

Divine Providence and Papal Diplomacy: The Case of Pius XII in World War II

(I would like to dedicate this essay to the memory of my beloved friend, Anthony S. Fraser of Scotland ("Tony Fraser"), who died suddenly in Scotland on 28 August 2014--the Feast Day of Saint Augustine of Hippo.)

Epigraphs

“Pius XI regarded the influence of the cinema as 'almost wholly evil.' At an audience given [in 1927] to the International Federation of the Film Press he referred to two films, *Ecstasy* and *Amok*. Eighty-seven million people a year, he told the surprised film-men, went to see this rubbish; **the film-men ought to take as their motto [Alessandro] Manzoni's 'Never utter a word which applauds vice and derides virtue.'** Most of the film-men had never heard of Manzoni [the moving Italian writer (d.1873) and novelist of the literary classic *The Betrothed, I Promessi Sposi* (1827)] and he commended to them the Clean Film Crusade promoted by a group of American bishops.” (Anthony Rhodes, *The Vatican in the Age of the Dictators (1922-1945)* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston), p. 46—footnote 12—my emphasis added.)

“**Whether the 'Unconditional Surrender' Formula was right or not does not concern this study** [*i.e.*, the 1973 Anthony Rhodes study].” [“**The Allied Unconditional Surrender conditions were announced at Casablanca**” by Churchill and Roosevelt in Morocco on **27 January 1943.**] (Anthony Rhodes, *The Vatican in the Age of the Dictators (1922-1945)*, pp. 271 and 267—my emphasis added.)

“Again the Pope [Pope Pius XII] **preferred to avoid condemnation**, believing that this [such a condemnation] might only encourage the aggression.” (Anthony Rhodes, *The Vatican in the Age of the Dictators (1922-1945)*, 1973, p. 232—emphasis added.)

“It is not difficult to imagine **the effect of this** [FDR's 20 September 1942 Letter to Pope XII, which was also an intransigent Manifesto in part: about “complete victory” and “no peace without victory.”] **on the Pope and his entourage**—at first of incredulity **and then as** the weeks passed and news of the first Axis reverses began to

come in, **and the Allied Unconditional Surrender conditions were announced at Casablanca (27 January 1943)**, a **realisation that** the Soviet Union, far from being annihilated, might emerge from the war **not only intact but enlarged....**The Pope's **great dream** that as a new Innocent XI he might unify the nations in the Christian West against the Infidel and save Vienna, Budapest and Warsaw as Innocent had saved those cities from the Turks—**but this time from the Bolsheviks—was over.**” (Anthony Rhodes, *The Vatican in the Age of the Dictators (1922-1945)*, 1973, p. 267—my emphasis added.)

“Albert von Kessel, the German Botschaftsrat [the Counsellor from the German Embassy] at the Quirinal [the Office of the Italian President or Chief of State] goes further....

“We knew [between September 1943 and June 1944] that a violent protest against the persecution of the Jews would have certainly put the Pope [Pius XII] in great personal danger, and it would not have saved the life of a single Jew. **Like a trapped beast, Hitler would have reacted to any provocation with extreme violence. Hitler, kept at bay by the Allies and their Unconditional Surrender demand, was like a beast of prey pursued by hunters, capable of any hysterical excess.**” (Anthony Rhodes, *The Vatican in the Age of the Dictators (1922-1945)*, 1973), p. 344—my emphasis added.)

“It was not easy for the **British** government to resist **the Papal 'Peace Initiatives'**, as they had come to be called at the Foreign Office. **Everyone but England seemed to want peace....**The Pope wanted peace, so that the world could form a united front against Bolshevism. Germany wanted peace, because it would leave her in full possession [sic] of what she had engulfed. **The only government which did not want peace was that of probably the most pacific and war-abominating nation in the world [i.e., putatively Great Britain herself!].**” (Anthony Rhodes, *The Vatican in the Age of the Dictators (1922-1945)*, 1973, p. 242—my emphasis added.)

However, **on 6 December 1941**—one day before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor—**Britain herself (and Canada) declared war even on brave little Finland:** *i.e.*, on the great Field Marshal Mannerheim's heroic anti-Soviet and publicly democratic nation. (Also of note, the war declared by Britain on 6 December was thus made and delivered on the Finnish Independence Day.)

Of the Christian Mysteries, the concept and reality of the Permissive Will of God is one of the most challenging doctrines, and a great personal test of the Faith of a Catholic. For, it is believed that God (the Holy Trinity) does not **intend** evil but, instead, **allows** evil. And the reflectively faithful

Catholic's attitude becomes something like this, expressed as “a correlative relative proposition”: **the greater** the evil that God allows, **the greater** the good He intends to bring out of it. Therefore, we must promptly and generously co-operate with that divine intention and strive to bring about a greater good from what God has allowed to happen. Moreover, it is believed that there is both God's **General** Providence for mankind, and also God's **Particular** Providence for each of us individually.

