

The Pope, the Church, and the Nazis

KLAUS EPSTEIN

The Catholic Church and Nazi Germany, by Guenter Lewy. *New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964. 416 pp. \$7.50.*

The Deputy, by Rolf Hochhuth; translated by Richard and Clara Winston. *New York: Grove Press, 1964. 352 pp. \$5.95.*

IN GUENTER Lewy's book we have at last a thoroughly scholarly account of one of the most controversial topics of modern history. The author has successfully performed a truly herculean labor of research in examining endless diocesan archives, Gestapo reports, German diplomatic documents, contemporary Catholic publications, Nazi personnel files (in the Berlin Documents Center) and the vast though fragmentary secondary literature which already exists on the subject. He has synthesized all this material into a well-organized and readable narrative. The reader will find an exhaustive discussion of the following topics in successive chapters: the Encounter between the Catholic Church and Nazism before 1933; the Great Reconciliation of 1933; the Concordat of July 20, 1933; the tribulations of the Catholic Organizations and Press; the Ideological Contest between Catholicism and Nazism; the Church and Hitler's Foreign Policy; the Attitude of the German Church toward World War II; the Conflict over Nazi Eugenic policies; the Church and the Jewish Question; and the Problem of Catholic Resistance to Nazism. A conclud-

ing chapter goes beyond the immediate subject in discussing the failures of Catholic political ideology in the face of the challenge of modern totalitarianism.

Lewy combines two roles in his narrative and analysis: he is both a conscientious historian and a confident prosecutor. His book is, and is intended to be, a continuous indictment of the policies of the Catholic Church during the Nazi era. The main theme is that the Church did not just *accommodate* itself to Hitler, which would have been bad enough in view of the monstrous character of the Nazi regime; he insists that the Catholic Church went much further in actively and willingly *approving* many Nazi policies (such as the establishment of an authoritarian state, the crushing of Liberalism, Socialism, Communism and Masonry, and the crusade against the Soviet Union). The Church did not just lack the courage for martyrdom; it was internally handicapped for resistance against Nazism because its leaders and followers had been deeply corrupted by nationalist if not outright Nazi poison well before 1933. This sharp accusation (which occasionally shoots beyond the mark) is the author's answer to the long dominant, officially fostered, Catholic "historical myth" which asserts that the Church resisted Nazism from the beginning and made only a few and reluctant concessions to Nazi barbarism. Lewy is exceedingly effective in demolishing this "mythological history" and documenting the fact that some German Catho-

lic historians have not scrupled to misquote documents in order to support their untenable contentions.

While Lewy's book must be reckoned a great achievement it is not without certain faults. There is in the first place, a certain lack of historical perspective; the author does not recognize the enormous role which the precedent of the Bismarckian *Kulturkampf* of the 1870's played in the minds of German Catholics in the 1930's. (In the 1870's the Church had won a defensive victory against a hostile Government through a skillful combination of intransigence and accommodation. Bismarck had soon recognized the folly of his attack upon the Church, presented it with an olive branch, and made the Catholic Centre Party one of the pillars of the governmental system of Imperial Germany. Many Catholics expected Hitler to act in a similar fashion). A second fault is Lewy's inability to make even the most prominent German bishops, who appear constantly in his pages, come to life: the book would have been strengthened by the inclusion of character portraits of such figures as Archbishop Groeber of Freiburg and Bishop Berning of Osnabrück (the two most notorious collaborators), Cardinals Bertram of Breslau and Faulhaber of Munich (the two most influential prelates, both with a curiously spotty record), and Bishops Galen of Münster and Preysing of Berlin (the bishops with the best "resistance record"). The reader learns very little about their individual personalities and nothing about their fate after 1945. A good opportunity for comparative analysis is missed by the failure to compare the treatment accorded to the French and German upper clergy after World War II. In France several bishops compromised under the Vichy regime were forced to resign; in Germany even the worst collaborators (like Groeber, who had been a "promoting member" of the SS, and Berning, who had accepted an appointment from Göring to the nazified Prussian Council of State in April, 1933) died in uncontested possession of their sees. It should be added, however, that these flaws of historical perspective and want of personality analysis do not seriously detract from the value of Lewy's study.

The same cannot be said of the book's major fault: its complete one-sidedness in judging the record of the Catholic Church. Lewy sometimes forgets in his indictment that the main function of the historian is to explain rather than accuse. He fails, specifically, to recognize that the Catholic prelates who accommodated themselves to Nazism were (with a few exceptions) neither villains nor fools, but rather intelligent men of good will who had

"subjectively good reasons" for acting as they did. They were required by the importance which the Church attaches to the regular exercise of the sacraments (deemed essential to salvation) to go to great lengths to avoid an open breach with the Nazi government, which certainly would not scruple about the closing of churches. They were not incorrect in their view that the defeat of Germany would lead to a dangerous expansion of Communism in Europe. They were afraid of getting out of touch with their parishioners, who stood under the steady influence of Dr. Goebbels' propaganda. Lewy shows too little understanding for these *historically* important considerations. He also errs, in the opinion of this reviewer, in applying what is surely a *utopian* yardstick in judging Catholic behavior. Lewy goes so far as to demand that the Catholic Church abandon its traditional neutrality toward various political systems (excepting only openly antireligious regimes like Communism) in favor of an explicit and exclusive endorsement of liberal democracy. He fails to see that a *universalist* Church cannot possibly do this in a world where liberal democracy is doomed—alas!—to remain a minority phenomenon, and where men require the sacraments to be saved in totalitarian as well as democratic countries.

