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**“If the Holy See knew all these things in 1942,
why did it not shout [them] out to the world?”
The Vatican in the Face of the Holocaust:
Information from Occupied Poland and its Reception
by the Holy See, 1941–1943¹**

Abstract

This article examines the chronology of information received by the Vatican from Poland under Nazi occupation regarding the persecution and mass killing of Jews between June 1941 and the summer of 1943. It analyzes the communication channels between Poland and the Holy See, assessing their reliability and trustworthiness. Furthermore, it considers the content of these sources and the Holy See’s response to it. By focusing on archival practice, the article analyzes Holocaust awareness in the Vatican. It demonstrates that Pius XII was extensively informed by his trusted sources about the ‘Final Solution’ as it unfolded. The findings imply that this intelligence was concealed by Vatican diplomatic services, thereby shedding light on the previously opaque human element influencing backstage decision-making within the Secretariat of State, especially the previously unknown role of the future pope Paul VI as an inhibitor of the information flow about the Holocaust. The article proposes a departure from the interpretation that the Christmas speech of 1942 constituted the Vatican’s reaction to the Holocaust. The documents show that the decision on how to react to the genocide was taken already in the early fall of 1942. Additionally, the article reveals new insights into the attitudes of the Polish Church hierarchy towards the Holocaust. On the one hand, the article dismantles the myth

¹ This text is, in the part discussing documents up to the autumn of 1942, an extension and compilation of two articles: the first appeared in French and English versions in the *Revue d’Histoire de la Shoah* (Monika Stolarczyk-Bilardie, “Le Vatican et la Shoah. La rétention de l’information en provenance de Pologne, 1941–1942,” *Revue d’Histoire de la Shoah* vol. 208, 2 [2023]: 205–237). Thanks to Audrey Kichelewski for granting permission for use. The second article entitled “The Terrible Secret. Reflection on Holocaust Awareness in the Vatican, June 1941 – December 1942” will appear in the early 2025 volume *Pius XII and the Low Countries (1939–1958)*, edited by Kim Christiaens, Jan De Volder, Sam Kuijken, and Dries Vanysacker (*Bibliothèque de la Revue d’Histoire Ecclésiastique* [2025]).

surrounding Cracow's Archbishop Adam Sapieha, while on the other, it illuminates the pivotal role played by Katowice's Bishop Stanisław Adamski in disseminating information about the unfolding Holocaust.

Keywords

Information about the Holocaust, Holocaust awareness in the Vatican, Pius XII, Giovanni Battista Montini, Giovanni Malvezzi, Adam Sapieha, Stanisław Adamski, Polish Catholic Church during WWII

On September 26, 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt's envoy to the Vatican, Myron Taylor,² presented a note to the Vatican Secretariat of State requesting confirmation of the rumors about the mass murder of Jews in occupied Polish territories. The American government had obtained such information from the Geneva office of the Jewish Agency for Palestine's report which was based on the testimony of two eyewitnesses. One of them had arrived from Poland on August 14 and compiled his observations into six points. It mentioned the liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto; the use of corpses for the production of fats and fertilizers; mass executions in specially prepared camps (Bełżec) and in cities such as Lviv/Lwów, Warsaw, and Lublin; as well as the situation in eastern Poland and the occupied Soviet territories where "not one Jew was left". This testimony also mentioned the deportation of Jews from Western Europe, transports in cattle cars, and tensions between ethnic Poles and Jews.³ In the note, which is known in the literature as the "genocide memo", Myron Taylor quoted six points from the Geneva bureau's report and expressed a desire to find out "whether the Vatican has any information that would tend to confirm the reports contained in this memorandum. If so, [Taylor] should like to know whether the Holy Father has any suggestions as to any practical manner in which the forces of civilized public opinion could be utilized in order to prevent a continuation of these barbarities."⁴ In a letter addressed to Papal Secretary of State Cardinal Luigi Maglione, the Americans assumed that the Vatican had its own reliable sources on the ground, wanted to find out what the Holy See knew about the murderous actions against the Jews, and asked for suggestions on how they could be countered.

² As the Vatican and the US did not have official diplomatic relations at the time, Taylor could not be sent to the Vatican with the rank of ambassador. However, he was often referred to as an ambassador in internal Vatican documents.

³ Historical Archives of the Secretariat of State, Section for Relations with States (hereafter ASRS, AA.EE.SS.), Pio XII (hereafter PXII), Parte I (hereafter P.I), Extracta, Germania 742, pp. 16–18, Myron Taylor to Cardinal Maglione, September 26, 1942. Original in English. All quotations, unless otherwise indicated, have been translated by the author from Italian, French, German, or Latin.

⁴ ASRS, AA.EE.SS., PXII, P.I, Extracta, Germania 742, pp 18–19, Myron Taylor to Cardinal Maglione, September 26, 1942. Original in English.

Two weeks later, on October 10, Cardinal Maglione replied to the Americans that "[r]eports pertaining to the severe measures taken against non-Aryans have also arrived at the Holy See from other sources, but thus far it has been impossible to verify their accuracy."⁵

The Vatican's response of October 10 referred to "other sources" informing the Pope about the situation in occupied Poland. This begs the question of what Holocaust-related materials were available to the Holy See, how reliable and credible they were in the eyes of papal officials, and what exactly they revealed about the persecution and murder of Jews, in particular about the specific issues raised by the American diplomat in the September 26 memorandum. Moreover, what did the Vatican do with the information in its possession?

This article provides answers to these questions. The aim is to trace the influx of information about the Holocaust from occupied Polish lands. In particular: (1) to analyze how communication was established with people in occupied Poland; (2) to verify whom the Vatican considered to be reliable sources of information about the situation in Poland; (3) to trace what these sources communicated about the persecution and murder of Jews, especially the topics raised in the Jewish report brought up by the Americans in September 1942; (4) to look at the activities of the bureaucratic machinery in the Vatican in the context of the information about the Holocaust; (5) to analyze Holocaust awareness in the Vatican; and (6) to analyze the Vatican's reaction to the reports of the Holocaust. The article will demonstrate, point by point, what information from trusted sources the Vatican had at its disposal up to September 26, 1942, i.e., until the acceptance of the aforementioned American note. This will be followed by an almost day-by-day analysis of the two key weeks between the American memorandum and the Vatican's laconic response of October 10, 1942. The final section will focus, on the one hand, on the continued flow of information on the Holocaust from occupied Polish lands until the summer of 1943 and, on the other, on the Vatican's strategy for handling and acting on this information. This analysis sheds new light on the attitude of both the Vatican and the Polish Church towards the Holocaust.

Although the extermination of Jews carried out by special units (*Einsatzgruppen*) began shortly after the Third Reich's attack on the USSR in June 1941, the greatest intensity of the genocide in occupied Polish territory (in terms of the number of victims in a relatively short period of time) occurred between March 1942 and November 1943 (Operation Reinhardt). The largest number of Jews was murdered between July and November 1942.⁶ Taking into account the number of victims in the three main extermination camps of Operation Reinhardt

⁵ ASRS, AA.EE.SS., PXII, PI, Extracta, Germania 742, p. 27, Minutes for the note to Myron Taylor, October 10, 1942.

⁶ Lewi Stone, "Quantifying the Holocaust: Hyperintense Kill Rates during the Nazi Genocide," *Science Advances* 5 (2019): 5; DOI: 10.1126/sciadv.aau7292.

(Bełżec, Sobibór, and Treblinka), reference is made to approximately 110,000 victims in July, 400,000 in August, 290,000 in September, 300,000 in October, and 150,000 in November.⁷ Although the camps were built in isolated areas of occupied Poland, the liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto of 450,000 inhabitants, 75 percent of whom were deported during 'Grossaktion Warschau' (July 22 – September 21), could not go unnoticed by witnesses, whether ethnic Poles or foreigners residing in Warsaw. Reports treating the scale of the extermination of Jews appeared in the Western world already in the late spring and summer of 1942,⁸ which coincides with the date when the American government sought confirmation of this from the Vatican. It is therefore of the utmost importance to establish whether the reports available to the papal Secretariat of State during the crucial summer and early autumn of 1942, when the Allied governments were hesitating about the strategy to be adopted towards the extermination of the Jews, were indeed insufficient to take an unambiguous position and confirm the worst. A report from the Polish underground containing incontrovertible evidence of the extermination of the Jews, along with the testimonies of Jan Karski,⁹ and other couriers between the underground in occupied Poland and the Polish government in exile, confirming this information – as well as the leaflet "Protest!" issued by the underground organization *Front Odrodzenia Polski* (Polish Renaissance Front) and containing many details of the Holocaust, did not reach the West until the second half of November 1942 (and were made available to the Allies in December),¹⁰ roughly two months after Taylor's mission to the Vatican. They caused a (temporary) change in the Allied position towards the Holocaust in the form of a public Joint Declaration on December, 17 1942 condemning crimes against the Jews.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 4.

⁸ Mention should be made here of the Bund report of May 1942, from which information was used by both the *Daily Telegraph* and the BBC, General Sikorski's radio address to Poles in the country on June 6, and July 1, and 15 editions of the *Polish Fortnightly Review*, which mentioned the camps at Bełżec and Sobibór, and the July 9 conference of the British Ministry of Information, the speeches from which were published in August under the telling title "Bestiality unknown in any previous record of history". For an analysis of these texts, and the British responses to them, see Michael Fleming, "Intelligence from Poland on Chelmno: British responses," *Holocaust Studies* 3 (2021): 172–190.

⁹ For the most recent publication, see Adam Puławski, *Wobec „niespotykanego w dziejach mordu”. Rząd RP na uchodźstwie, Delegatura Rządu RP na Kraj, AK a eksterminacja ludności żydowskiej od „wielkiej akcji” do powstania w getcie warszawskim* ["Faced with 'an unprecedented murder in history'. The Government of the Republic of Poland in Exile, the Delegation of the Polish Government to the Home Country, the Home Army and the extermination of the Jewish population from the 'great action' to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising"] (Chełm: Stowarzyszenie Rocznik Chełmski, 2018).

¹⁰ Dariusz Libionka, "Against a Brick Wall. Interventions of Kazimierz Papee, the Polish Ambassador to the Holy See with Regard to German Crimes in Poland, November 1942 – January 1943," *Holocaust Studies and Materials* (2008): 270–293, here pp. 271–272.

Walter Laqueur, author of the classic and to date only comparative study of the transmission and reception of Holocaust information by key actors, countries, groups, and organizations, concluded that this information was largely concealed by governments and organizations. Subsequent country-specific research, particularly over the past two decades, have nuanced his conclusions, without, however, undermining his thesis of the suppression of information about the Holocaust.¹¹ When Laqueur was collecting sources for his book, only a small number of documents from the Second World War had been made available to researchers. Despite this limitation, it was clear to him that the Vatican must have been one of the first countries to receive reliable news of the Holocaust through the nunciatures in Switzerland and Turkey, and he concluded that the Vatican was "better informed than anyone else in Europe" because of the network of Catholic priests in all the countries involved and the information provided by the Polish government-in-exile.¹² Other scholars have discussed the influx of news of the extermination of Jews within the Vatican to determine the point at which the Pope and his immediate entourage could and should have realized that what was happening "was a disaster of immense, unprecedented proportions."¹³ According to Michael Phayer, the Vatican may not have come to the conclusion that genocide had occurred until late 1942,¹⁴ that is,

¹¹ Richard Breitman (*Official Secrets. What the Nazis Planned, What the British and Americans Knew*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999) focuses on how British and American intelligence learned about the Holocaust and how they suppressed information about Nazi killings. *Weltöffentlichkeit und Diktatur. Die amerikanischen Auslandskorrespondenten im 'Dritten Reich'* [World publicity and dictatorship. The American foreign correspondents in the 'Third Reich'] (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2021) by Norman Domeier offers insights into the work of American foreign correspondents in relation to the Holocaust in chapter six. The British case is analyzed on the basis of BBC broadcasts by Jeremy Harris ("Broadcasting the Massacres. An Analysis of the BBC's Contemporary Coverage of the Holocaust," *Yad Vashem Studies* 25 [1996]: 65–98), and the first information about the death camps and its reception by the British government by Michael Fleming in "Intelligence from Poland on Chelmno: British responses" (*Holocaust Studies* 3 [2021]: 172–190). Soviet coverage of the 'Final Solution' is discussed by Karel Berkhoff in "Total Annihilation of the Jewish Population: The Holocaust in the Soviet Media" (*Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, vol. 10, 1 [2009]: 61–105). Finally, the Italian casus has recently been analyzed by Michele Sarfatti in his *I confini di una persecuzione. Il fascismo e gli ebrei fuori d'Italia (1938–1943)* (Roma: Viella, 2023), in particular in chapter three: "Le notizie dello sterminio nazista nel 1942," pp. 65–80.

¹² Walter Laqueur, *The Terrible Secret. An Investigation into the Suppression of Information about Hitler's 'Final Solution'* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1980), p. 55.

¹³ Susan Zuccotti, *Under His Very Windows. The Vatican and the Holocaust in Italy* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 112. See also Michael Phayer, *The Catholic Church and the Holocaust, 1930–1965* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), pp. 47–50, and John F. Morley, *Vatican Diplomacy and the Jews during the Holocaust, 1939–1943* (New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1980).

¹⁴ Phayer, *The Catholic Church...*, p. 48.

three months after Myron Taylor's genocide memo and a month after the Polish underground reports were handed over to the Allies in November.

Based on sources of information reaching the Holy See from the occupied territories of Poland and the Soviet Union, I shall show that the Vatican knew about the Holocaust as early as September 1942, but chose to suppress this knowledge. There is a general consensus among major Holocaust and Pius XII scholars that reliable information about the mass murder of Jews must have been reaching the Vatican from the early onset of events.¹⁵ The greatest challenge to date has understandably been to figure out the chronology of the influx of this information and to analyze the internal processes in the Holy See in response to it. This challenge was due to the lack of access to all Vatican documents from the period.¹⁶ However, the situation changed in March 2020, when a decision by Pope Francis made the Vatican archives relating to the pontificate of Pius XII available to researchers.

This analysis is therefore based primarily on the newly available sources, in particular the Apostolic Archives (AAV) and the Historical Archives of the Secretariat of State, Section for Relations with States (ASRS, AA.EE.SS.), in addition to the Vatican documents published in *Actes et Documents du Saint Siègre relatifs à la Seconde Guerre mondiale*.¹⁷ In the two archives I have analyzed thousands of documents relating to the area and the persecution and murder of Jews from the outbreak of the war until the end of 1943. This allows a comprehensive answer to the research questions posed.

Sources of Information from Poland

With the outbreak of war in September 1939 and the subsequent occupation of Polish territory, two of the most important sources of information for the Vatican – namely, Apostolic Nuncio Filippo Cortesi and Polish Primate August Hlond – fled the country. This presented the Secretariat of State and the remaining Polish

¹⁵ Saul Friedländer speaks in this context of the spring of 1942, admitting that there is no evidence of what the Vatican knew in the autumn of 1941 (Saul Friedländer, *The Years of Extermination: Nazi Germany and the Jews, 1939–1945* [New York: HarperCollins, 2007], p. 463; idem, *Pius XII et le IIIe Reich. Documents* [Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1964], p. 99). Frank Coppa places the first information about the mass murders after the Wannsee Conference, but the first document he discusses dates from May 1942 (Frank J. Coppa, *The Life and Pontificate of Pope Pius XII. Between History and Controversy* [Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2013], pp. 159–160). Robert Ventresca places the first information in the second half of 1941 (Robert Ventresca, *Soldier of Christ. The Life of Pope Pius XII* [Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013], pp. 181, 187).

¹⁶ See, for example, Friedländer, *The Years of Extermination...*, p. XXIII.

¹⁷ *Actes et Documents du Saint Siègre Relatifs à la Seconde Guerre Mondiale* [Acts and Documents of the Holy See relating to the Second World War] eds. Pierre Blet, S.J., Angelo Martini, S.J., Burkhardt Schneider, S.J., Robert Graham, S.J., vols. 1–11, Vatican City, 1965–1981.

bishops with the considerable challenge of establishing secure and regular alternative channels of communication.

The Polish bishops who remained in occupied Polish territory were forbidden by the German occupier from communicating with the Vatican, and thus such attempts were dangerous for all parties involved. This became clear to the Vatican as early as May 1940, when the nuncio resident in Berlin Cesare Orsenigo, being charged with Polish affairs in the absence of nuncio Cortesi,¹⁸ wrote to his superiors about the limitations he faced: "Any access to Poland is expressly denied [...]. People residing in Poland, both priests and lay people, very rarely reach Berlin. The mail works, but the secrecy [of correspondence] is not guaranteed, nor is it observed."¹⁹ Similarly, the Archbishop of Cracow, Adam Sapieha, regularly complained in his letters about the impossibility to communicate freely with the Holy Father and the resulting danger. The Gestapo (rightly) suspected him of corresponding with the Vatican and arrested several of his close associates, accusing them of helping the archbishop to correspond with Rome.²⁰ As a result, verbal communication through trusted intermediaries grew in importance and over time became more preferred than written communication.

The official line of communication with occupied Poland ran through the nunciature in Berlin, and consequently through the Apostolic Nuncio Cesare Orsenigo. Although both Orsenigo and the Polish bishops were well aware of the limitations of this means of communicating, it remained active throughout the war. However, the topics discussed were limited to official Church matters, such as official relief efforts of the Holy See, powers/or faculties for bishops, etc. Notwithstanding these limitations, Nuncio Orsenigo managed to acquaint himself with Polish affairs quite well, building up a secret network of emissaries and informers acting as couriers between him and the Polish bishops.²¹ The length, content, and frequency of the letters and messages he exchanged with the apostolic administrator of the Warsaw diocese, Bishop Stanisław Gall, and with Bishop Stanisław Adamski of Katowice suggest that both prelates trusted Orsenigo and saw him as the legitimate representative of Pius XII for Polish affairs. The situation was different in the case of Archbishop Adam Sapieha of Cracow who, judging by the nature of the correspondence, did not trust Orsenigo (nor that their correspondence was assured the required secrecy). Sapieha therefore

¹⁸ In 1940, the Apostolic Nuncio Cesare Orsenigo was also entrusted with Belgian, Dutch and Luxembourg affairs.

