CATHOLICISM IN CRISIS: SATAN’S ASSAULT ON THE CHURCH

Session #2: An Embattled Church in a Hostile World

A. The Aftermath of World War I

More people were murdered during the 20th century than any other in history, with the two primary targets being Jews and Catholics; Our Lady’s predictions at Fatima that the Church would have much to suffer were tragically fulfilled. This suffering was unnecessary, if world leaders had listened to the wisdom of the Church during and after World War I, and if the leaders of the Church themselves had consecrated Russia to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, as the Mother of God had requested, modern history would have been radically different.

The Treaty of Versailles placed all the guilt for World War I upon Germany and required huge reparations of that nation—but without erasing Germany’s power to seek revenge in the future. Due to the noble but naïve insistence of President Woodrow Wilson, the Treaty also dismembered the Austrian-Hungarian Empire (ruled for hundreds of years by the Catholic Hapsburgs), replacing it with a number of small nations too weak to protect the rights of minorities or later defend themselves against Nazism and Communism. Much ethnic violence resulted (as with the Serbs and Croats in the new country of Yugoslavia). In Russia, following the Revolution of 1917, the Communists began a ruthless persecution of religion—primarily of the Orthodox Church, but also of Catholicism. By 1925, 200,000 Catholics in had Russia simply disappeared, and within another ten years, 3,500 Catholic churches and chapels had been destroyed. Pope Benedict XV and his successors were quick to recognize the evils and dangers of Communism, and unwavering in their opposition to it—but they failed to take the single most important step in overcoming it: consecrating the nation of Russia to Mary’s Immaculate Heart.

B. Successes and Failures

Pius XI, elected in 1922, sought to engage the Church with the world in a number of ways: by establishing Vatican Radio, by promoting missionary work around the world, and by signing the Lateran Treaty with Fascist Italy (in which the Church accepted the loss of the Papal States to Italy, with Italy recognizing Vatican City as an independent nation). The Church forced Mussolini’s government to respect her rights, but was less successful in defending Catholics from persecutions that occurred in Mexico, Spain, and especially Germany. A concordat (diplomatic agreement) was signed with Nazi Germany in 1934, but the Nazis began violating it soon afterwards. In response, the Church vigorously attacked the worldview and actions of the Nazis, most especially in Pius XI’s 1937 encyclical Mit Brennender Sorge (“With Burning Anxiety,”) which was smuggled into Germany and read from every Catholic pulpit, thereby infuriating Hitler and his government.

In 1925 Pope Pius instituted the Feast of Christ the King in response to an increasingly secular, anti-religious world, and he also canonized a number of saints (including Thomas More, John Fisher, John Bosco, and Therese of Lisieux) as a source of inspiration to Catholics trying to practice their faith under difficult circumstances. Pius also issued several important encyclicals, including Quadragesimo Anno (“After Forty Years”), on the anniversary of Leo XIII’s Rerum Novarum, and Casti Connubii (“Of Pure Marriage”), which—in response to an Anglican statement of the previous year—reaffirmed the traditional teaching (accepted by all Christian churches until 1930) that every act of marital intercourse must be open to the possibility of new human life being conceived.
C. Pius XII and World War II

Sister Lucia had been told by Our Lady that when she saw the night sky "illuminated by an unknown light," that would be the sign that God was allowing a new and more terrible war to break out as punishment for humanity's sins. This sign occurred on the night of January 24 – 25, 1938, when an aurora borealis gave the skies over Europe an eerie reddish glow. When Pius XI died early in 1939, the cardinals who gathered in Rome took only one day to elect his secretary of state, Cardinal Eugenio Pacelli, as the new pope. Pius XII had served as papal nuncio (ambassador) in Germany from 1917 – 1929; while known for his lifelong opposition to Communism, he also, during that twelve-year period, publicly denounced Nazism over forty times.

