

# Pope Francis, CIA and 'Death Squads'

**Exclusive:** In the 1970s, Father Jorge Bergoglio faced a moment of truth: Would he stand up to Argentina's military neo-Nazis "disappearing" thousands including priests, or keep his mouth shut and his career on track? Like many other Church leaders, Pope Francis took the safe route, Robert Parry reports.

By Robert Parry

The election of Argentine Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio as Pope Francis brings back into focus the troubling role of the Catholic hierarchy in blessing much of the brutal repression that swept Latin America in the 1970s and 1980s, killing and torturing tens of thousands of people including priests and nuns accused of sympathizing with leftists.

The Vatican's fiercely defensive reaction to the reemergence of these questions as they relate to the new Pope also is reminiscent of the pattern of deceptive denials that became another hallmark of that era when propaganda was viewed as an integral part of the "anticommunist" struggles, which were often supported financially and militarily by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency.

It appears that Bergoglio, who was head of the Jesuit order in Buenos Aires during Argentina's grim "dirty war," mostly tended to his bureaucratic rise within the Church as Argentine security forces "disappeared" some 30,000 people for torture and murder from 1976 to 1983, including 150 Catholic priests suspected of believing in "liberation theology."

Much as Pope Pius XII didn't directly challenge the Nazis during the Holocaust, Father Bergoglio avoided any direct confrontation with the neo-Nazis who were terrorizing Argentina. Pope Francis's defenders today, like apologists for Pope Pius, claim he did intervene quietly to save some individuals.

But no one asserts that Bergoglio stood up publicly against the "anticommunist" terror, as some other Church leaders did in Latin America, most notably El Salvador's Archbishop Oscar Romero who then became a victim of right-wing assassins in 1980.

Indeed, the predominant role of the Church hierarchy from the Vatican to the bishops in the individual countries was to give political cover to the slaughter and to offer little protection to the priests and nuns who advocated "liberation theology," i.e. the belief that Jesus did not just favor charity to the poor but wanted a just society that shared wealth and power with the poor.

In Latin America with its calcified class structure of a few oligarchs at one

end and many peasants at the other, that meant reforms, such as land redistribution, literacy programs, health clinics, union rights, etc. But those changes were fiercely opposed by the local oligarchs and the multinational corporations that profited from the cheap labor and inequitable land distribution.

So, any reformers of any stripe were readily labeled “communists” and were made the targets of vicious security forces, often trained and indoctrinated by “anticommunist” military officers at the U.S.-run School of the Americas. The primary role of the Catholic hierarchy was to urge the people to stay calm and support the traditional system.

It is noteworthy that the orchestrated praise for Pope Francis in the U.S. news media has been to hail Bergoglio’s supposedly “humble” personality and his “commitment to the poor.” However, Bergoglio’s approach fits with the Church’s attitude for centuries, to give “charity” to the poor while doing little to change their cruel circumstances as Church grandees hobnob with the rich and powerful.

### **Another Pope Favorite**

Pope John Paul II, another favorite of the U.S. news media, shared this classic outlook. He emphasized conservative social issues, telling the faithful to forgo contraceptives, treating women as second-class Catholics and condemning homosexuality. He promoted charity for the poor and sometimes criticized excesses of capitalism, but he disdained leftist governments that sought serious economic reforms.

Elected in 1978, as right-wing “death squads” were gaining momentum across Latin America, John Paul II offered little protection to left-leaning priests and nuns who were targeted. He rebuffed Archbishop Romero’s plea to condemn El Salvador’s right-wing regime and its human rights violations. He stood by as priests were butchered and nuns were raped and killed.

Instead of leading the charge for real economic and political change in Latin America, John Paul II denounced “liberation theology.” During a 1983 trip to Nicaragua then ruled by the leftist Sandinistas the Pope condemned what he called the “popular Church” and would not let Ernesto Cardenal, a priest and a minister in the Sandinista government, kiss the papal ring. He also elevated clerics like Bergoglio who didn’t protest right-wing repression.

John Paul II appears to have gone even further, allowing the Catholic Church in Nicaragua to be used by the CIA and Ronald Reagan’s administration to finance and organize internal disruptions while the violent Nicaraguan Contras

terrorized northern Nicaraguan towns with raids notorious for rape, torture and extrajudicial executions.

The Contras were originally organized by an Argentine intelligence unit that emerged from the country's domestic "dirty war" and was taking its "anticommunist" crusade of terror across borders. After Reagan took office in 1981, he authorized the CIA to join with Argentine intelligence in expanding the Contras and their counterrevolutionary war.

A key part of Reagan's Contra strategy was to persuade the American people and Congress that the Sandinistas represented a repressive communist dictatorship that persecuted the Catholic Church, aimed to create a "totalitarian dungeon," and thus deserved violent overthrow.

A special office inside the National Security Council, headed by longtime CIA disinformation specialist Walter Raymond Jr., pushed these propaganda "themes" domestically. Raymond's campaign exploited examples of tensions between the Catholic hierarchy and the Sandinista government as well as with *La Prensa*, the leading opposition newspaper.

To make the propaganda work with Americans, it was important to conceal the fact that elements of the Catholic hierarchy and *La Prensa* were being financed by the CIA and were coordinating with the Reagan administration's destabilization strategies. [See Robert Parry's *Lost History*.]

### **Evidence of Payments**

In 1988, I discovered evidence of this reality while working as a correspondent for Newsweek magazine. At the time, the Iran-Contra scandal had undermined the case for spending more U.S. money to arm the Contras. But the Reagan administration continued to beat the propaganda drums by highlighting the supposed persecution of Nicaragua's internal opposition.

To fend off U.S. hostility, which also included a harsh economic embargo, the Sandinistas announced increased political freedoms. But that represented only a new opportunity for Washington to orchestrate more political disruptions, which would either destabilize the government further or force a crackdown that could then be cited in seeking more Contra aid.

Putting the Sandinistas in this "inside-outside" vise had always been part of the CIA strategy, but with a crumbling economy and more U.S. money pouring into the opposition groups, the gambit was beginning to work.

Yet, it was crucial to the plan that the CIA's covert relationship with Nicaragua's internal opposition remain secret, not so much from the Sandinistas,

who had detailed intelligence about this thoroughly penetrated operation, but from the American people. The U.S. public would get outraged at Sandinista reprisals against these "independent" groups only if the CIA's hand were kept hidden.

A rich opportunity for the Reagan administration presented itself in summer 1988 when a new spasm of Contra ambushes killed 17 Nicaraguans and the anti-Sandinista internal opposition staged a violent demonstration in the town of Nandaime, a protest that Sandinista police dispersed with tear gas.

Reacting to the renewed violence, the Sandinistas closed down *La Prensa* and the Catholic Church's radio station both prime vehicles for anti-Sandinista propaganda. The Nicaraguan government also expelled U.S. Ambassador Richard Melton and seven other U.S. Embassy personnel for allegedly coordinating the disorders.

Major U.S. news outlets, which had accepted their role treating the Sandinistas as "designated enemies" of the United States, roared in outrage, and the U.S. Congress condemned the moves by a margin of 94-4 in the Senate and 385-18 in the House.

Melton then testified before the Senate Intelligence Committee first in secret and then in public, struggling to hide the open secret in Washington that Nicaragua's internal opposition, like the Contras, was getting covert help from the U.S. government.

When asked by a senator in public session about covert American funding to the opposition, Melton dissembled awkwardly: "As to other activities that might be conducted, that's they were discussed that would be discussed yesterday in the closed hearing."

When pressed by Sen. Howard Metzenbaum on whether the embassy provided "encouragement financial or otherwise of dissident elements," Melton responded stiffly: "The ambassador in any post is the principal representative of the U.S. government. And in that capacity, fulfills those functions." He then declined to discuss "activities of an intelligence nature" in open session.

### **On the Payroll**

In other words, yes, the U.S. government was covertly organizing and funding the activities of the supposedly "independent" internal opposition in Nicaragua. And, according to more than a dozen sources that I interviewed inside the Contra movement or close to U.S. intelligence, the Reagan administration had funneled CIA money to virtually every segment of the internal opposition, from the Catholic Church to *La Prensa* to business and labor groups to political parties.

"We've always had the internal opposition on the CIA payroll," one U.S. government official said. The CIA's budget line for Nicaraguan political action separate from Contra military operations was about \$10 million a year, my sources said. I learned that the CIA had been using the Church and Cardinal Miguel Obando y Bravo to funnel money into Nicaragua.

