

Book Reviews

THE SILENCE OF PIUS XII.

By *Carlo Falconi*. Translated by Bernard Wall

(Faber. £3.50).

Review by Whitall N. Perry

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By now the issue is comfortably academic: the result has largely been achieved; but when Rolf Hochhuth's drama, *The Representative*, appeared in 1963, a wave of anguish shook the Catholic Church (or at least that portion influential with the press). Had Pius XII actually failed his duty in refusing to speak out where he could and should have done? Was he really a Germanophile who could wink at anything to save his flock from Bolshevism? An impartial investigation was needed, and some publishers in Milan and Monaco (one knows the leanings of the fourth estate) commissioned Carlo Falconi to get to the bottom of the matter through access to the relevant archives. However, that an English translation of his discoveries should be appearing five years after the original edition indicates that certain consciences are still not entirely at rest.

The background for all this can best be understood in the penumbra of what Alexis Curvers calls "l'Entreprise générale de la Subversion". The formula is simple: to destroy an institution, it is first necessary to demolish the image of its strongest leaders. The systematic auto-dismemberment of the Church in the last decade first postulated the removal of its keystone—the spiritual and intellectual legacy here exemplified in the person of Pius XII. A silence indeed exists, but it is not that alleged of this Pope towards the crimes of the last war; rather is it a Conspiracy of Silence from high places regarding an even graver devastation—that of the soul and essence of the Church, its holy and supernatural heritage so necessary for salvation: "Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."

No amount of documentation can forge a personality; it is the personality that throws light on the documents. But a manifest premise is that a Pope—speak he never a word—is by definition ineradicably opposed to irreligion and monstrous crime unless he expressly goes on record to the contrary.

Signor Falconi tells us this "is not a polemical work". He protests his "astonishing disinterestedness" and says "we shall examine, we shall not judge. The true and proper judgment must be for the reader himself to deduce." But promptings from the author are certainly not lacking. He takes Pius XII to task for failing to heed his own criticisms of

Benedict XIV (as though a parallel existed between the Axis Powers and the Catholic courts of eighteenth century Europe). First we are told that the silence of the Sovereign Pontiff had "inadequate motives," later, that it "amounted to complicity with iniquity". His spiritual consolations are "as remote and cold as the stars". We read of "his usual vague and generalized style", of "his enormous sin of omission", of his "blind trust in diplomacy": "the root of such disconcerting obstinacy must have lain in some infantile fixation". He regards the election of Eugenio Pacelli in 1939 (the cardinalate was unanimous) "as a fatal error of judgment", and says that "his unconscious professional deformation explains the final victory of the diplomat over the man of God." He equates Pius XII's Catholic exclusivism with "Hitler's blasphemy... in identifying God with the land and blood of the German race." There is an echo of Christ's temptation in the scoffing challenge: "After all it is written in the Gospel that the gates of hell shall not prevail against (the Church)—and Pius XII recalled this in paragraph 38 of his *Summi Pontificatus*." Did not Leo the Great, unarmed, halt Attila the Hun? (as though Attila, recognized as the "Scourge of God", could have the remotest resemblance to a gigantically armed psychopathic house painter from modern Austria). "Terrorism... if confronted with unexpected resistance... collapses." Moreover, "(the Church) has at her disposal the weapons guaranteed to bring about the inevitable and final victory of all spiritual power when assailed by brute force."... What weapons? And where today even are the voices of indignation crying out from ecclesiastical authorities in condemnation of persecutions and massacres in Russia, China, Tibet?

Now in fact, for anyone capable of exercising the *principium contradictionis*, there are excellent citations in the book, especially by Pius XII, giving all the defense needed. But these are patronizingly explained away on psychological grounds. Thus, in a manifestation of courage by the Pontiff "lurks a nostalgia for adventure", while restraint in speech brands him as "the sibyl of Cumae", or as "incredibly utopian". When he writes in his first encyclical: "Our paternal heart is torn by anguish... Because of this apocalyptic foresight of disaster, imminent and remote, We feel We have a duty to raise with still greater insistence the eyes and hearts of those in whom there yet remains good will to the One from Whom alone comes the salvation of the world"—when he writes thus compassionately, we are told this is "all he could find to say". Falcon does admit with the Christmas message of 1942, i.e., "... these hundreds of thousands of persons who, by the fact alone of their nationality or their race, have been destined for death by progressive extinction"—that "the Pope had begun to talk. But, alas, he had also finished."

