing. They said, "at least for the time being, nothing should be done." In addition, all of these Jewish organizations went on record saying that "there should be no parades, demonstrations, or protests by Jews."

When it was reported in 1942 that two million Jews had been killed in the Nazi extermination campaign, the *New York Times* placed the story on page ten surrounded by ads for Thanksgiving Day turkeys.

In 1943, Hitler's biographer, John Toland, said, "The Church, under the Pope's guidance, had already saved the lives of more Jews than all other churches, religious institutions, and rescue organizations combined, and was presently hiding thousands of Jews in monasteries, convents, and Vatican City itself."

[Note: All of the above information, and much more, can be found in Bill Donohue's book, *Why Catholicism Matters*,

published by Image (Random House) in 2012; citations are provided for everything he said.]

Attempts to belittle the role of the Catholic Church during the Holocaust has long been a cottage industry. But with the release of more and more documents from the Vatican archives, it looks like the Church's worst critics are on the losing side of this argument.

PIUS XII: THE LATEST ATTEMPTED SMEAR

Ronald J. Rychlak

In September, there was a rash of news stories saying new evidence shows that the Vatican knew about the Holocaust earlier than it admitted. We asked Professor Ron Rychlak to offer a response.

The *New York Times* headline read, "Pope Pius XII Likely Knew of Holocaust, Newly Discovered Letter Suggests." CNN reported, "Wartime Pope Pius XII probably knew about Holocaust early on, letters show." Fox News said, "Wartime letter show Pope Pius XII may have known about Holocaust earlier than previously thought." On and on they went.

Giovanni Coco, an official with the Vatican archives, recently discovered a letter dated December 14, 1942. It had been written by an anti-Nazi German Jesuit priest, Father Lothar König, and it was addressed to Pius XII's personal secretary, Father Robert Leiber.

The letter, which is part of a set of archival papers set to

be published in the near future, reported that an estimated 6,000 Jews and Poles were being killed every day at the Belzec concentration camp in what was then German-occupied Poland (today it's part of western Ukraine). König also referred to the operation of "blast furnaces" and made reference to the Auschwitz and Dachau camps.

That news outlets find this revelation significant is probably not surprising. The reporters have not studied the matters in detail. Author David Kertzer, however, has built a career critiquing the papacy. Nevertheless, he has been promoting the importance of this letter. He should know better.

As most scholars who work in this field know, the Vatican received reports of atrocities as early as 1941. This letter, dated December 14, 1942, came just three days before the Allied joint statement which said:

From all the occupied countries Jews are being transported in conditions of appalling horror and brutality to Eastern Europe. In Poland, which has been made the principal Nazi slaughterhouse, the ghettos established by the German invader are being systematically emptied of all Jews except a few highly skilled workers required for war industries. None of those taken away are ever heard of again.

Pius had been invited to join this statement, but he opted to make his own statement on Christmas Day.

Pius must have been shown the Allied statement well before it was released. Moreover, it is fair to assume that the pope received the December 14 letter after at least a short delay from when it was dated. In other words, the letter likely came after he had seen a draft of the Allied statement. Thus, it did not give him any new information about the atrocities.

On Christmas Day, less than two weeks after the date on the letter, Pius issued his own statement in which he spoke of "hundreds of thousands who, without any fault on their part,

sometimes only because of their nationality or race, have been consigned to death or gradual extinction." The *New York Times* editorialized, "This Christmas more than ever he is a lonely voice crying out of the silence of a continent...."

Of course, Pius did not limit himself to words. In 1941, he provided the Allies with advance information about German troop movements, and as Mark Riebling explained in his book *Church of Spies: The Pope's Secret War Against Hitler*, Pius was connected to at least three plots to topple Hitler, starting just after he assumed the seat of Peter in late 1939 and continuing until at least the summer of 1944 with the bomb plot involving German military Col. Claus von Stauffenberg, portrayed by Tom Cruise in the motion picture *Valkyrie*.

One part of the December 1942 letter is left out of many news accounts. In it, Father König urged the Holy See to not make public what he was revealing in the letter because he feared for his own life and the lives of the others who had provided the intelligence. This is but one of several such messages that Pius had to take into account when he chose action and diplomacy over banging away at the bully pulpit.

That so many outlets have failed to report that part of the letter suggests that others either miss the importance of the message or they are intentionally downplaying a very serious threat. That's either poor history or dishonest journalism. We're entitled to better.

