



Mit Brennender Sorge (1937–2027): A Nonagenary Reflection on the Genesis, Clandestine Dissemination and Impact on Church-State Diplomacy

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.100801159>

Received: 12 September 2026; Accepted: 17 September 2026; Published: 26 September 2026

ABSTRACT

On Palm Sunday, 21 March 1937, Pope Pius XI's encyclical *Mit brennender Sorge* (With Burning Concern) was read from the pulpits of all the German Catholic Churches. Composed entirely in German rather than the traditional ecclesiastical Latin and addressed directly to the German Church, the encyclical categorically denounced the violation of the *Reichskonkordat*, the deification of the state and the idolatry of race and nation. This document was certainly an attempt of the Church to confront Hitler and his ideology. This encyclical represented a significant development in the modern Church-State relationships and has much to offer to the contemporary problems faced by the Vatican in international diplomacy. While celebrated as a courageous criticism of Nazism and a transnational policy influencer, the story of this encyclical is not without historiographical complexity. This paper offers a critical, nonagenary reflection on the historical context, genesis, composition and the impact of the encyclical by analysing a vast body of primary and secondary sources. By presenting both the critics and the advocates of the encyclical, this paper aims to arrive at a clearer historiographical perspective.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND GENESIS OF THE ENCYCLICAL (1933–1937)

The first decades of the 20th century posed unprecedented challenges to the Catholic Church. Secularism and communism were on the rise and the European Catholic empires that protected the Church and its rights no longer existed. The emerging socio-political scenario signalled a clear separation of the Church and the state. The long period of the 'Roman Question' and the loss of territorial independence had left the Church weak in the international arena. Boundaries of nations were redefined and newer countries were formed especially after World War I. All these 'newer challenges' required 'newer solutions'. The Church deemed concordat diplomacy as this 'newer solution'. While 'concordats' date back to the middle ages, with the promulgation of the 1917 Code of Canon Law, it received an internal legal framework. So much so, altogether more than forty concordats were signed during the pontificates of Pius XI and Pius XII¹. From the time of the abdication of Kaiser Wilhelm II, the Church had been on the lookout for a concordat with the Weimar Republic. But the Church's demand for state support for the Catholic schools and for Catholic religious instruction in the public school remained a point of contention². With Hitler rising to power in 1933, the Nazi regime needed a legitimization in international politics³ and the Church in turn was seeking a concordat that would provide legal guarantees for the rights of the Catholic Church in Germany. Besides, given the early manifestations of Nazi violence, the Vatican found it

¹ Klaus Scholder, *A Requiem for Hitler and Other New Perspectives on the German Church Struggle* (London: SCM Press, 1989), 188.

² Robert A. Krieg, "The Vatican Concordat with Hitler's Reich," *America* 189, no. 5 (2003): 15.

³ Joseph A. Biesinger, "The Reich Concordat of 1933: The Church Struggle Against Nazi Germany," in *Controversial Concordats: The Vatican's Relations with Napoleon, Mussolini, and Hitler*, Frank J. Coppa (ed.) (Washington D.C: Catholic University of America Press, 2011) 142.



prudent to secure "some cast-iron legal guarantees for the German Church"⁴. The German episcopate found a concordat to be the "last hope for avoiding further *Kulturkampf*"⁵ and signalled their assent. Thus the Church entered into the *Reichskonkordat* with the German state on 20 July 1933, with Cardinal Eugenio Pacelli, Secretary of State representing the Church and Franz von Papen representing the German Reich⁶. But as the Pope himself feared,⁷ all the concordat hopes proved to be momentary and short-lived.

The Erosion of the Reichskonkordat

No sooner had the ink dried on the concordat agreement, than the Nazi regime began violating the agreements unilaterally⁸. Hitler "stripped the concordat of its contents and very soon only the skeleton remained"⁹. "National Socialists encroached on Catholic religiosity through a series of small but aggressive acts even as they proclaimed tolerance and safety"¹⁰. Hitler who promised to defend the Christian foundations of the nation¹¹ soon shed his conciliatory mantle. Even before the concordat was signed, Hitler's regime breached the mutual agreements that were being discussed, when they imposed compulsory sterilization law for people with hereditary conditions¹². On 1 December 1936 the Hitler Youth Law was passed subordinating all other associations to the Hitler Youth Movement and thus restricted the activities of the Catholic youth groups¹³. Next came the turn of the confessional schools and all the diplomatic protests fell on deaf ears¹⁴. "Attacks on the Church continued with increasing severity, through propaganda, police terror, the closing of Catholic schools, suppression of Catholic charitable organizations, suppression and take-over of Catholic youth movements" etc.¹⁵. Between 1933 and 1937 over seventy protest notes and memoranda were sent by the Holy See to the German Reich¹⁶. The annual meeting of the Fulda Bishops' Conference held on 18 August 1936 sent a delegation of German bishops to Rome to request the Pope to intervene¹⁷ and they met the Pope in early 1937 and the result was a papal encyclical¹⁸. Even the journey of these bishops was under the pretext of *ad limina* visits to prevent Gestapo interventions¹⁹. This was a point of no return and the end of a diplomatic approach tried for over three years and the beginning of a confrontational front between the Church and the Nazi regime.

⁴ John F. Pollard, *The Papacy in the Age of Totalitarianism, 1914-1958* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 252.

⁵ Hubert Wolf, *Pope and Devil: The Vatican's Archives and the Third Reich*, Kenneth Kronenberg (trans.) (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2010), 177.

⁶ Holy See, "Inter Sanctam Sedem et Germanicam Rempubicam Sollemnis Conventio," *Acta Apostolica Sedis* 25 (1933): 389-413.

⁷ Philip Hughes, *Pope Pius the Eleventh* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1938), 298.

⁸ Robert P. Ericksen, *Complicity in the Holocaust: Churches and Universities in Nazi Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 109.

⁹ Zsolt Aradi, *Pius XI: The Pope and the Man* (New York: Hanover House, 1958), 221.

¹⁰ Skye Doney, "Brown and Black Boundaries: Nazism and German Catholicism in the Summer of 1933," *The Catholic Historical Review* 104, no. 2 (2018): 272, <https://doi.org/10.1353/cat.2018.0026>.

¹¹ Grgo Grbešić, "The Church Against Totalitarianism During the Pontificate of Pius XI," *Diacovensia : Teološki Prilozi* 31, no. 3 (2023): 454, <https://doi.org/10.31823/d.31.3.6>.

¹² F. J. Coppa, "Between Anti-Judaism and Anti-Semitism, Pius XI's Response to the Nazi Persecution of the Jews: Precursor to Pius XII's 'Silence'?", *Journal of Church and State* 47, no. 1 (2005): 72, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jcs/47.1.63>. Also see Pollard, *The Papacy in the Age of Totalitarianism, 1914-1958*, 267.

¹³ William M. Harrigan, "Pius XI and Nazi Germany, 1937-1939," *The Catholic Historical Review* 51, no. 4 (1966): 459; Hughes, *Pope Pius the Eleventh*, 300.

¹⁴ Harrigan, "Pius XI and Nazi Germany, 1937-1939," 473.

¹⁵ Patrick J. Corish, "The Holy See and the Second World War," *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 55, no. 217 (1966): 93.

¹⁶ Gerhard Besier, *The Holy See and Hitler's Germany*, William Reginald Ward (trans.) (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) 143.

¹⁷ Carlo Falconi, *The Silence of Pius XII*, Bernard Wall (trans.) (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1970), 400.

¹⁸ David I. Kertzer, *The Popes Against the Jews: The Vatican's Role in the Rise of Modern Anti-semitism*, (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), 277.

¹⁹ Harrigan, "Pius XI and Nazi Germany, 1937-1939," 460.