Obando was a plodding but somewhat complex character. In the 1970s, he had criticized the repression of the Somoza dictatorship and expressed some sympathy for the young Sandinista revolutionaries who were trying to bring social and economic changes to Nicaragua.

However, after the murder of El Salvador's Archbishop Romero in 1980 and Pope John Paul II's repudiation of "liberation theology," Obando shifted clumsily into the anti-Sandinista camp, attacking the "people's church" and accusing the Sandinistas of "godless communism."

On May 25, 1985, he was rewarded when the Pope named him Cardinal for Central America. Then, despite mounting evidence of Contra atrocities, Obando traveled to the United States in January 1986 and threw his support behind a renewal of military aid to the Contras.

All this made a lot more sense after factoring in that Obando had essentially been put onto the CIA's payroll. The CIA funding for Nicaragua's Catholic Church was originally unearthed in 1985 by the congressional intelligence oversight committees, which then insisted that the money be cut off to avoid compromising Obando further.

But the funding was simply transferred to another secret operation headed by White House aide Oliver North. In fall 1985, North earmarked \$100,000 of his privately raised money to go to Obando for his anti-Sandinista activities, I learned from my sources.

I was also told that the CIA's support for Obando and the Catholic hierarchy went through a maze of cut-outs in Europe, apparently to give Obando deniability. But one well-placed Nicaraguan exile said he had spoken with Obando about the money and the Cardinal had expressed fear that his past receipt of CIA funding would come out.

### **What to Do?**

Discovering this CIA funding of Nicaragua's Catholic Church presented professional problems for me at Newsweek, where my senior editors were already making clear that they sympathized with the Reagan administration's muscular foreign policy and felt that the Iran-Contra scandal had gone too far in undermining U.S. interests.

But what was the right thing for an American journalist to do with this information? Here was a case in which the U.S. government was misleading the American public by pretending that the Sandinistas were cracking down on the Catholic Church and the internal opposition without any justification. Plus, this U.S. propaganda was being used to make the case in Congress for an expanded war in which thousands of Nicaraguans were dying.

However, if Newsweek ran the story, it would put CIA assets, including Cardinal Obando, in a dicey situation, possibly even life-threatening. So, when I presented the information to my bureau chief, Evan Thomas, I made no recommendation on whether we should publish or not. I just laid out the facts as I had ascertained them. To my surprise, Thomas was eager to go forward.

Newsweek contacted its Central America correspondent Joseph Contreras, who outlined our questions to Obando's aides and prepared a list of questions to present to the Cardinal personally. However, when Contreras went to Obando's home in a posh suburb of Managua, the Cardinal literally evaded the issue.

As Contreras later recounted in a cable back to Newsweek in the United States, he was approaching the front gate when it suddenly swung open and the Cardinal, sitting in the front seat of his burgundy Toyota Land Cruiser, blew past.

As Contreras made eye contact and waved the letter, Obando's driver gunned the engine. Contreras jumped into his car and hastily followed. Contreras guessed correctly that Obando had turned left at one intersection and headed north toward Managua.

Contreras caught up to the Cardinal's vehicle at the first stop-light. The driver apparently spotted the reporter and, when the light changed, sped away, veering from lane to lane. The Land Cruiser again disappeared from view, but at the next intersection, Contreras turned right and spotted the car pulled over, with its occupants presumably hoping that Contreras had turned left.

Quickly, the Cardinal's vehicle pulled onto the road and now sped back toward Obando's house. Contreras gave up the chase, fearing that any further pursuit might appear to be harassment. Several days later, having regained his composure, the Cardinal finally met with Contreras and denied receiving any CIA money. But Contreras told me that Obando's denial was unconvincing.

Newsweek drafted a version of the story, making it appear as if we weren't sure of the facts about Obando and the money. When I saw a "readback" of the article, I went into Thomas's office and said that if Newsweek didn't trust my reporting, we shouldn't run the story at all. He said that wasn't the case; it was just that the senior editors felt more comfortable with a vaguely worded story.

## Hot Water

We ended up in hot water with the Reagan administration and right-wing media attack groups anyway. Accuracy in Media lambasted me, in particular, for going with such a sensitive story without being sure of the facts (which, of course, I was).

Thomas was summoned to the State Department where Assistant Secretary of State Elliott Abrams heaped more criticism on me though not denying the facts of our story. Newsweek also agreed, in the face of right-wing pressure, to subject me and the article to an internal investigation, which quietly reconfirmed the facts of the story.

Despite this corroboration, the incident damaged my relations with senior Newsweek editors, particularly executive editor Maynard Parker who saw himself as part of the New York/Washington foreign policy establishment and was deeply hostile to the Iran-Contra scandal, which I had helped expose.

As for Obando, the Sandinistas did nothing to punish him for his collaboration with the CIA and he gradually evolved more into a figure of reconciliation than confrontation. However, the hyper-secretive Vatican has refused to open its archives for any serious research into its relationship with the CIA and other Western intelligence services.

Whenever allegations do arise about the Catholic Church's hierarchy winking and nodding at the kinds of human rights atrocities that claimed hundreds of thousands of lives in Latin America during the 1970s and 1980s, the Vatican PR department lashes out with sternly worded denials.

That practice is playing out again in the days after the election of Pope Francis I. Rather than a serious and reflective assessment of the actions (and inactions) of Cardinal Bergoglio, Cardinal Obando, Pope John Paul II and other Church leaders during those dark days of torture and murder, the Vatican simply denounces all allegations as "slander," "calumny" and politically motivated lies.

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# Evita, the Swiss and the Nazis

**From the Archive:** Jorge Bergoglio's election to be Pope Francis has revived troubling questions about the Catholic Church's role in the Argentine "dirty war" and other right-wing repression in Latin America of the 1970s and '80s. But the history goes back to ties to the Nazis, as the late Georg Hodel wrote in 1999.

By Georg Hodel (Originally published Jan. 7, 1999)

On June 6, 1947, Argentina's first lady Eva Peron left for a glittering tour of Europe. The glamorous ex-actress was feted in Spain, kissed the ring of Pope Pius XII at the Vatican and hobnobbed with the rich-and-famous in the mountains of Switzerland.

Eva Peron, known as "Evita" by her adoring followers, was superficially on a trip to strengthen diplomatic, business and cultural ties between Argentina and important leaders of Europe. But there was a parallel mission behind the high-profile trip, one that has contributed to a half century of violent extremism in Latin America.

According to records emerging from Swiss archives and the investigations of Nazi hunters, an unpublicized side of Evita's world tour was coordinating the network for helping Nazis relocate in Argentina. This new evidence of Evita's cozy ties with prominent Nazis corroborates the long-held suspicion that she and her husband, Gen. Juan Peron, laid the groundwork for a bloody resurgence of fascism across Latin America in the 1970s and '80s.

Besides blemishing the Evita legend, the evidence threatens to inflict more damage on Switzerland's image for plucky neutrality. The international banking center is still staggering from disclosures about its wartime collaboration with Adolf Hitler and Swiss profiteering off his Jewish victims. The archival records indicate that Switzerland's assistance to Hitler's henchmen didn't stop with the collapse of the Third Reich.

And the old Swiss-Argentine-Nazi connection reaches to the present in another way. Spanish "superjudge" Baltasar Garzon sought to open other Swiss records on bank accounts controlled by Argentine military officers who led the so-called "Dirty War" that killed and "disappeared" tens of thousands of Argentines between 1976-83.

During World War II, Gen. Peron – a populist military leader – made no secret of his sympathies for Mussolini's Italy and Hitler's Germany. Even as the Third

Reich crumbled in the spring of 1945, Peron remained a pro-fascist stalwart, making available more than 1,000 blank passports for Nazi collaborators fleeing Europe.

With Europe in chaos and the Allies near victory, tens of thousands of ranking Nazis dropped out of sight, tried to mix in with common refugees and began plotting escapes from Europe to Argentina across clandestine "ratlines."

At the Argentine end of that voyage was Rodolfo Freude. He also was Juan Peron's private secretary, one of Evita's principal benefactors and the chief of Argentine internal security. Freude's father, Ludwig, played another key role. As managing director of the Banco Aleman Transatlantico in Buenos Aires, he led the pro-Nazi German community in Argentina and acted as trustee for hundreds of millions of German Reichsmarks that the Fuehrer's top aides sent to Argentina near the war's end.

