

## Who Bombed the Vatican? The Argentinean Connection

PATRICIA M. MCGOLDRICK\*

*Little is known in the English-speaking world about the bombing of the Vatican city-state during World War II or about the controversy surrounding the identity of the culprits once responsibility for the attack, and the damage it caused, had been denied by the major belligerent powers. This article gives a documented and eyewitnessed account of the bombing; revisits the controversy in the light of files now available in the National Archives, London; and offers a plausible conclusion about the identity of those responsible and the reason for the attack.*

*Keywords:* Argentina, Vatican bombing, World War II, propaganda

At 8:10 pm on the evening of November 5, 1943, a small, unidentified, low-flying aircraft, which had circled the area for some time beforehand, dropped five bombs on the 110-acre territory of Vatican City and disappeared into the night. At the same moment a squadron of Allied aircraft, which earlier had taken part in an extensive bombing raid on the Adriatic coast of Italy between Ancona and Pescara, was passing over Rome and returning to its airbase in North Africa.<sup>1</sup>

Sir D'Arcy Osborne, the British minister to the Holy See who had taken refuge in the neutral territory of Vatican City when Italy declared war on England (see figure 1), was in the Santa Marta building next to the Vatican City wall and noted the sound of overhead aircraft. "I said that most of them were Allied," he recorded. But Major Sam Derry, an escaped British prisoner of war who was with him at the time, said: "You hear that

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\*Ms. McGoldrick is a retired academic and visiting scholar at Middlesex University, London, email: patmcgoldrick@hotmail.com. Unless otherwise indicated, the author has provided English translations in this article. The author would like to thank the journal's anonymous reviewers and Elizabeth Foxwell, staff editor of *The Catholic Historical Review*, for the many helpful comments and suggestions from which this article has benefited.

1. The National Archives, London (hereafter TNA), German Air Force (GAF) reconnaissance report, November 5, 1943, HW5/388 CX/MSS/3502, Inter Service (2).



FIGURE 1. Sir D'Arcy Osborne, British minister to the Holy See 1936–47, n.d. Photo courtesy of the British Embassy to the Holy See.

one now. That is German.' Whereupon there was the sound of bombs very near and the doors and the windows, and the whole building shook."<sup>2</sup>

Monsignor Domenico Tardini, secretary of the Congregation for Extraordinary Affairs, was in a corridor on the top floor of the four-storied Governorate Palace, the main Vatican administrative building at the back of St. Peter's Basilica that houses offices and apartments for senior members of the Curia and visiting dignitaries. He was en route to his study when another bomb exploded next to the building. It blew in all the windows, caused extensive structural damage, and destroyed his study. There were, he recorded, "no human victims. But one could have been me if I had reached my study."<sup>3</sup>

2. London, British Library, Sir D'Arcy Osborne, *Diary*, entry for November 5, 1943, Egerton Collection.

3. Domenico Tardini, *Actes et documents du Saint Siège relatifs à la seconde guerre mondiale* (hereafter ADSS), 7 (Vatican City, 1980), pp. 688–89: "Nessuna vittima umana. L'unica sarei forse stato io stesso, se mi fossi trovato nel moi studio (ero, invece, nel corridoio, avviato verso lo studio)." All twelve volumes of ADSS are available online at [http://www.vatican.va/archive/actes/index\\_fr.htm](http://www.vatican.va/archive/actes/index_fr.htm).

At the same time Bernardino Nogara and his wife, Ester, were having dinner in another part of the same building. Nogara was a member of the board of directors of Banca Commerciale Italiana, Italy's largest private bank, and the papal delegate responsible for running the Amministrazione Speciale per la Santa Sede, the Vatican City state treasury.<sup>4</sup> Because Vatican buildings were unheated throughout the war, Nogara and his wife, in an effort to keep warm, had taken to living in one small room at the rear of their immense apartment in the Governorate. As a consequence, they escaped the worst effects of the blast. But they heard two women screaming and raced to the service area of their apartment. As Ester recorded in a letter to her granddaughter, "arriving at the laundry area, I saw two legs quivering under a bed: they were those of the maid . . . I did not know if she was carried under there by the blast or if she herself took refuge there." As Bernardino helped the woman out, "with great care because the room was full of glass and pieces of doors and windows," Ester served them cognac to help steady their nerves. She then went to inspect the damage to the rest of the apartment. On seeing the blown-in windows, demolished doors, and walls of which there was left "not even a trace," and the amount of glass and debris strewn across what had been her elegant apartment, Ester herself began to tremble, "and even I had to have a finger of cognac."<sup>5</sup>

Five bombs were dropped on the Vatican that evening. The first exploded outside the palace of Cardinal Nicola Canali, president of the Pontifical Commission for Vatican City. This was the bomb that shook, but did not damage, the Santa Marta building. The full force was taken instead by the palace, where windows, shutters, and doors were blown in and the interior sheered by splinters of flying glass and debris. But the sturdy structure of the building itself remained intact, save for pockmarks along its masonry caused by shrapnel. The second bomb hit the roof of the Mosaic Studio (see figure 2), which also housed the conservation laboratory, and which was located half-way between St. Peter's Basilica and the Vatican railway station. Here the damage was considerable. The roof and walls came crashing down, and rows of steel cabinets that contained an

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4. Francesco Pacelli, *Diario della Conciliazione* (Vatican City, 1959), p. 141.

5. Antonietta Nogara Osio, *Diari e pagine sparse* (Verona, 1989), pp. 103–07: "Giunti in guardaroba ho visto due gambe che si agitavano sotto al letto: erano quelle della cameriera . . . non so se portata là sotto dallo spostamento d'aria o se rifugiatisi: vi ho lasciato il Nonno [Bernardino Nogara] perché lui la tirasse fuori coi dovuti riguardi perché tutta la stanza era piena di vetri e di pezzi di porte e finestre. . . . Ho ubbriacato l'una e l'altra di cognac e ho lasciato che mi raccontassero per lasciarle sfogare: poi sono andata a vedere i disastri e ritornata poi da loro è cominciata la tremarella a me e allora mi sono bevuta un dito di cognac anch'io."



FIGURE 2. Damage in the Mosaic Studio after the November 1943 bombing of the Vatican. Photo by Luigi Felici, Vatican photographer. Repr. in Augusto Ferrara, 1943: *Bombe sul Vaticano* (Vatican City, 2010). Photo reproduced by permission of the author.

irreplaceable collection of various shades and gradations of petrified glass—the *tesserae* used to create and repair religious mosaics—were blown to smithereens. In addition to the structural damage, numerous mosaics and many paintings undergoing restoration were badly damaged, including copies of Raphael's *Seated Madonna*, an *Angel* by Fra Angelico, a *Madonna* by Murillo, and an original painting of *The Good Sheppard* by Seitz. Bomb fragments and flying debris from the explosion ricocheted off nearby buildings, destroying almost all the glass in the Palace of the Tribune, which housed diplomats from South America and China, and leaving the hand-carved reliefs on the travertine edifice of the railway station badly scoured and pitted. The third bomb exploded beside the south wing of the Governorate where it did considerable damage to offices and apartments along that side of the building (see figure 3). But as it exploded so close to St. Peter's Basilica, it also blew in all the windows of the apse of the basilica and pierced the great golden window forming the centerpiece of Bernini's baroque masterpiece *The Dove of the Holy Spirit*. However, the explosion did not damage the interior of the basilica itself.<sup>6</sup> Margarita de Wyss, a

6. Report to Benito Mussolini on bombing of the Vatican City, November 6, 1943, TNA, GFM36/474 Frames 096686 to 096690; Irish Minister, Vatican, to Foreign Office,



FIGURE 3. Damage in the Governorate Palace, the main Vatican administrative building, after the November 1943 bombing of the Vatican. Photo by Luigi Felici, Vatican photographer. Repr. in Augusto Ferrara, 1943: *Bombe sul Vaticano* (Vatican City, 2010). Photo reproduced by permission of the author.

well-connected Swiss journalist, managed to gain admission to the scene, obtained a firsthand account of some of the turmoil that followed, and recorded the following in her diary:

In the tiny neutral State, people who didn't expect anything of the sort were simply thrown off their balance. Very old priests living in the fourth floor [of the Governorate] and usually moving with slow dignity were seen in the front of the building before the smoke and dust raised by bombs subsided. A great commotion ensued; everybody ran to the place of the bombardment to see what happened.<sup>7</sup>

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Dublin, November 7, 1943, TNA, HW12/294/124863; ADSS, 7, pp. 688, 691; Jane Scrivener, *Inside Rome with the Germans* (New York, 1945), diary entries for November 7 and 8, 1943, pp. 49–51. Jane Scrivener was the pen-name of Mother Mary St. Luke (born Jessica Lynch), an American nun who worked for the Vatican Information Service.