The new pope pleaded in vain for peace. The month after Germany's September 1939 invasion of Poland, Pius issued his first encyclical: *Summi Pontificatus* ("Of the Supreme Pontificate"), which denounced aggressive war (delighting the British and angering the Germans). In 1940 it was Vatican Radio which first announced to the world the terrible sufferings of the Jews in Nazi-occupied Poland, and the pope's 1941 and 1942 Christmas messages, broadcast over Vatican Radio, protested the actions of the Nazis and expressed support for their victims. When the Germans occupied Rome in 1943, they threatened reprisals against the Jewish community there unless they paid a ransom of 50 kilograms of gold in just 24 hours; Pius had gold chalices in the Vatican to be melted down for this purpose. The pope also ordered all the Catholic institutions in the city to hide Jewish refugees, and had the Vatican issue safe-conduct passes and even fake baptismal certificates. Due to these and other (mainly behind-the-scenes) efforts, Heinrich Himmler, one of the Nazi leaders, asserted, "We should not forget that in the long run, the pope in Rome is a greater enemy of National Socialism [Nazism] than Churchill or Roosevelt." Following the war, Jewish organizations and individuals were lavish in their praise and expressions of gratitude to the pope for his efforts; one Jewish historian later credited him with saving as many as 860,000 Jewish lives.

Beginning in the 1960s, many revisionist historians accused Pius XII of alleged indifference to the fate of the Jews—but such criticism is baseless; the pope knew that any public criticism of Hitler would only increase his persecution of Judaism, so he made quiet and effective efforts to save as many of them as possible. According to H. W. Crocker III, in *Triumph: The Power and the Glory of the Catholic Church*, "If the accusations against Pius XII are despicable, they are also ludicrous coming from liberals or secularists, who for hundreds of years pressed for the destruction of the Catholic Church as a temporal power . . . and the stripping of all conceivable authority from the institution. It is, however, perhaps a backhanded compliment to the papacy and the Catholic Church that no one asks why [other churches] did not do more to help the Jews. In such enormous world crises, there really is only one Christian voice and one Christian institution that matters; the rest—whatever great and heroic individual efforts are made—are so fractured, politically unimportant, or compromised as to be irrelevant" (p. 404).

Pius' encyclicals laid the groundwork for the reforms of Vatican II, including *Mystici Corporis* ("Of the Mystical Body of Christ"), *Divino Afflante Spiritu* ("Inspired by the Divine Spirit"), and *Mediator Dei* ("Mediator of God"). He also updated the Holy Week liturgies, shorted the fast before receiving Holy Communion, and acknowledged the greater diversity in Catholicism by creating many new cardinals, most of whom were non-Italians. Pius' personal devotion to Mary led him, in 1950, to define the dogma of her Assumption (the teaching that she was taken up to heaven in both her soul and body). Moreover, the pope's consecration of the entire world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary on October 31, 1942—at the height of World War II—while not the consecration of Russia that Our Lady had specifically asked for, did shorten the length of the war by at least a year.
KEY PAPAL ENCYCICALS (A Partial Listing)

(taken in part from Lives of the Popes, by Richard P. McBrien)

Leo XIII (1878 – 1903) - 5 of his 84 encyclicals listed here:

Aeterni Patris ("Of the Eternal Father") – on the restoration of Christian philosophy, especially that of St. Thomas Aquinas (August 4, 1879).

Libertas Praestantissimum ("Freedom") – on the Church as the custodian of freedom, properly understood (June 20, 1888).

Catholicæ Ecclesiæ ("Catholic Churches") – against slavery in the missions (November 20, 1890).

Rerum Novarum ("Of New Things") – a strong defense of private property (against socialism), along with an emphasis on the social responsibilities which accompany private property (against laissez-faire capitalism)—namely, the obligation to pay workers a just wage and to honor their rights, especially that of forming trade unions (May 15, 1891).

Providentissimus Deus ("Most Provident God") – guidelines for the scientific study of Sacred Scripture (November 18, 1893).

St. Pius X (1903 – 1914) - 3 of his 16 encyclicals listed here:

E Supremi ("From the Highest") – on the restoration of all things in Christ (October 4, 1903).

Pascendi Dominici Gregis ("Feeding the Lord’s Flock") – the condemnation of Modernism as "the synthesis of all heresies," along with approval of the teaching and study of Scholasticism, and a defense of the censorship of writings (September 8, 1907).

Benedict XV (1914 – 1922) – 2 of his 12 encyclicals listed here:

Ad Beatissimi Apostolorum ("At the Threshold of the Most Blessed Apostles") – a call for an end to the division between traditional and progressive Catholics (begun during the pontificate of Pius X), and an insistence that the noun "Catholic" needs no qualification by "fresh epithets" (November 1, 1914).

Pacem, Dei Munus Pulcherrimum ("Peace, the Most Beautiful Work of God") – an appeal for international reconciliation after World War I (May 23, 1920).

Pius XI (1922 – 1939) – 7 of his 30 encyclicals listed here:

Quas Primas ("Those First Things") – the establishment of the feast of Christ the King to counteract atheism and secularism (December 11, 1925).

