

SECULAR ASSOCIATION OF NSW INC.  
OCCASIONAL PAPER SEPTEMBER 2022  
EDITED TRANSCRIPT  
CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS  
IQ SQUARED DEBATE, LONDON, 19 OCTOBER, 2009

*'The Catholic Church is a Force for Good in the World'*

**SPEAKERS FOR:** His Grace, John Onaiyekan, Catholic Archbishop of Abuja, Nigeria, and Ann Widdicombe, former Conservative member of parliament, former member of the European Parliament, convert from Anglicanism to Catholicism.

**SPEAKERS AGAINST:** Christopher Hitchens and Stephen Fry.

**HITCHENS:** If [Speakers *For*] want to defend the Catholic Church, in public, in front of an educated and literate audience, they simply have to start by making a great number of heartfelt apologies and requests for contrition and forgiveness (audience applause) ...

Now, you might ask, brothers and sisters, who am I to say that?

Well, in the Millennium Jubilee Year, 2000, the Vatican spokesman, Bishop Guido Morini<sup>1</sup>, explaining a whole sermon of apology given by His Holiness the Pope, that was supposed to cover the entire history of the church in its Jubilee Year, said ... I'll quote Bishop Morini directly ...

*Given the number of sins<sup>2</sup> we've committed in the course of twentieth century, reference to them must necessarily be rather summary ...*

Well, I think Bishop Morini had that just about right. I will have to be summary too, but I think he said just about *the least* of it.

His Holiness on that occasion (12<sup>th</sup> March 2000) begged forgiveness for ... among some other things ...

the Crusades;<sup>3</sup>

the Inquisition;<sup>4</sup>

the persecution of the Jewish people;<sup>5</sup>

injustice towards women – that's half the human race right there ... (audience laughter)

... the forced conversion of indigenous people, especially in South America ...<sup>6</sup>

... and *that* followed a whole series of preceding apologies ... apologies of a kind made by the late Pope John Paul who - it troubles me not at all to say - was a very impressive and serious human being ...

[There was] no less than ninety-four ... recognitions on his part of appalling crime, and error, and cruelty, and stupidity, and offences to the free intelligence, ranging from - I shall be summary like Bishop Morini ...

the African slave trade apologised for in 1995;<sup>7</sup>

the admission that Galileo was *right* (audience laughter) about the relationship between the sun and the earth and other orbs, which came in 1992;<sup>8</sup>

[admission to] violence and torture ... torture was *legalised* and institutionalised by the Roman pontiff during the Counter-Reformation<sup>9</sup> ... that [apology] came in 1995;

... the decision to join Hitler's Final Solution, or 'Shoah'<sup>10</sup> ...

... as well as, coming in 1999, just under the Jubilee wire, an apology for the burning alive [in 1415] in the main square of Prague of the great Czech Protestant, Jan Hus.<sup>11</sup>

Since that big fiesta of forgiveness which culminated in 2000 ... fiesta of *asking for forgiveness* ... the papacy also asked to be forgiven *for*:

the sack of Constantinople and the massacre of Byzantine Christianity in April 1204 as part of the fourth Crusade;

the anathema on all Eastern Orthodox Christians as heretics, unbelievers, as people dwelling outside the health of the church [that was] was lifted only in 1964 ...

He also expressed sorrow about the murder and forced conversion of Serbian Orthodox Christians in the Balkans during the Second World War ....<sup>12</sup>

... and it doesn't *end* there ... there are smaller and equally significant avowals of a very bad conscience:

These have included regret for the rape and the torture of orphans and other children in church run schools in almost every country on earth, from Ireland to Australia ...

... and I'm pleased to see that due written consideration is being given and *has* been given to the hellish – I choose the word carefully – doctrine of Limbo, St Augustine's cruel and stupid disposal problem ... solution to a non-existent problem ... that is to say, the destination of the souls of unbaptised children.

Up until now Catholic parents have been told that [Limbo] is where their unbaptised children went. A form of torture that is sometimes worse than the physical. Now it seems that this piece of Augustine sadism is undergoing reconsideration as well ... but remember, this is from a church that, on the whole, cannot err.