7. M[argarita]. de Wyss, *Rome under the Terror* (London, 1945), diary entry for November 6, 1943, p. 155.

The fourth and fifth bombs were dropped some way from these main buildings on two separate embankments of the old Leoine Wall; the broadcasting tower and administrative headquarters of the Vatican radio station were located atop the wall. As the fourth bomb exploded, Vatican Radio, which had been broadcasting normally up until that moment, suddenly went off the air, “and the bulletins at 20.15 (English), 20.45 (German) and 21.00 (Spanish) were not given.” Since this was the tiny, landlocked territory’s main means of communication with the outside world, “it was necessary to work through the night to bring the equipment back to some level of functionality.” The fifth and final bomb did not explode, giving rise to early reports that only four bombs had been dropped, but had it done so damage to the radio station and its capacity to broadcast undoubtedly would have been much greater.<sup>8</sup>

The first indication to the outside world that something had happened came a mere fifty-five minutes later, at approximately 9 pm, when German-controlled Rome Radio stayed on air beyond its usual closing time and announced that an important communiqué was about to be issued.<sup>9</sup> The communiqué, picked up by the BBC Monitoring Service at 2:27 am, reported that “[a] criminal air raid attack” had been made against the Vatican City “which is being protected by Reich troops,” that it was probable “the attack was directed against St. Peter’s Basilica,” and that “a thorough and conscientious enquiry will not fail to denounce to the whole world the authors of this criminal act.” German and Far Eastern radio stations repeated this report throughout the night, but their reports changed a “criminal air raid attack” to “an Allied air raid attack.” It was not until 9:15 am that Allied-controlled Radio Sardinia first reported the incident, adding that

The Allied air force had no reason to bomb the Seat of the Vicar of Christ. Therefore it is easy to understand who is responsible for this grave offence against the neutrality of the Vatican City and the Catholic religion.<sup>10</sup>

The litany of denials had begun.

As the massive clean-up operation commenced early that morning, Cardinal Luigi Maglione, Vatican secretary of state, transmitted a brief communiqué about the incident to Vatican representatives around the

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8. BBC Radio Monitoring Report, November 5, 1943, TNA, FO371/37548/R11359; Report to Mussolini on bombing, November 6, 1943, TNA, GFM36/474 Frames 096686 to 096690.

9. De Wyss, *Rome under*, diary entry of November 6, 1943, p. 154.

10. BBC Monitoring Report, November 5, 1943, TNA, FO371/37548/R11359.

world, giving no indication of the suspected culprits or the full extent of the damage. Shortly thereafter, a formal note was delivered to the representatives of the German, British, and American governments protesting the violation of the neutral state's rights under international law and requesting an immediate investigation into the incident to establish the identity of those who, "on a clear moonlit night" and in a plane that had "circulated the Vatican City for sometime beforehand," were responsible for this reprehensible attack.<sup>11</sup>

In Rome first editions of the Fascist newspaper *Il Messaggero* were already on the streets, proclaiming in block headlines, as the newspaper continued to do for some days to come, the "Outrage" committed "by Gangsters against the Center of Christianity"; a "Criminal Anglo-Saxon attack on Vatican City"; and the "Angry protest of Roman's Republican Fascists against this wicked attack on the world center of Catholicism."<sup>12</sup> In addition, on November 7 the newspaper carried a Berlin report that cited many European, although mostly Axis-controlled, newspapers "and as many Argentinean papers" that deplored the Allied attack. It suggested as motive Allied anger at a Vatican statement, issued a week earlier, that German troops were respecting the integrity and neutrality of the Vatican city-state since their occupation of Rome in September 1943.<sup>13</sup> The people of Rome were not convinced. As one diarist recorded:

The papers, naturally, publish columns of hysterical condemnation of the brutality of the British in daring to attack the Pope's own property and to endanger his life . . . But in spite of all the printer's ink, and all the radio propaganda, the people of Rome are already saying with conviction "*i Tedeschi*" [the Germans].<sup>14</sup>

But this was not to last. Although newspaper and radio reports claimed that the Vatican had invited German experts to survey the damage

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11. ADSS, 7, pp. 689, 690; Osborne to Foreign Office, November 6, 1943, TNA, FO371/37548/R11404.

12. "Attentato di Gangsters contro il Centro della Cristianità," *Il Messaggero*, November 6, 1943, p. 1; "Il Criminale Attacco Anglo-Sassone sulla Città del Vaticano," November 7, 1943, p. 1; "Dopo il Bombardamento Anglo-Sassone della Città del Vaticano," November 8, 1943, p. 1: "Vibrata protesta del Fascismo repubblicano romano per il nefando attentato contro il centro del mondo cattolico."

13. *Il Messaggero*, November 7, 1943, 1. With the fall of fascism in July 1943, Germany occupied Italy, rescued Mussolini, and set him up in September 1943 as head of a now German controlled puppet government, the Italian Social Republic, in Salò at Lake Garda in northern Italy.

14. Scrivener, *Inside Rome*, diary entry for November 6, 1943, p. 48; see also de Wyss, *Rome under*, diary entry for November 7, 1943, p. 155.

and examine the bomb fragments, this was not so. The Vatican established its own team of Italian experts—the engineer Enrico Galeazzi; the nephew of Pope Pius XII, Carlo Pacelli; and the governor of Vatican City, Cardinal Canali—who would examine the fragments and make their report.<sup>15</sup> To this day that report has never been published. But almost immediately, key details began to circulate around Rome—specifically, that the bombs were British. Thereafter, further evidence seemed to implicate the Allies. Tardini was informed by a British cleric that November 5, Guy Fawkes Day, was a traditionally anti-Catholic day in England. An American pilot “reported seeing an Allied plane dropping its load on the Vatican,” and Monsignor Walter S. Carroll, an American priest working at Allied headquarters in Algeria, reported that

[i]n a conversation with the American Chief of Staff during the past week I was informed *very confidentially* that they [the Americans] feel that the bombing of the Vatican is probably attributed to an American pilot who lost his way.<sup>16</sup>

Suspicion of Allied culpability was further fueled by the curious reticence on the part of the British to issue an outright denial. In the immediate aftermath of the attack, at 7:55 am on November 6, Baron Ernst von Weizsäcker, the German ambassador to the Holy See, telephoned Maglione to say that he had been “authorized by the German High Command to state explicitly that neither German bombs nor German bombers” were responsible.<sup>17</sup> This was followed on November 10 by an official response from Berlin stating that “[n]o German aircraft was south of the Livorno-Ancona line at the time in question” but that the “type and origin of the bombs” could be identified “if experts of the German Luftwaffe were permitted to make a detailed on the spot examination.”<sup>18</sup> In the United States President Franklin D. Roosevelt ordered a full investigation and on November 13 Harold Tittmann, U.S. chargé d’affaires to the Holy See, was able to report that “[a] reply has now been received from General Dwight Eisenhower which establishes beyond any doubt that the attacking aircraft was not an Allied aircraft.”<sup>19</sup> By contrast, although Osborne, in acknowledging Maglione’s note, observed that British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden had previously given assurances that Allied pilots flying

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15. Scrivener, *Inside Rome*, diary entry for November 6, 1943, p. 49.

16. ADSS, 7, p. 689nn6, 7. Emphasis in original.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 697n3.

18. *Ibid.*, pp. 697–98.

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 695–96, 702.



over Rome “would be specifically ordered to ensure that no bombs fell in the vicinity of Vatican,” the formal reply from London, when it came on November 15, was both circumspect and terse. Devoid of explicit denial of British involvement, it referred merely to a communiqué issued on November 7 by Allied Forces headquarters in Algiers, to the effect that it was “manifestly impossible to establish beyond doubt the fall of bombs from aircraft participating in night operations,” but on the night of November 5 “crews adhered to their standing instructions and did not bomb the Vatican City.”<sup>20</sup> Although initially nobody in Rome held the Allies responsible:

Now, however, the situation has changed. The noisy and eloquent German-Italian propaganda has brought results, especially when confronted with the dry and short Allied communiqués. Many Italians say: “The Anglo-Saxons must be guilty if they keep so quiet,” and doubt about the Huns’ fault spreads.<sup>21</sup>

The reason for British reticence is found in the Foreign Office files: In a “Most Secret” telegram Harold Macmillan, the British minister in Algiers, informed the Foreign Office: “I think we probably did bomb the Vatican.”<sup>22</sup> On the night in question seven British Boston bombers were in action over Castelnuovo di Porto, just north of Rome. One developed engine trouble and jettisoned its bombs through clouds over an unknown location so it could lighten its load and return to base. These, it was thought, must have been the bombs that fell on Vatican City. Only later did a sharp-eyed Foreign Office official spot that, by all accounts, it had been a clear, moonlit night over Rome at the time of the bombing, and thus the impaired Boston aircraft could not have been responsible.<sup>23</sup>

In the meantime, Italian newspapers were reporting that Joseph Stalin had sent a telegram to Winston Churchill congratulating him on bombing the Vatican. Osborne asked London for a denial. But in what must have been a fit of exasperation, the Foreign Office replied that “it was no more necessary for us to issue a denial” than to issue a denial “of every other report of the same kind published in the Axis press” and made no further

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20. *Ibid.* pp. 691–92, 703–04.

