

Vatican and Holocaust

INTRODUCTION

The World War II started in September 1939 and ended in September 1945. It was the most widespread and peyorative war in the history. Almost 62 million people were annihilated, over 100 million military personnel became assembled, and almost 11 million people happened to be the victims of Holocaust, among which 6 million were Jews (Solar Navigator).

As the name suggests, this paper discusses the role of Vatican church and Pope Pius XII during Holocaust. This topic itself, as well as the Pope's role, is very controversial. Many people, mainly Catholics, believe that the church did a lot to help the Jews. On the other hand, critics say that whatever Pope did was too little and that more lives could have been saved. Pope Pius XII definitely made a mistake by not speaking publicly about Nazi's violence. Instead, he stood aside and did whatever he could. Very few Jewish people were persuaded that it was the only way for them; others assumed that he was not responsible for genocide, and he did not care about the Jews. The paper discusses in detail these two main ideas. But before we bring them up, we need to focus a bit on the structure of the work. First, we touch upon the notion of Holocaust, its brief history. Secondly, it's important to estimate how many Jews were assassinated during Holocaust. Later on, we concentrate on Pope Pius XII biography since this prominent person had a great impact on society. He knew many Bishops and it made him powerful in the most diverse sections of society.

HOLOCAUST

Holocaust refers to massive destructions of human species by other humans. During World War II it was a mass killing of innocent people, planned and executed by National Socialist regime under Adolf Hitler. The Nazis call it “the Final Solution to the Jews Question” (Winston para. 1). It started in 1933 when National Socialist German Workers' party of Germany at the head of Adolf Hitler has established a dictatorship over all main social activities of people. It concerned mainly Jewish doctors, teachers, lawyers, etc. who were abstained from professional work. They lost their jobs, and no governmental institution was allowed to hire the Jews.

In May 1935 anti Jew propaganda started to heat up. In September 1935 the Law for the Protection of German Blood and Honor was passed. This law banned marriages between any Jew and non Jew. In November the Citizenship Law came into force. It stated that all Jewish people were no longer citizens of their own country. The Nazis were relentless towards the Jews by all means. They were not allowed to participate in social, political, economic life of the country. It's a downright fact that they were deprived of medical care, and even their children were not allowed to attend schools. In November 1938 a lot of Jewish properties were confiscated. By 1939 all Jewish companies had collapsed due to lack of capital. In November 1939 legislation to remove all Jews from the society was enacted, though almost half of the population i.e. 500, 000 in Germany had already escaped. A great number of Jewish men were arrested and sent to “death camps”. People endured severe shortages of food and water, lived in terrifying conditions. It led to the spread of various diseases, which were common for majority of prisoners. Some Jews who survived this exhaustion and diseases were

either shot, or killed by gassing. For the interior ministry providing birth records, it was easy to find each and every Jew who was killed during those years. No social, religious, scholarly organization or community came forward to help and speak for the Jews.

In 1939 there were almost 7 million Jews in Central and Eastern Europe. About 5 million were killed in Poland and Soviet Union. The Nazis persecuted Jewish people all over the Europe, such countries as Netherlands, France, Belgium, Yugoslavia and Greece were not exceptions. Anybody who had three or more grandparents was to be killed immediately. Many people died from various medical experiments which were conducted. They were placed in pressure chambers; their children's eyes were injected with chemicals to see if they change color, various brutal surgeries were done on them, they were frozen, infected by harmful or even fatal diseases, numerous drug tests were conducted, and the ones who survived all this were later dissected (Leyson and Schindle para. 1).

POPE PIUS XII

Pope Pius XII was the head of Vatican City and the Roman Catholic Church from 1939 till October 1958. It was said that his views could influence almost 400 million Catholics because he was also the Bishop of Rome and was familiar with all other bishops. His real name was Eugenio Pacelli. His actions during World War II and Holocaust were considered to be controversial by many researchers. His views on Hitler's actions were also promiscuous. Adolf Hitler came to an agreement with the Pope. By mutual consent, religion was separated from politics, and Catholics have got freedom of practice in return. A lot of people condemned this Pope's decision, assuming that he was on

Hitler's side, but he acted in a different way. On April 28th, his speech to 250,000 pilgrims served a good illustration of his awareness. To his point of view, the annihilation of the Jews persecution by the Nazis was nothing but a massacre. At the time when Hitler simply called it social revolution, Pope Pius XII completely disagreed with him (Schoenberg).

The question is whether the Pope really did help the Jews or not?

