Jesuits, Jews, Christianity, and Bolshevism: An Existential Threat to Germany?

Beth Ann Griech-Polelle
Pacific Lutheran University
griechba@plu.edu

Abstract

The long-standing stereotypes of Jesuits as secretive, cunning, manipulative, and greedy for both material goods as well as for world domination led many early members of the National Socialist German Workers' Party to connect Jesuits with "Jewishness." Adolf Hitler, Alfred Rosenberg, Dietrich Eckart, and others connect Jesuits to Jews in their writings and speeches, conflating Catholicism and Judaism with Bolshevism, pinpointing Jesuits as supposedly being a part of the larger "Judeo-Bolshevik conspiracy" aiming to destroy the German people. Jesuits were lumped in with Jews as "internal enemies" and this led to further discrimination against the members of the order.

Keywords

Judeo-Bolshevism – anti-Catholicism – stereotypes – Marxism – Adolf Hitler

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Pure Christianity—the Christianity of the catacombs—is concerned with translating the Christian doctrine into facts. It leads quite simply to the annihilation of mankind. It is merely whole-hearted Bolshevism, under a tinsel of metaphysics.¹

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1 Quote taken from Hugh R. Trevor-Roper, ed., *Hitler's Secret Conversations, 1941-1944* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Young, 1953), 119-20.

On May 31, 1941, less than a month before the invasion of the Soviet Union by Nazi forces, the German Army High Command received a declaration from Chancellor Adolf Hitler (1889–1945, as chancellor 1933–45) that men serving in the Wehrmacht from the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) were “morally unfit” to fight in the coming invasion. This was part of an ongoing escalation in the battle between the Nazi regime and the Society. Although many works mention this directive levelled against the Jesuits in the Wehrmacht, only passing explanations are generally given that seek to explain the question: why target the Jesuits specifically (and not all orders of priests involved in the war effort) and why do so in 1941 on the eve of one of the largest invasions of the war? I will suggest that the timing and the motivation behind the declaration are directly related to the imagery of Jesuits so long propagated in works such as the forged *Monita privata Societatis Jesu* (Private directives of the Society of Jesus), and that, in Hitler’s mind, Jesuits were part of a Jewish-Bolshevik conspiracy which threatened to destroy the creation of a united German Volksgemeinschaft. By examining some of the leading ideologues of the early Nazi Party as well analyzing some of Hitler’s pronouncements, one can find the conflation of Roman Catholicism, stereotypes about the Jesuit order, Judaism, and Bolshevism.

The Jesuits impacted by this Nazi directive correctly identified it as an attempt on the part of the Nazi regime to place Jesuits into the same category of other persecuted groups in German society such as the Jews, the mentally ill and physically handicapped, the Roma and the Sinti, and criminals.² Many Jesuits noted their stigmatization as “internal enemies” who were being accused of working to bring about the destruction of the Volksgemeinschaft.³ Many German Catholics had already worried about being placed into the category of outsider, and they could point to earlier attempts on the part of Hitler’s regime to position Catholic priests and other religious as dangerous to the German state. To name just a few examples, Catholics could point to the morality and currency trials, culminating in 1936 with wide press coverage implying that members of Catholic religious orders were sexual deviants, predators, and corrupt financial schemers. By 1937, Jesuit priest Rupert Mayer (1876–1945) was arrested and sent to Dachau concentration camp in an attempt to convince the public that Mayer was a traitor to the German nation. Within the first two years of the war, the Nazis had arrested and imprisoned approximately three hundred German priests with over a hundred of them sent to Dachau

2 See Antonia Leugers, *Jesuiten im Hitlers Wehrmacht: Kriegslegitimation und Kriegserfahrung* (Munich: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2009), 110 and 115.

3 Leugers, *Jesuiten im Hitlers Wehrmacht*, 110.

for administering to Catholic Poles.⁴ Between 1933 and 1941, Nazi leadership was most definitely attempting to smear Catholic religious leadership with the hopes that German Catholics would lose respect for their church leaders. However, by the time Hitler launched the assault on the Soviet Union in June 1941, it appears that an escalation in attacks against Catholic priests, and Jesuits more specifically, was unfolding.

In most scholarly works dealing with the role of Jesuits in the Wehrmacht, only passing references are made to the strong anti-Jesuit tradition that existed in Nazi circles and in broader German society.⁵ However, I would argue that the lengthy history of anti-Jesuit imagery allowed for not only the social marginalization and persecution of Jesuits in Nazi Germany, but that it also contributed as a primary factor in the attempted dismissal of Jesuits from service in the German military as it was preparing for one of Nazi Germany's largest land invasions.

Despite Hitler's calling for the dismissal of Jesuits before the invasion was unleashed, many German soldiers commented on the Jesuits serving with them as being "good comrades" and cited them for behaving as "good soldiers."⁶ For the officers, some acted as though they "did not understand or in any case did not want to know [...] it was an order from the Führer, and therefore inscrutable."⁷ That meant that many Jesuits did, in fact, remain in the Wehrmacht. Jesuit historian Vincent A. Lapomarda estimates that at least thirty-seven Jesuits died fighting for the Wehrmacht after the invasion of the Soviet Union began. His work suggests that of the thirty-seven who died, approximately two dozen of that number had been killed before the surrender at Stalingrad. Of this number, Lapomarda states that "five were priests, eleven brothers, and twenty-one scholastics. Some served as aides to chaplains and to doctors, others fought as brave soldiers in battle."⁸ In addition to those men fighting and dying in the

4 Statistics cited in Brenda Gaydos, *Bernhard Lichtenberg: Roman Catholic Priest and Martyr of the Nazi Regime* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2017), 132.

5 See Leugers, *Jesuiten im Hitlers Wehrmacht*; Lauren Faulkner Rossi, *Wehrmacht Priests: Catholicism and the War of Annihilation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015); and Vincent A. Lapomarda, *The Jesuits and the Third Reich* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2005) for discussions of the May 1941 directive.

