

JOHN T. MCGREEVY · CATHOLICISM

Chapter 8: Crisis

The Politics of the 1930s

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I

IN THE SPRING OF 1933, Münster resident Edith Stein, a philosopher and convert to Catholicism from Judaism, wrote to Pope Pius XI. She gave the letter to the Benedictine abbot who served as her spiritual director, and he arranged for intermediaries to place the letter on the pope's desk. She referred to herself, significantly, not only as a "daughter of the Catholic Church" but also "as a daughter of the Hebrew people." In the weeks since Adolf Hitler and the National Socialist Party had taken control of the German government, she explained, the new government "had exhibited a total disregard of justice and humanity." Its leaders had long "preached hatred of the Jews." Why had the pope said nothing? "Not only the Jews," she explained, "but also thousands of faithful Catholics in Germany, and, I believe, the entire world, have been waiting and hoping [p. 188] that the Church of Christ would make itself heard in condemning this abuse of the name of Jesus Christ. Is this idolatry of race and of the power of the state, with which the masses are bombarded daily over the radio, not open heresy?" She predicted that silence when crimes were committed against Jews would only encourage attacks on Catholicism, "carried out more quietly and in a less brutal way than that against the Jews."¹



Edith Stein (*Katholiek Documentatie Centrum, Nijmegen, Photo: AFBK-2A9135*)

Born on Yom Kippur, as her mother liked to point out, into a devout Jewish family in Breslau, Germany (now Wrocław, Poland), in 1891, Stein was a brilliant student. While attending the university in Breslau she fell into the circle of young scholars interested in the work of the philosopher Edmund Husserl. She transferred from Breslau to the university in Göttingen to be near Husserl, whom she and other students called “the Master.”

Husserl founded phenomenology, as much a method as a theory. Phenomenologists urged people to closely describe their individual experience, coming to grips with the things and emotions that structure day-to-day existence. Many Catholic neo-Thomists found Husserl’s work appealing, especially those clustered around Belgium’s Cardinal Mercier and working at the Catholic University of Louvain. They blended phenomenology with psychological experiments to gain a deeper understanding of such topics as memory and perception and spread Husserl’s ideas around the world through their scholarly networks. Both Husserl and these Catholic admirers presumed the existence of an identifiable physical and moral order. One Belgian understood Husserl as proving from a different angle neo-Thomist claims about “objective truth.”²

During World War I, Stein volunteered as a nurse on a typhoid ward and became an ardent German patriot. “I believe I can assert objectively,” she wrote to a colleague in 1917, “that since Sparta and Rome there has never been as strong a consciousness of being a state as there is in Prussia and the new German Reich. That is why I consider it out of the question that we will now be defeated.” On a break, she visited her family in

Breslau. She could not bear the mundane chitchat and decided, in the moment, that “my individual life has ceased, and all that I am belongs to the state.”³

[p. 189] The horrific last year of the war and its turbulent aftermath shattered this certainty. “Good and evil, knowledge and ignorance,” she now concluded, “are mixed on all sides.”⁴ She grew interested in the limits of national loyalties and found herself drawn to religious questions. Because she was a woman, Stein could not pursue the second dissertation (or habilitation) that would qualify her for a university professorship, a policy Husserl chose not to challenge. Because she was Jewish, academic employment opportunities were limited. When apprised of an open teaching position in Hamburg, she declined to apply, since “there are already two Jewish philosophers there.” More would not be welcome given the “present level of rampant anti-Semitism.”⁵

Husserl himself was a nonobservant Jew who eventually converted to a nondogmatic form of Protestantism. His circle of students included men and women with a diverse set of religious commitments, most famously Martin Heidegger, a onetime Catholic seminarian, but also Max Scheler, one of Germany’s most important philosophers and self-identified for a time as Catholic. Heidegger eventually developed a disdain for the Catholicism of his youth, and some Catholics began to regard Scheler’s philosophical approach as insufficiently neo-Thomist. (Scheler’s divorce and subsequent remarriage to one of his students also scandalized onetime admirers.) Stein knew Heidegger, and when she encountered him by chance at Husserl’s home, she took a walk with him and another student to discuss “the philosophy of religion.”⁶

Other Husserl students, including the Austrian Dietrich von Hildebrand, found in phenomenology inspiration for their conversion to Catholicism. Stein was a member of this second group, and she later wrote that phenomenology guided her into the “majestic temple of scholastic [or neo-Thomist] thought.”⁷ When she informed her mother of her conversion to Catholicism, it was the first time Stein had seen her cry. (Even a decade later Stein knew that her mother remained convinced that “everyone ought to live and die in the faith in which they were born.”)⁸ During the 1920s, Stein taught German literature and history at a teacher’s college for women. She asked her local bishop for his permission to read authors listed on the Index of Forbidden Books: Bergson, Hume, Kant, Locke, and Spinoza. All were works she “formerly used in the study of modern philosophy.”⁹

[p. 190] Despite a grueling teaching schedule, Stein completed major translation projects on Aquinas (from Latin into German) and John Henry Newman (from English into German). In 1929, Stein published a comparison of Aquinas and Husserl, with Aquinas winning the argument. (That same year, another brilliant young German Jewish philosopher, Hannah Arendt, also a onetime Husserl student, published her dissertation on St. Augustine.) Stein worked closely with the German-Polish Jesuit Erich Przywara and explained their shared goal as “a confrontation between traditional Catholic and modern philosophy.”¹⁰ Przywara put it this way: making sure Aquinas stands “eye to eye with Husserl, Scheler and Heidegger.”¹¹

II

ERICH PRZYWARA HAD once forecast a “ ‘Catholic renewal’ ... a positive view of ‘Catholic’ as a creative factor in the life of the spirit and culture.”¹² But by the early 1930s, Przywara and other Catholics took a more defensive stance. The old enemies, after all, remained. Catholics continued to fulminate against socialists (who returned the favor) and Freemasons (likewise). One influential Polish priest urged Catholics to unite against a comprehensive list of foes: “international Masonry, international socialism, and international sects and heresies [as they] gather all their forces against Christ and His Church.”¹³

Two groups—communists and Jews—took on new importance. Catholics had long denounced an atheistic communism, if often only in the abstract. The Russian Revolution of 1917 created an actual communist state, but Bolshevik policy toward Catholicism was at first less aggressive than anticipated—only 7 percent of Catholic churches had been closed in 1928. Yet while Vatican officials repeatedly attempted in vain to negotiate a concordat protecting Catholic institutions, the Soviets began to pressure Christian organizations.¹⁴ A French priest based in Moscow uttered grave warnings about the future of the country’s two million Catholics. “There is no apostolate,” he explained to his superiors, “no religious instruction of the young, nobody to replace the priests who have died or fled, and no bishop. We are witnessing the death, slow but sure, of Latin Catholicism in Russia.”¹⁵

