

## ***Ad Majora Mala Vitanda: Catholic Responses to the Holocaust***

D'Arcy Osborne, British minister to the Holy See during the Second World War, once remarked that the atmosphere at the Vatican<sup>1</sup> was not only “supranational and universal, it is also fourth-dimensional and, so to speak, outside of time... They reckon in centuries and plan for eternity” (qtd. in Marrus 50). Indeed, the responses of Catholics to the Holocaust, and in particular the inaction of the Vatican, are incomprehensible without a complete understanding of this “fourth-dimensional” component. It is essential to keep in mind not only the cultural context in which the Church<sup>2</sup> found itself between 1933 and 1945, but also the two thousand years of established practices, institutions, and beliefs which served to further entrench anti-Semitism within Catholic attitudes. More importantly, the Church, despite possessing sovereignty, an ideology, and great influence on international affairs, did not view itself as a political institution akin to states and parties. Rather, the Church idealistically viewed itself as a perfectly autonomous, neutral, and eternal institution above worldly affairs.

The Church's inability to reconcile this idealized conception of itself with its real responsibility to combat the atrocities of the Nazis rests at the heart of its failure to respond with leadership during the Holocaust. Thus, to understand the Church's response to the Holocaust, it is necessary to begin with the theories, ideologies, and doctrines of the Church, especially as they relate to anti-Modernism, in their foundational roles in the anti-Semitism of the interwar period. From these early stages of détente with Fascism and casual anti-Semitism, the Church effectively limited its options for coordinated opposition to Nazism and was neither willing nor able to

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this paper, *the Vatican* and *Rome* will be used to refer to not only physical places, but also as metonymy for what is more appropriately termed *the Curia* or *the Holy See*—the office of the Pope and the complex clerical bureaucracy including the Secretariat of State which governs and oversees the Church as a whole.

<sup>2</sup> The Catechism of the Catholic Church notes that: “In Christian usage, the word ‘church’ designates the liturgical assembly, but also the local community, or the whole universal community of believers. These three meanings are inseparable” (Catholic Church par. 752). The latter two meanings will be most clearly operative in this paper.

launch a defense of the Jews. Simultaneously, however, individual members of the Church independently made great efforts to combat the Holocaust and were also counted among the foremost victims of the Nazis. Since the Holocaust, the Church has strived to reconceptualize its role in the Holocaust and fuse the salvific suffering of its martyrs such as Maximilian Kolbe to the suffering of the Jews.

### **Catholic Anti-Semitism in Theory**

Illustration 1. “Adolf Hitler greets an unidentified Roman Catholic cardinal at a public ceremony.” c.1933-1939 (credit: Maz Hollweg, courtesy of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum photo archives, Photograph # 97350)



From a modern perspective, the Church was quite clearly a bastion of anti-Semitism from the Middle Ages through WWII. However, the anti-

Semitism of the Church was by no means analogous to the racial anti-Semitism of the Nazis, at least from the Church’s perspective. In the Catholic encyclopedia, *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, published in 1930, the entry on “Anti-Semitism” drew a distinction between unacceptable racial anti-Semitism and acceptable non-racial anti-Semitism (Ronheimer 19). Pius XI even had an encyclical<sup>3</sup> prepared in 1939 condemning racial anti-Semitism, although its release was abandoned shortly after his death (Hoppenbrouwers 39). The Church’s prejudice towards Jews is more accurately characterized as deriving from virulent anti-Modernism.

After the Russian Revolution, the Church was prepared to take all necessary steps to prevent militantly atheistic Communism à la the Soviet Union from coming to dominate the rest

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<sup>3</sup> A papal encyclical functions as essentially a circular letter written from the Pope to all the bishops or a group of bishops to offer appropriate guidelines for dealing with their congregations. It should be noted that Pius XI at no point ever established new doctrine, but rather offered opinions on how doctrine should be interpreted.

