

Pius XII and the Jews— A Study of the Evidence

by Michael O'Carroll C.S.Sp.

In the month of April, 1957, I was in Israel and thanks to a letter of introduction from a Dublin Jewish friend, spent part of an evening with the Chief Rabbi, an old Dubliner, Dr Herzog. I told him that I would be passing through Rome the following week and hoped to have a brief audience with Pius XII. I explained that the purpose of this interview was to present to the Pope a book I had written on St Joseph ten years previously, but which was dedicated to His Holiness 'to commemorate his charity to the stricken Jews of Europe'. Dr Herzog became quite enthusiastic about Pius XII. He was very proud to have been received in audience by him, rather exceptionally on a Sunday morning, and told me that the audience lasted a full half hour. 'Take my blessing to him' the old patriarchal Jew repeated and this I promised to do. When I did so a week later I recalled the fact that Jews the world over seemed very grateful to the Pope for the help he had given them. We were speaking in French and the Pope ended the brief interview with words I translate as 'I wish I could have done more'.¹

I had been a member of a Dublin Christian-Jewish society at the time of the 'Final Solution' and had kept a fairly constant curiosity about the attitude of Jews to Pius XII since that time. With the exception of occasional remarks in the Israeli press and a rather silly comment in Gerald Reitlinger's otherwise dignified and scholarly work, this attitude was more sympathetic than that of Jews to any previous Pope. Pius XII received from Jews public expressions of gratitude that were most remarkable. The Israeli Foreign Minister, Mme Golda Meir, praised him at the United Nations, recalling his benefaction to her people in their terrible ordeal. The Israeli Symphony Orchestra on tour in Europe gave a special performance in his honour in the Vatican. The Chief Rabbi of Rome, Dr Israel Zolli, became a Catholic after the war and took the Pope's baptismal name, Eugenio. His successor, Elio Toaff, spoke after the Pope's death in terms similar to those used by Mme Meir. Delegations of Jewish ex-internees and of such bodies as the World Jewish Congress came to tell the Pope personally all that they owed him.

Very often Rabbis or other representative Jews, in recording their thanks to papal nuncios or bishops for the relief work they accom-

¹The exact words were 'J'aurais voulu faire davantage'.

plished during the massacre of the Jewish people, associated the name of the Pope with his local representative. This kind of local action was possible in areas which, though within the Nazi orbit, retained a measure of administrative if not political autonomy. In Vichy France the bishops of Nottoban, Lyons and Toulouse publicly protested against the arrest and deportation of Jews, not fortunately with the unhappy results that followed a similar protest in Holland, immediate reprisals. When Cardinal Saliège of Toulouse died, his coffin was piled high with messages from Jewish associations all over the world and Jews in the city mourned his death officially.

That was the climate of opinion down to the appearance of Herr Hochhuth's play in 1963. Since then prominent Jews have publicly expressed the same views. I mention the names of Chief Rabbi Melchior of Denmark, Mr Maurice Edelman of the Anglo-Jewish Association, a journalist diplomat Pinhas Lapide, at one time Israeli consul-general in Milan and the Jewish historian Eugene Levai. In Washington last December, in the head office of N.C.W.C. news agency, I was shown the complete file on Pius XII and the Jews and noted that a number of American Jews had felt obliged to defend Pius XII. By far the best short defence of the Pope is a pamphlet issued by N.C.W.C. but written by Joseph Lichten of the anti-defamation league of B'nai B'rith.

It would be the supreme irony of the age if Jews had to wait for a German to tell them what to think about events in Germany and German-occupied Europe during the war, a German too who, though in a very junior section, was still part of the Nazi machine. This irony would still triumph if the evidence so dictated; it does not do so.