Ronald J. Rychlak is Distinguished University Professor and Jamie L. Whitten Chair in Law and Government at the University of Mississippi. He also serves on the advisory board of the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights. The Congregation for the Causes of Saints at the Vatican called his book, Hitler, the War, and the Pope "definitive" in its response to charges made against the leader of the Catholic Church during World War II.

CATHOLIC BAITING IN OHIO

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There is an important ballot initiative in Ohio this November on the issue of abortion that has generated considerable controversy. The discussion should ideally center on what limits should be placed on abortion. Unfortunately, the pro-abortion side cannot confine itself to this issue, and has chosen instead to take the low road. To be specific, it is flexing its anti-Catholic muscles in public.

Ohioans United for Reproductive Rights is running a TV ad statewide that shows a man kneeling in prayer in a Catholic church. There is a picture of the Sacred Heart of Jesus on one wall, and the Stations of the Cross on another wall.

This imagery is purely demagogic: it is inviting the people of Ohio to think that the Catholic Church is seeking to impose its views on everyone. This is a classic case of Catholic baiting.

The Catholic Church does not impose its teachings on anyone: it proposes what is true, and everyone is free to disagree. Moreover, what the Church teaches about abortion is totally consistent with Biology 101: life begins at conception, and not a day later.

Those who choose to reject what Catholicism and science teach can do so; they can believe whatever they want. What they cannot do is promote anti-Catholic bigotry.

The Ohio coalition supporting this invidious TV ad includes

such anti-Catholic groups as Catholics for Choice and Faith in Public Life, both funded by George Soros. We have written about these groups in detail for decades. The bishops have several times condemned Catholics for Choice, and Faith in Public Life has a record of coaching the media on how to manipulate the bishops.

The Catholic League appeals to voters in Ohio to reject this bigoted TV ad. It further asks that those who champion abortion rights denounce this stunt by calling it for what it is—anti-Catholic bigotry.

We contacted the Ohio media and leaders in government at all levels about this disgraceful attack.

CLEVELAND DIOCESE ISSUES MODEL LGBT POLICY

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The Catholic Diocese of Cleveland, under the leadership of Bishop Edward C. Malesic, has issued a policy for Catholic parishes and schools on sexuality and gender identity that is a model for all Catholic entities, nationwide. Predictably, LGBT activists and their supporters in the media and politics are unhappy, and some are seriously misrepresenting the policy.

In explaining his position, Bishop Malesic restated Church teachings on this matter. “The human person,” he said, “created in the image and likeness of God, deserves the utmost

respect, for each person's dignity is inherent and inviolable." This set the tone for his policy.

Contrary to what some are saying, the policy does not forbid students who suffer from gender dysphoria—or confusion about their biological sex—from attending Catholic schools. None will be denied. But what will not be tolerated are public denunciations of Church teachings on sexuality. This would include strictures on homosexuality and gender identity. In other words, everyone is welcome to attend Catholic schools, but no one is allowed to publicly resist what the Church teaches.

Policy specifics include notifying parents if their child is experiencing gender dysphoria. Correct pronouns—those which reflect the biological sex of the student—must be used to describe students. Boys' bathrooms are for boys, not girls, and vice versa. Sports competition allows only biological girls to compete against girls, not boys who think they are girls.

School functions, such as dances, must respect the biological differences between the sexes. Personal appearances and attire should also reflect these differences. No one may undergo sex-reassignment surgery. And all school records will mirror the biological sex of the student.

None of this should be considered controversial, but in some quarters it is.

Benjamin Huelkamp is an LGBT activist who maintains that "the majority of American Catholics are actually supportive of the LGBTQ community." Wrong. They are not.

A Pew Research Center survey of Christians last year found that Catholics are considerably more likely to say that "society has become too accepting of transgender people" now than they were in 2017. A plurality of Catholics support requiring students to use the public bathrooms of their

biological sex, and a plurality want to make it illegal to teach gender ideology in the schools. Six-in-ten want biological boys and girls to compete against those of their own sex, and not against each other. Almost two-in-three oppose adding new gender options to government documents.

The LGBT Community Center of Greater Cleveland issued a statement saying the Cleveland diocese's policy used "harmful rhetoric towards the LGBTQ+ community." This is a lie. It cited not one example.

Cleveland Mayor Justin Bibb said that "the new policy forces LGBTQ+ kids to hide their authentic selves and attend school in fear of persecution of who they are." This is also a lie. It should also be noted that the "authentic selves" of students is their biological sex, not some socially contrived notion of who they think they are.

We are delighted that Bishop Malesic did not shy away from this issue. By issuing a clear and specific policy on sexuality and gender identity he did Catholics in the Cleveland community a favor. Indeed, he did Catholics everywhere a favor.