### **Finding New Homes**

By 1946, the first wave of defeated fascists was settling into new Argentine homes. The country also was rife with rumors that the thankful Nazis had begun to repay Peron by bankrolling his campaign for the presidency, which he won with his stunning wife at his side.

In 1947, Peron was living in Argentina's presidential palace and was hearing pleas from thousands of other Nazis desperate to flee Europe. The stage was set for one of the most troubling boatlifts in human history. The archival records reveal that Eva Peron stepped forward to serve as Gen. Peron's personal emissary to this Nazi underground. Already, Evita was an Argentine legend.

Born in 1919 as an illegitimate child, she became a prostitute to survive and to get acting roles. As she climbed the social ladder lover by lover, she built up deep resentments toward the traditional elites. As a mistress to other army officers, she caught the eye of handsome military strongman Juan Peron. After a public love affair, they married in 1945.

As Peron's second wife, Evita fashioned herself as the "queen of the poor," the protector of those she called "mis descamisados" – "my shirtless ones." She created a foundation to help the poor buy items from toys to houses.

But her charity extended, too, to her husband's Nazi allies. In June 1947, Evita left for post-war Europe. A secret purpose of her first major overseas trip apparently was pulling together the many loose ends of the Nazi relocation.

Evita's first stop on her European tour was Spain, where Generalissimo Francisco Franco – her husband's model and mentor – greeted her with all the dignified

folderol of a head of state. A fascist who favored the Axis powers but maintained official neutrality in the war, Franco had survived to provide a haven for the Third Reich's dispossessed. Franco's Spain was an important early hide-out for Nazis who slipped through the grasp of the Allies and needed a place to stay before continuing on to more permanent homes in Latin America or the Middle East.

While in Spain, Evita reportedly met secretly with Nazis who were part of the entourage of Otto Skorzeny, the dashing Austrian commando leader known as Scarface because of a dueling scar across his left cheek. Though under Allied detention in 1947, Skorzeny already was the purported leader of the clandestine organization, Die Spinne or The Spider, which used millions of dollars looted from the Reichsbank to smuggle Nazis from Europe to Argentina.

After escaping in 1948, Skorzeny set up the legendary ODESSA organization which tapped into other hidden Nazi funds to help ex-SS men rebuild their lives – and the fascist movement – in South America.

### **Meeting Pius XII**

Evita's next stop was equally fitting. The charismatic beauty traveled to Rome for an audience with Pope Pius XII, a Vatican meeting that lasted longer than the usual kiss on the ring.

At the time, the Vatican was acting as a crucial way station doling out forged documents for fascist fugitives. Pope Pius himself was considered sympathetic to the tough anti-communism of the fascists although he had kept a discreet public distance from Hitler.

A top-secret State Department report from May 1947 – a month before Evita's trip – had termed the Vatican "the largest single organization involved in the illegal movement of emigrants," including many Nazis. Leading ex-Nazis later publicly thanked the Vatican for its vital assistance. [For details, see Martin A. Lee's *The Beast Reawakens*.]

As for the Evita-Pius audience, former Justice Department Nazi-hunter John Loftus has charged that the First Lady of the Pampas and His Holiness discussed the care and feeding of the Nazi faithful in Argentina.

After her Roman holiday, Evita hoped to meet Great Britain's Queen Elizabeth. But the British government balked out of fear that the presence of Peron's wife might provoke an embarrassing debate over Argentina's pro-Nazi leanings and the royal family's own pre-war cuddling up to Hitler.

Instead, Evita diverted to Rapallo, a town near Genoa on the Italian Riviera.

There, she was the guest of Alberto Doderó, owner of an Argentine shipping fleet known for transporting some of the world's most unsavory cargo.

On June 19, 1947, in the midst of Evita's trip, the first of Doderó's ships, the "Santa Fe," arrived in Buenos Aires and disgorged hundreds of Nazis onto the docks of their new country. Over the next few years, Doderó's boats would carry thousands of Nazis to South America, including some of Hitler's vilest war criminals, the likes of Mengele and Eichmann, according to Argentine historian Jorge Camarasa.

On Aug. 4, 1947, Evita and her entourage headed north to the stately city of Geneva, a center for international finance. There, she participated in more meetings with key figures from the Nazi escape apparatus.

A Swiss diplomat named Jacques-Albert Cuttat welcomed the onetime torch singer. The meeting was a reunion of sorts, since Evita had known Cuttat when he worked at the Swiss Legation in Argentina from 1938 to 1946.

### **Swiss Bank Accounts**

Documents from Argentina's Central Bank showed that during the war, the Swiss Central Bank and a dozen Swiss private banks maintained suspicious gold accounts in Argentina. Among the account holders was Jacques-Albert Cuttat.

The Swiss files accused Cuttat of conducting unauthorized private business and maintaining questionable wartime contacts with known Nazis. In spite of those allegations, the Swiss government promoted Cuttat to chief of protocol of the Swiss Foreign Service, after his return from Argentina to Switzerland.

In that capacity, Cuttat escorted Eva Peron to meetings with senior Swiss officials. The pair went to see Foreign Minister Max Petitpierre and Philipp Etter, the Swiss president. Etter extended a warm welcome to Evita, even accompanying her the next day on a visit to the city of Lucerne, "the doorway to the Swiss Alps."

After her "official" duties had ended, Evita dropped out of public view. Supposedly, she joined some friends for rest and recreation in the mountains of St. Moritz. But the documents recounting her Swiss tour revealed that she continued making business contacts that would advance both Argentine commerce and the relocation of Hitler's henchmen. She was a guest of the "Instituto Suizo-Argentino" at a private reception at the Hotel "Baur au Lac" in Zurich, the banking capital of Switzerland's German-speaking sector.

There, Professor William Dunkel, the president of the Institute, addressed an audience of more than 200 Swiss bankers and businessmen – plus Eva Peron – on

the wonderful opportunities about to blossom in Argentina. Swiss archival documents explained what was behind the enthusiasm. Peron's ambassador to Switzerland, Benito Llambi, had undertaken a secret mission to create a sort of emigration service to coordinate the escape of the Nazis, particularly those with scientific skills.

Already, Llambi had conducted secret talks with Henry Guisan Jr., a Swiss agent whose clients included a German engineer who had worked for Wernher von Braun's missile team. Guisan offered Llambi the blueprints of German "V2" and "V3" rockets.

Guisan himself emigrated to Argentina, where he established several firms that specialized in the procurement of war materiel. His ex-wife later told investigators, "I had to attend business associates of my former husband I'd rather not shake hands with. When they started to talk business I had to leave the room. I only remember that millions were at stake."

### **The Second Nazi Emigration**

Intelligence files of the Bern Police Department show that the secret Nazi emigration office was located at Marktgasse 49 in downtown Bern, the Swiss capital. The operation was directed by three Argentines – Carlos Fuldner, Herbert Helfferich and Dr. Georg Weiss. A police report described them as "110 percent Nazis."

The leader of the team, Carlos Fuldner, was the son of German immigrants to Argentina who had returned to Germany to study. In 1931, Fuldner joined the SS and later was recruited into German foreign intelligence.

At war's end, Fuldner fled to Madrid with a planeload of stolen art, according to a U.S. State Department report. He then moved to Bern where he posed as a representative of the Argentinean Civil Air Transport Authority. Fuldner was in place to assist the first wave of Nazi emigres.

One of the first Nazis to reach Buenos Aires via the "ratlines" was Erich Priebke, an SS officer accused of a mass execution of Italian civilians. Another was Croat Ustashi leader Ante Pavelic. They were followed by concentration camp commander Joseph Schwamberger and the sadistic Auschwitz doctor, Joseph Mengele.

Later, on June 14, 1951, the emigrant ship, "Giovanna C," carried Holocaust architect Adolf Eichmann to Argentina where he posed as a technician under a false name. Fuldner found Eichmann a job at Mercedes-Benz. (Israel intelligence agents captured Eichmann in May 1960 and spirited him to Israel to stand trial for mass murder. He was convicted, sentenced to death and hanged in 1962.)

Though Evita's precise role in organizing the Nazi "ratlines" remains a bit fuzzy, her European tour connected the dots of the key figures in the escape network. She also helped clear the way for more formal arrangements in the Swiss-Argentine-Nazi collaboration.

