

The Catholic Response to the Holocaust

INSTITUTIONAL PERSPECTIVES

Preface

Since the appearance of Rolf Hochhuth's controversial play *The Deputy* in 1963, most of the attention of researchers focused on the church question in terms of Catholicism has centered on Pope Pius XII. To what extent did he actually attempt to assist the victims of Nazism, particularly the Jews? Should much have been expected from him given the relatively isolated situation in which the Vatican found itself, sitting in the center of Fascist Italy? In the final analysis do any of the adjectives such as "indifferent," "callous," or "discreetly caring" apply to Pius's overall approach? Such questions and other similar ones certainly remain relevant and in need of further discussion.

But the entire emphasis of any examination of institutional Catholicism during the Shoah should not fall solely on the activities of Pius XII. There is equal need to examine how church bodies and Catholic leaders in other parts of Europe were reacting to Hitler's effort to annihilate the Jewish people and to eliminate thousands of the disabled, gay people, Poles, Gypsies, and others, and whether they were affected by Vatican decisions to any significant degree. Likewise we must examine the sense of self-identity prevailing within institutional Catholicism during that critical period, especially in Vatican circles, to see what impact this self-identity (what theologians term "ecclesiology") ultimately exercised on the Vatican's response to the Hitlerian challenge. For whatever the final evaluation of historians regarding Pius XII's tenure as pope, and much remains to be researched in this regard, his deeds will remain buried with him. There is nothing the contemporary church can do but confront the record with full honesty. It cannot rewrite history. It can, however, significantly redefine its understanding of how a religious institution and its leadership ought to respond in the midst of a grave social crisis.

Several years ago, speaking at an International Jewish-Christian Conference in Vienna, historian Michael R. Marrus sounded an apt warning about evaluating historical situations such as that faced by the Vatican during the Nazi era. He argued that a measure of humility must surround any investigation of individual and/or group responses during such difficult periods. Posing such questions as "Why didn't

they (i.e., the Pope, American Jews, Churchill, Roosevelt, etc.) do more during the Holocaust?" is dangerously misleading, according to Marrus. For behind it stands the uncontested assumption that we today would in fact act more responsibly. Marrus termed such an assumption "narcissistic."

Another caution that must be sounded has to do with the tendency to generalize about the Vatican or overall Catholic responses to the Holocaust. At the same November 1988 international conference in Vienna, Bernard Lewis strongly urged that this tendency be strenuously resisted. Instead we need to undertake a painstaking country-by-country analysis in Europe (Western, Central, and Eastern), taking into account the church's particular social and political status in each nation. Only such an approach can lead to a truly fair assessment of the Catholic response.

Clearly there are those in the Catholic community, including influential Catholic organizations in the United States, who wish to void any critical scrutiny of the church's activity during the Nazi era and to portray Christians purely as victims. Such a position fortunately has been rejected by an increasing number of responsible Catholic leaders. At the May 1992 meeting of the Vatican-Jewish International Dialogue in Baltimore, for example, Cardinal Joseph Bernardin of Chicago, in the opening plenary address, praised the 400-page report by a panel of historians commissioned and supported by the Cardinal Archbishop of Lyons (France) regarding the diocese's response to the Nazi challenge. He said that "it is only through such candor and willingness to acknowledge mistakes where documentary evidence clearly warrants it that Catholicism can join in the pursuit of contemporary global justice with full moral integrity."¹ He urged the church as a whole to submit its World War II record to thorough scrutiny by respected scholars.

The Vatican Response: What the Historians Say

The staunchest defense of Vatican activities during the period of the Holocaust, and Pius XII in particular, is to be found in the writings of the long-time Vatican archivist, Fr. Robert Graham, S.J. He spent more than two decades collecting and organizing materials related to the Vatican response to Nazism. In particular he focused on the final year and a half of World War II. Based on his analysis of the documents, now published, he concluded that Pius XII must be judged a "great humanitarian," truly deserving of that forest in the Judean hills that kindly people in Israel proposed to name for him in October 1958."²

Graham's argument, to state it succinctly, followed this general course. Though Pius XII felt disappointment over his inability to prevent the outbreak of World War II, he committed himself from its very beginning to the alleviation of human suffering to the fullest possible extent. While Pius's concern extended to all the victims of the Nazis, there is evidence in the materials now collected and available in the official Vatican Acts from this period of his ever increasing predilection for attention to the sufferings of the Jews. While many Vatican actions on behalf of Jews were the direct result of Jewish organizations' requests for assistance (a sign, for Graham, of genuine confidence in the Pope and the Catholic Church), other such helpful actions were initiated solely by the Vatican. Graham argued that there is evidence of an unparalleled amount of communication between the Holy See and Jewish leaders. In the

early years of the war, when emigration was still a realistic option in many places, diplomatic pressure was exerted upon countries with close Vatican ties, Spain and Portugal, for example, to issue entry and transit visas to Jews escaping from Nazi-controlled territories. And when the emigration option faded away between 1940 and 1942, the Catholic strategy began to focus on diplomatic protests against the deportation of Jews.