[p. 191] A more open Soviet persecution of Christian churches of all types began in 1929, predicated on Joseph Stalin’s suspicion that groups independent of the state might resist his agricultural collectivization program. Priests were imprisoned and parishes closed. Protests from Vatican diplomats and European supporters were unavailing, since as the commissar for foreign affairs calmly explained, “the Soviet government has an anti-religious orientation.”¹⁶ Soon, the price for serving on a parish council could be a decade in a Siberian gulag.¹⁷ By 1938, the 1,217 Catholic parishes extant within the Soviet Union in 1917 had been reduced to exactly one, in Moscow, led by an American priest, Léopold Braun, who ministered to diplomats and a handful of local parishioners willing to brave monitoring by the secret police. At night, as Braun reported to his superiors, trucks deposited those arrested during the Great Terror of 1937 at the Lubyanka prison just a few yards from the parish.¹⁸

Earlier than their secular peers, Catholic intellectuals shrewdly recognized in Soviet communism a competing cosmology, or, in the words of Erich Przywara, a “religious spirit phenomenon.”¹⁹ They worried [p. 192] that these anti-religious sentiments might spread from Moscow across Europe. Revolutionaries in 1848 had hoped to topple decrepit monarchies and install governments committed to civil liberties and (male) suffrage. Revolutionaries in 1919 hoped to install atheist, communist governments. Germany’s bishops organized 1,737 parish and diocesan meetings against radicalism and communism in the single year of 1931. On the first Sunday of Lent in 1932, every German pastor gave a sermon on “Bolshevism.”²⁰ As one German priest speculated, the Soviet strategy was to “drive

Germany to the side of Bolshevism” and create a “victorious united Soviet Germany and Soviet Russia.” The Church could still lead an anti-communist movement, “but it will not be possible much longer.” Austrian Catholics committed themselves to opposing “Bolshevism’s battle against religion and Christian culture both inside and outside Russia.”²¹ Vietnamese Catholics, aware of communism’s appeal to some contemporaries, worried about the “spirit of Bolshevism that is in the air.”²²



Anton Walter family, 1932. Walter was sentenced in 1933 to a decade-long prison term in the Soviet Union for the crime of serving on a parish council. (Courtesy of Rare Books and Special Collections, Hesburgh Library, University of Notre Dame)

Catholic leaders in countries with barely perceptible communist movements were no less watchful. Brazilian bishops and priests portrayed communism as a “moral plague” and communists as “modern barbarians armed with sickle and hammer.”²³ Ireland’s bishops accused the Irish Republican Army of trying to “impose upon the Catholic soil of Ireland the same materialistic regime, with its fanatical hatred of God, as now dominates Russia and threatens to dominate Spain.”²⁴

Pius XI confided to a priest based in China that “the great danger is Bolshevism for China, India, Europe, throughout. The Bolsheviks are marvelous propagandists.”²⁵ When Vincent Lebbe lived in Paris, he saw himself as competing for the allegiance of Chinese students with the future communist premier Zhou Enlai, also living in Paris and for a time a correspondent for Lebbe’s newspaper. Ma Xiangbo worried about the allure of communism—defined as the “compulsory sharing of property and women”—to intellectuals.²⁶

The Vatican convened conferences and organized museum exhibits in the mid-1930s on communism, the world's only "truly global organization" besides Catholicism, and founded a new Secretariat on Atheism.²⁷ Vatican officials, and subsequently French bishops, worried about Catholic trade unionists willing to consider alliances with communist counterparts, the so-called *main tendue*, or extended hand, since communism "despite certain occasional camouflages remains the worst danger."²⁸ More commonly, Catholic trade unionists needed no Roman encouragement to see themselves as in the vanguard of opposition to communist influence. Catholic members of the San Francisco longshoreman's union successfully mobilized to defeat communist candidates in elections for shop leadership positions.²⁹

Some of the same Catholics thought that Jews subverted national unity, too. A modern anti-Semitism emerged within Catholic circles in the nineteenth century, building on traditional religious tropes but translating them into a new idiom. The most virulent forms of this anti-Semitism were frankly conspiratorial, and its advocates across Europe and North America promoted the idea of the Jews as bent on "world domination."³⁰ But less conspiratorial Catholics also voiced anti-Semitic sentiments. In Hungary, Bishop Ottokár Prohászka translated *Rerum Novarum* into Hungarian and daringly entitled an early work *Modern Catholic*, a text that drew unfavorable scrutiny from Pius X's anti-modernist censors. During the brutal final months of World War I, with Hungary's armies enduring horrendous losses, this self-professed "modern" Catholic expressed his fears about a "militant phalanx" of Jews subverting the country's war effort. He falsely accused the country's Jews of not enlisting in the army in numbers proportionate to their presence in the population.³¹ After the war, as a leading member of parliament, Bishop Prohászka advocated a quota for Jewish students at universities. Such laws, he claimed, represented a necessary cultivation of a "national Christian tendency."³² For the same reason, some Polish Catholics fought for the same quotas on Jewish students in Polish universities.³³

The idea of a link between Judaism and communism, what contemporaries termed a Judeo-Bolshevik conspiracy, became widespread. The notion was hardly limited to Catholics but nonetheless nestled within the Catholic milieu. In 1919, two future popes, Eugenio Pacelli (Pius XII) as a nuncio in Munich and Achille Ratti (Pius XI) as a nuncio in Warsaw, witnessed struggles with local communists firsthand. Pacelli stayed in Munich in 1919 during the city's short-lived Bavarian Soviet Republic, and by his own possibly self-aggrandizing account, revolutionaries with guns drawn threatened to shoot him on the steps of the nuncio's residence.³⁴ During the anxious days of Warsaw's siege during the Soviet-Polish War, Ratti also remained in the city.³⁵ Neither man distinguished revolution from communism or from the Jewish people. Pacelli feared a "grim Russian-Jewish-Revolutionary tyranny."³⁶ Ratti described Bolshevism as "essentially Jewish, anti-Catholic [and] anti-religious."³⁷

Not all Catholic leaders were anti-Semitic, and in New York City and other places, Catholics and Jews occasionally developed alliances. When the head of the world's Jesuits, Włodzimierz Ledóchowski, proposed firing the Jewish dean of Fordham University's

pharmacy school, simply because it seemed inappropriate for a dean at a Catholic university to be Jewish, the university's Jesuit community thwarted the effort.³⁸

As the grip of the global depression tightened, however, Catholic anti-Semitism became more visible. By the 1930s, Fr. Charles Coughlin had become the most famous Catholic priest in the United States. Based in suburban Royal Oak, outside of Detroit, Michigan, Coughlin's weekly radio program drew an audience in the tens of millions. An early champion of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal—"Christ's New Deal"—Coughlin began criticizing Roosevelt as insufficiently radical in the mid-1930s, urging him to nationalize the banking industry and inflate the currency. For a short time, he seemed to be Roosevelt's primary political rival.³⁹