Additional evidence is contained in postwar diplomatic correspondence between Switzerland and Argentina. The documents reveal that the head of the Swiss Federal Police, Heinrich Rothmund, and the former Swiss intelligence officer Paul Schaufelberger participated in the activities of the illegal Argentine emigration service in Bern.

For instance, one urgent telegram from Bern to the Swiss Legation in Rome stated: "The (Swiss) Police Department wants to send 16 refugees to Argentina with the emigration ship that leaves Genoa March 26 [1948]. Stop. All of them carry Swiss ID cards and have return visa. Stop."

### **Scientific Help**

Besides political sympathies, the Peron government saw an economic pay-off in smuggling German scientists to work in Argentine factories and armaments plants. The first combat jet introduced into South America – the "Pulque" – was built in Argentina by the German aircraft designer Kurt Tank of the firm, Focke-Wulf. His engineers and test pilots arrived via the illegal emigration service in Bern.

But other Nazi scientists who reached the protected shores of Argentina were simply sadists. One physician, Dr. Carl Vaernet, had conducted surgical experiments on homosexuals at the Buchenwald concentration camp. Vaernet castrated the men and then inserted metal sex glands that inflicted agonizing deaths on some of his patients. [See Lee's *The Beast Reawakens*.]

For the Swiss, the motives for their cozy Nazi-Argentine relationships were political and financial, both during and after the war. Ignacio Klich, spokesman for an independent commission investigating Nazi-Argentine collaboration, said he believes the wartime business between Nazi Germany and Argentina was handled routinely by Swiss fiduciaries.

That suspicion was confirmed by Swiss files released to the U.S. Senate as well as papers from the Swiss Office of Compensation and correspondence between the Swiss Foreign Ministry and the Swiss legation in Buenos Aires.

One target of the commission's investigation is Johann Wehrli, a private banker from Zurich. During World War II, one of Wehrli's sons opened a branch office in Buenos Aires which, investigators suspect, was used to funnel Nazi assets into Argentina. The money allegedly included loot from Jews and other Nazi victims. (Later, the giant Union Bank of Switzerland absorbed the Wehrli bank.)

Swiss defenders argue that tiny Switzerland had little choice but to work with the powerful fascist governments on its borders during the war. But the post-war assistance appears harder to justify, when the most obvious motive was money.

According to a secret report written by a U.S. Army major in 1948, the Swiss government made a hefty profit by providing Germans with the phony documents needed to flee to Argentina. The one-page memo quoted a confidential informant with contacts in the Swiss and Dutch governments as saying, "The Swiss government was not only anxious to get rid of German nationals, legally or illegally within their borders, but further that they made a considerable profit in getting rid of them."

The informant said German nationals paid Swiss officials as much as 200,000 Swiss francs for temporary residence documents necessary to board flights out of Switzerland. (The sum was worth about \$50,000 at the time.) Moreover, that memo and other documents suggest that KLM Royal Dutch Airlines may have illegally flown suspected Nazis to safety in Argentina, while Swissair acted as a booking agent.

### **The Beloved Evita**

Back in Argentina, the rave reviews for Evita's European trip cemented her reputation as a superstar. It also brought her immense wealth lavished on her by grateful Nazis. Her husband was re-elected president in 1951, by which time large numbers of Nazis were firmly ensconced in Argentina's military-industrial apparatus.

Evita Peron died of cancer in 1953, touching off despair among her followers. The fearful military buried her secretly in an unannounced location to prevent her grave from becoming a national shrine.

Meanwhile, a feverish hunt began for her personal fortune. Evita's brother and guardian of her image, Juan Duarte, traveled to Switzerland in search of her hidden assets. After his return to Argentina, Duarte was found dead in his apartment. Despite her husband's control of the police – or maybe because of it – the authorities never established whether Duarte was murdered or had committed suicide.

In 1955, Juan Peron was overthrown and fled to exile in Spain where he lived as a guest of Franco. Peron apparently accessed some of Evita's secret Swiss accounts because he sustained a luxurious lifestyle. The money also may have greased Peron's brief return to power in 1973. Peron died in 1974, leaving behind the mystery of Evita's Nazi fortune. In 1976, the army overthrew Peron's vice president, his last wife, Isabel.

Paradoxically, the cult of Evita flourished still. The idolatry blinded her followers to the consequences of her flirtation with the Nazis.

Those aging fascists accomplished much of what the ODESSA strategists had hoped. The Nazis in Argentina kept Hitler's torch burning, won new converts in the region's militaries, and passed on the advanced science of torture and "death squad" operations.

Hundreds of left-wing Peronist students and unionists were among the victims of the neo-fascist Argentine junta that launched the Dirty War in 1976.

### **The Butcher of Lyon**

When the junta started its "war without borders" against the Left elsewhere in Latin America, it used Nazis as storm troopers. Among them was Klaus Barbie, the Gestapo's Butcher of Lyon who had settled in Bolivia with the help of the "ratline" network.

In 1980, Barbie helped organize a brutal putsch against the democratically elected government in Bolivia. Drug lords and an international coalition of neo-fascists bankrolled the putsch. A key supporting role was played by the World Anti-Communist League, led by World War II fascist war criminal Ryoichi Sasakawa of Japan and the Rev. Sun Myung Moon.

Barbie sought assistance from Argentine intelligence. One of the first Argentine officers to arrive, Lt. Alfred Mario Mingolla, later described Barbie's role to German journalist Kai Hermann.

"Before our departure, we received a dossier on [Barbie]," Mingolla said. "There it stated that he was of great use to Argentina because he played an important role in all of Latin America in the fight against communism."

Just like in the good old days, the Butcher of Lyon worked with a younger generation of Italian neo-fascists. Barbie started a secret lodge called "Thule," where he lectured his followers underneath swastikas by candlelight.

On July 17, 1980, Barbie, his neo-fascists and rightist officers from the Bolivian army ousted the center-left government. Barbie's team hunted down and slaughtered government officials and labor leaders, while Argentine specialists flew in to demonstrate the latest torture techniques.

Because the putsch gave Bolivian drug lords free reign of the country, the operation became known as the Cocaine Coup. With the assistance of Barbie and his neo-fascists, Bolivia became a protected source of cocaine for the emerging Medellin cartel. Two years later, Barbie was captured and extradited to France

where he died in prison. [For more details, see Robert Parry's [Secrecy & Privilege.](#)]

Most of the other old Nazis are dead, too. But the violent extremism that the Perons transplanted into South America in the 1940s long haunted the region.

In the 1980s, the Argentine military extended its operations to Central America where it collaborated with Ronald Reagan's CIA in organizing paramilitary forces, such as the Nicaraguan Contras and Honduran "death squads."

Even today, as right-wing dictators in Latin America are called to account for past atrocities, fledgling democracies must move cautiously and keep a wary eye on rightists in the region's potent militaries. The ghosts of Evita's Nazis are never far away.

[This story was based, in part, on a Swiss German-language documentary directed by Frank Garbely and entitled "Evitas Geheimnis – Die Schweizer Reise."]

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## 'Dirty War' Questions for Pope Francis

**Exclusive:** The U.S. "news" networks bubbled with excitement over the selection of Argentine Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio to be Pope Francis I. But there was silence on the obvious question that should be asked about any senior cleric from Argentina: What was Bergoglio doing during the "dirty war," writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry (Updated March 14, 2013, to delete incorrect reference to Bergoglio in Guardian article)

If one wonders if the U.S. press corps has learned anything in the decade since the Iraq War i.e. the need to ask tough question and show honest skepticism it would appear from the early coverage of the election of Pope Francis I that U.S. journalists haven't changed at all, even at "liberal" outlets like MSNBC.

The first question that a real reporter should ask about an Argentine cleric who lived through the years of grotesque repression, known as the "dirty war," is what did this person do, did he stand up to the murderers and torturers or did he go with the flow. If the likes of Chris Matthews and other commentators on MSNBC had done a simple Google search, they would have found out enough about Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio to slow their bubbling enthusiasm.

Bergoglio, now the new Pope Francis I, has been identified publicly as an ally

of Argentine's repressive leaders during the "dirty war" when some 30,000 people were "disappeared" or killed, many stripped naked, chained together, flown out over the River Plate or the Atlantic Ocean and pushed sausage-like out of planes to drown.

