

How Pope Pius XII Became 'Hitler's Pope'

A firsthand account of a Communist disinformation scheme

By Lt. Gen. Ion Mihai Pacepa with Prof. Ronald J. Rychlak

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Not everyone has the privilege to be born in the United States. I was born in the quiet, pastoral kingdom of Romania. All I wanted in life was to go to America. That had also been the dream of my father, who spent his working career managing the service department at the U.S. General Motors affiliate in Bucharest.

Trapped by World War II and then by the Soviet occupation of Romania, both my father and I were forced to give up our American dream. Then came that unforgettable year of 1951, when my class at the Polytechnic Institute graduated as the first generation of engineers educated under Communist rule. The *Securitate*—the new Romanian political police created by the Soviets—hired as many of those engineers as it could. I was one of them.

There, in what had become the Soviet bloc, where the government paid for your entire education, you had no chance to choose your employer. The government

decided where you worked. I was distraught, but since I did not really know what "America" meant, it took me many years before I was able to assign true dimensions to my loss. We, the authors of this article, have summarized those years in our book, *Disinformation*, published in June 2013.

Coming clean

A few years ago, I published *Red Horizons*, in which I documented that my former boss, Romanian President Nicolae Ceausescu, who had been praised by President Jimmy Carter as a "great national and in-





The Vatican secret archives. As a Romanian official in 1959, the author helped orchestrate a plot by Soviet Russia to get three spies who were priests into the archives in order to set into motion a plot to discredit Pope Pius XII.

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ing Communism. I had been a player in the Kremlin's war against the Vatican and was peripherally involved in the framing operation aimed at changing Pius XII's past in an effort to drive a wedge between Jews and Christians.

Kremlin vs. Vatican

The Kremlin's framing of Pius XII began on June 3, 1945, when Radio Moscow insinuated that Pius XII was Hitler's pope. I got involved in that framing operation in October 1959, when Khrushchev visited Romania. I had just been appointed head of Romanian industrial espionage, and I attended several official meetings

ternational leader," was in fact an international terrorist who had made a fortune by trafficking in human beings, bacteriological weapons, and drugs. On Christmas Day 1989, Ceausescu was sentenced to death at the end of a trial whose main accusations came almost word for word out of *Red Horizons*, subsequently published in twenty-seven countries.

The bullets were still flying over Bucharest when Congressman Frank Wolf (R-Va.) landed there to free my daughter, Dana, and her husband. The second chapter of the congressman's latest book, *Prisoner of Conscience*, is dedicated to *Red Horizons* and Dana's rescue from Romania.

After Dana, now an American citizen, had settled in the U.S., I published "Moscow's Assault on the Vatican." The article dealt with a KGB disinformation operation aimed at changing Pius XII's strongly anti-Nazi past and absurdly alleging that he was, in fact, "Hitler's pope." It was like Ceausescu's framing operation in reverse. Kathryn Jean Lopez, who at that time was the editor of *National Review Online* and had published "Mos-

cow's Assault on the Vatican," put me in touch with Ronald Rychlak.

We became a unique team. Rychlak has spent much of his professional life documenting that Pius XII was instrumental in defeating Nazism, just as Pope John Paul II was instrumental in defeat-



Agostino Casaroli was the author's Vatican contact.



General Ivan Agayants was chief of the KGB's disinformation department.

with Khrushchev, whose *dogonyat i peregonyat*, meaning that the Soviet Union was supposed to overtake America economically, made industrial espionage a main weapon in his arsenal.

"Religion is the opiate of the people," I heard Khrushchev say, "so let's give them opium." Soon thereafter, Khrushchev approved a joint Communist Party/KGB operational plan for destroying the Vatican's moral authority in Western Europe. Concocted by KGB chairman Aleksandr Shelepin and Aleksey Kirichenko (the Soviet Politburo member responsible for international policy), the new plan would be based on a fictionalized scenario, supported by genuine, slightly modified Vatican documents (the originals of which would never be released to the public).

There was an unflinching KGB rule for handling modified and counterfeited documents: They should be made available only in the form of retyped documents or in specially prepared photocopies, as even the most perfect counterfeit by today's standards might become vulnerable to future detection techniques.

I supervised that part of the plan. Romania had a fairly large Roman Catholic



The Kremlin was behind the largely successful calumny of Pius XII.

community, so it was logical to ask its foreign intelligence service, the DIE, to help get agents into the Vatican archives. Moreover, I was in an excellent position to contact the Vatican. The year before, I had negotiated a "spy swap" with the Holy See involving four prominent Catholics who had been sentenced on spurious charges of espionage in 1951. The four were exchanged for two DIE officers caught spying in West Germany.

