

⁵ See Sheldon B. Liss, *Marxist Thought in Latin America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); Barry Carr and Steve Ellner, eds., *The Latin American Left: From the Fall of Allende to Perestroika* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993); or for a cynical view, Jorge G. Castañeda, *Utopia Unarmed: The Latin American Left after the Cold War* (N.Y.: Vintage Books, 1994).

Michael Phayer, *The Catholic Church and the Holocaust, 1930-1965* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000).

Don't be fooled by what is absent from the prosaic title. With *The Catholic Church and the Holocaust, 1930-1965*, Michael Phayer has written the best Pius XII book to appear in the recently resurgent controversy. By virtue of its attention-grabbing title, John Cornwell's *Hitler's Pope* (1999) is the best known of the lot.¹ But Phayer, rejecting Cornwell's thesis that anti-Semitism is the best explanation for Pius XII's behavior during the Holocaust, undertakes a less sensational and more professional assessment.²

One must understand Cornwell's conclusion as part of a personal, journalistic quest to make sense of the Church's wartime record. Cornwell started to write his book in order to refute a group of young Catholics critical of Pius XII, who, one evening, had argued with him that, "the Church had sided with all the worst right-wing elements in the history of the 20th century."³ To his "moral shock," however, Cornwell discovered that, with regard to anti-Semitism, Pius XII was, on balance, part of the problem rather than part of any cure, either spiritual or political. Thus bewildered, Cornwell then drew hasty conclusions about Pius XII's personal motives.

Rather than inviting the reader to pass judgment on the anti-Semitism of one important man, and thus run the risk of scapegoating, Phayer provides the reader with evidence leading to more productive conclusions. They are more productive in that they address the collective responsibility of an institution, which still lives, and not the guilt of one man, who is now dead. Consequently, Phayer's book is the best one-volume introduction to the Holocaust memory that the Church, as an institution, must cultivate, at least if it is to face the future honestly.

Instead of focusing his narrative on the personality of the wartime Pope, Phayer tackles the question of Catholic anti-Semitism in a measured historical context: before, during, and after the Holocaust. Only four out of eleven chapters analyze events during the Holocaust: three analyze before, and four after. With the sweep of this non-biographical scope, Phayer is able to assess Pius XII more soundly than Cornwell. Paradoxically, by not making Pius XII the pri-

mary focus, Phayer is able to shed even more light on Pius XII's career than if he had. By chronicling Catholic resistance to anti-Semitism from 1930 to 1965, Phayer is able to make an effective contrast between Pius XII and the vanguard of that resistance.

More often than not, Pius XII was an obstacle to the resistance. In the words of Cardinal Tisserant, the Vatican chose instead to follow "a policy of selfish convenience."⁴ Tisserant wrote these words in 1940, but, as Phayer shows, they also characterized subsequent Vatican policy. The misplaced priorities of the Vatican are painfully clear in retrospect, but Pius XII even ignored the protests of those who saw his misplaced priorities in advance. "Our superiors do not want to understand the real nature of this conflict," wrote Tisserant to Cardinal Suhard.⁵

France's postwar ambassador to the Vatican, philosopher Jacques Maritain, had warned presciently about anti-Semitism before the war.⁶ Yet Pius XII still ignored Maritain's post-Holocaust warnings about postwar anti-Semitism (177-82). Pius XII chose rather to combat Communism, not postwar anti-Semitism. Accordingly, he made anti-Communism the bedrock of Church spirituality and discipline. The Vatican viewed with suspicion philo-Semitic and pro-Israel Christians like Gertrud Luckner and it investigated those with her who were engaged in advancing post-Holocaust dialogue with Jews (176-77).

In order that they might live to fight Communism another day, the Vatican sought clemency for convicted war criminals and assisted them in postwar escape (162-75). In spite of all this, Pius XII's apologists today still have the nerve to dismiss any observation of his papacy's historical favour for Nazis over Communists as "standard Communist propaganda" (76-77).

Pius XII may not have been anti-Semitic, but he certainly had greater priorities than resistance to anti-Semitism. The welfare of the Catholic Church was his greatest priority, and helping Jews in need figured in his plans only when he judged it would not place his greater aims in jeopardy. For example, he saw Rome as the symbol of universal Catholicism, and hence the fate of Rome's Jews was subordinate to his fears over whether the Vatican would be bombed during wartime (61-64; 97-104).

Jews were, in effect, pawns to be sacrificed on Pius XII's diplomatic chessboard, however regrettable and sorrowful this was to him. Although the papacy was restricted in terms of worldly power, Pius XII saw himself as a chessboard king, albeit similarly constrained. His vanity was most pronounced in the way he cultivated his stance as a Vicar of Christ, the role of a divine peacemaker unsoiled by worldly affairs. In order that he might be the postwar broker of peace, and thereby accrue honour and prestige for him and the Church, he pursued a diplomatic policy of neutrality that kept him from explicitly condemning particular acts of genocide (54-61). In reality he was far from neutral. At all

times he preferred a strong Germany, to fight Communism, and accordingly he obsessively micromanaged Vatican relations with Germany, in order to preserve his desired queen on the chessboard. To keep this queen, he sacrificed the pawns, and Phayer documents how Pius XII consistently subordinated the exercise of moral leadership to diplomatic considerations.