RIGHTEOUS GENTILES

This term is used to identify people who helped Jews in Holocaust. They were non-Jews themselves and were called Righteous Gentiles. As Hitler had very strict rules about such people, i.e. he said anybody who helped any Jew would be committed to death (Marchione), these people still helped them at all hazards. David P. Gushee has written an excellent book on this topic *The Righteous Gentiles of the Holocaust: A Christian Interpretation*. This book has many protagonists copied from real people who were the Righteous Gentiles. No doubt, Pope Pius XII belongs to them, though he himself was not depicted in this work.

As has been said already, some people believed that the Pope struggled to save the Jews and yet he is not given credit for what he did. Critics are convinced that people who say that the Pope did not help the Jews have no sense of history.

Pope Pius was always against the Nazis, even before the war started. As has been said before, he condemned the Nazis saying that they were miserable plagiarists, and said that it did not matter what the Nazis believed because whatever they believe was wrong. You cannot kill anybody based on his or her religion (Graham 106).

He also sent various notes to Berlin protesting Nazis policies. By that time he had already become their enemy, though he was Vatican secretary. The Germans never wanted Pius XII to become the Pope. When Pius XI died in 1939, they already detested Pacelli, and were against the candidate (Lichten 107).

A Polish Jew, who was a diplomat, wrote that the Pope had spoken so much about the Nazis, but since he confronted them and condemned their antagonism, Hitler assumed that he was against his regime. Pacelli had served the government for quite sometime before he replaced the late Pope. At that time the Nazis thought that if he had become the Pope, he would have never been on their side (Lichten 107).

From 1917 to 1929 Pope Pius XII had made almost forty four speeches on the German land, out of these at least forty of his speeches condemned the Nazis regime. The Pope had helped to avoid the lynching for many Jewish families. He worked secretly to save the Jews from being murdered by Hitler's army. Though Hitler tried to persuade Pope Pius XII not to work against them, he still refused. Archbishop of Utrecht also pronounced Hitler to be guilty for people's deaths. When the Dutch Jews were sent to extermination camps, the Archbishop started protesting, and was warned by the Hitler's army. The Nazis retaliated started killing all the Jews from Holland. A famous Jew philosopher, Edith Stein was also assassinated. This was the revenge to the hatred Archbishop. Yet, more innocent civilians were sent to death. This is the reason why Pope Pius XII did not speak out so strongly against the Nazis, instead helped and saved Jews lives quietly, and this silence of Pope Pius XII resulted in people believing that he did not want to help and that he did not care, but the Pope remained indifferent to what people said and did all possible to save the Jews and other victims of Nazism. Pope

Pius XII saved a Jewish couple by helping them escape from an extermination camp and bringing them to Spain with him. The couple later stated that they themselves never wanted the Pope to come out in the open and stated that he was against the Nazis because then he would become the center of attention, and in order to help them the Pope had to make sure that the Hitler's army did not suspect him of helping the Jews. The couple said that they knew why the Pope kept silent and they thought he was right (Akin n.p.).

Countries like the U.S. and Great Britain did not allow any Jew to enter their countries. The Pope helped many Jews by issuing them fake documents showing the Jews as Christians so that they can immigrate to these countries. As all the Jews were deprived of their money and properties, the Pope paid millions of dollars to help them. When Nazis invaded Italy, it was too late for some people to emigrate and the Pope started to find places to hide the Jews. He ordered that people in all the religious building should help save the Jews by giving them a place to hide. The Pope said that people should hide these even at the risk of personal sacrifice. He removed the cloister rule, which was in monasteries and convents. This rule kept any stranger from entering any religious place but since it has been repealed; monasteries automatically became shelters for Jews. They were the refugees, being at Pope's and Vatican mercy, managed to find more than 180 safe shelters with food and cloths to be given in case of need. Thanks to Pope's strong commitment, many regular people gave refuge to them in their private homes. Many buildings turned out to be the shelters for the Jews, prosecuted by the Nazis, churches, basilicas, Vatican Church administrative buildings, parish houses, even the Pope's summer mansion had hidden refugees. It is a mystery

how people managed to endure the war years, famine and lurching. Only faith that hasn't been shattered and conspiracy retained many Jews alive. In 1943 when many Jews were taken into custody in Italy, Pope Pius XII had extremely reproached the Nazis, constantly confiscating and demolishing Jews' properties. This written speech extremely disapproved Hitler's regime, and for that the Pope was even called "a mouthpiece of Jews" (Marchione).

When World War II had ceased, almost 8,000 Jews abandoned Italy. This number is almost nothing compared to other European states. Further on, when for about 800,000 Jews, residing in Hungary faced deportations, Pope Pius XII wrote a telegram to the Admiral Miklos Horthy, the ruler of Hungary, and helped to call off these exiles. It is obviously noticeable that owing to the Pope's endeavors, many of them avoided banishment. As the Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem, Isaac Herzog said in his message to the Pope that he would never forget him for his mercy. Many brothers and sisters obtained assistance when they really needed it and he would always be in their hearts as benefactor (Marchione).