Always opposed to communism—he installed an anti-communist club for students in his parish grade school—Coughlin started promoting anti-Semitism in the late 1930s. He drew from the writings of Fr. Denis Fahey, an Irish priest educated in Rome by French anti-modernist clergy.⁴⁰ Fahey, and then Coughlin, reprinted the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, the fabricated document alleging a Jewish plot aimed at world domination. Notoriously, Coughlin defended violence against Jews on Kristallnacht, the night in November 1938 when Nazis encouraged the destruction of synagogues and Jewish-owned stores. Other American Catholics, notably Fr. John Ryan, immediately took to the airwaves to rebut Coughlin, and most Catholic newspapers and many bishops declaimed against Nazi violence. Still, the activities of paramilitary Christian Front organizations inspired by Coughlin, located in heavily [p. 195] Catholic areas of Boston and New York, echoed fascist mobs tormenting Jews in Italy and Germany. They organized boycotts of Jewish-owned stores, assaulted Jewish pedestrians, and claimed, as in Europe, to counter communist influence.⁴¹

Other Catholics thousands of miles away followed the same path. The Argentine priest Gustavo Franceschi delivered that country's most popular radio broadcasts in the 1930s. Unlike Coughlin, he rejected conspiracy theories. But he still thought Jews were motivated by "the spirit of wealth and the power of gold."⁴²

Some Catholic theologians and scholars, especially in central Europe, used scientific racism to justify anti-Semitism. Europe's leading Catholic anthropologist, Austrian Wilhelm Schmidt, considered Nazi ideas about Aryan superiority absurd, but he found some versions of racial theory irresistible. In a 1934 essay on "The Jewish Question," Schmidt lamented the predominance of Jews in the medical profession and the film industry.⁴³ Karl Adam, a German Catholic theologian influential for his support of ecumenicism, professed admiration for Nazi efforts to unite German Protestants and German Catholics in a "blood unity."⁴⁴

Poland's Cardinal Augustus Hlond offered a tortured defense of economic boycotts directed against Jews in 1936:

One may love one's own nation more but one may not hate anyone. Not even Jews. It is good to prefer your own kind when shopping, to avoid Jewish stores and Jewish stalls

in the marketplace, but it is forbidden to demolish a Jewish store, damage their merchandise, break windows or throw things at their homes.⁴⁵

Hlond also offered another line of analysis. “It is a fact,” he concluded, “that the Jews are fighting with the Catholic Church, that they are embedded in free-thinking, that they constitute the avant-garde of godlessness, the Bolshevik movement and revolutionary activities.”⁴⁶

Remarkably, then, Jews seemed to some Catholics implicated in both capitalist and communist modernities. The German Jesuit Gustav Gundlach rejected laws targeting Jews and reminded Catholics that Jews remained a “chosen people within the divine and Christian economy [p. 196] of salvation.” But he also warned of the “truly harmful influence of the Jewish segment of the population in the areas of economy, politics, theater, cinema, the press, science and art.” He thought it worrisome that Jews managed to “operate within the camp of world plutocracy” as well as “international Bolshevism.”⁴⁷

III

THE TWO MOST controversial Vatican concordats of the era—the 1929 Lateran Accords with Mussolini and the 1933 Reichskonkordat with Hitler—used diplomatic means to protect Catholic institutions. The Lateran Accords finally ended the long standoff with the Italian state that began with the country’s unification in 1870 and granted the Holy See sovereignty in Vatican City. Mussolini also guaranteed Catholic instruction in state schools, ended legal divorce, and promised independence for Catholic Action organizations. Pius XI congratulated Mussolini for not sharing “the concerns of the liberal school.”⁴⁸

This positive appraisal of Mussolini was shared by a surprising number of non-Catholic intellectuals and politicians. But enthusiasm for Mussolini was especially notable among Catholics, including bishops and priests who had trained in Rome. In the United States, the bishop of rural Sioux Falls, South Dakota, who had spent eighteen years in Rome at the North American College seminary before his episcopal assignment, finagled an invitation to meet Il Duce in 1932. He “likened [Mussolini’s] attitude to that of George Washington.” The rare Italian priest in the diaspora community who publicly criticized Mussolini, such as Detroit’s Giuseppe Ciarrocchi, a supporter of the now disbanded Partito Popolare Italiano, endured efforts to silence him by Italian Fascist diplomats because he refused, in Ciarrocchi’s words, to condone the “worship of Mussolini.” No less an authority than Vatican secretary of state Eugenio Pacelli intervened to halt Ciarrocchi’s embarrassing (to the Vatican) “anti-Fascist campaign.”⁴⁹

Within Italy, the agreement forged between the Vatican and the Italian state almost collapsed at its outset. In 1929 the pope had insisted, explicitly quoting the majority opinion in the US Supreme Court decision in *Pierce v. Society of Sisters* (1925), which prohibited the state of Ore [p. 197] gon from banning Catholic schools, that parents, not the state, had the primary right (and duty) to educate their children.⁵⁰ In 1931, Pius XI

protested with more vehemence Mussolini's decision to abolish Catholic youth groups and, in the pope's words, foster "Statolatry," or the "pagan worship of the State."⁵¹ Still, until the late 1930s, Vatican and state intermediaries managed to smooth over differences between Pius XI and Mussolini occasioned by censorship of Catholic publications and restrictions on Catholic organizations.⁵²

The Reichskonkordat negotiated between the Vatican and the new National Socialist government was signed in the summer of 1933. Until that moment, most German Catholic bishops had denied that Catholics in good standing could join the Nazi Party. German Catholic voters were the single voting bloc within Germany most resistant to Hitler's persuasive powers, and the most Catholic regions of Germany were the least likely to support the National Socialists.⁵³



Reichskonkordat signing, 1933, Vatican secretary of state Cardinal Eugenio Pacelli, the future Pope Pius XII, at center. (KNA-Bild, #77146)

Hitler's electoral victory in 1933 presented new threats but also an opportunity. Always wary, Pius XI nonetheless credited Hitler in these early days with being "the first and only man of state who speaks against [p. 198] the bolshevists. Until now, it [has] only been the Pope."⁵⁴ In Cardinal Pacelli's phrasing, by negotiating the Reichskonkordat with the National Socialists, Catholics dodged a "Kulturkampf much worse than in Bismarck's times."⁵⁵ A pleased Hitler told an aide that no one would have thought "that the Church would be ready to commit the bishops to this state." Cardinal Faulhaber of Munich, long critical of the National Socialists and once willing to forbid Catholics from joining the Nazi Party because of the Nazi belief in Aryan superiority, congratulated Hitler in a

handwritten note. The letter conveyed Faulhaber's distaste for democratic politics. "What the old parliament and parties did not accomplish in sixty years," he admiringly told the new Reich Chancellor, "your statesmanlike foresight has achieved in six months."⁵⁶