¹⁹ Vatican Apostolic Archive (hereafter AAV), Pio XII (hereafter PXII), Secretariat of State (hereafter Segr. St.), Titoli, Anno 1939, Rappresentanze, Posizione 198, Orsenigo to Maglione, May 4, 1940.

²⁰ ASRS, AA.EE.SS., PXII, P.I, Polonia 216, p. 603, Internal note of Undersecretary Montini, August 23, 1942.

²¹ It may not be possible to reconstruct these channels of communication of the Berlin nunciature, as the archive was destroyed by fire on November 22, 1943 during the bombing of Berlin.

confined himself to official communications, in most cases only laconically replying to letters received from Berlin. The Vatican trusted Orsenigo's opinions on Polish matters, although his superiors were aware of the limitations of his role and therefore sought alternative channels of communication.

In addition to official correspondence, Church leaders also communicated secretly through various trusted intermediaries. These were mainly citizens of countries sympathetic to Nazi Germany, both laymen and clergy, who, because of their work in business or diplomacy, family ties, or in the context of the war effort after Germany's attack on the Soviet Union, could freely enter occupied Poland and on such occasions smuggle financial aid, material goods, documents, letters, and messages from and to the bishops. All these people were Catholics and most of them offered their services to the Holy See at their own initiative. Organizing alternative channels of communication was a long process, especially for Vatican officials, as they were somewhat reluctant to engage in practices that were illegal from the point of view of the German occupier. This applied not only to communication itself, but also to all charitable initiatives in favor of the Polish bishops, the Polish clergy, and those in need. Moreover, it took time to establish contacts based on trust: the persecuted bishops could not of course believe every foreigner who knocked on their door and claimed to be a papal emissary. Forced by circumstances, however, Vatican officials at one point had no choice but to entrust this random group of individuals with communication between the Pope and the bishops. Although the channels of communication established proved effective, they were random, irregular, and required flexibility on each side. A change in Italy's wartime situation in the summer of 1943 put an end to the informers' activities and prevented correspondence between occupied Poland and the Vatican for almost two years.

By far the most important lay informant to the Holy See on Poland was Giovanni Malvezzi, an entrepreneur from the Italian state-controlled holding company Istituto per la Ricostruzione Industriale (IRI, Institute for the Reconstruction of Industry). Malvezzi had been presented to the Secretariat of State by the Polish Embassy to the Holy See as early as November 1939. Since the 1930s the IRI, for which he worked, had been the majority owner of the important Poznański textile factory, located in the centre of Łódź, Poland's second largest city.²² Malvezzi, in charge of foreign entities at IRI, travelled extensively in Europe, especially to occupied Poland. The Secretariat of State began to use his services very quickly, in early 1940.²³ In July 1940, an official of the State Secretariat described him in an internal memo as "a good and trustworthy person," ready

²² Piotr Wesołowski, „Historia Łodzi. Od imperium Poznańskiego do Manufaktury,” *Gazeta Wyborcza. Tygodnik Łódź*, May 19, 2016, <https://lodz.wyborcza.pl/lodz/7,44788,20100405,historia-lodzi-od-imperium-poznanskiego-do-manufaktury.html>, accessed October 19, 2022.

²³ AAV, PXII, Segr. St., Commissione Soccorsi (hereafter Comm.Socc.) 199, Polacchi Civili Polonia 24, p. 2, Internal note of the Secretariat of State, January 2, 1940.

to forward letters and messages to occupied Poland.²⁴ In September of the same year, another memo described him as a person who knew Bishops Gall and Sapieha well and was "disposed to help the church in the best possible way."²⁵ Malvezzi reported on his travels and conversations with Church representatives in Poland in two ways. Either he wrote reports himself, or he reported in person to the Undersecretary of State Giovanni Battista Montini (the later Pope Paul VI),²⁶ who took notes of these meetings. In his first report, which was presented orally to Montini on August 1, 1940, he gave detailed information about the Polish episcopate in the General Government (GG) and signaled the need to appoint an apostolic delegate for the area.²⁷ The idea was taken seriously by the Secretariat of State, as evidenced by the intensity of communication on the subject, both internally and with Nuncio Orsenigo. On one of his subsequent trips, in January 1941, Malvezzi carried a papal letter to Archbishop Sapieha. It was after this trip that he proposed a transaction to the Secretariat of State. The 70,000 złoty that IRI had in the Poznański company could be given to the bishops for charitable purposes, and the Holy See would reimburse him the equivalent amount in Italian lire. The Vatican, although it was aware of the enormous needs and wanted to support the Polish Church financially, could not do so through the official route because of the restrictions imposed by the German occupier. Montini therefore declined this proposal because of its "irregularity" and "the excessive [exchange] rate."²⁸ However, after another report from Malvezzi (following his stay in Łódź and Warsaw), which confirmed the great need for financial support for the starving Poles, the Pope reconsidered the entrepreneur's proposal and agreed to the exchange. One Vatican official summarized the situation as follows:

It is also believed that it is necessary in each case, in order to send aid and money, to use trusted intermediaries who do not expose the Holy See. To the Holy See's objection to pursuing illegal practices, he [Malvezzi] argues that one must not be a stickler when there are people who are dying of hunger and who lose their faith for lack of material help. He is always willing to carry anything, even at his own risk.²⁹

²⁴ AAV, PXII, Segr. St., Comm. Socc. 199, Polacchi Civili Polonia 24, p. 7, Internal note of the Secretariat of State with handwritten annotations, July 3, 1940.

²⁵ ASRS, AA.EE.SS., PXII, P.I, Polonia 207, p. 12, Internal note of the Secretariat of State with handwritten annotations, September 30 and October 4, 1940.

²⁶ During the pontificate of Pius XII, Montini was Deputy for Ordinary Affairs and head of Section I of the Secretariat of State. On June 21, 1963, he was elected Pope and took the name Paul VI. He was canonized by Pope Francis in 2018.

²⁷ ASRS, AA.EE.SS., PXII, P.I, Polonia 207, pp. 2–4, Internal note of the Secretariat of State, August 1, 1940.

²⁸ AAV, PXII, Segr. St., Comm. Socc. 199, Polacchi Civili Polonia 24, p. 3, Handwritten internal note of the Secretariat of State, January 3, 1941.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, f. 3, Handwritten internal note of the Secretariat of State, end January 1941. and handwritten note Ex.Aud.SSmi, January 30, 1941.

Malvezzi's influence grew from trip to trip. From January 1941, he carried large amounts of financial support in various currencies on each trip to Poland, as well as letters from the Vatican to the Polish bishops. After many journeys, he produced extensive reports addressing various issues concerning occupied Poland, especially the situation of the Polish Catholic Church.

Another important informant of the Holy See who had access to the occupied lands of Poland was Father Pirro Scavizzi, a military chaplain on the hospital train of the Order of Malta. Scavizzi first appears in the documents on November 21, 1941, shortly after the completion of the first mission of his hospital train to Dnepropetrovsk, which lasted from October 17 to November 15, 1941.³⁰ While Malvezzi's reports mainly focused on the situation in Warsaw and his discussions with Bishops Gall and Adamski, Scavizzi passed through Cracow and brought news from there. His letter shows that as soon as his first mission, he carried letters from occupied Poland and information about Bishop Adam Sapieha.³¹ Like Malvezzi, Scavizzi also carried large amounts of 'illegal' funds from the Pope for the Polish bishops. In November 1941, he asked the Holy Father for instructions for a second trip. He was to smuggle \$5,000 for Archbishop Sapieha³² and to pass on information orally.³³ Returning by hospital train from his third mission, he carried Sapieha's most famous letter to the Pope, bearing the date February 28, 1942, but not handed over to Scavizzi until April 15. In this letter, the Archbishop described in detail the terror to which the Polish Church was subjected. The following day, however, on April 16, Sapieha sent his close associate to Scavizzi with a request that the letter be destroyed because, he claimed, the Germans "would kill all the bishops, and not only them" if the letter fell into their hands.³⁴ Fortunately, Scavizzi made a copy of the letter by hand, then destroyed the original and delivered the copy to the Pope. Further hospital train missions took place in the summer and autumn of 1942. After four of his six missions in 1941 and 1942, Scavizzi compiled his impressions in long, confidential reports to Pope Pius XII.³⁵ In addition to Scavizzi, there were other military chaplains who conveyed their impressions of occupied Poland in reports to the Pope, but

³⁰ Michele Manzo, *Don Pirro Scavizzi. Prete romano (1884-1964)* (Casale Monferrato: Edizione Piemme, 1997), p. 124.

³¹ AAV, PXII, Segr. St., Comm. Socc. 206, Polacchi Civili Polonia 226, p. 3rv, Scavizzi to Montini, November 21, 1941.

³² AVV, PXII, Segr. St., Comm. Socc. 199, Polacchi Civili Polonia 26, p. 39, Internal note of the Secretariat of State with handwritten annotations, November 27, 1941.

³³ *Ibidem*, p. 42, Internal note of the Secretariat of State with handwritten annotations, January 10, 1942.

³⁴ *Actes et Documents...*, vol. 3, doc. 357, p. 539.

³⁵ The first mission took place between October 17 and November 15, 1941 (and reached Dnipropetrovsk), the second from January 12 to February 20, 1942 (to Yassinovataya), the third from April 8 to May 3, 1942 (to Cracow), the fourth from June 29 to July 23, 1942 (to Dnipropetrovsk), the fifth from September 16 to October 11, 1942 (to Dnipropetrovsk) and

none of them produced more than one text and did not, like Scavizzi, become a permanent informant to the Holy See.³⁶ In the context of this argument, however, mention should be made of Silvio Negrato, a military chaplain on another hospital train, who, during a trip to collect wounded soldiers in March and April 1942, met, among others, Archbishop Sapieha and both bishops of Lviv (the Roman Catholic Twardowski and the Greek Catholic Szeptycki). After being received in audience by Pius XII, he poured his observations onto paper, providing papal advisors with invaluable information about the territories he visited.³⁷

In addition to Malvezzi and the military chaplains, there were other important and trusted informers and emissaries who passed information, money, or goods to occupied Poland. The only woman in this group was Countess Luciana Frassati-Gawrońska. Thanks to her family ties and Italian citizenship, she was able to travel freely between Rome and Warsaw and transport funds and small messages between the Vatican and Bishop Gall.³⁸

Many religious congregations also had their own methods of communication with their outposts in the occupied territories of the Polish Republic. Most of them sent regular updates to the Pope about their religious houses and monasteries in Poland. However, their communication was limited to information about the situation of their own congregations. The Jesuits, whose Superior General at the time was a Pole, Włodzimierz Ledóchowski, were an exception in this respect. Ledóchowski's role in the communication efforts between the Vatican and occupied Polish territory still requires in-depth research, but a first glance at the Polish files at the Vatican suggests that he was somehow involved in almost every legal and illegal means of communication with Poland, and that his voice carried considerable weight in the Vatican. He was the only one who managed,

the last from November 4 to 28, 1942 (Debaltsevo). See Manzo, *Don Pirro Scavizzi...*, p. 124. Confidential reports to the Pope were submitted after the first four missions.

³⁶ These reports are kept in: ASRS, AA.EE.SS., PXII, P.I, Russia 696.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 75–91. The files consulted do not contain any additional information regarding Father Silvio Negrato. A preliminary search in the scholarly literature revealed that he was still active in the Military Ordinariate in Italy in 1946, defending the rights of former military chaplains who had been slandered by their bishops. His report on the matter was forwarded to Undersecretary Montini, which shows that his superiors trusted his opinions. See: Mimmo Franzinelli, "L'Ordinariato militare dal fascismo alla Guerra fredda," *Italia Contemporanea* 233 (2004): 648.

³⁸ ASRS, AA.EE.SS., PXII, P.I, Stati Ecclesiastici 630, p. 273rv, Internal note of the Secretariat of State, January 27, 1940. Luciana Frassati-Gawrońska made several trips to Polish occupied territories during the Second World War, including to Warsaw and Cracow. She smuggled out works of art and documents relating to Nazi atrocities, gave money to the Polish underground, and rescued several Polish families from occupied Poland. Among those rescued was Olga Helena Zubrzeska, wife of General Władysław Sikorski. She also appealed to Mussolini on behalf of the arrested professors of Jagiellonian University, see: "Addio a Luciana Frassati testimone del Novecento," *La Repubblica*, October 7, 2007.

with the reluctant blessing of the Vatican, to send spies to the Soviet Union in the early years of the war.³⁹ He almost placed a spy in German-occupied Warsaw,⁴⁰ and did succeed in maintaining direct contact with Archbishop Sapieha.

Other sources of information on Poland were of less value to Vatican officials. This also applied to the reports and memoranda regularly submitted to the Secretariat of State by the Polish Embassy. The Vatican was aware that it was better informed about certain aspects of the situation in occupied Polish territory through its own sources (Nuncio Orsenigo, Polish bishops, Malvezzi, Scavizzi, and others) than was the Polish government-in-exile. This was particularly true of the situation of the Catholic Church. The same conclusion can be reached with regard to the reports sent to the Vatican by Primate Hlond, who was far from occupied Poland (in Italy and later in France). Internal Vatican documents show that the reports of both the embassy and the Primate were often compared with other reports, which made the inaccuracies in them all the more apparent.⁴¹ One Vatican official, who was entrusted with preparing a comprehensive summary of the situation of the Church in occupied Poland, explained in the introduction to the text why certain sources were to be given more credibility:

For the notes attached here, one used the information sent by H.E. Mons. Orsenigo [...], by the Rev.ma Curia S.J. [Societa 'Jesu' i.e. Jesuits – M.S.B.] and some other trusted person [Malvezzi – M.S.B.]. In general, the notes of the Polish Embassy of the Holy See or the Memorials of the Eminent Cardinal Hlond have not been taken into account, for the fear that these sources may not be exact in detail.⁴²

In addition, other channels of communication to, from, and about occupied Poland ran through the nunciatures in Budapest and Bratislava and through

³⁹For an introduction to this topic in: Johan Ickx, *Le Bureau: Les juifs de Pie XII* (Paris: Michel Lafon, 2020), chapter 6, "Histoire d'informateurs secrets". This channel of communication, although interesting in other contexts, did not play a significant role in the transmission of information about the persecution of the Jews.

⁴⁰It concerned a Jesuit priest, Father Morillo, who was to function in Warsaw disguised as a Spanish diplomat. He even had a diplomatic passport already issued as an officer with a special mission in Warsaw. See AVV, PXII, Segr. St., Comm. Socc. 198, Polacchi Civili Polonia 6, p. 6, Internal note of the Secretariat of State, March 5, 1940.

⁴¹Another matter that requires further research is that the Vatican resented the cardinal for leaving the country and was annoyed by his constant pressure on the Pope to speak out on the Polish issue.

⁴²ASRS, AA.EE.SS., PXII, P.I, Stati Ecclesiastici 688a, p. 192, Appunto dell'ufficio circa la situazione religiosa in Polonia in seguito all'occupazione tedesca [Office memo about the religious situation in Poland following the German occupation], January 6, 1941. Hlond's reports were published in London in 1941. See: Cardinal August Hlond, *The Persecution of the Catholic Church in German-occupied Poland: Reports Presented by H.E. Cardinal Hlond, Primate of Poland, to Pope Pius XII, Vatican Broadcasts, and Other Reliable Evidence* (London: Burns, Oates, 1941).

certain Italian diplomats. These sources, although reliable and of interest to the Secretariat of State in various contexts, are not the most important, as they did not transmit information to the Vatican about the persecution and murder of Jews. This is surprising because Budapest was a key hub in the transit of reports from the Polish underground to the West, including those concerning the Holocaust. Why this information did not reach, for example, the Apostolic Nuncio in Budapest, Angelo Rotta, is a question for research. In the following analysis, I will focus only on those informants who passed on news of the ongoing extermination of the Jews to the Vatican. These were the entrepreneurs Giovanni Malvezzi and Adolfo Lucat (Fiat's representative in Warsaw), Father Pirro Scavizzi, Father Silvio Negrato, other military chaplains, Countess Luciana Frassati-Gawrońska, the Italian couple Gagliardini, who lived in Warsaw, the Apostolic Nuncio to Germany Cesare Orsenigo, and the Superior General of the Jesuits Włodzimierz Ledóchowski.

Information on the Persecution and Systematic Murder of Jews, July 1941 - September 1942

Having established the Vatican's most trusted sources of information on the situation in the territory of occupied Poland, from here I will focus on what these sources revealed about the persecution and murder of the Jews, and in particular about the topics raised in the letter of the American envoy. In order to provide as comprehensive picture as possible and best track the state of knowledge of the officials of the Secretariat of State, and through them the knowledge of Pope Pius XII, during the years 1941–1942, up to September 26, 1942, the documents will be discussed in chronological order.

Malvezzi played a key role in the context of communication about the persecution of the Jews. The first mention of Jews in his accounts can be found in his report of 7 July 7, 1941, where he described at length the situation in the ghettos of the two cities he visited during his trip – namely, Łódź and Warsaw. About Warsaw he wrote:

Warsaw: The situation is extremely more serious than in Łódź because most of the food smuggled into the ghetto was seized by the authorities: there is also lack of assistance, arising from the use of funds overtaken by the liquidation of confiscated Jewish assets. It is also important to keep in mind the much greater number of miserable people than in Łódź. Horrible scenes of human suffering pile up in the ghetto: we are talking about several hundreds of deaths from hunger and fatigue every day: the author, [Malvezzi wrote about himself in the third person – M.S.B.], having been able to enter the ghetto, counted 5 abandoned corpses on the sidewalk of the main street of Nalewki [Nalewki], which clearly bore the stigmata of death by exhaustion, and they are left abandoned for the whole day until a mortuary wagon passes to pick them up. According to posters posted

in the ghetto, petechial fever⁴³ and scurvy had developed: indeed some roads were closed. While during the winter it seemed that some Jews – baptized from birth – could live in Warsaw, now with the greatest severity all [Jews] in the city or in the countryside were forced to live in the ghetto. About 450,000 people live in the Warsaw ghetto.⁴⁴

This report is crucial in several respects. First of all, it reveals that Giovanni Malvezzi had access to the Warsaw Ghetto and that his testimony was first-hand and not, as in the case of others, based on hearsay. It is difficult to state whether the officials of the Secretariat of State were aware of this and/or whether they attributed any significance to it. It is also unclear whether Pius XII read the full report himself (18 handwritten pages) or only a one-page summary prepared on the same day by an official of the Secretariat of State, and in which Jews were not mentioned. Only the summary is annotated with ‘Seen by the Holy Father’.⁴⁵ Unusually in this case, the Pontifical Relief Commission (*Commissione Soccorsi*) did not follow up on the information about the epidemic in the ghetto, although it often arranged for shipments of medicines when it received similar reports of epidemics among the Polish (non-Jewish) population.

