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MS-603: Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum Collection, 1945-1992.

Series C: Interreligious Activities. 1952-1992

Box 46, Folder 8, Tisserant, Eugene [Cardinal], 1964.

COPY

THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

Institute of Human Relations

165 EAST 56TH STREET NEW YORK 22, N. Y.

PARIS OFFICE

30, rue la Boétie

Paris VIII

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Memorandum

To: Foreign Affairs Department

From: Paris Office

A letter of Eugene, Cardinal Tisserant, deploring the failure of Pope Pius XII to issue an encyclical on the duty of the individual to obey the dictates of his conscience rather than give blind obedience to governments like that of Hitler and Mussolini, has been discovered in German archives and published in Europe where it has been attracting considerable attention.

It should be made clear from the outset that this letter of Cardinal Tisserant's does not deal with Jews -- it was written in June 1940, almost two years before the Germans decided on "The Final Solution" -- nonetheless one cannot but be struck by the analogy between the problem of silence of the Pope on this question as on the question raised by the Hochhuth play "The Vicar."

The letter, whose full text we cite below, becoming known, Cardinal Tisserant has asserted, according to press agency reports that "this letter had nothing to do with Nazi activities against Jews for at that time the persecution of Jews had not manifested itself in all its horror." The Cardinal also went on to add that Pius XII did all he could to help victims of racial persecution. He said that he was convinced that any Papal intervention would only have aggravated the fate of the Jews.

The text of the letter of Cardinal Tisserant written to the late Cardinal Suhard, reads as follows:

"Rome, June 11, 1940

Most Eminent and Venerated Sir,

Yesterday I received the letter Your Eminence sent me on the 4th. Great thanks for the kindness shown me by Your

Eminence; should we live through this trial I would be most happy to profit of the hospitality you offer me during my visits to Paris. But what will happen from now till then? I foresaw from August 28 onward what happened yesterday, and I told this to General Georges when I met him at the end of December. How can we resist this new danger? May God help us and help you!

It is essential that the French have no illusions: What their enemies desire is their destruction. The Italian papers these days were full of texts of His Excellency Mussolini saying: We are prolific and we want land! And that means land without any inhabitants. Germany and Italy, therefore, will apply themselves to the destruction of the inhabitants of the occupied regions as they did in Poland. Instead of dying on the battlefield Frenchmen will die inchmeal, men separated from their wives and children spared, perhaps, to serve as slaves of the victors for such is the law of war for our enemies. Those who govern us do not want to understand the nature of the true conflict and persist in imagining that this is an old-fashioned war, but Fascist and Hitlerian ideology have transformed the consciences of youth, and those under 35 years of age are ready for any crime for their goal ordered by their chief.

With insistence, I have asked the Holy Father since the beginning of December to issue an encyclical on the duty of the individual to obey the dictums of conscience for this is the vital point of Christianity, while Islam which has served as a model for the theories of Hitler thanks to the son of the Moslem Hess, replaces the individual conscience by the duty to obey the orders of the Prophet or of his successors, blindly.

I fear that history may reproach the Holy See of having chosen the policy of the easy way out for itself and not much more. This is most sorrowful especially when one has lived under Pius XI, and everybody puts his trust in the fact that Rome was declared an open city thinking that nobody of the Curia will have to suffer in any way; it is ignominious. All the more so since the Secretariat of State and the Nuncio have persuaded great numbers of nuns and monks not to leave in order to furnish hostages to Italy. Yet still Rome is a cut-off camp surrounded by a belt of forts always occupied by troops, and there are two great armament factories, an ammunition plant and an artillery repair shop. But these, like the Germans, will hide under the Geneva cross (that is, the Red Cross) which the French and the English ought to declare that they do not recognize any more since it does not protect our hospitals.

I live in the most complete uselessness, retained here, though I have asked the Holy Father to send me to France. I pray for you, Eminence, and muchly.

Most devotedly yours in Our Lord,

Eugene Cardinal Tisserant."

The letter of Cardinal Tisserant was found in German archives by Professor Eberhard Jaeckel of the University of Kiel. The Germans searched the Paris Archbishopric for three days in September, 1940, found this letter and sent it to Berlin with a commentary: "Here is the proof that Cardinal Tisserant is an Allied agent." Cardinal Suhard was at the time Archbishop of Paris.

Professor Jaeckel published a long article on the letter this last January in the German review, "Geschicht in Wissenschaft und Unterricht." His article points out that the problem of Papal silence, of failure to denounce crimes committed in the name of race, already existed at the time the letter of Cardinal Tisserant was written, because from October 1939 onward it was patent that the German government was following a radical policy in Western Poland, evicting all Polish elements in order to implant Germanism, with deportations toward the Warsaw region and pure and simple extermination being used as alternative methods.

Pius XII intervened only once in his first encyclical "Summi pontificatus", where the Poles were expressly named, leaving Radio Vatican and the "Osservatore Romano" the task of reporting German policy in Poland.

The Pope, according to this article, was perfectly well informed as to the racial character of the German policy, and Cardinal Tisserant's letter is one evidence that there were many who were pressing him to quit his stand of "impartiality," but obviously without success.

cc: Dr. Tanenbaum