**Soviet Spies and Propaganda**

The debate continues whether Pius XII did not do enough to oppose Nazism or to help Jews during the Holocaust. As more records are revealed and found, the debate will continue, though significant evidence of Vatican assistance for Jews and others persecuted by the Nazis continues to be found. The question will remain whether he had done enough.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Four years after the end of the Fascist and Nazi terror in February 1949, Pius issued a loud remonstrance of the Communist persecution of Cardinal Josef Mindszenty in Hungary. He declared that the Church must loudly condemn tyranny. If he believed he had earlier been too silent or inactive, would he issue the invectives below? Would he not be worried people would call the Church spineless hypocrites for staying too silent during the Holocaust? Apparently, he did not and there were no accusations against him in 1949.

From the balcony of the Papal apartment, Pius publicly asked:

*Do you want a Church that remain silent when she should speak; that diminishes the law of God where she is called to proclaim it loudly, wanting to a accommodate it to the will of man? Do you want a Church that departs from the unshakeable foundations upon which Christ founded her, taking the easy way of adapting herself to the opinion of the day; a Church that is a prey to current trends, a Church that does not condemn the suppression of conscience and does not stand up for the just liberty of the people; a Church that locks herself up within the four walls of her temple in unseemly sycophancy, forgetting the divine mission received from Christ: “ Go out to the crossroads and preach to the people?” Believed sons and daughters! Spiritual heirs of numerous confessors and martyrs! Is this the Church you venerate and love? Would you recognize in such a Church the features of your Mother? Would you be able to imagine a Successor of St. Peter summitting to such demands?[[2]](#footnote-2)*

Pius was a clear threat to Communist domination in eastern Europe and to any further expansion in central or western Europe. It is no wonder that the Soviets looked at his death in 1958 as an opportunity to discredit the Pope’s moral credibility.

Prior to his death Pius was routinely praised for his efforts to save Jewish lives, especially in Italy. That all changed five years after his death, though. German author and playwright, Rolf Hochhuth, produced a drama titled *The Deputy: A Christian Tragedy*, which alleges Pope Pius XII's indifference to Hitler's extermination of the Jews.[[3]](#footnote-3) Serious scholars have long suspected that the origins of that campaign against Pius and the Church lie in the Soviet intelligence service, the KGB’s obsession to discredit the Church. The Church had provided obstacles and opposition to total Communist domination in many Soviet-occupied countries.

Romanian Communist spy Lt. General Ion Mihai Pacepa reported that the play was part of a KGB campaign to discredit Pius XII. According to Pacepa, the Soviets had suffered public relations injuries and a backlash, due to their persecution of Catholics in eastern European nations. Soviet oppression of Catholics and the Church had picked up where the Nazis had left off after the war. He was assigned to have Romanian agents masquerade as priests to research the Vatican archives, looking for any evidence to discredit Pius. They believed, as the later head of the KGB Yuri Andropov taught, “Dead men cannot defend themselves.” Pacepa writes:

*In February 1960, Nikita Khrushchev approved a super-secret plan for destroying the Vatican’s moral authority in Western Europe. . .. Eugenio Pacelli, by then Pope Pius XII,was selected as the KGB’s main target, its incarnation of evil, because he had departed this world in 1958. The code name for this operation against Pope Pius XII was“Seat-12.”[[4]](#footnote-4)*

Students can investigate Pacepa’s reports of what he and the Romanian and Soviet Communists did to discredit Pius’ work in Italy and Europe. Major General Oleg Kalugin, the Head of the KGB in the U.S. during the 1980s, confirmed the Soviet plan and Pacepa’s allegation in an interview with Kevin T. Brady, then President of the American Institute for History Education.[[5]](#footnote-5)

The Holocaust is still an open wound on humanity. There are abundant examples of sadistic and gratuitous pain inflicted on Jewish men, women, and children, as well as other victims. It is as if evil transformed and possessed nations and individuals. Likewise, when we examine Italy during this time, we will also see examples of abject evil. Nevertheless, we see many more examples of sacrifice and heroism coming from countless Italian citizens as they risked life and limb to protect their Jewish neighbors. Most of those protectors came from members of the Catholic hierarchy, clergy, and religious orders of brothers and sisters. Examiners must then ask whether this refuge would have been possible without knowledge, permission, and actual direction from the Vatican, especially in Italy. Investigators must also honestly ask whether the Vatican had done enough. Could they have effectively done more with louder more vociferous condemnations? Or could regular, stentorian condemnations have led to greater pain for the Jewish people, the destruction of the Church institutions in Nazi-held lands, along with the deaths of many, many more Catholic people and clergy on the ground in those nations. Why was the Jewish experience so different in Italy than in nearly all other nations? That is a question that requires much more examination.

Many times, out of pain and suffering comes good. After years of torture and death, from the smoldering ashes of the Holocaust came the rebirth of a Jewish homeland, after nearly 1,900 years. Additionally, in reaction to the newsreels and *Life* magazine photos of the Holocaust, Americans during the post-World War II years, black and white, began to rethink the festering condition of race relations in the U.S. They were being forced to see the ultimate result of vile racism at its extreme. Many attribute the shock of the Holocaust to not only producing the State of Israel, but also reviving the Civil Rights Movement in the U.S. It had been struggling in vain since the end of Reconstruction. As students participate in the lessons, through research and analysis, they will produce their own conclusions.

As Victor Frankl explains, we are all responsible for our own conclusions, attitudes, and actions:

*We who lived in concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number, but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms – to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way.*

― Viktor E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*

1. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. M. Pascalina Lehnert, translator: Susan Johnson, *His Humble Servant: Sister M. Pascalina Lehnert’s Memoirs of Her Years of Service to Eugenio Pacelli, Pope Pius XII*, South Bend, IN: St. Augustine’s Press, 2014. <https://www.amazon.com/His-Humble-Servant-Pascalina-Lehnerts/dp/1587313677> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Corinna da Fonseca-Wollheim, “Rolf Hochhuth, Who Challenged a Pope’s Wartime Silence, Dies at 89,” *The New York Times*, May 20, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/20/theater/rolf-hochhuth-dead.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ion Mihai Pacepa, “Moscow’s Assault on the Vatican,” *National Review,* January 25, 2007.

   <https://www.nationalreview.com/2007/01/moscows-assault-vatican-ion-mihai-pacepa/> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Kevin T. Brady, Interview with KGB Major General Oleg Kalugin, Head of KGB political operations in the United States at Spy Museum, October 2010. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)