Lewy's indictment of the Church can also provide a false and unfair general impression when viewed too much in isolation. The Catholic record of accommodation to Hitler, based upon the failure to understand the true significance of Nazism and to act accordingly, must be seen in the general context of Germany's and indeed Europe's failure in the face of Nazism. The record of the Catholic Church unquestionably compares favorably with that of German Protestantism (which has, unhappily, not yet been studied in similar scholarly detail). It is certainly no worse than that of other groups within Germany's so-called elite. One must also remember that the true significance of Nazism was almost universally misunderstood in 1933, and that resistance later—after illusions had vanished—was made extremely difficult by the accommodations mistakenly made during the intoxicated atmosphere of the "national revolution" of 1933. These considerations suggest, I believe, a more charitable, or at least less sanctimonious, judgment upon the Church's conduct than Lewy is willing to allow, even if one quite properly rejects the famous dictum of Mme de Staël that "To understand all is to forgive all."

It appears appropriate, in view of the importance and controversial character of Lewy's topic, to use his book as a springboard for discussing here the

major questions raised by the relationship between Nazism and the Catholic Church. Two questions appear of greatest importance. Why did the Church in 1933 adapt itself so quickly and completely to the Nazism it had strongly opposed earlier? Why did it nonetheless become involved in a struggle with the Nazis despite its desperate desire to avoid conflict? (This desire was shown most clearly by its failure to protest Hitler's extermination policy toward the Jews—a problem which will be covered at the end of this article in a discussion of Rolf Hochhuth's *Deputy*.)

II

THE FIRST question, "Why did the Catholic Church adapt itself so quickly and completely to Nazism in 1933?" necessitates a discussion of the general characteristics of German Catholicism in that period. The Church had vigorously and repeatedly denounced the neo-paganism of Hitler's movement before 1933, only to make a complete *volte-face* in the spring of that fateful year. The Catholic Centre Party voted for the Enabling Law of March 23, 1933, which provided the legal framework for Hitler's tyranny; if it had opposed it—as did the Socialist Party—the Nazis would have lacked the necessary two-thirds constitution-amending majority. The German episcopate, at a special meeting on March 28, 1933, formally withdrew its earlier ban against pro-Nazi political activity; a second meeting on June 1, 1933, went so far as to urge the active support of Nazism. The Centre Party dissolved itself, peacefully and without any last-minute gestures of defiance, on July 5, 1933, to permit the Nazi Party to assume a monopolistic status. The Vatican did not hesitate to give international prestige to the still very disreputable Nazi government by concluding a concordat on July 20, 1933. These steps are all milestones in the Catholic accommodation to Nazism, though the bare chronicle gives only a very inadequate impression of the undignified and far-reaching nature of this accommodation. Lewy's book provides innumerable painful examples of the almost Byzantine devotion which bishops and leading laymen bestowed upon the Führer.

Two considerations serve to emphasize the importance of the "great reconciliation" of 1933. There can be no question that the Catholic Church—and the Centre Party which was closely allied to it—could have greatly embarrassed Hitler in the early stages of his government. A refusal of the Centre to accept the Enabling Law would have forced the Nazis into openly unconstitutional conduct and deprived them of the invaluable attribute

of "formal legality." A refusal to withdraw the ban upon pro-Nazi activities would have forced the Nazi into a *Kulturkampf* at a time when the regime faced many other problems on the road to consolidation. A Vatican refusal to negotiate a concordat would have maintained Germany's diplomatic isolation at a time when Hitler's international position was still decidedly shaky. The Church assumed a heavy historical responsibility when it embarked upon the deliberate policy of appeasing Hitler.

A second consideration to remember is that the "great reconciliation" of 1933 had consequences throughout all the rest of the Nazi era. It made it impossible for the Church at a later time to oppose Nazism as a *general* phenomenon, as distinguished from opposition to *specific* Nazi policies. It thus left the Church open to the charge that it opposed Nazism only *when and as* particular Catholic *rights* (e.g., the survival of Catholic associations) or Catholic *dogmas* (e.g., the indissolubility of marriage, even when contracted between "Aryans" and Jews) were violated. The Church was unable to avoid all clashes with the Nazi government, but it always went to great length to *minimize* the points of friction; and it adamantly refused during the entire Nazi period to counsel any *general* resistance against the most criminal regime known to history—all this despite the fact that resistance could have been justified by the old Catholic theory vindicating tyrannicide. This attitude of refusal to condemn Fascism outright—in contrast to the frequent Catholic condemnation of Communism—has driven many good Catholics to despair and provided a strong talking point for anti-Catholics the world over.

What, then, were the reasons that induced the Church to embark upon its unfortunate "great reconciliation" in 1933? They may be enumerated as follows.

1. The Catholic Church did not regret the passing of Weimar-style liberal democracy in Germany. It must be remembered that Catholicism and Liberal Democracy had stood in a position of mutual antipathy on the European Continent ever since the French Revolution. This is not the place to examine the responsibilities for this historic antagonism: suffice it to say that most liberal democrats have been vehemently anti-clerical while most Catholic believers have viewed Liberalism (and to a lesser degree Democracy) as mortal foes of the Church. In Germany the Church and the Catholic Centre Party had felt comfortable under the Second Empire, once the *Kulturkampf* had been abandoned by Bismarck. Both Church and Centre

Party had adjusted with scarcely feigned reluctance to the 1918 revolution, and a good many bishops and Centre politicians viewed the Weimar Republic as nothing better than a temporary *de facto* government. This attitude remained virtually unaffected by the fact that the Republic scrupulously respected Catholic rights and completely abandoned the Erastianism long characteristic of the relationship between Church and state in Germany. Many Catholics felt alienated from what they considered—quite mistakenly—to be an anti-clerical regime, and they resented the fact that no parliamentary majority could be found for a concordat between the German government and the Vatican. (We shall see that they found one reason for cheering Nazism because it made a concordat possible.)