After another trip a few weeks later, on July 16, 1941, Malvezzi presented a much more detailed report in which he highlighted the resurgence of antisemitism among Poles, which he attributed to rumors of alleged Jewish collaboration with the Bolsheviks in oppressing Poles.⁴⁶ The report does not provide any further details on this. However, the allegation was nothing new to the Vatican. A number of informants, particularly those originating from Church circles, who passed on information from Soviet-occupied eastern Poland in the early years of the war, noted the same.

In the autumn of 1941, Father Pirro Scavizzi went on his first mission by hospital train to German-occupied Poland and the Soviet Union, to sites where Italian military formations were stationed. On his return, still shocked by what he had seen, he decided to secretly approach the Vatican to recount his experiences.

⁴³ Another name for typhus.

⁴⁴ ASRS, AA.EE.SS., PXII, PI, *Stati Ecclesiastici* 688a, pp. 385–386, Second report by Mr. Malvezzi about the religious situation in Poland, July 7, 1941.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 368, Internal note of the Secretariat of State with handwritten annotations, July 7, 1941.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 356, Mr. M.’s third report on Poland, July 16, 1941. In the summer of 1941, following Germany’s attack on the USSR, a wave of German-inspired pogroms of Jews swept through the territories previously occupied by the Soviets. The perpetrators were driven by exactly this motive – to avenge the alleged Jewish collaboration with the Soviets. The best-known case is the mass murder in Jedwabne. See Jan Tomasz Gross, *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001) and Andrzej Żbikowski, *U genezy Jedwabnego. Żydzi na Kresach północno-wschodnich II Rzeczypospolitej. Wrzesień 1939 – lipiec 1941* [At the origins of Jedwabne. Jews in the Northeastern Borderlands of the Second Polish Republic. September 1939 – July 1941] (Warszawa: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, 2006).

Scavizzi was well known in ecclesiastical circles in Rome and was also a close friend of the Pope's sister Elisabetta Rossignani. This enabled him to obtain a lengthy audience with Pius XII. According to Scavizzi's own account, during the meeting the Pope "cried like a baby and prayed like a saint" after hearing what the priest had told him.⁴⁷ A few weeks later, at the request of Pius XII, Scavizzi submitted a long, confidential written report on what he had seen and heard from witnesses and experienced himself during this trip⁴⁸. Three pages of the 23-page report dealt with the 'Jewish question'.

Beyond the borders of Italy, in the Reich or in countries allied to it or occupied by it, the Jewish question is of exceptional gravity. All Jews are required to wear a branded armband. They are forbidden to enter most shops, offices, and public places of meeting or entertainment, to get on trams or public cars. In Cracow, Lviv, and the main cities of Poland they have been relegated to ghettos where filth and squalor plainly reign. They must not leave the enclosure before dawn, nor re-enter it after sunset.

The lack of a bracelet or identification card, or finding them around after hours, can result in immediate killing.⁴⁹

This information had long been known to the Vatican from many different sources. However, the following description left no doubt as to the ultimate intention the Nazis had for the Jews. It is the first such accurate description of the Holocaust to reach the Vatican:

It is evident that the intention of the occupying government is to eliminate as many Jews as possible by killing them by means of various methods, of which the most frequent and best known is that of mass shootings. For these executions groups of Jewish families (men, women, and children, also infants) are deported a few kilometers from the city, near the war trenches or in places where huge pits had previously been dug, forcing the Jewish men themselves to do this work. At the edge of trenches or pits, these groups of hundreds and hundreds and sometimes thousands, are relentlessly machine-gunned and thrown into the pits. This story was told by a German army officer and Polish citizens. [...] I was told that to perform these "eliminations" the S.S. sometimes ordered whole groups of families to get into a train and these closed railway cars were dragged away and then abandoned until the poor deportees were almost all dead. [...] The number of Jews killed has so far risen to around one million.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Manzo, *Don Pirro Scavizzi...*, p. 130. This description comes from an article written by Scavizzi in 1964; it is kept in the documentation for Scavizzi's beatification.

⁴⁸ ASRS, AA.EE.SS., PXII, P.I, Russia 695, p. 3, Scavizzi to Pius XII, January 6, 1942.

⁴⁹ Ibidem, pp. 16–17. Interestingly, this report, omitted from *Actes et Documents...*, but published together with three further reports in 1997 by Michele Manzo (*Don Pirro Scavizzi...*, pp. 205–221), has not found wider circulation. For unknown reasons, it was not mentioned by Zuccotti and Phayer, who published their books in 2000.

⁵⁰ ASRS, AA.EE.SS., PXII, P.I, Russia 695, pp. 17–18, Scavizzi to Pius XII, January 6, 1942.

In the subsequent part, the obviously shaken priest described scenes of cannibalism among Jews and Russian prisoners of war: “The argument [of cannibalism] is so serious and terrible that the pen refuses to write and the mind even to remember.”⁵¹ Scavizzi ended his long letter on a personal note suggesting how much of a shock it was for him to see what he had in the East: “Most Blessed Father, many other sad things have been reported to me and I had to see them and my soul is full of them and my heart shrinks from having to narrate them in more detail.”⁵² This report was transmitted to the Vatican on January 13, 1942.

Meanwhile, voices and requests were received by the Holy See through the nunciatures in Bratislava, Budapest, and Bern to ascertain the fate of Slovakian and Hungarian Jews deported to Poland in the spring of 1941 and to intervene with the authorities on their behalf.⁵³ In one case, the Vatican decided to find out through one of its emissaries what was happening to the deportees. On January 6, 1942, the same day that Pirro Scavizzi completed his report to Pius XII, the Secretariat of State prepared a short note for Countess Frassati-Gawrońska, who was leaving for Poland:

For Mrs. Gavronska [*sic!*]

About 19,000 Jewish people were deported from Hungary to Galicia and Ukraine in recent months.

Their relatives and acquaintances who remained in Hungary would like to have news of the deported relatives and be able to communicate with them.

It is desirable to know if it is possible to establish contact with these people.⁵⁴

Frassati-Gawrońska returned to this matter after her return to Italy. There is an undated note in the Vatican listing the tasks entrusted to her. Next to the point about the fate of the 19,000 Jews from Hungary, a Vatican official noted in red pencil “there is no news.”⁵⁵ The documents do not reveal whether or through whom the countess sought information about the deported Jews. However, this was certainly not the primary purpose of her mission.

In the meantime, Pirro Scavizzi departed by hospital train on his second (January 12 – February 20) and third (April 8 – May 3) missions to occupied Poland. After these journeys, as well, he put his observations down on paper. In

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, p. 18.

⁵² *Ibidem*, p. 24.

⁵³ For an introduction on the role of nuncios in Slovakia and Hungary, see Ickx, *Le Bureau...*, chapter 1: “Histoire de deux fous, de jeunes filles disparues et d’un chargé d’affaires,” pp. 21–59.

⁵⁴ AAV, PXII, Segr. St., Comm. Socc. 200, Polacchi Civili Polonia 29, p. 18, Internal note of the Secretariat of State, January 6, 1942.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 41, Internal note of the State Secretariat with handwritten annotations, n.d., probably between February and May 1942.

a report to Pius XII of April 5, 1942, he wrote: "The conditions of Jews in Germany, Poland, and Ukraine is increasingly tragic. The recurring phrase is 'exterminate them without mercy'. Mass killings are multiplying everywhere". After giving horrific details of the murders of Jewish women and children, Scavizzi concluded that the extermination of Jews in Ukraine was "almost finished".⁵⁶ In his third report, dated May 12, 1942, he stated that "the massacre of Jews in Ukraine is now complete" and that Polish and German Jews are to follow.⁵⁷

When Scavizzi was in Cracow on his third mission, Operation Reinhardt had already begun in the GG and Polish Jews were being deported to the Bełżec death camp. It did not take long for this new phase of the 'Final Solution', the liquidation of the ghettos in occupied Poland, to be confirmed to the Vatican through its own sources.

Just one day after Scavizzi's third report, on May 13, 1942, the military chaplain Silvio Negrato presented his testimony at the Vatican. Like Scavizzi before him, he was received by the Pope in audience and, at his request, described his experiences. Negrato had been stationed in Cracow and Lviv in March and April 1942, during which time he spoke to local bishops and many priests. His text stands out from the accounts of military chaplains for the precision with which the information was taken from the source, and for the fact that he devoted most attention to the subject of the extermination of the Jews:

In Cracow, before the war, their [the Jews'] number was around 150,000 (Cracow Station Commander) – reduced by massacres and deportations to around 20,000 [...]. In Lviv their number will have to drop from 200,000 to 40,000 (declaration by the Gestapo Commissar who was a guest on the train one day). Currently there are still around 80,000. [...]

Mass executions are ordinarily carried out in pre-established locations, where the victims must first dig their own large mass grave. [...] In Lviv, executions were repeated three or four times a week with the number of executed being around five or six hundred at a time. [...] In Suamenka [probably Znamianka in the district of Krzywý Róg – M.S.B.] all the Jews of the city were hanged, including women and children. From Kasatin [probably Koziatyn near Winnica – M.S.B.] to the front, you can no longer find a Jew. Italian officers and soldiers narrate the gruesome scenes with which the Germans carry out these crimes: women buried alive, children thrown up and hit by revolvers before falling into the already prepared grave, young men and women made targets. I felt the profound disgust of Italian soldiers who witnessed such atrocities, also confirmed by the Military Chief Chaplain Pontonello from the C.S.I.R.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ ASRS, AA.EE.SS., PXII, P.I, Russia 695, p. 44, Scavizzi to Pius XII (second report), April 5, 1942. The report arrived at the Secretariat of State on April 11, 1942.

⁵⁷ *Actes et Documents...*, vol. 8, doc. 374, p. 534; see also Manzo, *Don Pirro Scavizzi...*, pp. 234 and 239.

⁵⁸ Italian Expeditionary Force on the Eastern Front.

There is no shortage of acts of sabotage carried out by Jews, who are often discovered as part of communist cells. In Dniepropetrovski [Dnipropetrovsk] they tried to poison some wells and destroy a bridge.

The Archbishop of Kraków is convinced of the ineffectiveness of the struggle waged by such means. The colonels in charge of the Vienna and Lviv stages were of the same opinion. However, no one [reference is made here to Sapieha, the Italian militaries, and probably Negrato himself – M.S.B.] denies the serious faults of the Jews to the detriment of Poland and the Church. Their present sad condition is but the application of the law of retaliation.⁵⁹

Negrato was the first trusted source to inform the Vatican about the systematic liquidation of the ghettos in Poland. He also tells about the killings carried out by the *Einsatzgruppen*, which later came to be known as the Holocaust by bullets (the first stage of the extermination of the Jews) and the start of the second stage, which was the extermination of the Polish Jews. Both stages ran in parallel for many months. What is striking is the detail of Negrato's text and the accuracy of his observations, although, like any report, it does not record all events – in this case the author did not mention the deportations of Jews from Lviv and other towns in the district to Bełżec. The text also confirms earlier reports according to which – above all in church circles – Jews were identified as communists. Negrato also indirectly raises the issue of antisemitism in the Polish Catholic Church, which manifested itself in the belief that the Jews themselves were to some extent to blame for what was happening.⁶⁰

That latter remark by Negrato suggests that Archbishop Sapieha also shared the opinion that Jews were closely associated with communism and that their actions had a negative impact on Poland and, as a result, that they were responsible for their fate. With this type of source, there is no way to verify whether these opinions actually came out of Sapieha's mouth, but there are arguments in favour of this possibility. Firstly, these views coincided with Sapieha's opinions about the Jews as expressed by him on various occasions before the war.⁶¹ Secondly, an analysis of the reports of military chaplains who often spoke with Sapieha in 1942 indicates that the Archbishop trusted them, passed confidential information to the Vatican through them, and did not avoid difficult topics in his conversations with them. It may be recalled that only a month earlier, Sapieha had sent through Scavizzi a letter in which he enumerated the

⁵⁹ ASRS, AA.EE.SS., PXII, P.I, Russia 696, pp. 79–80, Report for Pope Pius XII, May 13, 1942 r.

⁶⁰ A monograph on the attitude of the Polish Catholic Church in this regard is still waiting to be written, which, however, may not be possible due to the unavailability of local church archives in Poland. In this context, Dariusz Libionka's publication may offer preliminary insights: Dariusz Libionka, "Polish Church Hierarchy and the Holocaust – an Essay from a Critical Perspective," *Holocaust Studies and Materials* (2010): 76–127.

⁶¹ On Sapieha's similar pre-war views on the relationship between Jews and communism, see *ibidem*, pp. 78, 84.

ways in which Poles and the Church were persecuted in the occupied territories, and that on many occasions he passed through him and other military chaplains information about the numbers of priests murdered or imprisoned in Poland. If this or other sensitive information had fallen into German hands, it could have led to Sapieha's arrest and increased persecution of the Polish Church. Given these arguments, Negrato's report appears to be a reliable source of information on Archbishop Sapieha, and was certainly regarded as such by the Vatican.

In Berlin, Nuncio Orsenigo was apparently much less well informed than his Vatican superiors, who nevertheless often commissioned him to obtain news of Jewish deportees from various countries. The Pope and other Vatican officials regularly received requests for help from persecuted Jews, their relatives, or other intermediaries. These were dealt with by both sections of the Secretariat of State; often the officials in charge of these cases first contacted Nuncio Orsenigo to intervene on behalf of Jews or to obtain information about Jews in Germany or in occupied territories, including occupied Poland. After a number of such requests reached the Berlin nunciature, Orsenigo reported to Undersecretary Montini on July 28, 1942 about those deported to Poland, confessing that he had not been able to obtain any reliable information about them, which left room for "the most macabre suppositions" as to their fate, especially as there was chatter of "mass murders of Jews".⁶² It is clear from this account that, owing to the rumors reaching Berlin, Orsenigo became increasingly aware of the tragic fate of the deportees and the reasons why no one could contact them.⁶³ He relayed this conclusion to his superiors in the Vatican, who already knew from other sources what was happening to the Jews deported to the East. It is striking that the Vatican did not share with Orsenigo the knowledge it had about the mass murder of Jews from alternative and reliable sources.

In the summer of 1942, Malvezzi travelled twice to occupied Poland. Four weeks after Orsenigo's letter, on 23 August 1942, after a long stay in Poland, he made another report orally to Undersecretary Montini. According to the note that the latter made of this conversation, Malvezzi extensively covered many topics in his report, but Montini mentioned the persecution of the Jews in his notes on this conversation only in one sentence under the heading "other news": "most pitiful condition of Jews", next to information about the lack of a church building for Germans in Warsaw.⁶⁴ From Montini's summary of the

⁶² *Actes et Documents...*, vol. 8, doc. 438, pp. 607–608, Orsenigo to Montini, July 28, 1942.

⁶³ Nuncio Cesare Orsenigo is generally not viewed positively in the literature and portrayed as a pro-Nazi anti-Semite. On several occasions he prevented information about the Holocaust from being transmitted to the Vatican. This happened in the case of Margarete Sommer's report in early 1942 and the testimony of SS officer Kurt Gerstein. See Phayer, *The Catholic Church*, pp. 44–46. The person of Nuncio Orsenigo deserves to be examined in detail in the light of newly available Vatican documents.

⁶⁴ AAV, PXII, Segr. St., Comm. Socc. 207, Polacchi Civili Polonia 272, p. 6. Note by Montini (Dr Malvezzi), August 23, 1942.

conversation between Montini and Malvezzi, it is impossible to deduce whether the businessman actually mentioned the Jews only as a side note, or whether Montini's note focused only on the topics most relevant to the Holy See at the time. However, in light of Malvezzi's earlier reports, those he had written himself, and later reports, including the one of September 1942, and the intensity of the deportations from the Warsaw Ghetto in August 1942, it is likely that Montini did not place as much emphasis on this issue as Malvezzi would have wished.