Such an assertion seems to imply that all the evidence has been published. This is not so, for until recently the Vatican has refused to release all the relevant documents. It is known that policy in the matter has been changed. We may now expect a series of important documents bearing on this whole controversy. They will we are told, probably include letters sent by Pius XII to the bishops or hierarchies of European countries, state papers which passed between the Holy See and governments, and official records of charitable activities undertaken by the Vatican during the war. A beginning has been made with the publication in Munich of the fifty-five diplomatic notes and memoranda which, as Secretary of State to Pius XI, Cardinal Pacelli sent to the Nazi government. These official documents fall between the Concordat which was signed in 1933 and the Encyclical Letter *Mit Brennender Sorge* which appeared in 1937. I have not seen them yet but I have formed an idea of their contents from the corresponding items which have been published in Documents on German Foreign Policy.²

²I shall not give detailed annotation in this article. Almost all quotations are at first-hand.

Until publication of the relevant papers is complete then, any judgement on the controversy about Pius XII and the Final Solution must be provisional. This will accord exactly with his own rigorously scientific approach to historical questions, or for that matter to any question he dealt with in the vast corpus of writing he has left us, unexampled in quantity and quality in the history of the Papacy. But we do not have to wait so long to form a judgement on what has been said and written about Pius XII by those desirous to condemn him at any cost. I am doing so in regard to the Jewish question only. To reproduce and refute all the easily verifiable factual errors which have been printed about him in the last few years would take a great deal of space.

In the order of strict causation the wholesale massacre of European Jewry was due to three factors: the personality of Adolf Hitler; the abnormal scope given his powerful dictatorship by the war and the prolongation of the war by the policy of Unconditional Surrender; the indifference of the allied powers to rescue of non-combatant lives inside the Nazi power zone.

Herr Hochhuth's greatest triumph has been to draw a heavy veil over Hitler's essential role in the anti-Jewish programme. Those who do not wish to read the evidence for themselves can take the word of one leading Nazi after another at Nuremberg, or, if they distrust these witnesses, read reliable accounts like those given by Professor A. J. P. Taylor and Alan Bullock. From a first inflammatory speech in 1922 through all the outpourings thereafter, through the Nuremberg laws, the pogroms of the 'Night of Glass', the Wannsee conference which decreed the Final Solution to his final testament from the bunker, anti-semitism was Hitler's strongest, most sincere emotion and the very core of his political philosophy. It runs through all his thought. It occurs hundreds of times in his table talk. It was rooted in his ego, intrinsically bound up with his sense of personal destiny. It provided him with an explanation for all the things he considered evil and wished to destroy.

Let me quote the two historians I mention, men with different interpretations of Hitler's place in European history. 'Hitler', says Professor Taylor, 'himself contributed two things: One was anti-semitism. This to my mind was the one thing in which he persistently and genuinely believed from his beginning in Munich until his last days in the bunker. His advocacy of it would have deprived him of support, let alone power, in a civilised country. Economically, it was irrelevant, even harmless'. Alan Bullock writes: 'Just as Hitler ascribed to the Aryan all the qualities and achievements which he admired, so all that he hated is embodied in another mythological figure, that of the Jew. There can be little doubt that Hitler believed what he said about the Jews; from first to last his anti-semitism is one of the most consistent themes in his career, the master-idea which

embraces the whole span of his thought. In whatever direction one follows Hitler's train of thought, sooner or later one encounters the satanic figure of the Jew. The Jew is made the universal scape-goat'.

Hitler liked to quote a saying which he wrongly attributed to Mommsen: 'The Jew is the ferment of decomposition in peoples'. When he heard of British criticism of the 'Night of Glass' he flew into a rage. 'To his resentment against Britain', adds Alan Bullock, 'was added the fury that the British should dare to express concern for the fate of the German Jews. He now saw London as the centre of that world conspiracy with which he had long inflamed his imagination and Great Britain as the major obstacle in his path'. I note for future reference the significant fact that British sympathy for Jews radically altered his attitude to Britain.

Alan Bullock lists the 'evils' which Hitler fought and which he associated entirely with the Jews; democracy, capitalism, interest-slavery of the money-lender, parliamentarianism, freedom of the press, liberalism and internationalism, anti-militarism and the class-war, Christianity, modernism in art, prostitution and miscegenation. Note especially Christianity; the man who, we are told, would have listened to a Christian leader like Pius XII pleading for the Jews constantly linked Christianity with the Jews as the scourge of mankind. 'The Jew who fraudulently introduced Christianity into the ancient world in order to ruin it, reopened the same breach in modern times, taking as his pretext the social question.' Saul became Paul and Mordechai became Marx! 'Christianity' said Hitler, 'is the invention of sick brains'.