2. To put the point more emphatically: numerous Church figures positively welcomed the overthrow of liberal democracy in favor of an authoritarian regime. The process had begun, in fact, when Centre politician Heinrich Brüning, aided and abetted by Centre leader Monsignor Ludwig Kaas and Papal Nuncio Eugenio Pacelli, replaced parliamentary democracy by a "Presidential system" in the spring of 1930. Most Catholics were desperately anxious to participate in the great popular movement of the so-called "national revolution" of 1933; a desire all the stronger because many German Protestants had for too long had the unfair habit of denouncing Catholics as an "un-German" minority group within Germany. (The Catholic response to Nazism and the "national revolution" often showed traces of what psychologists call "overcompensation" in seeking identification with an "in-group" which nonetheless remained essentially suspicious toward those "wishing to belong.") Most German Catholics had in fact been pathologically nationalist during the Weimar Republic, and had shared the widespread view that parliamentary democracy was an alien Wilsonian import into Germany. They were prepared to hail any authoritarian government as a long overdue return of Germany to her "true self."

3. To promote the "great conciliation" many German Catholic thinkers—including a world famous theologian like Karl Adams and a great historian like Josef Lortz—stressed the similarities which existed (or they believed existed) between Catholicism and Nazism. The process of intellectual accommodation was facilitated by the existence, within Catholic social and political thought, of a fuzzy organicist-authoritarian tradition deeply hostile to the modern world of democracy, capitalism, and rationalism. This tradition was by no means the *only* Catholic tradition, for no less a figure

than Pope Leo XIII had favored an accommodation to modernity; but it had long been the predominant tradition in Germany with a line of distinguished thinkers extending from Adam Müller to Karl von Vogelsang. To put the matter in a nutshell: there was in fact a close affinity between some Nazi doctrines—for example the need for authority, the "community of the folk," and the idolization of the peasant—and the predominant form of German Catholic political and social thought, and a good many Catholic thinkers were only too eager to stress this affinity.

4. The accommodation was further facilitated by the fact that the Catholic Church and Nazism possessed the same enemies. Catholics and Nazis both opposed Socialists along with Communists and too often bracketed the two together under the thought-killing category of "godless Marxists." They both hated Liberals and Freemasons and, most emphatically, Jews. It is, perhaps, not unnecessary to add that there was a world of difference between the generalized anti-Semitism of many German Catholics and the specific (but in 1933 still unknown) Nazi plan to exterminate the Jews; but it is, nonetheless, an important fact to remember that there was a widespread sentiment of anti-Semitism among Germany's Catholics in 1933 (a sentiment fully reciprocated by the anti-Catholicism of most German Jews). The consequences of Catholic moderate anti-Semitism was that the virulent anti-Semitism of Hitler did not disturb Germany's Catholics as much as it should have.

5. A major factor to keep in mind is that the Catholic leadership—along with Germany's Protestants and indeed almost all contemporaries, German and non-German alike—failed to grasp the true nature of Nazism in 1933. It is easy to be impatient with this error of judgment from the safe distance of 1964. We must remember, however, that most contemporaries saw in Nazism primarily a great idealistic revolutionary uprising against the nihilism, materialism, and immorality of the post-World War I world. It was noted that *all* revolutionary movements had their negative sides, but that these—however unpleasant at the moment—usually did not prevent results judged to be beneficent in the long run. We must also remember that the phenomenon of Nazism was something utterly unprecedented at the time, and that the worst crimes subsequently perpetrated by Hitler—the deliberate unleashing of the Second World War and the systematic practice of genocide against Jews and Poles—were really *unthinkable* before they actually happened, most of all in a civilized European community like Germany. It was gen-

erally believed that governmental responsibility would turn Hitler from an intoxicated demagogue into a sober statesman, and that the fantastic reveries of *Mein Kampf* need not be taken seriously. It was further complacently believed that unless Hitler behaved as a sober statesman his government would not remain in power long.

6. The latter possibility—that Nazism might prove a brief episode, with its triumph proving a very temporary phenomenon—confronted the Catholic Church with the problem of *interim* accommodation. Assuming that Hitler was in fact something other than the long sought national authoritarian leader, the question arose: "How could the Church best pass through what was expected to be a comparatively brief period of danger?" Open resistance would provoke the persecution of a powerful government, and its need would scarcely be understood by a clergy and laity only too anxious to participate (for the reasons outlined above) in the "national revolution." Accommodation would be welcomed by clergy and laity alike, might prevent the otherwise threatened dismissal of Catholic civil servants *en masse*, and allow the survival of the vast network of Catholic schools, youth groups, trade unions, newspapers, and periodicals until the expected next political turnover. It would certainly guarantee the regular administration of the sacraments so important in the Catholic scheme of values. A policy of accommodation was also indicated by the Church's natural preoccupation with *its own* concerns. It is a fair accusation that the Church felt too little responsibility for the maintenance of general civilized political conditions in Germany, provided that its organizations were allowed to survive. Hitler in fact promised not only to protect these but even to advance them: he made the specific pledge that he would champion "positive Christianity" and opened the possibility of achieving the long desired national concordat. The dismissal of the *Reichstag* under the Enabling Law placed Hitler in a position to negotiate a concordat in a manner impossible under the anti-concordat parliamentary majorities of the defunct Weimar Republic. There were Catholics who believed that the (presumably transitory) condition of non-parliamentary government must be exploited to create a *fait accompli* which would prove binding upon Hitler's successors as well.