Mortalium Annos ("The Souls of Mortals") – a negative assessment of the newly-forming ecumenical movement, with Catholics forbidden to participate in ecumenical conferences (January 6, 1928).

Casti Connubii ("Of Pure Marriage") – a condemnation of contraception (in response to the Anglican Lambeth Conference of 1930, which allowed it in limited cases), and a reaffirmation of the doctrine that marriage must be chaste, monogamous, and faithful—along with a recognition that a secondary purpose of marriage (after procreation) is the mutual help of the spouses (December 31, 1930).

Quadrageisimo Anno ("After Forty Years") – a commemoration of the 40th anniversary of Leo XIII’s Rerum Novarum. The encyclical criticized both the excessive individualism of capitalism and the deadening collectivism of socialism, and introduced the principal of subsidiarity, which says nothing should be done by a higher agency (i.e., government) that can be done equally as well, if not better, by a lower agency (May 15, 1931).

Non Abbiamo Bisogno (Italian, "We Have No Need") – a condemnation of Italian fascism and a promotion of Catholic Action (a lay movement cooperating with the hierarchy) in Italy (June 29, 1931).

Mit Brennender Sorge (German, "With Searing Anxiety") – a condemnation of Nazism as inherently racist and anti-Christian (March 14, 1937).

Divini Redemptoris ("Of the Divine Redeemer") – a condemnation of Communism as atheistic (March 19, 1937).
Piú XII (1939–1958) – 5 of his 40 encyclicals listed here:

*Summi Pontificatus* ("Of the Supreme Pontificate") – a call for peace, and a Christian vision of a properly-ordered society (October 20, 1939).

*Mystici Corporis Christi* ("Of the Mystical Body of Christ") – an affirmation that the One True Church has both a hierarchical structure and a charismatic, or interior, reality, and that membership in this Church requires baptism, profession of the True Faith, and union with the pope (June 29, 1943).

*Divino Afflante Spiritu* ("Inspired by the Divine Spirit") – a promotion of the historical-critical method of Scripture study by Catholic scholars (September 30, 1943).


*Humani Generis* ("Of the Human Race") – a criticism of various errors in science and philosophy, and a support of the teachings of St. Thomas Aquinas, or Thomism (August 12, 1950).

Bl. John XXIII (1958–1963) – 3 of his 8 encyclicals listed here:

*Ad Petri Cathedral* ("To the Chair of Peter") – a recognition of non-Catholics as "separated brethren" (June 29, 1959).

*Mater et Magistra* ("Mother and Teacher") – an update on Catholic social teaching (on the 70th anniversary of Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum*), which balanced the principle of subsidiarity with that of socialization—namely, a recognition of "the growing interdependence of citizens in society" requiring higher agencies (i.e., government) to meet needs that would otherwise remain unmet (May 15, 1961).

*Pacem in Terris* ("Peace on Earth") – an insistence that the recognition of human rights and responsibilities is the foundation of world peace (April 11, 1963).

Paul VI (1963–1978) – 2 of his 7 encyclicals listed here:

*Populorum Progressio* ("On the Progress of Peoples") – an insistence that the goods of the earth are intended for everyone (March 26, 1967).

*Humanae Vitae* ("Of Human Life") – a reaffirmation of the Church’s traditional teaching that every act of marital intercourse must be open to the transmission of life (July 25, 1968).

John Paul II (1978–2005) – 9 of his 14 encyclicals listed here:

*Redemptor Hominis* ("Redeemer of Humanity") – an emphasis on the dignity and worth of every human person, and a condemnation of consumerism and the arms race (March 4, 1979).

*Divini Misericordiae* ("Rich in Mercy") – on the mercy of God (November 30, 1980).

*Laborem Exercens* ("On Doing Work") – an insistence that work is a form of collaboration with God, and that the laborer is more important than capital or private property (September 14, 1981).

*Redemptoris Mater* ("Mother of the Redeemer") – on the role of Mary in the mystery of Christ and her presence in the life of the Church (March 25, 1987).

*Centesimus Annus* ("The Hundredth Year") – a commemoration of Leo XIII’s *Rerum Novarum* and a reaffirmation of the Church’s "preferential option for the poor" (May 1, 1991).


*Evangelium Vitae* ("The Gospel of Life") – a condemnation of contraception, euthanasia, and abortion in language similar to that used in infallible pronouncements, along with a prudent condemnation of capital punishment (March 25, 1999).