IV

THIS CLUSTER OF IDEAS—a fierce anti-communism, an underlying drumbeat of anti-Semitism, and skepticism about democratic politics—existed across the Catholic world in the mid-1930s. In majority Catholic states such as Brazil, Portugal, and Austria, the result was a distinct Catholic authoritarian vision, built on the corpse of a discredited liberalism but attempting to distinguish itself from Italian fascism and German Nazism. After a coup overthrew the Brazilian Republic in 1930, Rio de Janeiro's powerful bishop, Sebastião Leme, helped negotiate the resignation of Brazil's president and welcomed the new president, Getúlio Vargas. Leme mobilized Catholic supporters in two massive rallies in Rio de Janeiro, telling the cheering throngs that "either the state ... will recognize the God of the people or the people will not recognize the state."⁵⁷

Vargas, an agnostic who named his son Luther, nonetheless chose to work with Leme, even as his government substituted authoritarian rule for electoral politics. A year later, Leme presided at the dedication of a massive statue dedicated to Christ the Redeemer, paid for in part with state funds, overlooking Rio de Janeiro's magnificent harbor. Attending the ceremony were Vargas and every member of his cabinet, along with forty-five bishops. The constitution of 1934 did not officially recognize Catholicism, but it allowed the Vargas government to support Catholic schools and trade unions and to provide state subsidies for Catholic hospitals, seminaries, and colleges for the first time since the founding of the republic in 1889. State education officials even funded a Portuguese translation of Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologica*.⁵⁸ (At the exact same moment Dominican priests completed the first translation of the *Summa Theologica* into Czech.)⁵⁹



Christ the Redeemer statue dedication, Rio de Janeiro, 1931. (Getty Images/Keystone France)

A Brazilian Jesuit described his country as immune to “individualist excesses and socialist exaggerations.” A modern Brazilian state would stress communal interests more than capitalist “oppression of the weak and the poor.”⁶⁰ A political party with many Catholic supporters, the Ação Integralista Brasileira, described its platform as directed “against the false mystique of democracy and against the false mystique of communism.”⁶¹

In Portugal, Antonio Salazar, a onetime Catholic youth leader and seminarian, became the country’s dictator in 1932. As a young man, Salazar had endorsed *Rerum Novarum* and the idea of a more ordered economy. A stint in parliament, with its unstable coalitions, dismayed him. As he explained, “We are drawing near to the moment in political and social evolution in which a political party based on the individual, the citizen or the elector will no longer have sufficient reason for existence.”⁶²

In Austria, the newly elected chancellor, Engelbert Dollfuss, promised in 1933 to build a “Catholic German state” inspired by *Quadragesimo Anno*, and he dismissed as anachronistic “the era of liberal and capitalistic systems.”⁶³ Dollfuss, like Salazar, eliminated not only rival [p. 200] political parties but also independent trade unions. Both Austria and Portugal banned the sale of birth control devices, and both disallowed forced sterilization, with Portuguese Catholics especially insistent on prohibiting sterilization as a “flagrant injustice.” Both states thought family allowances were a way to promote large families and to allow mothers to remain in the home.⁶⁴

Dollfuss and Salazar distinguished their movements from Nazism. Portuguese Catholic newspapers repeatedly criticized Nazi attempts to dismantle Catholic organizations in Germany, and Dollfuss was assassinated by Nazi thugs in 1934 in a failed plot to overthrow the government. Dollfuss and his successor, Kurt Schuschnigg, protected (and funded) Catholic scholars who disparaged Nazi views on race and physicians who refused to implement Nazi sterilization programs.⁶⁵

Salazar's influence in the Catholic world extended not only to Portuguese-speaking Brazil but also to surprising places such as Britain, where writer G. K. Chesterton and other Catholic luminaries lauded the Portuguese experiment.⁶⁶ In France, especially, many Catholics saw this type of authoritarian politics as alluring, especially when they contemplated their own turbulent democracy. Jesuits in the Philippines pondered whether the elimination of political parties and a regime modeled on either Austria or Portugal might prove a worthy goal.⁶⁷

When the British political theorist Michael Oakeshott surveyed the range of political options in Europe in the 1930s, he identified "representative democracy," "communism," "fascism," and "National Socialism." Referencing Portugal, Poland, Ireland, and Austria, he also listed "Catholicism."⁶⁸

V

A CASCADING SERIES OF events in the late 1930s shattered this nationalist and authoritarian Catholic vision. The most important, and violent, occurred in Spain. Spain's left-wing movements had inherited a tradition of hostility and violence directed against Catholic leaders and institutions, and Spanish Catholics, in turn, had long insisted on the unity of nation and faith. This polarization made Spain's culture wars more enduring than those of Germany and France, which had been eased by [p. 201] the shared trauma of World War I.⁶⁹ The collapse of Spain's authoritarian government and the advent of the Second Republic in 1931 began an era of heightened tension. Spain's Catholic leadership saw the republic as born "in the shadow of unbelief and modern rationalism." Naturally, it would be "hostile to Religion."⁷⁰

In these uncertain first days of the Spanish Republic, a Vatican scarred by its experience of anticlericalism in Mexico in the 1920s counseled caution. Bishops and laypeople alike knew that one-third of Spanish Catholics, primarily located in the north, actively practiced their faith, while another third, primarily in the south, were actively hostile.

To the dismay of most Catholics, however, the draft version of the new Spanish Constitution gave no special protection or financial aid to the Church, and it recommended the expulsion of all religious orders and the seizure of their property. One of the most reactionary Spanish bishops, Pedro Segura y Sáenz of Toledo, judged the constitution with its separation of church and state entirely unacceptable, a claim he supported with a torrent of references to Pius IX's Syllabus of Errors. He traced the

constitution's lineage from the French Revolution to "democracies hostile to the Church." Republican leaders forced Segura into exile.⁷¹

The eventual Spanish Constitution banned only the Jesuits, not all religious orders, although it formally prohibited all men's and women's religious orders from teaching in publicly funded schools. Follow-up legislation removed all crucifixes from classrooms, secularized cemeteries, and legalized divorce. Revolutionaries began directing acts of violence against the church—including the assassination of thirty-four priests and the burning of fifty churches.