Slovakia serves as a good illustration of this later strategy, according to Graham. When it became apparent in March 1942 that the Nazis intended to forcibly deport some eighty thousand Slovak Jews, the Vatican's diplomatic apparatus moved into high gear. Protests were lodged by papal representatives in Bratislava and by the papal nuncio in Budapest. And when a second round of deportations was announced for 1943, Vatican officials again raised their voices in denunciation of the plan. Finally, says Graham, when it seemed likely that yet more deportations were in the offing in 1944, the Holy See ordered its representatives in Slovakia to approach both the foreign ministry and President Tiso (a Catholic priest) in its name. The representatives were instructed to make clear that "the Holy See expects from the Slovak authority an attitude in conformity with the Catholic principles and sentiments of the people of Slovakia."³ At the same time it suggested that a joint protest by the Slovak bishops might prove extremely helpful in stopping the deportations. Subsequently, Vatican officials met with the Slovak minister to the Vatican and handed him a formal message that read in part as follows: "The Holy See, moved by those sentiments of humanity and Christian charity that always inspire its work in favor of the suffering, without distinction of parties, nationalities or races, cannot remain indifferent to such appeals."⁴

Graham claimed that the Vatican exhibited particular concern for the Jewish community in its midst, intervening directly with the Nazi authorities for the safety of the Jewish community of Rome and supporting the numerous monasteries and convents that sheltered Jews during those trying times. As one example, Graham cited the intervention of Cardinal Maglione, then the Vatican Secretary of State, who in a private meeting with the Reich ambassador, Ernst von Weizsäcker, in October 1943 strongly protested the special SS raid that had seized more than one thousand Italian Jews for transfer to Nazi death camps in Poland. The cardinal spoke of the pain experienced by Pius XII over this act and over the suffering of so many persons solely because of their race. Graham adds that many of the Jews who were able to escape the raid were taken in by monks and nuns for the remaining months of the Nazi occupation.

Hungary was a particularly noteworthy and successful field of Vatican activity on behalf of Jews, in the eyes of Graham. Prior to 1944 the Hungarian Jewish community had lived in an atmosphere of comparative freedom and security despite the passage of severe antisemitic legislation. The greater part of the Hungarian government had steadfastly refused to relinquish its own Jewish citizens, as well as the Jewish refugees who had fled there from Nazi persecution in Slovakia and Poland. But all that changed when Nazi armies advanced into Hungary in March 1944. The previous leader of Hungary, Admiral Horthy, eventually was replaced by a local government composed mainly of members of the virulently antisemitic Arrow Cross movement. Deportation to Auschwitz in occupied Poland, to Austria for forced labor,

or outright massacre within Hungary itself, became an increasingly common fate for Jews residing in Hungary, whether citizens or refugees.

Volume ten of the official Vatican Acts from the period contains substantial documentation concerned with the Holy See's central role in the international effort to protect Hungarian Jews. After the Nazi invasion, while Admiral Horthy was still head of state, Papal Nuncio Angelo Rotta communicated extensively with both governmental leaders and Vatican officials in the hope of halting the deportations of Jews. The result was the release of an "open" telegram to Admiral Horthy from Pius XII; it read in part:

We are being beseeched in various quarters to do everything in our power in order that, in this noble and chivalrous nation, the sufferings, already so heavy, endured by a large number of unfortunate people, because of their nationality or race, may not be extended and aggravated. As our Father's heart cannot remain insensitive to these pressing supplications by virtue of our ministry of charity which embraces all men, we address Your Highness personally, appealing to your noble sentiments in full confidence that you will do everything in your power that so many unfortunate people may be spared other afflictions and other sorrows.⁵

This papal appeal was followed in short order by several other international efforts, including a press campaign in Switzerland and a warning from the British foreign minister, Sir Anthony Eden. The bombing of Budapest was also ordered. These joint efforts initiated by the Vatican intervention resulted in a decision by Admiral Horthy to suspend Jewish deportations. Jewish organizations as well as the War Refugee Board formally conveyed their gratitude to the Vatican, according to Graham, for its crucial role in bringing about this decision by the Hungarian government.

After Horthy was deposed, Rotta found his work on behalf of Jews considerably more difficult. With the assistance of the neutral Swedish ambassador, he arranged for a meeting with the new Arrow Cross leadership. But, as he himself would later relate, his plea for the safety of the Jewish community met with silence. He confessed that he found the Arrow Cross leaders brimming with "fanatical hatred" toward the Jewish community.

The failure to move the new Hungarian government on the Jewish Question did not, however, put an end to Rotta's efforts. He turned to other approaches, principally the issuance of "Letters of Protection"; these seemed to have a measure of success in stalling the deportations of at least some Jews who received them. They proved particularly useful in the case of baptized Jews. These letters, along with similar ones granted by neutral foreign embassies in Budapest, often served as the equivalent of habeas corpus writs for their recipients. In his official report to the Vatican on this endeavor, Rotta claims that some 13,000 such documents were granted under his aegis.

Graham's extensive treatment of the situation in Hungary clearly shows that he regarded this country as one of the prime examples of active Vatican commitment for the safety of the Jewish community. The collaboration of the papal nuncio and Vatican officials in Rome was as intense as possible under very trying political conditions.

Examining Graham's overall argument we certainly see that it makes some important points in support of his contention of a positive papal and Vatican response

to the Nazi annihilation of the Jews. On the other hand, definite limitations appear, rendering his conclusions far less solid than he would have us believe.

