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Against a Brick Wall. Interventions of Kazimierz Papee, the Polish Ambassador at the Holy See with Regard to German Crimes in Poland, November 1942–January 1943

Głową w mur. Interwencje Kazimierza Papée, polskiego ambasadora przy Stolicy Apostolskiej, w sprawie zbrodni niemieckich w Polsce, listopad 1942 – styczeń 1943

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**Against a Brick Wall.
Interventions of Kazimierz Papée, the Polish
Ambassador at the Holy See, with Regard to German
Crimes in Poland, November 1942–January 1943¹**

In no vague terms I raised
the issue of the pope's
responsibility
vis-à-vis the future.
Every word uttered
by the Holy Father
will eventually be analysed
and commented on by history.
(Kazimierz Papée's report from
his audience with Pius XII,
23 January 1943)

On 2 January 1943, the president of the Republic of Poland, Władysław Raczkiewicz, sent a telegram to Pius XII via the Polish Embassy at the Holy See. In dramatic words he described the intensifying German terror in occupied Poland and appealed for moral support: "The last weeks of the previous year brought new shocking information from Poland. The terror that afflicted all strata and segments of Polish society has taken on terrifying forms, not only in the refined cruelty of methods applied, but also in its sheer scale. The extermination of the Jews, including many Christian Semites, turned out to be the first attempt at a systematic and veritably scientific mass murder." The fate of Polish Jews was to herald the physical extermination of the Polish nation, as proved by the deportations from the Zamość region. The president, therefore, requested that the pope "speak out loud and clear, condemning the evil and the evil-doers." As if anticipating the Holy See's arguments against such intervention, he referred to the heroism of Polish Catholic milieus: "I am convinced that confirming it [the Polish nation – D. L.] in the faith that God's law knows no compromise and is above all the transient human considerations, will fortify its determination to endure. It will strengthen its spirit of veritably supernatural courage, which allowed Polish Catholics in Warsaw

¹ I wish to extend my deepest gratitude to Witek Mędykowski and Larry Weinbaum for their help in the compilation of materials.

to stand up in protest against the humiliation and murder of the Jews, taking no heed of the fact that every word of proclamation could lead to brutal repression.”² Clearly, reference is made here to a leaflet published by *Front Odrodzenia Polski* (Poland’s Revival Front) dated 11 August 1942, in response to the “Great Action in the Warsaw Ghetto”.

The date of this letter, and the reference to the leaflet written by Zofia Kossak-Szczucka, a Catholic writer, were not purely accidental. The Polish government-in-exile, as other Allied governments, were very well informed about Pius’s strategy concerning the ongoing conflict. Their awareness stemmed from an analysis of Vatican policy, and conversations and meetings with the pope and his close associates (Secretary of State Luigi Maglione as well as Domenico Tardini and Giovanni B. Montini) conducted by the British envoy extraordinary at the Vatican, D’Arcy Osborne,³ and American chargé d’affaires, Harold Tittman, but particularly by Personal Representative of the President Franklin D. Roosevelt, Myron Taylor. The latter not only tried to persuade Vatican circles to take an official stand on war victims, including the Jews,⁴ but also verify information on the extermination of Polish and European Jews received by the US government from Jewish milieus in Geneva.⁵ He failed in his mission: the information was not confirmed.⁶ But, at

² Full text in: *Armia Krajowa w dokumentach 1939–1945*, vol. VI, *Uzupełnienia* (Wrocław-Warsaw-Cracow, 991), 281–282.

³ Already in July 1942 the British diplomat requested that an official position be taken as regards Polish matters. In reply he heard that the pope had already spoken on the matter. Suggestions concerning condemnation of crimes committed against the Jews were repeated in the following weeks. More on that subject: Owen Chadwick, *Britain and the Vatican during the Second World War* (Cambridge, 1986), 212, 215.

⁴ It was his third consecutive mission (17–28 November 1942) to the Vatican. This is a fragment of M. Taylor’s conference with Cardinal L. Maglione of 25 September 1942: “Ambassador Taylor stated that there is a general impression, not only in America, but also in Europe and elsewhere – an impression of which His Excellency has personally seen much evidence – that the Holy Father should again speak out against the inhuman treatment of refugees and hostages, and especially of the Jews – in occupied territories. Mr. Taylor also pointed out that the general call for a statement from His Holiness comes not only from Catholics but from Protestants as well, and added that he had heard it in America, Lisbon, in Madrid, and anywhere that he has gone in recent months. His Eminence, in reply, declared that the Holy See has been working incessantly for the relief of the unfortunate peoples of the occupied countries and very particularly for refugees and for the Jews. The Secretariat of State and other Vatican agencies, he said, are constantly devoting themselves to these problems. [...] Furthermore, Cardinal Maglione declared [...] His Holiness has on many occasions condemned this treatment of peoples and individuals and had declared that the blessing or the malediction of Almighty God would descend upon rulers according to the manner in which they treat the people under their rule.” [Memorandum of conference between the Cardinal Secretary of State Maglione and Myron Taylor, 25 September 1942, [source:<http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/psf/box52/a467r01.html>].

⁵ For more on how these materials arrived from Switzerland see David S. Wyman, *Pozostawieni własnemu losowi. Ameryka wobec Holocaustu* (*The Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust, 1941–1945*) (Warsaw, 1994), 67–73.

⁶ Three weeks later the Americans were informed that the news of “severe restrictions” imposed on the Jews did, indeed, reach the Vatican, but it could not be verified (see Wyman, *op. cit.*, 76).

the end of 1942, after the Polish government had published materials delivered by the courier Jan Karski, the matter was finally resolved, and through diplomatic actions and propaganda it became common knowledge.⁷

Frantic diplomatic efforts of Allied diplomats at the Vatican yielded, as we know, no measurable results. On the contrary, the papal address on Christmas Eve 1942, of which much had been expected, both in content and form, was phrased in a manner characteristic of Pius XII. Only in the closing lines of his address did the pope very generally and vaguely refer to the victims of the war: "International agreements that lead to rendering the war less inhuman, limiting it only to the belligerents, proscribing norms for occupation and detention of those conquered, remained a dead letter in a number of countries: and who could see the end of this growing deterioration!" In this context he referred to the fallen soldiers, the suffering of their families and that of the emigrants (those who "had been blown out of their homeland and scattered all over the world by the winds of war"). Then he said: "This wish is what humanity owes to the hundreds of thousands of people, who, through no fault of their own, sometimes only due to their race or nationality,⁸ had been doomed to die or slowly perish." This list was closed by victims of bombing⁹ without any reference to their nationality. The words Poles, Jews, and Germans were not mentioned.

Key fragments of this address were so casual as to meet with deep and general disappointment of diplomats accredited at the Holy See. Most scholarly texts quote mainly opinions of American and British diplomats. American chargé d'affaires, Harold Tittman, in a telegram to US Secretary of State Cordell Hull wrote: "As regards the Christmas address, the impression the pope made on me is one of a man sincerely convinced that he had spoken with adequate clarity to satisfy those who in the past demanded that he condemn Nazi crimes. He seemed surprised when I told him that this is not a commonly shared opinion. In his mind, evidently all the world knows that when he spoke of hundreds of people murdered, some for national or ethnic reasons, he did mean the Poles, the Jews and the hostages. He told me that speaking of war atrocities he could not mention the Nazis without mentioning the Bolsheviks, which would certainly not be welcome by the Allies. He added that he was afraid that information the Allies have on the atrocities was indeed true, although his attitude indicated that there was an element of exaggeration for propa-

⁷ On 10 December 1942 the Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs sent a note to Allied governments regarding the extermination of Polish Jews. One week later, the governments of Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Greece, Luxembourg, Holland, Norway, Poland, the USA, Great Britain and Northern Ireland, USSR, Yugoslavia and the French National Committee published a statement on this issue [both documents in: *Ten jest...*, 1007-114].