*Ut Unum Sint* ("That All May Be One") – an acknowledgement that while the papacy is an essential structure of the Church, its exercise is always subject to criticism and improvement (May 25, 1995).

*Fides et Ratio* ("On Faith and Reason") – on the compatibility of reason and faith (October 1, 1998).

Benedict XVI (2005–) – his first two encyclicals listed here:

*Deus Caritas Est* ("God is Love") – on the nature of God and our relationship with Him (2005).

*Spe Salvi* ("For in This Hope We Were Saved") – on the nature of true Christian hope (2007).
WAS POPE PIUS XII “SILENT” ABOUT THE JEWS?

Several recent books have attempted to argue that during World War II, Pope Pius XII (and by implication, the Catholic Church) knew about the Nazis’ extermination campaign against the Jewish people, and deliberately turned a blind eye, rather than protesting and opposing this terrible evil. Examples of this revisionist history include Constantine’s Sword, by James Carroll; Papal Sin, by Garry Wills; Under His Very Windows, by Susan Zuccotti; and perhaps the most infamous of all, Hitler’s Pope, by John Cornwell. However, these works have been refuted and discredited by unbiased scholarship. For instance, after the 1999 publication of his book, John Cornwell claimed he was a “good Catholic” who had intended to defend Pius XII, but whose “unprecedented access” to secret Vatican archives “shocked” him and forced him to write a very different story than the favorable one he had intended. In fact, this so-called “good Catholic” had written back in 1991 that he was “increasingly convinced that human beings were morally, psychologically, and materially better off without a belief in God.” Moreover, many other scholars have had access to the same archives as Cornwell, and Vatican records show that he consulted these materials for only three weeks (often for very brief periods)—hardly the time necessary for groundbreaking research. Cornwell evidently had a strong anti-Catholic bias entering into his project, causing him to misinterpret evidence and ignore facts inconvenient to his thesis. (Indeed, some have suggested his criticism of Pius XII is actually an indirect attack on the leadership of Pope John Paul II.) According to the New York Review of Books, “The trouble with Cornwell’s book lies in its sensationalism. Pius XII was not ‘Hitler’s Pope’: the two hated each other, as Cornwell himself admits.” A review in Newsweek magazine stated, “Errors of fact and ignorance of context appear on almost every page,” and another review in the magazine First Things declared that Cornwell’s book “is a malign exercise in defamation and character assassination.” Similar charges have been made against the other books cited above.

The “case” against Pope Pius XII can only be made by ignoring some very important, but inconvenient, facts:

1. As Secretary of State for Pius XI, Eugenio Cardinal Pacelli (the future Pius XII) played a key role in formulating and implementing the Vatican’s policy of opposition to Nazi Germany (a policy which became increasingly more outspoken as the true nature of the Nazi regime became apparent). For instance, the 1937 papal encyclical Mit brennender Sorge (With Burning Anxiety), in which Pius XI condemned the new paganism represented by Nazi Germany, was actually drafted by Cardinal Pacelli.

2. When Cardinal Pacelli was elected Pope early in 1939, the German government was very upset because “he was always opposed to Nazism” (from an editorial in the Berliner Morgenpost).

3. In October 1939 (a month after the German invasion of Poland), Pius XII’s first encyclical, Summi Pontificatus, condemned aggressive warfare. This delighted the British (who gave it wide publicity), and angered the Nazis (who arrested German priests brave enough to read it from the pulpit).

4. In January 1940, at the Pope’s instruction, Vatican radio and L’Osservatore Romano (the Vatican’s official newspaper) first revealed to the world the terrible treatment the Jews and Catholics of conquered Poland were suffering from the German occupation army.

5. In his Christmas messages of 1941 and 1942, the Pope protested the actions of the Nazis and expressed his support for their victims. As a result, The New York Times editorialized, “The voice of Pope Pius XII is a lonely voice in the silence and darkness enveloping Europe this Christmas . . . In calling for a ‘real new order’ based on ‘liberty, justice, and love’ . . . the Pope put himself squarely against Hitlerism.”

6. When the Catholic bishops of Holland bravely protested the Nazi persecution of the Jews in their country, the Germans responded by deporting and eventually murdering a larger percentage (79%) of Jews from Holland than from any other Western European country. Pius XII had been preparing an even stronger and more direct denunciation of Hitler’s regime—but when he heard what happened after the Church’s futile protest in Holland, he tore up the document so as to avoid provoking an even worse Nazi
reaction against the Jews. From then on he remained “silent” while actively opposing the Nazis behind the scenes (the same prudent and quietly heroic approach used by the International Red Cross).