Towards a Definitive Condemnation

The Holy See had been planning a condemnation of the errors of the National Socialist ideology from as early as 1934. The fundamental work of Nazism, *Myth of the Twentieth Century* by Rosenberg was placed on the index by the Holy Office on 5 February 1934. Henceforth the Holy Office debated whether to use Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, the *magnum opus* of the Führer as a basis for a solemn syllabus of errors²⁰ like the one issued by Pope Pius IX. When the idea came up for discussion in a meeting in October 1934, the Pope agreed to proceed with the same and Fr. Vladimir Ledóchowski, the Superior General of the Jesuits was asked to constitute a team for the same. He assigned Jesuits Franz Hurth and Johannes Baptista Rabeneck. A draft condemnation was submitted as early as March 1935²¹. Later other experts like Louis Chagnon SJ, Martin-Stanislas Gillet OP- Superior General of the Dominicans- and Msgr Ernesto Ruffini -a permanent consultor of the Holy Office- joined hands, to form various drafts of the proposed condemnation²². Consultor of the Holy Office, Msgr Domenico Tardini strongly backed the decision to move ahead with the condemnation and in his opinion two documentary condemnations were necessary; an encyclical of solemn condemnation and a decree by the Holy Office with the list of erroneous propositions²³. However, the project of the Holy Office was halted because some members of the hierarchy like Cardinal Pacelli, Cardinal Francesco Marchetti Selvaggiani, Secretary of the Holy Office and Cesare Vincenzo Orsenigo, the German Nuncio feared a definitive rupture and retaliations from the Nazi regime²⁴. But, the work continued on the syllabus and it was permanently benched only after the publication of the encyclical. Because, Pacelli and probably Ledóchowski thought it better to avoid a 'double document'²⁵ as there existed no further scope or need for further statements.

From 1935 the Pope had been planning an encyclical to tell the Nazis in clear terms what he actually thought about them. However, the potential risks prompted him to postpone such a direct confrontation²⁶. By 1936 the conflicts between the Church and the Nazi regime escalated and there was an evident rift. As per the invitation from the Pope through the Cardinal Secretary of State sent on 21 December 1936 Cardinals Adolf Bertram, Michael von Faulhaber and Joseph Schulte, along with bishops Clemens August von Galen and Konrad von Preysing,²⁷ met the Pope on Sunday, 17 January 1937. Meanwhile the Pope was recuperating from a grave illness and the cardinals met him at his bedside²⁸ for which we have internal textual evidence in the encyclical itself²⁹. Citing the Faulhaber archival sources, historian Peter Godman outlines the discussions as follows:

The anxieties of Pius XI and Pacelli at the consequences of an encyclical were expressed at a meal following the audience with the Pope on January 17, 1937. Then the Secretary of State asked whether such a document might lead the Nazis to do away with the concordat. Schulte, the Cardinal of Cologne, thought that was possible. Cardinal Faulhaber of Munich disagreed. Much depended on the form and style that the encyclical took. "Polemic" must be avoided, opined Faulhaber. National

²⁰ Wolf, *Pope and Devil*, 264.

²¹ Coppa, "Between Anti-Judaism and Anti-Semitism, Pius XI's Response to the Nazi Persecution of the Jews," 73.

²² Pollard, *The Papacy in the Age of Totalitarianism, 1914-1958*, 265.

²³ Wolf, *Pope and Devil*, 258; Pollard, *The Papacy in the Age of Totalitarianism, 1914-1958*, 266.

²⁴ Frank J. Coppa, *The Papacy, the Jews, and the Holocaust* (Washington D. C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2006), 159; See also Emma Fattorini, *Hitler, Mussolini and the Vatican: Pope Pius XI and the Speech that was Never Made*, Carl Ipsen (trans.) (Cambridge: Polity, 2011), 116; Wolf, *Pope and Devil*, 262.

²⁵ Peter Godman, *Hitler and the Vatican: inside the secret archives that reveal the new story of the Nazis and the Church* (New York: Free Press, 2004), 147.

²⁶ William Patch, "The Catholic Church, the Third Reich, and the Origins of the Cold War: On the Utility and Limitations of Historical Evidence," *The Journal of Modern History* 82, no. 2 (2010): 408, <https://doi.org/10.1086/651615>.

²⁷ Kevin P. Spicer, *Resisting the Third Reich: The Catholic Clergy in Hitler's Berlin* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois Univ. Press, 2004), 54; Biesinger, "The Reich Concordat of 1933," 156.

²⁸ Angelo Martini, "Il Cardinale Faulhaber e l'enciclica 'Mit Brennender Sorge,'" *Archivum Historiae Pontificiae* 2 (1964): 305; Elisabetta Galdabini, "Diplomazia vaticana, allocuzioni papali e Germania nazista dal concordato tedesco (1933) all'enciclica Mit brennender Sorge (1937) (II)," *La Scuola Cattolica* 118, no. 4 (1990): 363; Fattorini, *Hitler, Mussolini and the Vatican*, 115; John Cornwell, *Hitler's Pope: The Secret History of Pius XII* (London: Penguin, 2008), 181.

²⁹ Pius XI, "Mit Brennender Sorge," *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* IV (1937): 168, 169.

Socialism and the Party should not even be mentioned. 'The document ought to refer to Germany, but should deal with dogma and be of a peaceful character.'³⁰

Finally, Cardinal Faulhaber was entrusted with the task of the preparation of the draft of the encyclical³¹. He set to work immediately, without even the help of a stenographer- to avoid any public notice. As per the archival sources, he submitted a rough draft as early as 21 January³². Considering the time taken for the preparation of the draft, one could reasonably assume that Faulhaber only edited a pre-existing proposal, probably a proposal brought from the Fulda Bishops' Conference itself. In the words of Emma Fattorini who compared the various draft materials available, the first draft maintained a pastoral spirit and was intentionally generic in nature to avoid offending Hitler³³. However, this draft was later made sharper. Even some accusatory elements were added to Faulhaber's conciliatory draft. The Cardinal Secretary of State played a decisive role in reshaping the draft. Thus, the draft submitted to Pope Pius XI was a lot more intense and incisive³⁴. Cardinal Pacelli elaborated the first part that addressed the violations of the concordat and even included the opening words *Mit brennender Sorge* (with burning concern), by which the encyclical is best known³⁵. While Faulhaber's draft maintained the style of a spiritual admonition and warning about Nazi heresy, Pacelli added a severe condemnation of 'the Church policy of the Nazi regime'. Thus, as Peter Pfister remarks, "the encyclical would go beyond just comforting the faithful, to show the world that Hitler's regime was in breach of contract and hostile to the Church"³⁶. There is a consensus among scholars regarding the role of the Secretary of State in articulating the encyclical on behalf of the Pope and very much in keeping with the mind of the Pope³⁷. Besides, when a group of German bishops thanked the Pope for the definitive condemnation in *Mit brennender Sorge*, he seemingly pointed to Cardinal Pacelli, saying that the latter was responsible for its message³⁸.

While most encyclicals are written in ecclesiastical Latin, this encyclical was composed in German with the intention of reaching out better to the German speaking faithful. The very next issue of *L'Osservatore Romano* after the readings on Palm Sunday, published the German encyclical along with its translation in Italian³⁹. The 1937 *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* also published the bilingual version⁴⁰. Thus *Mit brennender Sorge* was special even in the choice of language.

³⁰ Godman, *Hitler and the Vatican*, 146.

³¹ Patch, "The Catholic Church, the Third Reich, and the Origins of the Cold War," 405–6; Grbešić, "The Church Against Totalitarianism During the Pontificate of Pius XI," 457; Peter Pfister, ed., *Eugenio Pacelli - Pius XII (1876 - 1958) in the View of Scholarship: Papers for the Exhibition "Opus Iustitiae Pax" Presented in Munich from 17 March to 3 May 2009* (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2012), 98.

³² Anthony Rhodes, *The Vatican in the Age of the Dictators: 1922-1945* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973), 203; Gerard Noel, *Pius XII: The Hound of Hitler* (London: Continuum, 2010), 87.

³³ Fattorini, *Hitler, Mussolini and the Vatican*, 118.

³⁴ Fattorini, *Hitler, Mussolini and the Vatican*, 118; Lauren Faulkner Rossi, *Wehrmacht Priests: Catholicism and the Nazi War of Annihilation* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2015), 48; Jacques Kornberg, *The Pope's Dilemma: Pius XII Faces Atrocities and Genocide in the Second World War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015), 228.