The casus of the note following Malvezzi's next trip, dated September 18, also drafted by Montini, seems to confirm the thesis of the future Pope's selective treatment of the subject of the Jewish tragedy. Montini wrote:

There are two serious facts to note in recent weeks: the bombing of Polish cities by the Russians and the systematic massacres of the Jews. The cities are defenseless: over a thousand dead and hundreds of wounded have occurred in Warsaw; the panic is very high; moral depression manifests in everyone. [...] The massacres of the Jews have reached horrific and appalling proportions and forms. Incredible massacres are carried out every day; it seems that by the middle of October whole ghettos of hundreds of thousands of languishing wretches are being emptied to make place for the Poles, who are displaced from their homes, where Germans, who became homeless because of the war, are being transported. Terror dominates everywhere. To a person who was leaving for Italy, a representative of the Polish aristocracy said: if this winter Germany will provide Italy with a batch of soap... remember us (who are in that soap).⁶⁵

There is no suggestion in this report or in previous reports that detailed information about the persecution and murder of Jews was provided at the request of the Polish bishops. On the contrary, the construction of the reports suggests that Malvezzi informed the Vatican at his own initiative. On the occasion of his trip, however, Malvezzi brought to the Vatican two documents from Warsaw. One was a leaflet entitled "Protest!"; written by the Polish Catholic activist Zofia Kossak-Szczucka in August 1942. A handwritten note on the leaflet by Montini suggests that it had been handed to Malvezzi by the Bishop of Katowice, Adamski, who was one of the entrepreneur's main interlocutors in Warsaw. This means that Adamski wanted the Vatican to see the content of the protest. It should be noted here that this is the only time that a Polish bishop gave information to the Vatican about the extermination of Jews from its beginning until the end of 1942, and that the leaflet reached the Vatican on September 18, 1942, two months earlier than it reached London. Without going into details of the meaning and interpretation of the leaflet, I will only highlight here its potential informative nature, which may have been relevant to the state of the Vatican's knowledge of the murder of Jews

⁶⁵ ASRS, AA.EE.SS., PXII, PI, Polonia 216, pp. 599–600, Note by Montini (Information from Poland), September 18, 1942. A shorter excerpt from this note was published in a footnote in *Actes et Documents...*, vol. 8, pp. 665–666.

during this period. The leaflet gave detailed information about the liquidation of the Warsaw Ghetto and the transports that were carried out, stating that the daily number of victims was between 8,000 and 10,000. Similar operations were carried out in all smaller and larger Polish cities and towns, regardless of the age and sex of the victims. The author of the leaflet protested against the murder of Jews and the silence of the world, but for reasons that can only be surmised did not mention the silence of the Pope. The Vatican archives do not, however, contain any translation or summary of the text of the leaflet, nor any annotation that it was actually read by someone, so it can be assumed that the information value of the document has not been put to a good use. This is incomprehensible, as it was a protest by Catholics and there was also a reference to the fate of converts, whom we know the Church cared about. It is unlikely that "Protest!" was presented to the Pope. Montini, in any case, did not mention it in his report after his conversation with Malvezzi. The brief description of the document, noted down presumably by Montini ("the exemplar of a leaflet of protest of the Poles against the ongoing extermination of Jews"⁶⁶), indicates only that the papal advisors understood the general nature of the text. In all likelihood they simply repeated what Malvezzi had said about the document. However, these words prove beyond any doubt that the Vatican was aware at this point of what was happening to the Jews in occupied Poland.

Around the same time as Malvezzi's September report, a famous letter from Andrzej Szeptycki, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Metropolitan, arrived at the Vatican. In the letter, the archbishop detailed the atrocities in his region and gave an estimate of the number of Jewish victims in Ukraine (over 200,000), confirming what Scavizzi had already reported five months earlier.⁶⁷ In light of the complete silence of most Polish bishops on the Holocaust, Szeptycki's letter takes on great symbolic value, as it is the only description of the systematic murder of Jews written by a hierarch from German-occupied Eastern Europe in 1941 and 1942.

Holocaust Awareness in the Vatican before September 26, 1942

Documentation from the Vatican Archives shows that during the first four years of the war, the Vatican was one of the best informed institutions in the non-occupied world about the situation in Poland. It achieved this position thanks

⁶⁶ ASRS, AA.EE.SS., PXII, P.I, Polonia 216, p. 595, Internal note of the Secretariat of State with handwritten annotations, September 19, 1942. Distinction in quotation – M.S.B.

⁶⁷ *Actes et Documents...*, vol. 3b, doc. 406, pp. 625, 628, Szeptycki to Pius XII, August 29–31, 1942. Friedländer attached great importance to the information provided by the Greek Catholic hierarch (Friedländer, *The Years...*, pp. 463–464). Ventresca, too, emphasizes the importance of this particular letter, describing it as "one of the earliest and clearest warning – and from a Catholic bishop – that Jews were the first and primary targets of Nazi brutality" (Ventresca, *Soldier of Christ...*, p. 172).

to a network of trusted informants and emissaries with access to the occupied territories who, often at personal peril, passed messages, letters, documents, financial aid, and material goods to and from Poland. These informers felt obliged to inform the Pope and his closest collaborators of the persecution and subsequent mass murder of Jews that was taking place before their eyes. It must be stressed that the initiative to obtain and pass on this information came entirely from the informers themselves. There is no evidence, apart from the case of Countess Frassati-Gawrońska cited earlier, that the Pope or his closest collaborators actively requested detailed information about the situation of the Jews in the occupied territories. The documents show that the Vatican was mainly interested in the situation of the Polish bishops, the Catholic population in occupied Poland, and the religious situation in Russia. However, in addition to the desired news, intermediaries passed on information about the unprecedented murder of Jews. The documents discussed above reflect the flow of information about these atrocities to the Vatican up to September 1942 and prove beyond any doubt that the Holy See had to have been aware as early as the beginning of 1942 that Jews were being killed on a massive scale in occupied Polish and Soviet territories, and as early as September 1942 that the extermination of Jews had spread to occupied Poland and was also targeting Jews from Western countries. In other words, the Vatican's knowledge of the Holocaust in September 1942 was extensive. Just as importantly, this knowledge came from various independent sources in which the Vatican had confidence. Pope Pius XII was therefore among those world leaders who, on the basis of the information he had gathered, already knew about the extermination of the Jews in the summer of 1942.⁶⁸ It is uncertain whether the Pope understood the unique and unprecedented turn that the systematic murder of Jews was giving to the ongoing war.⁶⁹ The ideal person to help him realize this was his close friend Father Pirro Scavizzi. Scavizzi, who served as a military chaplain in both world wars, understood this difference, as evidenced by his personal diary and reports to the Vatican. He even had to interrupt his service for a while to mentally recover from what he had seen in the East.⁷⁰ Is it possible that Scavizzi did not share these reflections during his two long meetings with Pius XII? Hardly. But Scavizzi's accounts did not lead to any action or change in the Vatican's attitude towards the Jewish cause.

⁶⁸ Walter Laqueur claimed that the Vatican was "better informed [about the Holocaust] than anyone else in Europe". See Laqueur, *The Terrible Secret...*, p. 55. See also Zuccotti, *Under His Very Windows...*, p. 95. The author quotes the opinion of Gerhart M. Riegner, who was a representative of the World Jewish Congress in Geneva in 1942, that "[t]he Vatican was probably better informed than we".

⁶⁹ Some historians argue that the Church was unaware of this, both during the war and afterwards, with incontrovertible evidence. See Andrea Riccardi, *La Guerra del silenzio: Pio XII, il nazismo, gli ebrei* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2022), pp. 288–339.

⁷⁰ Manzo, *Don Pirro Scavizzi...*, p. 144.

The Vatican documents discussed so far are scattered: they are to be found in the files of two sections of the Secretariat of State concerning Poland, Russia, Germany, and other countries. The Congregation for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs (First Section) was headed by Domenico Tardini and the Congregation for Ordinary Affairs (Second Section) by Giovanni Battista Montini. Both sections were headed by Cardinal Secretary of State Luigi Maglione. This dispersion can be explained by two factors. Firstly, the information presented here on the persecution and murder of Jews was in each case only part of a longer report that also, even primarily, dealt with other issues. Secondly, none of these reports was devoted exclusively to the situation of the Jews. An analysis of Vatican documentation makes it possible to identify patterns in the handling of new information. Usually, when an issue or situation presented in a general report required follow-up action or deeper attention, the relevant passage was copied and placed in a separate folder opened specifically for that purpose, then gradually supplemented as new data arrived. This happened with countless files concerning Poland and other countries. In the case of the systematic murder of Jews, this did not happen until September 1942.⁷¹

What does this indicate? First of all, it means that not every low- or mid-level official in the Secretariat of State could have been aware of the full picture emerging from the documents presented here, since these officials in most cases dealt only with assigned country-specific cases for which they were

⁷¹ In this context, mention must be made of the "Ebrei" (Jews) files in the archives of the Secretariat of State and the "Razza" ['race'] files in the archives of the Pontifical Relief Commission (*Commissione Soccorsi*) in two sections of the Secretariat of State. As soon as the persecution of Jews in Germany began, the Vatican started receiving requests for help from individual Jews, families, or intermediaries acting on their behalf. As the persecution intensified, the number of such petitions increased. As with any other category of victims who sought assistance from the Pope, the Vatican sought to help where possible, although it applied strict criteria for assistance. Given that this documentation relates to individual cases (or small groups) and that Vatican assistance to Jews was externally motivated, i.e., one had to ask for help in order to receive it, and that this assistance began long before the war and the genocide of the Jews, I do not consider this documentation to be strictly Holocaust-related. However, it would be interesting to explore whether, and if so, how news of the Holocaust intensified the efforts of Vatican officials to help Jews seeking assistance. An introduction to these documents is offered by Vatican archivist Giovanni Coco, see Giovanni Coco, "Concevoir le secours. Pie XII, La Secrétairerie d'État du Vatican et l'assistance aux juifs (1938–1947)," [Conceiving rescue. Pius XII, The Vatican Secretariat of State and Assistance to the Jews (1938–1947)] *Revue d'Histoire de la Shoah*, vol. 218, 2 (2023): 91–127. Some of the files in the "Ebrei" series are discussed in Ickx, *Le Bureau*, chapters 2, 5, 8, 11, 14 and 17. See also Hubert Wolf, Sascha Hinkel, Elisabeth-Marie Richter, Judith Schepers, Barbara Schüler, "Je dois mentionner que je suis juif..." Questions soulevées par l'édition critique en ligne des archives du Vatican, concernant les requêtes de Juifs," [I must mention that I am Jewish... Questions raised by the online critical edition of the Vatican archives, concerning requests from Jews] *Revue d'Histoire de la Shoah*, vol. 218, 2 (2023): 179–204.

considered specialists. Their superiors, on the other hand, had access to all the texts discussed here and were certainly able to gain a full picture of the situation and conclude that something unprecedented was happening to the Jews in the territories occupied by Nazi Germany. The fact that neither Pius XII, nor Cardinal Maglione, nor his deputies, Tardini and Montini, instructed their subordinates to open a file on the information they received about the persecution and murder of Jews cannot be explained other than to say that they considered this information marginal and of low importance/priority for the Church. It was in September 1942 that a change in this respect took place, not under the influence of internal reflection, but because of external pressure.

Two letters and Two Weeks of Investigation, September 26 – October 10, 1942.

Myron Taylor arrived in person at the Secretariat of State on September 26 with a letter addressed to Cardinal Maglione. The American diplomat wanted to know if the Vatican could confirm information about the mass murder of Jews in occupied Polish lands and asked the Vatican for suggestions on how to deal with such barbarities. The Americans rightly assumed that the Vatican had its own reliable and independent sources. Because of Maglione's absence during the American envoy's visit, the memorandum, which was regarded as important, was immediately forwarded to Pius XII, who read it and then sent it back to the desk of his Secretary of State.

On the same day, September 26, 1942, Ledóchowski, the Superior General of the Jesuits, also wrote a letter to Cardinal Maglione. It appears that the day before, Malvezzi had met Ledóchowski and told him about what he had witnessed in Warsaw.⁷² Ledóchowski wrote:

[Malvezzi] was above all moved by the inhuman treatment of the Jews all condemned to death in one way or another. The Nazis are hoping that all the Jews [underlining by Ledóchowski – M.S.B.] will be killed by the end of October; it goes without saying that this is true also for those coming from France. A Nazi asked why they also killed children replies with cynicism: "Es gibt auch Himmel-Lager" [There is also a camp in heaven]. In that way the ghettos will be free to put the Poles there and have their houses recovered by the Germans. [...] The arrests of priests continue; all the higher classes see themselves condemned to extermination. The latest letters received from the Provincials of Poland and Bohemia confirm that they [the priests there] expect to share the fate of the Jews. The houses of religious men and women are confiscated without any reason or necessity,

⁷² The fact of this meeting is confirmed by an annotation in Ledóchowski's private agenda. Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu (hereafter ASRI), Fondo Ledóchowski 1013/320 (Visite in casa, 1940–1942), September 25, 1942.

it is forbidden to receive novices, the best [priests] are made to die slowly in the concentration camps, even simple Italian soldiers who pass through Poland rebel against this "barbarism for the sake of barbarism", as Mr. Malvezzi has put it "showing indignation, which, he [Malvezzi] added, is not a sign of sympathy but of a human feeling".⁷³

Ledóchowski, after repeating the terrible details Malvezzi had told him and emphasizing that the Nazis' intention was to exterminate "all the Jews", suggested to Maglione that the businessman should be granted an audience by Pius XII to give an account of what he had seen in Poland.⁷⁴ He was undoubtedly alluding to the "barbaric" extermination of the Jews, which, as evidenced by this very letter from the General, also made a great impression on the Jesuit superior. This kind of intervention on behalf of the Jews was unusual for Ledóchowski, who was not known for his philosemitism.⁷⁵ The issue of antisemitism is also evident in the letter, especially in Ledóchowski's words in which he tries to justify his and Malvezzi's indignation as stemming from human feelings rather than sympathy for the Jews, and shows more concern for the fate of Catholic priests and Poles than for the Jewish victims of the total annihilation.

To summarize, on September 26, 1942 the Secretariat of State received letters from two independent and important parties. One from Myron Taylor and the other from Włodzimierz Ledóchowski. These letters forced the Pope and his entourage to address the issue of the systematic murder of Jews.

The next day, after reviewing the contents of Taylor's letter, Cardinal Maglione remarked, "I don't think we have any info[r]mation that confirms - in details - this very serious news, do we?".⁷⁶ It seems that at this point the cardinal could not recall the reports written by military chaplains Scavizzi and Negrato a few months earlier and the recent letter from Szeptycki. On the same day, September 27, Maglione presented Ledóchowski's proposal to the Pope to receive Malvezzi in audience. Let us recall that Malvezzi had returned a few days earlier from Warsaw (where the ghetto was being liquidated and people taken to the death camps), bringing with him a protest leaflet and first-hand information. Pius XII and Cardinal Maglione, having discussed Ledóchowski's suggestion, decided not to grant an audience to Malvezzi because, as explained in their reply to the Jesuit general: "[t]he Holy Father has already been informed of what Mr. Malvezzi reported on his last trip to Poland. Therefore, in this case, there is

⁷³ ASRS, AA.EE.SS., PXII, P.I, Polonia 216, p. 593rv, Ledóchowski do Maglione, September 26, 1942.

⁷⁴ Ibidem, p. 593v, Ledóchowski to Maglione, September 26, 1942.

⁷⁵ See David Kertzer, *The Pope and Mussolini: The Secret History of Pius XI and the Rise of Fascism in Europe* (New York: Random House, 2014), p. 289.

⁷⁶ ASRS, AA. EE. SS., PXII, P.I, Extracta, Germania 742, Handwritten note by Cardinal Maglione, September 27, 1942.

no reason for an audience.”⁷⁷ In other words, the Pope could have personally spoken to an informant who had access to the Warsaw Ghetto and first-hand information about the extermination of the Jews, but instead decided that it was not necessary, even though it was exactly one day after the American request for information on exactly the same subject – namely, the mass murder of Jews. The Pope’s decision must have been based on the content of Montini’s summary of his conversation with Malvezzi, since Montini, as Undersecretary of State, reported to him daily.⁷⁸ It cannot be ruled out that Montini omitted certain details that Malvezzi had given him. This interpretation may be supported by the contents of a letter sent by an unidentified cardinal of the Roman Curia to the Polish ambassador Papée on September 23, 1942. It is likely to be Cardinal Tisserant, prefect of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches, who informed the ambassador of news “from an Italian personality who came from the country,” whom historian Dariusz Libionka identified in 2006 as Giovanni Malvezzi. The Cardinal, and through him Papée, learned from Malvezzi about the details of *Grossaktion Warschau*, about the operation of the extermination camp outside Lublin (gassing the victims), and about the plan for the “brutal extermination of about 300,000 Jews.”⁷⁹

The next day (September 24), Papée relayed this news to Taylor and later reported to his superiors in London that “the matter itself [the mass murder of Jews] is known to him [Taylor], the intention of extermination and the method – less so. Unfortunately, he [Taylor] is of the opinion that nothing can be done yet.”⁸⁰ Given the date of Papée’s conversation with Taylor, this new information from the Polish ambassador may have been one of the motives behind Taylor’s request for a briefing from the Vatican two days later. What is particularly important for this analysis is that Malvezzi spoke to at least three people within a radius of one square kilometer about what he had witnessed in Poland, and assuming that he told them all the same story, Montini’s note on the extermination of the Jews stands out as much less detailed and less explicit than those from Superior General Ledóchowski, a cardinal of the Roman Curia, and Ambassador Papée. According to historian Michele Sarfatti, the words in Montini’s summary after

⁷⁷ ASRS, AA.EE.SS., PXII, PI, Polonia 216, p. 601, Internal note of the Secretariat of State (Ex. Aud. SS.mi), September 27, 1942. These words suggest that Malvezzi had previously been received by the Pope. Documents show that he met the Pope in early 1941, before his reports of the persecution and murder of the Jews took such a dramatic turn. See: AAV, PXII, Segr. St, Comm. Socc. 199, p. 24, Ledóchowski to Tardini, January 22, 1941. Although the letter from 1941 contains only Ledóchowski’s proposal to receive Malvezzi in audience, and the documents on the matter do not give an answer as to whether the audience took place, Maglione’s reply to the proposal in 1942 indicates that Malvezzi was received by the Pope in early 1941.

⁷⁸ Phayer, *The Catholic Church*, p. 37.

⁷⁹ The Archive of the Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum in London (hereafter PISM), A.44.49/6. Quoted in: Libionka, “Against a Brick Wall...,” pp. 281–282.

⁸⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 282.

his meeting with Malvezzi, "horrible and appalling proportions and forms", probably refer to the gassing of victims.⁸¹ Even if one were to assume that this was the case, it shows that Montini filtered the messages given to the Pope. Intentionally or not, even in internal documents, and the note of conversation with Malvezzi was just such a document, he used vague language, one might even say a typical ecclesiastical paraphrase that hid the terrible reality reported by Malvezzi behind descriptive language.