7. Most German Catholics obviously attached value to Hitler's promises, and believed that Hitler would readily concede a *quid pro quo* for Catholic support. It is not surprising that there was a strong "will to believe," for the alternative to accommodation appeared bleak indeed. A majority of the

German people, both Catholic and Protestant, obviously hailed the "national revolution"; and whatever the follies and barbarities of the Nazis, there was no alternative government in sight. The parties of the old Weimar Coalition—Centre, Socialists, and Democrats—had shrunk from 78 per cent of the electorate in 1919 to about 35 per cent in 1933, and were generally discredited; the Communists on the extreme Left had hovered between 10 and 20 per cent during the last free elections, and while not a genuine danger in themselves contributed importantly to paralyzing the democratic alternative to Nazism. The warnings delivered by the bishops against Nazism before 1933 had not deterred the considerable support which Hitler enjoyed among Germany's Catholic population. It was clearly a situation where even bishops hostile to Nazism were bound to take the attitude; "If we can't lick them, let's join them." Failure to join would place Catholicism in a position of unpleasant isolation, and since the Nazis could obviously be rough with opponents there was serious danger of martyrdom—martyrdom under conditions, moreover, where the Catholic laity of Germany would have little understanding of its necessity.

8. The advocates of the concordat (in both Germany and Rome) also thought that it would constitute a trump in case the hoped-for Nazi-Catholic co-operation did not in the long run work out as expected. It would convince Catholic waverers that the Church had done everything in its power (and perhaps more than it *ought* to have done) to get along with the Nazis, and that the fault for any conflict was exclusively on Hitler's side. Even more, the concordat would provide a clear-cut legal position for the defense of Catholic rights against future Nazi attack; defense where the Church could count upon the support of the laity as it felt it could not in 1933.

All these reasons suggested the desirability of accommodation to Nazism: lack of devotion to liberal democracy; the long-standing yearning for authoritarian government; the affinity between some Nazi and Catholic tenets; common enemies; the desire to create a legal fall-back position in case of future conflict; and above all the failure to understand the true nature of the Nazi government. (The latter was most clearly expressed in the belief that Hitler would either prove a benevolent authoritarian ruler or soon see his government collapse.) I believe that the cumulative weight of these reasons made the attempt at accommodation "inevitable" in the sense that this policy was not due to the "accidental" aberration of judgement of individual prelates and Vatican diplomats, but

rather expressed certain essential characteristics of the German Catholicism of 1933. I believe that the Church was bound to cut a sorry figure when confronted by the extraordinary and unprecedented situation of 1933. It is surely significant that the policy of accommodation was *at the time* condemned only by an infinitesimal minority, one which could scarcely make itself heard in the chorus of jubilation characteristic of the vast majority of Germany's Catholics as their Church withdrew its pre-1933 warnings against Hitler.

III

WHY DID THE Church get embroiled with the Nazis after 1933 despite its almost desperate desire to avoid conflict? The basic reason was that the Nazi government refused to tolerate the Church's existence as an independent body, no matter how much it groveled in the dust to minimize friction. The Nazis refused to accept the Catholic accommodation as either sincere or sufficient, and they had no intention of abiding by the terms of the concordat of July 20, 1933. This concordat, once it had served the specific purpose of winning for Hitler a certificate of respectability and disarming potential Catholic opposition, no longer had much value for the Nazis, except for the fact that they skillfully used the threat of abrogation to put the Catholics on their "best" behavior. Any Catholic opponents to Nazism were always rebuked by many of their fellow-religionists on the ground that their conduct "imperiled the concordat."

Yet the Church could not permanently avoid all conflict with a government which contained prominent pagan members and engaged in many specific policies which were completely incompatible with Catholic teachings. The Church placed the neo-pagan work of Nazi ideologist Alfred Rosenberg, *Der Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts*, on the index in February, 1934, in a vain attempt to drive an open breach between Rosenberg and Hitler. It made some feeble and unsuccessful attempts to prevent the Nazi suppression of the independent Catholic youth groups, journeymen's associations, etc., even to the point of protesting their suppression with the unworthy argument which might be paraphrased as, "You can't do this to near-Nazi organizations like ourselves." The open neo-paganism of the Nazis and their harassment of Catholic groups was condemned in the famous Papal encyclical *Mit brennender Sorge* of March 21, 1937—but this proved a mere episode which did not alter the fundamental Catholic policy of accommodation. Occasionally Catholic mass protests were successful against the

acts of Nazi and anti-clerical zealots, such as the removal of crucifixes from schools in Oldenburg (1936) and Bavaria (1941) and the dismissal of nuns from teaching posts in Bavarian schools (1941). Lewy in fact argues that "there can be little doubt that the bishops grossly underestimated the strength of their position, especially during the war period" (p. 313). It is true that Hitler could scarcely afford a major conflict with his Catholic subjects while Germany was engaged in war. This explains the great Catholic success of stopping the "euthanasia program" of killing Germany's feeble-minded and incurably ill persons, which Hitler had begun in 1939 but canceled after a courageous sermon preached by Bishop Galen on August 3, 1941. It also explains the successful Catholic opposition to the proposed compulsory divorce of so-called "mixed marriages" in 1943. A few courageous bishops denounced some Nazi atrocities during the war with impunity. These successes are certainly pertinent to the much debated problem (to be discussed below) of the Church's refusal to interfere with Hitler's "final solution" of the Jewish problem.