Francisco Franco led a group of Spanish military officers and their troops in a violent rebellion against the democratically elected republican government in 1936. The reaction of Catholic leaders was initially hesitant. Many in Franco's inner circle possessed anticlerical tendencies, and neither Franco nor his aides had provided church officials with advance notice of the insurrection. An early policy statement by a Franco lieutenant—"We believe that the Church ought to be separated from the State for the good of both institutions"—was not reassuring. Still, the cultural fault lines etched so deeply in Spanish history evolved [p. 202] into military divides. One cardinal who worried about Franco's eagerness to dominate the church still supported the rebellion because its failure would lead to "the installation of a Communist regime."⁷²

Pius XI resisted the entreaties of his secretary of state, Eugenio Pacelli, to formally endorse Franco's nationalist Catholicism.⁷³ But wartime savagery on both sides squeezed out room for compromise. Loyalists (or Republicans) denounced Catholic tolerance of Nationalist war crimes, even tolerance of the execution of Basque priests sympathetic to the republic.⁷⁴ Catholics supporting the rebellion pointed to an unprecedented level of violence by Loyalists directed against the church. In a burst of iconoclasm, Loyalist militants "executed" (toppled) statues of Jesus and the Sacred Heart across Spain and then used dynamite to finish the job. They melted down church bells and burned altar cloths and vestments. Liturgies in Loyalist regions effectively ended. Thousands of church buildings were destroyed, and thirteen bishops, over two hundred nuns, and several thousand priests were killed, most in the first six months of the war. These assassinations and this destruction constituted the most comprehensive attack on Catholicism since the French Revolution, an event that many Spanish Catholics now saw as the "stepmother" to the Loyalist government in Spain.⁷⁵ Within Spain, bishops and Catholic intellectuals sacralized the conflict, defining it, in the words of one activist, as "a crusade against Communism, to save religion, the nation, and the family."⁷⁶

With the Soviet Union sending material to the Loyalist armies and Hitler and Mussolini aiding Franco's Nationalist army, the civil war also became a global conflict. Liberals on both sides of the Atlantic rallied to support a democratic government threatened by a fascist rebellion, but Catholics around the world understood this mobilization as condoning anticlerical slaughter. When the Loyalists surrendered in the spring of 1939, the newly elected Pius XII sent a telegram to Franco congratulating him on this "long-desired Catholic victory in Spain." In return, the generalissimo expressed gratitude

to the Holy Father for his prayers in the battle against “enemies of Religion, the Fatherland and Christian civilization.”⁷⁷

[p. 203] **VI**

THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR catapulted French philosopher Jacques Maritain into a newfound fame, and he soon became the world’s most influential Catholic intellectual. His story was an unlikely one. After a personal crisis that included contemplation of suicide, Maritain converted to Catholicism, along with his wife, Raïssa, in 1906. He devoted himself to neo-Thomist analyses of aesthetics and culture, lecturing at Catholic universities and contributing to philosophical journals. His *Three Reformers* identified, in rote fashion, Luther, Descartes, and Rousseau as the men responsible for the modern world and “all the problems which torment it.”⁷⁸

Democratic politics seemed suspect. “The more I think about it,” he wrote to a friend in 1914, “the more I am persuaded that we must have a political doctrine and that this doctrine can only be anti-revolutionary, anti-republican, anti-constitutional, and therefore monarchist.”⁷⁹ In 1922, Maritain dismissed the work of the American philosopher William James as a “philosophy of Democracy” that “pictures the world as an immense swarm, with no established order or hierarchy, the wills of all members being equal in importance.”⁸⁰

For Maritain, the turning point came in 1926 with Pius XI’s condemnation of Charles Maurras and the Action Française.⁸¹ Maritain wholeheartedly accepted the pope’s decision, and in a major break with onetime allies, ended his cooperation with the movement. As democracies crumbled across Europe and Latin America, Maritain began to write less about aesthetics and more about politics. He published an essay arguing that Thomas Aquinas had favored democracy as a form of government, implicitly challenging his onetime mentor, the Dominican priest Reginald Garrigou-LaGrange, the world’s most prominent neo-Thomist and a top papal adviser. Garrigou-LaGrange admired the Action Française and thought only “arrivistes” and “incompetents” would run for office in a democracy.⁸² In 1934, after the Nazis came to power in Germany and a right-wing demonstration in Paris ended with fifteen dead, Maritain drafted an anti-fascist manifesto, “For the Common Good.”⁸³ In 1936, he published his masterpiece, *Integral* [p. 204] *Humanism*, in Spanish and French and then in multiple translations, a text that became one of the key documents of twentieth-century political thought.

It was an unusual treatise. *Integral Humanism* contained sharp criticism of “imperious” atheism within the Soviet Union. But Maritain criticized with equal vigor “individualist liberalism.” Like a surprising number of Catholic reformers, Maritain dove into the recently published manuscripts of the young Karl Marx and pondered the problem of worker alienation.⁸⁴ Another Catholic personalist and Maritain ally, Emmanuel Mounier, founded a journal, *Esprit*, preaching the need for a Catholicism able to circumvent dominant ideologies. “We reject the evil of East [communism] and West [capitalism] alike,” he wrote in the journal’s inaugural issue.⁸⁵

For Maritain, the flourishing of the human “person” required respect for the person’s embeddedness in communities such as the family, professions, and churches. No social theory should begin or end with an isolated individual quavering before a powerful state. “Person” was a term of art, and its varied meanings, filtered through translations of Maritain’s meandering French prose, frustrated him. A decade later he complained that “there are at least a dozen personalist doctrines, which at times have nothing more in common than the word ‘person.’”⁸⁶

But in the 1930s Maritain was clear. “Persons” possessed an inherent “dignity”—another Catholic key word. A free market capitalism shorn of buffering institutions would not protect persons. Neither would communists obsessed with class conflict or National Socialists obsessed with race. Catholics described the primary danger faced by the world as “totalitarianism,” a term popularized by two Maritain supporters, the German journalist and scholar Waldemar Gurian and the exiled leader of the Partito Popolare Italiano, Fr. Luigi Sturzo. Debates about what constituted “totalitarianism” occurred around the Catholic world in the 1930s and 1940s.⁸⁷

As a corollary, only a “pagan theology,” in the words of the German theologian Erik Peterson, another Maritain admirer, could endorse what so many Catholics had long considered a worthy goal: a unity of church and state. Catholics should not equate theology with politics and [p. 205] should instead welcome pluralism. (Maritain’s use of “pluralism” placed the term into widespread circulation.)⁸⁸ Democratic governments with universal suffrage followed from this distinction between religious and political authority, and Maritain drew on Aristotle to stress the vocation of the democratic politician, as opposed to a denigration of politics as “Machiavellian.”⁸⁹