⁸ According to S. Zuccotti (1 and 329) Pius XII never used the word "race". The Italian term "*stirpe*" ought to be translated as "origin". She blames the translator Józef Lichten for this mistake (but the text in question was published in 1963), but earlier Polish translations also used the word *rasa* ("race").

⁹ From a radio address on Christmas Eve (quoted in *Pius XII a Polska, 1939-1949, Przemówienia, listy, komentarze*, ed K. Papée, Rome 1954, 57).

ganda purposes.”¹⁰ But in the letter of the US president to the pope, this matter was referred to in a very delicate manner.¹¹

These matters looked different from the Polish point of view. As we shall see in documents published here, the assessments of the Polish ambassador at the Vatican, Kazimierz Papée, were not different from those of his American and British colleagues. “Polish London” was even more disappointed, particularly in the light of general expectations of a clear and poignant statement on Polish affairs. The pope’s words, however, were not only very general, but also difficult to understand, which is confirmed by the fact that the editors of Polish newspapers (those published in London and in the underground) found it hard to understand the papal address. They did not even notice those words which, according to the pope, referred to the situation in Poland.¹² Furthermore, the press organ of the High Command of the Home Army (*Komenda Główna Armii Krajowej*), the *Biuletyn Informacyjny*, published a note regarding the statement of Sawa, the Orthodox bishop of Grodno, living in Turkey, in which he condemned German policy in occupied Poland, and blessed his persecuted brethren in faith. In his statement he also said that the Ecu-

¹⁰ Quoted in Falcone, *op. cit.*, 208. See also Z. Waszkiewicz, *Polityka Watykanu wobec Polski, 1939–1945*, Warsaw 1980, 327. Here without the last two sentences. For an assessment of the pope’s attitude by the British ambassador Osborne see Chadwick, *op. cit.*, 220 and Cornwell, *op. cit.*, 351–352.

¹¹ In reply to President Roosevelt’s letter sent on 31 December 1942, the pope (5 January 1943) felt obliged to reassure the president of his efforts: “We are not inactive. . . . that it is our undeviating programme to do everything in our power to alleviate the countless sufferings arising from this tragic conflict: sufferings of the prisoners and of the wounded, of families in fear and trembling over the fate of their loved ones, of entire peoples subjected to limitless privations and hardships: sufferings of the aged, of women, of children who at that moment’s notice find themselves deprived of home and possessions.”

¹² The fact that the pope’s message was completely misunderstood is confirmed by an article in *Dziennik Polski* published in London. We read here: “The Holy Father spoke on Christmas Eve. . . . He said that the church cannot stay mute about the war, although it is not meant to get involved. The pope is the guardian of the natural and supernatural order; thus he had to demand obedience to laws on which an entire new world order will have to be founded. There is a danger of subordinating everything to politics, the heresy of a nation state that aims to subordinate everything to human law. All the world desires peace, yet this peace cannot be merely an external peace between the nations of the world, but it should be an internal peace based on the unity of each nation. Perfect peace, it seems, exists only in the field of work. The Church cannot ignore the fact that the worker still opposes systems that are not a natural obstacle, but a man-made one. The worker ought to have a chance to obtain private property. The pope appealed to all those willing to free themselves from error, achieve unity, improve conditions of social life and end this “sad time of fear”. The road leading there is long and hard, and consists of five stages. [...] Those seeking peace should contribute to the construction of a better world. The existing social order has proved incapable of securing peace.” (“Trzy mowy”, *Dziennik Polski*, 28 December 1942, No. 757, 1, 4). The pope’s address met with a similar reception back in Poland. *Biuletyn Informacyjny* did actually add: “This year’s papal address is a momentous event. It is a kind of a national and social constitution with pervasive democratic aspirations. As the Atlantic Charter, it is based on the pillars of sound democracy: respect for human rights and securing it morally and materially. The Holy Father’s address is a flat denial of everything covered by the Nazi “new order” and a condemnation of totalitarian systems.” (“Orędzie papieża”, *Biuletyn Informacyjny* No. 1, 7 January 1943).

menical Patriarch of Constantinople did not recognise the changes introduced by the occupation authorities. The editor commented: "the bishop's statement [...] and the position of the Patriarch of Constantinople should be taken heed of. A good friend in need is a friend indeed."¹³

This was, one might surmise, a clear allusion to the silence of the Holy See on Polish matters. And thus it was soon understood by the defenders of Pius XII from the National Party (*Stronnictwo Narodowe*).¹⁴

Unlike F. D. Roosevelt's letter of courtesy to the pope, the letter of the Polish president was not only a desperate attempt at making Pius XII aware of what was going on in Poland. One should mention here the opinion of Carlo Falconi, who is one of the pioneers of research into Polish-Vatican relations: "Evidently, every word of this document is an indirect but total criticism of Pius XII's restraint and obscure behaviour."¹⁵ The Polish ambassador at the Vatican also made efforts to make the pope aware of how serious the situation was. Kazimierz Papée (10 January 1889–19 January 1979) was an experienced diplomat, who had worked for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1923–1928) and in diplomatic agencies in the Hague, Berlin, Stockholm, Ankara, Tallin, Königsberg (consul general), Gdańsk (commissioner general of the Republic of Poland). Shortly before his posting to the Vatican he had been appointed by President Ignacy Mościcki (on 17 July 1939) as the Polish envoy in Prague.¹⁶ From the beginning of his tenure Papée submitted materials on Polish matters at the Secretariat of State. In March 1941, he presented the study *The German New Order in Poland*, including detailed information on the situation of the Jews in occupied [Polish] territories.¹⁷ Such interventions increased in number in the second half of

¹³ "Oświadczenie biskupa Sawy", *Biuletyn Informacyjny* No. 51, 31 December 1942.

¹⁴ "Pius XII did not speak incidentally, but addressed the whole world. He spoke as a potentate, officially and with utmost solemnity. He spoke four years on behalf of the Polish nation. He spoke and acted on its behalf. But he is not a friend. Friends in need prove themselves as friends. But Pius XII, at this hour of our greatest historical misfortune turned out to be . . . oh God! There is something atrocious in the anti-papal efforts of Polish underground [organisations] There is something terrifying in the obtuse look of criticism among Polish Catholics and non-Catholics. Thank God, there are signs of awakening. Catholics are getting organised. Individuals are developing their views. What is needed is courage. A few strong blows on the rotting trunk of anti-church and its entire hypocrisy and lies will crumble as rotten wood trampled by the foot of a giant." (See *Warszawa-Rzym 1939-43*, Centralny Wydział Propagandy Zarządu Głównego SN, 84; the brochure was authored by Józef Warszawski.)

¹⁵ Carlo Falconi, *The Silence of Pius XII*, (Boston-Toronto, 1970), 218.

¹⁶ Ample and detailed information on the embassy, its operations and its archives can be found in: J. Żaryn *Stolica Apostolska wobec Polski i Polaków w latach 1944-1958 w świetle materiałów ambasady RP przy Watykanie*, (Warsaw, 1998). As it only covers a limited period, it is only in part relevant to the period in question (9–15).