The important point to keep in mind, however, is that Nazi-Catholic co-operation remained the rule, Catholic resistance to Nazism the exception, from the enthusiastic beginning to the bitter end of the Third Reich. The Church never spoke out against the Nazi police terror or the concentration camps; the notorious Bishop Berning even went so far as to visit several camps in June, 1936. Writes Lewy: "Addressing the [Catholic] inmates . . . Berning reminded them of the duty of obedience and fidelity towards people and state that was demanded by their religious faith. In a talk to the guards the Bishop was reported to have praised their work in the camp, and to have ended with three *Sieg Heil* for Führer and fatherland," (p. 173). The Church consented to the strangulation of its independent press and submitted diocesan papers to Nazi censorship and direction as the price for survival. The result was that much Nazi propaganda was peddled under a clerical masthead, to the advantage of the government and the confusion of the faithful. The Church stood by meekly while Hitler sought to discredit the clergy in 1935 through a carefully staged series of trials of priests for sex perversion and violation of currency regulations. The Church opened the use of Church archives to the new breed of "racial researchers" (*Ahnenforscher*) busily engaged in proving the Aryan descent of their clients or the Jewish blood of their enemies (Church archives were important in this work because civil registries had been es-

established only in 1874). The Church permitted Catholic bureaucrats and doctors to co-operate with the notorious sterilization laws although these specifically violated canon law. The bishops also participated in the extraordinary adulation which swept through Germany upon Hitler's fiftieth birthday on April 20, 1939.

The Catholic bishops gave enthusiastic, spontaneous, and important support to Hitler's aggressive foreign policies, both before and during the Second World War. They urged the faithful to vote "yes" in several of the plebiscites which Hitler called to endorse his foreign policy moves *ex post facto*—although the Church claimed on other occasions that it never meddled in purely political questions. The German bishops whose dioceses included the Saar were largely responsible for the nearly unanimous pro-German vote in the Saar plebiscite of 1935. The Episcopate gave fervid support to the German war effort from 1939 to 1945—a fervor which obviously bespoke sincerity rather than intimidation—although they should have known that Hitler was fighting an "unjust war" in terms of Catholic theology, and that a German victory would prove disastrous for both Catholicism and the civilized world. (On this topic see the well-documented study of the American sociologist Gordon Zahn, *German Catholics and Hitler's War*, 1962.) The Vatican appointed the infamous Franz Josef Rarkowski military bishop, a man whose pastoral letters were indistinguishable from the most poisonous products of Goebbels' propaganda machine. The German bishops, like the Vatican, did nothing effective to protest the unspeakable policy of the Nazi toward the Jews. All this is a sad, sad story for which many mitigating circumstances but no real excuse can be found.

It may be said in summary that the German Catholic failure in the face of Nazism was partly moral and partly intellectual. Admitting the very difficult, and entirely unprecedented, situation of 1933 it remains nonetheless inexcusable, in the opinion of this reviewer, that the Church agreed with too many Nazi, and near-Nazi, ideas and went out of its way to maximize such agreement; that instead of standing up for elementary decency it was primarily preoccupied with the tactical question of how best to protect purely Catholic interests and that its judgments even in this narrow field were clouded by an abysmal—though far from unique—inability to understand the true character of Nazism. From those flaws came the "great reconciliation" which brands the Catholic Church with a measure of responsibility for Hitler's consolidation of power, and set the Church upon a fatal

embrace of Nazism from which it proved unable to extricate itself until the collapse of Nazism in 1945.

IV

THE CATHOLIC failure in the face of Nazism has recently been brought to the attention of a broad public by the play of the Germany playwright Rolf Hochhuth, *The Deputy*. After arousing much controversy in Europe it was staged in New York in the spring of 1964, and appeared simultaneously in a good English translation. We are not concerned here with the aesthetic qualities of the play, but propose rather to discuss its double theme: the complicity of Germany's so-called elite in all the horrors of Nazism, and the failure of Pope Pius XII to speak out effectively against the worst of these horrors, the extermination of six million Jews.

The guilt of the entire German elite is presented in the second scene of Act I, where the infamous Eichmann serves as host at a bowling party held in the Berlin hotel *Jägerkeller*. His guests include an aristocratic armaments manufacturer named Rutta and a bourgeois corporation lawyer named Fritsche; an officer from the High Command named Serge and a civilian bureaucrat named Pryzilla; the grotesque Professor Hirt of Strasbourg, notorious for collecting Jewish skulls; and the demonic nameless Auschwitz doctor who embodies an extraordinary mixture of cynicism, hedonism, sadism, and Teutonic erudition. All of these characters are not only fully aware of the extermination of the Jews, but most of them profit from it in some form as well. (The latter fact is brought out again in the last scene of the play, in which most of these characters meet again at Auschwitz.) It is the obvious intention of Hochhuth to suggest that Nazism was not merely the work of a few fanatics and party scoundrels, but enjoyed the active complicity of the managerial class, the legal profession, the officer corps, the bureaucracy, and the professorate. There can be no question that there is much truth in this indictment, though Hochhuth certainly uses liberally the artist's license to exaggerate. His individual figures are caricatures rather than convincing flesh-and-blood persons; he certainly wastes no time depicting the doubts, hesitations, and occasional acts of resistance which can in fact be found in the actual record of most upper-class Germans. There is, of course, some substance behind every effective caricature; but it appears fair to say that Hochhuth's play is—like Lewy's study—better at indicting Germans than at explaining why they acted as they did. What both authors tend to forget is that

Germans cannot be clearly differentiated between convinced and criminal Nazis, on the one hand, and consistent and heroic anti-Nazis, on the other. There were, of course, a certain number of both types, but it is probable that they constituted a small minority of the population. The vast majority of Germans (especially among the so-called elite which interests us here) were sometimes pro- and sometimes anti-Nazi, being influenced at different times by such variegated factors as conviction, conscience, fear, and opportunism. Most were at one time or another (like the Catholic bishops in 1933) far more pro-Nazi than they were later willing to admit to others (or even to themselves); most also at one time or another disapproved of some Nazi policy and engaged in some kind of activity (be it only that of "inner emigration"), which required some measure of courage and was easily presented after 1945, with subjective honesty, as anti-Nazi "resistance." All this is a very human story with which a genuinely great dramatist ought, perhaps, to come to terms. It is a commonplace of dramatic criticism that the effectiveness of vicious characters (for example, Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth) is enhanced by the inclusion of some relieving traits; there are none to be found in the galaxy of Hochhuth's Nazi camp-followers.