Maritain promoted his version of personalism through ceaseless writing and traveling. Following a trip to Germany, he confided to Waldemar Gurian his dismay that some German Catholics had been won over by “the mystique of the Reich.”⁹⁰ He made the first of many visits to North America in 1933, where he established contact with intellectuals and reformers in the United States and Canada. In Quebec, especially, his disciples challenged the patriotic chauvinism they associated with French Canadian Catholicism.⁹¹ In 1934, Maritain gave a set of lectures on *Integral Humanism* in Santander, Spain, to little effect in a country hurtling toward a civil war.⁹² He traveled to Poznań, Poland, where he gave seminars and addressed virtually all of Poland’s Catholic elite at the International Thomistic Congress. Here, too, he cautioned against the “corporatist”—but not democratic—state favored by so many Catholics and became an inspiration for leaders of Poland’s nascent Christian Democratic Movement.⁹³

In Italy—where some Catholic intellectuals supported Mussolini into the late 1930s—Maritain’s ideas thrilled a cadre of young activists disenchanted with Il Duce. These activists would later become leaders of the postwar Christian Democratic Party, including the future Italian prime ministers Alcide De Gasperi, Giulio Andreotti, and Aldo Moro. Giovanni Battista Montini, a Brescia native whose father had been active in the Partito Popolare Italiano, admired Maritain and wrote an introduction for the Italian

translation of *Integral Humanism*. Montini became one of the closest aides of Pius XII and in 1963 he would be elected Pope Paul VI.⁹⁴

The outbreak of the Spanish Civil War gave Maritain a new international platform. Repeatedly, he explained to Catholics, even French cardinals, why Franco's rebellion should not be considered a "holy war."⁹⁵ In North America, Maritain and former German chancellor Heinrich Brüning inspired editors at *Commonweal* to draft a statement [p. 206] urging American Catholics not to believe that Franco will "inaugurate a beneficent and progressive social order." Even this mild criticism of Franco led to blistering attacks from other Catholic publications and a sharp decline in subscriptions.⁹⁶

By then, Maritain had sailed for South America. In Rio de Janeiro, his lectures on *Integral Humanism* attracted the country's leading intellectuals. The director of the country's most influential Catholic center, a onetime enthusiast for the Action Française, identified himself as an "open Catholic, democratic and reformist" after listening to Maritain.⁹⁷

In Buenos Aires, the reception was chillier. A few notables, including scientists who began a reading group dedicated to *Integral Humanism*, cheered on Maritain's efforts.⁹⁸ Still, important figures in the Argentine church, such as Fr. Gustavo Franceschi, questioned the wisdom of Maritain's "strong polemic." Franceschi agreed with Maritain that Catholics must reject Nazism and communism as "totalitarianisms ... opposed to Catholic doctrine." But he thought Maritain too quick to dismiss [p. 207] Portugal's Salazar and Spain's Franco. Franceschi's reports of his own visit to wartime Spain (where he brought supplies, including liturgical vestments, to embattled Spanish Catholic clergy) stressed persecution. "No Catholic in South America," he told Maritain in an open letter, "ignores that if the reds triumph in Spain, our continent will find itself in a very great danger." Argentine Catholics to the right of Franceschi flatly termed Maritain a communist.⁹⁹



Jacques Maritain, right, just after arriving in Rio de Janeiro, 1936. (*Rights reserved. Collection and photographic reproduction: National and University Library of Strasbourg*)

Maritain also reached out to like-minded Catholics in England. In London, the People and Freedom Group translated and reprinted essays by Maritain and his allies. Its executive secretary told Maritain that “your cause is our cause.”¹⁰⁰ Even among Maritain’s students, though, the sequence of opposition to individualism, emphasis on the human person, and support for democracy did not always unfold in predictable ways. One of his pupils, Yoshimitsu Yoshihiko, was one of the few Catholics among Japan’s intellectual elite. He absorbed Maritain’s criticism of the “isolated and abstract individual” but transposed it into an attack on a corrupt Western modernity and a justification for a “new East Asian spiritual civilization.”¹⁰¹

VII

INTEGRAL HUMANISM also contained an attack on “racist totalitarianism” as exhibited by Mussolini and Hitler.¹⁰² As Maritain knew, racism ran deep within the European and North American Catholic milieu. Poland’s most distinguished young Thomistic philosopher, an admirer of Maritain, had not hesitated in 1930 to recommend that Poles “defend our special Polish culture from a deluge by the bankrupt Jewish culture, particularly in education, art and social mores.”¹⁰³

Married to Raïssa, a Jew, and with many Jewish friends, Maritain sought to untie this anti-Semitic knot. His evolution away from the anti-Judaism in Catholic circles was halting, and as late as 1937, he ruminated on divine “penalty” or “punishment” of Jews. But he

also courageously denounced anti-Semitic laws. Others inspired by Maritain, often Catholic converts from Judaism based in Vienna, where they could still publish freely on the topic of next-door Nazi racism, thought [p. 208] it “absurd ... to make today’s Jews responsible for the crucifixion of Christ 2,000 years ago.”¹⁰⁴

This campaign against anti-Semitism overlapped with an equally fledgling campaign against colonialism and against racism directed toward people of Asian or African descent. Maritain admired the work of Mahatma Gandhi in India and supported Vincent Lebbe’s effort to build an Indigenous church in China. Maritain told Lebbe that Christianity must be “truly Chinese in China, as it is French in France or Italian in Italy.” No Catholic should consider “imposing the universal primacy of Greco-Latin culture.” When a shipment of Maritain’s books arrived in China, Lebbe offered Maritain his gratitude for the philosopher’s “admirable work.”¹⁰⁵

On his first visit to North America, Maritain reached out to the American Jesuit John LaFarge. Beginning with a parish assignment among Black Catholics in southern Maryland, LaFarge had spent much of his career attempting to diminish Euro-American Catholic racism. LaFarge published English translations of Maritain’s attacks on an “intrinsically inhuman” German racism and urged the French philosopher to view campaigns against anti-Semitism as part of a larger effort to “teach the Catholic world the principles of justice toward people of other races.” (He also prepped Maritain on how to respond if Black Catholics pressed him on the question of whether “the Catholic Church justified slavery.”) Maritain, in turn, described LaFarge’s 1937 *Interracial Justice*, the first Catholic book to define racism as a violation of the “human dignity of the person,” as a text of “first importance” and circulated it among European colleagues.¹⁰⁶

Pierre Charles, the Belgian Jesuit who from his teaching post in Louvain taught thousands of future missionaries, became the most significant European Catholic critic of racism. (Charles knew and admired both Vincent Lebbe and Maritain.) He authored the first Catholic dissection of the fraudulent *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, alleging a Jewish conspiracy to dominate the world, and continually insisted on humanity’s common origins and the “substantial equality of different races.”¹⁰⁷

Crucially, and for the first time, Catholics from European colonies entered this conversation. They found their voice (and each other) not in West Africa or Vietnam or India but in European capitals such as Paris, [p. 209] London, and Rome, where a growing number of students from the colonies arrived in the 1930s and where they formulated new ideas about colonialism and race. African Catholic students, especially, having won the opportunity to study in France through competitive examinations in Catholic secondary schools, shared inexpensive Parisian apartments or dormitories and discussed how to advance their native countries.