One test of the often subtle operation of this Divine Providence in history is to consider the conduct and motives of the divinely founded Papacy (both individual Popes and the Holy See itself) during war, especially during a great war, and a protracted war, such as World War II. One may learn much not only from a Pope's acts of commission, but also from his acts of omission, which are often consequential, too.

The case of Pope Pius XII will be illustrative of these proposals or theses. The deeply researched 1973 book by Anthony Rhodes, *The Vatican in the Age of the Dictators (1922-1945)*,¹ will be our main guide and challenging text here.

For many years during my studies, I have wondered, for example, what Pope Pius XII said and did after the Soviet Union itself destructively attacked eastern Poland first **on 17 September 1939**, less than three weeks after the well-known German incursion on 1 September 1939.

Moreover, what did Pius XII say and do after Great Britain declared war on little, heroic Finland on 6 December 1941, which was six months after the German invasion of Russia in June of 1941? Did the Pope ever say or do something about the cruel Soviet conquest of the Baltic Republics and parts of Finland (the region of Keralia on the east)?

Anthony Rhodes does not give any answer to these questions in his book, and I still do not know what Pius XII did, both overtly and covertly — or diplomatically. What did he say and do after the January 1943 declaration of the doctrine and policy of “Unconditional Surrender,” especially after the injustices of Versailles? Why was Pius XII so trustful of the manifoldly deceitful American President F.D. Roosevelt? Look at the consequences of Roosevelt's deceitful manipulations and repeated uses of “**the back door to war**” (Charles Callan Tansill)?

For me, regrettably, Papal Diplomacy throughout Church history has so often — too often —

¹ □ Anthony Rhodes, *The Vatican in the Age of the Dictators 1922-1945* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973). This book is the second Volume of three in his searching trilogy, entitled *The Power of Rome in the Twentieth Century*. The other two volumes of the trilogy are: Volume I—*The Vatican in the Age of the Liberal Democracies 1870-1922* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1973); and Volume III—*The Vatican in the Age of the Cold War 1945-1980* (London *et al.*: Michael Russell Publishing, 1992).

seemed to undermine the principles and sacramental life of the Catholic Faith. How is this, too, part of the Divine Providence? Like the variously promiscuous and putatively ecumenical “*Ostpolitik*,” it certainly seems to provide a set of test cases for us, especially for our trying to respond promptly, generously and faithfully to the Permissive Will of the Holy Trinity. (A man of droll wit might even say: “If God sticks by such Papal Diplomacy, He will loyally stick by anybody”!)

Another thing I had hoped to find and understand from Anthony Rhodes' volumes about the diplomatic history of the Papacy in the twentieth century was what Pope Pius XII and his entourage said and did after Germany's 22 June 1941 invasion of Bolshevik Russia. And why America and others decided to form a Grand Alliance with Stalin's Soviet Union. For soon the so-called Allies were to be thoroughly collaborating with the Communist Soviets — *i.e.*, with Revolutionary **International** Socialism—to defeat Revolutionary **National** Socialist Germany. It is important to remember or to know for the first time that Franklin D. Roosevelt's government (that had prestigiously already recognized the Soviet Union diplomatically back in 1933) now wanted no “compromise peace” (266).

Here are portions of an important personal letter President Roosevelt sent to Pope Pius XII on 20 September 1942, which was, as the Vatican saw it, to be a turning point in the War. The following excerpts² of President Roosevelt's vehement resolve and sophistry will show us unmistakably both his deceitful mendacity and his vengeful destructive intentions, as if the Soviet Union were a trustworthy and wholesome peace-loving partner and ally now:

It is of great importance that, at this juncture when the Allied Powers are passing to the offensive in the conduct of the war, the attitude of the United States government with respect to the present world struggle should be restated to the Holy See.... A peace-loving people, we exhausted every honorable means to remain at peace; in the midst of peace negotiations we were foully attacked by Germany's partner in the Orient [Japan]. Like Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland and the rest, we were made the victims of Axis aggression at the very moment when their diplomats were talking peace. How then could we have confidence in the word of any Axis Power? In the conviction that anything less than complete victory would endanger the principles we fight for and our very existence of our nation, the United States of America will prosecute this war until the Axis collapses. We shall not again allow ourselves to be imperilled from behind while we are talking peace with criminal aggressors. **Our confidence in complete victory** [with Unconditional Surrender? At least after 27 January 1943?] is based upon the most objective foundation. There is nothing of emotional optimism or wishful thinking. We are prepared for a long war. We foresaw early reverses. But in the end, we know that no nation or combination of nations could