Hochhuth's second theme, the censurable failure of Pope Pius to speak out against the extermination of the Jews, has also much merit, though it certainly fails to do justice to a very complex historical situation. There is no question that the famous central scene of the play (Act IV), in which the Pope appears on the stage himself to justify his passivity, is dramatically quite effective. The bitter feelings stirred up by the play could of course have been largely avoided if the Papal position had been presented only by the prominent cardinal who in fact does state it (Act II) long before Pius appears on the stage, (instead of by the Pope himself). This reviewer deplores, on the one hand, the tactlessness of making a much revered and recently deceased Pope the villain of a stage drama; yet it is probable, on the other hand, that Hochhuth's play would have remained buried in obscurity if he had not perpetrated this act of tactlessness. There is no denying that Hochhuth shows a talent for provocation. It must be added immediately, however, that Hochhuth's provocation was itself far from unprovoked. The Pope who described himself as Christ's deputy, and was believed to perform this role by faithful Catholics the world over, failed to speak up effectively when Jews were rounded up for extermination within sight of the Papal apartments in Rome. He was, moreover, an exceptionally articulate

Pope who spoke up vigorously on innumerable issues of far less importance during a long and distinguished Pontificate of 19 years. Why, then, did he make only veiled and extremely general protests in the face of the greatest crime in history—the systematically organized, coldly implemented, scientific mass murder of six million Jews at Auschwitz and other extermination factories?

Hochhuth explains Pius' passivity (insofar as he tries to explain it) by the use of two categories: faults of personality and adherence to arguments based upon expediency rather than morality. He depicts the Pope's personality in a very unattractive light: absorbed in Vatican monetary affairs rather than the relief of human suffering; satisfying an atrophied conscience through sanctimonious and completely ineffective general statements; and preoccupied above all with securing favorable diplomatic constellations where he might mediate between the antagonists of the Second World War. It need scarcely be said that this view of Pius is a caricature rather than an accurate portrait. The best that can be said for it is that it at least avoids the sometimes heard charge that personal cowardice (specifically the fear of Nazi violence against his person) was the primary motive for Pius' inaction.

The arguments by which the Pope justified his stand are presented, though neither fairly nor completely, by Hochhuth in Act II in a discussion between a cardinal, Count Fontana (a high figure in the business administration) and the Jesuit Father Riccardo (the hero of the play who later seeks and finds martyrdom). Put in a nutshell: the Vatican did not wish a total Nazi defeat because such a defeat would subject much of Europe to atheistic Communism, which the Vatican has always considered to be much worse than Fascism. To condemn individual Nazi policies, no matter how atrocious, would inevitably embarrass the Nazi war effort to the ultimate benefit of Stalin. The outcome of the war desired by Pius was a negotiated peace between Germany and the Western Allies, to be followed by a common front against Communism. The Pope was openly critical of the Allied policy of "unconditional surrender" because it clearly precluded any negotiated peace; and he continued to hope against hope that it might still be abandoned. He wanted the Vatican to remain available as a neutral mediator in such a contingency (which might become more probable if there should be an internal overthrow of the Nazi regime); this constituted an additional important reason for avoiding sharp conflict with the Nazis on the Jewish or any other issue.

(An additional "political consideration" is left

unmentioned by Hochhuth: the Pope's fear of post-war hostility toward Catholicism if the Pope should play an open role in the defeat of Nazi Germany. One must always remember that Pope Pius had been Papal Nuncio in Germany throughout the Weimar Republic and had observed the poisonous course of the "stab-in-the-back legend" of that period. What if it should be turned next time against Catholics rather than Jews? The Pope was certainly not alone in expecting that neo-Nazism would play an important role in post-war Germany. It is a sad commentary upon the limited power of human foresight that intelligent men went wrong with quasi-unanimity on both the significance of Nazism in 1933 and its insignificance after 1945.)

Hochhuth briefly mentions without elaboration three further arguments which confirmed the Pope in his passivity. There was, in the first place, the consideration that a Papal protest against the extermination of the Jews would probably prove unsuccessful. It was most unlikely that a fanatic like Hitler would cease and desist in the face of Papal condemnation. (The case can be put more strongly: a Hitler goaded to fury would probably enlarge the net of his victims. This was shown when the Dutch Catholic bishops protested the deportation of the Dutch Jews. Hitler replied by deporting the previously exempt half-Jews as well. The Vatican had reason to believe that a Papal condemnation of Hitler would increase rather than diminish human suffering.)

A second consideration was that a Papal condemnation might prove not only generally vain but specifically ineffective. The Nazis controlled the entire European communications network, and it appeared far from certain that a Papal condemnation of Hitler would reach German Catholics (and thereby perhaps goad them into opposition against Nazi genocide). The Vatican radio existed upon Nazi sufferance, and independent communication between Rome and the German episcopate was rather precarious. The earlier commitment of the German bishops to a policy of avoiding conflict with the Nazi government created some question whether all bishops would have co-operated with a completely new policy of open condemnation of Nazi barbarism.

