

Honors 290: Philosophy and the Holocaust

The Church and the Jews during the Holocaust

The Vatican (Pope Pius XII)

A. what the Pope could have done

1. Speak out against the extermination publicly, using the moral authority of the papacy, which would have greater credibility than the Allies governments (since they were fighting a war against Germany). Pope was pressed to do this by Jewish organizations, certain governments (Britain, U.S., Brazil), and various Bishops and Vatican representatives from different countries, e.g. Bishop Preysing of Germany; Polish representative (and Polish government-in-exile based in London).

2. confirmed reports received by Allies of exterminations in 1942. Repeatedly requested to do this, and Vatican knew of exterminations from own nuncios (Vatican representatives in different countries) but said it did not (Pawlikowski 557).

3. give information and resources to Catholic aid and resistance groups, e.g. in Poland and France

4. Excommunicate perpetrators (most SS and even Nazis retained their membership in their churches)

5. Tell German ambassador Weizsäcker the world is watching

6. Protest round-up of Rome's Jews in October 1943

7. Urge church leaders in different countries to give shelter to Jews (as some did), to speak out against the extermination, and to urge their parishioners to give shelter to Jews

8. Press Catholic rulers to stop deportations of Jews from their countries (Slovakia, Croatia, Hungary, Romania)

B. why Pope Pius did not do more of these things

1. concern for unity of Church so did not want to take sides in the war because worried that this would drive the Catholics of the disfavored country away from the Church

2. Vatican is traditionally political neutral and pope wanted to keep it that way (but he did violate the neutrality occasionally)

3. fear of (atheistic) communism was greater than opposition to Nazism. Wanted Germany to stop Soviets, did not like alliance between Americans/British and Soviets. So did not want to antagonize Germany

4. saw himself as a peacemaker. Tried to keep war from breaking out, and wanted to find a negotiated settlement (connected to points 2 and 3 but somewhat distinct).

5. concern with bombing of Vatican property

C. what pope did

1. Christmas 1942 public address: sympathy for "those who by reason of their nationality or race are marked down for death or gradual extinction" (Phayer 256, note)

2. before Nazis took over Hungary in 1944, got ruler, Horthy, to stop deportation of Jews (this was primarily in response to Nuncio Rotta, rather than initiative of Pope himself).

3. Nuncios in Romania and Slovakia helped save Jews (but this was not due to Pope but their own initiative)

Other issues:

**German Protestants: German Christianity (criticized by Vatican 1937); Confessing Church (Barmen convention [1934]; Niemöller)

**German Catholic Church: the Concordat (1933); grass-roots efforts of some priests, nuns, lay people and Catholic organizations; protest against euthanasia program

**Pius XI (pope during late 20's and '30's; died in 1939)