As the Führer's success inside and outside Germany was confirmed, his sense of personal power naturally grew. It is not easy to say that from the beginning he planned elimination of the Jews by mass-murder. His thoughts moved more easily in that direction with the extension of the military conflict and the increasing use of bloodshed and killing. The daily worsening of international relations widened the scope of terrorism.

If the war had not taken place, Hitler could not have achieved extermination of the Jews. True, Stalin – if we accept his own word to Sir Winston Churchill – took ten million lives to push through the collectivization of the farms and the Chinese since the war may have killed more than that – they admit two million. But conditions were in each of these cases different from those in Germany and in German-occupied Europe. Germany itself contained only about a half million Jews. The numbers were to be swollen by the extension of Nazi control in eastern and western Europe. Poland brought over three million Jews into danger; one would have to add possibly a million and a half for the other conquered or surrendered territories.

It was not only that the war brought all of Europe's Jewish population within Hitler's lethal reach. The confusion of war and the practice of secrecy which modern war demands facilitated the execution of the programme. We touch here one of the enigmas of the time: How much did the German people know? Highly placed government servants swore at Nuremberg that they knew nothing about the extermination camps while they were in operation. Hoess, the Auschwitz camp commandant, described at great length the regulations observed in his area to ensure such secrecy. But he and the government servants were also shown documents or previous admissions which seemed to weaken their testimony.

Apart from the unresolved question of German ignorance, it can be maintained that in peace time the segregation and murder of the half million Jews inside the country would have been impossible. The Jews were, therefore, the first and principal victims of World War Two. If the war was unnecessarily prolonged either by the doctrine and policy of Unconditional Surrender or by a desire to accommodate Russia, then responsibility for Jewish lives becomes a very particular problem.

Was this responsibility accepted at the time and weighed? As I see it, the attitude of the allied powers to the massacre is incomprehensible. Practically no study has been done on the subject. But what has been made public so far is profoundly troubling – far more so than anything said or written about Pius XII. You have for instance the question put formally in the House of Commons after some horrifying details had been given of slaughter of Jews, as to what would be done. Reply: the guilty ones would be punished *after the war*. In the Hopkins papers there is an account of a suggestion made at the highest level to the British government that shipping should be provided to effect rescue of the trapped Jews in eastern Europe. The proposal was turned down. I refrain from giving names as in fairness a full account would be needed to let the reader judge the moral value of these decisions. That holds too for the question of resettlement of the evacuees.

The possibility of ransom was known to exist and non-strategic goods could have been used. Again, little or nothing was done. And most surprising of all, no attempt was made to put the extermination centres out of action. Due to the energy and compassion of a Vatican official in eastern Europe, the world was alerted in June, 1944, about the death roll in Auschwitz. Now if Jewish lives were valued, the first step should have been to destroy the railway.

I had put this opinion in print before I read Rudolf Vrba's narrative *I Cannot Forgive* and saw therein that the rescue squads were waiting for just this action. Why was it not undertaken? Oil fields and dams were attacked. To have cut off Auschwitz from the outside world would have saved hundreds of thousands of lives.

Why was this not done? Was it even given a moment's thought? Was there at any time any thought given by those who disposed of such powerful destructive forces to the problem of so isolating all the extermination centres that doomed freight could not reach them? For the murders were committed in these places only.³

Every generation thinks that its mental categories and norms will dictate the judgement of posterity. Professor Taylor has already shaken some of this complacency about the second world war and future historians will no doubt continue this work. Will they think that the central problem was in fact largely ignored, the problem of saving Jewish lives from Hitler? Will they delay very long in consideration of a man who was notoriously short of divisions? Will they accept the view that some words spoken by Pius XII would have halted a vast operation, one for which a large, highly specialized machinery had been over the years patiently mounted, all of this the total expression of Hitler's ego? To touch his ego was to provoke an explosion.