The "disappeared" included women who were pregnant at the time of their arrest. In some bizarre nod to Catholic theology, they were kept alive only long enough to give birth before they were murdered and their babies were farmed out to military families, including to people directly involved in the murder of the babies' mothers.

Instead of happy talk about how Bergoglio seems so humble and how he seems so sympathetic to the poor, there might have been a question or two about what he did to stop the brutal repression of poor people and activists who represented the interests of the poor, including "liberation theology" priests and nuns, during the "dirty war."

Here, for instance, is an easily retrievable story from Guardian columnist Hugh O'Shaughnessy from 2011, which states:

"To the judicious and fair-minded outsider it has been clear for years that the upper reaches of the Argentine church contained many 'lost sheep in the wilderness', men who had communed and supported the unspeakably brutal Western-supported military dictatorship which seized power in that country in 1976 and battered on it for years.

"Not only did the generals slaughter thousands unjustly, often dropping them out of aeroplanes over the River Plate and selling off their orphan children to the highest bidder, they also murdered at least two bishops and many priests. Yet even the execution of other men of the cloth did nothing to shake the support of senior clerics, including representatives of the Holy See, for the criminality of their leader General Jorge Rafael Videla and his minions.

"As it happens, in the week before Christmas [2010] in the city of Córdoba Videla and some of his military and police cohorts were convicted by their country's courts of the murder of 31 people between April and October 1976, a small fraction of the killings they were responsible for. The convictions brought life sentences for some of the military.

"These were not to be served, as has often been the case in Argentina and neighbouring Chile, in comfy armed forces retirement homes but in common prisons. Unsurprisingly there was dancing in the city's streets when the judge announced the sentences.

"What one did not hear from any senior member of the Argentine hierarchy was any

expression of regret for the church's collaboration ... in these crimes. The extent of the church's complicity in the dark deeds was excellently set out by Horacio Verbitsky, one of Argentina's most notable journalists, in his book *El Silencio* (Silence)," which alleges Bergoglio's complicity in human right abuses.

The Guardian article stated: "The most shaming thing for the church is that in such circumstances Bergoglio's name was allowed to go forward in the ballot to chose the successor of John Paul II. What scandal would not have ensued if the first pope ever to be elected from the continent of America had been revealed as an accessory to murder and false imprisonment.

"One would have thought that the Argentine bishops would have seized the opportunity to call for pardon for themselves and put on sackcloth and ashes as the sentences were announced in Córdoba but that has not so far happened. ... Cardinal Bergoglio has plenty of time to be measured for a suit of sackcloth perhaps tailored in a suitable clerical grey."

Now, instead of just putting forward Bergoglio's name as a candidate for Pope, the College of Cardinals has actually elected him. Perhaps the happy-talking correspondents from the U.S. news media will see no choice but to join in the cover-up of what Pope Francis did during the "dirty war." Otherwise, they might offend some people in power and put their careers in jeopardy.

In contrast to the super-upbeat tone of American TV coverage, the New York Times did publish [a front-page analysis](#) on the Pope's conservatism, citing his "vigorous" opposition to abortion, gay marriage and the ordination of women. The Times article by Emily Schmall and Larry Rohter then added:

"He was less energetic, however, when it came to standing up to Argentina's military dictatorship during the 1970s as the country was consumed by a conflict between right and left that became known as the Dirty War. He has been accused of knowing about abuses and failing to do enough to stop them while as many as 30,000 people were disappeared, tortured or killed by the dictatorship."

**[For a limited time, you can purchase Robert Parry's trilogy on the Bush family for only \$34. For details, [click here.](#)]**

**Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his new book, *America's Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)).**

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# Ryan's Clash with Catholic Teachings

Republican vice presidential choice Paul Ryan calls himself a devout Catholic, but his right-wing politics would divert more wealth to the rich at the expense of the poor, the opposite of both the teachings of Jesus and the recommendations of the Vatican, notes Catholic ethicist Daniel C. Maguire.

By Daniel C. Maguire

Sound the alarm! There has been a Catholic *coup d'etat* in the United States of America! Six members of the Supreme Court are Catholics (just imagine the furor if six were Muslims or Jews!). Speaker of the House John Boehner and Senate minority leader Mitch McConnell are Catholics. And now, rising to top of this surging Catholic dynasty is the alleged Wunderkind of Republican economics, perky Paul Ryan.

Ryan wears his strange version of Catholicism with a jaunty sophomoric pride: "Catholic social doctrine is indispensable for officeholders." If only Paul Ryan knew what "Catholic social doctrine" is he would take flight from it just as fast as he is scrambling from the Ayn Rand breasts that, as he has proclaimed, suckled him and inspired all his political and economic views.

Catholics who know the difference between Jesus Christ and Ayn Rand skewered perky Paul. They know that Jesus' mission, unlike Ayn Rand's, was "good news for the poor" (Luke 4:18). They embarrassed the righteous Ryan when he spoke at the Jesuit Georgetown University carrying a sprawling sign that asked: "Where were you, Paul Ryan, when they crucified the poor?"

Of course they know where he was. He was driving the nails into everything that helps the poor and remember most of "the poor" are children. Budgets are intensely moral documents. They show where the heart is. To budget-makers we can say: show me the losers and the winners and I will tell you what you are.

The Ryan budget plan, embraced by Mitt Romney as "marvelous," puts greed over need. Among its losers: Medicaid, Medicare, food stamps, health insurance, preschool programs, environmental and financial regulations, Pell grants, Head Start, mortgage guarantees. "Are there no poor houses?"

The budget is not all sour. There are sweet tidings for the already engorged mega-rich. And as for the military, ah, yes, the military, Ryan feels they do not ask enough though they have never been known for modesty or timidity in their requests. Ryan would further feed that black hole in the economy that already sucks out some \$2 million a minute. Kill-power is prized more highly

than Head Start and Medicaid.

### **How Dare You, Paul Ryan!**

How dare you invoke “Catholic social teaching” to bolster that warped and brutal vision! Had you presented that budget as an assignment in my theology class at Marquette University I would have had to give you an F and a note would go to your parents saying, “this student is wasting your tuition money.”

So, listen up, Paul, and I’ll show you why the “Nuns on the Bus” and Catholic university faculties are storming against your Catholic pretensions. It is no major undertaking to correct you. That’s why your ignorance must be classified as crass.

Just last year, in October 2011, Pope Benedict’s Pontifical Council on Justice and Peace gave all the help you need. The council summed up centuries of “Catholic social teaching” in a single document and applied it to today’s tottering global economy.

When asked about the document, you equivocated about whether you had read it. Clearly, from your recent utterances you either did not read it or you read it and trashed it. Small wonder. It would give Ayn Rand a stroke. Jesuit Thomas Reese said the document is “closer to the view of Occupy Wall Street than anyone in the U.S. Congress.”

### **Catholic Social Teaching 101**

Here it is in gist: The Vatican document supports fair taxation, greed-controlling regulation and bailouts “with public funds” when necessary. Now, brace yourself, Paul, it excoriates “neoliberals,” the greed-is-good creed of your right wing.

The document calls for an international solidarity that would end poverty and obsessive reliance on military violence for security. It calls for more active citizenship, not voter suppression. Internationally it calls for “a new model of a more cohesive, polyarchic international society that respects every people’s identity within the multifaceted riches of a single humanity.”

It calls for a “public, supranational authority with universal jurisdiction, a “true world political authority” and a “world bank” to preside over a “global, universal common good.” Nations need to “transfer a part of each nation’s powers to a world authority and to regional authorities.”

It does not call for a tyrannical despotic world authority. The traditional Catholic tradition of “subsidiarity” means that nothing should be done by a

higher authority that can be done by active participation at lower levels. Right-wingers like you grab that one word “subsidiarity” and claim it supports their maniacal hatred of government. It doesn’t.

The document, like the Hebrew and Christian Bibles, considers government the prime care-taker of the common good with a particular mission to protect the powerless and the poor from exploitation.

Catholic social teaching abhors despotism, either that of governments or that of corporate power that can enslave the poor of the world as it is now doing. The blood, sweat and tears of the poor are on our clothing, our shoes and on our iPads. Using what is cynically and euphemistically called “labor arbitrage,” corporations ship most of their work to slave operations in “the third world.”