The bishops on Pius XII's chessboard, in their own way, also failed in their leadership. Phayer devotes an entire chapter to survey the higher clergy geographically across Europe. Absent Pius XII's lead, Phayer shows how they were reluctant to sacrifice themselves by resistance. Many would actually fear making the Pope look bad by doing so. Some acted admirably, but most did not. Only one European bishop lost his life on account of hiding Jews (109).

The bishops, moreover, were not encouraged in resistance by the Vatican, which kept atrocities under a veil of silence. Information about acts of genocide, which could mobilize sentiment and inspire resistance, when it was given by any one bishop or informant to the Vatican, was not shared by the Vatican with other bishops. The Vatican, despite having the centralized resources to gather and disseminate information, failed to leverage what institutional advantages its global bureaucracy had.⁷

Even before the Holocaust, as Phayer documents in two chapters, the Vatican abdicated its moral authority by failing to condemn genocide in Poland in 1939 and Croatia in 1941. It opted instead to pursue diplomatic strategies aiming to shore up the political power of Catholicism in Europe. During the Holocaust, some lower clergy and laypeople spoke out against Nazism and suffered for it. As Phayer shows, they were not adequately encouraged in their rescue efforts by the hierarchy, and so widespread resistance failed to occur. Worse, disdain for Jews was not adequately admonished by the hierarchy, and, in the current political climate, this was tantamount to blowing in the same direction as the Nazi wind.

The future of Catholicism, however, lay with the rescuers and dissidents, who, in co-operation with Jews, paved the way for the eventual renunciation of Church anti-Semitism at Vatican II. Phayer's book has the virtue of being able to draw upon his own previous research into many women rescuers and to pay homage to them: Gertrud Luckner, who, while en route to Rabbi Leo Baeck with relief money, was arrested and sent to Ravensbrück, but survived and went on to advance Christian-Jewish relations; French underground member Germaine Bocquet, who hid Jules Isaac while he wrote *Jesus and Israel*; convent rescuers Matylda Getter and Margit Slachta; diocesan rescuer Margareta Sommer; Zofia Kossak-Szczucka of rescue organization Zegota; and Germaine Ribièrè of Amitié Chrétienne.

Apologists for Pius XII consistently arrogate to him the rescue efforts of such Catholics, and they try to claim that Pius XII provided the leadership for

such efforts. Phayer does not engage these polemicists but, much more effectively, notes instead, event by event, the lack of documentation of such leadership. He also notes, by documenting the Vatican's other institutional priorities, the obstacles erected by the Vatican for resistance to anti-Semitism.

The most effective rejoinder to the right-wing polemicists, however, ought to be based upon the evidence that Phayer assembles regarding the Vatican's postwar record. It is a sorry record that sheds light on the hidden motives of the preceding years. The Pius XII apologists understandably pass over it in silence. If the apologists want the moral capital of any Catholic resistance to anti-Semitism to accrue to the papacy, simply because Pius XII did on occasion effect the rescue of some Jews, it is only fair to apply such logic consistently. The infamy of Catholics' sins of omission and commission with regard to anti-Semitism ought also to accrue to Pius XII, since he too subordinated a moral response to anti-Semitism to preoccupation with other concerns. The magnitude of this mutual failure renders irrelevant the question of who was imitating whom.

As Phayer documents, Catholic inaction outweighed Catholic action from 1930-1965. Nevertheless, as Vatican II heralded, the future would still belong to the activists.

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¹ John Cornwell, *Hitler's Pope: The Secret History of Pius XII* (New York, 1999).

² *Ibid.*, 295-297; cf. Phayer, *The Catholic Church and the Holocaust*, xii-xiii. The index to Phayer's book is deficient with regard to Cornwell; the index cites only Phayer's disagreements with Cornwell in Phayer's Introduction, but neglects to include references to his disagreements at more crucial points in the text; cf. e.g. Phayer, 76.

³ Deal Hudson, "Crisis Interview With John Cornwell," *Crisis* (Vol. 20, No. 3), March 2002. Available on-line at <http://crisismagazine.com/march2002/feature2.htm>

⁴ Phayer, 175 and 264 n.74. Phayer quotes from Guenter Lewy, *The Catholic Church and Nazi Germany* (New York, 2000 [1964]), 307.

⁵ Lewy, 306-307. The Germans confiscated this 1940 letter from Suhard's residence; cf. Lewy, 401 n.156.

⁶ Cf. Jacques Maritain, *Antisemitism* (London, 1939).

⁷ Phayer, 76-77.