The most influential young African Catholic was Léopold Senghor. Senghor grew up in rural Senegal, where he was educated in missionary schools and converted from Islam to Catholicism before winning a scholarship to study in Paris. He excelled as a student,

qualifying to teach at an elite French lycée, or high school, and then at a French university. He also fell in with a group of African Catholic students and writers, including Paulette Nardal and Louis Thomas Achille, two cousins from Martinique. Nardal began an important pan-African literary journal and Achille, after his Paris sojourn, taught French at Howard University in Washington, DC. All of these students admired the writers of the Harlem Renaissance, and Senghor himself helped found the Negritude movement, emphasizing Black African culture and its independence from Western models. He became one of the first African-born writers to establish a major reputation in the West.¹⁰⁸ Senghor also read both Maritain and Emmanuel Mounier, and he even wrote an admiring tribute to the Reform Catholic hero of the French Revolution, Abbé Grégoire.¹⁰⁹

Both anti-fascist European Catholics and African Catholics studying in Paris were jolted into action by Benito Mussolini's decision to send the Italian army into Ethiopia in 1935. Since the early twentieth century, links between Italian Catholic missionaries and government officials in North Africa had eased once formidable tensions between state and church. In Libya, in the 1920s, missionaries provided up-to-date maps for Italian soldiers.¹¹⁰ In Ethiopia, missionaries and Catholic antislavery activists founded "freedom villages" as "oases of Christianity" free from any taint of slavery.¹¹¹

The invasion of Ethiopia, complete with atrocities that included the wiping out of whole villages with poison gas, led to sanctions from the League of Nations. Many Italian Catholics nonetheless endorsed this military venture. Milan's Cardinal Schuster hailed the invasion [p. 210] as opening Ethiopia to "Catholic faith and Roman civilization," and a delighted Mussolini broadcast the cardinal's speech on state radio. Another Italian bishop identified the country's critics as motivated by "Russian bolshevism, communism, international masonry [and] English Protestantism."¹¹²

Small groups of Catholics across Europe promoted a different view. Some French Catholics—including Maritain—denounced the "sophistry" of racism and mocked anyone who after the Italian invasion could with a straight face extol the "benefits of Western colonialism."¹¹³ (The editors of *Civiltà Cattolica* wanly responded by recommending "prudence.")¹¹⁴ Fr. Luigi Sturzo, now exiled to London, criticized an obviously "unjust war" from his vantage point as "a Catholic and as an Italian."¹¹⁵

Pius XI had expressed dismay at the prospect of the Italian invasion of Ethiopia before it occurred, but after the event he retreated into a studied neutrality. He pondered a direct appeal to Mussolini, acknowledging Italy's imperial ambitions but denying the justice of the particular conflict with Ethiopia. He quietly registered his disagreement with Cardinal Schuster's endorsement of the invasion.¹¹⁶

The pope knew that the invasion had had a disillusioning effect on African Catholics. Paulette Nardal and other African Catholic students based in Paris arranged lectures to Catholic groups across northern Europe on the importance of supporting Ethiopian independence. In Africa itself, European missionaries pleaded with the pope not to support Mussolini. The missionaries knew that African nationalists were castigating

Catholics and their church for condoning the invasion, with rumors in places such as the Gold Coast (Ghana) of weekly church collections being secretly sent to Mussolini via the Vatican. The mood in the Gold Coast, worried one local Catholic, was now “charged with anti-Catholicism.”¹¹⁷

VIII

JACQUES MARITAIN’S FEVERISH ACTIVITY made him the spokesman for anti-fascist Catholicism at a moment when Catholics around the world, beginning in Rome, were beginning to reconsider entanglements with fascist governments. After an extended drafting period, Pius [p. 211] XI issued two encyclicals on the world situation in 1937. The first, *Mit Brennender Sorge* (With Burning Concern), was smuggled into Germany by church officials, secretly distributed, and then read out loud from pulpits on Palm Sunday. Fundamentally, the letter protested Nazi violations of the 1933 Reichskonkordat. The sections on race—attacking the “myth of race and blood” and defending the origins of the New Testament in the Hebrew Bible—became the most cited and were the most direct challenge to Nazi ideology, although the document did not contain a condemnation of anti-Semitism.¹¹⁸

The second encyclical, *Divini Redemptoris*, appeared three days later. It defined “bolshhevistic and atheistic communism” as a “Satanic scourge” wherever it appeared—in the Soviet Union, Mexico, or Spain. While *Mit Brennender Sorge* pleaded for the protection of Church institutions—a conventional Catholic demand—*Divini Redemptoris* assailed communism for its effect not only on institutions but also on the human person. No ideology should be permitted to deny “human personality of all of its dignity.”¹¹⁹

Mit Brennender Sorge infuriated Hitler and Joseph Goebbels and led to an intensified assault on independent Catholic institutions. After launching an expanded defamation campaign against the clergy—in one of the largest mass rallies of the era, Goebbels sneered at the “animalistic sexual degeneracy” that he believed to be “widespread” among priests—pressure on Catholic institutions increased. “We will have to bend the Churches to our will and make them serve us,” Hitler told Goebbels. “The vow of celibacy must be eradicated. Church assets must be confiscated, and no one should be allowed to study theology before the age of twenty-four. With that we will rob them of their next generation. The monastic orders will have to be dissolved.”¹²⁰ Goebbels’s Propaganda Ministry, for a brief time, identified the battle against Catholicism as the government’s “most important domestic confrontation.”¹²¹

In 1936, Catholics in the town of Oldenburg successfully reversed the Nazi decision to remove all crucifixes from Catholic schools, with priests ringing church bells in protest, farmers erecting crucifixes in their fields, and women wearing small crucifixes as jewelry. In 1938, when the decree was reinstated, they could do little. When some parents attempted to organize a strike in protest, the Gestapo sent them [p. 212] to a concentration camp. The local government then closed all Catholic schools.¹²²

The British ambassador to the Vatican noticed a shift. Until 1935, he reported, “The Vatican’s consuming obsession was the fear of communism.” Now, “the German persecution seemed to have displaced the Communist menace as the Vatican’s major and immediate cause of preoccupation.”¹²³

In Italy, the promulgation of Nazi-inspired racial laws in 1938, including laws prohibiting marriage between Catholics and baptized Jewish converts, seemed yet another warning signal. Pius XI became more confrontational in his unscripted remarks and issued a plea for Catholic universities to discredit specious doctrines of a biological “race.” He told a group of French trade unionists that limits must be placed on the state.¹²⁴ He told a group of Belgians that all Catholics were “spiritually” Semites. Racist legislation made him “ashamed to be an Italian.”¹²⁵

John LaFarge toured Europe that same year. When Pius XI learned LaFarge was nearby, he summoned him to the Vatican for a secret meeting and charged him with drafting an encyclical on race. “Say what you would say,” Pius XI told LaFarge, “if you were Pope.” He knew of LaFarge through reading the Jesuit’s just published *Interracial Justice*. LaFarge spent a summer in Paris working with a German Jesuit, Gustav Gundlach, and a French Jesuit on the assignment.