² □ On his page 267, Anthony Rhodes says: “The texts of President Roosevelt's messages which Mr. [Myron] Taylor brought [from FDR] have recently been published by the Vatican (1969)....” And he gives the full citations in French.

stand against us in the field.... The entire industry of the world's greatest industrial nation is now directed to one objective – to manufacture, by mass production methods in which we excel, the implements of war. We have only begun and yet we have already surpassed the arms output of Germany at her peak. The world has never seen such an avalanche of war weapons, manned by skilled mechanics and stout-hearted freemen, as we shall loose in 1943 and 1944 against the Axis. In some sectors we have already taken the offensive, months ahead of our original plans. That offensive will rise in irresistible crescendo, more and more rapidly, more and more powerfully, until totalitarianism [to include the Aggressor Soviet Union?], with its menace to religion and freedom, is finally and utterly crushed.

The Axis knows this, knows that its ill-gotten gains cannot be held by continuing the war. **What they won through treacherous war, they may not try to retain by a treacherous peace.** We have reason to believe that they are casting about for someone to make a peace proposal which will enable them to escape the inexorable results of defeat in the field. **This is no time for a recourse to diplomacy.** Having made every effort to avoid this war, we shall not now be weakened by Axis cunning when we have taken the field. We consider that Axis-aspired proposals of “peace” would be nothing less than a blow aimed at us. There is reason to believe that our Axis enemies will attempt, through devious channels, to urge the Holy See to endorse in the near future proposals for peace without victory. In the present position of the belligerents, we can readily understand how strong a pressure the Axis Powers may bring to bear upon the Vatican. We therefore feel it a duty to support the Holy See in resisting any undue pressure from this source. (A. Rhodes, pp. 268-269—my emphasis added.)

Western collaboration with “Atheistic Communism” as an “Ally,” to occur more openly and energetically soon after the 22 June 1941 German invasion of Russia, also appears to bypass (with quite manipulative sophistry) Pope Pius XI's own important 19 March 1937 Encyclical on Atheistic Communism: *Divini Redemptoris*. Pius XI therein emphasized that no collaboration with Communism should occur at any time, under any circumstances.

What Pope Pius XII's Nuncios (Msgr. Cicognani *et al.*) and other agents later chose to do — to get America and at first reluctant Catholics in the U.S. into the War as an open Ally of the Soviets — is likely not a pretty story that resorted to such manipulative sophistry and an expedient “deconstruction” of Pope Pius XI *Divini Redemptoris*. But Pope Pius XII went along with it.

As Anthony Rhodes wrote in his extensive study: “Again the Pope [Pope Pius XII] preferred to avoid condemnation, believing that this might only encourage the aggression.” (232) Moreover, when Rhodes took a longer view of Pius XII's deeply abiding character, he observed:

This article [concerning the 1933 “German Concordat” with the Vatican] may well have been written or inspired by Cardinal Pacelli [the future Pius XII], for he was primarily a diplomat; throughout his clerical career he had never been anything else.

He believed that all problems could be solved by compromise. A born negotiator, he always contended, even years later, that the German concordat “brought advantages, or at least prevented greater evils.” (182—my emphasis added)

On 11 September 1942—just nine days before Pius XII's receiving the resolute and decisive letter from President Roosevelt—the Briton, Hugh Montgomery, presented his diplomatic credentials, and he wrote, as follows, about his revealing experience:

I told His Holiness ... that the Poles had hoped for some further expression of sympathy from the Holy See. At this a look of great concern came over His Holiness' face, and he said, “But I have already done so much!”....The Poles, he added, did not know what difficulties faced the Vatican. Other messages to them had, he said, been prevented from reaching their destination by the Germans [and by the Soviets, too?]. **If he were to go into details and mention names, it would only harm the unfortunate victims.** (291—my emphasis added)

That last sentence certainly reveals the Pope's lack of resourcefulness and passive sense of his hampering limitations. Had he no other means to support the Poles — not just the Jews — and had he not other initiatives besides sending messages, public or private? He would soon show his greater vulnerability to the will and demands of the Roosevelt Administration, and just some three months before Roosevelt's Punic Declaration (with Churchill) of Unconditional Surrender.

For, Pius XII and his entourage never publicly criticized this barbaric declaration of unconditional surrender, nor even its implementation, with the help of “total war” strategic bombing (also of non-military targets). The Air Power Theorists said strategic bombing would “shorten” the war, although the later-enforced inhuman demands for an unconditional surrender would only “lengthen” and “embitter” the war. Where was the anemic Vatican in all this? Where was the later reparation?

How were we then to have striven, condignly, to bring a greater good out of what God had so mysteriously allowed to transpire? To include our “*Ostpolitik*” collaboration with Stalin's monstrous Soviet Union.