Because many of Graham's writings have appeared in what maybe described as a "polemical context," that is, they are aimed at diluting the accusation of silence on the Jewish question on the part of Pius XII and his administration, these works often lack the kind of critical analysis that one might legitimately expect from a historian. In one sense Graham ably carried out his assignment. He persuasively demonstrated that simplistic claims about the "silence" of Pius XII do not stand up under the weight of currently available evidence and are likely to become even more problematic as further evidence surfaces. There is little question that Pius and key Vatican officials undertook important initiatives on behalf of all, and not merely Jewish, converts to Christianity.

Let me make it clear, however, that this judgment in no way fully settles the question about the wartime activities of Pius XII and key Vatican officials. Significant questions remain regarding the adequacy and the basic suppositions of Pius's approach. These need a thorough airing by responsible Jewish and non-Jewish scholars. But use of the term "silence," besides being factually inaccurate, degrades the tone of the ongoing investigation and discussion and opens the door to those in both the Christian and Jewish communities who would espouse basically uncritical opinions.

Focusing more specifically on those areas where Graham's materials reveal considerable weakness, the following points stand out: First, he rarely, if ever, questions whether the interventions he brings to the fore were pursued over a longer period or were more in the nature of sporadic efforts. Do the available documents reveal official Vatican persistence in pursuing the issue of Jewish safety and survival, or were Jewish organizations continually forced to renew their appeals to Rome regarding the plight of European Jewry? Only the former stance in my mind would qualify as an indication of a deep, primary policy commitment on the issue. Nor does Graham ever ask whether Pius should have reconsidered his position on certain matters (i.e., his unwillingness to identify Nazi victims by name) in light of the gravity of the situation. In each and every controversial policy decision, Pius XII is accorded the full benefit of the doubt. Those in the Jewish and the Polish community who sustain Pius's judgments are singled out for praise, while the many critics of the Pope in both communities receive a quick dismissal or no mention at all.

Another problematic aspect of Graham's argument is its heavy focus on papal and Vatican activities in the final year of World War II. Graham makes some reference to Vatican interventions on behalf of Jews prior to 1944. But their inclusion serves only to obscure the question of whether in fact the Vatican response was far too slow in coming. His presentation creates this problem by leaving the false impression that the increased activity of the final year had earlier parallels. Uncritical readers might easily reach this misleading conclusion. Regrettably, Graham basically avoids the question of why a more concerted effort to save Europe's Jews took so long to develop in Vatican circles.

Another drawback in Graham's perspective is that his writings convey the impression of rather harmonious collaboration between Jewish organizations and the Vatican throughout the period of the war. The subtle message seems to be that criti-

cism regarding the Vatican's response to the Shoah is essentially a postwar phenomenon that ignores the testimonies of Jewish leaders at the time. This again, as we shall shortly see, greatly oversimplifies matters.

Finally, Graham seems little inclined to question the view of the Church that prevailed in Vatican circles during the period and that exercised a decided impact on the shaping of papal social policy. The same holds true for the fairly evident commitment of Pius XII and his close advisors to a defense of the established social order in Europe. This was a course that many other historians view as an important factor muting direct papal condemnation of Nazism for many years, the Nazi movement having been seen, despite its radical human rights abuses, as a bulwark against destruction of social order by the Bolsheviks in particular. Though Pius's personal commitment to defense of this social order appeared to have waned considerably as the war went on (and this may account in part for the Vatican's greater willingness to intervene directly on behalf of Jews), it was only with the election of John XXIII to the papacy and the Second Vatican Council that this commitment was fundamentally abandoned.⁶

For a perspective on the Catholic response to the Nazi period that differs in several major points from that of Fr. Graham, we turn to the testimony of Dr. Gerhart Riegner of the World Jewish Congress, himself an active participant in the organized Jewish efforts to save European Jewry during the Third Reich. His analysis clearly raises questions about several of Graham's claims and shows that considerable research is still needed in a number of areas.

Riegner devoted much of his 1983 Stephen S. Wise Lecture at Cincinnati's Hebrew Union College to a description of Vatican-Jewish relations during World War II as he recalled them from his experiences as an important Jewish representative of the time.⁷ The first years of the war were marked by considerable apprehension on the Jewish side. There was great reluctance to seek from Rome assistance for the Jews of Germany and elsewhere. Protestant leadership was seen as much more approachable. This hesitation stemmed in great measure, according to Riegner, from perceived favorable attitudes toward the Third Reich on the part of many German Catholic bishops, as well as what appeared to Jewish leaders to be a basic policy of appeasement on the part of Vatican authorities, particularly after the signing of the Concordat. Other factors that played a role in inhibiting a Jewish approach to Catholic officials were the presence of antisemitism in sectors of Polish Catholicism in the interwar period as well as the seeming ineffectiveness of Catholic protest efforts on those occasions when they were in fact forthcoming. Jewish leaders were also conscious of the Vatican's delicate geopolitical situation, an enclave within a fascist state.