6 See Leugers, *Jesuiten im Hitlers Wehrmacht*, 114 and L. Faulkner Rossi, *Wehrmacht Priests*, 93.

7 L. Faulkner Rossi, *Wehrmacht Priests*, 93. Cited also by Leugers, *Jesuiten im Hitlers Wehrmacht*, 114.

8 Lapomarda, *The Jesuits and the Third Reich*, 23. Lapomarda's statistics seem to be supported by Leugers's collection of data in the tables in the book's appendix, 189. Faulkner Rossi's work notes that only 405 Jesuits were discharged following the May 1941 directive, *Wehrmacht Priests*, 93.

Soviet Union, other Jesuits fought in Belgium, in Greece, and, by December 1941, an additional thirty Jesuits were wounded. A total of fifty-four were decorated for bravery. At the end of the war, an estimated fifty Jesuits were reported as missing.⁹ Jesuits were clearly still engaged in the German military throughout the entire war despite the May 1941 directive and despite the mistrust of Jesuit soldiers.

It should also be noted, however, that from May 1941 onwards, Jesuits were targeted for discharge. In historian Ulrich von Hehl's research, one Munich priest was discharged from the Army in 1942 because he was a Jesuit.¹⁰ In addition, Hehl's work reveals one Jesuit, Franz Josef Stoerchle, refusing a promotion as a military officer, while yet another man, Erich Rommerskirch, was labeled "N.Z.V." (not to be trusted) and was transferred to the Home Army as a threat to the Reich.¹¹ One man, Georg Trapp, served in the Wehrmacht until 1944 (!) when he was discharged because he was a Jesuit.¹² Even Alois Grillmeier, later created a cardinal, served in the Wehrmacht 1942–44, when he was dismissed as being "unworthy of fighting for his country."¹³

Even from these few examples, one can see that the application of the May 1941 directive for removing Jesuits from the Wehrmacht was applied unevenly and in somewhat haphazard ways. What one can also see is that when it was convenient, Jesuits could be targeted for dismissal at any given time, no matter what their record of service had been to the German fighting machine. Jesuits remained, throughout the duration of the war, easy targets who could be removed whenever it became inconvenient to have them around. This was largely possible due to the long tradition of anti-Jesuit sentiment in Germany and to the Nazi development linking Jesuits with Jews and Bolshevism.

The Development of Anti-Jesuit Myths

In order to understand how Jesuits had been depicted in German society, it is necessary to turn to a brief investigation into the origins of some of the stereotypes about Jesuits in Germany. In 1555, the Peace of Augsburg recognized the right of Lutherans to exist in the Germanic lands. To combat the spread

9 Lapomarda, *Jesuits and the Third Reich*, 23.

10 Ulrich von Hehl, *Priester unter Hitlers Terror*, 2 vols. (Mainz: Matthias Grünewald, 1984 and Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1998), 731.

11 Von Hehl, *Priester unter Hitlers Terror*, 778 and 283.

12 Ibid., 771.

13 See Lapomarda, *Jesuits and the Third Reich*, 57n40.

of Lutheranism and to reinvigorate the Catholicism of the local people, the Society of Jesus sent a young man, the priest Peter Canisius (1521–97), to become rector at the Jesuit university at Ingolstadt. By 1556, Canisius was made provincial of Germany (which at that time also included authority over Switzerland, Austria, Hungary, as well as Upper and Lower Germany). After purging several priests, he continued in his quest to educate Catholic young boys (mostly fifteen-year olds) at the colleges with the ultimate aim of making Jesuits “indispensable both to the people and to the rulers of the land.”¹⁴ This aim, of making the order indispensable, was part of the original mission laid out by the founder, St. Ignatius of Loyola (c.1491–1556). From the time of Canisius forward, the Jesuits would often find their order at odds with the local rulers and the wider population of Germany, particularly as central Europe found itself drowning in the Thirty Years’ War and other subsequent wars of religion.

The Jesuit presence continued to expand, despite the warfare, and in 1650, a Jesuit teacher named Hermann Busenbaum (1600–68) published an important work, *An Epitome of Moral Theology*; this work became the foundation for one of the most powerful myths regarding how the Jesuits functioned as an order. In his work, Busenbaum examined moral principles and solutions proposed by various authorities to cases that might come up in the confessional. For an unknown reason, Busenbaum’s writing came to be portrayed as representing the doctrine “the end justify the means,” although in reality Busenbaum’s writing “excluded the use of bad means.”¹⁵ The idea that Busenbaum, and by extension, all members of the order, followed the maxim “the end justify the means” became a catchphrase that would be used against the Jesuits over and over again.

Also in the early seventeenth century, a Polish man, named Hieronim Zahorowski (1582–1634), published a work that would have a long-lasting impact, creating most of the stereotypes and myths that would be utilized by Hitler and other Nazi leaders to defame members of the order. Zahorowski attended a Jesuit college, converted from Orthodox Christianity to Roman Catholicism, and entered the Society of Jesus. By 1599, Zahorowski was living in Cracow as a novice. He was moved around quite a bit, and eventually he took his comprehensive examination in theology at Poznań. Unfortunately for Zahorowski, he did not pass the examination, which meant that he would not be permitted to take the fourth vow of the order. It did allow him, however, to

14 Manfred Barthel, *The Jesuits: History and Legend of the Society of Jesus*, trans. Mark Howson (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1984), 111–12.

15 See William A. Bangert, S.J., *A History of the Society of Jesus* (St. Louis, MO: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1986), 223.

be ordained and to become a spiritual coadjutor. This seems to have greatly embittered Zahorowski, who believed that the position of spiritual coadjutor, which would limit his ability to teach beyond the lower schools, would exclude him from occupying higher level offices in the order.