¹⁷ Another issue is the transfer of information obtained from Italian sources to London. For example, in March 1942 the ambassador reported: "A person of Polish origin, now an Italian citizen, who had been to Poland, namely in Cracow and Warsaw in April and May of this year. He said the following: . . . Recently the terror has intensified and turned on the Jews. Reportedly, several dozen people are shot every day in the Warsaw and Cracow ghettos. Only in Vilna over 25 thousand were shot. Mass murder and executions in Lwów are commonly known. Exterminatory executions took place in Lublin, Rzeszów, Stanisławów, Kołomyja, Kutry, Mielec and many other towns. One of

1942, and were part of propaganda and information efforts of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs,¹⁸ but, it turns out that some of these efforts he initiated himself. On 18 November the ambassador wrote to the minister of foreign affairs, Count Edward Raczyński: "In the light of the mass extermination of the Polish Jews, I have intervened a number of times at the Secretariat of State, submitting relevant documents. On 3 October I submitted the attached memorial¹⁹ to Monsignor Giovanni B. Montini.²⁰ A special issue of *Polish Fortnightly Review* of 15 July,²¹ which covered the persecution of Polish Jews, reached the pope and cardinal secretary of state. Propaganda materials on this issue which I received from the Ministry of Information were promulgated throughout the Vatican and in the Catholic circles in Rome. We did not receive many copies. I shall keep you advised on this matter, particularly as regards the Vatican's reactions."²²

The documents attached herein regard the ambassador's interventions with Vatican circles on German terror in occupied Poland. All of them are kept in the archives of the Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum in London (henceforth: AIP). Based on their character, these documents can be divided into two categories. The first pertains to the flow of information on the Holocaust between the Polish Embassy, the Secretariat of State and London at a critical time for Polish Jews. The first document is the ambassador's letter sent to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with an enclosed note containing information on the situation in the Warsaw Ghetto obtained via

the Gestapo chiefs in Poland reportedly said that within the next year over a million Jews need to disappear from GG (the General Government). The cruelty and perfidy . . . are beyond belief. Examples from Lublin and Krościenko. (List do ministra spraw zagranicznych, AIP, A.44.49/5, 21 May 1942).

¹⁸ On 27 August 1942, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs sent a memorial to the pope requesting moral support for Poland.

¹⁹ According to the distribution list, this document was submitted to D. Tardini. See document No. 2.

²⁰ Giovanni B. Montini (1897-1978), head of section of the Secretariat of State. In 1963 became pope (Paul VI).

²¹ It was the issue of the *Polish Fortnightly Review* No. 48, 15 July, entitled "German Crimes Arraigned". Its parts: public executions, terror as programme, collective responsibility, concentration camps, the Resolution of the National Council of 8 July 1942; press conference in the Ministry of Information of 9 July 1942, with speeches on Jewish affairs by Szwarzbart and Zygielbojm. Information in this speech comes from materials delivered from Poland, both from Polish and Jewish sources. They mentioned 700 thousand murdered. The most important document was a letter from the Bund to the Polish Government of 11 May 1942 [For more see: Stola, *Nadzieja i Zagłada...*, 161-162; Engel, *In the Shadow...*, 181-182]. The issue closed with a broadcast by the archbishop of Westminster regarding the persecution of Poles and Jews, aired on 9 July 1942. Amongst other things, he said the following: "I am going to set down things which cannot be gainsaid concerning the barbarities of those tyrannous invaders in their treatment of Jews and Christians in Poland. . . . In Poland alone the Nazis have massacred 700,000 Jews since the outbreak of war. Must we not appeal to reason? A Jew is a man among rational civilized people. No man may be condemned unless he is tried and found guilty. But the Nazis have put to death without the semblance of justice numberless innocent peoples of non-Aryan race. Innocent blood cries to heaven for vengeance; the Lord will reply in his own good time."

²² AIP, A.44.49/6, Pismo ambasadora Papée do MSZ, 18 November 1942, no pagination.

a person who arrived from the General Government in the second half of September 1942. It appears to be the first information on the great action ever to reach the embassy. The next two documents are materials submitted by the ambassador (3 October and 23 November 1942) to the Secretariat of State. In my opinion, they shed some new light on the role of Polish circles in informing the world about the Holocaust. We [in Poland] are inclined to believe that it was the Polish side, which had the most reliable information on the fate of the Jews, that played the key role in the transfer of relevant information to the Holy See.²³ But, as it turns out, the actual information available to the Polish Embassy at the Vatican on the deportations from the Warsaw Ghetto was exceedingly poor, and most of the information came from Italian sources. In brief, the Vatican, thanks to its own information network (but it should be stressed here that this information did not come from the Polish clergy²⁴) and data obtained from the Americans, was, at the critical moment of Warsaw Ghetto liquidation, far better informed than the Polish embassy. The fact that the embassy was not in touch with what was going on in Warsaw is confirmed particularly by the last of these documents, i.e., by the detailed memorial submitted by the Polish ambassador on 23 November 1942, regarding German terror in occupied Poland. The liquidation of the Warsaw Ghetto is barely mentioned.²⁵ The information campaign and diplomatic efforts of the Polish government on the liquidation of the Warsaw Ghetto began three days later.²⁶

The second set of documents pertains to Ambassador Papée's interventions regarding crimes committed on Poles and Jews with information obtained via Jan Karski. This set contains three documents. The first document is a note from Ambassador Papée's conversation with the deputy secretary of state of the Vatican, Domenico Tardini of 21 December 1942, on the occasion of his first note based on London sources being submitted to him. The other two documents are Kazimierz Papée's reports from an audience with the pope sent to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, related to the papal Christmas address (of 27 December 1942) and President Raczkiewicz's letter (of 23 January 1943). Even though Pius XII and his attitude during World War II have been extensively written about,²⁷ these documents are

²³ J. Cornwell, for example, claims that "throughout October letters from Jewish communities and organisations kept coming to the Vatican. Among them were the reports of Jan Karski, an eyewitness who had been to the Warsaw Ghetto and the death camp at Bełżec." (J. Cornwell, *Papież Hitlera*, 352). This is inaccurate; Karski arrived in mid-November and the materials he brought were published at the end of the month.

²⁴ The Polish Church played a minimal part in informing the Holy See about the Holocaust. I wrote about it in "Antisemitism, Anti-Judaism, and the Polish Catholic Clergy during the Second World War", in: *Antisemitism and its Opponents in Modern Poland*, ed., Robert Blobaum (London: Ithaca 2005), 243–247.

²⁵ It did, however, make an enormous impression, at least in the Allied camp. See Zuccotti, *op. cit.*, 107.

²⁶ See "Likwidacja getta w Warszawie", *Dziennik Polski i Dziennik Żołnierza*, No. 732 26 November 1942, 1.

²⁷ A number of publications on these issues have appeared in Poland: the out-dated and apologetic Pierre Blet, *Pius XII i druga wojna światowa w tajnych archiwach watykańskich* (Katowice: 2000); the extremely critical works of John Cornwell, *Papież Hitlera. Tajemnicza historia Piusa XII*

an interesting contribution to this still interesting and controversial issue. But, in my opinion, although pushed back not only by foreign authors, the Polish ambassador commands more attention, more than the pope himself. One is impressed by the dignity of his demeanour, determination and certainly that he is right, but also by his rare critical attitude towards the Church. His matter-of-factness and realism and his awareness of the futility of his efforts make one wonder and command the deepest respect.

Equally interesting is Kazimierz Papée's characterisation of the pope's behaviour and his assessment of the pontiff's attitude, whose arguments and defence strategies are already known from other sources. What is interesting, the pope, in the presence of the Polish ambassador, not only ignored Jewish matters, mentioned for the first time by the diplomat, but was also indifferent to the fate of converts, an issue that was brought up by President Raczkiewicz. Pius XII is not even interested in the attitude of the Polish Church to the Holocaust, although this matter had been raised indirectly, by reference to *Protest* in the president's letter (*Protest* itself, apparently, never reached the Vatican).