Let us assume, however, that a Papal condemnation had reached Germany and won the full support of the episcopate. The question would then arise: "How would the German laity react?" The Vatican had some reason to believe that there would have been a mass defection from the Church. Most German Catholics were ardent nationalists; many had long been anti-Semitic in varying degrees;

nearly all shared the traditional German instinct for obedience to constituted political authority. An open conflict between their government and their Church would have thrown them into doubt, despair, and above all confusion. The Pope in Rome and the problem of ultimate salvation would probably have appeared remote, the bullet and torture-chamber of the Gestapo very near. Resistance to Nazism meant danger not only to oneself, but all one's relatives and friends as well. It is true, of course, that the Nazi government could not possibly punish all German Catholics if they acted with solidarity—but in truth there was no prospect of such solidarity in such a cause. The Vatican must have feared a fragmentation of German Catholicism, a widespread ignoring of Papal commands, opportunist desertion by the many, and probably ineffective martyrdom by the few. This prospect was calculated to discourage any strong Papal condemnation of Hitler's barbarous anti-Semitic policy.

Hochhuth fails to mention a further consideration already discussed above in connection with the reasons for the German Catholic accommodation to Nazism in 1933: the great importance which the Church attaches to the regular administration of the sacraments. Conflict with a government in a position to interfere with regular Church services should, therefore, always be avoided if avoidance is at all possible. Non-Catholics are, of course, unlikely to show much understanding for this point, but it probably played some role in Pius' mind.

V

HOCHHUTH MENTIONS, at one point or another, the following arguments on behalf of Papal passivity: preoccupation with the Communist danger; desire to maintain neutrality to allow possible mediation between Hitler and Roosevelt; the probable ineffectiveness of any protest in view of Hitler's intransigence and the Nazi control of communications; and the desire to avoid embarrassment to German Catholics and probable fragmentation of the Church. For Hochhuth all these arguments are, however, irrelevant, for he obviously identifies himself with the position of Father Riccardo, the hero of the play. Riccardo is horrified by the fact that the basic question—to speak out or not to speak out—is put by the Pope and his advisors on the plane of expediency rather than moral principle. He believes that it is the simple duty of Christ's Deputy to condemn barbarism irrespective of consequences. There is obviously much to be said for this position, and it becomes all the more attractive when Riccardo supports his stand by joining the Jewish deportees and sharing their death at Ausch-

witz. He feels that he is doing what the Pope ought to do himself; he acts, so to speak, as deputy for Christ's Deputy when the latter has betrayed his commission.

This reviewer has considerable sympathy for the position of Hochhuth (and Riccardo) but wishes to add one caveat and one elaboration. The caveat is that a Pope is *both* the deputy of Christ and the head of the *institutional Church*: he must act on moral principle in the former role, but cannot ignore all considerations of expediency in the latter. The expediential considerations outlined above (in a manner, it is hoped, fuller and more sympathetic than Hochhuth's) obviously possess a certain cumulative force. They could be held and implemented by a man who was not necessarily the cold, unctious aristocrat preoccupied with money and diplomacy depicted by Hochhuth. There is much historical evidence that the real Pius was a tormented soul who agonized deeply about his proper role in a time of exceptional difficulty.

The reviewer would add, by way of supplementing Hochhuth, that the Pope may have erred in placing expediency above morality; but that he *certainly* erred in his specific assessment of the expediencies of the situation of 1943. Hochhuth's case can be reinforced, I believe, by refuting much of the Papal case on grounds of *expediency* instead of simply dismissing it on grounds of *principle*. There is reason to believe that the Pope was substantially mistaken in his assessment of many of the factors which apparently influenced him in his policy of maintaining silence.

1. The hope for a Papal mediation between Roosevelt and Hitler (or even a post-Hitler German government, if such could be established after an internal overthrow of Nazism) was clearly illusory; that of driving a wedge between the Russians and the Western democracies, virtually non-existent. While there is much to be said—especially with the power of hindsight—for the view that a West-German rapprochement (always presupposing the prior internal overthrow of Nazism) would have been desirable in the light of the Russian Communist danger, it is certain that such a rapprochement was objectively impossible at the time, public opinion in the Western democracies being what it was. It may be considered inevitable that the "Great Coalition" stuck together to secure the total defeat of Germany, and that Communism would make great headway in the ensuing Central European power vacuum. It appears that it was simply beyond the power of the Pope to prevent this development, and the Vatican concern about maintaining German resistance to the Russians—however understandable

—was unrealistic once this fact has been grasped. The Vatican diplomatic conception collapses like a house of cards in the face of the impossibility of a negotiated peace and the inevitability of an Allied-Russian total victory. The Vatican conception—intrinsically quite debatable—that Communism constituted a worse evil than Fascism may or may not be true, but it is certainly irrelevant in judging the political realities of 1943. It suffices to establish the point that concern for Germany's necessarily ephemeral power to resist the Russian armies and desire to maintain Papal "availability" for mediation ought not to have influenced the Pope in his policy toward the Nazi extermination of the Jews.

2. The Pope's fear that post-war Germans would resent any Papal condemnation of Nazi anti-Semitism, because it had contributed to Germany's military defeat, was faulty in its assessment of future political trends. It failed to foresee the extent to which Nazism would be discredited once its crimes were revealed to the German population, and how it would be hopelessly compromised in the eyes of its votaries, by the greatest crime possible under their pattern of values—failure. It may be objected, and readily granted, that this fact was far from obvious in 1943. A simple question should, however, close this line of argument: "What is one to think of a Papal policy premised (at least in part) upon a desire to appease German postwar neo-Nazi sentiment?"

