A BRIEF EXAMINATION OF ALLIED AND VATICAN DIPLOMATIC INTERACTIONS REGARDING THE EUROPEAN THEATER OF OPERATIONS DURING WORLD WAR II

Christopher S. Miller

Student ID: 4109958

MILH555 – World War II: Politics, Political Leadership, and Diplomacy

Professor Arthur Coumbe

30 June 2023

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INTRODUCTION

For nearly eighty years, the Second World War has been the focus of numerous examinations both within and without the academic world. In these examinations, most often the examiners aim their focus upon the over-arching aspects of the war and tend to gloss over items not deemed essential to a general understanding of the subject. These main aspects include many diverse topics such as individual battles, economics, social perceptions, military considerations, strategies, and more; as well as their impact on global events moving forward. Although this provides a nice general overview of the conflict, it often fails to provide enough attention to other less-impactful variables which – although perhaps having a smaller influence – still played a role in the war.

It is within the purview of these "minor" variables that researchers most often locate material related to the diplomatic efforts intended to prevent the breakout of hostilities and efforts to end them once they had commenced. Out of this material scholars have produced significant numbers of books, podcasts, research papers, and other media projects documenting the diplomatic and political actions undertaken by the various American and European leadership involved. But surprisingly there are a noticeably fewer number of scholarly works available which examine the particulars regarding interactions between the Allied forces, the Pope, and the Vatican.

The absence of such academic material suggests a deficiency in examining how such a massive power as the Vatican can be generally overlooked related to the politics of the continent and its impact during one of the most crucial periods of human history. It is within this narrow scope of work that this research paper intends to continue adding to scant existing scholarship and illuminating what role the Vatican played within the war

effort both officially and unofficially – especially focusing upon diplomatic interactions with Allied forces.

Despite declaring an official stance of neutrality throughout the war, initial inquiries into this area of interest indicate that the Church actively pursued diplomatic communications regarding a wide array of concerns and issues with the Allies through numerous back channels. Many of these interactions were focused upon efforts to end hostilities between the warring parties (as previously stated), but there were also other discussions and negotiations surrounding civilian infrastructure, supplies for those displaced by fighting, prisoner treatment, and other war-related items. Unfortunately, these interactions appear to be often relegated to a casual mention, if any, in most academic discussions and materials without any significant analysis of their impact on the war both in the long and short-term.

It is the focus of this research paper to begin taking a deeper look into this discrepancy while also building and expanding upon previous preliminary research done by the author. It is hoped that this material makes inroads into providing a more complete picture related to the academic perception and understanding of the Vatican and its role during the war. This will be accomplished by inquiring into three areas of consideration:

1. What direct interactions - if any - occurred between the representatives of the Allied forces and those of the Vatican? And if so, to what extent?
2. How impactful were these interactions upon both the immediate area of operations as well as regarding the overall status of the war and its eventual outcome?
3. How did these interactions affect foreign relations pertaining to the Vatican

moving on from the war into the present day?

It is the hypothesis of the author that data accumulated within this research will provide illumination regarding observations that Allied/Vatican interactions were an important activity with far-reaching implications conducted throughout the duration of the war. All initial data provided in this preliminary inquiry will be laid out as an "introduction" to these areas of interest with an intent to further flesh out the information in future documentation better suited in scope and size. Additionally, it is the aim of the author to combine this new research with data collected on other aspects of the war into an eventual final single comprehensive missive examining the entirety of Intelligence activities from both world wars, their impact, and their evolutions moving forward.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE VATICAN

To properly understand the position of the Vatican during World War II, it is essential that a brief review of its history should be presented to better gain an appreciation for the uniqueness of its place within both European and global affairs. Vatican City – more colloquially known simply as the Vatican – was established in 1929 with the Lateran Treaty, a part of a series of agreements known as the Lateran Pacts of 1929. These agreements sought to provide a definitive answer to the question surrounding the granting of temporal powers to the Pope and provided the guidelines concerning jurisdiction of Vatican City falling to the Holy See.