For this new mission, I was instructed to tell my Vatican contact (future Cardinal Secretary of State Agostino Casaroli) that Romania was ready to restore diplomatic relations with the Holy See in exchange for a billion-dollar loan. I was also instructed to tell the Vatican that Romania needed access to the Vatican archives in order to find historical roots that would help our government justify its change of heart toward the Holy See.

Of course, this was a ploy. Ceausescu had no intention of restoring diplomatic relations with the Holy See, and we never expected the loan to come through; the Kremlin only wanted us to get agents

into the archives so they could obtain documents to help with the plan.

Priest spies in the Vatican archives

For the assignment to Rome, the DIE chose three priests who were also co-opted intelligence agents. The Vatican had no qualms about letting them into its secret archives. The term *Vatican secret archives* is a misnomer. The word *secret* does not have the modern meaning; it simply indicates that the archives are the pope's own, not those of a department of the Roman Curia. Since 1881 these archives have been open to outside researchers.

Thus the concession from the Vatican—permitting Romanian priests to enter these archives—was not significant. It did, however, provide an air of authenticity to Khrushchev's project. The priest/agents secretly photographed some unimportant documents, and the DIE sent the film to the KGB. Nothing that the agents found could be used as a basis for fabricating believable evidence. They were mainly things like press reports and transcripts of unclassified meetings and



Rolf Hochhuth was an aspiring playwright who willingly allowed the KGB to manipulate his play.

KGB agents offered to help Hochhuth “shape” his play *The Deputy*. In fact, they shaped it so well that they turned it into an eight-hour monstrosity that would have been impossible to stage.

speeches, but they gave Moscow what was needed to fabricate a story.

At this time I was managing Romania's industrial espionage, and I had no reason nor opportunity to know the identity of the DIE agents sent to search the Vatican archives. After my account of this operation was first published in 2007, historians and volunteer researchers started looking into the recently opened *Securitate* archives in Romania. So far, they have been able to identify one of the three DIE agents: Fr. Francisc Iosif Pal, S.J. He had been recruited as a *Securitate* agent in 1950, when he was detained in the infamous Romanian prison of Gherla. Pal's task was to inform on other Catholic priests who were also detained there.

Fr. Pal's cooperation with the *Securitate* in organizing the 1951 trial against the Vatican nunciature in Bucharest was revealed in a 2008 book published by William Totok, a Romanian-born German researcher. Aurel Sergiu Marinescu first disclosed Pal's involvement with the Vatican archives in a study on the history of Romanian exiles. Romanian researcher Remus Mircea Birtz confirmed it. It is still unknown whether Pal was sent to the Vatican using his own identity or on a false passport—a practice frequently used by both the *Securitate* and the DIE.

The framing of Pius XII

Nothing that Pal or the other two DIE agents found in Vatican archives could be used as a basis for fabricating believable evidence making Pius seem sympathetic to Hitler's regime or unconcerned about the Jews. Moscow expected that. The KGB wanted only to be able to claim

that it had on hand original Vatican documents so as to give the impression that its allegation that Pius XII was “Hitler's pope” was based on solid evidence.

General Ivan Agayants, chief of the KGB's disinformation department, which coordinated the framing of Pius XII, made a career out of writing false histories. A year before the infamous anti-Pius play *The Deputy* was launched, Agayants fabricated out of whole cloth a manuscript designed to persuade the West that, deep down, the Kremlin thought highly of the Jews; this manuscript was published in Western Europe, to great popular success, as a book titled *Notes for a Journal*.

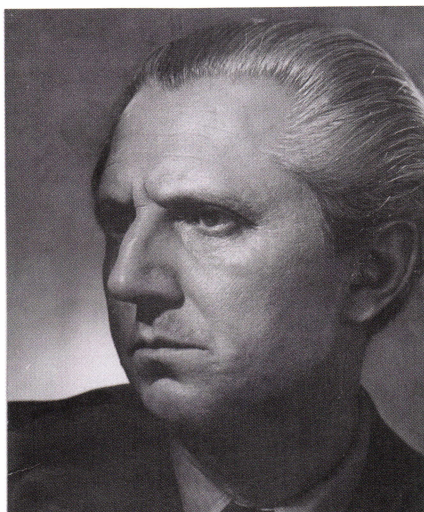
The manuscript was attributed to Maxim Litvinov, né Meir Walach, the former Soviet commissar for foreign affairs, who had been fired in 1939 when Stalin purged his diplomatic apparatus of Jews in preparation for signing his “non-

aggression” pact with Hitler. Agayants's book was so flawlessly counterfeited that Britain's most prominent historian on Soviet Russia, Edward Hallet Carr, was convinced of its authenticity and in fact wrote an introduction for it.