21. de Wyss, *Rome under*, diary entry November 10, 1943, p. 157.

22. Resident Minister [Harold Macmillan], Algiers, to Foreign Office, London, November 8, 1943, Telegram 2269, TNA, FO371/37548/R11402.

23. Annotated report on the bombing of Vatican City, TNA, FO371/37548/R11476. See also TNA, AIR8/438/MS21715.

comment.<sup>24</sup> This was unfortunate, as the lack of a forceful and unqualified denial by the British has led to the belief, long since commonplace among Italian historians but more recently also asserted by British historian Richard Overy, that it was the British who bombed the Vatican on the night of November 5, 1943.<sup>25</sup> Overy's argument is based on finding a copy of the Macmillan telegram, referred to above, in an Air Ministry file. However, he failed to notice the subsequent report of the official Air Ministry inquiry into the incident, passed to Churchill. It gave a detailed account of the activities of each British aircraft operating near Rome that night; established that the impaired Boston had jettisoned its bombs over Arce, some 50 miles southeast of Rome; and made it "quite clear that bombs dropped on Vatican City were not dropped by Allied aircraft of this command."<sup>26</sup> The veracity of this account is given credence by the fact that the Air Ministry was quite willing to acknowledge, at least in private, that British bombers had damaged Vatican property inadvertently during a March 1944 bombing raid on Rome, giving no reason to believe that it would, in an internal classified document, deny the earlier November incident if evidence indicated that it was responsible.<sup>27</sup> Thus the available Foreign Office and Air Ministry files seem, quite clearly, to exonerate the British. But if the British were not responsible, then who was? And why?

According to Eitel Möllhausen, chargé d'affaires at the German Embassy in Italy, none of the authorities in Rome could provide any explanation, and "all were swimming in a sea of conjecture."<sup>28</sup> A confidential report commissioned by Benito Mussolini was likewise unable to identify those responsible, whereas the fact that he commissioned it in the first place strongly suggests that the action did not originate with the Italian Social Republic (RSI) or the National Republican Air Force (ANR).<sup>29</sup> It was perhaps the Vatican itself that received the first indication of the iden-

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24. A[nthony]. Rumbold, Foreign Office minute, November 12, 1943, TNA, FO371/37548/R11595.

25. Richard Overy, *The Bombers and the Bombed* (London, 2013), p. 346. See also Cesare De Simone, *Venti angeli sopra Roma* (Milan, 1993), p. 312, although De Simone wrongly dates the incident to December 5, 1943; Harold H. Tittmann, *Inside the Vatican of Pius XII* (New York, 2004), p. 192; Andrea Tornielli, *Pio XII. Eugenio Pacelli. Un uomo sul trono di Pietro* (Milan, 2007), p. 407; and Pietro Cappellari, *Santità, chi è stato? Bombe angloamericane sul Vaticano 1943–1944* (Bologna, 2011), pp. 21–28, 49–59.

26. M.A.C. Post to Air Ministry, November 10, 1943, TNA, AIR 19/215/4284; War Cabinet, November 8, 1943, TNA, CAB 65/36/151.

27. Freedom Algiers to Air Ministry, March 25, 1944, TNA, AIR 19/215/2857.

28. Eitel Möllhausen, *La carta perdente* (Rome, 1948), p. 152.

29. Report to Mussolini on bombing, November 6–10, 1943, TNA, GFM36/474.

tivity of the culprit. On November 8, 1943, in a telephone conversation intercepted by the Servizio Speciale Riservato, a division of the Servizio di Informazione Militare (SIM) that routinely monitored telephone calls from Rome and the Vatican, an Italian priest contacted a high-level Vatican Jesuit, Tacchi Venturi, with important information. He had, he explained, just returned from the Viterbo Air Force base, north of Rome, where he learnt from someone who had been present throughout the entire operation that the bombing had been carried out by Roberto Farinacci and a Roman pilot in an Italian Savoia-Marchetti aircraft "with 5 bombs on board destined to strike the Vatican radio station, because Farinacci was convinced it transmitted military information to the enemy."<sup>30</sup>

Farinacci, the *Ras* or party boss of Cremona, belonged to the fanatically pro-German and extreme anticlerical wing of the Fascist Party and championed violent *squadristi* methods of silencing political opponents. A first lieutenant and pilot in the Italian Air Force during the Second Ethiopian War (1935–36), he lost his right hand in a grenade accident and thereafter returned to Italy to resume publication of his Cremona-based newspaper, *Il Regime Fascista*, from which he launched a series of vitriolic attacks against the Vatican, accusing it of being antifascist and broadcasting anti-Axis propaganda from its radio station.<sup>31</sup> Farinacci's accusations were not without foundation. From 1940 onward, the Axis powers had long suspected the Vatican of sending secret military intelligence to the enemy from its transmitter and accused it of using its public broadcasts to launch a series of unrestrained attacks on National Socialism. On May 3, 1940, the Vatican had sent an urgent, encrypted signal to Belgium and the Low Countries,

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30. Ugo Guspini, *L'orecchio del Regime* (Milan, 1973), pp. 248–49: "È la sacrosanta verità che abbiamo potuto appurare attraverso la testimonianza di persone che sono state presenti a tutto lo svolgimento della manovra. Era un apparecchio Savoia-Marchetti, con a bordo 5 bombe destinate a colpire la stazione radio vaticana, perché Farinacci era convinto che essa trasmettesse al nemico notizie di carattere militare!" This document is not found in the Servizio Speciale Riservato files in the Archivio Centrale dello Stato (ACS), Rome. But Ugo Guspini was one of those who intercepted and recorded telephone conversations, often working from documents in his personal possession not lodged with the ACS. The author thanks the archivist at the ACS for providing this information. See also Augusto Ferrara, *1943 Bombe sul Vaticano* (Vatican City, 2010), pp. 22–23.

31. For Roberto Farinacci, see TNA, GFM36/185 Frames 033970 to 033974. See also Romano Canosa, *Farinacci, il superfascista* (Milan, 2010), pp. 230–34; Matteo Di Figlia, *Farinacci, il radicalismo fascista al potere* (Rome, 2007), pp. 209–10; Harry Fornari, *Mussolini's Gadfly: Roberto Farinacci* (Nashville, 1971), pp. 160–61. For his attacks on the Vatican, see Osborne's reports on *Regime Fascista*, June 1941, TNA, FO371/30174/R15886, R16610 and R16734. Also Owen Chadwick, *Britain and the Vatican during the Second World War* (New York, 1986), p. 186.

warning that Adolf Hitler was about to invade and occupy their territories.<sup>32</sup> But Italian military intelligence (SIM) had broken the Vatican ciphers; and Count Galeazzo Ciano, Italian foreign minister and Mussolini's son-in-law, warned the Holy See's nuncio to Italy, Monsignor Borgoncini Duca, that "we read everything and Mussolini reads everything."<sup>33</sup> On January 22, 1940, Vatican Radio was first to broadcast to the world that "Jews and Poles are being herded into separate ghettos, hermetically sealed and pitifully inadequate for the economic subsistence of the millions destined to live there."<sup>34</sup> From that date onward, Vatican Radio broadcasts unleashed an intermittent series of direct and vigorous attacks on the "New Order" in Europe; its totalitarian structure; pagan foundation; profoundly un-Christian racist ideology; and the appalling suffering and devastation it inflicted on peoples in the occupied territories across Europe.<sup>35</sup>

As might be expected, the Allies were quick to seize upon the propaganda opportunity thereby provided. Reports of these broadcasts, occasionally a little embellished, were regularly carried by both the British and American news services, and incorporated into the BBC's Radio London transmissions to Europe.<sup>36</sup> Since Vatican Radio was considered a reliable

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32. Cardinal Luigi Maglione to nuncios in Brussels and the Low Countries, May 3, 1940, ADSS, I, pp. 436–37.

33. Monsignor Borgoncini Duca to Cardinal Luigi Maglione, March 31, 1940, ADSS, I, p. 436n2, and ADSS, I, pp. 412–13.

34. Quoted in "Vatican Denounces Atrocities in Poland; Germans Called Even Worse than Russians," *New York Times*, January 23, 1940, 1, 5.