In his anger, Zahorowski began to write anonymous letters to former and potential future students (specifically targeting sons of the Polish nobility), urging them to attend “better” schools than Jesuit ones. Zahorowski’s identity as the author of the letters was discovered and he was expelled from the Society in 1613. Zahorowski continued to battle the Society to first be reinstated (it was denied) and then he fought to retrieve the property he had donated (this was granted to him). It is thought that it was around this time of struggle that the very embittered Zahorowski wrote the *Monita privata*. Using his inside knowledge of the Society, Zahorowski decided to write an “exposé” of the internal workings of the order—filtered through his own disappointments. The pamphlet, called the *Monita* hereafter, purported to be “found” documents providing secret directives that only certain select Jesuits of the highest order would be privy to and, the *Monita* stressed the secrecy of the directives, to be denied by all Jesuits if the documents were ever disclosed. By 1615, local Polish religious authorities were already aware of the pamphlet and were also denouncing it as a forgery.¹⁶

The *Monita*, despite the frequent denunciations that the pamphlet was forged, took on a life of its own. The more Jesuits denied the truth of the pamphlet, the more anti-Jesuits saw the proof that the document was being denied because it supposedly revealed the “truth” of how the Society worked. In particular, the *Monita* claimed that the Society of Jesus worked on a double level, with its members pretending to be lowly and humble, yet all the while waiting to take advantage of the trust of anyone willing to give it. The Jesuits were accused of attempting to sway everyone—from the most powerful monarchs and princes to the lowliest of commoners—in an unceasing quest to acquire material goods and ultimately, to take over the world.¹⁷

Zahorowski’s construction of the *Monita* was modelled on real constitutions of the Society with just enough of a dash of real experience inside the order to make his version seem true. Throughout the *Monita*’s directives, Jesuits are told to manipulate princes and noblemen by using the confessional as a way of both controlling the public actions of princes, i.e., advising them on which course

16 See the outstanding work by Sabina Pavone, *The Wily Jesuits and the Monita secreta: The Forged Secret Instructions of the Jesuits; A History and a Translation of the Monita*, trans. John P. Murphy, S.J. (St. Louis, MO: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2005), 31–41.

17 Pavone, *Wily Jesuits*, passim.

of action would be most beneficial to the Jesuits, all the while pretending to be disinterested in the public realm. In addition, Jesuits are advised to manipulate and fawn over rulers to win them over. Further directives encourage Jesuits to steer wealthy people into bestowing gifts, rewards, and offices upon men who might be useful to the order. Throughout all encounters with the powerful, the Jesuits are told to pretend to be disinterested in worldly affairs, “but, little by little, and not suddenly, the direction should aim at political governance.”¹⁸ Dissimulation is the name of the game here, with Jesuits pretending to have no interest in acquiring power, wealth, or worldly influence.

The final two directives, Numbers 17 and 18, address the need for secrecy and exact enforcement of the previous directives. Directive 17 makes it clear that only a select few will be made aware of all the directives, while Directive 18 contains the dire warning: “If at some time (may God forbid) these directives fall into the hands of others, they are to be denied (since they would interpret them in a bad light) [...]. These directives are then to be refuted by the written and printed General Directives and Constitutions that are contrary to them.”¹⁹

The picture that emerges from the *Monita* is that Jesuits are never to be trusted. They are cunning, pretending to be humble servants of the Lord, while in reality, they are after political power and the accumulation of great wealth. Through their powerful network of brethren, they will work to destroy all enemies—including some of their own co-religionists, if they stand in the way of Jesuit success. The Jesuits were known to stress obedience to hierarchy and to practice internal discipline, therefore the *Monita* could argue that this core group fanatically led the other members of the order into committing deplorable acts. Through duplicitous conduct, anything was possible for the Jesuit brethren to achieve, including sowing discord and chaos around the world in order to rise up to control it. The Jesuits would stop at nothing to acquire power and wealth. This type of language about the Jesuits—that they masked themselves, disassembled, and seduced their way into powerful positions—mimics much of what was said about Jews.²⁰

Jews, like the Jesuits portrayed in the *Monita*, supposedly plotted to take over the world and would not rest until they had done so. Just as the Jesuits had their top secret set of directives in the *Monita*, Jews had their secret document too. It was also a forgery, called *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, completed by the Tsar’s Russian secret police and frequently used to invoke pogroms among

18 Pavone, “Appendix: Translation of the *Monita*,” in *Wily Jesuits*, 220.

19 Ibid., 232–33. Quote from 233.

20 For a full exploration of anti-Jesuit activities in the German Empire, see Rósín Healy, *The Jesuit Specter in Imperial Germany* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), passim.

the Russian Orthodox population. Like the language of the *Monita*, Jews were supposedly hiding their true agenda of acquiring world power and unlimited material gains through deception and seduction, wheedling their way into the courts of princes and kings, using the art of flattery, accumulating secrets of powerful people to use against them when necessary, exploiting people's weaknesses for their own people's gain. Also, like the *Monita*, the *Protocols* insisted upon strict secrecy with only limited knowledge being shared with a select few. Jews and the Jesuits were both on the same page: the end justifies the means. Both of these forgeries came into play in the minds of many in top Nazi circles.

The Association of Jesuits with Jews and Christianity with Marxism

One of the earliest ideological influences on Adolf Hitler was Johann Dietrich Eckart (1868–1923). Eckart was a poet, playwright, and journalist over the course of his lifetime. He was a member of the German Workers' Party (DAP) founded by Anton Drexler (1884–1942) in 1919 and, along with Gottfried Feder (1883–1941) and Alfred Rosenberg (1893–1946), he edited a journal titled *Auf gut Deutsch* (In good German). The German Workers' Party became the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP) in February 1920. Eckart then edited the Nazi official newspaper, *Völkischer Beobachter* (People's observer), and he is credited with writing the lyrics for the song "Germany Awake." Eckart despised the Treaty of Versailles, the creation of the hated Weimar Republic, and the rise of Marxism-Bolshevism. He participated in the November 1923 failed Beer Hall Putsch alongside Hitler, was imprisoned in Landsberg Fortress, but was released due to ill health in 1923. He passed away not long thereafter.

After Eckart's death, unfinished notes for a short work were discovered and published under the title, *Der Bolschewismus von Moses bis Lenin: Zwiegespräch zwischen Hitler und mir* [Bolshevism from Moses to Lenin: Dialogues between Hitler and me]. In Eckart's 1923 work, he and Hitler are having an informal conversation that will be approachable for a relatively unsophisticated reader. The subject, of course, is an exploration of the history of the Jewish question. Yet, even within this supposed dialogue (there is debate whether Hitler ever spoke the words attributed to him in the work), we can also find disparaging remarks about Catholicism and its purported links with the Jews.