The curial Cardinal, the Polish ambassador, and Ledóchowski immediately grasped how important and disturbing Malvezzi's news was and passed it on (Ledóchowski to Maglione and Pius XII, the cardinal to Papée, Papée to Taylor, Pius XII, and London), while Montini's note of September 18 does not give the impression of importance. It is clear that for Malvezzi, who, in Ledóchowski's words, "was *above all* moved by the inhuman treatment of the Jews [emphasis in the text – M.S.B.],"⁸² the most important and urgent issue was the extermination of the Jews, hence his meetings with at least three high-ranking people. However, in his report after his meeting with Malvezzi, in addition to the information already quoted about the extermination of the Jews, which was classified under "two serious facts to notice", Montini discussed at length other issues, including the situation in the Warsaw diocese after the death of Bishop Gall, the death of Bishop Kozal at Dachau, the consecration of 15 Ukrainian bishops of the Orthodox Church, the rivalry of that Church with the Greek Catholic Church in Ukraine, the precarious situation of the priest seminars in occupied Poland, the confiscation of buildings belonging to religious congregations, the relief work, the situation of the Italian priest Marabotto, and German antipapal propaganda in occupied Poland.⁸³ Montini's note hardly makes the impression that information about the extermination of the Jews was an urgent matter requiring immediate attention, in contrast to the texts of Ledóchowski, the anonymous cardinal, and Papée. Apparently other issues required more attention in the Vatican at the time, which only confirms that the subject of the Jews in general, and their tragedy under German occupation in particular, was not a priority for Church leaders.

The American request for information, however, could not be as easily disposed of as Ledóchowski's suggestion. Given the importance the Vatican attached to its relations with the Americans,⁸⁴ their request required further research and reflection at the Secretariat of State. On September 30, someone from the Secretariat of State (judging by the handwriting, probably Domenico

⁸¹ Sarfatti, *I confini di una persecuzione...*, p. 70.

⁸² ASRS, AA.EE.SS., PXII, PI, Polonia 216, p. 593, Ledóchowski to Maglione, September 26, 1942.

⁸³ ASRS, AA.EE.SS., PXII, PI, Polonia 216, p. 597–600, Note by Montini (News from Poland), September 18, 1942.

⁸⁴ On the importance of Vatican–American relations, see Ickx, *Le Bureau...*, chapter 3, pp. 77–108 and Riccardi, *La Guerra del silenzio...*, pp. 13–16.

Tardini, Secretary of the Congregation for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs) answered Maglione's question of three days earlier ("I don't think we have any info[rmation] that confirms – in details – this very serious news, do we?"⁸⁵), recalling that "[t]here is this [information] of Mr. Malvezzi."⁸⁶ Presumably then, Angelo Dell'Acqua, a mid-level official in the State Secretariat who usually dealt with Jewish affairs in the First Section, was instructed by his superiors to go through the archives in search of documents that could confirm the terrible facts presented in the American letter and open a dossier on the subject. Meanwhile, the following day (October 1), Harold Tittmann, who was Taylor's assistant at the time, paid an unannounced visit to the Secretariat of State and insisted on receiving a reply to Taylor's letter. Tardini commented on the impatience of the American representative: "Mr. Tittmann shouldn't be in such a hurry... We're inquiring..."⁸⁷ Clearly, the matter was of great importance to the Americans.

The very next day, Dell'Acqua presented the results of the investigation to his superiors in a note. The official wrote:

The news contained in the letter from Ambassador Taylor is very serious, there is no doubt.

However, it is necessary to make sure that it corresponds to the truth, because exaggeration is easy even among Jews... [...]

And it is not enough, in my humble opinion, to rely on the information given by the Ruthenian-Catholic Metropolitan of Lviv and by Mr. Malvezzi (those of the Eastern rite are not, in fact, an example of honesty).

But, also deeming that the news is true, it will be better to proceed with great caution in confirming it to Mr. Tittmann because I also tend to see a political purpose (if not purely political) in the move of the American government, which would perhaps not fail to give publicity to the possible confirmation [of the news] by the Holy See, which could have unpleasant consequences not only for the Holy See, but for the Jews themselves who are in the hands of the Germans, who would take advantage of it [the possible confirmation] to aggravate the hateful and barbaric measures taken against them.

Finally, it should be born in mind that the recent protest of the French bishops against the deportation of the Jews (protest that is thought to have been suggested by the Holy See) is sufficient to prove the disapproval of the Catholic Church for such inhuman acts. The Anglo-Americans did not fail and do not fail to profit from such a protest.

⁸⁵ ASRS, AA.EE.SS., PXII, PI, Extracta, Germania 742, p. 14, Internal note of the Secretariat of State with handwritten annotations, this particular comment written between September 27 and 30.

⁸⁶ Ibidem, p. 14, Internal note of the Secretariat of State with handwritten annotations, September 30, 1942. See also *Actes et Documents...*, vol. 8, doc. 493, p. 665.

⁸⁷ Ibidem, p. 24, Internal note of the Secretariat of State with handwritten annotations by Tardini, October 1, 1942.

One might write to the Nuncio in Berlin, but what can he say with certainty, poor fellow...⁸⁸

Several aspects of this note should be considered important in the context of the present argumentation. First, apart from the obvious antisemitic and anti-Eastern rite comments (in this case, Dell'Acqua referred to the Greek Catholic Archbishop Szeptycki), Dell'Acqua's note omits a number of key documents that could verify on a macro scale the information presented in the American letter; most notably the reports of the military chaplains Scavizzi and Negrato, which mention the intention to kill all Jews. It is also possible that Dell'Acqua never read these reports because, above all, they were tucked away in the files on Russia and, second, as already mentioned, there was no separate documentation on the persecution and murder of Jews and reports on this subject were scattered in the archives of both sections of the Secretariat of State. However, this does not apply to Dell'Acqua's superiors, who, by virtue of their positions and duties, must have been aware of the existence of these reports. Moreover, Dell'Acqua considered Malvezzi's last report to offer insufficient evidence, even though Malvezzi was the only Holy See informant with access to the Warsaw Ghetto. Malvezzi had given the Vatican first-hand information about the atrocities taking place there, even pointing out the use of fat from corpses to make soap, which was also mentioned in the American letter.⁸⁹ Dell'Acqua also failed to mention the protest leaflet that Malvezzi had brought just two weeks earlier, which contained even more details about the liquidation of the ghettos in Poland. In this light, it is difficult to understand the editors of the publication *Actes et Documents...*, who dismissed Malvezzi's report as "serious but general and not corresponding to the report from Geneva."⁹⁰ It is also unclear why Dell'Acqua did not believe Malvezzi.⁹¹ It seems that political concerns outweighed a serious examination of the facts clearly presented in the reports. Raising the recent protest of the French bishops, Dell'Acqua went a step further, equating possible confirmation of the facts with a protest against the inhumane treatment of Jews.⁹²

⁸⁸ Ibidem, p. 25, Internal note of the Secretariat of State by Dell'Acqua, October 2, 1942.

⁸⁹ It is possible that Dell'Acqua did not read the entire report written by Montini after his meeting with Malvezzi, as it is in another file, concerning Poland. The file that Dell'Acqua opened after the American letter contains only a fragment of this report, omitting the sentence about the soap. It is not clear from the documents who prepared this passage.

⁹⁰ *Actes et Documents...*, vol. 8, Introduction, p. 52.

⁹¹ Johan Ickx (*Le Bureau...*, p. 234) sees the reason for Dell'Acqua's comment about Jewish exaggeration in the passage about the use of human fat. The author ignores the fact that exactly the same thing was mentioned by Malvezzi. The story itself has been debunked, see for example Joachim Neander, "The Danzig Soap Case: Facts and Legends around 'Professor Spanner' and the Danzig Anatomic Institute 1944–1945," *German Studies Review*, vol. 29, 1 (2006): 63–86.

⁹² A more detailed analysis of the Vatican's motivations for both denying and suppressing knowledge of the Holocaust requires further research, which is beyond the scope of this

While Dell'Acqua's superiors were familiarizing themselves with his note, the following day, October 3, the Polish Embassy to the Holy See sent a letter to the Vatican with information – both known and new – about the systematic murder of Jews.⁹³ It is clear from the Cardinal's (Tisserant?) letter of September 23, discussed above, that Papée's letter was based on information that Malvezzi had passed on to the Cardinal, who in turn had passed it on to Papée a week earlier. The Polish ambassador's note to the Vatican specified the means by which the killings were being carried out (including "asphyxiation in specially prepared rooms"), mentioned the liquidation of ghettos in Vilnius and other towns in the region, and gave a little more detail about the liquidation of the Warsaw Ghetto, specifying that the Jews were being deported "by train beyond Lublin, to the east". It appeared, "according to information from a citizen of the Axis countries who had visited these parts, that the Jews were first concentrated in a camp where they would then be killed."⁹⁴

Three days later, on October 6, 1942, Dell'Acqua's findings and proposals were discussed with Cardinal Maglione. The latter instructed his subordinate to "[p]repare a brief note, in which it is said, in substance, that the Holy See has received news of severe treatment against the Jews. However, it [the Holy See] has not been able to verify the accuracy of all the information received. On the other hand, the Holy See itself has not failed to intervene in favor of the Jews whenever the opportunity arose."⁹⁵ The dossier returned to Dell'Acqua's desk.

Meanwhile, the next day, while the Secretariat of State was still deciding how to respond to Taylor's letter, military chaplain Scavizzi reappeared on the scene and gave a report on his fourth mission to Poland and Soviet Russia (from June 29 to July 23). Once again, he gave details of the mass extermination of Jews, describing it as "almost totalitarian" and emphasizing its indiscriminate nature.⁹⁶ However, even this report, which raised the number of victims to over

article. What is certain, however, is that the issue of antisemitism, the motive to avoid a greater evil (*ad majora mala vitanda*), the fear of the Axis powers and their potential revenge on the Vatican, and the papal policy of impartiality must be taken into account.

⁹³ Susan Zuccotti (*Under His Very Windows...*, p. 105), discussing this document, argues that the Polish embassy was a reliable source of information for the Vatican. In fact, the documents presented by the Polish ambassador were often inaccurate and Vatican officials were aware of this.

⁹⁴ ASRS, AA.EE.SS., PXII, P.I, Extracta, Germania 742, p. 35, Note from the Polish Embassy to the Holy See, October 3, 1942.

⁹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 25, Handwritten note Ex. aud. Ecme, October 6, 1942. This note was published in *Actes et Documents...*, vol. 8, doc. 496 (Notes de Mgr. Montini), p. 669, as part of or a continuation of the note of October 1, reporting Tittmann's visit to the Secretariat of State. This choice was misleading, to say the least, since the handwritten note can be found on the same page as the internal note prepared by Dell'Acqua on October 2, which has been omitted from this publication.

⁹⁶ ASRS, AA.EE.SS., PXII, P.I, Extracta, Germania 742, p. 26. The same fragment of the document is published in a footnote in *Actes et Documents...*, vol. 8, pp. 669–670 next to the

two million, did not change the Vatican's attitude. We know that it was taken into account because its extract referring to the extermination of Jews is included in the file on the Taylor letter. Pius XII and the Cardinal Secretary of State followed the logic presented by Dell'Acqua in the note dated October 2 and decided not to interfere and to suppress information from their own sources. They instructed Dell'Acqua to prepare a response on the matter. Cardinal Maglione personally delivered it to Tittmann on October 10, 1942. The reply was typed as instructed "on white paper, without number or watermark,"⁹⁷ which deprived it of any official character. After two weeks of internal investigation, the Vatican replied: "Reports pertaining to the severe measures taken against non-Aryans have also arrived at the Holy See from other sources, but thus far it has been impossible to verify their accuracy. It is well known that the Holy See is taking advantage of every opportunity offered in order to mitigate the suffering of non-Aryans."⁹⁸ For Tittmann, "it was evident from the attitude of the Cardinal that it [the Holy See] has no practical suggestions to make."⁹⁹ The matter raised by the Americans was closed and put away in the archives. In practice, all enquiries on the subject and appeals for papal intervention on behalf of the Jews were from then on dealt with in a similar manner. Finally, on Christmas Day, December 25, 1942, Pius XII and Cardinal Maglione instructed papal representatives that requests for information about Jews and for action on their behalf be answered (preferably verbally) with a standard line implying some kind of unspecified action on their behalf from the Holy See.¹⁰⁰

Change in the Perception of the Holocaust

The developments of the two weeks in question, in September and October 1942, caused both perceptions of the Holocaust and the approach to information about it to change in the Vatican. Surprised by the unusual and undiplomatically direct behaviour of the American government, Pius XII and his advisors were forced to consider the content of incoming reports mentioning the mass murder of Jews and determine how to respond. It was decided to conceal the news

document of October 6 (note on the decision on the content of the reply to Tittmann), as an example of the impossibility of checking the accuracy of all sources. However, on October 6 Maglione could not have known the content of Scavizzi's report, which he did not complete until a day later. For the entire report, see Manzo, *Don Pirro Scavizzi...*, pp. 241–247.

⁹⁷ ASRS, AA.EE.SS., PXII, PI, Extracta, Germania 742, p. 27, Minutes for the note to Myron Taylor, October 10, 1942.

⁹⁸ Ibidem, p. 27, Minutes for the note to Myron Taylor, October 10, 1942.

⁹⁹ *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS). Diplomatic Papers, 1942, Europe*, vol. 3, eds. G. Bernard Noble and E.R. Perkins (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1961), doc. 661: Minister in Switzerland (Harrison) to the Secretary of State, October 16, 1942.

¹⁰⁰ ASRS, AA.EE.SS., PXII, PI, Extracta, Germania 742, p. 53, Handwritten note Ex. Aud.SSmi, December 25, 1942.

that the Vatican had obtained from its own reliable sources, and to avoid any diplomatic involvement in the matter. This was probably not the reaction that the informants had hoped for, in bringing the Pope and his closest associates this terrible news about the unprecedented treatment of the Jews. Nevertheless, the American letter requesting information set in motion what was to become something most resembling a 'Holocaust dossier' at the Vatican. It was probably Dell'Acqua, who was tasked with investigating the contents of the American letter, who began to compile the documents in a file called Germania 742.¹⁰¹

This large file contains 48 *fascicoli* (smaller subject files) over its 627 pages. The first of the *fascicoli*, entitled "Mass killings of Jews perpetrated in the territories occupied by Germany", was devoted to the investigation of the US government's letter. Dell'Acqua filed there Taylor's letter and its Italian translation, Maglione's note and Tardini's commentary on it, another note on Tittmann's visit to the Secretariat of State on October 1, with Tardini's commentary, his note of October 2, with handwritten annotations after his conversation with Cardinal Maglione, an excerpt from Scavizzi's report of October 7, and notes for the final answer given to the Americans. The passage about the Jews (without the sentence about the soap) from Montini's report after his meeting with Malvezzi in September 1942 and the excerpt from Szeptycki's letter are on loose pages at the very beginning of the dossier, so it can be assumed that these pages were also originally part of Dell'Acqua's investigation. The absence of the earlier reports by Scavizzi and Negrato confirms that these documents were not considered. The next *fascicolo*, judging by the protocol numbers, was initiated shortly after the first one or around the same time and was entitled "Impossibility of obtaining news of non-Aryans deported from Germany". It contained *inter alia* a copy of Orsenigo's letter to Montini of July 28, the original of the 'Protest!' leaflet brought by Malvezzi with its one-sentence description, and a letter from the Polish ambassador Papée from October 3. In the following months and years, the Germania 742 dossier was supplemented by incoming files (*fascicoli*) on issues relating to the 'Final Solution'. Vatican officials placed there, among other things, files on the Joint Declaration of December 17, 1942, appeals received on behalf of the persecuted Jews (with the note of December 25, instructing the papal delegates to respond to these appeals in the standard manner), notes sent by the Polish embassy and some other informants on the extermination of the Jews, several photographs of victims of mass execution, information on concentration

¹⁰¹ Today, the Germania 742 file is stored in the Historical Archives of the Secretariat of State under the name 'Extracta'. The original cover of Germania 742 has, for unknown reasons, been replaced by a new one with a computer-entered title and description (index) of the documents inside. The title given on this added page is "Ebrei – persecuzione e barbarie nei paesi occupati" [Jews – persecution and barbarism in occupied countries. As the original cover of Germania 742 is missing, it cannot be verified at this stage whether this was the original title given to the dossier in 1942 or shortly thereafter.

camps, eyewitness testimonies, etc. The last document in this file is dated in 1946.

It is evident from the documents under discussion that the Vatican was receiving reliable information about the 'Final Solution' as early as the first months of Operation Barbarossa in 1941, and from its own trusted sources. This is significant because both the Americans and the British obtained this information second-hand, through the Polish government-in-exile or Jewish organizations in Geneva, among other sources. Through the information gathered, Pius XII was able to see that all Jews within reach of Germany were destined for extermination, an unprecedented crime in modern history that drastically changed the nature of the war. However, despite the Pope's initial emotional reaction and some interest in the news, as evidenced by his request for the military chaplains Scavizzi and Negrato to describe what they had seen in the East, and his attempts to ascertain the fate of Jewish deportees through intermediaries or Nuncio Orsenigo (although one wonders why Orsenigo was not informed of what was being relayed by informants such as Malvezzi and the military chaplains), the archival practice with regard to documents mentioning the mass murder of Jews up to September 1942 clearly shows a lack of reflection on the subject. This cannot be explained, other than to say that the Jews and their tragedy were a low-priority issue for Church leaders, which for a long time did not merit a separate dossier in order to keep track of incoming information.

This attitude was challenged at the end of September 1942, not as a result of internal reflection and certainly not due to any internal motivation, but as a result of external pressure. The refusal to listen to Malvezzi, the Vatican's most trusted intermediary with access to Polish territory, a suggestion made by the Superior General of Jesuits Włodzimierz Ledóchowski, indicated the first negative change in this attitude. The initial openness to the news was replaced by a certain caution. However, the American request of September 26, 1942 to confirm or deny information about the mass murder of Jews could not be so easily dismissed and initiated an internal (and incomplete) investigation and reflection on the subject. As a result, Church leaders decided to suppress the information they had from their own reliable sources and developed a general and diplomatically non-committal approach to similar requests for information on the Holocaust and for appeals on behalf of the Jews. Nonetheless, the Vatican at the same time began to collect messages about the mass murder of Jews in a separate dossier dedicated to this topic, although this did not lead to any deeper internal reflection or change in the general approach to this issue, which was considered political and, as such, was not the main focus of the Church. The human aspect of the news and the facts on which it was based – namely, the horrific deaths of at least two million Jewish men, women, and children, of which the Vatican was aware in the early autumn of 1942 (and which, as we know from the historical record, was an underestimation), followed by millions more in the months and years that followed – were not investigated and remained mere

numbers without meaning in the documents that can be read in the Vatican archives today.