It was not until 1942 that the policy of Jewish organizations on dealings with institutional Catholicism began to change. In large measure this was due to the increasing gravity of the situation in Nazi-controlled Europe and the general feeling among Jewish leaders that every possible avenue had to be explored in the effort to rescue the Jews who faced annihilation. Pius XII now became a special target of Jewish organizational appeals in light of his acknowledged moral authority. Jewish efforts were coordinated through contacts with papal representatives in Switzerland, New York, and London. Some responses did materialize. Particularly important, according to Riegner, was Vatican intervention in Slovakia, where Nazi-leaning

President Tiso (a Catholic priest) relaxed pressure on the Jews for a time after Vatican intervention. But in the final analysis, Riegner's assessment is that little of substance was done with respect to other countries. What steps occurred in Romania seemed more the result of local initiative than Vatican directive. And Rome's reaction to the condition of Jews in the unoccupied sectors of France was much weaker in Riegner's estimation than that of several leading French bishops, particularly Bishop Saliege and Bishop Theas, who in response to Jewish appeals strongly criticized Vichy's anti-Jewish legislation and the deportations in the summer of 1942.

Riegner then turns his attention to an important question that remains basically ignored by Fr. Graham. In March 1942, Riegner assisted in the preparation of a joint World Jewish Congress/Jewish Agency memorandum at the request of the papal nuncio in Bern. This document described in considerable detail the conditions facing Jews in those countries where the Vatican was judged to exercise special influence because of the size of the local Catholic community. Included on this list were Slovakia, Croatia, Hungary, Romania, and unoccupied France. "Strangely," says Riegner, "the detailed memorandum is not reproduced in the collection of documents published by the Vatican on its action during World War II. The collection contains only the letter of transmittal."⁸ This represents a critical omission in his mind. For this memorandum clearly demonstrates that the Vatican had been supplied with extensive information about Nazi attacks on the Jews throughout Europe at a relatively early date. When the Vatican first acquired detailed knowledge of the gravity of the Jewish situation certainly is a vital component of any overall assessment today regarding the adequacy of its response to the Shoah.

Another central moment in Vatican-Jewish relations came in autumn 1942. The Vatican received a request at that time from U.S. Undersecretary of State Sumner Welles for confirmation of reports being received by the Allied governments of massive extermination of Jews in Nazi-controlled areas. After some delay and a series of repeated American requests for such confirmation, Cardinal Maglione, then Vatican Secretary of State, responded that the Holy See was not in a position to guarantee their accuracy. Riegner sees this reply as "strange" in light of the briefings that Rome had received from its nuncios about the deportations of Jews from Bucovina and Bessarabia in December 1941, from Bratislava in March 1942, and, in July 1942, from both Paris and Zagreb.

The year 1942 also witnessed a concerted effort by several nations to persuade Pius XII to issue a forthright condemnation of the Nazis for their treatment of the Jews. Included in this coalition undertaking were Great Britain, the Polish government-in-exile, Brazil, the United States, and Uruguay. The motivation for this effort came largely from new revelations about the extent of Jewish suffering made public in London by the World Jewish Congress and the Polish government-in-exile. The Pope eventually did respond to this international appeal in his Christmas radio address of that year. But in rather typical fashion the Jews were not specifically mentioned.

Riegner admits that a first reading of the papal statement leaves the impression of significant courage on Pius's part. But when one places this statement opposite the moving appeals of Polish President Raczkiewicz and others to the Pope, as well as the blunt statement of Cardinal Hinsley of London at a mass protest meeting in

New York in early 1943 in which he explicitly named Jews as primary victims and the Nazis as the oppressors, the fundamental weakness of Pius's stance stands out for Riegner. It is obvious that he does not fully accept the contention of Graham and others that diplomatic reserve on the part of the Pope helped rather than hindered the safety of European Jewry at the time.

The one region where Riegner clearly acknowledges positive Vatican/Jewish collaboration is in Hungary. His recollection of events in this connection parallels in many ways the description offered by Fr. Graham. Fr. John Morley of Seton Hall University has also undertaken further research into the situation in Hungary, focusing especially on 1944–1945. His preliminary conclusion, related in private correspondence, is that the materials existing in various Israeli archives as well as in the Public Records Office in London covering this period tend to compliment the conclusions drawn by Fr. Graham from volume ten of the published Vatican documents. Riegner's own conclusion on the Hungarian situation is stated in the following terms: "On the whole, one can probably say that the Vatican action in Hungary stands out as effective and energetic; it certainly contributed to the saving of many Jewish lives."⁹

Riegner also speaks of certain papal nuncios, especially those in Slovakia and Romania, who apparently undertook numerous efforts to rescue Jews. But the same level of activity is not apparent in other capitals. In this analysis Riegner seems to offer confirmation to the basic thesis advocated by John Morley, to be discussed shortly, regarding untapped possibilities for saving Jews that existed through Vatican diplomatic channels.