³⁵ Wolf, *Pope and Devil*, 266–67; Peter Bartley, *Catholics Confronting Hitler: The Catholic Church and the Nazis* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2016), 52; Pinchas E. Lapide, *Three Popes and the Jews* (New York: Hawthorn Books Inc. Publishers, 1967), 111.

³⁶ Peter Pfister, *Eugenio Pacelli - Pius XII, 1876-1958*, 98.

³⁷ David Dalin and Joseph Bottum, *The Pius War: Responses to the Critics of Pius XII* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc, 2010), 18, 84; Steven McClernon, "Pope Pius XII and the Holocaust," *The Dunwoodie Review* 25 (2023): 153; José M. Sánchez, *Pius XII and the Holocaust: Understanding the Controversy* (Washington D. C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2001), 42; Susan Zuccotti, *Under His Very Windows: The Vatican and the Holocaust in Italy*, Yale Nota Bene (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2002), 21; Ralph McInerny, *The Defamation of Pius XII* (South Bend, Indiana: St. Augustine's Press, 2001), 38; Spicer, *Resisting the Third Reich*, 55.

³⁸ Lapide, *Three Popes and the Jews*, 111; Margherita Marchione, *Pope Pius XII: Architect for Peace* (New York: Paulist Press, 2000), 100; McInerny, *The Defamation of Pius XII*, 31.

³⁹ Pius XI, "Mit Brennender Sorge," *L'Osservatore Romano*, no. 67 (22-23 March 1937): 1–4.

⁴⁰ Pius XI, "Mit Brennender Sorge," *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, IV (1937): 145–88.

A Clandestine Dissemination

Another noteworthy aspect of this encyclical was its clandestine dissemination⁴¹. The very process was a success of the grassroots-level parish networks of the then German church. It was prepared in secret and it took the Nazis by surprise⁴². By then, Hitler had taken control of the entire communication system of the country and hence the Vatican could not depend on any direct mail service. The document was smuggled across to Germany⁴³ under the very nose of the Gestapo who were on guard⁴⁴. On March 14, 1937, Cardinal Orsenigo handed over the final version of the encyclical to Bishop Preysing. His trusted friend Fr. Walter Adolph took up the task of persuading Cardinal Bertram to order a universal reading of the papal encyclical on Palm Sunday in all the German churches. However, in order to avoid conflict during the Holy week, the latter at first rejected the idea but on further insistence finally succumbed⁴⁵. Once it reached the German hierarchy, the next task was the printing. Since all the diocesan printing services were under surveillance, in the diocese of Berlin, they chose to print the same in the Salvatorian provincialate press. Since the ordinary printing methods of the day, left behind forensic clues as to the printing press used, stencil process was used to hide the site of the work⁴⁶. A similar course of action was chosen in dioceses across Germany. Roughly 300,000 copies of the encyclical were printed in Germany⁴⁷ and even a larger number in the Vatican for the world press and international dissemination⁴⁸.

The next challenge was to make it reach the parishes and institutions. Since postal services and couriers could not be trusted, the task was given to trusted Catholics, mainly from youth networks and they delivered the item to parish priests by hand. They travelled in motorbikes and bicycles, often avoiding major routes to avoid Gestapo interception⁴⁹. Some copies were delivered to the priests at the confessional and some of the priests kept them locked in the tabernacles⁵⁰. There were instances when some last-minute parochial deliveries came in as late as Sunday morning, just in time for reading⁵¹. Finally, the encyclical dated 14 March, was read from the pulpits all over Germany on 21 March, 1937, Palm Sunday⁵². By then, however, the Nazis received the information and on the day of the reading the SD Chief, Reinhard Heydrich had sent a radio message to his police asking them to be on guard during the reading and to arrest anyone who spread the copies outside the churches⁵³. Thus, this encyclical is particularly unique also for its logistics and dissemination, a significant victory of the grassroots networks of the Church.

Ideological Condemnations in Mit Brennender Sorge

The reading of the encyclical on Palm Sunday in all the churches of the German Reich was an open challenge thrown at the Nazi regime. The encyclical had an international impact and was a mirror turned towards the Nazi ideology. As Fr. William Arthur Purdy, Vatican diplomat and Rome- correspondent for *The Tablet* rightly

⁴¹ David Dalin and Joseph Bottum, *The Pius War*, 112; Ronald J. Rychlak, *Righteous Gentiles: How Pius XII and the Catholic Church Saved Half a Million Jews from the Nazis* (Dallas: Spence Publishing Company, 2005), 34; Ronald J. Rychlak, *Hitler, the War, and the Pope* (Columbus: Genesis Press, 2000), 93; Margherita Marchione, *Pope Pius XII: History and Hagiography* (Città del Vaticano: Libreria editrice vaticana, 2010), 55.

⁴² Fattorini, *Hitler, Mussolini and the Vatican*, 121.

⁴³ McClernon, "Pope Pius XII and the Holocaust," 140–41.

⁴⁴ Michael O'Carroll, *Pius XII: Greatness Dishonoured: A Documented Study* (Dublin: Laetare Press, 1980), 40.

⁴⁵ Spicer, *Resisting the Third Reich*, 54.

⁴⁶ Spicer, *Resisting the Third Reich*, 54–55.

⁴⁷ Grbešić, "The Church Against Totalitarianism During the Pontificate of Pius XI," 457.

⁴⁸ Martini, "Il Cardinale Faulhaber e l'enciclica 'Mit Brennender Sorge,'" 303.

⁴⁹ Galdabini, "Diplomazia vaticana, allocuzioni papali e Germania nazista dal concordato tedesco (1933) all'enciclica Mit brennender Sorge (1937) (II)," 365; Faulkner Rossi, *Wehrmacht Priests*, 48.

⁵⁰ Cornwell, *Hitler's Pope*, 182.

⁵¹ Hughes, *Pope Pius the Eleventh*, 300.

⁵² Lewy Guenter, *The Catholic Church and Nazi Germany* (New York: McGraw Hill Book Company, 1964), 156; Beth A. Griech-Polelle, *Bishop von Galen: German Catholicism and National Socialism* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2008), 197.

⁵³ Spicer, *Resisting the Third Reich*, 55.

narrated: "some thought it too strong and many were shaken by it"⁵⁴. The encyclical was a unique protest, a doctrinal clarification and a diplomatic intervention. It condemned the Nazi ideology of blood and race outright. The following section gives an overview of the ideological critiques raised by the encyclical.

In uncompromising terms the encyclical rejects the exaltation of racism and nationalism as distortions and perversions of the world order created by God:

Se la razza o il popolo, se lo Stato o una sua determinata forma, se i rappresentanti del potere statale o altri elementi fondamentali della società umana hanno nell'ordine naturale un posto essenziale e degno di rispetto; chi peraltro li distacca da questa scala di valori terreni, elevandoli a suprema norma di tutto, anche dei valori religiosi, e divinizzandoli con culto idolatrico, perverte e falsifica l'ordine, da Dio creato e imposto, è lontano dalla vera fede in Dio e da una concezione della vita ad essa conforme.⁵⁵

It called racism an idolatrous and demonic doctrine, opposed to Catholic teachings and to humanity itself⁵⁶. The encyclical heroically brings out the folly of a national god and a national religion:

Solamente spiriti superficiali possono cadere nell'errore di parlare di un Dio nazionale, di una religione nazionale, e intraprendere il folle tentativo di imprigionare nei limiti di un solo popolo, nella ristrettezza etnica di una sola razza, Dio, Creatore del mondo, re e legislatore dei popoli, davanti alla cui grandezza le nazioni sono piccole come gocce in un catino d'acqua.⁵⁷

The encyclical laments that there are forces at work in Germany which demand leaving the Church as a sign of fidelity to the nation. The Pope expresses his sympathy with those members of the Church who have to bear up with open measures of intimidation and economic and civic oppressions. He enjoins them to remain faithful even at the cost of worldly sacrifices and to answer the oppressors with courage: "Begone Satan! (Matthew 4:10)"⁵⁸. The encyclical speaks also about the breaches of the concordat like that of the encroachments into confessional schools, youth organizations etc⁵⁹. The tone of the letter becomes even more emotional when it addresses the youth directly saying: "*Se alcuno vi volesse annunziare un Evangelo diverso da quello che avete ricevuto, sulle ginocchia di una pia madre, dalle labbra di un padre credente, dall'insegnamento di un educatore fedele a Dio e alla sua Chiesa, " costui sia anatema "*" (Gal., 1, 9)"⁶⁰. He encourages those priests who remain faithful even in the face of difficulty and asks them to continue to support and care for the flock entrusted to them. "*Il primo e il*

⁵⁴ William Arthur Purdy, *The Church on the Move: The Characters and Policies of Pius XII and John XXIII* (New York: The John Day Company, 1966), 44.