Prior to the establishment of the Vatican in 1929, tradition states that the Holy See was founded by the Saints Paul and Peter in the first century to outline the status of position given to the Pope as well as his authority over the Catholic Church. Over the centuries as the Church grew in popularity, its influence spread across the globe and relations with numerous foreign entities were created. As most of these entities were composed of individuals faithful to the religion, established beliefs of the populace and its rulers were upheld, and the Church eventually came to be regarded as a sovereign entity beholden to itself. This status was confirmed by the Edict of Milan in 313 by Constantine the Great.

This is not to say that over the centuries since then there have never been any other occurrences in which the Church's authority and power were challenged. Indeed, there were many such occurrences, yet in every instance the Holy See was able to retain its status as the central government of the Catholic Church independent of outside

interference. Examples of this retaining of power can be viewed in such events as the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea, the First Ecumenical Council of Constantinople, the Council of Trent, the Council of Ephesus, and many more.

Beyond the official diplomatic and political activities of the Church, throughout its history its impact was also felt through the creation of various humanitarian and social programs. Most global citizens know of these types of programs via historical records describing the establishment of missions across the globe by missionaries accompanying explorers as they circumnavigated the globe and later by collaborating with humanitarian organizations. These missions were meant to spread the Christian religion but often also provided educational and welfare assistance to the local communities as well.

With the establishment of the Vatican under the authority of the Holy See in 1929, the position and powers of the Pontificate were guaranteed and since that time diplomatic relations with one hundred eighty-three (183) sovereign states have occurred. Additionally, the Holy See is actively engaged with numerous international agencies such as the United Nations (among others) to advocate for various diplomatic endeavors centered on bettering the welfare of the world.

As the Vatican moves forward into the future, it continues to be a major presence within global affairs and maintains its stated objectives to expand the Catholic faith into new territories as well as collaborate with other agencies and nations to improve quality of life for every citizen – regardless of background and situation.

BACKGROUND REVIEW ON POPE PIUS XII

Elected Pope on 2 March 1939[1], Eugenio Maria Giuseppe Giovanni Pacelli - better known as Pope Pius XII - would guide both the Catholic Church and Vatican City throughout the duration of World War II. Having family ties to the Vatican as a member of the "black nobility", he had attended the Almo Collegio Capranica before becoming ordained at the age of twenty-three (23). Shortly after his ordination, Pacelli would be offered a post within the Vatican, which he accepted, and he began to steadily rise through the ranks. As the years passed, he would move into several positions of importance such as the Secretary of the Department of Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs, as a Papal Nuncio to Germany, and as the Cardinal Secretary of State.

Pius XII was a controversial Pope with many considering his actions throughout the war to be questionable in motive and that he failed to take a definitive stance against Nazism. While some supporters maintain that he was simply trying to maintain neutrality of the Church and protect the Vatican and its interests; others maintain he was a German sympathizer who only vaguely spoke against the atrocities committed by the Nazis. His statement on 24 December 1942 proclaiming

Humanity owes this vow to those hundreds of thousands who, without any fault of their own, sometimes only by reason of their nationality or race, are marked down for death or gradual extinction.[2]

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[1] Donald Watt, *How War Came: The Immediate Origins of the Second World War 1938-1939*. (Pantheon, 26 August 1989), 387.
[2] John Cornwell, *Hitler's Pope: The Secret History of Pius XII* (Viking Adult, 1 October 1999), 292.

was met with disappointment and derision from many across the globe who felt he hadn't gone far enough to condemn the German regime and its activities. Indeed, there are a small yet growing number of historians in modern scholarship examining this perception with such works as John Cornwall's *Hitler's Pope: The Secret History of Pius XII*, Daniel Goldhagen's *Hitler's Willing Executioners*, and Gitta Sereny's *Albert Speer,* among others.

This continuing debate on the legacy of Pius XII has come to be coined the "Pius Wars" – a term used to reference the on-going discussions and interpretations surrounding his actions and their various talking points. Origins of the term have been most attributed as originating after the debut of a theatrical play entitled "*The Deputy: A Christian Tragedy*" in which the Pope was portrayed as an individual willing to praise Hitler for the benefit of himself and his agenda. However, on the opposite of the argument, there are just as many scholars who defend Pius believing his actions contributed to the saving of between 700,000 to 800,000 Jewish lives by the war's end.