The reply to President Raczkiewicz's memorial was drafted only on 16 February 1943. The pope made only a superficial reference to the issues, ignoring the Jews completely. He said, which was indeed true, that among the facts presented "there is none we would not be aware of," making reference to his previous efforts for Poland and the Poles.²⁸ Even before this letter arrived, the Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Edward Raczynski, had sent a letter to the pope, in which, despite the failure of efforts made at the Vatican, he expressed gratitude for the words in the Christmas address: "The Polish government and Polish society find hope and comfort in the solemn thoughts expounded in Christmas addresses of the supreme pontiff, with a view to a better and truly Christian organisation of human living and international co-operation. . . . The Polish government instructed its diplomatic personnel to take heed of the pope's address in their efforts. Poland welcomed the indirect condemnation, expressed in the pope's Christmas address, of the lawless and cruel actions of the occupiers who victimise the Polish nation, and for these solemn words and for all the Holy Father has done to alleviate the suffering of the nation, [Poland] is grateful."²⁹

(Warsaw: 2000) and Daniel J. Goldhagen *Niedokończony rozrachunek. Rola Kościoła katolickiego w Holocauście i niedopełniony obowiązek zadośćuczynienia* (Warsaw: 2005). As regards the latest studies, one should mention the monograph by Susan Zuccotti, *Under His Very Windows. The Vatican and the Holocaust in Italy* (New Haven-London: 2000) and Michael Phayer's *The Catholic Church and the Holocaust, 1930-1965* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2000).

²⁸ The pope was convinced of the gravity of his efforts for Poland. We also know that President Raczkiewicz's letter aroused some discontent at the Vatican. Maglione complained (3 March 1943) in his letter to Archbishop William Godfrey, the Holy See envoy to the Polish government, that the letter from the Polish president did not contain a word of gratitude for what the pope had done for Poland. He also requested that "Polish London" be made aware of such efforts on the part of the Vatican.

²⁹ See Edward Raczynski's letter of 10 February 1943, Pius XII's letter to Władysław Raczkiewicz, in: *Pius XII a Polska*, 59, 62-63.

This was not a capitulation but a sound assessment of reality: Polish diplomacy did face future challenges, where the Vatican's position was of importance. The Polish side was still determined to obtain a clear papal position on Polish affairs. The prime minister and the commander-in-chief, Władysław Sikorski, met on 25 March 1943 with the archbishop of New York, Francis J. Spellman, and Archbishop Godfrey. During the meeting he polemized with the Vatican, using arguments to the effect that a papal statement would have caused greater repressions: "one should disregard [possible] German reactions. Nothing worse could happen to Poland today. And the Vatican's voice, which Poland so desires, would only raise spirits and strengthen attachment to the Church."³⁰ However, condemnation of crimes against the Jews was not discussed. One month earlier the bishop of Włocławek, Karol Radoński, who was in London, severely criticised Pius XII's attitude. But he did not bring Jewish matters to the foreground, either.³¹

Polish expectations vis-à-vis the Holy See, apart from certain diplomatic efforts, were met by the pope's speech at the College of the Cardinals on 2 June 1943, where he spoke on the historic role of Poland in the history of Catholicism, in general terms, reminiscent in style of the Christmas address. General Sikorski sent a telegram to the pope, thanking "His Holiness for mentioning the role of Poland in the defence of Christendom throughout the ages."³²

The words of gratitude offered by representatives of the Polish Government were the basis of the legend of the involvement of Pius XII in Polish affairs (as early as during the war itself nationalist circles began to defend the pope.)³³ Papée himself

³⁰ *Protokoły posiedzeń Rady Ministrów Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, vol. V, wrzesień 1942-lipiec 1943* (Cracow 2001), 350.

³¹ In a letter to Secretary of State Cardinal Maglione (15 February 1943) he wrote: "Facts demonstrate that despite His Holiness's silence, persecutions become more intense day by day. Now, even children are taken away from their parents and deported to Germany, and mothers who try to protect their children are killed on the spot. With such injustice crying for vengeance, the inconceivable silence of the Supreme Teacher of the Church, for those who do not know its reasons – and there are hundreds of them – might lead to spiritual ruin." The fate of the Jews was treated here in an instrumental manner. Radoński complained that the Poles "also heard that the Holy Father condemned, via his nuncio, the persecution of the Jews in France. Are we really less valuable than the Jews?" The silence on the extermination of the Jews is stranger not only because Radoński was the only Polish bishop to speak out on this issue in public (see doc. No. 6, note No. 6). In the letter to Pius XII quoted herein, he gives an account of his conversation with ... Jan Karski (for the entire letter see Józef Dębiński, *Biskup włocławski Karol Mieczysław Radoński (1883-1951): życie i działalność* (Toruń: 2001), 184–188).

³² Quoted in: "Papież milczy?" *Agencja Informacyjna Kraj* No. 1, 15 July 1943. Fragments of the pope's speech were published in the *Biuletyn Informacyjny* (23 June 1943, No. 25). From the point of view of the critics of papal policy, "It is hard to deny . . . that in spite of all, this speech must strike everyone because it fails to take a clear stand and name not only victims of violence and cruelty, but also the perpetrators." (*Kraj* No. 5, 24 August 1943).

³³ In 1943, the Jesuit Edmünd Elter, National Party envoy, in consultation with the ambassador brought to Poland a collection of papal speeches on the situation in Poland. The pope's position was defended primarily by the nationalist press. See Żaryn, *op.cit.*, 13. In Poland, apart from the booklet *Warszawa-Rzym 1939-43*, one more brochure was published: *Papież Pius XII a Polska* (published in 1943 by Z. Frączyński, written by Bishop Stanisław Adamski). In London, texts on

has contributed to this, both directly and indirectly. It appears he succeeded in persuading the government that the pope was not in a position to do more.³⁴ In the study *Pius XII a Polska*³⁵ published in 1954, not only did he conceal the gravity of the situation and the futility of his efforts in 1942/1943, but also, through carefully selected quotations from Vatican dignitaries and his own reports, Papée presented the efforts of the Holy See in a definitely favourable light. He wrote in the foreword: "It is doubtful whether there is another Catholic nation which, on the basis of [available] documents, would display such complete concern and such a watchful participation in papal thought. Indeed, Pius XII's statement, his speeches, addresses and letters, are but a fragment of the Holy See's efforts for Poland and Poles at this tragic historical moment. There is no field where these efforts were not of importance."³⁶ This is not surprising – he was still the ambassador at the Vatican and the publication was consulted with the Vatican. This publication remained a reference point for historians for many years.³⁷ President Raczkievicz's letter to the pope was not published in the Vatican volume on Polish-Vatican relations during World War II, *Actes et Documents du Saint Siège relatifs à la Seconde Guerre Mondiale* (1967).³⁸ In this context, an extensive presentation by the ambassador published in the London newspaper *Dziennik Polski* appears to be particularly noteworthy. Although he was clearly surprised at the lack of Polish government documents, he defended the publisher's decision, rightly predicting that the missing memorial from President Raczkievicz to the pope would be published in another volume of the series.³⁹ In this text, apart from a severe reprimand of authors criticising the war-time attitude of the pope (*Hochhut, Friedlander, Levy i Falconi*)⁴⁰, he admitted that the audience with the pope, when he delivered the president's letter, "was not easy."⁴¹ This intriguing

this subject were published by a former member of parliament and collaborator of *Maty dziennik*, Jan Rembieliński (*Sprawa* No. 23, 1943) and S. Grabski (*Jutro Polski* No. 18, 1943).

³⁴ In a conversation with the American ambassador, despite his criticism, he was to have said that, if stripped of the rhetoric, the address was an indictment of totalitarian doctrines, Nazism in particular. He emphasised that his government would not be satisfied until the word "Nazism" be used in such condemnation. He also said that he had done everything in his powers to explain to his government that the pope was not in a position to speak with greater clarity. See Chadwick, *op. cit.*, 220.

³⁵ *Pius XII a Polska, 1939-1949, Przemówienia, listy, komentarze*, Kazimierz Papée, ed., (Rome, 1954).

