

'The Deputy'

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A few months after the beginning of the second World War, Father Max Metzger, founder of the Una Sancta Brotherhood, wrote a letter from his prison cell pleading with Pius XII for the convocation of a council of peace and of reunion. This letter—the full English text appears for the first time in the new American quarterly, *Continuum*, Summer, 1963—has a bearing not only on the prehistory of Vatican II, but even more significantly on a recent dramatic production, *Der Stellvertreter* (*The Representative* or *The Deputy*), by a young German publisher's assistant, Rolf Hochhuth. In the play as in the letter, the Pope was requested to speak forthrightly in the name of justice; in the play the request is openly ignored, while the fate of Max Metzger's letter remains unknown. In both instances the question that seems to rise spontaneously concerns the failure of the Pope to fulfil his role as servant of the servants of God.

The play has been recognized in the European and American press as perhaps the most controversial drama of the post-war era. An English translation is about to appear; it will be produced in Stockholm by Ingmar Bergman; Georges de Beauregard is filming it in France; and it will open next season in London and New York. While there is no doubt that some of this immediate fame is due to the dramatic merits of the piece, an even larger part is probably the result of the 'scandal' on which it is based, on the alleged failure of Pius XII to speak out on the persecution of the Jews. It may be observed in passing that, aside from the religious issue, much German acclaim for the work probably derives from the national need for a catharsis of the Nazi past, and, on the West-Berlin theatrical scene, from the desire to achieve a local work comparable to Brecht's social dramas.

The play opens at the Berlin residence of the Papal Nuncio, in August, 1942. An SS chief, Gerstein, who had joined the Party in order to undermine its activities, tells the Nuncio that he has personally witnessed the slaughter of thousands of Jews, and pleads for some papal statement to stop the continuing massacre. In the face of the Nuncio's indifference, a young Jesuit, Riccardo, who is present during the conversation, decides that he will journey to Rome to persuade the Pope of the need

for such a declaration. Shortly after, a Jewish refugee, Jacobson, who has been concealed in Gerstein's house, is aided to escape by Riccardo who trades his soutane and passport for the Jew's clothes and identifying badge, the yellow star. In the second and third acts, Riccardo informs his father, Count Fontana, who is in the Vatican service, of his intent; and along with Gerstein seeks to secure the help of the Superior General of the Jesuits in carrying out the mission. In these two acts it is brought out that Rome is unconcernedly celebrating its traditional festivals, while under the very windows of the Vatican Jews are being corralled for deportation to the death camps. In the climax of the play in the fourth act, the Pope, who is preoccupied with preserving his neutrality between the warring powers, with the fear of communism and even with the solvency of the Vatican treasury, remains haughtily indifferent to the plea of Riccardo, and finally dismisses him as guilty of disobedience and 'Protestantism.' In the last act, Riccardo, who has worn the yellow star of David and has let himself be deported to Auschwitz, is shot by a sentry in the act of striking a diabolic Nazi doctor. In the background, an authentic document—the letter of the German ambassador at the Vatican to the Nazi foreign minister—is heard being read over the loudspeaker: 'Despite the pleas which have been addressed to him from all sides, the Pope has not let himself be persuaded to make any effective proclamation against the deportation of the Jews . . .'

There are many additions to this brief summary in the published version of the play (Rowohlt-Verlag, Hamburg) from which the above synopsis has been derived; the book is about three times as long as the staged production, and there is a lengthy annexe made up of various documents which attempt to reinforce the play's thesis. This attempt to certify the guilt of Pius XII has been criticized by a number of commentators, both Catholic and Protestant, and so there is no need to discuss here whether the portrait of Pius XII is historically accurate, whether the apparently gratuitous asides on his court—effeminate cardinals, 'ganz rund, ganz rot'—are based on fact, and whether or not, finally, the reasonable word of Pius XII would have had any salutary effect on the Nazi insanity: all of this is incidental to the dominant question of what the drama means *as* an artwork, not for the West-Berlin viewer, not for the German Catholic or Protestant viewer, but for Christians everywhere.