Israel Zolli, the Romanian chief said that whatever the Pope did in order to save the Jews was a remarkable example of bravery and courage and that he would always be remembered. He also said that the Pope served as an Honor to the Catholics (Lichten n.p).

Zolli later became a catholic and took Pope's given name "Eugenio" to honor him. Obviously, he was inspired by the Pope and the work he had done to save the Jews. Similarly, a lot of other Jews wanted to convert to show their gratitude to the Pope, as he was the one who stood by them during the war. It was estimated that the

Catholic Church alone saved almost 700,000 to 860,000 Jews. This number is larger than what all other organizations, Jewish included, had saved (Lichten n.p.).

HITLER AND THE VATICAN

Some researchers have an ambiguous opinion regarding Pope Pius XII and Vatican and their attitude towards genocide. Many of them think that he was yet another arm of Adolf Hitler who was assisting him during Holocaust by staying aside. Peter Godman in his book *Hitler and the Vatican* talks about the Pope and the Vatican Church. According to him, he could have spoken out strongly about this issue (Godman 22). In accordance with a review by American Library Association, Pope Paus XII, is depicted as a “suffering martyrdom of patience” (Marchione). They assumed that many people requested his help, but he remained indifferent. In 1940 Isaac Herzog asked the Pope to help him stop Hitler’s army from transporting the Jews to the Extermination camps; instead, Pope kept silent and did nothing. In 1942 a person working under the Pope told him about the Jews who were sent to death camps. Again he preferred to remain aside. The Assistant Chief of the U.S delegation to the Vatican, Harold Tittman reported to the Pope about the mass killings. He asked the Pope to say something about it in order to condemn the Nazis. He replied that he wanted to be neutral. How could have he been indifferent to mass killing and brutal terminations? How could he keep silent when he could impact the assassination of more than 400 million people? Almost 200,000 Ukrainian Jews were reported dead in August 1942. The Ukrainian Metropolitan Andrej Septyckyj wrote a letter to the Pope telling about the Nazis, and how they were killing each and every Jew, how their government became corrupted. The gut wrenching

stories of how people were killed by brutal techniques and how they were dissected and experimented upon as they were guinea pigs, would have made anybody sympathize with them, but the Pope replied by saying, “bear adversity with serene patience” (Gilbert 40).

In September 1942 Giovanni Battista Montini wrote to the Pope. He said that the killings and massacre of Jews had reached such huge proportions that it was frightening. He also wrote that the Pope should do something about that. The same month the U.S. representative in the Vatican, Myron Taylor also wrote to the Pope. He said that the Pope’s silence showed what kind of moral values he had. The secretary of state replied on Pope’s behalf that there were just rumors and it was impossible to verify them. Bishop of Berlin and President of Poland had written to the Pope Pius XII quite a few times. They asked the Pope to speak publicly about Nazi’s violence and brutal killings. He refused to do so. The Allied government issued orders saying that anybody who helped in extermination of Jews would be punished. Many people said that the Pope could have done the same to help the Jews, and finally an answer broke out. The Pope said that he could not announce Hitler’s Brutal acts publicly because in this case he would need to interfere in politics. He was able to only to condemn those killings, and no action could be taken. In January 1940 almost 15,000 Polish civilians were killed by the Nazis army. Hearing that, the Pope had made a broadcast speech in which he agreed to the fact that there were eye witnesses who have told and proved how Hitler’s army had brutally killed homeless and helpless people (Gilbert 40). The Pope did not mention Jewish people. He just said that the Nazis were killing people based on their

religion, nation or race (Gutman 1137). Although he disapproved Nazis' violence in a very mild manner, he did not mention the Jews.

In 1941 French Marshal Henri Philippe Petain asked the Pope if he condemned these anti Jewish laws. Pope Pius XII replied that the church had always condemned racism but would not do the same to each and every rule against Jews. This shows the indifferent attitude of his. He said that as long as any legislation did not conflict with the catholic teachings of charity and justice, it was okay to carry it out. In 1940 on a radio broadcast, he said that one cannot be indifferent if moral values were involved in a situation. As he was neutral in case of mass murder of Jews, we can only imply that according to him, killing Jews was not a moral issue (Gutman 1137).

Nazis invaded Italy in September 1943. The entire Italy, including Vatican became occupied by Hitler's army. Nazis threatened the inhabitants of one settlement that if they fail to bring in 50 kilograms of gold they would take 300 hostages. Obviously, those hostages would be Jews. The church was willing to loan 15 kilograms but it became pointless as the Nazis extended the deadline (Israel Pocket Library 133).