Let us take the possibility of influencing Hitler and let us first recall what the so-called 'silent' Pope did say. For strange as it will appear to many, he said a great deal.

As Secretary of State to Pius XI, Cardinal Pacelli had spoken against Nazi ideology and excesses at Lourdes where he went as papal Legate to the triduum of Masses for peace, and again to an international press gathering in Rome. He had taken personal responsibility for the diplomatic notes of protest to which I have already referred; these were direct, vigorous and uncompromising.⁴ They produced no results worth mentioning. Then it was decided to issue the Encyclical *Mit Brennender Sorge* and in the composition of that document Cardinal Pacelli had a principal part. He saw too to its speedy distribution.

Though Pius XI as Pope had prime responsibility for anti-Nazi pronouncements, the real venom in press campaigns against Rome was reserved for his Secretary of State. He was identified with the Jews: 'Pius XI is half a Jew, Pacelli wholly so'. At the time of his visit to France in 1937 scurrility was poured over his name and picture; faithful Nazis were informed by their party organs that he was planning the encirclement of Germany – in collaboration with Mr Anthony Eden!

Pius XII sought a *détente* with the Nazi regime in the months

³The 'memorial' to the death camp at Auschwitz is a model of some railway carriages on a siding. It is also a memorial to those who could have put the railway out of action by bombing.

⁴Von Bergen, German Ambassador to the Vatican at the time, referred on one occasion to the 'ultimatum-like vein' of the notes; in others there was explicit reference to 'flagrant acts of unlawfulness and violence' to 'harshness and despotism worse than the Kulturkampf' to 'malicious slander and defamation, disgraceful calumnies' appearing day after day in press and speeches.

after his election, as is well known. As the war became imminent he tried by every means in his power, public appeals, direct approaches to governments, to avert it. When it broke out he did not retreat into a policy of 'careful silence'. In the first Encyclical of the pontificate we read: 'The blood of so many who have been cruelly slaughtered, though they bore no military rank, cries to heaven especially from the well-loved land of Poland'. Since the Encyclical contained a condemnation of state-worship, one can well understand why a prominent Nazi considered it directed against his country.

Two months later, Pius XII gave his first Christmas address. It was then that he published the five peace points which were soon after endorsed by religious leaders in Britain. One of the points was respect for ethnic minorities. The Pope also referred to violations of positive international law, of the principles of natural law and of 'the most elementary feelings of humanity'. He condemned 'atrocities, by whichever side they may be committed, and the illicit use of means of destruction against civil populations fleeing from war, against old people, women, and children; contempt for human dignity, human freedom, and human life, resulting in deeds that cry to Heaven for vengeance . . . '.

In the following May the Pope sent telegrams to the governments of Belgium, Holland and Luxembourg on the invasion of their countries. They were also published in the *Osservatore Romano* on May 12. It was on the very next day that Pius XII made his important statement to Dino Alfieri, the Italian Ambassador to the Vatican who was bidding him farewell before taking up duty in Berlin: 'We are not afraid of the concentration camp'. The Pope had this remark reported in the *Osservatore Romano*.

In June of that year, after the invasion of France, Pius XII received the new French Ambassador, Count Wladimir d'Ormesson and spoke to him words of encouragement for his people. France was drenched in her children's blood, but she remained the Eldest Daughter of the Church and she had in her past a treasury from which people and rulers would draw. This, I add, is the Pope we are sometimes asked to consider pro-Nazi.⁵ Wladimir d'Ormesson, a distinguished writer, remained a warm admirer of Pius XII and wrote in his defence to *Le Figaro* when *Le Vicaire* was put on at the Athénée in Paris. Significantly many of those near the Pope in the wartime crisis have given this kind of testimony, the representatives at the Vatican of Britain, Sweden, Ireland, Japan, Germany (Von Kessel, assistant to Von Weizsaecker, the Ambassador), prelates dealing directly with the Pontiff, Cardinal Tardini, the present Pope

⁵Two items of 'evidence' have recently been shot to pieces. A remark attributed to the Pope about not wanting to cause a crisis of conscience for German soldiers has been proved apocryphal; Professor Friedlander's assertion that the Pope invited the Berlin National Orchestra to perform in the Vatican likewise.

who has spoken on the subject many times, Cardinal Bea and Cardinal Tisserant. (I refer to the 1964 Press Conference, not the 1940 private letter.)