Professors W. K. Winsatt and Monroe Beardsley have underlined the critical pitfalls in the assumption that if we know an author's

intention we can necessarily better understand his work. What they have termed the 'intentional fallacy' is dangerous because in any painting, poem or drama, there is not only the purpose of the artist at play, there is also the inner logic of the work itself. These two forces may sometimes run parallel, sometimes be fused, and sometimes be moving in opposite directions. The latter is unfortunately too often the case in *Der Stellvertreter*. Hochhuth's intention seems to have been to write a play which would exonerate the German people and relieve national remorse by supplying a scapegoat (a deputy) in the person of Pius XII. Only this can explain the obsessive bitterness, the ever-recurring almost pathological attacks on the character of the Pontiff, and the imputation—or better, 'deputation'—of greater guilt to the Pope in Rome for failing to speak than to the German citizens at home for failing to act. Such extra-esthetic motivation may also explain the uncomplicated and dramatically unbelievable figure of the Pope: successfully to assuage national remorse, the scapegoat must be conceived as utterly clothed in iniquity: the pontiff *must be* depicted as almost entirely caught up in the machinery of the Vatican, as haughty, frigid, and immobile in the face of, not a vile rumour but, the confirmed fact of genocide. Whether or not this picture is historically acceptable is, from the standpoint of this analysis, irrelevant: what is relevant is that it is dramatically ineffectual because it is slack. There is no tension in the drawing of this character, and therefore no stimulation of interest, save of a sociological or political nature. The power of the drama resides in the monstrosity of the Nazi crimes around which it circulates, rather than in any coherent organization of factors and counter-factors.

There might, for example, have been a faint parallel with the esthetically rich action of Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* or Claudel's *Père humilié* if the news had been communicated to the Pope that Riccardo and Gerstein were planning on killing him in the hope that such a murder would be attributed to the Gestapo and would thus arouse the world against the *Endloesung der Judenfrage*. But there is no indication in the dramatic scheme that Pius knew of the plot, and thus the possible conflict over fear of death, passion for martyrdom, satisfaction of priestly ego, and a host of other possible motives are all sacrificed to the sociological and psychological predispositions of the author.

However, it is important to note that in the actual composition of the drama this extra-esthetic intention was apparently overpowered from time to time and in various scenes by the structural demands of the play itself. (But that neither the explicit intention nor the inner logic com-

pletely dictated the movement of the drama has resulted in a hybrid production of occasional intensity and limp propaganda). The inner logic of the play would seem to have required a succession of ever-enlarging analogical images of deputyship, with the whole work deputed to bear away *by this esthetic evocation of the complexity of reality* the guilt of the masses of the German people. The drama could not then have been centred on the sin of Pius XII. For though the Pope is deputy, is vicar of Christ, so also is every other major figure in the play a deputy. The very nature of deputyship, of vicarious acceptance or rejection, which constitutes the theme of the work, indicates then that the central issue is not—as some Protestant critics have recently suggested—whether faith is regarded, on the one hand, as unmediated acceptance of God or is regarded, on the other hand, as mediated by some human being, in this case the Pope. To reduce it to such elementary ‘Roman Catholic v. Protestant’ terms is to ignore, first, the structure of the drama itself, and second, the author’s esthetic judgment that it is a pro-Catholic work.

First, the focus of the drama is on the tensions resulting from various attitudes towards deputyship, that is, on the imperative need for some mediating principle and, consequently, on the impossibility of any absolutely unmediated commitment by any person, whether he be Pope or Jesuit, Protestant or Jew. This is the significance of Gerstein, the Evangelical, who by his uniform and his office is an SS leader—clothing and uniforms throughout the play symbolize this investiture with deputyship—but who in his heart is an ardent Christian. This is the import of Riccardo, the Catholic and Jesuit, being deputized a Jew; it is the import of Jacobson, the German Jew, being deputized a Jesuit and Italian. It is the reason why before approaching the ‘Holy Father’, Riccardo approaches his natural father; why before approaching Pope Pius, Riccardo approaches the ‘black Pope’, the Jesuit general.