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

³⁷ Cf. C. Falconi, *op. cit.*, 208–209.

³⁸ *Actes et Documents du Saint Siège relatifs à la Seconde Guerre Mondiale, Le Saint Siège et La Situation Religieuse en Pologne et Dans Les Pays Baltes 1939-1945* (Vatican, 1967) (henceforth: ADSS).

³⁹ *Le Saint Siège relatifs à la Seconde Guerre Mondiale, Novembre 1942-Décembre 1943* (Vatican, 1973), 1979–180.

⁴⁰ Rolf Hochhut, *Der Stellvertreter* (1966); Saul Friedlaender, *Pius XII and the Third Reich: A Documentation* (1966); Guenter Levy, *The Catholic Church and Nazi Germany* (1964); Saul Friedlander, *Pius XII and the Third Reich* (1966); Carlo Falconi, *op. cit.*

⁴¹ K. Papée, "Akta i dokumenty Stolicy Apostolskiej dotyczące drugiej wojny światowej", *Dziennik Polski* No. 29, 22 July 1967, 1.

confession passed unnoticed by researchers.⁴² From the apologists' point of view, the matter was evident and needed no further explanation: Pius XII in his Christmas address condemned German terror in Poland and the Polish side recognised and appreciated this fact.⁴³ Polish historians usually limited themselves to very general information on the content of President Raczkiewicz's letter, hardly ever mentioning the reaction of Pius XII.⁴⁴ Texts on the attitude of Polish diplomacy towards the extermination of the Jews do not differ significantly. Dariusz Stola merely states that "as Polish politicians feared, these efforts were in vain."⁴⁵ David Engel says nothing about the fate of Raczkiewicz's letter or other Polish efforts at the Vatican.⁴⁶ Most astonishing is the approach of Father Zygmunt Zieliński, who in his article on diplomatic relations between the Polish government-in-exile and the Holy See during World War II, simply fails to mention President Raczkiewicz's letter to Pius XII.⁴⁷

It seems to be high time to resume the discussion of Polish-Vatican relations, and describe the history of the Polish embassy at the Vatican during World War II.⁴⁸

⁴² I am grateful to Adam Puławski for pointing out this text to me.

⁴³ Cf. Blet, *op. cit.*, 136-137.

⁴⁴ Typical approach: Eugeniusz Duraczyński, *Rząd polski na uchodźstwie 1939-1945* (Warsaw, 1993), 207; Z. Waszkiewicz, *Polityka Watykanu...*, 327-328.

⁴⁵ D. Stola, *Nadzieja i Zagłada...*, 197; *idem*, *Dyplomacja polska wobec zagłady Żydów*, in: *Historia dyplomacji polskiej*, Waldemar Michowicz ed, vol. V (Warsaw, 1999), 684-685.

⁴⁶ D. Engel, vol. II, 41 ["They addressed a note to the Vatican about the murder of Jews and asked 'that the Holy See (...) clearly and distinctly condemn' the German crimes."]

⁴⁷ Lack of orientation in London-published materials is out of the question, as the author uses them selectively, just as he does with the Vatican sources. Z. Zieliński, *Polska-Watykan w latach 1939-1945*, [in:] *Historia dyplomacji polskiej*, W. Michowicz, ed. (Warsaw, 1999), vol. V 1939-1945, 711-739. The same shortcoming is the case in: *Epoka rewolucji i totalitaryzmów. Studia i szkice* (Lublin, 1993).

⁴⁸ After I had completed this text I read the manuscript of Marek Kornat's study, which in a novel way deals with these issues [Materiały źródłowe: *Ambasador Kazimierz Papée – piętnaście rozmów z papieżem Piusiem XII w czasie II wojny światowej* to be published in *Zeszyty Historyczne* No. 156. Another work is to be published, *Stolica Apostolska i Polska w przededniu i podczas II wojny światowej (Z dziejów stosunków dyplomatycznych)*].

DOCUMENT NO. 1

Vatican, 7 October 1942.

Nr 49/SA/133
Załącznik odpis: Prywatnie/SA/124

Confidential
To
The Minister of Foreign Affairs
London

From a friend, a curia cardinal, whom I sent a copy of *La France Libre* of 15 June 1942 with Mr. B. Pragier's article⁴⁹ "La paix après la deuxième grande guerre – le point de vue polonais", I have received a reply, copy enclosed.

[–] K. Papée
Ambassador of the R[epublic of] P[oland]
At the Vatican

23 September 1942
[admitted 24 September 1942].

Dear Sir,

A few days ago an Italian dignitary,⁵⁰ who had come from Poland, provided me with some information, which thanks to a favourable coincidence I was able to send on without delay.

Alas, it is only today that I can communicate one piece of this information, but perhaps it might still be useful in conversation with Ambassador Taylor.⁵¹

We are aware that practically every day several thousand Jews are deported to the east, beyond Lublin, where, in separate barracks, they are stripped of their clothes and gassed or shot on a mass scale. The so-called "small ghetto" has already

⁴⁹ The reference here is made to Adam Pragier (1886–1976), an economist, PPS activist, and member of the National Council (Rada Narodowa).

⁵⁰ The informant in question was probably Prince Roberto Malvezzi, an industrialist from Istituto per la Ricostruzione Industriale, who had arrived from the General Government. On 18 September he shared his observations with Cardinal Maglione. A summary of this conversation was published in ADSS, vol. VIII [doc. 493, note 2], 665–666. In comparison with the document published in this volume, the summary is very general, and, primarily, it contains no reference to the situation in the Warsaw Ghetto. Cf. Zuccotti, *op. cit.*, 104. Malvezzi had been to Poland several times before; he also carried correspondence from Polish bishops to the Vatican.

⁵¹ US President's special envoy Myron Taylor (1874–1959) arrived at the Vatican on 19 September 1942. On 19, 22, 26 September he was specially received by Pius XII. He handed him President F. D. Roosevelt's letter and informed the pope of American war goals. During the third audience, he raised the issue of the pope's attitude to war victims, including the persecution of the Jews.

been emptied, whereas the “big ghetto” (this information is reliable but generally unknown) is to be emptied by 30 October.

Thus by the end of October around 300,000 Jews are to be exterminated in a brutal manner, while the ghetto is meant to be returned to the Poles.

The reason I write this is that, according to my sources, Mr Taylor arrived also in connection with the Jewish matter, and not without some pressure by American Jews, so the above information could be of particular significance to him.⁵²

With true respect.

[signature, illegible]

[Hand-written note]:

I have spoken with Taylor.⁵³ He is informed in the matter but as to the intention to terminate and manner – less so. Unfortunately he believes that, for the time being, nothing can be done. 24 September 1942. P⁵⁴

Source: AIP, A44.49/6, Państwa a Polska 1942.

⁵² On 25 September, Taylor in a memorandum to Cardinal L. Maglione included information from the Jewish Agency for Palestine sent on 30 September 1942.

⁵³ Unfortunately, in the London archives I did not find the report from the conversation between the ambassador and the US president's envoy. Possibly, such a document can be found in American archives (Truman Presidential Museum and Library, F. D. Roosevelt Presidential Library, and others). This issue is interesting for one more reason: Taylor's memorial contains an alarming passage on the attitude of Poles to the extermination of the Jews: “It is a tragedy that the Polish population is being incited by the Germans against the Jews and the relationship between the Poles and the Jews has been aggravated to the last degree. In Lemberg this is particularly true” [quoted in: *Vatican Diplomatic Files*, box 52 in: F. D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum, <http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/psf/box52/a467r01.html>].”

⁵⁴ Kazimierz Papée.

DOCUMENT NO. 2

No 49/SA/132

Vatican, 3 October 1942

Slaughter of Polish Jews in Poland carried out by the Germans is generally known.⁵⁵ These killings are carried out on a mass scale, by various methods, including gassing in specially adapted rooms.