In 1940 too, Pius XII sent a secret directive to his representatives and to bishops in the warring countries urging them to assist as much as possible the victims of racial discrimination. In his Christmas Eve address to the College of Cardinals he outlined the relief measures he had undertaken on behalf of the victims of war, especially prisoners: the Pontifical Relief Commission and the Vatican Information Service.

It is hard to avoid superlatives in dealing with this gigantic enterprise of charity. I mention it here as it had an important bearing on the Pope's decision to speak or not speak on the massacre of Jews. I note in passing that the Information Service handled altogether twenty million requests; that the Relief Commission had spread its network into forty countries and channelled enormous sums of money and mounds of food and medical supplies. For a while Pius practically fed all Rome's poor or refugees; he made financial grants for the repatriation of over 630,000 displaced persons, taking complete responsibility for 53,000. He was to continue this programme on a still greater scale in the immediate post-war years.

In the 1940 address to the Cardinals, the Pope spoke of the assistance he was giving to the Non-Aryans. Three years later, in the letter to Cardinal Preysing he referred to similar charity. A contributor to the vast literature of the Hochhuth play, the Austrian Catholic historian, Frederick Heer, makes the bold, unqualified assertion that in the millions of words given out by Pius XII there is no mention of the Jews. Here is the most practical, compassionate mention in the moment of crisis, more meritorious I suggest than much that has appeared twenty years later. How many other heads of government were at that time allocating a proportion of their resources to relief work among the Jews? How many paid the travel expenses of the escaping Jews, as Pius XII told Cardinal Preysing he was doing? This was the help that was needed, needed then, not rhetoric twenty years later.⁶

To continue with the Pope's pronouncements. In 1941 he outlined his idea of the New Order. Amongst other things he said: 'Within the limits of a New Order founded on moral principles, there is no room for the violation of the freedom, integrity and security of other states, no matter what may be their territorial extension or their capacity for defence'.

In August, 1942, Pius decided to risk a public and explicit condemnation of the atrocities committed against Poles and Jews. His letter which was to be made public in Poland was sent to the Archbishop of Cracow, Cardinal Sapieha, a man with strong nerves. The

⁶Pinhas Lapide thinks that Jews saved or rescued by Catholics may have numbered 400,000. The *Opera di San Raffaele* was conspicuous in this work.

papal messenger, Mgr Paganuzzi has told how the Cardinal burned the document in his presence, saying that if it fell into the hands of the Nazis, it would lead to further killings. The Poles appreciated sympathy but begged that they be given a chance to live.

Representatives of the allied and also of some neutral governments had been pressing the Pope to issue a solemn condemnation of Nazi crimes. He had now to take into account one certain effect of his words in Germany and the areas where Nazi control was tightest: reprisals, if he named Germans. He did, however, issue a general condemnation. In the 1942 Christmas address he spoke of 'the hundreds of thousands who, without any fault of their own, sometimes only by reason of their nationality or race, are marked down for death or gradual extinction'. He also spoke words which are not so often quoted: 'the many thousands of non-combatants, women, children, aged and infirm, whom aerial warfare (the horrors of which we have repeatedly denounced from the beginning) waged indiscriminately or with insufficient precaution, has deprived of life, property, health, homes, charitable institutions, and churches'. The first words did not stop Auschwitz and the second did not stop the bombing of Dresden, Hiroshima or Nagasaki. As many were killed in the three cities in three days as in Auschwitz in any two months. No play has been written about them yet.

This was not all that Pius XII did or said in favour of the Jews. Papal representatives on orders from the Pope made formal protests to the governments which were collaborating in the 'Final Solution', when the danger of reprisals did not exist. In Rome Bishop Hudal, ordinary of the Germans resident in the city, handed a letter to the military governor, General Stahel, an Austrian 'old Catholic', vigorously requesting that the deportations cease forthwith. In France the Apostolic Nuncio, Mgr Valeri, denounced racist policies to Petain personally. In Hungary Archbishop Rotta did likewise to Horthy. In Roumania and Slovakia the Nuncios also intervened.

