

Catholics Against Hitler

by **Edward Krause**

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The Jesuits and the Third Reich

by **Vincent A. Lapomarda, S.J.**

The Edwin Mellen Press, 375 pages, \$39.95

At the beginning of this valuable study, Vincent A. Lapomarda, who is Curator of the Hiatt Collection of Holocaust Materials at Holy Cross College, allows that Catholics have not recounted their share of the World War II legacy very well, to our common detriment.

A part of that legacy is the story of Hitler's animus toward and campaign against the Jesuits. In Nazi circles they were often associated with Jews and other *Untermenschen*. Their schools and properties were confiscated or destroyed, thousands were imprisoned or exiled, and 259 were killed, 152 of these in Nazi concentration camps. The campaign against the Jesuits was, of course, a small part of the Nazi persecution of the Church and of Christianity in general and it is immensely helpful to have at hand the kind of documentation Lapomarda's work supplies. He relies heavily on the recently published but as yet untranslated materials of Ludwig Volk, Ulrich Von Hehl, and Dieter Albrecht of the *Kommission fur Zeitgeschichte* of the Catholic Academy in Bavaria under the inspired leadership of Dr. Konrad Repgen.

As partial explanation for the unbalanced impression many have of "Catholic indifference and inaction," Lapomarda refers to the postwar Stalinist policy in Eastern Bloc countries. The Communist governments that took over these countries after 1945 consistently spread lies to the effect that Catholic authorities had collaborated with the Nazis during wartime occupations. When church leaders sought to correct such false accusations by bringing evidence before the people, they were usually thrown into prison or hunted down as traitors to their country. The result, says Lapomarda, "has been a silence so tight that the truth about much of the heroic efforts of various individuals in the Nazi era has been neglected. . . ."

Lapomarda's work is one of the first to breach that silence, especially with regard to the situations in Czechoslovakia, Hungary, the Baltic states, Yugoslavia, and Russia. He outlines in separate chapters the persecution of the Jesuits and their role in inspiring and sustaining Church resistance in Germany and throughout the different nations of occupied Europe.

In Germany, keen Jesuit intellectuals like Jakob Notges and Anton Koch led the assault on Alfred Rosenberg's *Myth of the Twentieth Century*. Jesuit editors of the journal *Stimmen der Zeit* like Erich Przywara, Gustav Grundlach, and Max Pribilla spearheaded a formidable and consistent intellectual resistance to Nazi propaganda until, after frequent raids, it, along with the more popular Jesuit publications, was shut down by the Gestapo. They continued to assist the Bishops and advise the Vatican until forced into exile. Perhaps nothing infuriated the Nazis more than the publication of Pius XI's encyclical *Mit brennender sorge* (March 1937) with its stern condemnations of totalitarianism and pseudo-scientific racism. The drafting of this courageous document, though primarily in the hands of Cardinal Pacelli, owed much to Jesuit advisors.

In 1935, in the midst of a crackdown on Jesuit schools, the Gestapo sent secret instructions to local police on how to handle the Jesuits. Many like Father Oswald von Neil Bruening, who was largely responsible for drafting Pius XI's encyclical on the rights of labor, *Quadragesimo Anno*, were caught up in the notorious morality and currency trials of 1936-39. At least ninety-three Jesuits were interrogated and variously harassed. Many were exiled, and the order was forbidden to accept new candidates. Three Jesuits were members of the Kreisau Circle headed by Count Helmuth von Moltke. The Jesuit provincial superior, Father Anton Rosch, with the full support of the order's superior general in Rome, was particularly courageous in his will to resist Nazi terror. Held in chains and beaten repeatedly, he was scheduled for execution when he was rescued at war's end by Russian troops.