35. Brief excerpts of some broadcasts are found in Robert Speaight, *Voice of the Vatican* (London, 1942), and *The Tablet*; see, for example, "The World Week by Week," *The Tablet*, January 27, 1940, 1; "The World Week by Week" and "Persecution and Persistence," February 3, 1940, 2, 8; "The Church Abroad," March 15, 1941, 9; and "News, Notes and Texts from All Parts," April 26, 1941, 9–10. But the original transcripts, made by the BBC Monitoring Service between 1940 and 1947, are held by the Imperial War Museum (IWM) at its site in Duxford, England, although unfortunately in a deteriorating condition. The author is grateful to Stephen Walton, the IWM Duxford archivist, for his help in providing this information.

36. See, for example, "Vatican Denounces Atrocities in Poland," pp. 1, 5; "Vatican Amplifies Atrocity Reports," *New York Times*, January 24, 1940, 8; "Vatican Continues Atrocity Charges," January 25, 1940, 4; "Vatican Stresses Rift with Germany," April 4, 1940, 8; "Vatican Again Notes Persecution in Reich," April 9, 1940, 10; "Vatican Declares Nazis Broke Pact," September 16, 1940, 5; "Vatican Radio Scores All Who Pledge a 'New Order,'" September 17, 1940, 5; "Vatican Says Nazism Is Foe of Christianity; Lists Persecutions in Reich to Support Charge," November 20, 1940, 1, 3; "Vatican Accuses Nazis," April 2, 1941, 2; "Vatican Held 'Anti-Axis,'" June 3, 1941, 4; and "Martyr's Fate' of Poland," *The Times* (London), January 23, 1940, 6; "Polish Priests Shot" and "Nazis at Work in Poland and Bohemia," January 25, 1940, 6; "Nazi Barbarities in Poland," January 29, 1940, 6; "Iron Hand in Poland," January 31, 1940, 7; "End of Rome Visit," March 12, 1940, 8; "Dutch Roman Catholics' Clash with Nazis," February 14, 1941, 3.

source of information, especially in Italy, the danger was that these broadcasts would become a focal point for antifascist opposition movements.<sup>37</sup> Even in France, the outspoken comments of the Vatican's French-language broadcaster, Belgian Jesuit Emmanuel Mistiaen, were transcribed, printed, and clandestinely circulated to anti-Vichy groups as *La Voix du Vatican*.<sup>38</sup> At first, the Nazis tried to jam the transmissions. But in May 1941, as they grew in intensity and frequency, Hitler pressured Mussolini to denounce the Lateran Treaty, invade the Vatican, and close down the radio station.<sup>39</sup> In the face of such an overwhelming threat, and much to the dismay of the British Foreign Office, the Vatican toned down its attacks on National Socialism. Thereafter such attacks were rare and made only in the most general and attenuated of terms. As A. W. G. Randall of the Foreign Office commented, "this means a serious loss to our propaganda."<sup>40</sup> Initially he urged the Vatican to continue broadcasting its critical commentaries, although later he conceded:

I do not think anything is to be gained by any further approach to the Pope at the moment . . . The Vatican wireless has been of the greatest service to our propaganda and we have exploited it to the full. No other neutral power would, in the face of this have persisted so long in furnishing us with useful material and risking violent criticism from powers with which it is in ordinary diplomatic relations.<sup>41</sup>

In terms of its criticism of National Socialism, therefore, Vatican Radio had been silenced effectively. But this raises a question: If the Vatican authorities were unprepared to risk occupation in 1941 when the situation was less precarious, why would they risk it in September 1943 when their tiny city-state was surrounded by the might of the German army, and they knew that their ciphers had been broken? There is no evidence to suggest the Vatican was transmitting military information to "the enemy" in September 1943. Thus the questions arise: What was the real reason

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37. Simona Colarizi, *L'opinione degli italiani sotto il regime 1929–1943* (Rome, 2000), pp. 371–73.

38. Jacques Adler, "The 'sin of omission'? Radio Vatican and the anti-Nazi struggle, 1940–1942," *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 50 (2004), 396–406, here 397, 399, 400–05. See also Robert Graham, "La Radio Vaticana tra Londra e Berlino," *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 127 (1976), 132–50, here 136–38.

39. On German pressure on Mussolini to denounce the Lateran Treaties: May 3, 1941, TNA, FO371/30177/RI4778.

40. A. W. G. Randall to Mr. Nichols, May 14, 1941, TNA, FO371/30177/RI5185.

41. A. W. G. Randall, Foreign Office minute, July 21, 1941, TNA, FO371/30177/RI7051.

behind the bombing, and why did Farinacci undertake it at that particular point in time?

After the fall of fascism and the abduction of Mussolini in July 1943, Farinacci evaded arrest by fleeing to Germany where he hoped to be appointed leader of a new German-backed Italian counter-government. Indeed, Hitler at one point openly considered such a possibility. But Farinacci made the strategic error of disparaging Mussolini to Hitler, totally underestimating the personal bond between the two dictators, and as a consequence earned Hitler's extreme displeasure and was excluded from any potential post in Mussolini's newly reconstituted Italian Social Republic at Salò in September 1943.<sup>42</sup> As Joseph Goebbels recorded in his diary:

From the Führer's talk with Farinacci, it is evident we cannot use this man on any grand scale. Nevertheless we are making sure of keeping control of him. The Führer gave him to Reichsführer SS [Heinrich] Himmler to take care of for the present.<sup>43</sup>

Farinacci returned to Cremona at the end of September 1943, where it was widely rumored that he received monthly payments of 150,000 lira from his German handlers. Thereafter he ruled Cremona as a pro-German province, published pro-German articles in his newspaper, and took it as a particular compliment that Radio London habitually referred to him as "Herr Farinacci."<sup>44</sup> It would appear, then, that by September 1943, Farinacci, having misplayed his cards with Hitler, had lost his power base in both Germany and Italy and had become a mere Nazi factotum in Italy. As shall be argued here, if he was the willing bomber of Vatican City on the night of November 5, 1943, he was acting on the instructions of his Nazi controllers, who were anxious it should appear that the British bombed the Vatican. Their reasons stretched all the way across the Atlantic to the other side of the world.

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42. Canosa, *Farinacci*, pp. 299–303. See also J. Alfassio Grimaldi and Gherardo Bozzetti, *Farinacci, il piu fascista* (Milan, 1972), pp. 225–27; F. W. Deakin, *The Brutal Friendship* (London, 1962), pp. 496–97; and Fornari, *Mussolini's Gadfly*, pp. 205–09.

43. Joseph Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Göbbels*, ed. Elke Fröhlich (Munich, 1993), Teil II, Band 9, July 27, 1943, p. 177: "Aus der Unterredung, die der Führer mit Farinacci hat, kann entnommen werden, daß dieser Mann für uns in großem Stil kaum zu gebrauchen ist. Aber trotzdem wird man ihn sich sichern. Der Führer ergibt [!] ihn zur vorläufigen Betreuung an den Reichsführer SS Himmler."

44. Fornari, *Mussolini's Gadfly*, p. 210; see also Grimaldi and Bozzetti, *Farinacci*, pp. 236–37.

## The Argentinean Connection

On September 23, 1939, just weeks after the outbreak of war in Europe, the foreign ministers of the American republics, including the United States, met at Panama and reaffirmed their common commitment to inter-American neutrality and solidarity under the terms of the Convention for the Maintenance, Preservation and Reestablishment of Peace, signed at Buenos Aires in December 23, 1936.<sup>45</sup> But in December 1941, subsequent to the attack on Pearl Harbor, the United States entered the war against the Axis and was anxious that, in keeping with the principle of solidarity, the American republics would either join the Allies or at least break off diplomatic relations with Axis countries. By January 1943, in accordance with principles adopted at the Rio de Janeiro Conference in January 1942, all but one of the South American republics had done so. The one exception was Argentina where, particularly within some sections of the military, a deeply conservative Catholicism, independent nationalism, and resentment of U.S. hegemony in the region combined to ensure that the country retained its neutrality and continued to maintain diplomatic relations with the Axis powers.<sup>46</sup>

The military was heavily influenced by its high regard for German military prowess; by the fact that many of its officers had trained in military academies in Germany; and by the fact that, although the United States was unwilling to supply Argentina with weapons, Germany offered at least the promise of so doing.<sup>47</sup> When, in June 1943, it was rumored that a pro-Allied and anti-neutrality candidate was being proposed as the main contender in the country's forthcoming democratic but hopelessly corrupt elections, this more right-wing element in the military staged a coup d'état and established an authoritarian military regime under President Pedro Pablo Ramírez that reaffirmed the country's policy of neutrality.<sup>48</sup>

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45. For the meeting of foreign ministers of the American republics for consultation under the inter-American agreements of Buenos Aires and Lima, held at Panama September 23–October 3, 1939, see *Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers, 1939. The American Republics* (Washington, DC, 1957), pp. 15–41.