After some preliminary material, Eckart's work begins with a look at pre-Christian times, explaining how the ancient Greek geographer Strabo (63/4 BCE–c.24 CE), the Roman politician and orator Marcus Tullius Cicero (106 BCE–43 BCE), the Roman prefect of Judea Pontius Pilate (d. c.39 CE), the ancient Egyptians, the ancient Persians, and the Roman Empire all had to contend

with the problem of the Jews. Throughout the examination of these time periods, Hitler is said to have remarked, "And in all eternity nothing will change [...] so far as the attitude of the Jews towards our kings and our leaders is concerned. To destroy them is their eternal sin, and when they can't accomplish this by force, then they will use cunning."²¹ The work continues its tour through historical time periods, illuminating the deviousness of the Jews. At one point, Eckart has Hitler exclaim, "If I had my way, I'd require placards to be hung in all the schools [...], on which would be printed nothing but Schopenhauer's description of the Jews: 'Great masters of the lie!'"²² Just a few paragraphs later, the Jews are called international, revealed for who they truly are: "In the Central Association itself, the mask has already fallen. Dr. Brünn frankly admitted there that the Jews could have no German national spirit."²³ Jews are depicted from ancient times forward as deceptive, manipulative, greedy, materialistic, international in spirit, cunning, and dishonest. Then the "conversation" veers into the rise of Christianity.

Eckart's work has Hitler take the position that Christ was against the Jews, warning of their hypocrisy, skill at swindling, and love of profit. In the case of Jesus of Nazareth, his teachings were perverted and twisted by Paul, originally a Jew named Saul who converted to the new religion of Christianity. Hitler decries the Jews such as Paul who took over Christianity and corrupted Jesus's original message. Paul preached to the Greek and Roman gentile world, bringing with him his own ideas about Christianity "with which the Roman Empire became unhinged. 'All men are equal! Brotherhood! Pacifism! No more privileges!' And the Jew triumphed."²⁴ From the outset, then, in Nazi thinking, Christianity was corrupted by Jewish influence and Jewish ideas.

Eckart's work continues with Hitler outlining how the Catholic Church has been polluted by Jewish infiltration. "There have been popes of Jewish blood. Also there has seldom been or never been a shortage of other dignitaries of the same descent in the church. Was that which they stood for Catholicism? No, it was Judaism. Let's take just one thing: the selling of indulgences. The very essence of the Jewish spirit."²⁵ The Catholic Church is portrayed as having been invaded, taken over, and ruled by Jews. Conspiracy theories abound: "But he also works from the inside, where he is even more dangerous, in the mask of

21 Dietrich Eckart, *Bolshevism from Moses to Lenin: A Dialogue between Hitler and Me*, trans. William Pierce (n.p.: Ostara Publications, 1925), 3–10, quote found on 10.

22 Eckart, *Bolshevism from Moses to Lenin*, 12.

23 Ibid., 13.

24 Ibid., 24–25, quote on 25.

25 Ibid., 27.

the Christian minister. The Christian confessions swarm with Jewish and half-Jewish clergymen.”²⁶ Finally, the pamphlet ends with the dire warning: “one can only understand the Jew when one knows what his ultimate goal is. And that goal is, beyond world domination, the annihilation of the world.”²⁷

From Eckart’s writing, one can see how the connection was made in the early Nazi Party between disavowing Jews while simultaneously discrediting Catholicism. According to Eckart (and supposedly Hitler shared these views), Catholic Christianity was manipulated and corrupted by a Jew, Paul, who altered the true message of Christ to suit his own purposes of destroying the Roman Empire, sowing chaos, and taking over the world. Eckart’s pamphlet also sought to force German Catholics to consider that their entire church hierarchy had been infiltrated by Jews. This was by no means unique to Eckart’s writing.

The Nazi newspaper, *Der Stürmer* (The attacker), for example, ran several articles in 1936 and 1937 that sought to portray the corrupted, infiltrated Catholic Church. In one article, “A Jew on the Papal Throne,” Pope Alexander VI (Rodrigo de Borja, 1431–1503, 1492–1503), related to the Spanish Borgia family, is reported to have been “by race a Jew.” Listing the pope’s series of immoral crimes, the article is meant to show how the Catholic Church was infiltrated by a Jew at its highest level, implying that it continues to be invaded and ruled by a “Jewish spirit,” and that the church’s institutions have been infected with “Jewishness.”²⁸ The image of the Jews masquerading as Christian leaders included attacks on Ignatius of Loyola himself. In the same edition of 1937, readers of *Der Stürmer* would have found (on page fourteen) a large-sized picture of Ignatius. The caption under the picture reads, “Baptized Jew: Founder of the Jesuit Order.”²⁹ The imagery and caption of Ignatius is meant to insert doubt into the mind of the readers: if the founder of the Jesuits was a baptized Jew (he was not), then perhaps many of the Jesuits were indeed working towards the same goals as the Jews.

The theme of Jesuits and Jews being alike in their quest for world control and for material wealth was also part and parcel of the writings of another early Nazi follower, Rosenberg. Rosenberg was with Eckart and Drexler at the beginning of the German Workers’ Party (DAP), and he also wrote articles for the *Völkischer Beobachter*. He was born in Reval, Russia (now Tallinn, Estonia) to Baltic German parents. He had experienced the Russian Revolution of 1917

26 Ibid., 29.

27 Ibid., 44.

28 *Der Stürmer*, Special Issue 6 (March 1937): 11–12.

29 Ibid., 14.

firsthand before moving to Germany in the latter part of 1918. Over the years, he attempted to become the official chief ideologue of the Nazi Party. Rosenberg acquired numerous party and state positions, most notably during the war years as Reich Minister for the Eastern Occupied Territories, where most of the systematic extermination of the Jews took place. His most famous work, *The Myth of the Twentieth Century*, went through several editions. His earlier works included *The Traces of the Jews through the Ages* (1920) and *Immorality and the Talmud* (1920), as well as attacks on Zionism, promotion of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, and editing a journal focused on bringing the “white races” together.