With reason. Just twenty days later, von Ribbentrop was to say: "If the Vatican should threaten or try out any political or propagandist action against Germany, the Reich would obviously have to retaliate in an appropriate manner... The Reich would have no lack of effective means..." Adam Stephen Sapieha, the Archbishop of Cracow, knew this well enough: "We have no need of any outward show of the Pope's loving concern for our misfortunes, when it only serves to augment them." And Pius XII said in an audience given to Mgr. Pirro Scavizzi and Signora Luciana Frassati (an Italian lady prominent in government and diplomatic circles): "Tell everyone, everyone you can, that the Pope is in anguish for them and with them! Say that many times he has thought of hurling excommunications at Nazism, of denouncing the bestiality of the extermination of the Jews to the civilized world. Serious threats of reprisal have come to our ears, not against our person, but against our unhappy sons who are now under Nazi domination. The

liveliest recommendations have reached us through various channels that the Holy See should not take a drastic stand. After many tears and many prayers, I came to the conclusion that a protest from me would not only not help anyone, but would arouse the most ferocious anger against the Jews and multiply acts of cruelty because they are undefended." Is this clear enough? (Yet the indefatigable author only cites these words as evidence that the Pope could not be excused on grounds of ignorance regarding the situation in Poland). Meanwhile Pius XII told Harold Tittman, President Roosevelt's personal representative to the Vatican, "that, in speaking of atrocities, he could not have mentioned the Nazis without also mentioning the Bolsheviks, and this would surely not have pleased the Allies". Referring later in a letter to von Preysing, Bishop of Berlin, about his Christmas message mentioned above, the Pope lamented, "We are unable to bring them any other effective help than that of Our prayers."

This massive deposition is threaded throughout with one long cry of horror. Thus, taken at random (for anyone who needs reminding): Poland, as is well known, was the tragic theater for the sacrifice of six million (??) Jews... mass extermination... unspeakable atrocities... savagery of the criminals... unspeakable acts of violence... wicked and hair-raising events... organized and scientific genocide... gas chambers burning systematically... assassinations in the name of euthanasia... colossal repressions... homicidal lunacy... brutal and grotesque racial theories... refinement of sadism... inhuman banishment of millions... degradation of mankind... hecatombs of victims... bodies mown down by hunger or execution squads... tortures for fun during nightly orgies... Jews and gypsies bloodily pursued... No reader will question the authenticity of the facts (although it is for history to reveal the final figures), but these and endless similar phrases are seeded throughout the book in such manner as to accumulate subconsciously an avalanche of rage culminating at the gates of St. Peter's.

Some of the heaviest-handed documentation comes in the 134 pages on the Croatian episode. It is known that violently antagonistic nationalist factions with religious facades left a wake of carnage in the short-lived Croat State—here represented as seven hundred thousand Serbs massacred by Croatians for refusing conversion to Rome, while the Catholic Pavelic, the Balkan *Duce*, contemplates a basket on his desk loaded with human eyeballs, and Orthodox priests are having their beards torn off, or—shod like horses—are hobbling about in the streets. And what is the Vicar of Christ held to be doing all this time? Apparently sitting in his "golden palace", his features wreathed in a bland diplomatic smile.

Testimony unfavorable to Pius XII is far more easily come by than its contrary, but it is known that forty thousand refugees—mainly Jews—were secretly sheltered in Rome under the Pope's personal protection, over four hundred in the precincts of the Vatican itself. And Pinhas Lapid, Israelian consul at Milan during the Pope's lifetime, is quoted in *Le Monde* (December 13th 1963): "I can affirm that the Pope personally, the Holy See, the nuncios, and the whole Catholic Church have saved from 150,000 to 400,000 Jews from certain death. When I was received at Venice by Mgr. Roncalli, who was to become John XXIII, and expressed the gratitude of my country for his action in favor of the Jews when he was nuncio at Istanbul, he interrupted me on several occasions to remind me that he had acted each time on the precise order of Pius XII." He recounts concurring statements of key Jewish witnesses, and continues: "All our press speaks the same words,

and two propositions have been made to plant a forest bearing the name of Pius XII." The *Gazette de Liege* (23rd January 1964) cites Maurice Edelman, president of the Anglo-Jewish Association: "The intervention of Pope Pius XII has made it possible to save tens of thousands of Jews during the war." This intervention reached from Italy, France, Belgium, and Holland, to Slovakia, Rumania, Turkey, Greece, Bulgaria, and Hungary.

Finally, there is the homage rendered by Paul VI just before leaving Israel on 5th January 1964 (quoted in the French weekly edition of the *Osservatore Romano* for 10th January of that year): "...We maintain, for all men and all peoples, only thoughts of benevolence. The Church indeed loves all equally. Our great predecessor, Pius XII, affirmed this with vigor and on many occasions, in the course of the last world conflict, and everyone is aware of what he did for the defense and salvation of all those who were afflicted, without any distinction. And yet, as you are aware, one has attempted to cast suspicions and even accusations on the memory of this great Pontiff. We are happy to have the occasion to declare on this day and in this place: nothing is more unjust than this attack against so venerable a memory. Those who, like Us, have closely known this admirable soul, are aware of the point to which his feelings could go, his compassion towards human sufferings, his courage, his tenderness of heart. Likewise are those aware who came on the morrow of the war, tears in eyes, to thank him for having saved their lives."

None of this, of course, is mentioned in *The Silence of Pius XII*; and the press itself—Catholic and other—largely mutilated (when it did not simply ignore) the speech of Paul VI in Israel. Those who see Pius XII as a monster will only have their views confirmed by the allegations in this book, while those who regard him as the last great Pope of the Church are certainly not going to have their judgment altered. The true silence of Pius XII is that delineated in the Arabic proverb: *The dogs bark; the caravan passes.*