

The vatican's silence during the holocaust

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With his death, Eugenio Pacelli, Secretary of State, was elected to be the new pope, and he reigned the Catholic Church till 1958 as Pius XII. The new pope was quite different from Pius XI. He openly stressed many times that he liked German people, which was reflected in the fact that his housekeeper, private secretary, and confessor all hailed from the Reich. He, also, was punctual and well organized, a characteristic often associated with Germans.

Pius XII implemented a new policy toward both Germany and Italy, one of impartiality and appeasement toward Nazis and fascists. Coppa writes that “ Pius refused to alter his impartial stance even though he received repeated reports of Nazi crimes against humanity in 1940 and 1941, and a series of sources within and outside the church alerted him to the genocide of the Jews. In May of 1942, Pius was told of the mass extermination in Massa) of Jews from Germany, Poland, and Ukraine while the military chaplain Father Pirro Scavizzi personally reported to Pius of the almost-total elimination of Jews through mass murder.”

His position never changed and scholars are still looking for answers to why that was the case. Coppa uses the pope’s own words to clarify the issue- “ First, there are over forty million German-speaking Catholics. If I should denounce the Nazis by name as you desire and Germany should lose the war, Germans everywhere would feel that I had contributed to the defeat, not only of the Nazis but Germany herself.... Second, if I denounce the Nazis by name I must in all justice do the same as regards the Bolsheviks whose principles are strikingly similar; you would not wish me to say such things about an ally of yours....”

For the most part, these words sum up Pius’ way of thinking. Although his <https://assignbuster.com/the-vaticans-silence-during-the-holocaust/>

critics go as far as claiming that he personally was anti-Semitic, the mainstream opinion is that he was torn between being a diplomat and being a pastor. The first choice clearly prevailed in his case. The pope was too concerned with the possible consequences of openly attacking Germans and Italians. Also, he was almost obsessed with communism and Bolsheviks in Russia and was afraid of their stance toward church and faith.

Coppa concludes in his article that getting full knowledge about the issue would require the opening of the pope's personal papers from the Vatican Archive and that we will have to wait for few more decades to be able to judge this pope armed with all necessary arguments. In the meantime, it is obvious that he wrote this article to contrast two consecutive popes and show how their different points of view were perceived differently in Europe.