Rosenberg’s diary, although filled with gaps, provides insight into this ambitious early Nazi supporter. Because of his experience in Russia, Hitler quite frequently relied on Rosenberg in the planning stages for the invasion of the Soviet Union. Rosenberg did play a role in formulating theories about the Nazi East. As Reich Minister for the Eastern Occupied Territories, he would naturally have been eager to ensure victory there. To that end, it is important to see what Rosenberg thought about the role of the Catholic Church and if he had anything to say about the Jesuits.

To get a feeling for Rosenberg’s disdain for the Jesuits, let us examine a few entries in his diary. Beginning in 1935, Rosenberg’s diary notes that a struggle for the minds of youth is occurring in Germany. Speaking to the Hitler Youth leader, Baldur von Schirach, Rosenberg advised him to have Hitler Youth indirectly attack Rome by reading out loud “the attacks of the Jesuits and bishops that are of topical interest and rebut them appropriately.”³⁰ Already in 1935, Rosenberg noted that Hitler had planned for a battle against the churches since 1919 and each *Gauleiter* (regional leader) had been told in meetings to monitor their personnel “so that if a decision comes someday, no one will stand on the side of the churches; instead, everyone will stand on the side of the [Nazi] movement.”³¹ In the summer of 1936, Rosenberg noted in his diary that he was reading a book by a German Catholic priest, named Huber, whose book was now being placed on the Index of Forbidden Books. Rosenberg’s reaction, “Jesuitical Rome is trying to kill even this benign attempt at freer, more genuine emotional reaction [...]. And the senior witch doctors in Rome have called upon the services of the Congregation of the Index.”³² Clearly Rosenberg saw

30 Alfred Rosenberg, *Documenting Life and Destruction Holocaust Sources in Context: The Political Diary of Alfred Rosenberg and the Onset of the Holocaust*, ed. Jürgen Matthäus and Frank Bajohr (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015), 65–66.

31 Ibid., 66.

32 Ibid., 86.

the Jesuits as running the Vatican and utilizing their power to destroy potential reformers within the church. Taking a page out of the *Monita*, Rosenberg was drawing on the well-developed stereotypes of Jesuits as cunning, ruthless, and absolutely bent on ruling.

With regard to the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War (1936–39), Rosenberg linked the awful violence and fighting in Spain to the historic role that Catholicism and the Society of Jesus had played in the country's history. Rosenberg was angry that the leader of the uprising, General Francisco Franco (1892–1975), had seemingly rejected antisemitism, and Rosenberg interprets this as the fault of the Catholic Church, “for the Church has made this nation stupid, sucked it dry, and fed it with hopes of heaven.”³³ Here again, Rosenberg is drawing on the images from the *Monita* to imply that Jesuits have tricked Spanish leaders into giving away Spain's wealth by feeding them false notions of redemption.

From these diary entries, it is also clear to Rosenberg that international Bolshevism and the Catholic Church are aligned in their civil war in Spain. He noted that the papacy condemns both Bolshevism and fascism. However, he incorrectly asserted that the church had decided that fascist movements were more threatening. “Even if the Reds gun down the priests like rabbits. The church thinks: there have already been many Sacco di Roma's. That is something Rome can endure. It creates several thousand new martyrs, and that in turn reinforces devoutly looking up to Rome, for which these sacrifices were made. But a new world that is reconfiguring itself without Rome, that is a crime in the face of which they are prepared to make a pact even with the Bolshevik underworld, as the case arises.”³⁴ Rosenberg ended that particular entry with the suggestion that priests be eliminated from the state and from government.³⁵ While not specifically singling out Jesuits, some of Rosenberg's language again reflects the tropes used in the *Monita*, that Jesuits have no loyalty, not even to members of their own order, and they will broker deals with whomever they can if it promises to keep them on top of the hierarchy.

In another series of entries, Rosenberg attacked Bishop Conrad Gröber (1872–1948). In the entries, Rosenberg claimed that the bishop kept a Jewish woman as his mistress, but when he jilted her, she gave his love letters to the deacons. One of the deacons reportedly gave the letters to the Nazi Party. A race defilement charge was slyly suggested by Rosenberg against the bishop and the *Osservatore romano* cited the complaint. Besides Rosenberg's seeming

33 Ibid., 89.

34 Ibid., 92.

35 Ibid., 93.

delight in this salacious story, he took the time to meet with a representative of the *Falange* (the Fascist party founded in 1933) from Spain, who called the pope “a Red-liberal old man” who leads an “International like the Masonic and Marxist ones.”³⁶ Rosenberg gleefully noted that this same Spanish man (whose name he apparently forgot) was planning to propose a pope for Spain, founding a national church there.³⁷ Once again, Rosenberg is tying together the imagery of an international conspiratorial network that links Jews, Masons, Marxists, and the Catholic Church all together; apparently, this cosmopolitan network was all the same to Rosenberg.

Several entries later, in May 1940, Rosenberg noted that the pope was furious with Mussolini's alliance with Nazi Germany and that the Holy Father had threatened to move to Lisbon if Italy entered the war. The spreading of this story abroad, according to Rosenberg, was the work of the *Osservatore romano*, a Vatican paper, and “the focal point of all of Germany's enemies and the opponent of Mussolini.”³⁸ Another paragraph down, Rosenberg noted that, upon the invasion of France, some seventeen thousand priests and members of religious orders were fighting in the French army. He contrasted that with German priests where he incorrectly noted that priests are “not volunteering to serve Germany, a verdict on the posture of the Roman Church will be rendered after the war.” Simultaneously, he also revealed that he was relieved that German priests were not fighting for Germany as “those people would only do mischief.”³⁹ Here again one can see how Rosenberg has placed Catholic priests, led by Jesuits in Rome, into the category of internal enemies, seeking to destroy the German fatherland.