3. It is probable that the Pope underestimated his ability to make trouble for the Nazis. (This was certainly the view of Orsenigo, the Papal Nuncio in Berlin, as explained in the opening scene of Hochhuth's *Deputy*, and is the contention of Lewy in a passage cited above.) It is true that the Pope could not be sure in advance of the "resistance" potential of German Catholics, *but neither could Hitler*. The Nazi government withdrew certain measures as soon as they were condemned by the Catholic episcopate on several occasions during the war (e.g., the euthanasia program, the compulsory divorce of mixed marriages, and the withdrawal of crucifixes from Bavarian schools); the *only* reason it did so was that it was afraid of alienating Catholics from the war effort. Is there serious reason to doubt that German Catholics would have rallied much less effectively to their bishops if ordered to oppose the Nazi extermination of the Jews? The communication problem between Rome and the episcopate was no doubt serious, but a Papal condemnation of Hitler's barbarous policies could not have been kept secret for long. Quite apart from Allied radio broadcasts, there were certainly ways of smuggling an anti-Nazi encyclical into Germany,

and no one seriously suggests that the bishops would have refused to read it to their flocks. Such an encyclical would have confronted the Nazis with the unpleasant alternative of either tolerating open opposition or punishing the entire episcopate. The former would have made the anti-Semitic policies far more difficult to execute; the latter would have maximized Catholic disaffection in the midst of war. It appears evident that Hitler—no matter how determined and fanatical—would have hesitated in the face of such an obstacle; and it is to the discredit of the Pope that he did not exploit this opportunity, preferably first in a secret diplomatic ultimatum but to be followed by open condemnation if necessary. It certainly constituted the only chance of saving Europe's Jews.

4. There is no question that an active Papal policy would have confronted many German Catholics with a difficult personal predicament and caused severe "embarrassment" to the Church. But is it not the duty of the Church to create predicaments for sinful men (and surely acquiescence in the murder of 6 million Jews was sinful), and the duty of the Pope to create embarrassment for a national branch of the Catholic Church which has acquiesced in evil to the extent that the German Church had?

5. One must also remember that there are short-run and long-run expediencies. The passive acquiescence in Nazi crimes spared the Papacy and the German Church much temporary embarrassment, but at what a price! It will take the Church and the Papacy decades before it lives down the irrefutable accusation that it failed to speak out against the greatest crime of history. The Papal silence has become a serious embarrassment to numerous faithful Catholics, and the worst single item in the generally unfortunate record of the Catholic response to the challenge of Fascism.

One is tempted to invoke an instructive historical parallel between the conduct of Popes Pius VII and Pius XII. The former defied several of Napoleon's policies and excommunicated the French Emperor; French troops thereupon seized his person and hauled him off to five years of captivity in Savona and Fontainebleau (1809-14). The Pope was thereupon unable to perform his pontifical functions and was humiliated and mistreated; there were many at the time who thought that the old man was eccentric in attempting to use purely spiritual weapons against overwhelming physical power. Yet the steadfastness of Pius VII stood rewarded when Napoleon's power collapsed in 1814; he returned to a liberated Rome in triumph, with the prestige of the Church (and especially the Pa-

pacy) vastly enhanced. How different is the record of Pius XII! He did everything in his power to avoid conflict with Hitler, though Hitler's policies were far more barbarous than Napoleon's; he never excommunicated the German *Führer* (though Hitler was a nominal Catholic and numerous Catholics have been excommunicated for infinitely less heinous crimes). He never gave Hitler reason to seize his person and haul him off to prison and exile beyond the Alps. The collapse of Nazism found him in the sad position of a Pope who had passively acquiesced in Nazi crimes. There was no triumphant return to Rome, and the prestige of the Church (and especially the Papacy) stood seriously impaired. Catholicism would surely have been in a far happier situation if the Pope had spoken up in condemnation of the Nazi crimes, which stagger the imagination, and suffered whatever consequences Hitler had chosen to inflict upon him.

VI

It is most unlikely that men will ever agree upon the great questions raised by the important works of Guenter Lewy and Rolf Hochhuth. They both have the merit of raising fundamental issues for discussion, and it is hoped that the observations here advanced may contribute to an elucidation of the problems involved. It is my contention that Lewy and Hochhuth are essentially right in their points of view, but that they provide little guidance in providing an adequate explanation for the conduct which they censure. (It is assumed that historians and playwrights have the duty to explain as well as condemn.) I believe that the actual historical circumstances were more complex than either author is willing to allow; and that condemnation of the German episcopate's conduct in 1933, and the Papal conduct in 1943, should be more cautious than is the case in these works. Historical justice requires recognition of the fact that the bishops and the Pope had—at the time—good reasons, or seemingly good reasons, for acting as they did, and that there was a high degree of "inevitability" in the conduct that is now so easily condemned. I believe that constant remembrance of this fact ought to take much of the bitterness out of the controversy about the role of the Pope and the German Church; yet it need not preclude severe condemnation of the conduct of Pope and Church alike, such as has been attempted in these pages in a spirit, it is hoped, somewhat different from that of the two authors here reviewed.

That bitterness can be self-defeating is clear from some of the responses which *The Deputy* has provoked both in Germany and here in America. It

was Hochhuth's intention to shock Catholics into a re-evaluation of recent Catholic history; his play has, however, tended on the contrary to choke off a promising movement of Catholic self-criticism, as many Catholic scholars have rallied instinctively in defense of the assailed Pope Pius XII. It was Hochhuth's further intention to intensify Germany's sense of guilt about her Nazi past; yet he has in fact encouraged a current (fortunately not a very strong one) of neo-Nazi self-exculpation with the theme: "If the Pope with his power and invulnerable position did not protest against the extermination of the Jews, how could we little people be expected to protest?" Hochhuth's play has certainly

exacerbated the relations among Catholics, Protestants, and Jews: it has specifically confirmed too many "liberal" intellectuals in their inveterate anti-Catholicism, and confirmed too many Catholic intellectuals in their morbid suspicion of "outside criticism." All these reactions are deplorable and point to the need of discussing the burning problems of contemporary history with greater charity and understanding. The key to such discussion should be to supplement the necessary indictment of evil—and acquiescence in evil—with an explanation of *why* able and honorable men acted, however mistakenly, as they did in circumstances of unparalleled difficulty.