We still await a more direct admission [and] I will give some suggestions of my own while we are at it ...

... I would like them to take that Concordat made with Adolf Hitler, the first Treaty he ever signed, giving the church a monopoly over any [indecipherable] in Germany in exchange for the dissolution of the Catholic Centre Party, to give the Nazi Party a clear run.

I would have apologised for the Lateran Pact with Mussolini myself, also the first Treaty ever signed by that fascist dictator.

I would also think I would want to reconsider the fact that Father Tiso, head of the Nazi puppet state in Slovakia was a priest in Holy Orders<sup>13</sup> ...

... [also] that the Croatia fascist puppet state, the Istashia state of Ante Pavelic, was also operating under full clerical protection disguise<sup>14</sup> as was the regime of General Franco<sup>15</sup> and the dictator Antonio Salazar<sup>16</sup> ...

... and I think I would really beg forgiveness for this: I don't think the German church should have asked for Hitler's birthday to be celebrated from the pulpit, every year, until he died.

These are very serious matters. They are not to be laughed off by references to the occasional [social] work of Catholic churches, but I draw your attention, not just to the apologies, ladies and gentlemen, but to the evasive and euphemistic form that they take.

Joseph Ratzinger,<sup>17</sup> the Cardinal ... considered by some Catholics to be the Vicar of Christ on earth, says of [South American] Indians [who were] massacred in the course of conversion in Brazil ... *after* the apology had been made to them, he said ...

*... nonetheless it must be remembered that before we came to convert them, they were silently awaiting the arrival of the church.*

I don't think that's a very genuine kind of apology, do you?

In his comment, one of the few he has made on the institutionalisation of rape and torture and maltreatment of children in Catholic institutions, he said ...

*... it's a very severe crisis which involves us in the following ...in the need for applying to these victims the most loving pastoral care.*

Well, I'm sorry, they have already *had* that! (audience laughs)

And to say that this is a responsibility laid upon you by the *horrific* admission you had already had to make, is not accepting responsibility in any adult sense.

When I say child abuse was institutional, how dare I say so, how do I prove it?

How could I prove such a thing? Well, I'll ask His Grace, and I'll ask Ann Widdicombe:

Where is Cardinal Bernard Law<sup>18</sup> now? Where is he? Where is the Cardinal Archbishop of Boston whose resignation was indignantly demanded, finally, by fifty members of the church and by the whole laity of Massachusetts ... who also demanded his prosecution for the promotion and protection, and covering-up of, and apology for, and defence of, people whose crimes against children are too revolting to specify.

He's not in the jurisdiction of Massachusetts now as perhaps you know.

He's the Supreme Vicar of the Church of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome, personally appointed by the Pope to that, as well as to many other important sinecures, and in 2005, this man, a fugitive from justice, and from complicity in the *filthiest* crime that is possible for a human being to imagine [child rape], was one of those voting in Conclave, to decide who the next Vicar of Christ on earth will be!

... I think I would want to hear a bit more shame about this. I would like to see a bit more confrontation with the reality of the business.

Now, this is a serious question as I've said, and Widdicombe, very often, rightly in my view, attacks the climate of moral relativism, of anything goes, that may well be the handmaiden of post-modernist, hedonistic culture. I'm glad she pointed this out.

But the rape and torture of children is not something to be relativised. Not something to be excused as a few bad priests. Certainly not to be excused by the hideously false claim made by some Catholic conservatives that this wouldn't have happened if queers hadn't been allowed into the church ... it's the thing [child rape] that if we were accused of this on this side of the house, we would die, rather than admit it, and if we were guilty of it, we would kill ourselves. And it's the one thing the church has decided to excuse itself for under this papacy.

The same euphemism ... that is used in all the apologies about the Crusades, the Inquisitions, the anti-Semitic pogroms and all the rest of it, it's that some Christians *fell into error*. Some Christians allowed themselves to be deceived in this way and act against the Gospel.

Well, anti-Semitism was preached as an official doctrine of the church until 1964. Do you think it might have had something to do with public opinion in Austria? And Bavaria, and Poland and Lithuania? That Jewish people were accused collectively, as a people, of deicide, of the crime of murder of God in the figure of Jesus of Nazareth?