7. The Pope had been strongly urged by Jewish leaders and by Catholic bishops in German-occupied countries not to protest the Nazi crimes publicly, as this would only make things worse. An Italian Jew in Rome stated twenty years after the war, “None of us wanted the Pope to speak out openly... The Gestapo would only have increased and intensified its inquisition... it was much better the Pope kept silent. We all felt the same, and today we still believe that.” Moreover, a bishop from Luxembourg who had himself been an inmate in the Dachau concentration camp for eighteen months notified the Vatican after his release that “whenever protests were made, treatment of prisoners worsened immediately.”

8. When the Germans occupied Rome in 1943, they threatened severe reprisals against the city’s Jews unless they paid a ransom of 50 kilograms of gold within 24 hours. There was no way to collect this much gold—until Pius directed that some of the Vatican’s gold chalices be melted down for this purpose.

9. The Pope ordered all the convents, seminaries, monasteries, and schools of Rome (155 different institutions) to hide Jewish refugees (and 3000 were hidden at the papal summer home of Castel Gandolfo). Pius also used his own family fortune to help smuggle Jews across German lines, and he had the Vatican issue safe-conduct passes and even fake baptismal certificates to Jews seeking to escape.

10. The German ambassador to the Vatican, Ernst von Weizsacker, told his superiors in Berlin that the Pope was not interfering in German efforts to round up Italian Jews—apparently the “smoking gun” or proof revisionist historians need to make their case against Pius XII. However, the fact is that Weizsacker, who was sympathetic to the Church and the Jews, knew that Hitler would order the Vatican invaded if he learned the truth—and in order to prevent this, the ambassador deliberately misled the Nazi regime.

11. In an interview with Time magazine in 1944, the great scientist Albert Einstein said that once the Nazis came to power in Germany, “Only the Church stood squarely across the path of Hitler’s godless campaign. I never had any special interest in the Church before, but now I feel a great affection and admiration. I am forced to confess that what I once despised, I now praise unreservedly.”

12. After World War II ended, Pope Pius XII was officially thanked for his efforts on behalf of persecuted Jews by the Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe, the World Jewish Congress, the American Jewish Congress, Agudas Israel World Organization, and the War Refugee Board; moreover, when the chief rabbi of Rome, Israel Zolli, converted to Catholicism after the war, he chose Eugenio as his baptismal name as a way of honoring the Pope (whose Christian name was also Eugenio).

13. In 1955 the Israeli Philharmonic Orchestra gave a special performance at the Vatican’s Consistory Hall as an official expression of the Papal gratitude for Pius XII’s efforts on behalf of persecuted Jews.

14. When Pius XII died in 1958, he was praised by numerous international Jewish organizations and leaders, including Golda Meir (Israel’s Minister of Foreign Affairs) and the chief rabbi of Palestine.

15. In his 1967 book Three Popes and the Jews (still considered the definitive Jewish study of the Nazi Holocaust), Israeli historian and diplomat Pinchas Lapide wrote that Pius XII “was instrumental in saving at least 700,000, but probably as many as 860,000 Jews from certain death at Nazi hands” (including 200,000 in Hungary, 50,000 in Poland, 360,000 in Bulgaria, and 250,000 in Rumania).

16. No one accused Pius XII of “indifference” to the fate of the Jews... until 1963, when a German Protestant named Rolf Hochhuth wrote a play called “The Deputee,” which portrayed Pope as being indirectly complicit in the Holocaust. Within a few short decades, this fictional play somehow achieved greater credibility than all the documented facts listed here.

Several reliable studies of this subject have come out in the last few years, including:
—Hitler, the War, and the Pope by Ronald J. Rychlak (Our Sunday Visitor Press; 1-800-348-2440, ext. 2460); $19.95 plus shipping;
—Yours is a Precious Witness: Memoirs of Jews and Catholics in Wartime Italy, by Sr. Margherita Marchione (Paulist Press, 1-800-218-1903); $16.95 or $13.95 (paperback) plus S3 shipping;
—Consensus in Controversy, by Sr. Margherita Marchione (Paulist Press); $24.95 plus shipping; and
—Pius XII and the Second World War, by Pierre Blet (Paulist Press); $29.95 plus shipping.