May we now better understand this test of our Faith as it was experienced then—not only in dismembered Poland—and as it is analogously experienced now.

The loser of World War I was Europe (Christian Europe) and the loser of World War II was Europe (a now attenuated and formerly Christian Europe). Moreover, as of the purported “end” of World War II, we have had to face a “Europe Between the Superpowers”: the United States and the Soviet Union. What a Dialectic of Dissolution! Look at Europe now, in 2018. And look at the Catholic Church now, too.

Lord, please help us see the greater good You have intended in all of this, and how we may best now be able to collaborate with Thee and the Blessed Mother, Our Lady.

CODA

At one point of his examination of the Wartegau region of Poland early in the war, in 1940, Anthony Rhodes—who was not yet a Catholic—expresses with a growing poignancy the following religious situation and some of its deeply spiritual effects:

It seems that these [German] plans were drawn up by the extreme anti-clerical elements of the Nazi party; and they wished to implement them immediately after the [1939] Polish campaign. But more cautious counsels prevailed. It was not until the intoxicating [German] victory of June 1940 in the West [in France and the Low Countries], that permission for full implementation [of a “National Church”] was granted. Once started however, the [novel and coercive] measures went forward at such a pace that on the 2nd September, 1940 the Vicar-General of Gniezo, **van Blericq**, managed to convey a message to Orsenigo, the [Papal] Nuncio in Berlin, **asking for Papal intervention. He said if nothing were done, within three months the Catholic Church in the Wartegau would be eliminated....**

The demand by van Blericq for a Papal intervention in the Wartegau was not complied with, and on the 28th of June, 1942 Father Breitingger, the (German) Apostolic Administrator of the Wartegau [near Posen] wrote to the Nuncio [in Berlin], **“One now hears Polish Catholics asking if there can still be a God when such injustice is possible, or if the Pope who—they had so often been told when things went well—had their interests at heart, had forgotten them completely now that their life was so intolerable.” Polish children in the Wartegau were, he said, being taken from their parents and deported *en masse* to Germany; and mothers who tried to hold them back were murdered. When such crimes, which cried to Heaven for condemnation, were committed, the inexplicable silence of the Supreme Pontiff became a cause of spiritual ruin.** The Apostolic Delegate foresaw that if the Allies [sic] won the war, “the Protestants of America with their money will find the field well prepared for conversions **in Polish Catholic hearts oppressed by bitterness.**”...Cardinal Hlond...wrote to the Secretary of State, Maglione, in August 1941 that...the Pope was believed by the people of Poland not only to have abandoned them, but to be actively supporting the Axis Powers....The confidence [trust] of the [Polish] people in their clergy (what remained of them) increased, their attachment to the Vatican diminished. **And because the Pope did not speak up strongly enough, there was even a movement among younger Poles to break with Rome and create an autonomous Polish-Catholic Church. Even worse, with the recent signature of a pact between [Bolshevist] Russia and the Polish government in exile [in London], the Poles believed that the Bolshevists would reconstitute a [Communist Atheist] Polish State**, while the Pope would continue [sic] to support the oppressive measures of Hitler and Mussolini. (286-287—my emphasis added)

What a situation, what a test of the Catholic Faith. And this intimately destructive Dialectic

continues today in the Catholic Church — in China, in Europe, in the United States and in South America and elsewhere. First dissolve the intimate bonds of trust and faith, then re-aggregate and amalgamate. We see again in Dialectic operation the Subversive Revolutionary Principle of *Solve et Coagula*.

In the Preface to the third and final volume of his trilogy,³ Anthony Rhodes, by way of partial summary, says the following:

At the end of the Second World War **the unconditional surrender terms to Germany** caused the first of a number of dissensions between the Vatican and the Western Allies. **The Vatican believed that...Germany was preferable to Soviet Russia and represented the only effective barrier against the spread of Communist atheism in the world.** It would be impolitic to destroy any barrier which might contain the Red Army **and the extension of Soviet frontiers into Europe. In the German-Russian war the Vatican looked therefore to a German victory—but a Pyrrhic victory**, so weakening Germany that she would sue for peace with the West, the only condition being that it would not be with *Nazi* Germany [*i.e.*, National Socialist Germany]. **Such a peace the Allies refused to negotiate.** Germany was forced to her knees, **and the Red Army took possession of half Europe. By 1945 Communist Russia ruled over 300 million human beings.** (Volume III—*Preface*, p. 1—my emphasis added)

Cui Bono?

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³ □ Anthony Rhodes, *The Vatican in the Age of the Cold War 1945-1980* (London-Norwich: Michael Russell Publishing Ltd., 1992), page 1 (Preface)