⁵⁵ "Whoever exalts race or the people or the state or a particular form of state or the depositories of power or any other fundamental value of the human community- however necessary and honorable be their function in worldly things- whoever raises these notions above their standard value and divinizes them to an idolatrous level, distorts and perverts an order of the world planned and created by God; he is far from the true faith in God and from the concept of life which that faith upholds." (The translation given here and henceforth for the encyclical is taken from https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_14031937_mit-brennender-sorge.html) Pius XI, "Mit Brennender Sorge," AAS (1937) 171; See also Eric Bentley, *The Storm over the Deputy: Essays and Articles about Hochhuth's Explosive Drama* (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1964), 92; Colin Tatz, *Genocide Perspectives IV: Essays on Holocaust and Genocide* (Sydney: UTS ePress, 2012), 177; Gerhard Besier, "Anti-Bolshevism and Antisemitism: The Catholic Church in Germany and National Socialist Ideology 1936–1937," *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 43, no. 3 (1992): 455, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S002204690000138X>.

⁵⁶ Limore Yagil, "Bishops in France, Pope Pius XII, and the Rescue of Jews, 1940–1944," *The Catholic Historical Review* 108, no. 1 (2022): 140, <https://doi.org/10.1353/cat.2022.0004>.

⁵⁷ "None but superficial minds could stumble into concepts of a national God, of a national religion; or attempt to lock within the frontiers of a single people, within the narrow limits of a single race, God, the creator of the universe, King and Legislator of all nations before whose immensity they are "as a drop of a bucket"." Pius XI, "Mit Brennender Sorge," AAS (1937), 172; See also Peter Eisner, *The Pope's Last Crusade: How an American Jesuit Helped Pope Pius XI's Campaign to Stop Hitler*, 1st ed. (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2013), 26.

⁵⁸ Pius XI, "Mit Brennender Sorge," AAS, (1937), 177.

⁵⁹ Pius XI, "Mit Brennender Sorge," AAS (1937), 182.

⁶⁰ "If anyone should preach to you a Gospel other than the one you received on the knees of a pious mother, from the lips of a believing father, or through teaching faithful to God and His Church, "let him be anathema" (Gal 1:9)." Pius XI, "Mit Brennender Sorge," AAS (1937), 183.

più ovvio dono di amore del sacerdote al mondo è di servire la verità, tutta intera la verità, smascherare e confutare l'errore, qualunque sia la forma o il suo travestimento."⁶¹ The Pope affectionately remembers those religious orders who have to work under hostile administrative measures and religious associations which bravely and at the cost of untold sacrifices remain faithful to Christ⁶². He also criticises in unequivocal terms the attacks on Catholic education of children because he finds an education that is contrary to the values of Christ as a profanation of 'the temple of the child's soul' consecrated by baptism⁶³.

The encyclical firmly criticizes the one-sided break away of the German Reich from the concordat agreements made in 1933⁶⁴. "It excoriated the German government for breaking the terms of the concordat and accused it of fundamental hostility to Christ and His Church"⁶⁵. While listing the concordat violations it mentions: "harassment of parochial school teachers; arrests of priests and religious; closing convents, monasteries and schools; suppressing Catholic associations; and shutting down religious presses"⁶⁶. It laments the failure of the policy of co-operation which the Church tried to maintain⁶⁷ until the regime had all but obliterated the guarantees of the concordat⁶⁸. Margherita Marchione who has studied the Church-State relations during the Second World War opines that "the encyclical *Mit brennender Sorge* had declared in the clearest and sharpest possible way that Hitler was not trustworthy and that a treaty signed by him was worthless"⁶⁹. Thus while maintaining a restrained language and dogmatic tone, the encyclical was a loud and clear protest sounded to the Nazi regime regarding its abrogation of treaties and deification of race.

State Retaliations Following the Encyclical

The encyclical was an open defiance of the Nazi regime. The relations between the Church and Reich came to a halt⁷⁰ after the publication of the encyclical and the government branded it as a 'call to battle'⁷¹. In a letter to German bishops, the Reich Minister of Church Affairs Heinrich Dietrich Johannes Kerrl criticized the papal action as a serious breach of the concordat agreements and an attack against the welfare and interest of the state⁷². The Nazi press unleashed a vicious attack on the Vatican. *Wille und Macht*⁷³ demanded that "racial issues had to be resolved by the state, without Vatican interference"⁷⁴. *Völkischer Beobachter*⁷⁵ came out strongly criticizing

⁶¹ "The priest's first loving gift to his neighbours is to seve the truth and refute error in any of its forms". Pius XI, "Mit Brennender Sorge," AAS (1937), 184–85.

⁶² Pius XI, "Mit Brennender Sorge," AAS (1937), 185–86.

⁶³ Pius XI, "Mit Brennender Sorge," AAS (1937), 186. See also Thomas Brodie, *German Catholicism at War, 1939-1945*, 1st edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 26.

⁶⁴ George O. Kent, "Pope Pius XII and Germany: Some Aspects of German-Vatican Relations, 1933-1943," *American Historical Review* 70, no. 1 (1964): 62; Kathleen Burton, *The Nazi Religion and the Rise of the French Christian Resistance*: (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2022), 48; Marchione, *Pope Pius XII* (2010), 56.

⁶⁵ Kertzer, *The Popes against the Jews*, 277.

⁶⁶ Anthony J. Sciolino, *Holocaust, The Church, And The Law Of Unintended Consequences: How Christian Anti-Judaism Spawned Nazi Anti-Semitism, A Judge's Verdict* (Bloomington: iUniverse Star, 2014), 108–9.

⁶⁷ Besier, "Anti-Bolshevism and Antisemitism," 455.

⁶⁸ Faulkner Rossi, *Wehrmacht Priests*, 62.

⁶⁹ Margherita Marchione, *Consensus and Controversy: Defending Pope Pius XII* (New York: Paulist Press, 2002), 227.

⁷⁰ Marchione, *Pope Pius XII* (2000), 160.

⁷¹ Dalin and Bottum, *The Pius War*, 112; Rychlak, *Righteous Gentiles*, 35; Coppa, "Between Anti-Judaism and Anti-Semitism, Pius XI's Response to the Nazi Persecution of the Jews," 77; Harrigan, "Pius XI and Nazi Germany, 1937-1939," 461.

⁷² Spicer, *Resisting the Third Reich*, 55.

⁷³ *Wille und Macht* was the official bimonthly journal of the Hitler Youth Movement starting from 1933.

⁷⁴ Coppa, "Between Anti-Judaism and Anti-Semitism, Pius XI's Response to the Nazi Persecution of the Jews," 77.

⁷⁵ *Völkischer Beobachter* (The People's Observer) was the official Newspaper of the Nazis from 1920 until 1945, the end of the World War II.

the "Jew-God and His deputy in Rome" while *Das Schwarze Korps*⁷⁶ stated that "every sentence in it was an insult to Germany"⁷⁷.

Soon the diplomatic protests followed. The German ambassador to the Holy See Diego von Bergen, under strict instructions from the Reich Government did not take part in the Easter ceremonies as was customary⁷⁸. On April 12, he sent a protest note that accused the Holy See of violating the concordat, inciting the faithful against the Reich Government, tarnishing its international reputation, and encroaching into the sovereignty of Germany. Pacelli responded on behalf of the Holy See with a lengthy and point to point refutation of the charges⁷⁹.