When the Americans approached the Pope for information in the early autumn of 1942, the fate of the Jews of Poland and Eastern Europe was already sealed, but the mass gassing of the Jews of Western Europe had only just begun. When the Allied intelligence services tried to get confirmation from the Vatican about the mass murders, the Pope, as shown above, already possessed this knowledge, but kept it to himself. This was, as mentioned above, two months before the reports of the Polish underground concerning the Holocaust reached the West (and were shared with the Allies as of November 24, 1942) and three months before the Allied declaration condemning Nazi crimes against the Jews (December 17, 1942). In September and October, world public opinion, although isolated information was appearing in the press, still had no wider knowledge of the genocide. On the one hand, one can concede to the Pope's defenders that his public protest would be fraught with consequences both for Catholics in Germany and for the persecuted Church in Poland. On the other hand, however, as an analysis of Vatican documents shows, the Pope had other methods at his disposal than public protest – or silence, which he then chose. In other situations, knowledge was shared informally with diplomats accredited to the Vatican or papal nuncios were asked to pass on certain information in confidential conversations. This is how diplomacy works. In this case, the Pope remained diplomatically uninvolved. It is surprising that the "Protest!" leaflet, for example, was not shared confidentially with Ambassador Papée.

In the context of bystander studies (the Catholic Church, like other organizations and countries such as the USA and England, is classified as a bystander according to the now classic division proposed by Raul Hilberg¹⁰²), one is struck by the similarity of the response to the Holocaust of the Pope and the Vatican more broadly in the summer and early autumn of 1942 to the tactics adopted by other key actors in this category. The Allied leaders had access to reliable information that was reaching the West, much of it sent by the Polish Underground State in a regular, structured manner as early as the spring and summer of 1942. The reactions of the American and British governments to this news can be summarized in a few words: delay, downplay, marginalize, and obscure.¹⁰³ They often chose to ignore the information or to understand it in a way that was consistent with their own political and strategic priorities. Also, the cultivation of the notion of rumor or uncertainty should be seen as a strategic practice by British Foreign Office officials and officials of other Allied governments to limit

¹⁰² Raul Hilberg, *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders: The Jewish Catastrophe, 1933–1945* (New York: Aaron Asher Books, HarperCollinsPublishers, 1992).

¹⁰³ See, among others, Fleming, *Intelligence from Poland on Chelmno...*; Breitman, *Official Secrets...*; and Michael Fleming, *In the Shadow of the Holocaust: Poland, the United Nations War Crimes Commission and Search for Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

demands (by Jewish organizations, among others) for specific action. The political choice of the British and American governments not to confirm information and thus make it 'official' fits into this trend.¹⁰⁴

In this regard, Dell'Acqua's statements ("However, it is necessary to make sure that it [Taylor's information] corresponds to the truth [...] But, also deeming that the news is true, it will be better to proceed with great caution in confirming it [...] because I also tend to see a political purpose (if not purely political) in the move of the American government [...]. The Anglo-Americans did not fail and do not fail to profit from such a protest"¹⁰⁵), as well as the content ("but thus far it has been impossible to verify their [the reports of the murder of Jews] accuracy"¹⁰⁶) and the form (an unofficial document) of the Vatican's response to Taylor's letter should be seen as part of a diplomatic merry-go-round in which all the main actors knew what was going on but refused, for their own particular reasons, to take the initiative and act. As shown above, Vatican diplomats (it should be noted here that Pope Pius XII himself was a seasoned diplomat¹⁰⁷), figured out this diplomatic game of the Allies and adapted to its rules.

In this context, the Vatican's reaction in the summer and early autumn of 1942 was indeed strikingly similar to that of the Western Allies. Neither of them were interested in the Holocaust and were preoccupied with their own affairs. The Vatican proved to be yet another practitioner of this indifference, which thus helped to maintain an unarticulated collective system of inaction towards the Holocaust.

It seems that seeing the tragedy of the Jews in political terms and keeping silent about it, even in the immediate post-war period, was a conscious choice in the Vatican. Pope Pius XII, as other scholars also point out,¹⁰⁸ never explicitly addressed the Holocaust after the war. It remained in the shadow of the martyrdom of the Church itself, both in Poland and elsewhere, and of the strategic struggle against communism. That this was a conscious choice can be seen from a note written in 1946 by Tardini, who was *de facto* Vatican Secretary

¹⁰⁴ See footnote above.

¹⁰⁵ ASRS, AA.EE.SS., PXII, P.I, Extracta, Germania 742, p. 25, Internal note of the Secretariat of State by Dell'Acqua, October 2, 1942.

¹⁰⁶ Ibidem, p. 27, Minutes for the note to Myron Taylor, October 10, 1942.

¹⁰⁷ This is pointed out by scholars of Pope himself. They see in the course of his diplomatic career and his lack of pastoral experience, and thus his remoteness from human affairs, in addition to his typically introverted and cautious character, one of the reasons for his silent attitude towards the Holocaust. See Ventresca, *Soldier of Christ...*, p. 170 and Chapter 5: "War and Holocaust," p. 169–218, and Riccardi, *La guerra del silenzio...*, pp. 25, 61, 74, 217.

¹⁰⁸ See, for example, Giovanni Coco, "Writing and Rewriting History. The Opening of the Vatican Archives for Pius XII's Pontificate," in *The Global Pontificate of Pius XII. War and Genocide, Reconstruction and Change, 1939–1950*, eds. Simon Unger-Alvi and Nina Vallbousquet (New York – Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2024), pp. 22–23.

of State after the death of Cardinal Maglione in 1944.¹⁰⁹ At the beginning of 1946, consideration was given in the Vatican to the publication of a letter written by Metropolitan Szeptycki in August 1942. The letter contains the following sentence: “Today, the whole country agrees that the German regime is, perhaps to a greater extent than the Bolshevik regime, evil, almost diabolical”. Szeptycki emphasized that the first victims of this regime were the Jews.¹¹⁰ In January 1946, tangible preparations were made for the letter’s publication and it was translated into four languages, removing anything that might help identify the author¹¹¹. However, Tardini stopped publication, arguing as follows:

I wonder:

1. Hasn’t enough already been said about Nazi and... German antics [*birbonate*]? Is it really necessary for the Holy See to add – now, during the Nuremberg Trials that mixes just indictments with so much injustice! – another... dose of terrible news...?

2. Is it appropriate *today* [this and further emphasis in the original – M.S.B.] to bring a document to support the thesis that the *German regime* is *worse* than *the Soviet one*? [Many times I have asked myself: Which one is worse? – And I found no answer other than: “Both!”] [square brackets and quotes in original – M.S.B.]

3. With the new... disclosure [of Szeptycki’s letter – M.S.B.] could we not – unintentionally – add credence to the calumnious criticism [of the Holy See – M.S.B.]: “If the Holy See in 1942 knew all these things, why didn’t it *shout* [them] to the world?”

So: for now: *cancelled*.¹¹²

Szeptycki’s letter was made public by the Vatican many years later on the occasion of the publication of *Actes et Documents*... It is noteworthy that the compilation of this multi-volume publication was commissioned by Pope Paul VI (Montini) in response to accusations against Pope Pius XII precisely for his silence in the face of the Holocaust, articulated in 1963 in *The Deputy* by German playwright Rolf Hochhuth.¹¹³ In the context of this argument, it should be noted that in 1946, for the second person after the Pope, the death of some six million innocent people was nothing more than a “Nazi antic”.

¹⁰⁹ Officially, the position of Secretary of State was left vacant after the death of Cardinal Maglione, as this gave the Pope greater control over Vatican diplomacy. In practice, everyone addressed Tardini as Secretary of State.

¹¹⁰ *Actes et Documents*..., vol. 3b, doc. 406, p. 625, Szeptycki to Pius XII, August 29–31, 1942.

¹¹¹ ASRS, AA.EE.SS., PXII, P.I, Polonia 216, p. 479. Internal note by the Secretariat of State with handwritten annotations by Tardini, January 19, 1946.

¹¹² *Ibidem*.

¹¹³ Rolf Hochhuth, *The Deputy*, transl. Richard Winston and Clara Winston (New York: Grove Press, Inc. , 2006); see also: Simon Unger-Alvi, Nina Valbousquet, “Introduction. Conservative Continuities and Roads to Reform in a Global Catholic Church,” in *The Global Pontificate of Pius XII*..., p. 3.

However, before moving on to further documents on the Holocaust from occupied Poland, mention must be made of the 1942 papal Christmas address, which is widely interpreted as, admittedly, a weak, over-generic, and below expectations condemnation of the genocide of the Jews and its causes. At the end of his long speech, the Pope referred in one sentence to the tragedy of the Jews, speaking of "the hundreds of thousands of persons who, without any fault on their part, sometimes only because of their nationality or race [*stirpe*], have been consigned to death or to a slow decline."¹¹⁴ This papal response was delayed by at least three months (in relation to the information at hand) and therefore had little impact on world public opinion. Rather, it should be seen as a direct response to the Allied Joint Declaration condemning the Nazi extermination of the Jews from December 17, and to the strongly increased number of requests from various quarters during this period for papal condemnation, such as that made by the Chief Rabbi of the British Mandate of Palestine, Isaac Herzog, only a month earlier.¹¹⁵ Furthermore, Hubert Wolf's analysis of this particular speech and its genesis, based on newly released Vatican documents, has shown that the quoted words were added by Pius XII to a previously prepared text at the last minute.¹¹⁶ This suggests an impulsive action on the part of the Pope rather than a considered long-term strategy by the Vatican in response to the ongoing genocide. The documents discussed here suggest that we need to move away from the interpretation that it was the Christmas address that constituted the main Vatican response to the Holocaust. The decision on how to respond to information about the murder of Jews at the level of diplomacy was, as has been shown, made in the first days of October 1942. However, since many did not understand the Pope's allusion to the murder of Jews in the Christmas message or considered it insufficient,¹¹⁷ Pius XII decided to repeat himself in an address

¹¹⁴ Several translations of this text can be found in scholarly circulation, sometimes the Italian word 'stirpe' (origin) is wrongly translated as 'race'. This is a mistake, as there is also the word 'razza' (race) in Italian, which the Pope consciously did not use in this or any other speech. The official Vatican website does not provide an English version of this address. The translation here is quoted in: Michael Phayer, "Helping the Jews is not an easy thing to do. Vatican Holocaust Policy: Continuity or Change?," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, vol. 21, 3 (2007): 426.

¹¹⁵ ASRS, AA.EE.SS., PXII, PI, Extracta, Germania 742, pp. 69–71, I. Herzog to Maglione, November 23, 1942.

¹¹⁶ Hubert Wolf, "Verschlossen, verwechselt, verlegt, verbrannt: Das Schicksal der Weihnachtsansprache Pius' XII. von 1942" [Sealed, mixed up, misplaced, burned: The fate of Pius XII's 1942 Christmas address] *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* vol. 70, 4 (2022): 723–759. See also: Giovanni Coco, "Gli scritti di Pio XII e il radiomessaggio del Natale 1942" [The writings of Pius XII and the Christmas 1942 radiomessage], *Rivista di Storia della Chiesa in Italia*1 (2020): 217–241.

¹¹⁷ One of these individuals was the Polish Ambassador Papée, see PISM, A. 44.122/28, Papée to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland in London. Quoted in Libionka, "Against a Brick Wall...", pp. 286–287.

to the College of Cardinals on June 2, 1943. Here, too, the similarity between the Pope's response and the strategy chosen by the Allies is striking. The latter briefly drew attention to the Holocaust under pressure, partly caused by the content of the documents that arrived from Warsaw in November (the Declaration of December 17), and then pushed it back to the margins of the wartime narrative. The same happened in the Vatican.

Further Inflow of Information from Poland, Autumn 1942 – Summer 1943

The development of a clear strategy in the autumn of 1942, both internally and externally, in handling messages about the Holocaust does not mean, however, that trusted informants in occupied Poland stopped providing the Vatican with news on the subject. Let us therefore trace who informed the Pope and when down to the summer of 1943, when regular contacts between occupied Poland and the Vatican ceased due to the German occupation of Italy. It was inevitable that a greater selection of available material had to be made. By the end of 1942, knowledge of the Holocaust had become widespread, certainly among diplomats, but a lot of information was also appearing in the press. The information also reached the Vatican through Jewish organizations, the Polish embassy, nunciatures, the press, etc. Apart from the aforementioned exception in the form of the Christmas message and the speech of June 2, 1943, this did not result in a change in the Vatican's strategy regarding the ongoing Holocaust. The focus of attention here will therefore not be on a detailed enumeration of all available documents on the Holocaust at the disposal of the Vatican in this period, but on the unique Vatican sources from occupied Poland that continued to provide the Pope with information on the ongoing Holocaust.

In December 1942, an unknown military chaplain – he did not sign his text – reported to the Secretariat of State. The content of the script he submitted showed that he had visited Archbishop Sapieha many times over the course of several months in 1942 and had also spoken to many priests in the occupied territories. He provided the Vatican with details of attitudes to Jews in Church circles, stressing the pernicious influence of "Jewish and Communist propaganda".¹¹⁸ He also provided a fairly detailed description of Auschwitz given to him by Sapieha.

He [Sapieha] talked about Polish priests [...]. Many of them find themselves interned in *Auschwitz*¹¹⁹, where there live, if their lives can be called living, forty thousand (40,000) concentrated. A large city of barracks, all fenced off with barbed wire. Every two hundred meters and above it is a sentry box where soldiers armed with machine guns stand guard. At night,

¹¹⁸ ASRS, AA.EE.SS., PXII, P.I, Polonia 216, p. 72, Report of a military chaplain (not signed), December 12, 1942.

¹¹⁹ In the original, the word "Auschwitz" is capitalized.

the huge prison camp is lit up by giant reflectors. For fear of increasing the prolixity of this report, I omit to speak of the sad conditions of the internees to whom Dante's words would be well adapted – one goes among the lost people – one goes into eternal pain – abandon all hope, you who enter. Interned Polish priests can be counted by the thousands; their only crime: being Polish. No exceptions were made due to poor health or advanced age.¹²⁰

This report, together with the letters that Sapieha sent to Rome and in which he did indeed mention concentration camps (not death camps, and only in the context of Poles, not Jews), as well as the information provided by intermediaries¹²¹ and other bishops,¹²² confirm the thesis that it was possible to secretly transmit any desired and confidential information to the Vatican. It is also confirmed that Sapieha informed only the Vatican about the suffering of the ethnic Poles and did not mention the camps in connection with the Holocaust.

In the context of Archbishop Sapieha's attitude, mention should be made of a letter he sent to Governor General Hans Frank on November 2, 1942. The Vatican did not immediately learn of it. In March 1943, that letter was brought to the Vatican by Malvezzi, who also referred to its contents in his report for the Secretariat of State. He wrote:

The attitude taken last November by Archbishop Sapieha [...] had enormous repercussions throughout Poland. [...] Archbishop Sapieha addressed a letter [...] to the Governor General Franck [Frank] himself: in this letter the main grievances of Poland against the German Government were summarized, including the maltreatment of the Jews.¹²³

Malvezzi suggested that in his letter to Frank, Sapieha protested against the "maltreatment of Jews". This was probably an interpretation presented to Malvezzi by his interlocutors in Polish Church circles.¹²⁴ In fact, Sapieha protested in this letter against the use of inebriated Polish youths from the Building

¹²⁰ Ibidem, p. 85, Report of a military chaplain (not signed), December 12, 1942.

¹²¹ In his report of May 12, 1942, Scavizzi wrote: "In the concentration prison [Auschwitz] the mortality rate is impressive. In December alone about 1,200 [prisoners] died in mysterious circumstances" (ASRS, AA.EE.SS., PXII, P.I, Russia 695, p. 80, Scavizzi to Pius XII, May 12, 1942). Scavizzi had not been to Auschwitz. This information was given to him by the Salesians of Kraków.

¹²² ASRS, AA.EE.SS., PXII, P.I, Polonia 220, p. 43, Adamski to Maglione, January 1943. See also further on in this article.

¹²³ ASRS, AA.EE.SS., PXII, P.I, Polonia 216, p. 321, Pro-memoria presented by Mr. Malvezzi, March 24, 1943.

¹²⁴ This interpretation can still be found in publications on Sapieha and the attitude of the Polish Catholic Church towards the Holocaust, e.g., Franciszek Stopniak, "Duchowieństwo katolickie i Żydzi w Polsce w latach II wojny światowej" [Catholic clergy and Jews in Poland during World War II], *Studia na Faszyzmem i Zbrodniami Hitlerowskimi Acta Universitatis Wratislaviensis* 11 (1987): 24.

Services (*Baudienst*) in the liquidation of Jews.¹²⁵ Moreover, the Secretariat of State was able to find this out for itself, since, as mentioned above, Malvezzi brought this letter to the Vatican.¹²⁶

Sapieha's letter to Frank was only one of the topics covered by Malvezzi in his extensive report of March 1943. In it, the businessman also provided information about Jews hiding on the so-called Aryan side of Warsaw and confirmed once again that he had been in the Warsaw Ghetto. In a self-written typescript he reported:

There are many people hiding in and around the cities: in and around Warsaw alone there are said to be tens of thousands of Jews and as many or more other wanted persons, especially former functionaries. [...] The situation of the Jews has worsened even more, because [the Germans?] are furious with the last remnants: when one thinks that there were about 3,500,000 of them and now they are reduced to a few hundred thousand, one has an idea of the horror that has taken place.

The Warsaw ghetto now has about 40,000 people, while originally there were more than half a million: 30,000 of them are workers, the rest women and children; the Kraków ghetto has 10,000–12,000 people and the Lviv ghetto about the same number. As is well known, the extermination took place mainly in three concentration camps – which the Germans called Vernichtungslager or ironically Himmellager – one in Flobeski [probably Bełżec – M.S.B.]¹²⁷ near Lublin, one in Sobibor north of Tarnów [*sic!*] and one in Treblinka near Białystok. To these, and especially to Flobeski [Bełżec], many Jews were brought from Western countries. Recently – and this is also a sign of the changed climate in Warsaw – because the Gestapo wanted to take revenge in the ghetto for the discovery of a Jew among the perpetrators of the assassination, the Jews desperately defended themselves with bombs and machine guns, so much so that the Wehrmacht had to be called in: the Germans are said to have lost 300 people and 5,000 Jews were massacred.¹²⁸ In all the cities visited, there was talk of an imminent campaign to destroy the remaining Jews and of a new search for Jews hiding outside the ghetto, with an estimated more than 100,000 [Jews in hiding] in and around Warsaw alone. Posters had recently been published reminding people of the death penalty for anyone

¹²⁵ The *Baudienst* was one form of forced employment of young Poles by the Germans. These formations existed in four districts of the General Government: Kraków, Radom, Lublin, and Galicia.