46. David Scheinin, "Argentina: The Closest Ally," in *Latin America during World War II*, ed. Thomas M. Leonard and John F. Bratzel (New York, 2006), pp. 183–204, here pp. 195–96.

47. Robert A. Potash, *The Army & Politics in Argentina 1928–1945* (Stanford, 1969), pp. 4–5, 117–18, 168–70.

48. Potash, *Army & Politics*, pp. 218–19; Ronald C. Newton, *The "Nazi Menace" in Argentina, 1938–1947* (Stanford, 1992), pp. 298–300.

The Catholic Church welcomed the coup and gave the new regime its wholehearted backing when it outlawed communism, promoted traditionalist Catholics to government office, and mandated compulsory Catholic education in all state schools.<sup>49</sup> Likewise, a decade earlier, the Argentinean clergy had supported the authoritarian regimes in Spain, Portugal, and Italy when these countries enshrined the privileged position of the Catholic Church in their constitutions and also mandated traditional Catholic teaching in their schools. In June 1941, it was Italy's Axis partner Germany that, at least from a distance, seemed to be saving Christian Europe from atheistic communism when it declared war on the Soviet Union.<sup>50</sup> In the light of these developments, the Catholic Church in Argentina gave the strong impression of being pro-Axis, and, as will be discussed, this opinion was shared by Allies and Axis alike. In the immediate aftermath of the coup, the British ambassador to Argentina, Sir David Kelly, put this point directly in June 1943 to the papal nuncio to Argentina, Monsignor Giuseppe Fietta:

Prompted by the Nuncio's communicative mood, I questioned him closely as to the view very commonly held amongst foreigners that the Argentine clergy were, broadly speaking, sympathisers with the Axis. He replied that while the proportion of Axis sympathisers among the clergy might be higher than among laymen, owing especially to the question of Russia, it was definitely untrue that the Axis sympathizers were a majority.<sup>51</sup>

This more nuanced view suggests that, although a significant proportion within the clergy were indeed decidedly pro-Axis, the majority were primarily attempting to protect Catholic values and institutions, and supported only those aspects of Axis policies, both at home and abroad, which seemed best suited to protect and promote the interests of the Catholic Church. But this is a fine distinction, and, as Kelly pointed out, "the commonly held view" was that the clergy were pro-Axis.

Another not inconsiderable influence in determining Argentina's stance on neutrality was the fact that, as in World War I, it benefited economically from neutrality by being able to export its goods—particularly to

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49. Jorge A. Nallim, *Transformations and Crisis of Liberalism in Argentina, 1930–1955* (Pittsburgh, 2012), pp. 118–21; Luis Alberto Romero, *A History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century*, trans. James P. Brennan (University Park, PA, 2002), p. 92; Potash, *Army & Politics*, p. 225.

50. Nallim, *Transformations*, pp. 48–50; Scheinin, "Argentina: The Closest Ally," pp. 187–88.

51. David Kelly to Anthony Eden, June 28, 1943, TNA, FO371/33514.



Great Britain, a major importer of Argentinean beef—safely across the Atlantic in its neutral ships.<sup>52</sup> But this independent stance incurred the wrath of the United States, which accused the government of being pro-Nazi and at one point even considered invading the country to install a more compliant regime.<sup>53</sup> But common sense prevailed, and instead an extensive propaganda campaign against Argentina and a later export embargo were launched in an attempt to bring the country into line.

In April 1942 Ambassador Kelly forwarded to the Foreign Office a report “regarded as wholly reliable,” which stated that “while the Church is one of the main opponents of the Axis in occupied countries, misinformed Catholic circles are one of the main tools used by Axis propaganda in this Hemisphere.” To counter this, a Catholic Intercontinental Committee had been established, under the auspices of the Archdiocese of New York, to enable eminent and respected Catholics from the occupied countries to disseminate within these “Catholic circles the truth about the persecution of the Church in their countries” and “the real aims of the war.” Kelly observed that this was, from a propaganda perspective, “a plum.”<sup>54</sup> But an even more potent propaganda opportunity for Argentinean consumption presented itself when, on September 8, 1943, the Germans occupied Rome, and the tiny territory of Vatican City found itself completely surrounded by Hitler’s army. Almost immediately, and continually throughout September and October, the Allied press in Britain and the United States published a series of alarming reports about the precarious position of the pope: “Pope a prisoner in the Vatican”; “Germans reported to have occupied Vatican City”; “Danger to Pope is that Hitler will kidnap him”;

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52. Scheinin, “Argentina: The Closest Ally,” pp. 194–95; Romero, *The History of Argentina*, p. 82.

53. Information first provided by Maurice Halperin, chief of the Latin American OSS section assigned to plan the invasion, to Ronald C. Newton in June 1980: see Newton, *The “Nazi Menace” in Argentina*, p. 431n2. This was corroborated by British ambassador to the United States Edward Wood, Lord Halifax, when he told London via an August 1943 telegram that he had just been visited by two members of the U.S. State Department, Mr. Bensal (possibly Philip Wilson Bonsal, later U.S. ambassador to Bolivia, Colombia, and Cuba) and Mr. Duggen (possibly Laurence “Larry” Duggan, head of the Latin American desk during World War II and later implicated in Soviet espionage). They informed him that State Department officials “are toying with the idea of covert intervention in Argentina” (TNA, FO371/33515/A7313). No document confirming the plan has ever been located, and, according to Halperin, it was abandoned after the German defeat at Stalingrad when “it was clear there was no longer a need for it.” See Don S. Kirschner, *Cold War Exile: The Unclosed Case of Maurice Halperin* (Columbia, MO, 1995), pp. 79–82.

54. On the development of a Catholic Intercontinental Committee (C.I.C.) for propaganda in fascist and isolationist Catholic milieux, see TNA, FO238/293.

“tanks and guns now surround Vatican City” and those who attempt to enter will be “shot without warning”; “Voice of Pope is silenced. Germans have closed the doors of St Peter’s and mounted machine guns on the colonnade under the windows of the Vatican”; “several Cardinals have been placed under house arrest”; “Pius XII” has “strongly protested his status as a virtual prisoner . . . and refused to see the German commander, Field Marshal General Albert Kesselring.” On October 3, Roosevelt described the Allied advance on Rome as a “Holy Crusade to liberate the Eternal City, the Vatican and Pius XII,” and on the same day Archbishop Francis J. Spellman of New York addressed a crowd of 75,000 at the Polo Grounds in New York City for a religious service to pray for the city of Rome and the pope. The archbishop did not exhort the attendees to pray for the sparing of the pope’s life—“for death to him in his agony of suffering would be a mercy”—but rather asked for prayers for the pope’s “cause, the cause of Christ, the cause of right the cause of civilization.”<sup>55</sup>

Although the occupation of Rome certainly had caused panic in the Vatican and invasion remained an ever-present possibility, these reports were wildly exaggerated.<sup>56</sup> But they had the desired effect. On September 18, Kelly in Argentina was pleased to inform London that the “[l]eading

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55. See “Nazis Occupy Rome, Take Milan After Siege,” *New York Times*, September 11, 1943, 1–2; “Nazi Vatican Step Alarms Catholics,” *New York Times*, September 11, 1943, 4; “Vatican Closely Guarded,” *New York Times*, September 12, 1943, 44; “Vatican Radio Calm in Ring of Germans,” *New York Times*, September 14, 1943, 1; “Pope Objects in Vain to Nazis on Isolation of Vatican City,” *New York Times*, September 17, 1943, 1, 5; Anne O’Hare McCormick, “Abroad: Where Is the Government of Italy?,” *New York Times*, September 18, 1943, 16; “Germans Seize Church Dignitaries Entering Territory of Vatican City,” *New York Times*, September 22, 1943, 1, 4; “Italians Maintain Fight on Germans,” *New York Times*, September 19, 1943, 1, 41; Daniel T. Brigham, “German Ravaging of Rome Is Feared,” *New York Times*, October 3, 1943, 38; “Vatican Prepares for Worst,” *New York Times*, October 7, 1943, 8; Daniel T. Brigham, “Kidnap’ Plot Reported,” *New York Times*, October 7, 1943, 8; Daniel T. Brigham, “Pope Surrounded by Germans’ Guns,” *New York Times*, October 9, 1943, 4; “Pope Said to Be Prisoner,” *New York Times*, October 9, 1943, 4; and “Germans Report Vatican ‘Attack,’” *New York Times*, October 10, 1943, 36. See also “Argentina and the Vatican,” *The Times* (London), September 21, 1943, 3; “The Pope ‘A Prisoner,’” *The Times* (London), September 27, 1943, 3; “Prayers for Rome in America,” *The Times* (London), October 5, 1943, 3; and “The Pope ‘Virtually a Prisoner,’” *The Times* (London), October 9, 1943, 4. Spellman quote: “The Archbishop’s Address,” *New York Times*, October 4, 1943, 10.