Riegner also makes the argument that, especially in the early years of the Third Reich, Catholic leaders tended to focus their rescue efforts on behalf of Jews in favor of those who had received baptism. This was particularly true for the German church. Ernst Christian Helmreich, a scholar fundamentally sympathetic to the church's difficulties in responding to the challenge of Nazism, has looked at this issue. There has also been recent research on internal Reich documents that monitored local church activities throughout the regions of Germany. Both investigative initiatives tend to lend credibility to Riegner's claims on this point.¹⁰

Overall, Riegner is forced to conclude that Vatican understanding of the full scope of the catastrophe befalling the Jewish community of Europe was very late in coming, if it was ever comprehended at all. Certainly the matter never assumed high priority within the upper echelons of the Vatican. Riegner offers the following personal examples to undergird his contention regarding Vatican misperceptions of the Jewish situation:

In a long conversation with Msgr. Montini, subsequently to become Pope Paul VI, in October, 1945, in Rome, during which I pleaded with him to help us obtain the return of Jewish children who had been saved by Catholics or Catholic institutions, I was shocked when the Catholic prelate contested the accuracy of my statement that at least 1,500,000 Jewish children had perished in the Holocaust. It took me more than half an hour to explain and justify my statement and for him to accept it. If one of the senior personalities of the Church . . . could take such an attitude in good faith . . . , it seems to me fair to say that high Vatican diplomats never really understood the extent of the tragedy that had befallen the Jewish people.¹¹

Without doubt, Riegner has raised some critical points that require further scholarly research and reflection. His recollections would seem to expose important weaknesses in the Graham narrative that need addressing before Catholics today can rest content. If a question is to be raised about Riegner's analysis, it would be his seeming conviction that if the Vatican had spoken out more forcefully and directly with respect to the annihilation of Jews in the public arena, a greater number of Jewish lives would have been spared. We now know from publications such as the wartime memoirs of Cardinal Henri de Lubac¹² that even the indirect language of Pius XII vis-à-vis Jews played a critical role in molding Catholic resistance in countries such as France. And Gunther Lewy, hardly a Vatican apologist relative to the Third Reich period, has insisted that a "flaming protest" by Pius XII almost certainly would have made no appreciable dent in final Jewish death figures, and might well have made matters worse for both Jews and Catholics.¹³ So the issue may be far more open to discussion than Riegner would seem to allow.

Having examined two perspectives on Vatican activities during the Nazi era in some detail, we can conclude this section with a brief overview of several other scholarly viewpoints. Fr. John Morley has argued, rather convincingly despite Graham's one-line rejection of his thesis, that the Vatican could have done considerably more to save Jews through its papal nuncios than in fact proved to be the case. In concert with most other historians who have analyzed the period, Morley views the problem as rooted in the basic tone and direction of Vatican diplomacy set by Pius XII rather than in crass papal indifference to the plight of the Jews, Poles, and other victims of the Nazis. Prudence and reserve were the prevailing characteristics of this diplomacy. It studiously tried to avoid "offending" any nation, the Third Reich included. This approach had a straitjacket effect on Vatican diplomacy and did little to distinguish it from the posture adopted by the civil states toward the Third Reich. In fact, on occasion, representatives of the Allied camp spoke more candidly and specifically about Jewish extermination than did the Vatican.¹⁴

Gerhart Riegner's recollections of the Nazi period, discussed above, would seem to strengthen the force of Morley's basic argument. Even Fr. Graham's own research, when read carefully, shows that most of the initiatives began with a particular papal nuncio, not the Vatican. The possibilities for direct Catholic institutional action differed from country to country. This must be underscored. Hence a measure of caution must be exercised in generalizing from particular areas of some success such as Hungary. Nonetheless there appear to be ample instances of important successes in alleviating the Jewish plight in those countries where nuncios did act and sometimes secured Vatican intervention as well to warrant Morley's more general conclusion.

Michael R. Marrus has joined those whose writings have critically assessed the overall Vatican response to Nazism.¹⁵ He too locates the problem fundamentally in the style of diplomacy that Pius XII had helped to shape during the Depression era as Pius XI's Secretary of State.

Marrus acknowledges the presence of Vatican opposition to racial policies of both Mussolini and Hitler, but he insists that this opposition had more to do with the Christian theology of baptism than it did with concern about the fate of the Jews themselves. Even after the release of the papal encyclical against Nazism in 1937 the

Vatican attempted to prevent an open break with the Third Reich. The primary goal remained, in Marrus's words, "political neutrality and the safeguarding of the institutional interests of the Church in a perilous political world."¹⁶

The first few years of the war witnessed little Vatican protest against growing Nazi hostility toward the Jewish community, no more in fact than was the case in the 1930s. Catholic representatives spoke generally about the need for justice but remained largely unconcerned about the new antisemitic campaigns being developed by the Third Reich and collaborationist governments. When the murder of Jews began in earnest, says Marrus, the Vatican refused to issue more than the most general of condemnations despite its excellent information on the seriousness of the Jewish condition. It is obvious that Marrus is not persuaded by Graham's argument that, though the Vatican's language was most often general in tone, omitting direct mention of both victim groups and the Nazis themselves, people understood the specific intent of the Holy See's statements.

Marrus joins several other historians in arguing that the root cause of the limited Vatican response was diplomatic style. Vatican documents, he insists, do not indicate any guarded pro-Nazi sympathies or the supremacy of opposition to the USSR. They in fact clearly demonstrate that neither simple hostility nor indifference explains Rome's posture during this critical period. What the documents do establish with reasonable certainty is the dominance of a policy of "reserve and conciliation" under Pius XII, a policy that shaped not only his personal approach but strongly influenced the basic tenor of the Church's diplomatic corps, as well. Marrus puts it this way:

The goal was to limit the global conflict where possible, and above all to protect the influence and standing of the Church as an independent voice. Continually apprehensive of schisms within the Church, Pius strove to maintain the allegiance of Catholics in Germany, in Poland, and elsewhere. Fearful too of threats from the outside, the Pope dared not confront the Nazis or the Italian Fascists directly.¹⁷

For Marrus the controlling reality under Pius XII was the preservation of the Church. All else took a backseat.