- I. According to a very reliable source, it has been confirmed that the Vilna Ghetto (80,000 Jews) has been reduced first to 30,000, and finally to 12,000. (This fact had already been indicated.) In Niemenczyn near Vilna (a town of 2,000 inhabitants), 600 Jews were killed; in Nowa Wilejka, 100; in Ejszyski, 200.⁵⁶
- II. Another source (from Warsaw) reports that the ghetto is being systematically vacated. One of its parts, the so-called "small ghetto", is already deserted. Groups of Jews of over 1,000 are deported by rail on a daily basis beyond Lublin, to the East. It seems, according to information from a citizen of one of the Axis powers, who had visited those areas, that Jews are first concentrated in a camp, where they are to be killed; in any case, it has been determined that their families have no further information from them. One can expect that in the next few months this will affect the entire population of the Warsaw Ghetto, while the vacated houses will be given to the "Aryans".⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Original in French, transl. Hanna Abramowicz. document published in ADSS, vol. 8 (doc. 497), 670.

⁵⁶ This information was already a few months old. On 30 April 1942 *Biuletyn Informacyjny* in a very detailed account on the extermination of the Jews wrote: "In the ethnographic part of Lithuania and in the Vilna region, the Germans found enthusiastic collaborators among the Lithuanians: they murdered all the Jews in all towns of pre-war Lithuania (the 'Kaunas Lithuania') including Kaunas itself, while in the Vilna region: in Niemenczyn – 600, in Ejszyski – 200, in Troki – over 1,000, in Woronów – 500, in Nowa Wilejka – 5,500, in Kleck and Sieniawka – everyone. In Vilna, with 70,000 Jews living there before the war, only 14,000 were left, i.e. around 50,000 had been murdered."

⁵⁷ Malvezzi was the source. Polish circles in London, although informed by Stefan Karboński, head of the Civilian Combat Committee (*Komitet Walki Cywilnej*) and by the commander of the Home Army (AK) Gen. Stefan Rowecki, did not realise how serious the situation in Warsaw was.

Distribution list.⁵⁹

Reports from Warsaw.⁶⁰

"Struggle continues in the entire country. Many arrests. Germans shot at crowds. Many Poles hanged. Families of those executed were forced to witness the executions, largely in public, often along railway tracks; bodies are left for a long time in view of passengers travelling by train (Poznań, Cracow).

Grain is seized, without regard to seeding or food supply. Those villages where requisition quotas have not been fulfilled are levelled, and their inhabitants (men, women and children) massacred.

The same happened in villages near which parachutists had been dropped.⁶¹

Prisons are full, and regularly emptied: each time they are emptied to make room for new prisoners, while the old ones are sent to concentration camps to die. Prisons in Warsaw, Radom, Cracow, Przemyśl, Rzeszów and Lublin are notorious for prisoners being tortured there.

There are many concentration camps; people are exterminated by malnutrition and exhaustion. Their families are notified of their death from cards that specify and date and victim's surname with a pre-printed text: "died in a concentration camp". Such cards arrive every day to all towns and villages, often in tens or hundreds.

The "manhunt" organised by specially trained units is still going on in order to secure the work force for forced labour in Germany. Every day trains full of deported people pass through Warsaw. (The number of Poles deported to forced labour in Germany is given by *Reichsarbeitsblatt*, the German Journal of Laws; in 1941 – 744,500 men and 362,700 women, i.e. over a million Poles out of a total of 2,139,500 of foreign workers in Germany; the number has increased significantly since.)

The Germans try to reduce Poland's demographic potential, afraid of population growth after the war. Germany organizes human breeding: women and young girls are brought in from Poland to bear children that are taken away from them and

⁵⁸ Original in French. Transl. [into Polish] by Hanna Abramowicz.

⁵⁹ The distribution list in the header says that 30 copies of this document were made. Recipients' names were pencilled in.

⁶⁰ The ambassador sent a copy of this memorial to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 27 November 1942. This material was prepared on the basis of information received from Poland and London. It is difficult to identify his sources. No doubt, one of them was the so-called "Letter of Polish women to General Sikorski", which, according to the ambassador, reached him via Budapest "through Church circles' contacts in Poland" (AIP, A.44.49/6, Letter of 21 November 1942, bp). This letter was published in the underground newspaper *Żywiq*. One could ask here why the more widely known *Protest* did not reach him in the same way.

⁶¹ This refers to Soviet saboteurs dropped in Poland to carry out sabotage and partisan operations.

educated by Nazi institutions. A good deal of women and men deported to Germany undergo sterilization.

Mass executions of Jews continue. In Warsaw, Lvov, Vilna, Lublin, Przemyśl, Przeworsk, Tarnów – the number of murdered Jews is estimated at tens of thousands, not to mention other towns and villages.⁶² They are killed with asphyxiating gas in specially prepared chambers (often in [railway] cars or by shooting; later the corpses or half-dead are buried in the ground. There are many cases of collective suicide of Jewish families; Jewish mothers throw themselves out of high-storey windows together with their children. In Lublin, Germans threw Jewish children against the pavement. In Przeworsk, a crowd of desperate Jews gathered round a cross, begging Christ for mercy. Transports of Jews led to their death can be seen everywhere. There are rumours that the Germans use their corpses in chemical factories (soap manufacturing).

It is estimated that the extermination of Polish Jews will soon be completed, and specially trained troops, unable to stop the daily bloodshed, cannot resist killing others. In eastern Małopolska, a hunt for beggars, men and women was organized; they were killed. There are fears that extermination of elderly people might be initiated. All these actions are undertaken in order to reduce the number of people to be fed.

These operations have enormous repercussions among the witnessing Poles: their fear grows constantly. More and more people tend to believe that only an immediate reaction directed at enemy towns could compel their government to change their policies vis-à-vis the Polish population.”

AIP, A.44.49/6, Polska a Państwa 1942.

⁶² The “Letter of Polish Women...” contains the following sequence of towns: Warsaw, Lvov, Cracow, Lublin, Przemyśl, Przeworsk. The letter also mentions the names of the death camps (Bełżec, Sobibór, Treblinka), which do not appear in the ambassador’s material.

DOCUMENT NO. 4.

Note from a conversation with Secretary of State Tardini,⁶³ 21 December 1942.

Top secret

Submitting a Note on the persecution of Polish Jews (vide Enclosure)⁶⁴ I expressed the conviction that the Holy See will strongly and clearly condemn these as well as other German crimes, whose scale exceeds anything known in history. Monsignor Tardini replied that one should simultaneously condemn Soviet crimes on the same Poles.⁶⁵

In my reply I said that I personally had no objection to such a formulation. Most important is condemnation *publiquement et sans équivoque*.⁶⁶ We have waited for this for a very long time. One could even ask whether our presence – our, i.e. non-Axis diplomats – at the Vatican is at all useful [*utile*]; whether it is not becoming useless. Not to mention the violation of our status by Italy – one might draw attention to the fact that our notes more and more frequently receive no answer (*c'est vrai qu'il ne s'agit pas des réponses formelles*),⁶⁷ [and] it seems that courier communication with our governments might be cut off. These matters are of vital importance for each embassy here.

⁶³ Domenico Tardini (1888-1961), deputy secretary of state, secretary of the Congregation of Extraordinary Church Affairs.

⁶⁴ The note, dated 19 December 1942, was written in French. It was emphasised that information came from one's own sources. The note contained a warning that "the Germans are liquidating the entire Jewish population in Poland" and that the number of victims exceeded one million. It confirmed the scale of deportations from the Warsaw Ghetto: "In Warsaw itself, in mid-July 1942 there were around 400,000 Jews in the ghetto. During July and August, over 250,000 were deported to the east. On 1 August [incorrect date – D. L.] only 40,000 food coupons were issued. In other Polish towns, extermination of the Jews proceeds at the same pace." **Document published in:** *Armia Krajowa w Dokumentach*, vol. VI [document No. 1729], 279.