Deputyship as such, vicarious commitment as such, mediated faith as such, none of these is being placed in opposition to direct, unmediated vision and action; the ‘Catholic’ conception of faith is not colliding with the ‘Protestant’ conception. (In fact these fictive antinomies are misused by those critics who view the play in these narrow confessional perspectives, since deputyship has a greater kinship with Lutheran ‘imputation’ than with Roman Catholic transformation). For this reason, there is no onus attached to Jacobson’s being deputized a Jesuit. Nor should there have been any attached to Pius XII if the intrinsic dramatic thrust of the play had been pursued.

But, as indicated above, it was not. It was frustrated by what seems the author's personal animus and/or by the psychological, sociological, political goals he had antecedently set himself. Where the drama does fulfil its esthetic potentialities and where it gives promise of transcending its propaganda intent, it is radicated in the ground of every genuine artifact, in the interplay between the numberless analogues of spirit-matter, interiority-exteriority, reality-appearance, what is and what is deputed. The tension between these polar constructs is necessarily the single theme of drama as of life. The inner logic of the play would have made of this theme an interwoven fabric of the various modes of deputyship and of the implicit truism that there are in reality no clear ideas, no simple essences, no unmixed goods, no unities without multiplicities, no ideal orders without factual concretions. To say otherwise would be to say that Gerstein is also playing the hypocrite, that he too should have borne his Christian witness without concerning himself over the good he might do by being deputed an SS man; to say otherwise would be to say that Jacobson is also playing the hypocrite when he is deputed a Jesuit.

To the degree that his play is true to its inner bent, Hochhuth is correct in describing it as a 'Christian drama.' It is such because it is the Christian pre-eminently who comprehends the incarnate situation in which man exists, this situation which in all experience affirms that the word *is* flesh, the man *is* Pope, the Jew *is* Jesuit, the Jesuit *is* Jew—and all by deputation of the charity of Christ. Given this structural leitmotiv, the Pontiff ought to have been recognized as the heroic witness to the tensions of the spirit-matter complexus in the psychological order, even as Riccardo is seen as its witness in the physical order. And if it were not for the extreme anti-papal passion of the author this recognition would probably have been the culmination of the drama.

Pius refused to opt for the clear essence, for the pure and untrammelled idea. This is explicitly and brilliantly brought out—though marred *passim* by the political prejudices of the author—by the fact that what is asked of the Pope is not a deed, an *actio*, which would achieve the cessation of the Jewish slaughter, but merely a statement, a proclamation, a *word*. The entire dramatic tenor of the play, and its very title, stress that what the Pope should have been acknowledged as seeking was a word made flesh, an accomplishment which would not merely pay futile homage to some ideal order of justice that ought to be, but a deed which would fuse the ideal and the real, which would, like the sacrament of which he was the high priest, '*work what he said*.' Since

such a 'sacrament' could not have been confected, the Pope remained silent.

Had the dramatic impulse of the play not been blunted by the author's private inclinations, had he shown more fidelity to the exigencies of his craft than to his extra-esthetic biases, he would have written a tragedy of the highest order, and one which by that very fact would have probably been closer to the truths of history.

Polish Culture at the Millennium

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After the millennial celebrations of the founding of the Polish state and the conversion of Poland to Christianity, the Poles may look back with some pride and with some horror. In modern times they have been perhaps the least favoured of European nations, with a recent past consisting of dismemberment, unsuccessful rebellion, two great wars, and the suffering of the worst imaginable crimes; under the Nazis there were about twelve extermination camps in Poland, of which Auschwitz was only the most well-known. This was followed by the poverty and oppression of the post-war and Stalinist period. Being poised between east and west has not been in Poland's favour, however interesting the phenomenon; only in the last seven years has it turned strangely to their advantage. October 1956 was the great moment in the history of modern Poland; they look back on it now as 'The Polish October' and 'The October Springtime'. The bitter but concealed intrigues in the back-streets of Warsaw, by which Wladyslaw Gomulka came to power and bloodlessly achieved a change of régime that deserved the name of revolution, demonstrated the political genius, and reversed the destiny of Poland. So did the glowering crowds, assembled in imitation of the earlier Poznan rioters and with no clear idea of what action they were going to take; when, rather to everyone's surprise, they accepted Gomulka's assurances quietly. They stood in the background as a lever for Gomulka against the Russians, but without committing any indis-