

**The nation of Slovakia (carved out of the defunct Czechoslovakia) came under Nazi rule on March 16, 1939. Nuremberg race laws were introduced in that country on September 9, 1941. Two days later Monsignor Burzio, the Vatican's Chargé d'Affaires in Bratislava (the capital of Slovakia), went to see President Tiso in order to stress the injustice of these ordinances which also violate the rights of the Church.<sup>1</sup> Shortly thereafter, Slovakia's representative to the Vatican received a written protest from the Holy See that these laws were in open contrast to Catholic principles.<sup>2</sup> Several other protests followed.<sup>3</sup>**

**When Jews were deported from Slovakia in 1942, the Vatican Secretary of State immediately filed a protest with the Slovakian government.<sup>4</sup> On March 21, 1942, a pastoral letter was read by episcopal order in all Slovak churches. The letter spoke of the lamentable fate of thousands of innocent fellow citizens, due to no guilt of their own, as a result of their descent or nationality.<sup>5</sup> Under direct orders from Pius XII, the Slovak Minister to the Holy See was summoned and requested to take immediate action with his government.<sup>6</sup> The Vatican also instructed the chargé d'affaires in Bratislava once again to contact Tiso and seek relief.<sup>7</sup> Catholic prelate Pavol Macháček, vice president of the Czechoslovak State Council, said in a broadcast to the Slovak people: It is impossible to serve simultaneously God and the devil. It is equally impossible to be at the same time a good Christian and an anti-Semite.<sup>8</sup>**

**Pope Pius XII weighed in on the matter with a letter, dated April 7, 1943, to the Slovak government:**

**The Holy See has always entertained the firm hope that the Slovak government... would never proceed with the forcible removal of persons belonging to the Jewish race. It is, therefore,**

with great pain that the Holy See has learned of the continued transfers of such a nature from the territory of the republic. This pain is aggravated further now that it appears... that the Slovak government intends to proceed with the total removal of the Jewish residents of Slovakia, not even sparing women and children. The Holy See would fail in its Divine Mandate if it did not deplore these measures, which gravely damage man in his natural right, mainly for the reason that these people belong to a certain race.<sup>9</sup>

The following day, a message went out from the Holy See instructing its representative in Bulgaria to take steps in support of Jewish residents who were facing deportation.<sup>10</sup>

On May 5, 1943, a message went out from the Vatican's Secretary of State to the representative in Slovakia condemning "the forcible removal of persons belonging to the Jewish race.... The Holy See would fail in its Divine Mandate if it did not deplore these measures, which gravely damage man in his natural right, merely for the reason that these people belong to a certain race."<sup>11</sup>

Shortly thereafter, the secretary of the Jewish Agency for Palestine met with Archbishop Roncalli, to thank the Holy See for the happy outcome of the steps taken on behalf of the Israelites in Slovakia.<sup>12</sup>

On September 20, 1944, the Vatican again instructed its representative in Bratislava to intervene for the Jews.<sup>13</sup> That same month, the *Jewish Chronicle* (London) editorialized that "The Pope's action is... a striking affirmation of the dictum of one of the Pope's predecessors that no true Christian can be an anti-Semite."<sup>14</sup> Jewish communities around the world soon recognized that the Vatican was an advocate in favor of Jews in Slovakia.<sup>15</sup>

**By October 1944, deportations were back underway, and many Jews were in hiding. Tiso reported to the Vatican on October 26: "In spite of all protests the German security forces continue transfer of Jews to Germany."<sup>16</sup> A telegram drafted under the name of the acting Secretary of State bears corrections in Pius XII's handwriting. It directed the Chargé d'Affaires to:**

**Go at once to President Tiso and, informing him of His Holiness's deep sorrow on account of sufferings which very large numbers of persons contrary to principles of humanity and justice are undergoing in that nation *on account of their nationality or race*, in the name of the August Pontiff bring him back to sentiments and resolutions in conformity with his priestly dignity and conscience.<sup>17</sup>**

**Between 1941 and 1944, the Vatican sent four official letters and made numerous oral pleas and protests regarding the deportation of Jews from Slovakia.<sup>18</sup>**

**In November 1944, the Holy See dispatched a note expressing deep sorrow and hope that the Slovak government would assure that Jews who are still in the territory... may not be subjected to even more severe sufferings.@ The note concluded:**

**The Holy See, moved by those sentiments of humanity and Christian charity that always inspire its work in favor of those who are suffering, *without distinction of religion, nationality or race*, will continue also in the future, in spite of the growing difficulties of communications, to follow with particular attention the fate of the Jews of Slovakia, and will do everything in its power to bring them relief.<sup>19</sup>**

**Tiso ultimately managed to slow down the deportation of Slovakian Jews,<sup>20</sup> but due to his collaboration with the Nazis (albeit under pressure from Hitler), the Slovaks hanged him**

after the war.