There seem to be no remarks in Rosenberg's diary regarding the May 1941 directive suggesting that Jesuits be discharged from the Wehrmacht, but his suspicions about the Catholic Church and its lack of support for Nazism are evident in an August 1943 entry: “As for the rest, the Vatican naturally has only one wish: that the Germans and Russians cause each other to hemorrhage to the point of losing consciousness, so that they are as broken as possible and become ripe again for the ‘mission.’ Our cardinals and bishops wish the same thing.”⁴⁰ The culmination of Rosenberg's ranting on the untrustworthiness of the Catholic Church and its leaders comes in entries which follow the July 20, 1944, assassination attempt on Hitler's life. In an August 1944 entry,

36 Ibid., 128, 136, 138.

37 Ibid., 138.

38 Ibid., 202.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid., 324.

Rosenberg is outraged that one of the accused participants, Ludwig Baron Leonrod (1906–44), confided to his father confessor about the plot to kill Hitler. The father confessor, in court, noted that he had passed the information on to his bishop but not to the Nazi Party. Rosenberg ends with: “So the Vatican has known about it for the past six months!” The rest of the entry attacks the Catholicism of Claus Schenk Graf von Stauffenberg (1907–44) and that of Hellmuth Stieff (1901–44) and mocks their religious devotion.⁴¹ Knowing that many of the accused conspirators were Catholics only seems to have confirmed in Rosenberg’s mind that Catholics were not to be trusted in any capacity. In Rosenberg’s philosophy, the “Jewish spirit” had successfully invaded and corrupted the foundation of Catholicism, imbuing it with “Jewish and Bolshevik traits.” He saw himself as one of the brave fighters in the struggle against the hierarchy of the Catholic Church.

In the various editions of *Traces of the Jew through the Ages*, one can see Rosenberg removing all references that originally granted any praise to Christianity. Repeatedly phrases that once resounded with pride for Germanic and Christian values were redacted by the time of the printing of the 1937 edition of the work. For example, in the original publication from 1920, Rosenberg was speaking of Martin Luther’s work *Concerning the Jews and Their Lies*, and Rosenberg stated Luther’s words serve as “the foundation and cornerstone of our German and Christian character: ‘Therefore know and do not doubt that next to the Devil, you have no more bitter, more poisonous enemy than a Jew.’” However, by the 1937 printing, Rosenberg had removed the phrase connecting Christianity with the German character.⁴² In still another section warning about Jewish world domination, originally Rosenberg wrote that Jewish hostility towards Jesus Christ was related to Jewish desire to control all people’s minds, quickly following this up with a paragraph on socialism and how it also sprang from a Jewish mind. By the end of the section he comes to what he sees as the consequences of Jewish domination. He writes, “only on the basis of this knowledge and the conscious fostering of our Christian and national German character is it possible to confront the threat of Jewification.” However, in the 1937 and 1944 printings, the phrase “Christian and national German” has been removed.⁴³ When speaking of cultural policy removing Jewish influence in German society, Rosenberg originally wrote, “but the most important thing,

⁴¹ Ibid., 342.

⁴² Matthäus and Bajohr, eds., “Supplemental Works,” in *Documenting Life and Destruction Holocaust Sources in Context*, 358. Martin Luther, *Von den Juden und ihren Lügen* (Wittenberg: Hans Lufft, 1543).

⁴³ Matthäus and Bajohr, eds., “Supplemental Works,” 360.

which no decree can achieve [is] a Christian culture." In the 1937 and 1944 editions, the wording has been edited to state "a German culture" rather than "a Christian culture."⁴⁴ In Rosenberg's mind, Christian culture was a Jewish invention, thought up by the Jew, Paul. If he could argue that Christianity, in its present-day form, was the product of Jewish thinking, then it would allow Germans to disassociate themselves from Christianity. This would also allow them to question the role of priests, especially the role of the Jesuit order since Nazi mythology had erroneously identified the very founder of the Society as having been a baptized Jew.

As Eckart and Rosenberg were influential in helping Hitler develop his ideas concerning Jews, Christianity, the Judeo-Bolshevik conspiracy, etc., it is important to examine Hitler's portrayal of the interconnectedness of Judaism-Christianity-Bolshevism and to understand what Hitler thought about the Jesuits in this trinity. Like Rosenberg's work, Hitler's writings on the dangers of Christianity to Germanism changed over time; however, in Hitler's earlier writings we can see much more clearly his desire to separate Catholicism from German soil. In *Mein Kampf*, written while Hitler was imprisoned due to the failed Beer Hall Putsch of 1923, the future Führer wrote the following: "The general impression could only be that the Catholic clergy as such was grossly infringing on German rights. Thus the Church did not seem to feel with the German people, but to side unjustly with the enemy."⁴⁵ Here Hitler is connecting the "foreignness" of the Catholic Church with its inability to truly represent the needs of the Germanic peoples. So, to Hitler, the Catholic Church and its religious members would always profess loyalty to a foreign power (the pope in Rome) before demonstrating loyalty and patriotism to Germany.⁴⁶

Using words that would conjure up imagery of the cunning Jesuits without naming them, Hitler remarked, "The sly fox knows perfectly well that this has nothing to do with religion [...]. To be sure, even among the priests themselves there are those to whom their holy office is only a means of satisfying their political ambition, yes, who in political struggle forget, in a fashion which is often more than deplorable that they are supposed to be the guardians of a higher truth and not the representatives of lies and slander."⁴⁷ Hitler, in the same passage, then goes on to argue that not all priests are like this; however, I would argue that his use of coded words, taken from anti-Jesuit sources such as the *Monita*, suggest he is attacking Jesuits in all but name. Words such as liars,

44 Ibid., 362.

45 Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1991), 109.

46 See Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, when Hitler is commenting on the Los-von-Rom movement, 110.

47 Ibid., 115.

sly foxes, and politically ambitious were all attributes associated with the Jesuits, but they were also assigned as characteristics of Jews. Both groups, Jesuits and Jews, were accused of wanting to achieve control of the world. In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler clearly lays out his theory that a great leader is the man who can convince the public that there is only one single enemy. "It belongs to the great genius of a great leader to make even adversaries far removed from one another seem to belong to a single category, because in weak and uncertain characters the knowledge of having different enemies can only too readily lead to the beginning of doubt of their own right."⁴⁸ According to Hitler's theory, then, to combine all potential opponents into the imagery of one single enemy is absolutely necessary in order to maintain the loyalty of his followers. Thus, Jews, Jesuits, Catholicism, and Marxism are all combined together into an amalgam of one existential threat to the German people.