This same perspective, it might be noted, is shared by another Jewish historian of the Holocaust, Nora Levin, though she attributes somewhat more direct influence to the Bolshevik factor as a principal threat to Catholic survival than does Marrus himself. This priority of Church survival led Pius XII, in Levin's words, to view the Jews as "unfortunate expendables."¹⁸ In the words of Helen Fein, they fell outside the "universe of moral obligation."¹⁹

To further underscore the predominance of the survival factor over pure antisemitism in shaping the Vatican's response to the Jewish Question, Marrus introduces the issue of the Holy See's reaction to other groups targeted by the Nazis. Here too, he says, the Holy See basically followed a policy of reserve even when it involved strong appeals from Polish bishops to denounce Nazi atrocities against Polish Catholics, as well as in the case of the Third Reich's "euthanasia campaign" and the Italian attack against Greece.

The relations between the Vatican and Poland, as Marrus has indicated, provide a useful parallel study to the question of the Holy See and the Jewish community during World War II. For here there was a staunchly Catholic community that, as

historians are increasingly bringing to light, became nearly as critical as the Jews regarding the policy of reserve pursued by papal diplomacy relative to the Nazis.

Polish-American historian Richard Lukas has raised this issue in his writings on the Nazi attack against Poland. He recognizes the practical difficulties the Vatican faced with respect to Poland, in part due to the flight of Cardinal Hlond from the country, which caused great disruption within Polish Catholicism. The cold reception accorded Hlond in Rome by Vatican officials and the Pope himself helped to restore some measure of credibility for Pius XII among Polish Catholics.

Overall, however, Lukas concludes that the balance sheet in terms of Vatican/papal activity on behalf of Poland shows a deficit. This is borne out, according to Lukas, by the concrete negative reactions of ordinary Catholics in the country toward the Pope. "In the face of the persecution of the church of Poland," says Lukas, "the Vatican pursued a timid, reserved attitude."²⁰ This was likely the result of a constellation of forces—a sentimentality about Poland on Pius' part, a tinge of Germanophilia, and fears that public denunciations would make matters worse for the Poles. It was not until June 2, 1943, that the Pope finally issued the long-awaited statement. And here again, as in the case of the Jews, Pius shied away from direct condemnation of the Nazis.

The 1943 statement, which admittedly did ease Polish-Vatican tensions to some degree, was an effort to counteract the widespread criticism that had grown up within clerical ranks because of the Vatican's seeming hesitancy on the Polish question. There were even some Polish voices calling for the complete severance of relations with the Vatican. The perceived abandonment of Poland on the part of Pius and the Vatican had led to the phenomenon of worshippers leaving church at the very mention of the Pope's name. The Jesuits of Warsaw became so concerned about Catholic loyalty that they published a defense of Vatican activities in behalf of Poland. And Fr. John Morley, who also addresses the Vatican's response to the Nazi attack on Poland and interprets Vatican inaction there as resulting from a certain primacy of the relationship with Germany in Vatican diplomatic circles, relates how Rome explicitly instructed its nuncios on how to counter the mounting dissatisfaction with its approach to Poland.²¹

In his own analysis, Fr. Graham has attempted to respond to the charges against Pius XII relative to Poland. But he concentrates almost exclusively on the 1943 speech and thereafter. And even in this limited context his argument rests on the positive comments of a few representatives of the Polish government-in-exile. It is obvious that a contemporary historian of Poland such as Lukas has not been fully persuaded by this defense.

To close this survey of historians relative to Vatican-Nazi relations, we shall briefly examine the writings of English Catholic historian J. Derek Holmes and an Anglican historian from Canada, John Conway. Besides Fr. Graham, Holmes is among the staunchest overall defenders of the regime of Pius XII. But he presents his position in considerably less polemical fashion. In general he contends that Pius's quiet diplomacy worked far better than many are willing to concede. He appeals, for example, to the remark of an unnamed Israeli consul in Italy who claimed that the Holy See in collaboration with the papal nuncios and regional Catholic leaders assisted in saving some 400,000 Jewish lives.²²

Yet even Holmes, unlike Graham, is prepared to grant that some major drawbacks existed in Vatican policy. In general, he remains convinced that Vatican officials failed to show sufficient resolve against racist attitudes throughout the Nazi era and Pius XII himself did not exhibit a sufficiently forceful style of leadership with respect to initiatives by local churches. A case in point, says Holmes, is Vichy France. After the Vichy government's ambassador in Rome had inquired of the Vatican whether proposed new legislation concerning Jews would create problems for the Holy See, Marshall Pétain, head of the Vichy government, was able to claim, says Holmes, "unfairly but not without some justification that the Vatican had adopted a careless or even an 'inhuman' attitude."²³

John Conway shares some of the same cautions as Holmes in his consideration of Vatican policy.²⁴ He recognizes that Catholic protest was not as strong as might have been anticipated. He attributes this largely to a twofold conclusion on the part of the Catholic leadership elite, both in Germany and in Rome. This conclusion, he argues, was common to the leadership of much of the Protestant Evangelical Church as well, resulting in the growth of an antiestablishment Confessing Church that did confront Nazi policy publicly up to a point. Both the Catholic and Protestant leaderships were convinced that the Christian faithful would abandon the hierarchy if the clergy protested too strongly against the Nazis, and they feared such opposition might open the doors for the emergence in Germany of a liberal, pluralistic society that would threaten their fundamentally conservative social outlook. In their minds the Church's well-being was inevitably tied to the preservation of the old social order in Germany and elsewhere in Europe.