Archbishop Rotta had reported to the Pope that with the turn political events had taken there was little point in his remaining on in Budapest; he had nothing officially to do. The order he received was to stay as long as he could save lives. Later, another Vatican diplomat, a man named Roncalli, who had done his utmost for the Jews in the Near East, replied to Jews who thanked him that he had but obeyed the orders of Pius XII. Mgr Valeri's *démarche* was not widely known until recently. It was known at the time in France. I have seen a photocopy of *Combat*, the clandestine French resistance paper for the month of October, 1942. It has an article which refers to 'Mgr Valeri, Apostolic Nuncio, who is protesting to Vichy in the name of Pius XII and the human conscience'.

It is interesting too to recall that at the time of the 1942 Christmas broadcast there appeared in the *New York Times* an editorial which eulogized Pius XII as the guardian of Europe's conscience, the sole

voice of the continent. When Tittmann, American *chargé d'affaires* at the Vatican, asked Pius XII why he had not mentioned the Nazis, the Pope replied that had he done so, he would have felt bound to mention the Russians also and that might not be so pleasing to the Allies. Tittmann, who could not have seen the *New York Times* editorial, agreed with the Pope that the speech would give satisfaction to Americans generally.

All the time the Pope was trying through the Nuncio to exert what influence he could on the German government. He always justified the Concordat which he had signed with the Nazi government on this precise ground that it gave the Church a basis of action and protest. Not that much came of these protests by the Nuncio. George O. Kent, historian attached to the American Department of State has listed thirty-five cases of formal protest, oral or written, made about confiscation of Church property between 1938 and 1942. He notes that even a partially satisfactory result was not obtained in twenty-eight instances. Yet in such matters the Church was on the best ground possible, in view of the Concordat.

Ribbentrop admitted at Nuremberg that he had 'a whole desk-full of protests from the Vatican'. Since Hitler had characterized an earlier protest about atrocities in Poland as a 'big lie', Ribbentrop who was in some kind of hypnotic subjection to him, disregarded them. One excerpt from the record will bear quotation:

'Question: Now, do you mean to say that you did not even read a protest from the Vatican that came to your desk? Ribbentrop: It is really true. The fact is that the Führer took such a stand in these Vatican matters that, from then on, they did not come to me any more'.

To see another aspect of this helplessness of Vatican officials one has to read the description given by Archbishop Orsenigo, Nuncio in Berlin, of an interview with Hitler at Berchtesgaden, in the course of which he mentioned the Jewish question. At the word the Führer rose from his place, walked to a window and began to beat on the panes; his back was turned to the speaker who kept on saying his piece. Then suddenly Hitler changed position, walked to a table, took up a glass of water and smashed it on the ground. The Nuncio thought this was the signal to end the meeting.

Von Steengracht, under-secretary at the foreign office, said that the Vatican diplomat would still come to him and mention cases of Jews seized or threatened. As there was no point in going higher, the Foreign Office man looked himself for some solution. So he said. I am far from suggesting that all that these people said, even at Nuremberg, is gospel truth. I wish that those who quote Nazis against Pius XII would make the same reservation. I should think that never have they been given fuller credence than when they leave some words which can be made – generally out of context – to damage him.

Von Kessel who was at the Vatican Embassy during the years of the Final Solution, 1942-44, has said since the appearance of Hochhuth's play that the Pope wore himself out looking for a way to help the Jews. The present Pope used almost identical language when he spoke to the ex-internees of concentration camps last summer about Pius XII's solicitude for them – 'he spent himself in the task by day and long into the night'. When in spring 1943 the German hierarchy petitioned him to send them a letter they could have read to the faithful, he replied with what a Vatican archivist has called a magnificent text. (It has not yet been published.) The bishops did not publish it then for fear of reprisals.