In one single passage, we can find Hitler mixing coded language for Jesuits with Marxism:

Worst of all, however, is the devastation wrought by the misuse of religious conviction for political ends. In truth, we cannot sharply attack those wretched crooks who would like to make religion an implement to perform political or rather business services for them. These insolent liars, it is true, proclaim their creed in a stentorian voice to the whole world for other sinners to hear; but their intention is not, if necessary, to die for it, but to live better. For a single political swindle, provided it brings in enough, they are willing to sell the heart of a whole religion; for ten parliamentary mandates they would ally themselves with the Marxist mortal enemies of all religions- and for a minister's chair they would even enter into marriage with the devil, unless the devil were deterred by a remnant of decency.⁴⁹

In this quote alone, one could go back to the *Monita* and see the imagery of Jesuits as lusting after power and wealth, as masking themselves as "good Christians" while swindling people behind their backs. Hitler has added to the *Monita* imagery that Jesuits also have joined forces with Marxists—a codeword for Jew—and he cheekily adds that only the devil's own sense of decency might stop the Jesuit-Jewish-Marxists from succeeding in their unholy plans. Throughout *Mein Kampf*, Hitler also wisely followed his own "great leader"

48 Ibid., 118.

49 Ibid., 268.

advice by morphing Catholicism and Marxism into one enemy. He does this simply by making sure to combine the phrases “Marxists and the Center” repeatedly throughout his book.⁵⁰ Towards the end of his autobiography, Hitler warns that German Catholics and German Protestants must unite in the fight to save Germany from its enemies, i.e., those forces aligned with the Jews.⁵¹

In the work *Hitler's Secret Conversations, 1941–1944*,⁵² one finds Hitler expounding on a wide range of topics. The notes of Hitler's lengthy monologues were taken at Hitler's East Prussian headquarters at Rastenberg that Hitler had named “Wolfschanze” (Fort Wolf). He also maintained a temporary headquarters in Winnitza, Ukraine called “Werwolf.” All of the conversations occurred at either Wolfschanze or Werwolf, and they all occurred over meal times, especially late at night when tea and cakes were served to the guests. Hitler's trusted deputy secretary, Martin Bormann (1900–45), asked the Führer if the conversations could be recorded for posterity, but Hitler refused as he thoroughly disliked any recording devices. This changed quite suddenly in July 1941 when Hitler announced that it would be possible to have someone unobtrusively sit in on the nighttime gatherings, taking shorthand notes. The notes would later be transcribed and then handed over to Bormann who made some corrections and comments to them and then preserved the records for posterity. Two different men were assigned the task of note-taking. First, Heinrich Heim served from July 7, 1941 through March 11, 1942. Heim was sent to Paris on a special mission for several months and in his absence; another man, Dr. Henry Picker (1912–88), was sent in to record the Führer's words. There were some occasions, too intimate to include either Heim or Picker, so the note taking task fell to Martin Bormann himself. Heim returned briefly to the job in August 1942; however, the late night monologues of Hitler were coming to an end. Hitler's audience, throughout this time period, was primarily composed of members of the German General Staff. By September 1942, Hitler had had a complete falling out with General Halder, and in disgust, Hitler ended these night meals with the generals. What followed were speeches to Hitler's secretaries and his inner circle of Nazi followers. The official note taking had ceased in September 1942; however, occasional notes were still recorded although they

50 For just a few examples of “Marxist and the Center” references see *ibid.*, 217, 366, and 493. The Center Party represented Catholic interests from 1871 until its dissolution in 1933.

51 *Ibid.*, 562.

52 Adolf Hitler, *Hitler's Secret Conversations, 1941–1944*, trans. Norman Cameron and R.H. Stevens, with an introductory essay by Hugh R. Trevor-Roper (New York: Farrar, Straus and Young, 1953).

were few and far between. These were also collected into Bormann's file for posterity.⁵³

The entries of Hitler's secret conversations began just a few weeks after the invasion of the Soviet Union, on a Saturday night, July 5, 1941. By the night of July 11–12, Hitler was already expounding to his captive audience on Christianity and Bolshevism. When one visitor asked Hitler if he envisioned launching a war against organized religions, Hitler answered with a definitive “no,” arguing that it would be best to allow the religions to “devour themselves.” He then moved on to elaborate: “The heaviest blow that ever struck humanity was the coming of Christianity. Bolshevism is Christianity's illegitimate child. Both are inventions of the Jew. The deliberate lie in the matter of religion was introduced into the world by Christianity. Bolshevism practices a lie of the same nature, when it claims to bring liberty to men, whereas in reality it seeks only to enslave them.”⁵⁴ It certainly did not take long in Hitler's nighttime ramblings to again combine his perceived enemies into one single foe: Christianity, Bolshevism, and, behind both, the Jew.

On October 14, 1941, Hitler had a special guest, Heinrich Himmler (1900–45). The notes reveal that the topic of conversation that night revolved around the idea of making another concordat with the Catholic Church and the fate of Christianity. Hitler advised against forming another agreement with the church, arguing that it would be best to let “Christianity die a natural death.”⁵⁵ The Führer continued by stating that “originally, religion was merely a prop for human communities. It was a means, not an end in itself. It's only gradually that it became transformed in this direction, with the object of maintaining the rule of the priests, who can live only to the detriment of society collectively.”⁵⁶ Here one can see the tropes used about Jesuits: “the end justify the means” and priests ruling over the people through lies and subterfuge. These tropes are picked up again by Hitler on October 24 for special guest Lt. Gen. Franz Dagobert Johannes von Rintelen (1878–1949). In this case, as Hitler expounded on the role of science versus religion, he again played the theme found in the *Monita*: “But old people cling madly to life. So it's amongst them that the Church recruits her best customers. She entices them with the prospect that death interrupts nothing, that beyond our human term everything continues, in much more agreeable conditions. And you'd refuse to leave your little pile

53 For a complete explanation of the Bormann collection, see H.R. Trevor-Roper, introduction to *Hitler's Secret Conversations, 1941–1944*, vii–xiii.