¹²⁶ On the broader context and timing of this particular memorandum, as well as the controversy surrounding its interpretation, see Libionka, "Polish Church Hierarchy," pp. 98–100.

¹²⁷ Italians often twisted Polish place names. The information about the location of the camp, "near Lublin", could suggest that Malvezzi is referring to the concentration camp at Majdanek.

¹²⁸ This refers to the so-called January campaign.

helping or hiding a Jew: in the Warsaw ghetto milieu I visited, there was grim fear in anticipation of the impending massacres.¹²⁹

In this report, in addition to the social, political, and economic situation in occupied Poland and the situation of the Church, Malvezzi made proposals to the Pope for comprehensive and long-term assistance, above all material, to Poland. It was to be channeled through the Polish bishops. Importantly, and without going into details that extend beyond the scope of the subject matter of this article, this aid would also embrace the Jewish intelligentsia and youth.

The report, important from the point of view of the Vatican, since Malvezzi had personally spoken to Bishops Szlagowski, Adamski, Szeptycki, and Sapieha, was presented to two people for their opinion. The first was Carlo Chiarlo, responsible in the Second Section for Polish affairs. His opinion, which admittedly does not relate directly to the subject of the Holocaust, is surprising and sheds new light on the thinking of some Vatican officials about certain aspects of the situation in Poland and about Malvezzi himself:

At least some of the horrors could have been avoided if the Poles had remained in a Christian disposition of obedience to the precepts of Divine Wisdom: *Nulli malum pro malo reddentes... Nos vosmetipsos defendentes, sed date locum irae (Domini. Scriptum est enim: Mihi vindicta: ego retribuam, dicit Dominus* (Rom. 12: 17,18,19). [Do not repay anyone evil for evil... Beloved, do not look for revenge but leave room for the wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord"]¹³⁰. [...] With regard to the request for a large sum of about half a million Italian lire per month and the method of obtaining this aid for Poland, the undersigned cannot easily dispel the impression that the proposal smacks of a more or less lucrative business deal. The rapporteur has already proposed something similar once and the proposal did not, it seems, make the best impression. The sacrifice that the Holy See would have to make to find such a large monthly sum is undoubtedly very serious, if at all possible amidst so many needs that the Holy See is already meeting, and on the other hand the result is unlikely to be as great as it is presented. But even Simeon Maccabees was convinced of the futility of the great sacrifice of money and hostages for Jonathan's salvation, and yet he sent money and hostages to Trypho "lest he should meet with the hatred of Israel, who would say, Because he did not send him money and children, therefore

¹²⁹ ASRS, AA.EE.SS., PXII, PI, Polonia 216, p. 317, 325–326, Pro-memoria presented by Mr. Malvezzi, March 24, 1943.

¹³⁰ English translation after New American Bible (Revised Edition) (NABRE), <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans%2012%3A17-19&version=NABRE> (accessed November 28, 2024). This comment probably refers to the description of the retaliatory actions of the Polish underground contained in Malvezzi's report.

Jonathan died...".¹³¹ In our case, too, if the Holy See does not send such a sum, and this plan is already known, discussed and desired in Poland, who knows whether one day it [the Holy See] would not be credited with some of the misfortunes that befall Poland from other causes.¹³²

The tenor of this text is obviously negative. Chiarlo did not believe in the arguments and needs presented by Malvezzi, but in order to avoid future accusations of failing to help both Jews and Poles, he thought it better to consider sending material aid. Vatican documentation does not reveal to what extent Chiarlo's opinion was taken into account in this case. The Pope, having read Malvezzi's report, immediately earmarked \$5,000 for emergency relief, and the Americans were also approached in search of further funds.¹³³

Malvezzi's report was forwarded for review to Nuncio Cortesi, who had been in Warsaw until September 1939 and in subsequent years was in Rome, from where he nevertheless maintained contact with people in Poland and where he was occasionally consulted on Polish matters. Cortesi replied just three days later. On the subject of interest to us he had little to say:

His [the author of the report i.e., Malvezzi's] calculation of the Jews in the Warsaw ghetto, who were reduced from 500,000 to 40,000 as a result of mistreatment by the occupation authorities, should also be corrected: this ghetto does not appear to have contained more than 50,000 [Jews] before the war.¹³⁴

Such blatant ignorance of the situation in the country did not go unnoticed by Vatican officials. Antonio Samorè, responsible in the First Section for Polish affairs, immediately prepared a memo verifying the data on the ghetto for Cardinal Maglione, which means that in 1943 reports on the subject were read and analyzed in the Vatican:

H.E. Cortesi noted, among other things, that before the war the Warsaw ghetto had no more than 50,000 people. Several people – including Mr Lucat – pointed out that the Warsaw Ghetto had been significantly enlarged in the previous year, and that Jews from other localities had been brought into the Ghetto. The figure of more than half a million people gathered there was also given by the aforementioned Mr Lucat.¹³⁵

¹³¹ This passage is from the first book of the Maccabees, although not quoted verbatim by Chiarlo: see NABRE, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Maccabees%2013&version=NABRE> (accessed November 28, 2024).

¹³² AAV, PXII, Segr. St., Comm. Socc. 209, Polacchi Civili Polonia 299, pp. 30–31, Internal note by Carlo Chiarlo, April 2, 1943.

¹³³ Ibidem, p. 34rv, Internal note of the Secretariat of State, April 5, 1943.

¹³⁴ Ibidem, p. 27, Comments on the report "Situation of Poland" by Cortesi, March 27, 1943.

¹³⁵ ASRS, AA.EE.SS., PXII, P.I, Polonia 216, p. 352, Internal Note of the Secretariat of State, March 31, 1943.

The 'Mr Lucat' mentioned by Samorè was Fiat's representative in Warsaw and was a regular visitor to occupied Poland. After his last stay, he contacted the Secretariat of State, explaining that he would be staying in Rome for a few days and was available to meet and provide information.¹³⁶ Cardinal Maglione then instructed Samorè to invite him to a meeting the following Sunday,¹³⁷ from which a note was drawn up. On the subject of the Holocaust, it observed:

Jews are systematically being destroyed. The Warsaw Ghetto had a population of over half a million people. It is now believed (counting is not possible even for the Jews living there themselves, as the ghetto is divided into many districts between which communication is not possible) that it has been reduced to about 50,000.¹³⁸

On his return from his trip to Poland in March 1943, Malvezzi submitted, in addition to the report already discussed, a long handwritten letter from Bishop Adamski with detailed information about the situation of the Polish bishops and the Church in the various dioceses. About Bishop Gall, who had died in September 1942, he reported: "Mündliche und schriftliche Eingaben des verstorbenen Erzbischofs Gall zu Gunsten der Katholiken jüdischer Abstammung an Behörden der Judenstadt in Warschau sowie andere derartige Schritte blieben erfolglos"¹³⁹ ["Oral and written petitions by the late Archbishop Gall in favor of Catholics of Jewish descent to the authorities of the Jewish City in Warsaw and other such steps were unsuccessful"].¹⁴⁰ Adamski did not specify how and at what stage of the persecution Bishop Gall intervened in favor of Jewish converts. This is the only existing document on such involvement by Bishop Gall.¹⁴¹ In the same letter Adamski informed Maglione about a priest from his diocese who had been arrested and sent

¹³⁶ AAV, PXII, Segr. St., Comm. Socc. 209, Polcchi Civili Polonia 290, p. 2, Lucat to the Secretariat of State, January 28, 1943. Lucat was already known to the Secretariat of State at that time. At the beginning of August 1942, he had passed on information about the rapidly deteriorating health of the administrator of the Warsaw diocese, Stanisław Gall, which made it possible to prepare the last papal letter to the archbishop, which was read to him on his deathbed by Bishop Adamski.

¹³⁷ Ibidem, p. 3, Internal note of the Secretariat of State (Lukat), January 29, 1943.

¹³⁸ Ibidem, p. 4, Internal note of the Secretariat of State (Information from Mr. Lucat about the situation in Poland, specifically in Warsaw), January 31, 1943.

¹³⁹ It was probably referring to the Judenrat.

¹⁴⁰ *Actes et Documents...*, vol. 9, doc. 39, p. 113, Adamski to Maglione, January 1943. On the interpretation of this note see Libionka, "Polish Church Hierarchy..." p. 93.

¹⁴¹ Since this note by Bishop Adamski was published in *Actes et Documents...*, many authors have repeated the information about Gall's alleged interventions in favor of Jewish converts. See, for example, Damian Bednarski, "I vescovi polacchi e la salvaguardia degli ebrei" [Polish bishops and the safeguarding of Jews], in *La Chiesa cattolica in Europa centro-orientale di fronte al Nazionalsocialismo 1939-1945*, ed. Jan Mikrut (Verona: Gabrielli, 2019), p. 750.

to Auschwitz.¹⁴² This is the only written mention of Auschwitz in the Polish bishop's letter to the Vatican.

At the end of April 1943, another Italian with access to occupied Poland, Luigi Gagliardini, presented himself to the Secretariat of State. He had lived in Warsaw for 15 years and had been sent to the Vatican by Bishop Adamski. A Vatican official described him as a "young person who gives the impression of being serious".¹⁴³ He carried urgent messages from Bishops Adamski¹⁴⁴ and Szlagowski.¹⁴⁵ The Secretariat of State invited him for a meeting on May 3, and Samorè drew up several notes on the topics he had reported.¹⁴⁶ One of these concerned the situation of the Jews:

The Jews. A dreadful situation. There were approximately four and a half million of them in Poland before the war; today *the estimate is* [emphasis in the original – M.S.B.] that not even a hundred thousand remain there, including those who have come from other countries under German occupation. In Warsaw a ghetto had been established which contained six hundred and fifty thousand of them; today there would be twenty to twenty-five thousand. Some, naturally, have avoided being placed on the list of names. But there is no doubt that most have been liquidated. Nothing is known of the thousands and thousands of persons who month after month have been deported. The only possible explanation here is that they have died, especially considering the enterprising character of the Jew who, if alive, in one way or another makes himself known [*se vive si fa vivo*]. There are special death camps near Lublin (Tremblinka) [*sic!*] and Brest-Litovsk [probably Sobibór – M.S.B.]. It is said that by the hundreds they are shut up in chambers where they are gassed to death. Transported in tightly sealed cattle trucks with lime on their floors. Churches in the Warsaw ghetto were also closed, and some time later they had to be emptied within two hours. Now these churches are used as warehouses etc.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴² ASRS, AA.EE.SS., PXII, PI, Polonia 220, p. 43, Adamski to Maglione, January 1943. In *Actes et Documents...* (vol. 3, doc. 472, p. 728 and vol. 9, doc. 39, p. 113) this passage has been omitted.

¹⁴³ ASRS, AA.EE.SS., PXII, PI, Polonia 216, p. 425, Internal note of the Secretariat of State, April 29, 1943.

¹⁴⁴ ASRS, AA.EE.SS., PXII, PI, Polonia 214, p. 307, Internal note of the Secretariat of State, May 3, 1943.

¹⁴⁵ ASRS, AA.EE.SS., PXII, PI, Polonia 223, p. 39rv, Internal note of the Secretariat of State, May 3, 1943.

¹⁴⁶ ASRS, AA.EE.SS., PXII, PI, Polonia 216, p. 421, Internal note of the Secretariat of State (Notes of conversation with Mr. Gagliardini, who came to the conversation on behalf of H.E. Bishop Adamski), May 3, 1943.

¹⁴⁷ ASRS, AA.EE.SS., PXII, PI, Extracta, Germania 742, p. 141rv, Internal note of the Secretariat of State (Jews), May 3, 1943. Here English translation (without sentences about the churches in the ghetto) quoted in: Pierre Blet, S.J., *Pius XII and the Second World War. According to the Archives of the Vatican* (Leominster: Gracewing 1999), p. 164.

Given the context of Gagliardini's visit to the Vatican, it cannot be ruled out, and it is even very likely, that he passed on this information on behalf of Bishop Adamski. On his way back to Warsaw, he took a short letter for Adamski. It was decided that other documents desired by the bishop concerning the papal commitment to Poland would be passed on through Malvezzi, who was to leave for Poland ten days later.¹⁴⁸ This meant that the Vatican was more likely to use a proven IRI entrepreneur in the transfer of sensitive and confidential information.

Malvezzi left for Poland on June 6, taking with him letters to the bishops, papal documents, and \$13,000 for the Polish bishops.¹⁴⁹ He returned around June 18.¹⁵⁰ Also after this trip he had much to report to the Vatican. He considered the subject of the Holocaust to be the most important, for it was with the Holocaust that he began his self-drafted report and devoted as many as two and a half typewritten pages to it. It is worth quoting this passage in full:

The most important event of recent months was the uprising in the Warsaw Ghetto ["La rivolta del ghetto di Varsavia" – M.S.B.].

Mention has already been made in the previous report of the first armed resistance of the Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto in January 1943 and of the concern expressed by the German authorities: after the violence committed by the Gestapo on April 18, the reaction in the Ghetto was so strong and decisive that almost two months later, on June 8, the struggle – although weaker – continued. The Jews – estimated at 30,000 to 40,000, two-thirds of whom were adult men – were joined by Russian refugees, Polish rebels, and quite a few German deserters – estimated at 5,000 to 8,000 in total – who formed the real core of the resistance. The defence was organized along the lines of Stalingrad, with fortified cellars connected by canals to bunkers, so that the Germans were forced to burn down all the houses in order to drive out the defenders, blowing them up with mines where resistance was fiercest. The insurgents had considerable armaments at their disposal: so far the Germans had seized four artillery guns, about ten flamethrowers, and countless light and heavy machine guns: hand grenades were used very frequently. Ammunition and armaments were brought into the ghetto through sewers, and many were stolen from German warehouses thanks to – it is said – bribes. Most Jews surrendered after the first three weeks, and those who survived were deported to regular concentration camps, where they were probably annihilated. The Germans admit to a loss of about 1,000 dead: the rebels certainly suffered far greater losses. The

¹⁴⁸ ASRS, AA.EE.SS., PXII, P.I, Polonia 214, p. 307, Internal note of the Secretariat of State, May 3, 1943. For a list of papal documents sent to Adamski, see *ibidem*, p. 296.

¹⁴⁹ AAV, PXII, Segr. St., Comm. Socc. 209, Polacchi Civili Polonia 299, p. 43, Internal note of the Secretariat of State, June 3, 1943 and *ibidem*, p. 41, Internal note of the Secretariat of State, June 4, 1943.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 47–48, 50, Internal note of the Secretariat of State and declarations by Bishops Szeptycki and Adamski, June 18, 1943.

consequences of these events were extremely serious both in Warsaw and in much of Poland. In Warsaw, at least a fifth of the city can be said to have been destroyed; this represents perhaps more than the damage caused by all the previous bombardments: houses set on fire or demolished by mines; furniture and furnishings destroyed by fire or looting; countless scenes of horror of families who, to protect themselves from flames or shells, threw themselves from the top floors where they had taken refuge.

In the rest of Poland, the persecution of the few remnants of the Jewish population was carried out in the most ruthless way: the author [Malvezzi] managed to visit the abandoned Lviv ghetto and see with his own eyes the bestial destruction carried out there. But in the cities of central and eastern Poland, the ghettos disappeared and the Jews were deported without news, probably – according to rumors – annihilated. For unknown reasons, nothing was done against the Jews in the Kraków district.

It should be remembered that there are several hundred thousand Jews hiding in the city and countryside: searched for with varying degrees of intensity – especially in Ukrainian areas – but protected above all thanks to the corruption of the Gestapo; living, however, for three years now with the specter of death before their eyes every day; that for those who are discovered, the punishment is the same as for those who hid them. Only Jews working for the Wehrmacht can be seen on the streets anymore. The Wehrmacht is keen to mark its distinction from the Gestapo: only this formation [the Gestapo] was involved in the recent actions against the Warsaw ghetto and in the persecutions in other cities.

It should be noted that on the Polish side, apart from natural human compassion, there is revealed an essentially tacit satisfaction with the destruction of the Jews as if it were a solution to a pressing national problem, so much so that from the Pope's last speech various bishops found it unnecessary to emphasize the part referring to the Jews, and only the Ruthenian Metropolitan [Szeptycki] protested against the massacres of the Jews in one of his texts.¹⁵¹

It is worth pausing here to trace what the Pope had in mind in his address to the College of Cardinals on June 2, 1943. This is the second, after the Christmas message of 1942, and the last mention of the tragedy of the Jews in a papal address: "Do not be surprised, venerable Brothers and dear Sons, if We respond with a particularly earnest solicitude to the prayers of those who run toward Us with eyes full of anguished supplication, exposed as they are because of their nationality or race [*stirpe*, which should be translated as 'descent' – M.S.B.] to still greater calamities and to more heart-felt sorrows; at times they are destined, even without fault on their part, to the threat of extermination."¹⁵²

¹⁵¹ ASRS, AA.EE.SS., PXII, P.I, Polonia 216, pp. 291–293, Report "Situation in Poland" by Malvezzi, June 1943.