In attempting to implicate Pius XII in the atrocities carried out in the Nazi satellite states of Slovakia, critic Daniel Goldhagen mentioned the work of Livia Rothkirchen, a respected authority on the annihilation of Slovak Jewry, but he failed to mention that in documenting and appropriately condemning the savageries committed by anti-Semitic Slovaks, Rothkirchen emphasized that this was done in spite of, not because of, Pope Pius XII.<sup>21</sup> In fact, she concluded that the several letters of protest delivered by the Vatican during the years 1941-1944 approve sufficiently that the Vatican objected to the deportation of Jews from Slovakia.<sup>22</sup>

Because he was a priest, some critics have argued that the Vatican supported Tiso, despite his collaboration with the Nazis. Actually, the available evidence demonstrates just the opposite. On the day that Tiso was chosen as the first President of the Slovak Republic (September 26, 1939) the Vatican released a statement expressing its grave misgivings, and warning that this move would corrupt the relationship between Church and State. As reported in the *New York Times*:

Owing to Slovakia's subservience to Germany it is not doubted that President Tiso will have to visit Berlin and most likely be seen and even photographed with Chancellor Hitler, whom the Vatican regards as a persecutor of Catholics.... It was recalled in this connection that the Vatican, prompted by a similar consideration, refused to sanction the appointment some months ago of a priest as Ambassador to the Holy See from a South American Republic, and the candidate had to be withdrawn.<sup>23</sup>

Despite Pius XII's concern that this move might have a Catholic priest pictured with Hitler, Tiso assumed the office in defiance of the Pope, not with his support. As it was written during the

**war:**

**What followed was strictly according to the Nazi pattern. Persecution of the Jews and imprisonment of every democratic voice; the creation of an Iron Guard to shoot down strikers and saboteurs; the Germanization of the school system; the expropriation of property, the confiscation of grain and foodstuffs; and the dispatch of Slovak youth to the Russian front. From Rome came the thunders of the Holy Father, denouncing these outrages, but Tiso paid no heed to the voice of the Holy Father.<sup>24</sup>**

**In the Vatican, the Secretary of the Congregation for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs (Msgr. Domenico Tardini) recorded in his notes of October 21 and 23, 1941, that if the pro-Nazi statements attributed to Tiso were actually made by him, the Holy Father wanted his name to be removed from a list of praiseworthy prelates.<sup>25</sup> Later, Tardini wrote: *It is a great misfortune that the President of Slovakia is a priest. Everyone knows that the Holy See cannot bring Hitler to heel. But who will understand that we can't even control a priest?*<sup>26</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> Lapidé at 138. In the Vatican, the Secretary of the Congregation for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs (Msgr. Domenico Tardini) recorded in his notes of October 21 and 23, 1941, that if the pro-Nazi statements attributed to Tiso were actually made by him, the Holy Father wanted his name to be removed from a list of prelates designated for special praise. Notes de Mgr. Tardini, October 23, 1941, Actes et Documents, vol. 5, page 273, no. 123. Later, Tardini said: AIt is a great misfortune that the President of Slovakia is a priest. Everyone knows that the Holy See cannot bring Hitler to heel. But who will understand that we can=t even control a priest?@ Notes de Mgr. Tardini, July 13, 1942, Actes et Documents, vol. 8, page 598, no. 426.

<sup>2</sup> Lapidé at 138. See La Secrétairerie d'Etat à la Légation de Slovaquie, March 14, 1942, Actes et Documents, vol. 8, page 459, no. 305 (Vatican Secretary of State=s concern over expulsion of Jews from the Slovak Republic).

<sup>3</sup> E.g., The Apostolic Delegate (Cicognani) to the Acting Secretary of State, Feb. 26, 1944, in Foreign Relations of the United States, Diplomatic Papers, 1944, vol. I (General) at 995, United States Government Printing Office (Washington, 1966).

<sup>4</sup> While Catholics did not face the same fate as Jews, the post-war Czechoslovak Official Report for the Prosecution and Trial of Major War Criminals documented Nazi efforts to suppress Catholicism in this area:

At the outbreak of war, 487 Catholic priests were among the thousands of Czech patriots arrested and sent to concentration camps as hostages. Venerable high ecclesiastical dignitaries were dragged to concentration camps as hostages.... Religious orders were dissolved and liquidated, their charitable institutions closed down and their members expelled or else forced to compulsory labor in Germany. All religious instruction in Czech schools was suppressed. Most of the weeklies and monthlies which the Catholics had published in Czechoslovakia, had been suppressed from the very beginning of the occupation.... To a great extent Catholic church property was seized for the benefit of the Reich.

Office of United States Chief of Counsel at 283.

<sup>5</sup> Lapidé at 141.

<sup>6</sup> See Le cardinal Maglione au chargé d'affaires à Presbourg Burzio, March 9, 1943, Actes et Documents, vol. 9, page 179, no. 87 (Vatican direction to impede the deportation of 20,000 Jews from Slovakia).

<sup>7</sup> See Le cardinal Maglione au chargé d'affaires à Presbourg Burzio, March 9, 1943, Actes et Documents, vol. 9, no. 87 (Vatican direction to impede the deportation of 20,000

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Jews from Slovakia).