Hitler in person lashed out in violent fury. While addressing the May Day rally, in Lustgarten, Berlin, he publicly warned the Catholic Church that Germany would not tolerate any challenge to its authority. If ever the Church were to attempt to arrogate to itself rights belonging to the State alone, "we will push them back into their proper spiritual activity"⁸⁰. Later in the day, he declared to a rally of German Youth that there could only be one German youth movement and one kind of education and training for German youth⁸¹.

On 24 April 1937, Msgr. Gaetano Cicognani, the Apostolic Nuncio in Austria reported that Hitler vented his feelings to Edmund Glaise von Horstenau, the Austrian foreign minister when the latter spoke to Hitler about the worsening of the relationship between the Reich and the Church and its effect on the Reich's relationship with Austria. Inveighing against the encyclical and calling Msgr Ludwig Kaas a traitor Hitler reportedly commented, "I will not put the bishops in prison but I will drown the Catholic Church in ignominy and shame by opening the secret archives of the monasteries and revealing the filth that lies hidden therein"⁸². And that's exactly what Hitler did. He unleashed a smear campaign against the Church, clergy and religious. Several members of the clergy and nuns were dragged into immorality trials⁸³. On April 6, Hitler gave orders that the Reich Ministry of Justice resume the proceedings on Catholic clergy regarding foreign currency and morality trials that were halted in July, the previous year. "In Nazi Germany there would be no martyr priests, only hysterically denounced political *Pfaffen*⁸⁴, currency smugglers and sex deviants"⁸⁵. At Koblenz 170 Franciscans were charged with turning their monastery into a 'male brothel' and in April 1937 itself roughly a thousand monks were put on trial⁸⁶. On May 27, when the bishop of Berlin exposed the folly of the Nazi propaganda, Paul Joseph Goebbels, the *Reich* Minister for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda, came out justifying the trials the very next day explaining that the trials of immorality would actually involve an enormous number of priests and so testify to the widespread decadence among the clergy exposing the German youth to a grave danger⁸⁷. In an attempt to pursue scandalous accusations against the clergy, they invaded the diocesan curias and archives in search of proofs. On 10 June 1937, the secret police raided the diocesan curia of Berlin and seized many documents. In some cases, the bishops themselves ordered the burning of documents of delicate nature that if they fell into prejudiced hands, could be made use for accusations⁸⁸.

⁷⁶ *Das Schwarze Korps* (The Black Corps) was the official newspaper of the SS (*Schutzstaffel*) published from 1935 to 1945

⁷⁷ Rychlak, *Hitler, the War, and the Pope*, 93; Rychlak, *Righteous Gentiles*, 35; Rychlak, *Hitler, the War, and the Pope*, 109; See also, Bartley, *Catholics Confronting Hitler*, 54.

⁷⁸ Rychlak, *Hitler, the War, and the Pope*, 93; Rychlak, *Hitler, the War, and the Pope*, 109.

⁷⁹ Harrigan, "Pius XI and Nazi Germany, 1937-1939," 462; See also Fattorini, *Hitler, Mussolini and the Vatican*, 119.

⁸⁰ Rychlak, *Hitler, the War, and the Pope*, 109; Harrigan, "Pius XI and Nazi Germany, 1937-1939," 463-64; Cornwell, *Hitler's Pope*, 183.

⁸¹ Harrigan, "Pius XI and Nazi Germany, 1937-1939," 464.

⁸² Fattorini, *Hitler, Mussolini and the Vatican*, 122.

⁸³ Bartley, *Catholics Confronting Hitler*, 54; Sciolino, *Holocaust, The Church, and the Law of Unintended Consequences*, 109; Besier, "Anti-Bolshevism and Antisemitism," 450.

⁸⁴ A highly derogatory and insulting term for Catholic Priests.

⁸⁵ Harrigan, "Pius XI and Nazi Germany, 1937-1939," 462.

⁸⁶ Rychlak, *Hitler, the War, and the Pope*, 109.

⁸⁷ Fattorini, *Hitler, Mussolini and the Vatican*, 124-25.

⁸⁸ Fattorini, *Hitler, Mussolini and the Vatican*, 123.

Groups of Gestapo raided the Catholic presses in search of remaining copies of the encyclical. Twelve Catholic presses were closed, Church affiliated publications banned and in some cases, the editors of the publications were arrested⁸⁹. The Gestapo agents interfered with the publication of even diocesan pastoral letters in weeklies and censored thoroughly those Catholic presses still open⁹⁰. Hitler also gave authorization to Martin Bormann, one of the powerful and ruthless officials in Nazi Germany to proceed against the Church property in Germany⁹¹. In the fall of 1937, the struggle over the question of religious instruction to the new community schools, resulted in the clergy being eliminated and replaced by the 'State trained' teachers who were exposed to the Nazi ideologies in the state-run teachers' training institutes⁹². The Nazis threatened to cancel the concordat, but they relented. In the opinion of Carlo Falconi, a scholar who wrote extensively about the twentieth century papacy, cancellation would have been a better bargain for the Church: "for she would have her autonomy restored whereas the State would have risked alienating the sympathies of twenty-two million German Catholics not to mention the crisis of conscience of those Austrians who wanted the *Anschluss* and might have ceased to opt for Germany"⁹³. Despite many ecclesiastical protests, the oppression staged by the government continued relentlessly. However, the Church and Pope Pius XI stood firm in its struggle against the atrocities of Hitler and in its efforts to uphold human and Christian values.

International Reception and Impact

As the French Ambassador to the Holy See, Francois Charles-Roux remarked: "It [*Mit brennender Sorge*] came like a clap of thunder"⁹⁴. The encyclical acted primarily as a guide to the confused Catholic population all over the world. In the face of a moral confusion, the papal proclamation gave them a direction and a roadmap. The encyclical generated an international momentum that scholars argue helped inspire various Catholic anti-Nazi resistance and rescue initiatives. The following section deals with these aspects of the post encyclical period.

A Beam of Light to the Catholics

During this period, the German Catholics experienced a great crisis of dual allegiance: they were caught up between their fidelity to God and His commandment of love of neighbour and their love for the German nation. It was right at this time that the papal letter addressed to the Catholics of Germany was read from all pulpits, where "without mincing words, he [the Pope] urged the clergy to refute Nazism's errors whatever their form or disguise"⁹⁵. "The reading of the encyclical was like a bomb going off in Germany"⁹⁶. In the opinion of Pierre Blet⁹⁷ the encyclical "brought light, direction, consolation and comfort to all who took seriously and consistently practiced the religion of Christ"⁹⁸. The Pope's voice became a motivating factor that prompted many German and Austrian Catholics to carry out clandestine rescue efforts for the Jews⁹⁹. Peter Hoffmann speaks of the possibility of the encyclical being an influence even on Claus von Stauffenberg who later attempted to overthrow Hitler's regime¹⁰⁰. The latter was a faithful Catholic and hence it is highly possible that he paid attention to the

⁸⁹ Rychlak, *Righteous Gentiles*, 35; Marchione, *Pope Pius XII* (2010), 57; Rychlak, *Hitler, the War, and the Pope*, 93; Harrigan, "Pius XI and Nazi Germany, 1937-1939," 461; McInerny, *The Defamation of Pius XII*, 167.

⁹⁰ Faulkner Rossi, *Wehrmacht Priests*, 49.

⁹¹ Griech-Polelle, *Bishop von Galen*, 216.

⁹² Harrigan, "Pius XI and Nazi Germany, 1937-1939," 471.

⁹³ Falconi, *The Silence of Pius XII*, 78.

⁹⁴ Bartley, *Catholics Confronting Hitler*, 55.

⁹⁵ F. J. Coppa, "Pope Pius XI's 'Encyclical' *Humani Generis Unitas* Against Racism and Anti-Semitism and the 'Silence' of Pope Pius XII," *Journal of Church and State* 40, no. 4 (1998): 781, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jcs/40.4.775>.

⁹⁶ Rychlak, *Righteous Gentiles*, 35.