⁶⁵ Tardini's note, drafted on 18 May 1942, in response to a letter of Archbishop Sapieha on the tragic situation of the Polish nation and church, presents a different line of argument: "it does not seem appropriate to publicise an act of the Holy See in order to condemn and protest against such great injustice. This is not due to the fact that there is no such matter, not because that such action does not fall within the scope of laws and obligations of the Holy See (as the supreme guardian of natural law), but because practical reasons seem to compel one to refrain, at least for the time being, from such public protest. Indeed, given the current situation, such public condemnation by the Holy See would be widely used for political purposes by one of the sides in this conflict. . . . as a result such a public declaration of the Holy See would be distorted and used for political purposes." The author of the document was of the opinion that a note to the German government should be drafted, which, as a matter of fact, would not change German policy, but it would be a document that "will see the light of day some time in the future, and when everything would be revealed: crimes and condemnation, [and] would prove the prudence and constancy of the Holy See" (quoted in: *Księga Sapieżyńska*, vol. II, 268). Such a note was submitted on 2 March 1943, but the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs sent it back as inconsistent with the concordat.

⁶⁶ Publically and unequivocally.

⁶⁷ It is true that the question here does not concern formal replies.

Mons[ignore] Tardini replied that he was unaware of any changes in courier communication. There are only fears regarding the safety of couriers travelling across occupied France. As to the air connection with Lisbon, it is hard to obtain a seat in an Italian airplane.

I replied that, in my opinion, the Holy See not only should have a free seat in an aeroplane, but also its own aeroplanes. But, unfortunately, this again demonstrates the extent of dependence of the Vatican on the Italian state. One arrives at the conclusion that not all problems *qui se posent entre le Saint Siege et l'Italie ont ete solutionnee*.⁶⁸ The Vatican is under constant pressure of the Italian state with respect to general ecclesial matters. After all, the fact that the Holy See has remained mute on so many crimes committed by the Germans could only be explained by its dependence on the Italian state. "Non siamo liberi."

Mons[ignore] Tardini, much disturbed, replied that not everything people say is true.

I said that I was not the only one to reach these conclusions, and that all this is taking place when the course of the war is already past a difficult turn, when Allied victory is near, and Italy should think how to save what is still left from disaster, because it needs the Vatican for more.

"I am saying all this" – I concluded – "not only in the interest of the country I represent, but also in the interest of the Holy See. Time will show I was right."

Source: AIP, A.44.122/28

⁶⁸ between the Holy See and Italy have been solved.

Vatican, 31 December [19]42.

No. 122/SA/297

Secret

To

The Minister of Foreign Affairs

London

On the 27th of this month I was received, together with embassy staff, by the Holy Father at a routine New Year's audience, to extend wishes to the Holy Father on behalf of the head of state, the government, the nation and myself.

Pius XII looks and feels good. After some serious health problems, which I had reported to the minister in the spring, the autumn brought some improvement and the pope's health leaves nothing to be desired. One notices tiredness due to chronic overwork.

Having listened gracefully to my wishes, the Holy Father replied that he wholeheartedly reciprocates them. The Polish nation is very close to his heart. He wishes Poland God's grace and grandeur, and extends to the president, the prime minister and the government as well as the "entire dear Polish nation" his fullest blessing ("sa plus ample Bénédiction").⁶⁹

Having inquired about the president's health the pope began to discuss the prime minister's visit to the United States.⁷⁰ I was able to inform the Holy Father in detail on the goals and current results of the visit on the basis of information bulletins received from you, Sir. I said, among other things, that the talks probably touched upon the future western borders of Poland. I mentioned the prime minister's speech at the Catholic University in Washington, D.C. on the occasion of being awarded an honorary doctorate from this University; I promised to send the text of this speech to the cardinal secretary of state, which the Holy Father acknowledged with interest.

In this part of the conversation I said that the last eight weeks, in my opinion, had significantly changed the course of the war. The Germans have lost the initiative to the Allies, and they are clearly running short of reserves and material. The pope replied: "Perhaps, but it will certainly be a long war." Then he began asking about Poland, the mood of the people and, finally, the prince metropolitan.

I briefly outlined the unfailing resistance at home, the steadfastness and the scale of persecution of both Poles and Jews. When I mentioned Father Sapieha, the metropolitan, the Holy Father said he recently wrote him a letter, which according to the prince metropolitan could not be published; this could bring even worse persecution of the faithful and the Church.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Full blessing.

⁷⁰ General Sikorski visited the USA in early December 1942.

⁷¹ On 28 August 1942 the pope sent the metropolitan of Cracow a handwritten letter, with the suggestion that it be read out in churches. On 28 October 1942 Sapieha replied: "We also regret that we cannot read Your Holiness's letter in public, because it would lead to new victims and fur-

In reference to the above the pope said how difficult it was for him to speak out, and that he was afraid that any further statement could bring new misfortune. "It is difficult to name names and states; still in my last Christmas Eve address I did speak clearly and did condemn."

As I did not respond, the Holy Father began to persuade me that in his last radio message he did indeed condemn in no vague terms certain theories, methods and states. He also recalled certain passages from his address. When I said, "j'espère que les fidèles l'auront compris",⁷² the pope started nodding vigorously. I was under the impression that the Holy Father would be very much interested to hear a proclamation that in his address he did condemn German crimes, that is to say that he satisfied the appeal of Allied states directed to him, and that he would like this fact to be acknowledged. There was a tone of disappointment in the pope's voice regarding possible doubts.

As I know Pius XII fairly well, I am deeply convinced that he spoke sincerely. The pope is now convinced that he clearly and strongly, albeit generically, condemned German crimes in the occupied countries.

This theme was also prominent during [papal] audiences with other allied diplomats: the ambassador of Brazil, the British minister, US chargé d'affaires and a councillor of the Yugoslavian embassy. The pope referred again to his condemnation (in his last address) of the attempted extermination of races and peoples, illicit executions, hostage taking, etc.

There lies the source of the difficulties in finding common ground language: with his great personal holiness, Pius XII, due to his sensitive and delicate nature, the character of his studies and a certain one-sidedness of his career – exclusively diplomatic and far from [real] life – cannot speak a different language and passes by the realities of our time, not realising how little an average Catholic can understand and remember from his enunciations, isolated from facts, complex and carefully polished. The very difficult situation of the Vatican obviously affects the style of such utterances.

The audience, warm in tone, was concluded with the customary personal blessing.⁷³

ther persecution." Sapieha's arguments, however, are interesting: "Such persecution, we presume, would be undertaken against us as a result of our secret contacts with the Holy See" (see *Księga Sapieżyńska*, vol. I, 268). In other words, it is not the contents of the pope's letter, but the method of communication that would be most important here. It is not without some significance in this story. Sapieha, therefore, did not oppose publication of the letter to Polish clergy, but he only suggested (in another letter) that the pope's letter addressed "ad Episcopos Poloniae" be published in "Acta Apostolicae Sedis" and sent to Poland by normal way of post! Furthermore, it did not even mention whether the pope should or should not address the Polish nation.

⁷² I hope the faithful will understand that.

⁷³ In the volume *Pius XII a Polska*, the ambassador published a summary of his report from this audience: "The Holy Father received me and embassy staff to hear New Year's wishes. During the audience the pope said with particular emphasis that Poland is one of the nations that are closest to his heart and pronounced his fullest blessing to the president, prime minister, the government and the entire nation, including Polish Americans. . . . He put particular stress on his last Christmas Eve

[–] K. Papée
Ambassador of the R[epublic of] P[oland]
at the Vatican

Source: AIP, A.44.122/28 Watykan a Polska, 1942.

address, explaining that he clearly condemned certain theories, methods and states. . . . The Holy Father also told other Allied ambassadors that his Christmas Eve address was the condemnation we had requested in our collective appeal” (58).