of Europe; during the interwar period, this objective seemed to necessitate a benevolent attitude toward Fascism as a more stable alternative to Democracy (Marrus 46). In his 1931 encyclical, *Quadragesimo Anno*, Pius XI decried Liberalism as “the father of this Socialism that is pervading morality and culture and... Bolshevism will be its heir” (par. 122). At the time, Socialism and Communism were both widely understood by Christian Europeans to have been the creations of secular Jews. In 1941, a newspaper run by the Catholic Bishop of Sarajevo went so far as to claim “Satan aided [the Jews] in the invention of Socialism and Communism... The movement of liberation of the world from the Jews is a movement for the renewal of human dignity” (qtd. in Shelah 327). Likewise, in the aftermath of Kristallnacht in 1938, the newspaper of the Archdiocese of Krakow decried the violence, but affirmed the rights of nations to defend themselves from “subjection to so foreign a nationality as the Jews and their injurious influence on social life... But always within the limits of ethics, that is, the limits drawn by universal Christian morality” (qtd. in Hoppenbrouwers 40). In addition, Catholics were frequently at the helm of the passage of laws aimed at the marginalization of the Jews in countries like Hungary and Slovakia where clergy made up significant portions of the legislatures (Hoppenbrouwers 41).

For the average German, anti-Semitism in and of itself was a secondary concern relative to fears of Bolshevism (Dietrich 262). In continuing to support the idea of a connection between the dangers of Communism and the Jews, the Church was inadvertently laying the foundation for the Holocaust. The Church’s attempt to strike a balance between the supposedly justified anti-Semitism and violent race-based anti-Semitism only provided more opportunities for the Nazi regime to manipulate the Church into complacency regarding the fate of the Jews. On April 26, 1933 Hitler declared to the representative of the German Bishops’ Conference:

The Catholic Church considered the Jews pestilent for fifteen hundred years, put them in ghettos, etc., because it recognized the Jews for what they were. In the epoch of liberalism the danger was no longer recognized. I am moving back toward the time in which a fifteen-hundred-year-long tradition was implemented. I do not set race over religion, but I recognize the representatives of this race as pestilent for the state and for the Church, and perhaps I am thereby doing Christianity a great service by pushing them out of schools and public functions. (qtd. in Ronheimer 24)

By co-opting the Church's own anti-Semitic language, Hitler precluded the Vatican from vocal and comprehensive criticism of Nazi anti-Semitism lest it appear to contradict fifteen hundred years of Church practice. Indeed, the Church's own anti-Semitic impulses allowed Franz von Papen<sup>4</sup> to claim at the Nuremberg trials that his attitudes towards the Jews were in line with Catholic teaching—he prided himself “on being a good Catholic” (Burke 152). In principle, the Church was opposed to hatred of the Jews. As Pius XI exclaimed, “Anti-Semitism is unacceptable. Spiritually, we are all Semites” (qtd. in Cassidy, Duprey, and Hoeckman 51). To the Church, unlike the Nazis, violence against Jews was never justifiable and a converted Jew was no longer a Jew. Nevertheless, the Church actively promoted the socioeconomic marginalization of the Jews as long as it was for so-called “defensive” purposes. For example, the official Catholic organ in Germany, the *Klerusblatt*, regarded the Nuremberg Laws of 1936 as an “indispensable safeguard for the qualitative make-up of the German people” (Cymet 375). In such a way, the Church facilitated the beginning of the Holocaust with equivocations and doctrinal ambiguity.

### **Catholic Anti-Semitism in Practice**

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<sup>4</sup> Franz von Papen was Vice-Chancellor of Germany under Hitler from 1933 to 1934.

The Church's failure to respond adequately was comprehensive—from the parish level all the way up to the Vatican, the failures of Catholics during the Holocaust were ones of diplomacy, of organization, and ultimately of conscience. Throughout the 1930's, the Catholic Church continuously attempted to come to some kind of understanding with the Nazi regime. However, these attempts, particularly the *Reichskonkordat*<sup>5</sup> of 1933 made it increasingly difficult for Catholics of conscience to act in opposition to the regime without being perceived as disloyal—Cardinal Faulhaber, the Archbishop of Munich, described the concordat as a statement “of confidence in the new [i.e. Nazi] German government” (qtd. in Burke 154). The future Pope Pius XII was the primary negotiator of the concordat as Pius XI's representative in Germany. During his own reign, Pius XII fastidiously abided by the concordat's terms well after its violation by Hitler—prompting Fr. John Oesterreicher,<sup>6</sup> a Jewish convert to Catholicism, to remark “it was time to either laugh or to cry” (qtd. in Phayer 6). To preserve the concordat, Pius XII kept Bishop Orsenigo, “a pro-German, pro-Nazi, anti-Semitic fascist”, as his nuncio<sup>7</sup> in Berlin (Phayer 44). The Vatican received reports from throughout Europe about the extermination of the Jews and individual members of the Curia even hid Jews on Vatican property for periods of time (Zuccotti 209-210); yet “the 11 volumes of wartime diplomatic documents published by the Vatican between 1965 and 1981... do not contain a single letter directing men and women of the Church to rescue Jews” (Zuccotti 207). With no instruction from Rome, two German Bishops in 1941 who learned of the deportation of 100,000 Jews from