I move on to June 1944, to deal with the best kept secret in recent international history, Pius XII's telegram to Horthy, the Hungarian regent, imploring him to spare Jewish lives. In two ways the Pope comes out of the affair with singular honour. It was his representative, Mgr Joseph Burzio, then *chargé d'affaires* in Bratislava, who first informed the outside world of the horrors of Auschwitz. Rudolf Vrba, an escapee from the death camp, tells in his book *I Cannot Forgive* how Jewish officials in Budapest disregarded his eye-witness report on the extermination – his estimate of deaths at the time was one and three-quarter million. He was then brought by resistance fighters to a secret rendezvous with the Vatican official, who had read his report carefully and questioned him for hours on its contents. He wept bitterly as Vrba's truthfulness became evident.

Mgr Burzio did more than weep. He went at once to Geneva and communicated the frightening report to the International Red Cross. From there it went to the chancelleries of the world and the famous 'bombardment' of Horthy's conscience began.

Pius XII knew the regent personally as he had stayed with him when he was in Budapest for the International Eucharistic Congress in 1938 – Horthy may even have remembered the Cardinal Legate's prophecy that 'brutal force threatened every moment to cause a catastrophe'. Now the Pope appealed in a public telegram to the regent's humanity. He may have known that Horthy had been using delaying tactics, had been putting off the deportation of Jews but had not stopped them. In answer to the Pope's plea, he promised that he would do everything in his power 'to enforce the claims of Christian and humane principles'.

A hero of the episode was Nuncio Rotta. He had gone to Horthy in March of that year to express the 'profound sorrow of the Holy Father' at the way the Jewish question was being treated 'in cruel violation of the rights of God and man'. The Hierarchy were also instructed to put pressure on the government. Three days after the papal telegram Cardinal Spellman broadcast a message to the Hungarian people which was beamed direct by the American Office of War Information. It was strong stuff and I only regret I cannot

quote it for lack of space. The Cardinal has stated in public that he was acting on orders from Pius XII.

All this will explain a piquant situation observable last summer during the trial at Frankfurt of the former Auschwitz officials. At the very time that some Catholics were beating their breasts on behalf of their Pope, a number of witnesses came forward to repudiate Hochhuth and defend Pius XII. One of them is a man of distinction and unique competence in the matter. Eugene Levai is a Hungarian Jew, with a considerable reputation as a historian. He is the leading expert on the massacre of Hungarian Jews; he is too a former inmate of Auschwitz. When questioned in court on the opinion he expressed about the Pope, he answered that it rested on irrefutable documentary evidence.

The Hungarian episode and the brief account I have given of other happenings suggest what appears a reasonably grounded interpretation. Pius XII had a long record of frustration in his attempts to influence German governments, ever since his first venture with Benedict XV's Peace Note in 1917. In the matter of the Jews he was conscious of an added block, Hitler's fanaticism and vindictiveness. A public humiliation from the Pope would lead to reprisals on Jews certainly, almost certainly on German Catholics. It would also mean the end of the relief work which Pius was operating on such a vast scale. We know that he had on one occasion a withering indictment of the Nazis ready; at the last moment, after a brief recollection in prayer, he cancelled it.

The reader need not think that this motive attributed to the Pope is mere benign interpretation made by those loyal to his memory. He expressed the view fully and explicitly in his 1943 letter to Cardinal Preysing and in the address to the College of Cardinals in June that year. It was the most terrible year of his life, with Italy cut in pieces, Rome in danger of destruction and overrun by a multitude of refugees whom he had to feed, the city honeycombed by the Gestapo and over all the threat which even German soldiers and diplomats dreaded – Hitler's idea of arresting the Pope. From a careful survey of the evidence I am convinced that Pius XII met every demand fully; and with the roof ready to fall in on him, this formidable man gave the world *Mystici Corporis* and *Divino Afflante Spiritu*.

One could add considerably to the testimony on Hitler's obstinacy, especially about anti-Jewish measures. At Nuremberg Von Steengracht, Von Schirach, one of Von Neurath's principal assistants, testified that it was impossible to influence him; you would suffer, even to the point of total extinction, by expressing dissent.

I do not consider here the opinion that Pius XII wished to spare the Nazis so as to have a bulwark against the Bolsheviks, whom he is said to have considered a greater menace. He was not that blind or naive; on the war between the two tyrannies he expressed his opinion in his Encyclical to the Russians.