Some Tentative Conclusions

With the above survey of the attitudes of a select number of Christian and Jewish scholars toward Vatican activities during the Third Reich we are now in a position to formulate several tentative conclusions. The first, to repeat a point made above, is that accusations of "silence" against Pius XII and the Vatican are simply unfounded. We must move beyond this code term to a much more nuanced discussion of the issues if we are to gain any insights from our analysis. On the other hand, none of the historians we have examined, whether Christian or Jewish, seemed convinced that Fr. Graham's work, however valuable on the narrow issue of "silence," has resolved all the serious questions at hand.

One conclusion clearly emerges from the research of nearly all the scholars who have examined the question thus far with a measure of objectivity. At the level of the Vatican, Pius had a profound commitment to a "diplomatic" church model. This flowed principally from his desire not only to preserve the Church as an institution but also to ensure continuation of the conservative social order that he and his circle deemed essential for the future health of Catholicism. And this commitment exercised a critical influence on his response to the plight of the Jews, Poles, and other groups who were victims of the Nazis. Behind his "diplomatic" model in practical affairs seemed to lie a fundamental theological understanding of the Church as a holy and spotless" reality whose true meaning lay beyond this world. It is only in some of the Christmas addresses toward the end of his papacy that we have hints

that Pius may have concluded that a totally new social order was now needed, even from the perspective of Church survival.²⁵ While it would be difficult to prove conclusively, it can at least be suggested that this general shifting of posture on the social order in Europe may have been responsible in part for his enhanced commitment to Jewish and Polish security in the final years of the Third Reich.

Assigning priority to an examination of the Church context of the Vatican's response during the Nazi period provides us with a perspective rooted in historical experience. It is a perspective that can prove extremely valuable as the Church confronts other difficult social situations in the present and the future. I believe that, consciously or not, Catholicism is beginning to learn from the failings of its policy of reserve in the face of the Nazi challenge. This learning is not without some struggle, however. Its recent challenges of unjust political regimes in South Africa, Malawi, the Philippines, and elsewhere, plus the forthright manner in which the February 1989 Pontifical Justice and Peace Commission document on racism condemned apartheid, antisemitism, and anti-Zionism by name²⁶ attest to decided movement away from the caution so evident during the papacy of Pius XII. While the diplomatic model of the Church has not totally disappeared in Catholic circles, there are now clear signs that the Church is beginning to put it aside as it speaks in a manner that unquestionably carries some measure of risk for its institutional well-being.

The tendency to view certain groups as "unfortunate expendables" in the effort to guarantee the survival of the Catholic community is gradually receding. No doubt this change is due at least in part to the basic theological change in understanding the church-world relationship that emerged from Vatican II's document on the Church in the Modern World.²⁷ In that perspective there is a sense of a far greater integration between the events of human history and the ultimate purposes of the kingdom of God than was true in Pius XII's fundamental vision of the Church.

A few closing considerations are in order. The first has to do with the question of how great a part traditional Catholic antisemitism played in shaping the Vatican stance toward the Jews during the Nazi era. There is ample evidence to suggest it had considerable impact at least in certain countries. France, Germany, Austria, Poland, and Slovakia, especially, come to mind.²⁸ At the level of the Vatican the picture is much harder to determine with great precision. Virtually no evidence exists of overt antisemitism at this level, as Jewish commentators such as Riegner have noted. But what subtle impact regional Catholic antisemitism may have had on policy formulation toward the Jews by the Holy See is an issue that awaits further research. This also holds for the private letters and records of personal discussions at the Vatican level—papers that have not been thoroughly examined. At this point, and until new documentation is scrutinized, there appear to be ample documentary grounds for maintaining that traditional Christian antisemitism was not a principal determinant of the Vatican's stance. This thesis does not preclude an argument, let it be clear, that on the regional level antisemitism may in fact have been a significant factor in a local Catholic community's response to the Nazi attack on the Jews.

At this point it must be stressed that if the study of Vatican attitudes is to be pursued with scholarly integrity and brought to finality, responsible scholars must be given adequate access to the relevant Vatican archives. Cardinal Joseph Bernardin of Chicago, in his opening plenary address at the May 1992 meeting of the Vatican-

Jewish International Dialogue held in Baltimore, called for the opening of these archives.²⁹ His call was substantially repeated in the final communique approved by the participants in that dialogue.³⁰ It is now incumbent upon scholars and Catholic leaders to join forces in urging the Vatican to implement this recommendation as quickly as possible.