Gen. Agayants took charge of the framing of Pius XII. Rather than frame Pius with factual charges that could be rebutted, Agayants decided to make the charges in a fictionalized play. That way, criticism of factual mistakes could be fended off by noting that it was fiction, while still asserting that it was essentially true. Brilliant! The person who would be known as the author of this play could not come from the intelligence community. Nor could the author be from the Soviet bloc.

A pliable playwright

Fortunately for the Soviets, there was a young German man who was working on



Erwin Piscator directed the German premier of *The Deputy*.



Herman Shumlin was the American producer who brought *The Deputy* to Broadway.

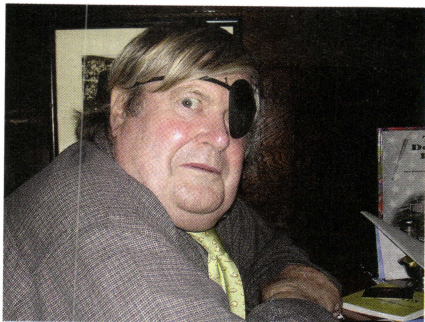
a play that seemed to present the perfect platform. His name was Rolf Hochhuth, and the play he was working on was based on the written statement of a Nazi officer named Kurt Gerstein. As a prisoner of the Allies after the war, Gerstein wrote about his efforts to let the world know what the Nazis were doing. Gerstein's story may have been true, but he was a confused man who hanged himself in his cell before his story could be confirmed. He remains an enigmatic figure.

Hochhuth was working for a German publishing house. He had edited a popular book of poems and drawings, but he had never published any of his own writings. Anxious to be published, Hochhuth was open to suggestions, and he frequently changed the plot of the historical plays he eventually became known for writing, always to be in line with the prevailing Soviet perspective on history. His original plan for what would become *The Deputy: A Christian Tragedy* did not even involve the pope.

KGB agents discovered Hochhuth working on this project, and they offered to help him "shape" his play. In fact, they shaped it so well that they turned it into an eight-hour monstrosity that would have been impossible to stage.

Director as propagandist

Fortunately for the cause of disinforma-



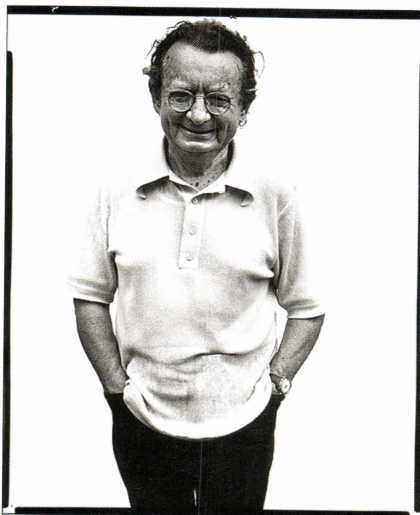
Warren Hinkle, editor of the ostensibly Catholic *Ramparts* magazine, waged a successful media battle to allow *The Deputy* to be staged in the U.S.

When *The Deputy* was about to open on Broadway, so many religious leaders, politicians, diplomats, and others had spoken against it that it was somewhat of an international scandal.

tion, the KGB had another expert it could call on: theatrical legend Erwin Piscator.

Piscator was a brilliant producer/director, but from his earliest days he used the theater to advance the cause of the Communist Party. He became a member of the German Communist Party at its creation in 1919. In the postscript to a 1934 edition of a play he produced, Piscator wrote that his theater "was always political, that is to say political in the sense approved by the Communist Party."

Piscator had returned to Germany from the United States in the 1950s after having received some pressure from the House Committee on Un-American Activities. Germany at that time was split into East and West Germany. Berlin, while solidly in the eastern (Communist)



Journalist I. F. Stone, who spent time as a paid Soviet spy, published influential articles in 1964 accusing Pius XII of being a Nazi sympathizer.

part of the nation, was also split. For a long time, Berliners were able to freely cross back and forth between the different sides of the city. Theaters openly propagandized. East German theaters promoted the Communist line. Theaters in West Berlin accepted East German currency, even though East German marks were not worth as much as West German marks. The pro-Western educational value was worth the lost profit.

In 1961, East German authorities erected the Berlin Wall, and people could no longer cross from one side of the city to the other. The East German authorities realized that their propaganda plays would no longer be able to influence theatergoers of West Berlin. And so they opened the *Freie Volksbühne* (Free People's Theater) in West Berlin for the purpose of producing pro-communist political theater. They hired Piscator to produce the theater's plays, and his first assignment was *The Deputy*.

Piscator cut the committee-written script down to a manageable two hours. He eliminated some, but not all, of the KGB-added anti-Semitism that would subsequently haunt Hochhuth. (Since he took credit as author, Hochhuth also was assigned blame.) Broadway producer Herman Shumlin, for instance, noted that all of the Jews in *The Deputy* were depicted as short bald men with big noses.