DOCUMENT NO. 6

Vatican, 23 January 1943.
 Nr 122/SA/6
 To
 The Minister of Foreign Affairs
 of the R[epublic of] P[oland]
 London

Following information sent via a different channel I report the following::

Immediately after I had received your instruction by wire and the president's message, I requested an audience with the Holy Father and fairly soon, on 21 January at 11 a.m., I was received.

After a few introductory sentences I came to the point. I briefly outlined the recent events in Poland and requested permission to read the president's message.

When I finished the pope, so far smiling and gracious, told me, clearly nervous: „D'abord je me demande Si Monsieur le Président a lu mon message de Noël. Je suis étonné, je suis même peiné. Oui, je suis peiné. Pas un mot de remerciement, de reconnaissance, je veux dire di riconoscimento – Anerkennung – et pourtant j'ai tout dit, tout. J'étais Clair et distinct”.⁷⁴

At this point, the pope quoted individual passages from his Christmas Eve address, pausing at the condemnation he pronounced of the persecution of nationalities, races, executions, deportations and plundering. He quoted extensively from memory.

“Apart from that,” said the pope, “I wrote a letter to Metropolitan Sapieha (i.e. the letter of 28 January 1942)”,⁷⁵ which was virtually addressed to all the Polish clergy. This letter clearly proves my care for Poland. Some time ago, the metropolitan thanked me in a special letter, but also informed me that the letter could not be made public, because it was well known that it might lead to further persecution of the Church and the faithful. And the metropolitan requested no further enunciations. After all, a man of his valour and virtue – being there on the spot – must be credible.⁷⁶ Other bishops are of the same opinion.”⁷⁷

I replied, assuring the Holy Father of the president's and the governments gratitude, for the recent Christmas Eve address and everything the Holy Father had done

⁷⁴ First, I wonder whether the president had [actually] read my Christmas Eve address. I am surprised and even sorry. Yes, I am sorry. Not a word of gratitude, appreciation, I wish to say di riconoscimento – Anerkennung – after all, I said everything, everything. I spoke clearly and poignantly.

⁷⁵ Cf. note 2 to previous document.

⁷⁶ Cf. document No. 5, note 2.

⁷⁷ Stanisław Adamski, the bishop of Katowice, wrote in January 1943 to the pope that many Poles were of the opinion that they had been forgotten by the pope.

for Poland. This gratitude can be confirmed by a long list of thanks in the archives of the Secretariat of State, as well as to the Holy Father personally. My communication with London is so irregular that I can never be certain in what chronological order I will receive my government's instructions. It is evident from such echoes as, for example, the London radio, with what gratitude the Holy Father's last address was received.

In Poland new events have taken place: their horrific character cannot be compared to anything known to history. It is not surprising that the president wished to share his knowledge of these events with the Holy Father and draw his attention to them. The Christmas Eve address, which is a marvellous document, contains general, generic and anonymous condemnation. The Holy Father uses a language we understand and admire, but will the general masses, for whose soul we are fighting now, understand him [particularly – handwritten note] in those translations I have seen? The Polish translation is poor; I have heard the same about the Portuguese [version]. Can appropriate comments on this address be obtained in Poland? Of course not, because the occupiers will not permit them.

As to our bishops – they are not free, but if they were now, they would speak the same language as I do. They would request words *de soutien et de réconfort*.⁷⁸ For the Polish nation, because, after all, this could help [them] in their struggle, in their work. The best proof is the appeal of Bishop Radoński,⁷⁹ whom I heard with deep emotion on the radio several days ago.⁸⁰

The pope interrupted me, saying that those in exile can speak impudently, but those back home suffer and have to answer for everything. The Germans are only waiting for a pretext for further persecution.

I replied that the Germans needed no pretext. The terror is a system, a premeditated method of government. The Gestapo produces its own pretexts. Voices begging for intercession, for the Holy Father's word for Poland, do come from home from our finest priests. The Polish people dismiss the idea that "pretexts should be avoided." I am afraid that the Holy Father is not aware of this trait of our national character.

⁷⁸ Of support and comfort.

⁷⁹ Karol Radoński (1883–1951), the bishop of Włocławek; spent the war in London. In his letters (14 September 1942 and 15 February 1943), he criticised Pius XII for his attitude towards crimes committed in Poland. See Józef Dębiński, *Biskup włocławski Karol Mieczysław Radoński (1883-1951): życie i działalność* (Toruń: 2001).

⁸⁰ Bishop Radoński got actively involved in Polish government's efforts aimed at informing the world about German crimes committed in occupied Poland. In a BBC radio broadcast on 14 December 1942 he also referred to the fate of the Jews. He said that the suffering of the Jewish population in Poland "exceeds everything the hatred and savageness of the oppressor could invent," and that "the murder of Polish Jews (...) must terrify and cause disgust all over the civilised world." As a Polish bishop he condemned those crimes with "utmost strength" [*Przemówienie biskupa Radońskiego*, "Dziennik Polski" 17 December 1942]. We refer here to Radoński's BBC radio broadcast on 17 January 1943. The extermination of the Jews was treated instrumentally: "After the extermination of the intelligentsia, of the spiritual leaders of the nation, the time has come to exterminate the Jews. Now they are exterminating our people" (quoted in: Dębiński, *op. cit.*, 198).

The pope: “But you do not want to understand my most valid arguments! How should I speak with you? After all, Poland is not the only one to suffer in Europe. And other European peoples are suffering terribly.” I replied that, indeed, the Italians have for some time been doing the same in Yugoslavia as the Germans have in Poland.”

The pope: “Besides, I have been and still am speaking about Poland – constantly.” I replied that, as far as I remembered, the Holy Father had spoken about Poland two and a half years before⁸¹.

The pope: “But one must understand and consider my difficult situation.”

Then I began to speak again of the horrific situation in Poland, of the German attempts to exterminate the people, of the atrocious facts that had prompted the president to make his appeal. I pointed out the historic moment, the gravity of my visit and the significance of every word the pope directed now to Poland – for the future character of relations between the Holy See and my country. I was unequivocal about the issue of the pope’s personal responsibility for the future. Each word uttered by the Holy Father will be analysed and commented on by history.

The pope was clearly impressed by these words. He seemed to be wondering. He reached for the president’s message and said:

“Mais, oui – je réfléchirai, je verrai Si on peut faire encore quelque chose”.⁸²

At that point I knelt and asked the Holy Father for personal blessing, to which he added apostolic blessing for the president of Poland, the government and all Polish people.

The audience lasted 40 minutes.

I left convinced that Pius XII was sincerely and deeply convinced that everything that could be said in defence of our country had been said clearly, and that Poles truly demanded the impossible of him. This is where the greatest communication problems lie. And the personal holiness of Pius XII exacerbates this difficulty.

Apart from that the political situation of the Holy See is now unenviable.

[–] K. Papée
Ambassador of the R[epublic of] P[oland]
at the Vatican
Source: AIP, A.44/122/30.

⁸¹ The reference here is to the pope’s speech to the Holy Collegium of 2 June 1940, which included the following words: “As for us . . . we wish to, at least, relieve the war’s consequences and we turn our fatherly love to all our sons and daughters . . . also bearing in mind with constant care the afflicted and dear to us Polish people as well as others. We beg the Almighty to soon comfort them in their tragic suffering” [quoted in: *Pius XII a Polska, 1939–1949*, 25.

⁸² Oh yes, I will consider [that] and see if something else can be done.