56. For the panic created by the German invasion of Rome, see Tittmann, *Inside the Vatican*, pp. 185–87. For the threat of invasion, see: Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher*, Teil II, Band 9, July 27, 1943, p. 171; also Ernst von Weizsäcker, *Memories of Ernst von Weizsäcker*, trans. John Andrews (London, 1951), pp. 290–91; and Rudolf Rahn, *Ruheloses Leben* (Dusseldorf, 1949), p. 233.

article in 'Nacion' today" reported that the "Vatican is infested by German troops" and with indignation protested that "[n]ever has it been possible to believe anyone would dare do such a thing."<sup>57</sup> On the same day German ambassador Eric Otto Meynen warned Berlin that the "alleged threat to the Vatican is being made much of by enemy Press sources here. Increased counter-measures are advisable."<sup>58</sup> From Berlin, German Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop sent a telegram to Weizsäcker in Rome to inquire if it was true that the pope had refused to receive Field Marshal Kesselring.<sup>59</sup> Weizsäcker replied immediately that it was not true. Neither Kesselring nor his representatives had requested such an audience.<sup>60</sup> Two days later, on September 20, Kelly informed London of rumors that the "Argentine Government are [*sic*] hoping to find opportunity in German treatment of the Vatican for rupture of relations with Germany."<sup>61</sup> These rumors were quickly given prominence in Allied press reports.<sup>62</sup> In London, a Foreign Office official suggested "we might have a word with the BBC asking them to 'pile on' the German treatment of the Vatican."<sup>63</sup> On September 21, Ribbentrop contacted Weizsäcker again and, specifically citing the extremely hostile and damaging reports in the Argentinean press, requested from him a detailed denial that, when it was received, was immediately transmitted from the Wilhelmstrasse to "All Stations" with instructions that it "should be disseminated in every way" in order "to oppose this enemy propaganda."<sup>64</sup> But, as previously noted, by October 3 Roosevelt had entered the fray, characterizing the advance on Rome as a "Holy Crusade" to liberate the Vatican, while Spellman in New York was giving lurid accounts of the suffering of the pope in Nazi captivity. In an

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57. Kelly to Foreign Office, September 18, 1943, TNA, FO371/33586/A8606.

58. Eric Otto Meynen to Berlin, September 18, 1943, TNA, HW12/292/123198. Allied press reports of the Nazi threat to the Vatican were carried as headline news on an almost daily basis by the *Buenos Aires Herald*, *La Prensa*, and (to a lesser extent) *La Nacion* between September 17, 1943, and October 29, 1943.

59. Franz von Sonnleithner to Weizsäcker, September 17, 1943, TNA, GFM34/808 Frame 277990.

60. Weizsäcker to Ribbentrop, September 18, 1943, TNA, GFM34/808 Frame 277991.

61. Kelly to Foreign Office, September 20, 1943, TNA, FO371/33586/A8642.

62. "Argentine Shift Seen Likely Now," *New York Times*, September 20, 1943, 5; "Argentina and the Vatican," *The Times* (London), September 21, 1943, 3.

63. R. Henderson, Foreign Office minute, September 21, 1943, TNA, FO371/33586/A8642.

64. Sonnleithner to Weizsäcker, September 21, 1943, TNA, GFM34/808 Frame 277995; Weizsäcker to Ribbentrop, September 22, 1943, TNA, GFM34/808 Frames 278001 to 278002; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Berlin, to All Stations, September 23, 1943, TNA, HW12/292 Frames 123088 to 123089.

attempt to put an end finally to this onslaught of damaging propaganda, Ribbentrop instructed Weizsäcker to secure from the pope himself a public denial of these reports and persuade the Curia to issue an official statement confirming the impeccable behavior of German troops toward the Vatican. In return for this, Weizsäcker was authorized, on behalf of his government, to offer the following *oral* declaration: "The Reich Government affirms that Germany fully respects the Sovereignty and Integrity of the Vatican State and the German Armed Forces presently in Rome are behaving accordingly."<sup>65</sup> However, by October 1943 Pius XII had every reason to distrust any pledge offered by the Reich government. As cardinal secretary of state, he had personally signed the *Reichskonkordat* in July 1933, only to find its guarantees violated almost before the ink of his signature had dried.<sup>66</sup> Thus Weizsäcker, in the report of his October 9 audience with Pius XII, noted that the pope was unwilling to associate himself with any such statement and would prefer a text in which the Vatican merely acknowledged a declaration of intent made in the first instance by the Reich government itself.<sup>67</sup> Protracted negotiations continued until Octo-

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65. Ribbentrop to Weizsäcker, October 7, 1943, TNA, GFM34/808 Frames 278073 to 278074: "Die Reichsregierung stellt demgegenüber fest., dass Deutschland die Souveränität und Integrität des Vatikanstaates in vollem Umfange respektiert und dass in Rom anwesende deutsche Wehrmatsangehörige sich entsprechend verhalten." An earlier version of this telegram is found at TNA, GFM34/808 Frames 278045 to 278046, but this is an unsent draft, as it contains handwritten corrections and lacks the transmission control data found on sent telegrams. The telegram sent on October 7 is much shorter and makes no mention of providing the Vatican with a written declaration of intent or of protecting Vatican City from combat, as is found in the earlier draft. Since Ribbentrop had a late-afternoon meeting with Hitler on October 6, as documented by National Archives and Records Administration (Washington, DC) T84/387 Frame 000602 and the October 7 telegram sent just after midnight from his special train (*Sonderzug*), it is likely that the edited and less substantial version was issued at Hitler's instruction.

66. For Pius XI's protest at these violations, see his March 14, 1937, encyclical, *Mit Brennender Sorge*, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-xi\\_enc\\_14031937\\_mit-brennender-sorge.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_14031937_mit-brennender-sorge.html). For a documented account, see *The Persecution of the Catholic Church in the Third Reich* (London, 1940). This book was based on reports to the Vatican by Josef Müller (part of the Catholic resistance in Germany who later survived the concentration camp Flossenbürg) and then-monsignor Johannes Neuhäusler (who later survived Dachau and became auxiliary bishop of Munich). It was edited by German Jesuit Walther Mariaux; passed to the Foreign Office in London by Osborne; authenticated by a specialist, Dr. Alfred Wiener of the Wiener Library, London; and published (anonymously to protect the authors from arrest) by Burns Oates in agreement with, and partly funded by, the British Foreign Office. See TNA, FO371/24421/C2652 and FO371/50068; and Harold C. Deutsch, *The Conspiracy Against Hitler in the Twilight War* (Minneapolis, 1968), p. 123.

67. Weizsäcker to Ribbentrop, October 9, 1943, TNA, GFM34/808 Frames 278086 to 278088.

ber 29 when, finally, the Vatican issued an official statement that had been mutually agreed upon by the parties, although it did not fulfill all of Ribbentrop's wishes:

To put an end to unfounded rumors . . . Germany, in accordance of her policy so far of respecting . . . the Sovereign rights and integrity of the Vatican City . . . is resolved to respect them in the future. The Holy See, in acknowledging that German troops have respected the Roman Curia and the Vatican City, has taken note of this assurance.<sup>68</sup>

Meanwhile, on September 24, Meynen in Buenos Aires had reported that the local enemy press continued to exploit the alleged threat to the Vatican and advised that "a heightened counteraction" was required.<sup>69</sup> On October 15, he warned that the situation was now serious and urgent action needed:

[The] policy of neutrality entails as prerequisites that no harm should befall the Holy See. . . . The situation in the Vatican remains the centre of discussion here. Enemy propaganda here is making great efforts, so far successful, to advance the theme of alleged endangerment of the Pope's freedom of action to stir up the whole Catholic Church in America against us, and to supply the Argentine with grounds for breaking of relations. The effect is still more prejudicial for us in that Fascist circles are not united. Viewed from here, it appears that our counter-measures are not strong enough. It is not sufficient to merely correct [*sic*] enemy reports. I again suggest [1 group].<sup>70</sup>

On October 24, he further warned that he had been advised by the nuncio (presumably the same Monsignor Fietta to whom Kelly had spoken earlier) that the local clergy were extremely agitated by these reports and that the Catholic Church in Argentina had now "abandoned its pro-German stance."<sup>71</sup> Given that President Ramirez of Argentina was a deeply devout Roman Catholic, there was a real danger that, although initially he was a supporter of neutrality, these reports would be sufficient to drive him into the arms of the Allies and break off diplomatic relations

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68. ADSS, 7, pp. 684–85.