Third, there is need to raise an issue related to the previously made point about the centrality for Pius XII of the preservation of Europe's traditional social order. Several of the papers in the published proceedings of the Historical Society of Israel's 1982 Conference on "Judaism and Christianity under the Impact of National Socialism"³¹ clearly show that many Catholics, in Germany especially (but elsewhere as well), perceived the Jews as a threat to their own security and, in some cases, as agents of liberalism and Bolshevism. This seemed to be a far more burning issue relative to Jews than charges connected with traditional antisemitism. While often there was genuine dismay about what was happening to the Jews on the human level, there was also relief that the Jewish community's "subversive" influence on the traditional social order was being removed. Though the case has not been documented and remains one of those unresolved issues that requires further research, it is legitimate to entertain the suspicion that, given Pius XII's high personal regard for the German church where the attitude about the Jewish "erosion" factor was especially strong, it may have had some impact on the overall shape of Vatican policy.

Consensus is beginning to emerge on some points but, on the whole, the research is still substantially incomplete and therefore conclusions must be understood as tenuous at best. We serve neither sound scholarship nor the cause of Christian-Jewish reconciliation with exaggerated charges or attempts to suppress parts of the actual record. A carefully nuanced approach, based on full scholarly access to relevant documentation, is the only approach worthy of the name of scholarship and capable of building a new foundation for Catholic-Jewish understanding in our time.

NOTES

1. Cf. Cardinal Joseph Bernardin, "Tikkun Olam, 'Healing the World,'" *Catholic International* 3/13 (July 1-14, 1992): 610-17.

2. Robert Graham, S.J., *Pius XII's Defense of the Jews and Others: 1944-45* (Milwaukee: Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, 1982), p. 34.

3. As quoted in *ibid.*, p. 21.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

5. As quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 29-30.

6. For relevant texts from Pius XII's *Christmas Messages* and John XXIII's *Mater et Magistra* and *Pacem in Terris*, see David M. Byers, ed., *Justice in the Marketplace: Collected Statements of the Vatican and the United States Catholic Bishops on Economic Policy, 1891-1984*, general and document introductions by John T. Pawlikowski, O.S.M. (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1985), pp. 91-170.

7. Gerhart Riegner, "A Warning to the World: The Efforts of the World Jewish Congress to Mobilize the Christian Churches against the Final Solution," Inaugural Stephen S. Wise Lecture (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, November 17, 1982).

8. Ibid., p. 7.

9. Ibid., p. 10.

10. Ernst Christian Helmreich, *The German Churches under Hitler: Background, Struggle, and Epilogue* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1979), p. 364; Otto Dov Kulka, "Popular Christian Attitudes in the Third Reich to National Socialist Policies toward the Jews," in *Judaism and Christianity under the Impact of National Socialism*, ed. Otto Dov Kulka and Paul R. Mendes-Flohr (Jerusalem: Historical Society of Israel and the Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, 1987), pp. 251-67.

11. Riegner, "A Warning," p. 11.

12. Cf. Henri de Lubac, *Christian Resistance to Anti-Semitism: Memories from 1940-1944* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990).

13. Cited in Michael R. Marrus, "The Vatican and the Holocaust," *Congress Monthly* (January 1988): p. 7.

14. John Morley, *Vatican Diplomacy and the Jews during the Holocaust: 1939-1943* (New York: Ktav, 1980), p. 209. In an October 12, 1993, letter to the author, Fr. Morley indicated that his still unpublished research in the archives of Yad Vashem, the Central Zionist Archives in Jerusalem, and the Public Record Office in London seems to support the thrust of the material found in volume 10 of the officially released Vatican documents on the Nazi period regarding Vatican efforts to assist the Jews of Hungary.

15. Marrus, "The Vatican," and idem, *The Holocaust in History* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1987).

16. Marrus, "The Vatican," p. 6.

17. Ibid., p. 7.

18. Nora Levin, *The Holocaust* (New York: Schocken Books, 1973), p. 693.

19. Helen Fein, *Accounting for Genocide: National Responses and Jewish Victimization during the Holocaust* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 33.

20. Richard Lukas, *Forgotten Holocaust: The Poles under German Occupation 1939-1944* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1986), p. 16.

21. Morley, *Vatican Diplomacy*, pp. 140, 146.

22. J. Derek Holmes, *The Papacy in the Modern World* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), p. 158.

23. Ibid., p. 164.

24. John Conway, "The Churches," in *The Holocaust: Ideology, Bureaucracy, and Genocide*, ed. Henry Friedlander and Sybil Milton (Millwood, NY: Kraus International, 1980), pp. 199-206. See also "The Churches and the Jewish People: Actions, Inactions and Reactions during the Nazi Era," in *Comprehending the Holocaust: Historical and Literary Research*, ed. Asher Cohen, Joan Gelber and Charlotte Wardi (Frankfurt/M., Verlag Peter Lang, 1990), pp. 125-43.

25. On Pius XII's Christmas addresses, see note 6 above.

26. Pontifical Commission "Justitia et Pax," *The Church and Racism: Towards a More Fraternal Society* (Vatican City, 1988).

27. The text of Vatican II's *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* can be found in various collections, including *Catholic Social Thought: The Documentary Heritage*, ed. David J. O'Brien and Thomas A. Shannon (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992).

28. See Kulka and Mendes-Flohr, eds., *Judaism and Christianity*.

29. See note 1 above.

30. See "Statement of the International Catholic-Jewish Liaison Committee," *Origins* 22/2 (May 21, 1992): 32.

31. Kulka and Mendes-Flohr, eds., *Judaism and Christianity*.