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<sup>5</sup> From the Middle Ages onward the Vatican negotiated numerous concordats (i.e. treaties) with European states which defined and protected the role of the Church in society. One such concordat in 1929 with Mussolini's Italy resulted in the creation of the Vatican City State. The *Reichskonkordat* had the dual effect of strengthening the position of the Church in politically turbulent post-war Germany and granting legitimacy to the new Nazi regime which had a vested interest in maintaining the loyalty of Germany's sizeable Catholic population.

<sup>6</sup> Fr. Oesterreicher later went on to author the Second Vatican Council's denunciation of anti-Semitism.

<sup>7</sup> A nuncio is the clerical equivalent of an ambassador—a representative of the Pope to a sovereign government. Pius XII's selection of Orsenigo as the man to continue his legacy as nuncio to Germany thus illustrates the great lengths to which the Vatican would go to not appear antagonistic to the Nazi regime.

Austria to Poland asked each other “whether the episcopacy<sup>8</sup> should intervene for them out of humanitarian concern or whether this should be left up to Rome to do” (qtd. in Phayer 51). With little instruction from Rome, bishops were left to gather whatever accommodations they could from the Nazi regime on their own, even if it meant conceding to Nazi ideology. For instance, one Polish priest imprisoned in Dachau recounted:

the German Bishop... received from Himmler the privilege... [to give] to the German priest a chapel... but under one condition: no one except German priests were allowed to take part all of the devotions performed in the chapel ... you see some people really intended... to go to the chapel and pray a little. But there was a custodian, the priest, who according to the order of Gestapo was not allowed to... [let] anybody to enter a chapel. And so the lay people said, “Well, how can I believe if this minister of God is so cruel just not to allow me to go to the chapel for a spiritual comfort? And obeys rather a Gestapo order and not God’s way.” We have to answer, “There are also people among the priests who act not according to their conscience, but according to the order received from the civil authority.” (Cegielka 5-6)

Consequently, by attempting to preserve the concordat, the Vatican sacrificed opportunities to rescue Jews and its legitimacy in the eyes of thousands of persecuted Catholics. Even in the face of impassioned pleas from the Allied powers, the Vatican refused to denounce the atrocities lest its neutrality be compromised. Britain’s envoy, Osborne, was outraged, “Is there not a moral issue at stake which does not admit of neutrality?” (qtd. in Phayer 49). In addition, despite possessing wide-reaching information on the extermination on the Jews, the Vatican repeatedly

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<sup>8</sup> The episcopacy refers the local bishop’s office. These two German bishops were therefore debating whether they should intervene locally on behalf of the Jews or whether such action should come from the Vatican.

refused to share any intelligence<sup>9</sup> with the American envoy<sup>10</sup> (Phayer 49). The Church hid behind the claim that it could not denounce the atrocities of one side without denouncing the atrocities of the other—it was not until 1942 that Pius XII deigned to make a veiled, widely misunderstood denunciation of killings in his Christmas address (Phayer 49).

The reasons behind the Church’s inaction can only be explained by what little instruction the Vatican gave. In his address to the College of Cardinals in 1943, Pius XII claimed:

Every word directed by Us in this regard to the competent authorities [to ease suffering], and every public allusion should be seriously considered and weighed in the very interest of those who suffer so as not to make their position even more difficult and more intolerable than previously, even though inadvertently and unwillingly. (qtd. in Marrus 49)

And in a letter to the Bishop of Berlin he gave “to the pastors who are working on the local level the duty of determining if and to what degree the dangers of reprisals and of various forms of oppression occasioned by the Episcopal declarations... seem to advise caution, *ad maiora mala vitanda* [to avoid greater evil] despite alleged reasons urging the contrary” (qtd. in Marrus 50). As prominent historian of the Holocaust, Michael Marrus notes, Pius XII offered neither “a heroic guide to policy, nor one in which it is easy to find a generous spirit, nor a strategy to be acclaimed by future generations” (50). Notably, what is evidenced here is that the Vatican did indeed possess some strategy in responding to the Holocaust and was not simply overwhelmed

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<sup>9</sup> The Vatican’s refusal to cooperate with the Allies in this matter was so beneficial to the Nazis that Heinrich Himmler personally praised the Church’s “discretion” during a 1942 visit to Rome (Cymet 379).