<sup>8</sup> Jacques Maritain, Atonement for All, The Commonweal, Sept. 18, 1942, at 509.

<sup>9</sup> Holmes at 159-60; See Notes de Mgr. Tardini, April 7, 1943, Actes et Documents, vol 9, page 233, no. 136 (regarding the Holy See's concern about the persecution of Jews in Slovakia).

<sup>10</sup> Le cardinal Maglione au délégué apostolique à Sofia Mazzoli, April 8, 1943, Actes et Documents, vol. 9, page 242, no. 141.

<sup>11</sup> La Secrétaire d'Etat à la Légation de Slovaquie, May 5, 1943, Actes et Documents, vol. 9, page 275, no. 176.

<sup>12</sup> Le délégué apostolique à Istanbul Roncalli au cardinal Maglione, May 22, 1943, Actes et Documents, vol. 9, page 306, no. 195. See also Congregation for the Causes of Saints, Positio, appendix 25 at 246 (protest by the Slovak nuncio, made at the opportune time, led to partial success of delaying deportation). Denis Barton, Fr. Tiso, Slovakia and Hitler (Church in History Information Center: Birkenhead, 1990) refutes many accusations about the Catholic hierarchy in wartime Slovakia. Similarly, evidence of the Slovak bishops appeals for Jews is found in The Tablet, June 12, 1943, at 283 and July 3, 1943, at 8. After the war, the Tablet re-affirmed that the Slovak Bishops did in fact, in accordance with the desire of the Holy See, make most emphatic public denunciation of the persecution of the Jews. @ The Tablet, February 15, 1947, at 108.

<sup>13</sup> La Secrétaire d'Etat à la Légation de Slovaquie, September 20, 1944, vol. 10, page 422, no. 328.

<sup>14</sup> The Jewish Chronicle (London), Sept. 11, 1942.

<sup>15</sup> Le cardinal Maglione au chargé d'affaires à Washington Cicognani. February 16, 1944, Actes et Documents, vol. 10, page 134, no. 60 (directive regarding requests from the World Jewish Congress); Le cardinal Maglione au chargé d'affaires à Presbourg Burzio, April 22, 1944, Actes et Documents, vol. 10, page 234, no. 159 (similar).

<sup>16</sup> Lapidé at 147.

<sup>17</sup> Notes de Mgr. Tardini, October 28, 1944, Actes et Documents, vol 10, page 461-62, no. 378 (Annexe); Robert A. Graham, Pius XII=s Defense of Jews and Others: 1944-45, in Pius XII and the Holocaust: A Reader at 65-66 (emphasis added); Lapidé at 147.

<sup>18</sup> O=Carroll at 106.

<sup>19</sup> Robert A. Graham, Pius XII=s Defense of Jews and Others: 1944-45, in Pius XII and the Holocaust: A Reader at 66 (emphasis added).

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<sup>20</sup> Michaelis at 373. The survival of nearly 25% of the Slovakian Jews has been attributed to Vatican pressure on Tiso. Lapidé at 144.

<sup>21</sup> See Livia Rothkirchen, The Destruction of Slovak Jewry (Yad Vashem: Jerusalem, 1961); Livia Rothkirchen, Vatican Policy and the Jewish Problem in Independent Slovakia (1939-1945), VI Yad Vashem Studies 27-53 (1966); Livia Rothkirchen, The Churches and the 'Final Solution' in Slovakia, in Judaism and Christianity under the Impact of National Socialism 1919-1945 413-41 (Otto Dov Kulka and Paul R. Mendes-Flohr, eds. 1987) (mentioning several papal interventions for Jews and contrasting them favorably with the behavior of the local populace.) To the extent that deportations were minimized in Slovakia, Rothkirchen credited the Pope. Commenting on the decision of the Slovak authorities to suspend deportations in the spring of 1943, Rothkirchen said: The impact of the Holy See at this phase was undoubtedly a decisive factor. This was known and widely commented upon. *Id.* at 419.

<sup>22</sup> Rothkirchen, The Destruction of Slovak Jewry, at xxxiii; see also Lapidé at 148; 358, n.28 (citing this passage). In volume XV of Yad Vashem Studies, John Conway also states that the archival material confirms the picture already drawn by such Jewish authors as Livia Rothkirchen and Pinchas Lapidé. Where the Nuncios were alert, and the governments susceptible to Papal remonstrances, then the interventions succeeded in delaying or reducing the deportations and other acts of persecution towards the Jews. See generally The Pius War at 271-73.

<sup>23</sup> Tiso Chosen as First President of Slovakia; Vatican Frowns on Priest as head of State, The New York Times, October 27, 1939, at 1.

<sup>24</sup> War Criminals and Punishment (Robert M. McBride and Company: New York, 1944) at 113.

<sup>25</sup> Notes of Monsignor Tardini, October 23, 1941, Actes et Documents, vol. 5, page 273, no. 123.

<sup>26</sup> Notes of Monsignor Tardini, July 13, 1942, Actes et Documents, vol. 8, page 598, no. 426.