



## Pope's Remarks Recall the Nazi War on Christ

Pope Benedict XVI, who like other teenagers in Nazi Germany, was forced to join the Hitler Youth, recently recalled solemnly the evils of Nazism. Although it was once fashionable to try to present Christianity as some sort of precursor to Nazi anti-Semitism, and in particular to attack the Catholic Church as an accomplice of the Nazis, honest history tells a very different story. Nazi persecution of all serious Christians was unrelenting and severe.



As Michael Power writes in his 1939 book, *Religion in the Reich*, in June of 1933 in Munich at a meeting of the Catholic Workers Union, the *Sturmabteilung* (SA — stormtroopers) attacked and “Priests accompanying them were beaten with steel and rubber truncheons.”

Albert Parry notes in his 1941 book, *Riddle of the Reich*, that not a single pastoral letter had been permitted by the Nazi government to be read from the pulpit for the three preceding years, and that this ban included even the Pope's encyclicals. By 1942, the book *The Persecution of the Catholic Church in the Third Reich* reported: “The war which National Socialism is waging against the Catholic Church is total war.”

The year before, journalist Rom Landau wrote: “There was inhuman persecution of the Jews, Catholics, and Lutherans.” Edmond Vermeil notes in his book: “Persecution of the Catholics redoubled soon after Hitler came to power.” Louis Budenz, an American Communist who had been editor of the *Daily Worker* and then after converting to the Christian faith abandoned his secular “religion,” reported in the 1940s that: “Hitler used German Trotskyites as guards and encouraged them to persecute Catholics of the resistance movement.” The so-called conflict between the National Socialists and the Marxist Socialists was, in fact, a clever lie.

The Catholic Church, for example, has often been attacked as doing too little to help the Jews during the Holocaust. Yet on July 19, 1933, the Catholic periodical *America* published a strong article condemning Nazi persecution of the Jews. Dark and Essex, in their 1930s book, *The War on God*, stated that almost as soon as the Concordant with German was signed: “The Church, too, courageously denounced the brutal and organized anti-Semitism.”

Pope Pius XI, even as an Apostolic Visitor to Poland after the First World War ended, was perceived as a compassionate friend of the Jews: “the chief rabbis who came, like the poorest of the Jewish flock, to beg his prayers and with whom he talked in Hebrew — all this taught him...what it meant to be Pope.”

Even before that, the Catholic Church during the first year of Nazi power proclaimed: “The assertion of the principle of race and blood, amongst members of the same state, leads to injustices which outrage the Christian conscience.” Bernard Berenson, writing *Rumor and Reflection* in 1944 about events in



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1936, wrote of Hitler: "He felt, too, that what stood most intransigently between him [Hitler] and the Vatican was the racial question, the exclusion of Jews from humanity and humane consideration and their treatment as inferior animals to be destroyed." Stephen H. Roberts observed in his 1937 book, *The House That Hitler Built*, that the hostility between Nazism and churches began as soon as the Nazis came to power, and that it quickly became impossible to be a good Catholic and a good Nazi.

A sensible person must wonder what, exactly, the Catholic Church could have done. Its priests were being put in concentration camps; its nuns were being raped; its churches were being desecrated; its lands and properties were being seized; its teachings were being openly mocked. Even so, the work of Pope Pius XII was so moving that the Chief Rabbi of Rome, the oldest continuously operating synagogue in the world, converted to Christianity after the Holocaust in gratitude for the work of the Catholic Church in protecting Jews. Bernard Berenson [notes](#) how the Catholic Church rescued him and his family from Nazi persecution: "There was danger that the Germans on their side would treat me not only as an American but as enemy number one, the enemy for whom and with whom there were no possible pacts, namely, a Jew. So a couple of days later, the Marchese Fillip Serlupi, Minister to the Holy See of the Republic of San Marino and enjoying the privilege due to an active diplomat, came and brought me and Nicky here, where I am writing now."

The Pope not only opposed the Nazis, who were, after all, brutal Germans, but his 1938 diary reveals that he also opposed Mussolini, particularly after Mussolini adopted anti-Semitic laws. Before the Second World War began, the Pope wrote: "Anti-Semitism is not compatible with the sublime thought and reality which is expressed in this text. That is a movement in which we Christians can have no part." Mussolini prohibited Italian newspapers from publishing articles from the Vatican's official newspaper, *L'Osservatore Romano*. Also in 1938, before the war began or the Holocaust began, the Nazi newspaper, *Der Angriff*, denounced Cardinal Pacelli (soon to be Pope Pius XII) by saying: "For the future we are going to speak of the Pope as the Jew-Pope. For that you can blame Pacelli."

Before he was Pope, Pius XII was specifically attacked by Nazis as being too friendly to Jews.

In neighboring Belgium, the Catholic church forbade giving communion to Nazis or pro-Nazis, including even the Rexists, who presumably were pro-Catholic and "...when the Germans strove to impose their un-Christian, anti-Semitic laws by ordering all Jews in Antwerp to wear the six-pointed Star of David, not only Jews obeyed, but within a few hours every Belgian in the city was wearing the star."

The same was true in France. Archbishop Gerlier, who was the Primate of France, Mgr. Saliege, the Archbishop of Toulouse, the Bishop of Montauban, along with the Protestant leaders of France "...not only protested with the greatest vehemence this outrage from Christian teaching [arrest and deportation of Jews in France], but they acted in defence of the Jews torn from their homes and separated from their families. Cardinal Gerlier, in his letters, called upon Catholics to refuse to surrender to the authorities the children of Jews ... He himself is said to have protected children in this way ... for which some, including a number of Jesuits, were arrested ... The resolution of the Bishops and priests remained unshaken. Priests and nuns even donned the yellow Star of David to shame the persecutors, while Mgr. Chaptel, auxiliary of the Bishop of Paris, went wearing the star behind the cross-bearer and torches to report the fact that he had Jewish blood in him."

What Catholics in Europe did was no different than what brave Protestants were doing as well. Hugh Martin notes in his 1943 book, *Christian Counter-Attack*: "Beyond all question the Nazis are waging war upon the Christian faith and Christian values ... While in Germany the political parties, the law, the universities, the Press, the trade unions capitulated, the first check to a triumphant onward march of



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Nazism was given by a small results body of Christian men.” It is not just that Christians — all Christians except the few “German Christians” who rejected the Old Testament and the Gospels and proclaimed that Christ was not a Jew — opposed the horror of Hitler. What Pope Benedict spoke of in his recent remarks is simply his memories of a time in which the real battle — atheist statists against people of faith — was clear, absolute, and terrible.

*Photo: Pope Benedict XVI meets the President of the German Bundestag Norbert Lammert during a private audience at the Vatican on May 30, 2011: AP Images*



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