<sup>10</sup> Phayer further notes:

The failure of the Vatican to exchange atrocity information with Taylor [the American envoy] was critical because it came at a time when England and the United States were attempting to verify what turned out to be very reliable information about ongoing ethnic cleansing and about Nazi plans to exterminate all Jews. U.S. Undersecretary of State Sumner Wells and Rabbi Stephen S. Wise worked intensely to verify rumors about the atrocities, but, as historian Richard Breitman has noted, Myron Taylor “was unable to gather much information” at the Vatican. (49)

by the gravity of the atrocities—what inaction there was on the part of the Church was calculated. Given that the Vatican was unable to rein in members of the clergy who, like the President of Slovakia, a priest, openly supported the deportation of the Jews despite official rebukes (Marrus 49), the Church decided it would not risk the evaporation of Church authority by taking a concerted stance against the persecution of the Jews who, as Cardinal Faulhaber put it, “are quite able to look after themselves” (qtd. in Ronheimer 22). While the Vatican’s response to the Holocaust was certainly callous, it cannot be ascribed to mere anti-Semitic hatred. The Church faced numerous challenges which required a weighing of priorities and a moral calculus which more often than not resulted in cowardice. Although it can never be definitively known what impact the Church could have made, the circumstances resulted in the absence of bold action when the world needed it most.

### **The Church: A Reconceptualization**

However, a critique of the responses of the institutional Church cannot be misconstrued as a blanket criticism of every individual Catholic. Indeed, Catholics were often not only victims of the Nazis, but also some of the foremost opponents of the Nazi regime. Yad Vashem’s list of the “Righteous Among the Nations”—Gentiles who risked their lives to save Jews—is replete with members of the clergy who, in the absence of leadership from the Vatican, endeavored independently to combat the Holocaust. Among them is Father Pierre-Marie Benoit who, in addition to smuggling thousands of Jews out of France and providing thousands more with counterfeit baptismal certificates for protection, personally met with Pius XII to present a plan to transfer the Jews of Nice, France to safety in North Africa—a plan that was only stopped by the German occupation of southern France (“Father Pierre-Marie Benoit”). Yet, in many places rescue efforts for Jews went beyond individual effort. In Assisi, for example, the Bishop ordered

his priests to coordinate the hiding of hundreds of Jews in convents and monasteries usually closed to the public, even going so far as to disguise Jews as monks and nuns<sup>11</sup> (“The Assisi Network”). The Church has never been a monolith and the Church of the Holocaust is no exception. While the Church fed pre-war anti-Semitism and was complacent in the face of the Holocaust, so too did Catholics respond at times with the utmost compassion for the Jews in opposition to Nazi oppression.

Although it is difficult to speak of gradations of suffering, it is clear that “in the Nazi economy of evil, priests and other religious in the camps were one notch above the Jews, and their torture was commensurate with that station” (Williams 173). The torture received by Catholic clergy at the hands of the Nazis reflected the fact that “priests and Jews were lumped together in the SS mind” (Treece 137). For example, one survivor of Auschwitz recalled:

We were working in a torn-down house when one of the prisoners found a crucifix. SS Storch got ahold of it and he called Father Nieweglewski. “What is this?” he asks the priest.

Father remains silent, but the guard insists until he says, “Christ on the cross.” Then Storch jeers: “Why you fool, that’s the Jew who, thanks to the silly ideals which he preached and you fell for, got you into this camp. Don’t you understand? He’s one of the Jewish ringleaders! A Jew is a Jew and will always be a Jew! How can you believe in such an enemy?”

Father Nieweglewski is silent. (Koscielniak qtd. in Treece 137)

In Poland alone a third of the Catholic clergy were sent to concentration camps, two-thirds of whom ultimately died (Treece 87). Since the Holocaust, the suffering of Catholics at the hands of

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<sup>11</sup> In stark contrast to reports from elsewhere in Europe of the forced conversion of hiding Jews, the clergy and religious of Assisi ensured that the Jews continued to practice their religion while in hiding—during Yom Kippur in 1943, the Catholic nuns of one convent prepared the meal for the end of the Jewish fast (“The Assisi Network”).

the Nazis has been transformed by the Church from an excuse to ignore the suffering of the Jews to a source of ecumenical solidarity with the Jewish people.