⁹⁷ Pierre Blet was a French Jesuit and church historian who served as a professor of church history at the Pontifical Gregorian University and was a leading scholar of World War II papal diplomacy.

⁹⁸ Pierre Blet, *Pius XII and the Second World War: According to the Archives of the Vatican* (New York: Paulist Press, 1999), 52.

⁹⁹ Lapide, *Three Popes and the Jews*, 109; Bartley, *Catholics Confronting Hitler*, 55; Rychlak, *Righteous Gentiles*, 34.

¹⁰⁰ See footnote number 37 in Peter Hoffmann, *Stauffenberg: A Family History, 1905-1944*, Second (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003).

words of the Pope. Numerous bishops and priests who chose to carry out heroic rescue operations for the Jews later mentioned this letter as a motivating factor¹⁰¹.

Fr. Michael Riquet was a French Jesuit priest who later became the director of the Laennec Conference in Paris, which was an association of Catholic medical students. Under his guidance, these students were trained not only in medicine but also in a Christian spirit of service. Later when Paris was under German rule, this group of thousands of medical professionals in various hospitals, hospices, clinics and other facilities of care acted as a clandestine network for rescue efforts. The encyclical acted as a motivation for Riquet and many other heroes in their attempts to save Jews¹⁰².

Global Reception and Geo-political Ripples

On the international front, the encyclical was well received by the various nations who were anxiously following up the political manoeuvres in Germany. Across Europe and the Americas, the encyclical united a global Catholic and public opinion. As Fattorini rightly puts it, "it was a true international grassroots campaign, which maintained the spirit of surprise, aggression, speed and internationalism..."¹⁰³. From countries across the globe, reports of overwhelmingly favourable reception of the encyclical reached the Reich¹⁰⁴. The Nazi diplomat in Switzerland reported that the Swiss Catholics entirely sided with the opinion of the Pope and the Church as given in the encyclical. The German Consul in Belgium reported of an instance when a meeting to discuss the encyclical stated that the Church now faced a more serious danger from the Nazis than from communism. The German ambassador in Chile sent reports of the formation of anti-Nazi opinion in Chile after the encyclical was published¹⁰⁵. The encyclical played a major role in shaping the international opinion about the Nazis and their racist agendas. The Pope's message was gladly received in the United States¹⁰⁶ and Britain¹⁰⁷. A.S. Duncan-Jones¹⁰⁸ described the encyclical as a "shattering force". Michael Power, the famous British journalist stated: "In one tremendous flash of light it illuminated, as no other account will ever be able to do, the whole nature and extent of the attack upon the Church, the width and depth of the gulf that separates National Socialism from the Christianity of Christ"¹⁰⁹.

The Cardinal Mundelein affair in the US is a classic example of the international resonances of this encyclical. During the quarterly diocesan conference, in a meeting of prelates and several priests, Cardinal George Mundelein publicly criticized Hitler, calling him 'an Austrian paperhanger and a poor one at that job'¹¹⁰. Despite mounting diplomatic protests and pressure from Germany, the Pope refused to rebuke the Cardinal and on one occasion even stated his admiration for the zealous Cardinal Mundelein¹¹¹. Evidently the Cardinal was prompted by the awareness of the grave situation in Germany that was brought to light in the international arena by the encyclical. Besides, this was a sign of the growing concern of the entire Catholic world for their brethren in Germany who were facing a grave danger.

However the result of the encyclical played out differently in Spain and Italy. Taking a pro-German (due to its alliance with Hitler) and anti-papal (due to the antitotalitarian- anti fascist teachings of the Vatican) stance, the

¹⁰¹ Yagil, "Bishops in France, Pope Pius XII, and the Rescue of Jews, 1940–1944," 140.

¹⁰² Yagil, "Bishops in France, Pope Pius XII, and the Rescue of Jews, 1940–1944," 138–39.

¹⁰³ Fattorini, *Hitler, Mussolini and the Vatican*, 122.

¹⁰⁴ Bartley, *Catholics Confronting Hitler*, 54.

¹⁰⁵ Rhodes, *The Vatican in the Age of the Dictators: 1922-1945*, 206.

¹⁰⁶ Bartley, *Catholics Confronting Hitler*, 54; Rychlak, *Hitler, the War, and the Pope*, Revised and expanded, 34–35; Marchione, *Pope Pius XII* (2000), 233; Dalin and Bottum, *The Pius War*, 279; Rhodes, *The Vatican in the Age of the Dictators: 1922-1945*, 206; Fattorini, *Hitler, Mussolini and the Vatican*, 156.

¹⁰⁷ Bartley, *Catholics Confronting Hitler*, 55.

¹⁰⁸ He was a famous English Anglican cleric and theologian who heroically opposed Nazism.

¹⁰⁹ Dalin and Bottum, *The Pius War*, 112.

¹¹⁰ Rychlak, *Hitler, the War, and the Pope*, 110; Pollard, *The Papacy in the Age of Totalitarianism, 1914-1958*, 268; Fattorini, *Hitler, Mussolini and the Vatican*, 134; Godman, *Hitler and the Vatican*, 152–53.

¹¹¹ Coppa, *The Papacy, the Jews, and the Holocaust*, 165; Cornwell, *Hitler's Pope*, 184; Peter C. Kent, "A Tale of Two Popes: Pius XI, Pius XII and the Rome-Berlin Axis," *Journal of Contemporary History* 23, no. 4 (1988): 596; Harrigan, "Pius XI and Nazi Germany, 1937-1939," 465–66.

Italian press mostly ignored the encyclical. The Ministry of Popular Culture prohibited the Italian newspapers from publishing the encyclical in entirety¹¹². In Spain, Franco found himself in a dilemma between Hitler and German government, upon which he depended for military support and the Catholic Church which had deep roots in Spain. In the end, the encyclical received minimal response from Spain¹¹³.

Heroic Stance or Compromised Diplomacy: A Critical Assessment

According to many historians *Mit brennender Sorge* was the strongest and most serious attack on Nazi ideas by the Vatican¹¹⁴. Pope John Paul II underlined this strong conviction right at the beginning of the Vatican statement *We Remember: A Reflection on the Holocaust*¹¹⁵. During a symposium on 'The Roots of Antisemitism', on 31 October 1997, the Pope recalled how Pope Pius XI called upon everyone to practise human charity and solidarity towards all in the face of racial hatred¹¹⁶. The Pope courageously pilloried those who exalted and worshipped nation or race.¹¹⁷ In clear terms the Pope established "the fundamental opposition between National Socialism and the Catholic Church,"¹¹⁸ condemned the Nazi paganism, the myth of race and blood and the fallacy of their conception of God¹¹⁹. In the words of Pierre Blet the encyclical disclosed to the world the reality of national socialism, its "arrogant apostasy from Jesus Christ, the denial of Christ's teaching and redemptive work, the idolatry of race and blood, the oppression of liberty and human dignity"¹²⁰. Dan Kurzman also shares this opinion¹²¹.

While the encyclical is praised for its heroism, there are scholars who are critical of its doctrinal approach and restrained way of delivering the matter. For that reason, John Cornwell thinks: "the encyclical arrived late in the day and failed to condemn National Socialism and Hitler by name"¹²². While its condemnation of racism was direct and vigorous, in its text, the encyclical does not name Hitler or Nazism¹²³. In the opinion of Peter Godman, this encyclical was blurred and blunted by general references and far from being a full rejection of national socialism, it was a compromise between the concerns of the German hierarchy and the Roman anxieties¹²⁴. After comparing the archival records of the planned condemnation by the Holy Office and the published encyclical, he believes that the encyclical was just a watered down version of the work of the Holy Office¹²⁵. There are historians who dismiss the idea of the heroism of the encyclical calling it apologetic, conciliatory or circumlocutory and as a half-measure that underplayed the serious dangers of the Nazi *Weltanschauung*¹²⁶.

¹¹² Meir Michaelis, *Mussolini and the Jews: German-Italian Relations and the Jewish Question in Italy ; 1922-1945* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 248; Kent, "A Tale of Two Popes," 595.

¹¹³ J. M. Sanchez, "The Popes and Nazi Germany: The View from Madrid," *Journal of Church and State* 38, no. 2 (1996): 369–70, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jcs/38.2.365>.