LaFarge had studied in Innsbruck as a seminarian and had contacts across the continent. His letters to a friend in the United States—with coded references to evade German and Italian censors—registered a dawning realization that an entire Catholic civilization was at risk. LaFarge favored the Nationalists in the Spanish Civil War and hoped that Franco would accept Portugal’s Salazar as a model and build a “Catholic cooperative state.” But he worried, too, about the “subjugation of the Church” in Spain. (And one Spanish cardinal would soon be writing the pope to complain about “ostentatious Catholic ceremonies” endorsed by his peers that venerated the Franco regime.) In Rome, before meeting the pope, LaFarge was dismayed to find anti-Semitic materials translated from the German in the city’s bookstores.¹²⁶

While visiting a seminary classmate, now a pastor at the most prominent parish in Koblenz in the heart of the Catholic Rhineland, LaFarge [p. 213] was stunned by widespread misinformation. “We understand,” parishioners told him, “that in Paris the streets are running with blood; there is a terrible revolution and people are being murdered by the Jews and Bolsheviks.” When LaFarge denied this, one dismayed parishioner responded by denouncing “the stuff [the Nazis] have been handing out to us here.” In late-night discussions at the rectory, local priests sardonically confided that while they remained “free to hold our beautiful pilgrimage and Corpus Christi processions,” the Nazi government used this freedom to demonstrate “how much Hitler loved the Church.” Honest criticism of the government, on the other hand, might lead to imprisonment in Dachau. LaFarge reflected:

Here had flourished the center of a great organized campaign of intensive Catholic living, of charitable works, of religious instruction, of apostolic works for all classes, of social reform, of liturgical realization. Here the banner of Christ the King had been

unfurled before vast multitudes in public squares. Here the clouds of godless Marxism had been rolled away, while Germany's great Catholic traditions were preserved or revived.

Would this Catholic world survive Nazism? "When things are definitely past," LaFarge worried, "they seem like dreams."¹²⁷

LaFarge's collaborator, Gustav Gundlach, was more scathing. "We have to see clearly," he told LaFarge, "that this business of race could become no less a danger to the world than red communism." The new pope, Pius XII, elected in early 1939, declined to release the encyclical drafted by LaFarge and Gundlach. A dismayed Gundlach urged LaFarge to read a new biography of Charles Montalembert and see how "this great patriot and Catholic" had offered a positive vision at a moment when "so many prelates were resigning themselves to the system."¹²⁸

In a subsequent letter, Gundlach regretted that "as a result of our own anti-communism, it was already secretly hoped that we could present ourselves as allies and companions, in one way or another, of the Authoritarians and Totalitarians." Catholics in South America might face a desperate choice between "communism and national totalitarian [p. 214] ism."¹²⁹ Alerted that the Gestapo might arrest him, Gundlach left Germany for Rome, where he would sit out the war. He complained that "modern anti-democratic Catholics" had proven too willing to conciliate dictatorial leaders. "Over and over again the historian will ask the question," he sadly concluded, "How could all this have happened without a protest as loud and clear as befitted the gigantic dimensions of events?"¹³⁰

IX

PIUS XI AND Secretary of State Eugenio Pacelli discussed Edith Stein's plea for a denunciation of the Nazis in a private meeting in the spring of 1933, as evidenced in Pacelli's handwritten notes. Then negotiating the Reichskonkordat between Hitler and the Vatican, they sent only a form letter of acknowledgment.¹³¹

Only months before, like virtually every European Catholic intellectual in the interwar era, Stein had made her way to the home of Jacques and Raïssa Maritain, just outside of Paris, where the couple organized a long-running salon. Discussions began in the early afternoon, included tea, and occasionally went late into the evening. Stein spent a "wonderful day" there. Jacques Maritain then sent her an inscribed copy of one of his philosophical works. In reply, Stein regretted that her teaching duties at the Catholic Pedagogical Institute in Münster prevented her from devoting herself to "principally philosophical questions."¹³²

Soon after Hitler took power, Stein lost her teaching position. Jews were no longer allowed to serve on college or university faculties. Martin Heidegger personally dismissed Husserl, his and Stein's teacher, from the university at Freiburg because of Husserl's Jewish ancestry. Stein decided to write her autobiography, focusing on her Jewish childhood and using the blank sides of a typescript of an essay on Aquinas. "I am not

permitted to give any lectures this semester,” she told a friend, “because of my Jewish descent.”¹³³

Stein formally entered a women’s religious order, the Discalced Carmelites, at the age of forty-two, a few months after her letter to Pius XI. She took the religious name of Sister Teresa Benedicta of the Cross. The violence of Kristallnacht in November 1938, including the destruction [p. 215] of synagogues in nearby Cologne, impressed upon her the dangers she faced. She moved just across the German border to a Carmelite convent in Echt, Holland, founded during the Kulturkampf as a haven when Bismarck expelled nuns and priests from Germany in the 1870s. Stein’s sister, Rosa, also a Catholic convert, made it to Holland as well. But German armies conquered and occupied the country in the spring of 1940. Stein began a desperate effort to find a new home. She arranged for a place in a Carmelite convent in Fribourg, Switzerland, but Swiss government officials rejected her request for asylum in order to avoid a “dangerous precedent.”¹³⁴

When the Dutch Catholic bishops courageously protested the Nazi treatment of the Jews on July 26, 1942, the German high command retaliated. A week later, two SS officers appeared in Stein’s convent and required her to leave in only ten minutes. As a Catholic convert and nun she might be protected. As a Jew her presence was intolerable. Other nuns hurriedly helped her pack. All Jews who had converted to Catholicism were grouped together in a transit camp, and one detainee witnessed Stein comforting separated families. Rosa was also arrested. On August 5, Stein wrote to ask sisters still living in the convent to save her last scholarly manuscript. On August 6, she requested “woolen stockings [and] two blankets” and, for Rosa, a toothbrush, cross, and rosary. That night, about one thousand Jews were deported, jammed into freight cars despite the summer heat. On August 7, the train stopped in Schifferstadt, in eastern Germany, and a station master spoke briefly with Stein. She told him she was “traveling East.” On August 9, 1942, she was murdered in the gas chambers at Auschwitz.¹³⁵

Notes to Chapter 8

Original chapter endnotes, with numbering preserved.

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