At the crux of this shift in attitudes is St. Maximilian Kolbe who has become, in a sense, the Catholic face to the Holocaust as a result of his martyrdom at Auschwitz. Despite being arrested as a political prisoner, Kolbe also made well documented attempts<sup>12</sup> to aid the Jews both before and during his internment in Auschwitz (Lerski 655). In life, he consistently espoused the salvific view of suffering championed by the Church. He lectured his fellow friars that “in suffering and persecution [we]... reach a high degree of sanctity and, at the same time... bring our persecutors to God” (qtd. in Treece 108). In his own words, suffering was “a good and sweet thing for him who accepts it wholeheartedly” (qtd. in Treece 107). Such proclamations could seem to border on the masochistic if taken out of the context of love in which they were said. As the German invasion of Poland seemed imminent, Kolbe addressed his religious community:

The third stage of life<sup>13</sup>, the one of suffering, I think will be my lot shortly. But by whom, where, how, and in what form this suffering will come is still unknown. However, I'd like to suffer and die in a knightly manner, even to the shedding of the last drop of my blood in order to hasten the day of gaining the whole world for God through the Immaculate Mother<sup>14</sup>. I wish the same for you as for myself. What nobler thing can I wish you, my dear sons? If I knew something better, I'd wish it for you, but I don't... Christ himself said, “Greater love than this no one has, than to lay down his life for his friends.” (qtd. in Treece 76)

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<sup>12</sup> Kolbe's reputation has come under attack by writers as numerous as Rabbi Zev Nelson, Richard Cohen, and Christopher Hitchens, all of whom allege some degree of antisemitism on Kolbe's part; such claims do not stand up to scrutiny when compared to the testimony of survivors who personally encountered Kolbe (Lerski 655).

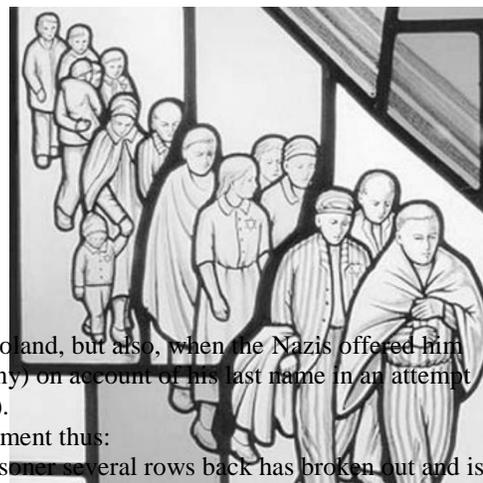
<sup>13</sup> The first two stages of life according to Kolbe were first, preparation for activity and second, activity itself. The third and final stage, as Kolbe describes it here, is suffering (Treece 76).

<sup>14</sup> I.e. the Virgin Mary, to whom Kolbe had a particularly strong devotion.

Kolbe embodied his words through his actions. He refused to take any action which would safeguard his life from the Nazis<sup>15</sup> and once sent to Auschwitz, voluntarily took the place of another prisoner in a punitive starvation chamber.<sup>16</sup> If it is, as Kolbe claimed, “a great grace... to be able to seal with our own life our ideals” then he of all men truly received that grace (Treece 116). Yet, no matter how holy Kolbe was, his suffering and the suffering of other prisoners of conscience stands in stark contrast to the suffering of those, like the Jews, for whom death was not a voluntary sacrifice, but a fate thrust upon them on account of their identity. Nevertheless, to the Church, Kolbe’s martyrdom bridges the gap between the Church’s conception of salvific suffering and the apparent meaninglessness of the Jews’ suffering. Simultaneously, Kolbe, like an *alter Christus*, is held up as a moral exemplar by whose death the Church’s many sins are atoned. His canonization inextricably ties the Church to the Holocaust and the Jews as both imperfect savior and co-victim.

Illustration 2. “Stained glass window by John and Laura Gilroy, The Chapel of St. Maximilian Kolbe, St. Joseph’s Church, Bristol, England.” (Williams 182)

Thus, modern Church iconography of the Holocaust not only frequently features Kolbe as its



<sup>15</sup> Not only did Kolbe refuse the entreaties of his fellow friars to flee Poland, but also, when the Nazis offered him the status of *Volksdeutsche* (ethnic German residing outside of Germany) on account of his last name in an attempt to coopt the influence he held among Poles, Kolbe refused (Treece 99).