In France, much underground resistance centered around the Jesuits and their journals *Etudes* and *Temoinage Chretien*. Yves de Montcheuil, editor of *Etudes* and a professor of theology at the Institute Catholique in Paris, was barbarously shot along with two Jewish doctors while caring for wounded soldiers in the hospital of St. Martin. His successor, Gaston Fessard, an early supporter of Charles de Gaulle and a good friend of the well-known Jesuit Teilhard de

Chardin, continued his predecessor's policy of courageous resistance to Vichy collaboration with Nazi policy and especially its anti-Semitism.

In Lyons, Fathers Pierre Chaillet and Henri de Lubac, both professors of theology at the University Catholique de Lyons, edited and wrote for *Temoinage Chretien*, which in 1942 had a circulation of 50,000. They repeatedly insisted that the persecution of Jews was inseparably an attack on Christianity and in any case intolerable. With their assistance. Cardinals Saliege of Toulouse and Gerlier of Lyons denounced the regime's anti-Semitic laws in pastoral letters and called upon the people to resist. Later, they helped inspire a joint protest written by Cardinal Suhard of Paris and signed by all the bishops of France in July of 1942, which stated, "We are profoundly shocked by the mass arrests and the inhumane treatment meted out to Jews. In the name of humanity and of Christian principle, we resolutely condemn this violation of the inalienable rights of man."

Subsequently, in a pastoral letter, the primate of France instructed French Catholics to refuse to surrender Jews to the authorities and to hide or shelter them when possible. Priests, nuns, and laity were already engaged in a massive rescue effort that saved tens of thousands of Jewish lives. The recent memoirs of the current Archbishop of Paris, Jean Cardinal Lustiger, who was one of those sheltered, and of Father De Lubac richly supplement Lapomarda's account of the Jesuit role in all of this.

In Italy, many of the pope's closest advisors were Jesuits, such as Robert Leiber, his long-time private secretary and a chief mediator in the 1940 conspiracy to overthrow Hitler; Mussolini's friend Tacchi Venturi; John LaFarge, the American Jesuit who helped prepare the draft for a papal encyclical condemning anti-Semitism; Augustin Bea, the pope's confessor and later the popular Cardinal Secretary for Jewish-Christian relations; and numerous others. Major rescue networks were centered in Genoa under the leadership of the Jesuit Cardinal Pietro Boetto, who worked closely with the Jewish emigration agency DELASEM, and in Milan under the leadership of a Jesuit priest who served as Cardinal Schuster's head of the office of religious assistance.

Jesuits hid Jews in the houses and schools of the society throughout occupied Europe, and Lapomarda does a real service in documenting many such efforts, as in the fascinating story of the forty-three Jews concealed by Jesuits in Rome at the Oriental

Institute and in the Gregorian University. Altogether, hundreds were hidden in the Vatican and at Castel Gondolfo, the papal summer residence, and thousands in religious houses around Rome. The chief Rabbi of wartime Rome had been sheltered by Jesuits, and he later paid eloquent and generous tribute to Pius XII and his collaborators for their rescue efforts, as did Dr. Raffael Contoni, head of Italy's wartime Jewish Assistance Committee and later president of the union of Italian Jewish communities.

This is but a sampling of the kind of information and documentation Lapomarda's study supplies. In his conclusion, he calls for additional studies of other orders and congregations in the church: the Benedictines, Dominicans, Franciscans, Pallotines, Ursulines, and others with similarly proud stories of heroism and resistance yet to be told. Lapomarda's own work, along with that of the Israeli diplomat Pinchas Lapide, *Three Popes and the Jews*, and the eminent Jewish historian Jenő Levai, *Hungarian Jewry and the Papacy*, is a good place to start for a fair and sympathetic account of the Catholic side of the unrelenting and often bitter struggle waged during the war years against both Nazi and Stalinist forms of atheistic secularism.

Lapomarda's rich notes lead the interested reader to numerous other sources. Such accounts of the previous generation's struggle to defend and advance authentic religious faith against the scientism, atheism, materialism, hedonism, and despair of the surrounding culture can do much to prepare and strengthen us for our struggles against similar forces in our time.

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