¹⁵² Pius XII, Discorso di Sua Santità Pio XII al Sacro Collegio nel giorno del Suo onomastico (June 2, 1943). Here English translation quoted in: Blet, *Pius XII and the Second World War...*, p. 164

In Poland, the quoted passage is less known, as most of the speech dealt with the situation of the Polish nation and the hope for its "future that corresponds to their [the Poles'] legitimate aspirations."¹⁵³ The passage on Poland elicited euphoria from the Polish bishops:

The Pope's word for Poland – reported Malvezzi – made a great impression of joy on all the Bishops to whom it was brought – bishop Adamski in Warsaw, bishop Tardowski [Twardowski] in Lviv, and Archbishop Sapieha in Kraków – and everything has been done so that it has the greatest diffusion. In Warsaw, provision will be made for a popular edition of the speech, naturally in a clandestine form.¹⁵⁴

The bishops were intent on ensuring that the papal speech be disseminated as widely as possible, but some of them, in order not to antagonize the faithful, were most keen to omit the passage concerning the Pope's words on the extermination of the Jews: especially since, even in the face of the almost total annihilation of Polish Jewry, a large part of Polish society was characterized by deep-rooted antisemitism. According to Malvezzi, Poles were outright pleased with the work of the Germans. The report shows that at least some Polish bishops were aware of these feelings, and perhaps even shared them. The Vatican's reaction to this situation is interesting. While the passage revealing that some bishops had planned to skip this part of the papal address was underlined and marked with an exclamation mark by whoever read the Malvezzi report, the internal note on the reception of this message by the Polish bishops did not mention the whole matter. Only the joy it caused and the ways in which the various bishops planned to disseminate it were emphasized.¹⁵⁵

Indirectly however, Malvezzi himself did not identify with the attitude of the Polish bishops, contrasting it with that of Metropolitan Szeptycki. Discussing the situation in the Galicia district, the businessman stressed:

The last weeks of May have been marked by the definitive persecution against the Jews, with the destruction of the Lviv ghetto and the [ghettos in the] minor cities of Galicia. Bishop Szeptycki has published an instruction in that regard, which the German censorship has changed significantly: both texts have been brought [by me to the Vatican]. On the Roman-Catholic side, there was no thought of making any demonstration [against the persecution of Jews].¹⁵⁶

¹⁵³ Pius XII, *Discorso di Sua Santità Pio XII al Sacro Collegio nel giorno del Suo onomastico* (June 2, 1943), https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/it/speeches/1943/documents/hf_p-xii_spe_19430602_onomastico-pontefice.html (accessed December 2, 2024).

¹⁵⁴ ASRS, AA.EE.SS., PXII, P.I, Polonia 216, p. 302, Report "Situation in Poland" by Malvezzi, June 1943.

¹⁵⁵ ASRS, AA.EE.SS., PXII, P.I, Polonia 244, p. 16, Internal note of the Secretariat of State, June 18, 1943.

¹⁵⁶ ASRS, AA.EE.SS., PXII, P.I, Polonia 216, p. 308, Report "Situation in Poland" by Malvezzi, June 1943.

With this remark, which concludes his extensive 18-page report, Malvezzi summarized not only the ecclesiastical situation in Lviv, but also in the whole of occupied Poland. The only protest against the extermination of Jews by a hierarch residing in the occupied territories was articulated by a Ukrainian Greek Catholic hierarch. He was also the only one who, *expressis verbis* and on his own initiative, informed the Pope at least twice in letters about the mass murder of Jews and criticized the attitude of his faithful towards this tragedy.¹⁵⁷ And indeed, in a letter of June 12, written in Latin to Cardinal Maglione, which was delivered to the Vatican by Malvezzi, Szeptycki referred to this protest, writing about people “breaking God’s law, especially the fifth commandment of the Decalogue.”¹⁵⁸

This was to be the last trip Malvezzi made to occupied Poland. In mid-July he was still planning a trip to Warsaw and had even collected letters for Sapieha, Twardowski, Adamski, and Szlagowski, as well as financial support – but the journey did not go ahead due to the change in the situation of Italy in the summer of 1943.¹⁵⁹

However, Bishop Adamski’s distinctive attitude should not be forgotten. When in early May 1943 the Vatican sought specific information about the fate of several Jews from Warsaw and Łódź, a request for information was sent in secret through Luigi Gagliardini to him. A while later, Adamski answered the Vatican through Mrs Gagliardini, Luigi’s wife, with information about the Warsaw Ghetto uprising and the Jews hiding on the Aryan side. This information was transmitted verbally and a Vatican official made a note after the conversation with Gagliardini:

In May a list of Jews, residents of Warsaw and Łódź, was delivered to Mr. Gagliardini in order to obtain news [about them] through Bishop Adamski.

This morning Mrs Gagliardini, who came from Warsaw, said on behalf of Bishop Adamski that unfortunately no news could be obtained. Since last May, the Warsaw Ghetto no longer exists. 800 houses have been burnt down. The Jews have either died or been deported elsewhere. Or, if they are free, they are living under other names: they cannot be traced. The same lady reports that a thousand Poles were killed in the Warsaw Ghetto in May. The Poles, despite some rumors, did not go so far as to act unjustly towards the Jews.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁷ Szeptycki informed the Pope about the extermination of the Jews in a letter of August 1942 (discussed above) and then in a letter of the summer of 1943. On Metropolitan Szeptycki’s attitude towards the Holocaust see John-Paul Himka, “Metropolitan Andrzej Sheptytsky and the Holocaust,” paper delivered at the inaugural conference of “Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry” at the Polish Embassy in London on January 16, 2014, n.p., <http://www.aapjstudies.org/index.php?id=220> (accessed April 18, 2024).

¹⁵⁸ *Actes et Documents...*, vol. 3b, doc. 521, p. 811, Szeptycki to Maglione, June 12, 1943.

¹⁵⁹ AAV, PXII, Segr. St., Comm. Soc. 209, Polacchi Civili Polonia 299, p. 71. internal note of the Secretariat of State, July 16, 1943 and an addendum of August 4, 1943.

¹⁶⁰ ASRS, AA.EE.SS., PXII, PI, Ebrei 45, p. 40, Internal note by the Secretariat of State by Samorè, July 7, 1943 r. The same note, but without revealing the names of the intermediaries or the context of the search, was published in the *Actes et Documents...* (vol. 9, doc. 255, p. 376).

The information exchange concerned members of the Frydman family. Paolina Frydman, who lived in Italy, was, together with her colleagues, received in audience by Pius XII. On this occasion, she requested the Pope's help in obtaining information about her immediate family, her parents and siblings together with their families, with whom contact had ceased a year earlier. She provided their names, dates of birth, and last known addresses in a letter that reached the Secretariat of State on May 2. After discussing the matter with the Pope, Samorè was commissioned to attend to it. As Gagliardini was returning to Poland, it was to him that the list of members of the Frydman family was entrusted, with the request to pass it on to Adamski.¹⁶¹ On July 8, Paolina Frydman was informed that, despite efforts, no information could be obtained on her next of kin.¹⁶²

That was the end of a fairly regular and effective exchange of information between occupied Poland and the Vatican. After the occupation of Rome by the Germans in the late summer of 1943 and the change in Italy's status from ally to enemy of the Third Reich, the Italians, who had been the main intermediaries between the Pope and Poland, were no longer able to travel freely in the occupied territories.

Conclusions. The Vatican and the Polish Bishops in the Face of the Holocaust

Vatican documentation leaves no doubt that it was possible to send confidential information from occupied Poland. The bishops often took advantage of this and transmitted letters and verbal messages to the Pope through trusted emissaries. This makes the almost total absence in this correspondence of information about the ongoing extermination of the Jews all the more surprising. This cannot be explained by fear of the Germans, as other information about the persecution of the Church and Poles, equally sensitive, was successfully transmitted. The only Polish bishop to notify the Vatican of the murder of Jews was Stanisław Adamski. He first forwarded the leaflet "Protest!" in the summer of 1942 and later, in the spring of 1943, sent Luigi Gagliardini on a mission to provide information on, among other things, the extent of the Holocaust, the situation of Jews in hiding, and the death camps. In July 1943, after being directly asked by the Vatican to obtain news of members of the Jewish family Frydman, he reported on the failure of the ghetto uprising and on Jews hiding under false names.

Sources on the attitudes of Polish bishops towards Jews and the Holocaust are scarce. Therefore, the accounts of intermediaries who often spoke to them and who enjoyed the trust of both sides are invaluable. Malvezzi noticed an increase

¹⁶¹ ASRS, AA.EE.SS., PXII, PI, Ebrei 45, p. 35–39, Paolina Frydman to Pius XII, May 2, 1943; List of Frydman family members, Note Ex. Aud.Ssmi, May 3, 1943, with Samorè's note about handing over the list to Gagliardini for Adamski, May 5, 1943.

¹⁶² Ibidem, p. 41, Note to Mrs Paolina Frydman Nosei, July 8, 1943.

in antisemitism among Poles as early as the summer of 1941, following rumors of Jewish involvement in the persecution of Poles under Soviet rule. In the following year, 1942, when the Holocaust covered the entire Polish territory, the myth of *żydokomuna* – that communism was the work of the Jews – was strongly present. The very well-documented pre-war antisemitic views propounded by the Polish Catholic Church¹⁶³ were, as the discussed documents suggest, also widely deemed valid at the time of the height of the extermination operations. The opinion expressed by representatives of the Polish Catholic Church, probably including Sapieha, and transmitted through Negrato, is shocking to say the least, given the timing of its utterance (spring 1942). For it was then suggested that the Jews had acted to the detriment of Poland, and that their present sad state was due only to the application of the law of retaliation. Antisemitism was once again confirmed in June 1943, when Malvezzi, who had brought the papal address of June 2, 1943, noted a quiet satisfaction among Poles over the destruction of the Jews (he was talking mainly to people from Church circles). The Jews were seen as a permanent national problem, and this was only a few weeks after the defeat of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. This antisemitic attitude of the broad masses caused the Polish bishops to consider omitting the passage in which the Pope spoke of the destruction of the Jews when disseminating the papal address in occupied Poland. The problem of antisemitism in the Polish Catholic Church during the occupation and the ongoing Holocaust and its possible consequences for the survival rates of Jews in Poland is a topic for further research, especially in local Polish (Church) archives. It should be noted here that it was certainly perceived as a problem by various intermediaries between Poland and the Vatican, but to date it has not been recognized as such by either the Catholic Church in Poland or the Vatican.

Antisemitism, although present in the attitude of some bishops during the war, cannot, however, be seen as the only reason for their silence on the Holocaust. Another explanation could be indifference to the tragedy of the Jews and, probably parallel to it, prioritizing their own suffering (that of the Church and the Poles) over that of the Jews. In the context of the occupation and the unprecedented persecution of the Catholic Church in Poland, the parallel tragedy of the Jews, who were not considered fellow citizens, as is clearly evident in Sapieha's letters to the Vatican and to Frank (when speaking of Poles, the Archbishop does not mean Jews), was not important enough to be raised in his correspondence with the Holy See and thus distract from the persecution of the Church and ethnic Poles. In light of the available documentation from the Vatican, when analyzing Sapieha's attitude towards the Holocaust, one can speak at most of indifference. Indifference explains the absence of a protest by the Polish bishops against the atrocities committed against the Jews, along with

¹⁶³ See, for example, Ronald E. Modras, *The Catholic Church and Antisemitism: Poland, 1933–1939* (London: Routledge, 1994).

the lack of a call to the faithful not to participate in any form in these atrocities, or any clear appeal to help the Jews.¹⁶⁴ All of this, however, in a comparable context of persecution of the Church and of his own person, was done by Metropolitan Szeptycki of Lviv in 1942 and 1943 in the face of the mass murder of Jews, the antisemitism of the faithful, and their voluntary participation in the murder of Jews. Malvezzi, it will be recalled, emphasized this fact, contrasting the attitude of the Metropolitan with that of the Polish bishops.

Last but not least, the absence of this topic may have been related to the pattern of expectations within the Vatican itself. For as I have shown, in the Holy See, the knowledge of the murder of the Jews, communicated in detail by Malvezzi, Adamski, Szeptycki, Scavizzi, Negrato, and other intermediaries, was ignored for a long time with nothing being done about it. As far as the situation in Poland was concerned, the Vatican was more interested in the administration of dioceses and in countering the anti-papal propaganda of the Nazis and the persecution of the Church. These were topics about which the Vatican wanted to be informed by the Polish bishops. The tragedy of the Jews was at best a secondary issue, often categorized as political. In line with this logic, the lack of information on the part of the Polish bishops was in some sense in accord with the Vatican's expectations. All the more remarkable, therefore, is the attitude of Bishop Adamski, who resisted this logic and, despite the fact that no one at the Vatican asked him to do so (with the exception of the above-discussed request of May 1943 concerning the Frydman family), was already providing the Pope with information about the ongoing Holocaust in the summer of 1942. Malvezzi himself was disappointed in 1943 not only by the attitude of the Poles and most of the Polish bishops towards the Holocaust, but also by the attitude of the Pope himself. He accused Pius XII of being "cold" and lacking the "evangelical courage" to take concrete action on behalf of the needy in occupied Poland.¹⁶⁵ Indeed, unlike the Polish bishops and the Vatican, Malvezzi made no distinction between Catholics and Jews in need. The ambivalent attitude of the Vatican towards the Holocaust, the absence of any instructions to the Polish bishops on how to face it, the lack of instructions concerning at least measures in favor of converts, as well as the antisemitism of some emissaries, above all some Italian military chaplains, were certainly

¹⁶⁴ Which is not to say that, at the local level, assistance to Jews was not given. Individual diocesan priests and many both female and male religious congregations were involved in sheltering Jews. However, there is no evidence that this was done with the approval or at the initiative of the church hierarchy. The claim that (almost) the entire Catholic Church in Poland was involved in one way or another in saving Jews, as some Polish scholars maintain, is not supported in any way by the documents preserved in the Vatican archives. The subject of helping Jews in the context of the church in Poland does not appear in any of the thousands of documents I have reviewed in these archives.

¹⁶⁵ AAV, PXII, Segr. St., Comm. Socc. 209, Polacchi Civili Polonia 299, p. 55rv (Paronetto to Montini, June 8, 1943) and p. 60rv (Paronetto to Montini, July 8, 1943).

not conducive to the Polish hierarchy taking or at least considering taking a different stance towards the Holocaust.

Further research in the Vatican archives should shed more light on the human factors behind the scenes of the Secretariat of State, especially how different personalities, their priorities and beliefs, assumptions and, of course, prejudices shaped papal policy towards the Jews. The cases of Angelo Dell'Acqua, Giovanni Battista Montini, and Carlo Chiarlo, who was Montini's protégé, stand out in the documents discussed here. Dell'Acqua was clearly thinking in antisemitic terms,¹⁶⁶ and the future Pope Paul VI, the documents suggest, regularly diluted the subject of the persecution and murder of Jews in his reports after his meetings with Malvezzi, making one wonder how much of what the businessman relayed about the Holocaust reached Pius XII himself.¹⁶⁷ The Pope's reaction to President Raczkiwicz's letter referring to the "Protest!" leaflet indicates that the Pope was unaware of its existence, even though Malvezzi delivered it to Montini on behalf of Adamski as early as September 1942.¹⁶⁸ In the wider context of the "Pius wars" and possible explanations for the Vatican's reticent behaviour towards the extermination of the Jews, the documents discussed here suggest that more attention should be paid to the papal policy of impartiality¹⁶⁹ and to the fact that the Jews and their tragedy were not a primary or even secondary concern of the Church: rather, they were treated in political terms.¹⁷⁰ In this respect, the words

¹⁶⁶ More recent research tends to move away from seeing antisemitism as the main motive for the Pope's conduct in the face of the Holocaust. See, e.g., Coppa, *The Life...*, p. 169. An explanation for this departure in Coppa's work is the consistency of the papal policy of impartiality and the pope's preference for appealing to diplomacy, and the Vatican's comparable conduct with regard to the genocide against Polish Catholics and Orthodox Serbs during World War II.

¹⁶⁷ In this context, it is worth noting the subsequent career development of both prelates in the Catholic Church. Angelo Dell'Acqua succeeded Giovanni Battista Montini as Undersecretary for Ordinary Affairs of the Secretariat of State in 1953, and 14 years later, in 1967, Montini, who was elected Pope in 1963 and took the name Paul VI, appointed Dell'Acqua as Cardinal Vicar of Rome.

¹⁶⁸ PISM, A. 44/122/30, Ambassador Papée to Mr. Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland. in London, January 23, 1943. Document published in Libionka, "Against a Brick Wall...", pp. 291–293.

¹⁶⁹ The papal policy of impartiality was initially developed by Cardinal Gasparri and implemented by Benedict XV during the First World War. It was a way of ensuring papal political neutrality in a conflict in which Catholic believers were fighting on two warring sides. It allowed the Pope to condemn policies that violated the principles of the Catholic faith, but at the same time prevented him from naming the perpetrators of these violations. For a more in-depth analysis of the Pope's policy of impartiality during the Second World War, see: Coppa, *The Life...*, chapters 6 and 7, pp. 124–173, and Suzanne Brown-Fleming, *Pope Pius XII, Vatican Neutrality and the Holocaust: Case Studies from the Newly Opened Vatican Archives*, in: *The Vatican and Permanent Neutrality*, ed. Marchall J. Breger and Herbert R. Reginbogin (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2022), pp. 105–121.

¹⁷⁰ Robert Vetresca discusses this argument in his biography of Pius XII (*Soldier of Christ...*, pp. 176–178).

of Cardinal Eugène Tisserant, prefect of the Congregation for the Eastern Churches and immediate superior of Metropolitan Szeptycki, addressed to Cardinal Suhard, Archbishop of Paris, in June 1940, sound – from today's point of view and with today's state of knowledge – almost prophetic, to use ecclesiastical terminology: "I am afraid that history will reproach the Holy See for following a policy of convenience for itself, and not much more. And that is extremely sad [...]"¹⁷¹ Ambassador Papée's words to the Pope during the audience at which he presented the aforementioned letter from Raczkiwicz proved similarly prophetic. In it, the President asked for words of condemnation of Nazi crimes in Poland, referring among other things to the courage of the authors of the protest: "In no vague terms I raised the issue of the pope's responsibility vis-à-vis the future. Every word uttered by the Holy Father will eventually be analysed and commented on by history."¹⁷² It is easy to admit that the Polish ambassador was right.

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¹⁷¹ Quoted in Coppa, *The Life...*, p. 167.

¹⁷² PISM, A. 44/122/30, quoted after Libionka, "Against a Brick Wall..." p. 270.

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