Now at this point, my student, Paul Ryan, is squirming in his seat. What I had just taught, relying on papal teachings, is not right wing. It is left wing in as much as the Left stresses social justice and fair distribution of wealth and opportunity, and the Left has a preference for peace-power over kill-power.

So, Paul Ryan, call your knavish, mean-spirited budget plan what you will. But do not call it Catholic. Stop defaming and insulting the stirring compassion and richness of Catholic social teaching by associating it with your form of upper-class warfare.

Have you no shame!

**Daniel C. Maguire is a Professor of Moral Theology at Marquette University, a Catholic, Jesuit institution in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He is author of *A Moral Creed for All Christians*. He can be reached at [daniel.maguire@marquette.edu](mailto:daniel.maguire@marquette.edu). (This article originally appeared as [a blog post](#) at HuffingtonPost.)**

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## Who Speaks for Jesus?

The Vatican has scolded American nuns for deviating from Church doctrine. Conservative bishops decry President Obama’s health-care reform for violating their religious freedom. But some Catholics find this heated rhetoric at odds with the gentler message of Jesus, as Catholic theologian Paul Surlis said in this excerpted sermon.

By Paul Surlis

Mark’s Gospel was written about 30 years after the death and resurrection of

Jesus perhaps around the year 70 and it was written in a community that was undergoing persecution. By the year 70, it was 30 years since Jesus proclaimed the coming of the reign or rule of God, but instead of change had come persecution and fear.

What did Jesus mean by announcing the coming of the rule or reign of God and making it the center of his message and ministry in the first place? Jesus was speaking of what the social order would be like if God ruled. His message was one with political implications even though it was primarily religious. He was speaking to people, most of whom were impoverished and oppressed in many ways.

We recall that Palestine was a colony of the Roman Empire and taxes of various types were high. There were also temple taxes. Small landowners had lost their properties because of debt and they had become day laborers for wealthy landowners or vineyard owners who often cheated them of their wages and almost always underpaid them. Along with impoverished workers there were bands of robbers and beggars. Many people were sick and undernourished.

In such a situation to announce a new social order was welcome news, good news, to the poor and they flocked to Jesus who healed them and often fed them with bread and fish, the food of the poor. Naturally, this activity was disturbing to the wealthy and powerful and they considered Jesus a rabble-rouser and a subversive who had to be got rid of.

Now, it's 30 years later and the new social order promised by Jesus is not yet a reality, and the Jesus portrayed by Mark tells parables counseling patience and reminding the people that seed has to die in the soil before producing fruit.

The Jesus of Mark's Gospel promotes trust in effect saying that God is in charge and the reign of God promised by Jesus is already a reality even if not yet fulfilled or evident. Like Paul the people are invited to walk by faith not by sight. There is an already and a not yet, what has already been accomplished in an undefeatable way but is not yet fully manifest, if it can be found at all in evidence.

The same remains true in our own place and time. Christian teaching on the dignity and equality of all persons helped to spark the anti-slavery movement and also helped to lead to the civil rights movement of the 1960's which achieved and is still achieving far-reaching social change.

Like Mark's hearers, we also live in that in-between time and we also experience conflict and could be tempted to question where is the reign of God to be found. It is meant to extend to the whole social order. The Church is the sacrament of the kingdom but is not identified with it.

But let us look at the church, at ourselves: We will soon be invited by the bishops to have a two-week period of public protest in defense of religious liberty. I suggest that we listen very respectfully but also carefully and critically to what the bishops have to say.

There are areas where Catholic institutions' rights are threatened especially by some states. For example, Catholic charities have a right to minister to all immigrants in need, whether documented or not. They have a right to minister to the poor whether Catholic or not.

For my part, I do not see a war on religious liberty. At the least that is overheated rhetoric. A major extension of health care benefits to millions of the uninsured is being proposed and in areas that affect women there are very serious issues about which conflicts exist but these are all areas where dialogue, compromise and negotiations are called for.

Evoking the names of Stalin and Hitler in this situation is inflammatory and quite frankly outrageous and is not conducive to the civil discourse that is called for.

While some regard contraception as wrong, today most Catholics and other persons of good will see it as a matter to be decided by married persons according to their consciences and good medical advice, and this has been the case since 1965 when dissent from the papal position in *Humanae Vitae* became widespread and was tolerated by several national conferences of bishops in a stance that has never been repudiated.

Likewise there are persons for whom abortion is a feasible choice according to their consciences. Does one group, e.g., the Catholic bishops, have a right to impose their position on all other persons even in violation of their consciences? Surely, consciences are inviolable when convictions are sincerely held.

In a democracy there are always people who object to how tax money is used but that does not mean people can be exempted from being taxed. One example is nuclear weapons, many people are absolutely opposed to them but they still tolerate their existence; some wars are also in that category.

Conscientious objection is legitimate if called for and if one is prepared to accept legitimate alternatives. Persons who accept tax money (the money of the people) should expect that other persons' convictions be provided for in the distribution of tax money. But we need to await the proposals from the bishops. All I'm saying now is let us be respectful, alert and critical.

And there is also the question of the sisters and the Vatican proposal to rein

in the Leadership Conference of Women Religious. I would argue that the most faithful adherents of the teachings of the Second Vatican Council are women religious and they are faithful to the teachings of Jesus in an exemplary way.

Here is an excerpt from an insert by Fr. Koesel and found in a parish bulletin in Cleveland and I quote:

“One of the results of the council was that the nuns became more educated, more integrated in the life of the people and more justice-oriented than the bishops and pope. They are doctors, lawyers, university professors, lobbyists, social workers, authors, theologians, etc. Their appeal was that they always went back to what Jesus said and did. Their value lay in the fact that their theology and their practice were integrated into the real world.

“The Vatican sounds like the Pharisees of the New Testament – legalistic, paternalistic and orthodox – while “the good sisters” were the ones who were feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned, educating the immigrant, and so on. Nuns also learned that Catholics are intuitively smart about their faith. They prefer dialogue over diatribe, freedom of thought over mind control, biblical study over fundamentalism, development of doctrine over isolated mandates.”

I think that sums it up quite well.

**Paul Surlis taught moral theology and Catholic Social teaching at St. John’s University, New York from 1975-2000. He is now retired and living in Crofton, Maryland.**

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## The Moral Challenge of ‘Kill Lists’

**Exclusive:** Counterterrorism adviser John Brennan has been called President Obama’s “priest” as they wrestle with the moral dilemma of assembling a “kill list” of “bad guys,” a role that recalls how established religions have justified slaughters over the centuries, writes ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern.

By Ray McGovern

In an extraordinary article in Tuesday’s *New York Times*, [“Secret ‘Kill List’ Proves a Test of Obama’s Principles and Will,”](#) authors Jo Becker and Scott Shane throw macabre light on the consigliere-cum-priestly role that counterterrorist adviser John Brennan provides President Barack Obama.

At the outset, Becker and Shane note that, although Obama vowed to “align the fight against Al Qaeda with American values,” he has now ordered the obedient Brennan to prepare a top secret “nominations” list of people whom the President may decide to order killed, without charge or trial, including American citizens.

The authors understate this as “a moral and legal conundrum.” It is, in fact, a moral and legal impossibility to square “kill lists” for extrajudicial murders with traditional legal and moral American values.

Enter the legal consiglieres. Attorney General Eric Holder and Harold Koh, the State Department’s top lawyer, seem to have adopted the retro (pre-1215) practices of their immediate predecessors (think Ashcroft, Gonzales, Mukasey) with their extraordinary ability to make just about anything “legal.”

Even torture? No problem for the earlier trio. Was not George W. Bush well-armed with the perfect squelch, when NBC’s Matt Lauer asked him about waterboarding in November 2010?

Lauer: Why is waterboarding legal, in your opinion?

Bush: Because the lawyer said it was legal. He said it did not fall within the anti-torture act. I’m not a lawyer. But you gotta trust the judgment of the people around you, and I do.

So there! You gotta trust those lawyers. The legal issue taken care of though early in his presidency, Bush had ridiculed other lawyers who thought international law should apply to him. “International law?” he asked in mock fear. “I better call my lawyer.” He surely knew his lawyer would tell him what he wanted to hear.

## **The Moral**

President Obama has adopted a similar attitude toward the moral conundrum of targeted killings around the world. Just turn to Consigliere John Brennan for some “just war” theorizing. We have it from Harold Koh that Brennan is “a person of genuine moral rectitude. It’s as though you had a priest with extremely strong moral values who was suddenly charged with leading a war.”