INTERACTIONS BETWEEN THE ALLIED FORCES AND THE VATICAN

As illustrated with the data presented above, the Vatican and its leader Pope Pius XII were uniquely positioned to play a role regarding World War II in the European theater. As such, numerous interactions between the Allies and the Vatican have been documented occurring throughout the duration of the event. One such interaction – known as the Zossen Conspiracy – occurred in 1939. In this event, German military leadership attempted to reach out via the Vatican to discuss the possibility of removing Hitler from power.[3] Although the Allies promised to deal fairly with any government formed after his removal, indecision on the part of the German generals prevented any action from being undertaken.

On another occasion in May 1940, the Vatican took efforts to provide warning to the Allies about an impending invasion of the Low Countries. This was accomplished by dispatching representatives to Brussels and the Hague while the Pope simultaneously met with the Italian Crown Prince Umberto and his wife, Princess Maria-Jose. In this meeting, Pius encouraged the princess to reach out to her brother King Leopold informing him of the impending danger. However, the Vatican's effort was dismissed, and Germany was able to complete its invasion.[4]

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[3] William Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany* (Simon and Schuster, 1960), 647-652.

[4] Eric Frattini, *The Entity: Five Centuries of Secret Vatican Espionage* (St. Martin's Press, 25 November 2008), 244-245.

On the civilian front, Pius utilized the Vatican as a central point for the dissemination of information regarding prisoners of war and refugees. According to some estimates, over ten million (10,000,000) requests for information were processed resulting in over eleven million (11,000,000) reports detailing specifics on those missing.

In 1943, Germany established a Nazi puppet state within Italy after it invaded in September. Known as the Italian Social Republic, this regime was created as a response to the arrest and imprisonment of Benito Mussolini when the Allies invaded Sicily. However, German forces intervened, rescuing Mussolini, and returning him to power until his eventual execution at the hands of partisans in April 1945. It was during this time that the German SS began rounding up Jews within the Italian population, but their efforts were met with fierce resistance and the Italian citizenry took extraordinary efforts to protect them. For his part, Pius directed a large portion of these efforts with the aid of the Allies as well as Italian resistance groups and his actions have been estimated to have saved 4/5ths of all Italian Jews.[5]

A final example can be seen through an examination of Operation Gladio – a "stay-behind" military operation intended to prevent the expansion of communist ideologies throughout the European continent after the war's end. According to author Paul Williams in his book *Operation Gladio – the Unholy Alliance between the Vatican, the CIA, and the Mafia*, these entities (along with NATO) would go on to affect not only

[5] Williamson Murray, *A War to be Won: Fighting the Second World War* (Belknap Press, 6 May 2000), 383.

the socio-political environment of the European continent, but in other areas across the globe as well.[6]

[6] Paul Williams, *Operation Gladio: The Unholy Alliance between the Vatican, the CIA, and the Mafia (*Prometheus Books, 3 February 2015).

CONCLUSION

As illustrated with the brief initial information provided in previous sections, the Vatican and its interactions throughout World War II were extremely complex activities which could be affected by numerous variables at any given time. Although morally against the atrocities being committed by the Axis powers, the Pope and other Vatican leadership had to balance protecting their own interests and appear neutral while attempting to promote agendas (often with assistance of the Allies) intended to protect those targeted by the Axis.

With its long and storied history, the Church found itself in a unique position to play a role in this regard – a role that is often ill-considered in much of academic scholarship due to a preference of historians to instead present narratives discussing the larger over-arching aspects of the war. Unfortunately, this tendency glosses over items not deemed essential to a general understanding of the subject.

To counter this, preliminary research provided in this missive is intended to provide an "introduction" to one aspect of these "minor" items – the interactions between the Allied powers and the Vatican. Each of these interactions could easily take an entire book to properly consider and if taken together as a whole could potentially provide an entirely new genre of historical research pertinent to the war. It is therefore the recommendation of the author that future scholarship should be developed in a bigger scope and size to accommodate the details and intricacies of these interactions.

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