<sup>16</sup> Drawing on eyewitness accounts, Treece describes the climactic moment thus:

Suddenly, there is movement in the still ranks. A prisoner several rows back has broken out and is pushing his way toward the front. The SS guards watching this Block raise their automatic rifles, while the dogs at their heels tense for the order to spring. Fritsch and Palitsch [SS officers] reach toward their holsters. The prisoner steps past the first row. It is Kolbe. His step is firm, his face peaceful. Angrily, the Block capo shouts at him to stop or be shot. Kolbe answers calmly, “I want to talk to the commander,” and keeps on walking while the capo, oddly enough, neither shoots nor clubs him. Then still at a respectful distance, Kolbe stops... Standing at attention like an officer of some sort himself, he looks Fritsch straight in the eye. “Herr Kommandant, I wish to make a request please,” he says politely... Survivors will later say it is a miracle no one shoots him, Instead, Fritsch asks, “What do you want?” “I want to die in place of this prisoner,” and Kolbe points to the sobbing Gajowniczek... Fritsch looks stupefied... Everyone notes how the German lord of life and death, suddenly nervous, steps back a pace... (171)

subject, but also his connection to the Jews. In one stained glass window (see Illustration 2) Kolbe is seen, like a latter-day Moses, leading a group of Jews easily identified by their stars of David. Reflecting no specific historical instance, the window instead “expands the text of Saint Maximilian’s life by presenting a tableau of triumph over death through solidarity in suffering... by freeing itself from the literal record of the horrors at Auschwitz and transcending the historical facts that segregated Jews from political prisoners, men from women, children from adults” (Williams 183). Such artwork breaches historical and temporal barriers in an expression of solidarity with the fate of the Jews. In such a way, the Church has come to understand the suffering of its members during the Holocaust just as it understands all human suffering—as profoundly redemptive. In the Shoah, the Church found itself as both Pilate and Christ, as both persecutor and suffering savior. The Church’s 1998 reflection on the Holocaust acknowledges that “as members of the Church, we are linked to the sins as well as the merits of all her children” (Cassidy, Duprey, and Hoeckman 55). While the guilt of the institutions and hierarchy of the Church is clear, the actions of Catholic individuals necessitate a more nuanced and multidimensional perspective of the Church during the Holocaust.

## **Conclusion**

Shortly before his imprisonment in 1941, Maximilian Kolbe noted:

No one in the world can change Truth. What we can do and should do is to seek truth and to serve it when we have found it. The real conflict is the inner conflict—beyond armies of occupation and the hecatombs of extermination camps, there are two irreconcilable enemies in the depth of every soul: good and evil, sin and

love. And what use are the victories on the battlefield if we ourselves are defeated in our innermost personal selves? (qtd. in Dauria 136)

By this metric, the Church as a moral institution failed under the challenges of the Holocaust. It secured itself politically, but at the cost of a defeat in this interior, moral battle. The Church viewed itself as an institution above and beyond time, concerned with the preservation of souls, not lives. Yet, by stepping outside of this fourth-dimension into the realm of political for the sake of its own self-preservation, the Church jeopardized its pastoral mission. The Christian theologian Franklin H. Littell has said the Holocaust “remains the major event in recent Church history—signaling as it does the rebellion of the baptized against the Lord of History [i.e. God]” (qtd. in Eckardt 455). This rebellion was one of idolatry, of placing greater value in the temporal structures of the Church than in its divinely mandated mission of compassion and bravery in the face of evil. Thus, the Church of the Holocaust was one “in vast apostasy” against the mission it claimed to profess (Eckardt 454). The paradox of the Church’s actions is that in the name of self-preservation, it sacrificed its purpose for even existing—what Bishop Marton called in May of 1944 “the idea of the brotherhood of man” (qtd. in Hoppenbrouwers 47). The failure of the institutional Church is all the more heinous given the sacrifices made by individual members in service of its unfulfilled obligation to humanity—sacrifices which allow the Church to be viewed as not only an accomplice to the tragedy of the Shoah, but a victim as well. Ultimately, the Church was a victim, not of the Nazis, but of its own timidity and shortsightedness.