54 Hitler, *Hitler's Secret Conversations*, 6.

55 Ibid., 49.

56 Ibid., 50.

of savings to the Church? *Grosso modo*, that's more or less how it goes."⁵⁷ Here again, one can see the long-lasting influence of anti-Jesuit writings that portrayed the supposed lust of the Society for wealth and their willingness to say anything to convince their followers to bequeath their estates to the order.

On April 9, 1942, at dinner (with no special guests in attendance noted), Hitler was entertaining his guests with the difference between the religion of Japan with Christianity. He noted to his audience, "When one examines the Catholic religion closely, one cannot fail to realize that it is an almost incredibly cunning mixture of hypocrisy and business acumen which trades with consummate skill on the deeply ingrained affection of mankind for the beliefs and superstitions he holds. It is inconceivable that an educated priest should really believe all the nonsense that the Church pours out; a proof there, to my mind, is the fact that the priests always try to confuse the issue on the subject of the swindle of dispensations."⁵⁸ Once more, Hitler was invoking the tried and true imagery of the shrewd, manipulative Jesuit, more interested in conducting business for his own gain than with the teaching of a true religion. Jesuits were supposedly masters of subterfuge, and with their educational training, Hitler believed that the Jesuits knew that they are preaching lies in order to gain control over people.

Again, on June 7, 1942, Hitler was discussing the aftermath of the Spanish Civil War and was predicting that the priests and monarchs would realign in Spain to seize power. He then moved on to discuss the threat Christianity posed to governments and how leaders must be on their guard: "The established religions, and particularly the Catholic Church, are adepts at presenting an innocent mien and in flattering the man in power. I myself experienced this when, shortly after assuming power, I received a visit from the Bishop [Adolf] Bertram [1859–1945]."⁵⁹ Hitler proceeded to say that the bishop greeted him with "such unction" that he would never have believed that the church had sought to restrict Nazi Party members from participating in the church. He continued: "It is with such semblance of humility that the Church has always wormed its way into power and succeeded in winning its way by flattery into the good graces of the German Emperors."⁶⁰ The conversation then went on to compare the use of charm by women to get their husbands to do what they want them to do, until "the man dances like a puppet to their whims."⁶¹ Once

57 Ibid., 70.

58 Ibid., 339–40, quote found on 340.

59 Ibid., 421–23, quote found on 422–23.

60 Ibid., 423.

61 Ibid., 423.

again, Hitler uses all of the powerful imagery that had long been associated with the dangers of the Jesuits without ever mentioning them specifically by name.

The final entry of the *Secret Conversations* is from the night of November 29–30, 1944, and it is fitting in that it ends with the dramatic coming together of Judaism, Christianity, and Communism. It begins with Hitler's opening statement: "Jesus was most certainly not a Jew."⁶² Hitler's theory (that was also supported by "scholars" working to prove that Jesus was, in fact, an Aryan)⁶³ was that Roman legionaries were living in Galilee and that one of the soldiers must have fathered Jesus. His diatribe continued, "Jesus fought against the materialism of his age, and, therefore, against the Jews." He elaborated that Paul of Tarsus (5–67) recognized that Christianity's message could be distorted, sold to the non-Jewish world, and would bring great profit to the Jews. "It was then that the future St. Paul distorted with diabolical cunning the Christian idea. Out of this idea, which was a declaration of war on the golden calf, on the egotism and materialism of the Jews, he created a rallying point for slaves of all kinds against the elite, the masters and those in dominant authority. The religion fabricated by Paul of Tarsus, which was later called Christianity, is nothing but the Communism of today."⁶⁴ The passage ends with Martin Bormann intervening, offering his indictment of the Jews as fomenters of rebellion throughout all of history. Bormann quotes himself: "any doctrine which is anti-Communist, any doctrine which is anti-Christian must, ipso facto, be anti-Jewish as well. The National Socialist doctrine is therefore anti-Jewish in excelsis, for it is both anti-Communist and anti-Christian. National Socialism is solid to the core, and the whole of its strength is concentrated against the Jews."⁶⁵ The Führer replies to Bormann at the end of the work: "Burgdorff has just given me a paper which deals with the relationship between Communism and Christianity. It is comforting to see how, even in these days, the fatal relationship between the two is daily becoming clearer to the human intelligence."⁶⁶

This final entry of the *Secret Conversations* brings together all of the themes presented in this essay. To return to the opening questions: why target only the Society of Jesus and why do so just as the German army stood poised to invade the Soviet Union? To Hitler, as to many other Nazi leaders, Jesuits were just as

62 Ibid., 586.

63 See Susannah Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), passim.

64 Hitler, *Hitler's Secret Conversations*, 586.

65 Ibid., 587.

66 Ibid.

the *Monita* and other anti-Jesuit materials had presented them: they were untrustworthy, cunning, sly, manipulative, and consumed by greed for wealth and for power. They exhibited the same character traits and qualities that the Nazis and other anti-semites had used to describe the Jews. I would argue that the imagery of the *Monita* and other popular anti-Jesuit pamphlets had become so ingrained in Nazi thinking that they accepted it wholeheartedly as an accurate portrayal of how the order conducted itself. What the Nazis added was their incorrect belief that Ignatius of Loyola had been a baptized Jew and that this allowed them to “prove” that just as St. Paul had infiltrated and corrupted the teachings of Jesus, the Jesuits had promoted “Jewish thinking” throughout their work. If the Society of Jesus was founded by a Jew and the rules of Society were based on “Jewish thinking” then it was a small mental leap for the Nazis to argue that Christianity, like Bolshevism, was a Jewish attempt to undermine the non-Jewish world, promote chaos and disorder, and seize control. If all of this was true, then it would make perfect sense for Hitler to decide that Jesuits, as “internal enemies” working for the destruction of the German Volksgemeinschaft, be sent away from Soviet territory where they might potentially link up with the hated “Judeo-Bolsheviks,” bringing the forces of Christianity together with the forces of Marxism to defeat his plans for German conquest. By linking Jesuits, Jews, Catholics, and Bolsheviks together, Hitler attempted to forge one existential enemy for the German nation to fight.