So, like the Caesars of old or the generals of World War I, Obama consults a priest or minister before having folks killed. And in this case the “priest” is Brennan, “whose blessing has become indispensable to Mr. Obama, echoing the President’s attempt to apply the ‘just war’ theories of Christian philosophers to a brutal modern conflict,” write Becker and Shane.

If, as the *New York Times* writers claim, President Obama is a student of the writings on war by Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, he seems to be getting very warped exegesis from Brennan.

Cameron Munter, Obama's ambassador to Pakistan, is just one who seems inadequately schooled in those theories. According to Becker and Shane, Munter has complained to his colleagues that the CIA's strikes are driving American policy in Pakistan, saying, "he didn't realize his main job was to kill people."

Western news reports have Munter leaving his post this summer, after less than two years, an ambassador's typical tenure. [For a panel discussion about this topic on AlJazeera, involving Ray McGovern, [click here.](#)]

### **Bellying-Up**

Now, don't "mis-underestimate" John Brennan. His heart is in the right place, we're told. The authors quote him as insisting, "The President, and I think all of us here, don't like the fact that people have to die." Yes, it really is too bad, don't you know; but, hey, sometimes you just have to belly-up to the really tough decisions.

In Brennan's and Obama's world, some suspects just have to die, partly because they seem to look/act like "militants," and partly because it is infeasible to capture them (while unprecedentedly easy, and safe, to kill them, by missiles from drones).

Thus far, the words of today's Gospel by post-9/11 "Christian philosophers." No doubt, these "just war" enthusiasts would brand hopelessly naive, or "quaint-and-obsolete," the words seen recently on a bumper sticker: "When Jesus told us to love our enemies, I think he probably meant not to kill them."

Not one of the thousand cars driving onto the Bronx campus of Fordham University for commencement on May 19 was sporting that bumper sticker, nor was there any attention given to the general concept at commencement.

That kind of thinking was hardly welcome that day at the "Jesuit University of New York City," after the Jesuits and their trustees decided to give Brennan the degree of Doctor of Humane Letters, *Honoris Causa*, and asked him to give the commencement address.

Several of the Fordham graduates, though, did take the trouble to learn more about Brennan's role in "war-on-terror" practices like kidnapping, torture, black-site prisons, illegal eavesdropping on Americans, and extrajudicial murder by drone. They found it preposterous that Obama would seek "priestly" advice from Brennan. At commencement, they orchestrated some [imaginative protests.](#)

## **Fordham and the Prestige Virus**

Fordham is the college that blessed the “priest” that blessed the president that killed from a list compiled in a White House that slaves built. And looking on silently from his commencement seat of honor atop the steps to Fordham’s Keating Hall was fellow honorary doctorate awardee, “pro-life” Timothy Cardinal Dolan, Archbishop of New York and head of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

I wonder if it occurred to Dolan that from these same steps an honorary degree was conferred in 1936 on Eugenio Cardinal Pacelli, author of the Vatican’s Concordat with Nazi Germany. Later, as Pope Pius XII, Pacelli could not find his voice to speak out forcefully against the wars and other abuses of the Third Reich, including genocide against the Jews.

So too, the new archbishop of New York and his fellow bishops cannot find their voice on the transcendent issues of aggressive war and its accumulated evil, preferring to focus on pelvic issues.

A few summers ago, I spent a couple of hours in Yad Vashem, the Holocaust museum in West Jerusalem. Decades earlier while serving in Germany, I had made it a custom to devote the last day of a visitor’s stay to Dachau, the first concentration camp, established in 1933.

At the end of the barracks at Dachau stands the famous caution from Santayana, “Those who do not remember history are condemned to relive it.” That dictum kept racing through my mind as past and present merged on the walls of Yad Vashem, mocking the ubiquitous “Never Again.”

There were parallels that stood stark naked for any thinking American to see: parallels between Hitler’s success in grabbing dictatorial power in Germany, largely because of a supine Parliament, an acquiescent Church, a careerist Army leadership, and a fearful populace, and the situation we Americans face today with “kill lists,” unconstitutional “laws,” and Gestapo-style police armed to the teeth.

## **Pledging Allegiance**

There they were in photos on the walls. It was 1934, and the German Army generals were in the limelight swearing allegiance to Hitler, not the German Constitution (what was left of it); the German Supreme Court swearing allegiance to Hitler, not to the law and Constitution; and, not least, the Reich’s bishops swearing allegiance to Hitler, not to God and the people they were supposed to serve.

I noticed that one of the English-speaking guides pointed to the generals and

jurists but avoided mentioning the bishops, so I insisted he make full disclosure. (It occurred to me that Hitler might have been stymied, had the Catholic and Lutheran bishops been able to find their voice.)

On an adjacent wall was the Hamlet-like Eugenio Pacelli, Pope Pius XII, trying to make up his mind on whether he should put the Catholic Church at risk, while Jews were being murdered by the train-full.

The most compelling story was that of Imre Bathory, a Hungarian who, like many other Hungarians, put their own lives at grave peril by trying to save fugitive Jews. Asked to explain, Bathory said that because of his actions:

“I know that when I stand before God on Judgment Day, I shall not be asked the question posed to Cain; ‘Where were you when your brother’s blood was crying out to God?’”

At Fordham’s commencement, one would have taken considerable risk in alluding to the crying-out blood of Iraqis and Afghans. Only happy, prideful talk is *de rigueur* on such occasions, together with honoring prominent people, with little heed paid to how they earned such prominence. A White House post suffices.

### **From the Grave, Albert Camus**

In 1948, still under the dark cloud of what had been a disastrous world war, the French author/philosopher Albert Camus accepted an invitation to come to the Dominican Monastery of Latour-Maubourg.

To their credit, the Dominicans wanted to know what an “unbeliever” thought about Christians in the light of their behavior during the Thirties and Forties. Camus’s words seem so terribly relevant today that it is difficult to trim them down:

“For a long time during those frightful years I waited for a great voice to speak up in Rome. I, an unbeliever? Precisely. For I knew that the spirit would be lost if it did not utter a cry of condemnation

“It has been explained to me since, that the condemnation was indeed voiced. But that it was in the style of the encyclicals, which is not all that clear. The condemnation was voiced and it was not understood. Who could fail to feel where the true condemnation lies in this case?

“What the world expects of Christians is that Christians should speak out, loud and clear, and that they should voice their condemnation in such a way that never a doubt, never the slightest doubt, could rise in the heart of the simplest man. That they should get away from abstraction and confront the blood-

stained face history has taken on today.

“It may be that Christianity will insist on maintaining a compromise, or else on giving its condemnations the obscure form of the encyclical. Possibly it will insist on losing once and for all the virtue of revolt and indignation that belonged to it long ago.

“What I know and what sometimes creates a deep longing in me is that if Christians made up their mind to it, millions of voices millions, I say throughout the world would be added to the appeal of a handful of isolated individuals, who, without any sort of affiliation, today intercede almost everywhere and ceaselessly for children and other people.” (Excerpted from *Resistance, Rebellion, and Death: Essays*)

It may be that the Dominican monks took Camus seriously; monks tend to listen. Vatican functionaries, on the other hand, tend to know it all, and to urge pope, cardinals and bishops to be highly “discreet” in what they say and do.

### **Help From the Outside**

Sometimes it takes a truth-telling outsider to throw light on our moral failures.

South African Methodist Bishop Peter Storey, erstwhile chaplain to Nelson Mandela in prison and outspoken opponent of Apartheid, has this to say to the platitude-inclined, patriotism-preaching American clergy in the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 attacks:

“We had obvious evils to engage; you have to unwrap your culture from years of red, white and blue myth. You have to expose and confront the great disconnect between the kindness, compassion and caring of most American people and the ruthless way American power is experienced, directly or indirectly, by the poor of the earth.

“You have to help good people see how they have let their institutions do their sinning for them. All around the world there are those who long to see your human goodness translated into a different, more compassionate way of relating with the rest of this bleeding planet.”

Albert Camus and Peter Storey are among the true prophets of our time. I think the late Madeleine L'Engle also had it right when she wrote:

“I think if we speak the truth and are not afraid to be disagreed with, we can make big changes.” The biggest obstacle is often within us, she observes. “We get so frightful.”