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## Reflection

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Before we arrived for the first day of class in my UW1020 course, Legacies of the Holocaust, the professor already had the class review a list of possible research topics. The topics listed ranged from specific events (e.g. the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and the Nuremberg trials) to locations (e.g. Auschwitz) and questions of logistics (e.g. the railroads). In this vast list, one topic immediately seized my attention—the relationship between religion and the Holocaust. As a Catholic, I was familiar both with the saints associated with the Holocaust, such as Edith Stein and Maximilian Kolbe, as well as the controversial role the institutional Church played in, by some accounts, enabling genocide. Moreover, the debate over the role of the Church in the Holocaust was one in which my professor—who noted in class that the Church could have prevented the genocide—had strong opinions. Likewise, I knew I would have to be wary of any bias on my own part which would lead me to explain away the Church's actions. Nevertheless, I relished the chance to grapple with a topic this polarizing and relevant to the millions of people tied to it by faith, personal history, or academic interest.

I began my research with a few sources which were posted on Blackboard for anyone interested in religion as a subject of study. The majority of these sources addressed the ways Jewish theology has responded to the Holocaust, not the historical actions of the Catholic Church. However, the articles which did address the Church proved to be a useful starting point for further research. In particular, by utilizing the works cited in these initial sources, I was able to identify and locate other articles which would be useful in continuing my research. Despite the specificity of my subject matter, GW's library included several volumes which provided the core of my research—notably, *Pope Pius XII and the Holocaust*, a collection of essays by several

Church and Holocaust historians which allowed me to access diverse viewpoints at each stage of the Church's involvement. Through the Washington Research Library Consortium, I was able to request *Catholics Remember the Holocaust* from the Catholic University of America, which included the Church's official "apology" for its actions during the Shoah. In addition, with the aid of my professor, I was able to search the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collections to survey oral histories and photographs from the period.

Having surveyed the available literature, I set about summarizing my key findings from each source and putting critical quotations into a research guide at the instruction of my professor. As I expected, much of the commentary in the literature tended to vacillate between the two extremes of unequivocal condemnation of the Church versus pro-Church apologetics—neither of which seemed entirely substantiated by the historical record. Yet, these works extensively cited primary sources which—with the exception of Church documents which the Vatican has since made available online

<sup>1</sup>—I would not have been able to access elsewhere. By quoting chiefly from the primary sources referenced in the literature, I hoped to prevent my own essay from being dominated, even inadvertently, by either side in the polemical debate over the Church's role in the Holocaust.

In the first version of my paper I approached my subject largely by examining the Church as an institution—the ways in which the Church hierarchy, and in particular the papacy, responded to the Holocaust as a political and spiritual crisis. As I expanded my paper, I realized that examining the institutional responses of the Church was too myopic; this approach supported the claim that the Church enabled the Holocaust, but it also neglected the ways in which members of the Church actively combated or themselves fell victim to the Shoah. Thus,

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<sup>1</sup> These documents initially proved difficult to cite since they were published by the Church. Luckily, my professor in consultation with one of her colleagues in the University Writing Department was able to provide a useful guide for citing ecclesiastical sources.

for my final draft I wanted to include a reconceptualization of the Church's role through examining the effects of the genocide on individual members. In particular, I decided to examine the legacy of one of the most prominent Catholic saints to emerge from the Holocaust—Maximilian Kolbe—and his role in the way the Church views itself in the aftermath of the Holocaust. Once more, GW's membership in the Washington Research Library Consortium allowed me to request *A Man for Others*, an exhaustively well-researched biography of Kolbe, from CUA. Likewise, through the online databases provided by GW (particularly *JSTOR*) I was able to access academic articles which allowed me to gain a holistic view of Kolbe's life and legacy.

In my completed paper, I attempted to synthesize all of the disparate elements which influenced my research, from questions of politics and culture to an examination of personal legacies. In doing so, I hoped to bridge the gap between critics and apologists, neither of whom entirely account for the totality of the Church's actions during the Holocaust. As I pursued this goal, the resources provided by GW libraries proved invaluable. In addition to checking out nearly every book on the shelves of GW's libraries related to the Church and the Holocaust, I requested several books through the Consortium and found helpful articles in GW's research databases. If I had not been able to draw on all of these resources, I could not have included nearly the same level of breadth and depth of research in my completed paper. Together, these sources led me to the conclusion that the institutional Church, in sacrificing its principles for the sake of pragmatism, failed to respond adequately to the genocide and, in doing so, did not live up to the example of those among its members who resisted and suffered at the hands of Nazism.