

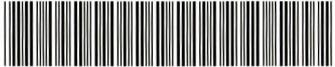
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THE POPE, THE JEWS
AND PROPERTY

by
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THE PROTESTANT FAITH

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Last week's edition of The Catholic Weekly carried the story of Pope Paul VI's recent visit to the rebuilt monastery of Monte Cassino. The Pope used the occasion to renew the condemnation of the Allies for bombing the monastery which (you will remember) was built on a strategic hill vital for the British and American Armies to capture in their advance against Hitler. Because the monastery was so obviously a defensible post the Allies expended much effort in reducing it. It need hardly be said that they would not have expended this effort if they had not been convinced of the strategic military importance of the place. However, at the time Pope Pius XII was loud in his denunciation of the bombardment. Speaking of these denunciations, the present Pope who was Under Secretary of State to Pius XII, said "We are a well informed witness of how much the apostolic see did to spare this fortress. That supplicating and sovereign voice was not listened to. Monte Cassino was bombed and destroyed". Pope Paul added, "It was one of the saddest episodes of the war".

This is an extraordinary statement, that Paul VI should describe this bombing of a strategic hill from which all civilians had been long since evacuated as "one of the saddest episodes of the war". The Pope seems more concerned with stones than with human lives, and in this sense the present Pope is only reflecting the attitude of his former chief, Pius XII, who protested at the military operation involved in the bombing of Monte Cassino but made no protest at all at the non-military and yet horrifying operation of Hitler in liquidating the Jews en masse without trial. The Vatican was well aware of Hitler's atrocities and had been asked to make a protest; but not even when the Jews of Rome were being arrested and loaded into the cattle trucks was any protest made; and yet the Pope is Bishop of Rome and many of these Jews had been baptized into the Roman Catholic Church. These deportations of Jews from Rome itself went on till after D Day at a time when it was quite obvious that Hitler was going to lose the war, yet at no time did the Pope make any protest, though he knew all about it, nor did he excommunicate

Hitler who was a Roman Catholic, though he did not hesitate to excommunicate Communists. All this time the Pope maintained his concordat with the Nazi Government which he himself had drawn up before the war. How are we to account for this terrible silence from one who claims to be the representative of Christ on earth? The Catholic Truth Society have published a pamphlet entitled "The Pope, the Jews and the Nazis" by Sir Alec Randall, (the pamphlet is on sale in Sydney churches). On page 14 the author asks the question, why did not the Pope excommunicate Hitler or denounce the concordat? And on page 16 he answers his question by saying that the Pope's silence was to avoid worse things happening. But how can a writer actually say such a thing? It is impossible to imagine anything worse than what was going on month after month - the most comprehensive manhunt in history when men, women and children were gassed and burned. To refrain from doing what is right because of fear for the consequences is not the action of a Christian leader. Prudence is not the motive for

Christian action when duty calls one to stand up for innocent sufferers. The Christian rule is simple; always do what is right when this is plain. Have faith in God to leave the consequences to Him. This may lead to Calvary but it is the only way by which God's cause is advanced.

On page 19 of the Catholic Truth Society pamphlet Randall offers an even more ignoble excuse for the Pope's silence. He writes of "The defenceless Pope...treating with desperate, ruthless men. For, there should be no mistake, Hitler could have done even worse ... He could have vented his fury on Christians too. The Pope had before his eyes the example of Dutch hierarchy who by their vigorous public protest against the deportation of the Jews caused the Governor in his fury to deport also Catholic Jews including the Carmelite nun, Edith Stein". This argument amounts to saying that it is right to save your own skin (in this case the skins of Catholic Christians at the price of silence when it is your duty to speak. Now these are the only arguments that the pamphlet puts

forward to excuse the fact, which the author admits, that "all through the war while the death factories ran at full blast the Papacy kept silence". Craven fear and calculated policy is not the way by which Christ's Kingdom is advanced. When Jesus stood before Pilate He told him fearlessly "My kingdom is not of this world, else would my servants fight". The use of the sword is only one example of a this-worldly method. Christ turned His back on that way of advancing God's cause. Faith in God and fearlessly doing the right, even though it leads to crucifixion is the only method by which God's cause is advanced in a world of sin, and we are called upon to tread the same path, to use the same methods. We must keep our eyes fixed on God the judge of all if we are going to overcome temptation to compromise with sin. Of course not all Roman Catholics approved of the Pope's silence. But it was the official policy and it is still being defended officially in the pamphlet referred to.