An inauspicious opening

The play opened in West Berlin under the direction of Erwin Piscator at the *Freie Volksbühne* on February 20, 1963. The basic plot involves a good Nazi



RICHARD AVEDON



The Freie Volksbühne, c. 1930. After the rise of the Berlin Wall, the West Berlin theater became a cultural propaganda palace for the East Germans.

(Gerstein) who tells a good priest about what the Nazis are doing to the Jews. The priest, however, is continually thwarted in his efforts to get a message to the pope. When he finally succeeds, Pope Pius XII does not care about the victims. The priest then sacrifices himself by donning a yellow star and going to a concentration camp, becoming the true deputy of Christ.

The Deputy ran for only a couple of weeks in Berlin, receiving mixed reviews. Despite this short and commercially unsuccessful debut, the play was quickly translated and produced by some of the most prominent names in theater. All were Western communists or sympathizers.

The American publisher of *The Deputy*, for instance, was Grove Press, which belonged to Barney Rosset. In a 2006 interview, Rosset was asked about his religion. He replied that he never had a religion: "So I became a communist. As a religion. And you better believe it."

Herman Shumlin was the American producer who brought *The Deputy* to Broadway. According to *Time* magazine (Feb. 5, 1940), Shumlin was the only producer who advertised in the communist *Daily Worker*. Shumlin served as chairman of "the left-ist Joint Anti-Fascist Refugee Committee" (JAFRC). When JAFRC refused to turn over records to the U.S. House Committee on Un-American Activities, a federal judge

held him guilty of contempt of Congress. He was fined \$500 and given a suspended three-month jail term.

Communists win publicity battle

When *The Deputy* was about to open on Broadway, so many religious leaders, politicians, diplomats, and others had spoken against it that it was somewhat of an international scandal. New York's Cardinal Francis Spellman called *The Deputy* "an outrageous desecration of the honor of a great and good man." With the play's ability to open in serious jeopardy, *Ramparts* magazine from San Francisco took the lead in defending it.

Ramparts had been founded in 1962 as a liberal Catholic quarterly. In early 1964, editor Warren Hinckle set up shop at the Waldorf Hotel in Manhattan, established a committee, sent out numerous telegrams, did news interviews, and threw a huge catered press conference, all to set forth a "Catholic" defense of *The Deputy*. It took far more money than a magazine like *Ramparts* would reasonably be able to devote to such a project, but it was successful. *Ramparts* won the media battle with Cardinal Spellman, and the play opened.

(*Ramparts* dropped its Catholic identity shortly after *The Deputy* episode. By December 1964, it described itself as "New Left," not Catholic. CIA documents released under the Freedom of Information Act confirm that by 1966 *Ramparts* was a reliable outlet for Soviet propaganda. The CIA eventually devoted twelve full-time and part-time officers to investigating *Ramparts*. They identified and investigated 127 writers and researchers, as well as nearly 200 other people. It is not hard to speculate about where *Ramparts* got its funding to promote *The Deputy*.)

A well-placed critic

Having assured that the play would open on Broadway and around the world, So-

viet bloc intelligence worked to promote the debate over the play. To provide but one example, recently published Soviet documents prove that the well-known Washington investigative journalist I. F. Stone (1907-1989) spent time as a paid Soviet spy. In March 1964, just weeks after *The Deputy* opened on Broadway, Stone wrote: "Pius XII, in being friendly to Hitler [and to Mussolini] was only following in the footsteps of Pius XI. . . . More than the sin of silence lies on the consciences of God's 'deputies.' They were accessories in the creation of these criminal regimes."

That November, the same month that the play closed, he wrote another article titled "Pius XII's Fear of Hitler." Stone's prominence and his caustic style played an immense role in calling attention to *The Deputy* and helping make it a *cause célèbre*.

In 1978, when I broke with communism, I left in my office safe a slip of paper on which Gen. Aleksandr Sakharovsky, head of the Soviet bloc espionage community, had written, *Gutta cavat lapidem, non vi sed saepe cadendo*—"A drop makes a hole in a stone not by force, but by constant dripping." It would take time, but wherever you could not use a drill, that was the best way to make a hole.

That was how the framing of Pius XII as Hitler's pope was achieved: drop by drop by drop. ■



Disinformation: Former Spy Chief Reveals Secret Strategies for Undermining Freedom, Attacking Religion, and Promoting Terrorism, the new book by



Lt. Gen. Ion Mihai Pacepa and **Ronald J. Rychlak**, was conceived with the intention of laying out in clear language the inner workings of the plot against Pius XII. The book deals with other topics as well, but this article is a basic outline of the Pius XII operation.