In *A Stone for a Pillow*: L'Engle adds:

"The true prophet seldom predicts the future. The true prophet warns us of our present hardness of heart, our prideful presuming to know God's mind.

"We must be careful ... that we are not being false prophets fearing only for our own selves, our own families, our own country. Our concern must be for everybody, for our entire fragile planet, and everybody on it. ...

"Indeed, we must protest with loving concern for the entire universe. A mark of the true prophet in any age is humility. And the final test of the true prophet is love."

After ten years of ecclesiastical silence regarding the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, it would be a cop-out, pure and simple, to expect the leaders of the institutional "Christian" churches in the United States to act any differently from the way the German churches did during the Thirties in Germany.

Americans can no longer in good conscience expect bold action for true justice from the largely domesticated clergy; nor can we use that feckless expectation as an excuse to do nothing ourselves. As theologian Annie Dillard has put it: "There is only us; there never has been any other."

And, she might have added, we don't do "kill lists."

**Ray McGovern works for Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. He served thirty years as an Army officer and CIA intelligence analyst; he holds an M.A. in Russian from Fordham and a Certificate in Theological Studies from Georgetown University.**

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## Pope Paul VI's Error on Birth Control

After conservative U.S. Catholic Bishops sued the Obama administration over its health-insurance requirement for contraceptives, many assumed the Bishops were upholding settled doctrine. But Catholic theologian Paul Surlis says Pope Paul VI incorrectly removed the issue from the Second Vatican Council in 1965.

By Paul Surlis

At the Second Vatican Council in 1965, on the day the Bishops were to debate birth control, a message was delivered saying that Pope Paul VI had reserved the issue to himself and asking that the Bishops move on without dealing with the important question of contraception. The Bishops applauded.

Later that day at a press conference held by representatives of the U.S. Bishops, a religious affairs correspondent (I believe from Time magazine) asked why the Bishops had applauded. The Bishops present simply hung their heads and fumbled an unconvincing response. (I was present at St. Peter's in Rome assisting Bishop Thomas J. Drury of Corpus Christi, Texas, as *peritus*, a Roman Catholic theologian giving advice at an ecumenical council.)

The Pope's letter had made an unwarranted entry into Conciliar deliberations, since an ecumenical council is meant to be the highest teaching authority in the Catholic Church. But a conservative curia did not accept that view. The Pope's intervention has since proven to be a major mistake that still causes suffering for Catholics and the Church.

In 1968, Pope Paul VI compounded the mistake by going against the view of the majority of his advisers and issuing a letter in which he asserted that *every act of intercourse must be open to new life*, meaning no birth control by artificial means.

The letter while authoritative was not infallible, as the pope himself pointed out. Many Catholics including theologians and priests dissented from the teaching. Bishops in national conferences intervened, but they too were divided. Some agreed with the pope, while others (about one-third of national conferences) stressed the legitimacy of dissent from the papal position.

In the Washington DC area, Father Charles Curran led the dissent from the papal teaching. He and other professors at Catholic University who joined in dissenting were fired by Cardinal O'Boyle but were later reinstated after student protests.

The Belgian Bishops, who along with other national conferences endorsed Curran's dissent, wrote in 1968: "If someone competent in the matter and capable of forming a well founded judgment which necessarily supposes sufficient information after serious investigation, before God, reaches different conclusions on certain points, he has the right to follow his convictions in this matter, provided that he remains disposed to continue his investigations."

This position has never been condemned or rescinded. At present, confusion is still being generated by the Catholic Church's stance on birth control. There is no single position that would qualify for the status of *Catholic doctrine*.

As for Curran, Pope John Paul II deprived him of the title “Catholic theologian” in 1978 and Curran lost his job at CU. Subsequently, no U.S. Catholic university offered him a position. However, Southern Methodist University did, and he still teaches there.

Today, one may argue that the papal position as expounded in *Humanae Vitae* (Of Human Life) has been rejected through non-acceptance. A majority of Catholic couples follow their consciences in electing to practice contraception. Some bishops and a majority of moral theologians accept the legitimacy of this practice.

And all of these are part of the People of God, namely the Church, and what they advocate is Church teaching also. So at most there are different positions being argued even at the highest levels in the Church.

What is sometimes called “fundamental Catholic teaching” has now changed. And as is customary, when disputes exist, the legitimacy of conscience and obedience to conscience prevail.

**Paul Surlis taught moral theology and Catholic Social teaching at St. John’s University, New York from 1975-2000. He is now retired and living in Crofton, Maryland.**

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## Vatican Decries Financial Excesses

The Christian Right talks about applying Biblical tenets to political issues, but ignores the most central of Jesus’s teachings standing with the poor, opposing financial elites and abhorring violence. The Vatican has now issued a reminder of those principles, as Daniel C. Maguire notes.

By Daniel C. Maguire

Medical alert: Right-wing Catholics, and that includes everyone from Reps. Paul Ryan and John Boehner to the majority of the U.S. Supreme Court, it is urgent that you stay on your meds because Pope Benedict’s Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace has just issued a stroke-precipitating document that will break your conservative hearts.

What right-wing Catholics piously desire is a Pelvic Zone Papacy, one that will rail against contraception, abortion, same-sex marriage and would you believe it even masturbation, but will leave the greedy to their grasping ways.

This narrow focus studiously ignores a whole tradition of left-wing Catholic social doctrine, espoused by popes and general councils of the church, which is well-grounded in the Bible.

Right-wing Catholics run from pronouncements about social justice just as they ran from "Blessed" Pope John Paul II when he presciently sent a Cardinal to tell President George W. Bush that an invasion of Iraq would be a "defeat for humanity."

With the release of this new document, with the unwieldy title "Towards Reforming the International Financial and Monetary Systems in the Context of Global Political Authority," the right-wingers are now running for cover again.

They're claiming the document is not official. "The pope didn't say it," just some little old Vatican group off on a left-wing bender, as if one word of this document (which is filled with papal quotations) could slip out of the Vatican by night without the pope's full blessing.

What this document does is to "carry forward the work of Jesus," which he himself defined as "good news for the poor" (Luke 4:18 ). When the neocons in Nazareth heard that they wanted to throw him off a cliff.

But this new document is true to that Jesus mission. Nowhere did Jesus say, "by this shall people know you are my disciples, that you do not contracept!" No he said, if you love justice and peace as I do, if you are good news to the poor as I am, "then all will know that you are my disciples" (John 13:35).

This document is good news for the poor and bad news for the Tea Party.

It says we need globalized solutions for globalized problems; it favors a market economy but not this one; it calls for "supranational authority," a healthy, non-tyrannical "world political authority" to tame the greed games that strip the poor and gorge the rich; it calls names, deriding "neoliberalism," the neocons' credo, as devoid of "moral perspective" and a writ for "collective greed." It seeks to tax financial transactions to create a "world reserve fund." Yes! Tax!

It moves beyond the tribal, selfish assumptions of "Westphalian" nation states and calls for a world community where differences would be respected and honored for the common good. The alternative to this is chaos and the gross inequalities that people are finally cluing into around the world and taking to the streets in response to.

There is nothing weird or radical about all this. What is radical is the status quo where the blood sweat and tears of the poor are on our clothes made in slave

shops, and on our iPhones where thousands of Chinese in Shenzhen assemble them working 11-hour days for 83 cents an hour under brutal conditions. The wages are even lower in Vietnam, Cambodia and elsewhere.

Certainly, the popes and the Vatican are not without fault. They have squandered much of their moral authority by binging on issues where they have no privileged expertise, i.e. sexual and reproductive issues for which a life of real or purported celibacy is not the best preparation.

They have had their say there. Now is the time to declare a solemn moratorium on papal sex talk. Leave masturbation to the masturbators. Leave pregnancy decisions to pregnant women, women have a better track record on life issues. And leave those whom God has made gay free to bond in love. (They also have a lot more penance to do regarding the pedophilia scandal.)

But this Vatican document is a gem of moral reasoning. It is hard-nosed justice theory applied to real life.

A final suggestion: along with the moratorium on sex talk, the Vatican should consider closing its bank, which has some issues of its own.

**Daniel C. Maguire is a Professor of Moral Theology at Marquette University, a Catholic, Jesuit institution in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He is author of *A Moral Creed for All Christians*. He can be reached at [daniel.maguire@marquette.edu](mailto:daniel.maguire@marquette.edu)**

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