Another hypothesis has been based on the successful denunciation of the euthanasia programme. This policy was not rooted in Hitler's personality and philosophy; it involved German lives; it would be interminable; it could not be accomplished secretly; it would openly compromise the medical profession; and it would affect military morale as the war-wounded would be possible victims. There does not appear to be a valid parallel.

Rome itself demands one final word. Most people interested in the controversy about Pius XII have read Von Weizsaecker's telegrams sent to Berlin in October 1943; they were despatched after Bishop Hudal's letter had been relayed from the embassy at the Quirinal to the foreign office. The Ambassador to the Holy See spoke of the pressure that was being put on the Pope, now that Jews were being rounded up under the Vatican windows but said that Pius XII 'had not let himself be drawn into any demonstrative censure of the deportation of Jews from Rome . . . he has done everything he could in this delicate matter not to strain relations with the German government and German circles in Rome'.

This looks bad, as readers of Hochhuth and Professor Guenter Lewy know. But only if you take it in complete isolation from Von Weizsaecker's history, character, evidence at Nuremberg and published autobiography. To do which is very bad history and that goes for Hochhuth and Professor Lewy.

Von Weizsaecker had no kinship with the Nazis, who distrusted him. In Rome he was shadowed by a man from Bormann's unit. He did his best to exercise a moderating influence. In this autumn of 1943 he had a powerful reason for doing so. Von Rahn Kesselring the area commander and he himself feared Hitler's coup against the Pope. They and every responsible German in Rome thought such a thing would be lunacy, that its effect on German prestige would be catastrophic. The Ambassador wanted therefore to give Hitler a favourable idea of Pius.

Another thing that determined his messages was his abhorrence of anti-semitism. Many of the Nazis found after the war that they had this sentiment. One is moved to give credence to this man because of Von Kessel's supporting testimony and because of the impressive group of internationally known diplomats and statesmen who offered to speak on his behalf at his trial. They included a member of the Vatican Secretariat of State, the Protestant bishop of Oslo and M. Etter, a former president of Switzerland. The sentence on him by the court was much criticised.

Von Kessel said at Nuremberg that Von Weizsaecker had sent him to warn the Jews in Rome before the roundup. Both of them and everyone in the embassy believed that at this stage not one Jewish life would be saved by a public protest. I think one can accept Fr Robert Graham's⁷ interpretation that Von Weizsaecker's telegrams

⁷Assistant editor of *America*, a specialist in these matters.

were part of a manoeuvre. He wished to give the Jews time to take the refuge that Catholic houses, on the Pope's orders, were offering them. In fact seven-eighths were saved. But let the German himself have the last word:

'It was well known – everybody knew it – that the Jewish question was a sore point as far as Hitler was concerned. To speak of interventions and admonitions and requests submitted from abroad, requests for moderation of the course taken – the results of these, almost in all cases, caused the measures to be made more aggravating, and more serious even, in effect. And I know that the two institutions – the most prominent humanitarian institutions in the world, if I may so call them, that is, the Roman Curia and the International Committee of the Red Cross, for that very reason waived general protest to be raised against the anti-Jewish measures. It is a matter of course and everybody knows it, that these two agencies of world significance and reputation and world-wide influence would have undertaken any possible step that they considered feasible and useful to help the Jews.'⁸

⁸I have not mentioned Pius XII's personal protest to Ribbentrop in the Vatican in March, 1940, because of the complexity of the evidence. The Pope's words to the College of Cardinals and to Cardinal Preysing in 1943 have been widely printed. In 1942 Tittmann reported to Washington that the Holy See was convinced 'that a forthright denunciation of Nazi atrocities, at least in so far as Poland is concerned, would only result in the violent deaths of many more people'. He also reported in that year that a statement handed him by Cardinal Maglione, Secretary of State, 'adds *it is well known* that the Holy See is taking advantage of every opportunity offered in order to mitigate the suffering of non-Aryans' (my italics). Tittmann did not question this factual assertion, though he had been pressing for an open denunciation.