69. Meynen to Berlin, September 24, 1943, TNA, GFM34/808 Frame 278015: "Angebliche Bedrohung Vatikans von Feindpresse hier stark missbraucht. Erhöhte Gegenwirkung ratsam."

70. Meynen to Berlin, October 15, 1943, TNA, HW12/293/124335. The final word is indecipherable, but, in the context, "countermeasures" seems most likely.

71. Meynen to Berlin, October 24, 1943, TNA, GFM34/808 Frame 278071.

with Berlin.<sup>72</sup> The Reich government was at this point wholly dependent on Argentina for its trade, banking, and foreign exchange facilities in Latin America, since, as neighboring countries joined the Allies, they systematically expelled German diplomats, confiscated German businesses, closed German bank accounts, and rolled up the German intelligence networks in their area, all of which subsequently moved to Argentina as the last friendly Latin American country open to them.<sup>73</sup> The intelligence networks were especially important in October 1943. British intercepts of clandestine links between Siegfried Becker, the head of Himmler's Sicherheitsdienst (SS) in Latin America (and at the time resident in Buenos Aires), and Walter Schellenberg, chief of Amt VI (foreign intelligence) in Himmler's Reichssicherheitshauptamt (RSHA) in Berlin, reveal that, in addition to regional economic and political intelligence, Berlin particularly wanted reports about the United States: new developments in its military economy and armaments programs, the possibility of war between the United States and Russia, and the likelihood of a second front being opened up in Europe. These details would provide Germany with information vital for the prosecution of its war on the Continent.<sup>74</sup> It was clear, then, that if this last key foothold in Latin America was not to be lost, something urgently needed to be done. Already Jewish arrest squads in Europe had been instructed that no Jews of Argentinean nationality were to be touched—the only group in the whole of Europe for which such an exception was made.<sup>75</sup> But the question remains: Did Berlin also stage-manage the bombing of the Vatican with British bombs to discredit the Allies in the eyes of the Argentineans? Such a tactic had proved successful two years earlier when the Germans bombed the Hungarian city of Kaschau (now Košice in Slovakia) with Russian bombs, intending to discredit Russia in the eyes of the Hungarians and propel them into war on the Axis side against the Soviet Union.<sup>76</sup> Although no decisive documentary evidence can be cited in support of such a theory, and the nature of the mission was such that little would have been committed to writing, nevertheless very

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72. R. Henderson, Foreign Office minute, September 21, 1943, TNA, FO371/33586/A8642.

73. Ronald C. Newton and H. S. Ferns, "Disorderly Succession: Great Britain, the United States and the 'Nazi Menace' in Argentina, 1938–1947," in *Argentina between the Great Powers, 1939–46*, ed. Guido di Tella and D. Cameron Watt (Oxford, 1989), pp. 111–36, here p. 117.

74. The intercepts for 1943 are found in TNA, HW19/250. See especially HW19/250/662, HW19/250/972, and HW19/250/1297.

75. TNA, GFM34/2770 Frame E421532 and GFM34/2702 Frame E411977.

76. TNA, FO371/37548/R11488; see also J. Lee Ready, *World War Two. Nation by Nation* (London, 1995), p. 130.

persuasive circumstantial evidence can be presented that strongly suggests that this was a Nazi-inspired operation stage-managed for propaganda purposes in Argentina.

On November 3, a German Air Force pilot on the last reconnaissance mission of the day reported seeing a single, unidentified aircraft flying low in the area around Rome, in what may have been a trial run for the attack two days later.<sup>77</sup> Thomas Joseph Kiernan, Irish ambassador to the Holy See, reported that “light signals were seen from the hills just before the bombing,” which may have been signals to the circling Savoia-Marchetti that the returning Allied air squadrons were about to pass over Rome, providing overhead camouflage for an attempt to implicate the Allies.<sup>78</sup> Immediately after the attack, Walter Reuschle, a German major accompanied by two officers, presented himself at the Vatican as part of an engineering corps anxious to investigate the damage and offer support. In fact, according to Möllhausen at the German Embassy in Rome, Reuschle was head of a propaganda unit. In the early hours of the morning it was he who transmitted the first radio reports about the bombing that were retransmitted around the world by Axis radio stations.<sup>79</sup> As discussed, Reuschle’s reports implicated the Allies at an hour when no such information was yet available and asserted, with a confidence that could only have been borne of prior knowledge, that “a thorough and conscientious enquiry will not fail to denounce to the whole world the authors of this criminal attack.” Möllhausen was given to understand that Reuschle had been admitted to the Vatican to investigate the damage, and both radio and press reports made similar claims. But this was not so:

Soon after it happened several important German officers presented themselves at the Vatican, full of concern, and ready to conduct a thorough investigation on the spot. Although the press stated that they did so, it was untrue, for their services were politely declined and they were not admitted.<sup>80</sup>

Undoubtedly Reuschle gave the impression that he had inspected the damage to give credibility to his reports. But repeated German Foreign Ministry requests that their experts be allowed to examine the bomb sites

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77. German Air Force (GAF) reconnaissance report, November 3, 1943, TNA, HW5/385 CX/MSS/3480/T5.

78. Irish Minister, Vatican, to Foreign Secretary, Dublin, November 7, 1943, TNA, HW12/294/124863.

79. Möllhausen, *La carta perdente*, p. 151.

80. Scrivener, *Inside Rome*, p. 48.

indicate that none had done so. Their solicitous offer that their technical experts would be able to identify the “type and origin of the bombs” indicates that the German Foreign Ministry also was quite confident the bombs would be found to be British and thus must have been complicit in the plot.

Over the next few days Ribbentrop’s Wilhelmstrasse sent out seven lengthy briefings on the incident to its representatives around the world. Each briefing was accompanied by explicit instructions that each one was to be given a prominent place in all radio and press reports, that emphasis be placed on the shock of the German people by the attack, that a storm of indignation had swept across the entire Catholic world, and that it was now clearly demonstrated that the English and the Americans were “inimical to religion” and “powers hostile to Europe and devoid of any sympathy for European life and culture.”<sup>81</sup> On November 6, 1943, the Argentine newspaper *El Pampero*, which was financed by the German Embassy, was first to report in block headlines that the Allies had bombed the Vatican, that the intention was to destroy St. Peter’s Basilica, and that German officers who had been admitted to the scene were informed by “a high Vatican dignitary” that this was a deliberate attack on the world center of Catholicism.<sup>82</sup>

In the German Embassy in Rome, Möllhausen was surprised when Ribbentrop telephoned him “about the bombing last night” and asked, “what did the Pope say?” When Möllhausen replied that the pope had said nothing, Ribbentrop was astonished—“Incredible! A bomb falls on his head and he says nothing!”—and instructed Möllhausen to go immediately to the pope “and be careful he does not give you just a mild statement.” Möllhausen sidestepped such an impossible task by observing that this was more within the competence of the German Embassy to the Holy See (Weizsäcker’s embassy) than his embassy, the German Embassy to Italy.<sup>83</sup>

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81. See TNA, HW12/294/124824; HW12/294/124964; HW12/294/124778; HW12/294/125028; HW12/294/124826; HW12/294/124902; and HW12/294/124904.

82. “Bombardearon El Vaticano: La Basílica de San Pedro Era el Objetivo del Raid Aliado,” *El Pampero*, November 6, 1943, 1: “Un grupo de oficiales alemanes qui se dirigió inmediatamente después del raid al lugar . . . entró en contacto con un alto dignatario de la iglesia, el cual expresó su convencimiento de un carácter netamente provocativo de este atentado contra el centro del mundo católico.” A microfilm of this newspaper is available at the New York Public Library, ref ZZAN-3871.