Pope Pius XII knew about those Jewish who were supposed to get deported but he remained silent and did not announce anything publicly, though he asked some catholic institutions to provide shelter for the Jews. The Vatican itself gave place to almost 477 Jews. Almost 4,238 Jews were placed in Roman monasteries and convents in order to protect them from extermination.

On October 16, almost 1,007 Jews, most of which were women and children, were captured. Only sixteen of them survived. The majority of those people were gassed and others were sent to prison camps.

Dave Hunt wrote in one of his books that the Pope had no excuse of remaining silent while the Nazis killed thousands and thousands of innocent people based on their religion. He also said that the Pope was paid by the Hitler's government to keep silent (Hunt 284).

Jack Chick who is also a writer said that the Pope was a big coward because when the war ended and he saw Hitler losing, he immediately said that he was not on his side but he was always on his side and in one way or another, and helped him killing all those innocent people (Chick 45).

RESPONSE OF AMERICA AND BRITAIN

Jews were the first Europeans to settle down in America. However, the antagonism towards them had always grown. During and after the Holocaust, when many people were coming to America to settle down, as their own countries were in bad economic and social conditions, the Jews again endured discriminations. The immigration laws reduced the number of Jews who could come to America. Even the government at that time did not respond properly to the situation (Bruccoli n.p.). President Roosevelt was quite aware of Holocaust, and its consequences for the Jewish nation. During his governing, many Jews were given high positions in the government. He has even made the acquaintance of some of these personnel, but none of them were able to respond properly to the Holocaust. Some were accused of neglecting this problem. Still many Jews were suffering all over the globe, and not too many people had courage to bring the required attention to genocide. America did not respond because it was an ethnic issue.

“There is always a limit to the amount of influence an ethnic sub group can exercise on policy, a limit which becomes more constricted during time of war” (Millikin University).

The restrictive measures the American government took in order to stop the Jews from entering the country carried on for long after Roosevelt’s inauguration. Many people believed that the reason why the country had to do this was because there was a shortage of resources. However, this was not the issue. Roosevelt knew long before what was happening to the Jews in Germany. He knew the extremity of the event, however, he preferred not to intervene. Pope Pius XII visited America in order to ask him to help.

Many American leaders tried to condemn Hitler’s regime. They boycotted German products in order to shatter their economy. But this was done on a smaller scale and did not budge the government.

On the other hand, even though he was not responding on a large scale, Churchill was certainly condemning Nazis actions. According to somebody who was very close to him, Churchill was very fond of the Jews (Gilbert).

Churchill said nobody could do anything about where they were born. As soon as Hitler came to power, Churchill through various speeches condemned his actions. In two months after Hitler had come into power, Churchill wrote in an article:

There is a danger of the odious conditions now ruling in Germany, being extended by conquest to Poland and another persecution and pogrom of Jews being begun in this new area. (Gilbert)

Churchill said that the anti Jewish element, which Hitler had created, was affecting not only Jews but also people of other nationalities, and it was a downright truth. When the Pope asked Britain to help, Churchill said that he was able to use all his resources to assist in saving the Jews, and that Pope Pius XII was doing the right thing. But unfortunately he wasn't aware of his real possibilities. He could have used other resources and could have freed many other Jews. Churchill, as well as Roosevelt, disapproved Hitler's regime, in some way they sympathized all assassinated people, but could not protect them. Many countries could have done more, but were too scared of getting a racist remark at that time.

CONCLUSION

Many people have commented on Pope's behavior and actions in World War II and the Holocaust. The President of the World Jewish Congress said that the Pope would always be remembered as he had helped the Jews in one of the biggest in the entire history genocide. Albert Einstein, who is probably the most well known Jewish figure, said that, in the days of Holocaust almost nobody came forward and protested the Jews. Only the Pope and Vatican church, who condemned Hitler's army, were among those who tried their best in Jews protection. He also added that he admired the Vatican church members for what they had done to help the Jews (Sobran).

Safran, who was a Roman leader, said that the Pope had done so much for the suffering Jews that he couldn't find a word to show his gratitude. He said that the Romanian Jews would never forget the Pope and the fact that he had helped them in Holocaust (Marchione).

After Zolli had become catholic, the Romanian chief said that they obtained the opportunity to show how grateful they were to Pope. Many people became Catholics in order to thank the Pope (Barton).

In his 1963 monograph, Dr. Joseph Lichten, the head of the Intercultural Affairs Department of the Anti-Defamation League, said that people had no solid proof against the Pope, and, thus, they were just accusing him of sins he had never done. Moreover, he added that the only mistake the Pope had done was his inability to announce publicly about Nazis violence (Marchione).

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