¹¹⁴ Robert P. Ericksen, *Complicity in the Holocaust: Churches and Universities in Nazi Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 109; Rhodes, *The Vatican in the Age of the Dictators: 1922-1945*, 204; Charles Delzell F., ed., *The Papacy and Totalitarianism between the Two World Wars*, Major Issues in History (New York: Wiley, 1974), 53; Rychlak, *Hitler, the War, and the Pope*, 107; Harrigan, "Pius XI and Nazi Germany, 1937-1939," 461.

¹¹⁵ John Paul II, "Noi Ricordiamo: Una Riflessione Sulla Shoah," *L'Osservatore Romano*, March 16-17, 1998, 1.

¹¹⁶ John Paul II, *The Address of His Holiness Pope John Paul II to a Symposium on the Roots of Antisemitism*, October 31, 1997, Art 4, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paulii/en/speeches/1997/october/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19971031_com-teologica.html.

¹¹⁷ Robert G. Weisbord and Wallace P. Sillanpoa, *The Chief Rabbi, the Pope, and the Holocaust: An Era in Vatican-Jewish Relations* (New Brunswick (U.S.A.): Transaction Publishers, 1992), 35.

¹¹⁸ Reginald F. Walker, *Pius of Peace: A Study of the Pacific Work of His Holiness Pope Pius XII in the World War 1939-1945* (Dublin: M H Gill and Son Ltd., 1945), 67.

¹¹⁹ Sciolino, *Holocaust, The Church, and the Law of Unintended Consequences*, 108–9.

¹²⁰ Blet, *Pius XII and the Second World War*, 51.

¹²¹ Dan Kurzman, *A Special Mission: Hitler's Secret Plot to Seize the Vatican and Kidnap Pope Pius XII* (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2007), 234.

¹²² Cornwell, *Hitler's Pope*, 181.

¹²³ Carol Rittner and John K. Roth, eds., *Pope Pius XII and the Holocaust* (London: Leicester University Press, 2002), 19; Burton, *The Nazi Religion and the Rise of the French Christian Resistance*, 73–74; Rolf Hochhuth and Robert David MacDonald, *The Representative: A Christian Tragedy*, Modern Playwrights (London: Oberon Books, 1998), 396.

¹²⁴ Godman, *Hitler and the Vatican*, 142.

¹²⁵ Godman, *Hitler and the Vatican*, 146–47.

¹²⁶ Faulkner Rossi, *Wehrmacht Priests*, 49.

According to Guenter Lewy and Randolph L Braham, the document has failed to challenge political and social totalitarianism that by then had taken complete control of the German nation¹²⁷. The former even believes that "with considerable skill, the extravagances of German Nazi doctrine are picked out for condemnation in a way that would not involve the condemnation of political and social totalitarianism"¹²⁸. There are scholars who are of the opinion that the issues raised in *Mit brennender Sorge* remained ecclesiastical in nature, the interest of the Church and of the Catholics¹²⁹. In the opinion of Gerard Noel it "could be taken in two ways: a cry for mass protest on the part of Germany's 23 million Catholics or merely another attempt to get the Nazis to respect the concordat"¹³⁰. Michael Phayer holds that "the encyclical stepped lightly around the issue of racism so as to keep the concordat intact" and for that reason criticized racism only in carefully measured words¹³¹. Peter C Kent and Kevin P Spicer detest the Pope's hope of leaving the possibility of reconciliation if the Nazis were to change¹³². It does not offer any mention of the issue of the persecution of the Jews nor any direct attack on antisemitism¹³³. In the opinion of certain historians, by using some of the traditional Christian anti-Judaic expressions like 'chosen people of God constantly straying far away from their God', 'people that were to crucify Him' etc. the encyclical in fact took a step backward¹³⁴.

CONCLUSIONS

The year 2027 marks ninety years of the promulgation of *Mit brennender Sorge*, an encyclical unique in its inception, promulgation and international impact. The principal merit of this document rests on the fact of its heroic confrontation of one of the most ruthless totalitarian regimes of the modern history. While it could not effect much change in Hitler's ideology or in his attitude to the Jews, it acted as a catalyst for change in the Catholic minds across the world. Scholars note that it inspired rescue attempts for Jews and motivated leaders across the world to create alliances and diplomatic relations to square up to Hitler. This initiative of the Pope continues to offer valuable lessons in Church- State relationship, in international diplomacy, in confronting totalitarian regimes and in global moral leadership. After having assessed the historical background, doctrinal content and the international impact of the encyclical, one could arrive at the following conclusions and lessons.

The nineteenth century marks a time of profound systemic changes in the nature of the Church diplomacy forced mainly by the Catholic Church's loss of temporal power. Following the annexation of the Papal States by the Italian unification in 1870, the diplomatic relations of the Holy See went into a period of hibernation prompted by the 'Roman Question'. The monarchies that offered temporal protection to the Church were no more and the aggressive modern ideologies like communism and secularism were taking their toll on the Church's influence. Therefore, after the Lateran concordat, the Church was left with the concordat diplomacy as the major legal mechanism for ensuring the rights and freedom of the Church. These Church- State agreements acted as legal shields and guarantees for religious autonomy, freedom of practice of faith, protection of Catholic education, legal and financial rights, and institutional protection. Therefore, when the German Reich offered the possibilities of a concordat, the Holy See could not reject the offer. It was a pragmatic act of self-preservation, not just in the sense of the institutional rights, but as a community of faithful. Thus Vatican sought firm legal guarantees to protect its faithful and the practice of religion in the face of a great *Kulturkampf*. Hence, the common

¹²⁷ Lewy, *The Catholic Church and Nazi Germany*, 158; Randolph L. Braham, "Remembering and Forgetting the Vatican, the German Catholic Hierarchy and the Holocaust," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 13, no. 2 (1999): 231.

¹²⁸ Lewy, *The Catholic Church and Nazi Germany*, 158.

¹²⁹ Ericksen, *Complicity in the Holocaust*, 109; Zuccotti, *Under His Very Windows*, 22; Spicer, *Resisting the Third Reich*, 55.

¹³⁰ Noel, *Pius XII*, 88.

¹³¹ Michael Phayer, *Pius XII, the Holocaust, and the Cold War* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2008), 175–76.

¹³² Kevin P. Spicer, ed., *Antisemitism, Christian Ambivalence, and the Holocaust*, (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2007), 57; Peter C Kent, *Lonely Cold War of Pope Pius XII: The Roman Catholic Church and the Division of Europe, 1943-1950* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014), 14.

¹³³ Kertzer, *The Popes against the Jews*, 277; Lapide, *Three Popes and the Jews*, 109; Lewy, *The Catholic Church and Nazi Germany*, 296; Pollard, *The Papacy in the Age of Totalitarianism, 1914-1958*, 474.

¹³⁴ Georges Passelecq and Bernard Suchecky, *The Hidden Encyclical of Pius XI*, Steven Rendall (trans.) (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1997); Braham, "Remembering and Forgetting the Vatican, the German Catholic Hierarchy and the Holocaust," 231.

misconception among some historians that the Church fell in for an act of 'institutional preservation' does not comprehend the deeper currents of the reality.

However, Hitler's true intentions surfaced within a short period of time. The mounting oppressive measures, first prompted the Church to resolve issues in a spirit of diplomacy and mutual discussions. Through several diplomatic exchanges and interventions, the Church tried to hold fast to its moral duties, despite the repeated breaches of the mutual agreements by the government. But, by the year 1935 the Vatican understood the incompatibility of Catholic doctrine and Nazi ideology. Therefore, the Holy Office was entrusted with the task of preparing a 'Syllabus of Errors'. The original intention was to use a 'dual-statement strategy': an encyclical refuting the theoretical foundations of National Socialism and a 'Syllabus' to list out the errors of the Nazi ideology. But the delegation of German bishops after the Fulda Episcopal Conference in 1936, was quick to move to work out a papal encyclical following a bed-side audience with Pope Pius XI, who was seriously ill at that time. The very urgency of its preparation is an ample testimony to the gravity of the matter and the 'burning concern' of the Church about the people of Germany.