83. Möllhausen, *La carta perdente*, p. 153: “la bomba di questa notte . . . il Papa che dice?” “Il Papa non dice niente.” “Ribbentrop: ‘(Doll!) Incredibile! Gli casca una bomba sulla teste e non dice niente! . . . Andate subito dal Papa e state attenti affinché non vi faccia *eine säuselnde Erklärung!*’”



But he took seriously Ribbentrop's instruction that he take action. Although in his postwar memoirs he maintained that Farinacci was the culprit and that Farinacci never denied it, he organized a public demonstration against the British and made it known to the Italian Foreign Ministry that German diplomats were displeased by the lack of a forceful statement by the pope.<sup>84</sup> On November 8, the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs reported to Mussolini:

Counsel Möllhausen let it be clearly understood that there exists in German diplomatic circles a certain resentment concerning the Supreme Pontiff who . . . has not shown sufficient firmness in denouncing the attack "certainly carried out by an English aircraft against the Vatican City" . . . Moreover . . . in the space of 24 hours, he was able to organize . . . a noisy demonstration . . . against the "English attack" and to reject the accusation doing the rounds in Rome against unknown fascist pilots who would on their own initiative have let fall 5 disgraceful bombs on the Vatican City.<sup>85</sup>

The pressure to secure a public condemnation of the British by the pope was intense. But it never came. By now, the Vatican had learnt the truth about the bombing and, unwilling to play any part in the deception, was not about to provide official confirmation that the bombs were British. As noted, the results of its official investigation were never published. In an attempt to counter the rumors, the Vatican's public position, based on the report of engineer Galeazzi, was that it was impossible to arrive at any definite conclusion about the origin of the bombs from the remaining fragments.<sup>86</sup> Since Ribbentrop had not secured the statement he wanted, he fabricated it. On November 9, the Wilhelmstrasse issued a further briefing to all stations:

The central position should be given to today's statement by Engineer Galeazzi, the director of technical services at the Vatican City, who

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84. *Ibid.*, pp. 152–53.

85. Report to Mussolini on bombing, November 8 and 10, 1943, TNA, GFM36/474 Frames 096685 and 096691: "Il Console Moellhausen questi mi ha lasciato chiaramente intendere che nel l'ambiente diplomatico germanico esiste un certo risentimento nel riguardi del Sommo Pontefice il quale . . . non ha dimostrato sufficiente fermezza nello stigmatizzare l'attentato 'certamente compiuto da aerei inglesi contro la Città del Vaticano.' . . . Moellhausen mi ha inoltre espresso la sua viva soddisfazione per essere riuscito, nello spazio di 24 ore, ad organizzare . . . una rumorosa manifestazione . . . contro 'l'attentato inglese' e per respingere l'accusa fatta circolare in Roma contro incogniti aviatori fascisti che avrebbero di loro iniziativa lasciato cadere le 5 deprecate bombe sulla Città del Vaticano."

86. ADSS, 7, p. 705n2.

maintains that the bombs dropped on the Vatican were English small caliber bombs.<sup>87</sup>

This, of course, was false. But puzzled as Ribbentrop must have been by the pope's failure to speak out and condemn the attack, when he had clear evidence that the bombs were British, a stratagem was devised to discover the pope's true position on the matter and perhaps to lure him into an unguarded statement that could later be used for propaganda purposes. On November 14, a proven and reliable agent of the RSHA Amt IV (Gestapo), who knew Pius XII well from the pope's service as papal nuncio to Germany, was sent to Rome with specific instructions: secure a meeting with the pope and obtain his views on a number of important issues but primarily on the bombing of Vatican City. Because the informant was known to the pope and was acting as a "secure" courier from the nuncio in Berlin, he was granted an audience. During a one-hour conversation, the pope told the informant that "according to the common view in Vatican circles, the bomb attack had been 'staged' by radical fascist elements" and that "it was considered likely these elements had been supported by the SS." When SS-General Ernst Kaltenbrunner, the chief of RSHA, passed the informant's report to the German Foreign Ministry, Ribbentrop must have known that the propaganda plot had failed and that the Germans now would never obtain the sort of statement they wanted from the Vatican to implicate the British.<sup>88</sup>

Nevertheless, *El Pampero* in Argentina continued to headline its accusations against the Allies, reporting that the bombing had been mutually agreed upon with Stalin at the Moscow conference and that such a move finally exposed the hypocrisy of the Allied false promise to safeguard the Vatican. It faithfully reproduced the German Foreign Ministry's fabrication that the Vatican had identified the bombs as British and added that the British had all but admitted that their Boston bombers were responsible.<sup>89</sup> But other news sources, which had initially carried *El Pampero's* ver-

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87. German Ministry of Foreign Affairs to All Stations, November 9, 1943, TNA, HW12/294/125028.

88. Ernst Kaltenbrunner to Ribbentrop, December 16, 1943, TNA, GFM34/730 Frames 262341 to 262342: "daß nach allgemeiner Ansicht in Vatikan der Bombenabwurf von radikalen faschistischen Kreisen 'inszeniert' worden sei. Auch wird vielfach als wahrscheinlich angesehen, daß diese Kreise hierbei von der SS unterstützt worden seien."

89. "Profundo Dolor Causo Al Papa El Bombardeo: El Vaticano ya no Cree en las Falsas Promesas Aliadas," and "El Bombardeo al Vaticano Habría Sido Acordado en la Conferencia de Moscú," *El Pampero*, November 7, 1943, pp. 1, 3, 4; "Son Británicas las Bombas Arrojadadas en la Santa Sede," November 8, 1943, p. 3; "Se Confirma Que Son Inglesas Las

sion of events, quickly countered in the following days with reports of Allied denials, the Vatican's statement that it was not possible to identify the origin of the bombs, and a London report that the whole affair was "a carefully planned German propaganda effort to bring odium on the Allies."<sup>90</sup> In the absence of a Vatican statement, the media reports were confusing and contradictory, and the identity of the bomber remained a mystery. But on December 24, as part of his Christmas address to the College of Cardinals that was broadcast live around the world, Pius XII made his only public reference to the attack: "Such an attack, deliberately planned and dishonorably and unsuccessfully screened behind the anonymity of the pilot is," he said, "a symptom . . . of the moral decadence of conscience to which some erring minds have sunk," thereby indicating to the whole world that he was fully aware of the false flag nature of the bombing.<sup>91</sup> In January 1944, when Argentina finally broke off diplomatic relations with Germany, any potential objection that might have been raised by the local Argentinean clergy had thus been silenced effectively.

So, who bombed the Vatican? Although not conclusive, all the available evidence points to a carefully choreographed but unsuccessful German propaganda operation, willingly executed by the extreme anticlerical fascist Roberto Farinacci, who never denied it, at the behest of his Nazi paymasters in Berlin, who were anxious to counter damaging Allied propaganda in Argentinean newspapers that threatened their diplomatic relations with that country—their last foothold and listening post in Latin America. If

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Bombas Arrojadadas En El Vaticano," November 9, 1943, pp. 2; "Bombardearon el Vaticano Aviones Mosquito y Boston," November 10, 1943, pp.1, 3; "Los Yanquis Querrían que el Papa Abandone el Vaticano," November 13, 1943, p.3; "Invitan A Evacuar Los Civiles Del Vaticano," November 14, 1943, p. 2; Alexander von Hohenbach, "La Religión y la Iglesia Católicaas son el Principio del Fascismo Republicano," November 16, 1943, p.1.

90. "Vatican Bombing' A Propaganda Plan: Effort to bring Odium on the Allies," *Buenos Aires Herald*, November 7, 1943, p. 6; "Pope to Investigate Vatican Bombing," November 8, 1943, p. 4; "Designs on the Vatican," November 9, 1943, p. 3; "Bombing of the Vatican," November 10, 1943, p. 4; "Vatican Bombing: why British Denial was delayed," November 11, 1943, p. 4. *La Prensa*, "Argel Destaca que Ningún Avión Aliado Voló en la Noche del 5 Sobre los Alrededores del Vaticano," November 7, 1943, pp. 1, 6; "En Francia Atribuyen a los Germanos el Ataque al Vaticano," November 9, 1943, pp. 1, 6; "Conócense Detalles del Ataque Aéreo a la Ciudad del Vaticano," November 10, 1943, pp. 1, 7. "El Ataque Aéreo a la Ciudad del Vaticano," *La Nacion*, November 7, 1943, pp. 2; "Acerca del Ataque a la C, del Vaticano," November 8, 1943, p. 2; "Acerca del Ataque a la C. del Vaticano," November 9, 1943, p. 2; "El Bombardeo de la Santa Sede No Fué Obra Aliada," November 10, 1943, p. 3; "Acerca del Ataque a la c. del Vaticano," November 11, 1943, p. 2.

91. ADSS, 7, 731. For the full text in English, see "Bombing of Vatican Planned, Pope Says," *New York Times*, December 28, 1943, 12.

this is a correct interpretation of the available evidence, then it finally provides an explanation for an otherwise puzzling incident in the middle of World War II—the bombing of Vatican City. Although Pius XII may have been aware of the identity of the culprit and the false-flag nature of the bombing, he was probably never aware of its real purpose, of the Argentinean connection that provided its motive, or of the extent to which the Vatican had become a mere pawn in the propaganda war between the Axis and Allied powers.