A young German playwright named Rolph Hochluth has written

a gripping and harrowing play called "The Representative" of which the central theme is the failure of the Pope to speak up for the Jews, even the Catholic Jews of his own diocese, when they were being carted off, gassed and burned, by the trainload. The facts are not denied. The problem is why did the Pope keep silent when he so freely denounced the Allies when they bombed the buildings of Monte Cassino and he even wrote a personal letter to Roosevelt when he thought that Rome might be bombed. Hochluth suggests that the Pope's silence was in order to preserve the property of the church from confiscation which might have followed, had Hitler been excommunicated, as he deserved to be, for his inhuman actions, or if the papal concordat with the Nazis had been revoked. It seems incredible that a concordat and agreement should be maintained by one claiming to be the representative of Christ with a government so obviously evil when the facts were well known. Yet the concordat was maintained all through the war and the question is, why? The explanation given

in the play, "The Representative", seems reasonable, namely to preserve the extensive properties of the church. Doubtless the motive was a noble one, namely that Christ's church might be able to fulfil its work, but it was mistaken in its methods, for there was a failure to recognise that Christ's work does not depend upon property or money and investments, but rather on faith and righteousness. God's resources are infinite and He calls us to live by faith alone. Covetousness is a terribly insidious sin, and it is not confined to any one denomination. We are all inclined to think that God's work depends upon the financial buoyancy of our church, or upon its buildings, and the outward impression it makes on the community, and the temptation will lead us to methods which are not the methods of faith. This is true in our own denomination as well as in others. How easily ministers fall into the habit of devoting their time and energies to simply running the outward organizations, which did not exist in the early days of the church and which are quite unessential,

and the ordinary members of the congregation also tend to place their trust in these earthly activities.

The Reformation rediscovered God's principle of faith. The Roman Church turned its back on the principle of faith but we who are heirs of the Reformation should remember the truth that we honour God by faith, that is, by belief and trust, for the words all mean the same; and the way of faith is the only way by which we may serve God acceptably, or obtain any of the blessings He has for us. We are saved through faith in Christ, and we obtain our daily needs by bringing them to our Heavenly Father in believing prayer. So in the work of the church we must always act in faith, never relying on material considerations. Thus in our attitude to money we must honour God through our faith. Seek first the kingdom of God, said our Lord, and rely on God to provide for your material needs. Had the Vatican done this in the war, it would undoubtedly have joined with others in the denunciation of the horrifying wickedness of the mass extermination of almost six

million Jews - men, women and children - being herded out of the cattle trucks and marched straight to the gas chambers and then to the crematoria.

If we are to avoid valuing property more than men's welfare, and if we are to avoid dishonouring God by actions and attitudes which fail to reflect faith in Him then we must keep our eyes firmly fixed on the heavenly things, for where our treasure is, there will our heart be also. When a man asked Jesus in Luke 12 to tell his brother to divide the inheritance with him, Jesus issued a solemn warning against covetousness and told the story of the farmer who had forgotten God's existence and whose thoughts were taken up entirely on the prosperity of his business. There was nothing wrong in the man's actions except God-forgetfulness, but Jesus reminded His hearers that the man might any day have to stand before God's judgment to give an account and then what is the value of all his property. So, too, we must fix our eyes on heavenly things and determine to use no method except the method that honours God through

faith, doing what we know to be
right, by His strength and entrust-
ing the outcome and consequences to
Him.

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