Evidently the draft committee appointed by the Pope was divided internally in its approach towards the delivery of the message. The Faulhaber draft was non-polemical and pastoral in nature while the Secretary of State Cardinal Eugenio Pacelli sharpened the tone of the encyclical. Clearly, despite the enormous historiography criticizing Pacelli for his silence during the Jewish Holocaust, historians who have studied the various stages of the draft recognize the accusatory revisions of Pacelli to the encyclical.

The very choice of the language of writing- choosing German over the traditional ecclesiastical Latin- is a testimony to the gravity in which the Church regarded the matter. To ensure wider readership and the formation of general opinion, besides reading it from pulpits in Germany, the Church chose to publish bilingual versions of the encyclical in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* and *L'Osservatore Romano*. This was to ensure immediate and unmediated access to the papal statement throughout the world.

By way of the logistical details, the promulgation of the encyclical was clearly a grand success of the Church's grassroots infrastructure. The highly dramatic clandestine operation that made the Palm Sunday reading of the encyclical possible continued to act as a medium of ecclesiastical communications throughout the Second World War period and inspired many hidden rescue networks. The tactical use of stencil method for the printing, simultaneous printing operations in several catholic printing presses, the choice of mostly the non-diocesan printing establishments etc make the dissemination of this encyclical unique. The highly heroic roles played by the Catholic associations, especially the youth movements will be enshrined in the saga of the history of the Church. Despite the Gestapo surveillance, the Catholic men and youth were ready to risk their lives to stand firm for their faith and for the truth. While the Pope and the curial machinery are to be commended for their confrontation and resistance, the actual circulation of the papal statement is a testimony to the bravery of the catholic associations, youth movements and the priests and clergy.

The doctrinal core of the encyclical can be summarized as follows: absolute rejection of the deification of race and the fallacy of a national God; the condemnation of the neo-paganism and myth of race and blood; protection of the confessional schools and thereby the Catholic upbringing of children; and the inviolability of treaties and agreements. Some historians who attempt to portray this encyclical as an act of 'institutional preservation' take the matter of confessional schools to justify their claims. However, the case of 'confessional schools' rather is a matter of Catholic training of the younger generation rather than the economic prospects from such schools. Even now the Church deems it a matter of utmost importance to instruct the children in Christian values right from a young age. The Catholic educational networks all over the world even in several developed countries are maintained with this aim in mind. In short, it is the defence of 'the temple of the soul of the child' rather than some petty economic benefits.

The encyclical also contained an invitation to open resistance which the Reich government deemed as a call to battle. In the Pope's eyes the Catholics had no other way than 'heroism' when the highest moral values are at stake and he instructs them to answer with the Lord at the cost of every worldly sacrifice: "Begone Satan!" He called upon the faithful to counter the erroneous developments with an uncompromising 'no' rather than extend a guilty cooperation with such corruption. The faithful were invited to face the sufferings and oppressions 'with

the strength of their faith' and to 'aim at the triumph of the good over evil'. His encouragement for the priests was 'to serve the truth, all of it', even at the cost of personal and economic sacrifice.

With such an acute tone the encyclical brought the Church and the German state to an open rift. The diplomatic relations came to a standstill. Despite Hitler's repeated threat of cancelling the concordat, cleverly they held on to it. On several occasions the Führer publicly criticized the Church and the Papal move. What followed was a shameful smear campaign to tarnish the face of the Church by placing accusations on the clergy and religious. A long list of accusations were made public and the Gestapo searched several curial archives for proofs to prosecute the clergy and religious. In an attempt to avoid further attack, some of the bishops even burned some documents from the archives to prevent misinterpretations by the Gestapo. While such actions were undertaken to avoid immediate institutional damage, they have created a long-term historical liability, placing those actions in the grey area. Future scholars when confronted with deliberate gaps in archival records, are highly likely to judge them as systemic efforts to sweep under the carpet certain malpractices. Thus, it can cause more severe and long-term damage.

Internationally, the encyclical acted as an unveiling moment. It opened the eyes of the international community to the great problems that were rising in Germany and prompted many to form counter alliances to stop Hitler's dream of world domination. While several countries like the US, Britain, Switzerland, Belgium and Chile positively responded to the Pope's invitation, the fascist Italy and Francoist Spain tried to suppress the voice of the Pope. In the Catholic circles, the papal intervention acted as a motivating force to several charitable initiatives to aid, rescue and resettle the Jews. Confrontational stance of several Catholic bishops for which the Mundelein affairs is a clear example, drew its inspiration from the boldness of the Pope. Thus in later history one could witness the formation of a clandestine Catholic and Christian 'militia' trying to oppose Hitler and his Nazi ideology not only intellectually and politically but also actively through their resistance and rescue efforts.

The planned Holy Office 'syllabus of errors' was never promulgated in the form originally envisaged, although work on its propositions continued after the publication of the encyclical. If both documents were to be published, that would have created a frontier of moral confrontation of National Socialism: doctrinally in the encyclical and practically in the 'Syllabus'. But, the absence of clearer pinpointing of the errors and naming of Nazism and antisemitism has cast a great amount of shadow on the heroic worth of this encyclical. The absence of explicit references to Hitler, National Socialism or antisemitism, has therefore led some historians to question the extent and nature of its intended impact. Therefore either the Holy Office should have followed the encyclical with the planned 'Syllabus' or the propositions of the Holy Office should have been incorporated into the encyclical itself. This absence of clear references has also opened the Church and the papacy to the criticism that this encyclical was not a manifesto of the universal human rights but a defensive document focused on the preservation of Catholicism and its institutions in Germany. The encyclical contains no direct defence of the persecuted Jews or an explicit condemnation of antisemitism. Thus, from the perspective of moral responsibility from a universal teaching authority like the Papacy, the encyclical does not meet the expectation without the 'Syllabus'. However, it is historically highly understandable because the Pope also had to keep in mind the possible retaliations and consequences to the millions of faithful Catholics who lived in Germany at that time. This factor must have played a crucial restraining role during the composition of the encyclical. At the same time, there are historians who maintain a critical attitude of the encyclical explicitly based on the 'Jewish factor'. Consequently, passing a balanced moral evaluation on the encyclical's restrained tone presents a deep historiographical challenge.

In this line it is to be noted that at a deeper evaluation, the use of traditional anti-Judaic expressions in the encyclical as Passelecq and Suchecky have indicated, though not in an antisemitic connotation, has given rise to criticism by some scholars and seems to represent a theological step backward.

Another important issue to be addressed is the 'paradox of keeping the concordat' while denouncing the ideological foundations of the regime. The question to be asked in this regard is 'what if the Pope were to altogether breakaway from the concordat?' While such a speculative question can have no absolutely right answer, one could reach the possible conclusion that the consequences would have been even more severe, not only for the Jews but also for the Catholics. Such a breach would have taken away even the minimal protection that the Catholics had and it must have prompted Hitler to engage in a vicious manhunt of faithful Catholics as

well and would have cost the lives of even more innocent victims. While it was a paradox to go along with the concordat with the Reich even after the encyclical, that now seems to be the safer and prudent option.

Ninety years from its publication, the papal encyclical *Mit brennender Sorge* stands not as a compromise but as a heroic prophetic stance in the face of an absolutely evil regime. Any element of restraint exercised was not exactly a sign of weakness or support for the regime, but a double-edged tragic necessity. Hence, despite some of its unavoidable limitations, this work stands out as a bold testament of moral leadership in times of human viciousness. Almost a century later, it has many lessons to offer to the Church in the field of diplomacy and Church-State relations. In the modern world when the Church is faced with the challenge of being a moral beacon in the face of several international issues, Pope Pius XI and his heroic attempts in the encyclical have much to offer. The lasting message of the encyclical echoes through decades: "Whoever exalts race or the people or the state or a particular form of state or the depositories of power or any other fundamental value of the human community- however necessary and honourable be their function in worldly things- whoever raises these notions above their standard value and divinizes them to an idolatrous level, distorts and perverts an order of the world planned and created by God."

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