And that anathema on them was not lifted until 1964 well after the perpetrators of the Holocaust had stood trial in secular courts and been rightly punished for their actions.

How can this church say it has any moral superiority?

It has difficulty in catching up to what ordinary people regard as common, moral, and ethical sense. And it still can't make itself apologise properly, and I'll tell you why.

Because – and I'll quote again from the Encyclicals<sup>19</sup> – it is said of the Crusades, of the complicity with the Holocaust, of the political and diplomatic alliance with fascism, it is said of all of these things, 'well, violence was committed' – but I'll stress this and underline it, and I'll quote directly – all these things were done ...

... *'in the service of the truth'*.

So how is equality possible, how is any other standing, other undertaking or firm purpose of amendment to be allowed, when the original sin – so to say – the *radix malorum*<sup>20</sup> ... the problem in the first place, is the belief, on the part of this church that it *does* possess a truth that we don't have, and it *does* have

a God-given right, a warrant, a mandate of Heaven, to tell other people what to do – not just in their public – but in their private lives.

And until that is changed, that fantastic and sinister non-founding faith is changed, these crimes will go on repeating themselves, being partially denied, partially admitted - when it's too late to do anything else - and covered up.

Behind all these crimes and miseries is the denial of what we on this side of the House affirm – which is that the only little handle of hope that our species does possess is ... the unfettered intelligence, the method of free inquiry and philosophy and science, and the refusal to admit that any one person can tell you not to do that.

It's the one thing, I might say, that, if not sacred, or sacrosanct is, shall we say, essential. And the church has always stood, and still stands, against it ...

Now in the little time remaining, I'll just propose a few more apologies that we might hope to hear in the immediate future.

There will come a time when the church will assume apologies and explanations, and half-baked appeals for forgiveness for things it is still doing.

The readmission of Roger Williamson<sup>21</sup> as a Bishop, a member of Marcel Lefebvre's fanatical, hysterical, breakaway sect, so-called Society of Saint Pius X.

Roger Williamson, found hiding in a reactionary, quasi-fascistic establishment in Argentina, has long been a believer, that, I'll put this [briefly], that the Holocaust did not occur, but the Jews did kill Christ. In other words, genocide, *no, deicide, yes.*

He was quite rightly excommunicated some years ago with some other members of his ratbag organisation. But Joseph Ratzinger invited him back into the community because to him, having this man, this liar, this fraud, this racist, in the church, is more important than church unity, [more important] than the things that he [Williamson] has said, and done, and continues to stand for.

Is this not a crime scandal?

I think there will be an apology for what happened in Rwanda.<sup>22</sup> The most Catholic country in Africa. One of the most Catholic countries in the world.

Where priests, and nuns, and Bishops, are on trial for inciting from their pulpits, the church's radio stations and newspapers, the massacre of their brothers and sisters.

The Papacy was silent on this appalling occasion. And everyone in Rwanda knows it. And there hasn't yet been a properly written apology for that disgrace.

Staying in Africa, I think it will one day be admitted, with shame, that it might have been in error to say, that Aids is bad as a disease, very bad, but not quite as bad as condoms are bad<sup>23</sup>, or not as immoral in the same way (audience applause).

I say it in the presence of His Grace, I say it to his face: the preaching of his church is responsible for the death and misery and suffering of millions of his brother and sister fellow Africans and he should apologise for it!

(audience applause)

He should show some shame for condemning my friend, Stephen Fry, for his nature. For saying,

'You couldn't be a member of our church, you were born in sin!'

(audience applause)

There's a revolting piece of casuistry that is sometimes offered on this point.

*We hate the sin, we love the sinner.*

Stephen, I am sorry to say, is not quite like other girls. It is his nature.

He is not being condemned for what he does, he is being condemned for what he *is*.

'You're a child made in the image of God? Oh no you're not! You're a faggot and you can't join our church and you can't go to Heaven!'

This is disgraceful. It's inhuman. It's obscene. And it comes from a clutch of hysterical, sinister virgins, who have already betrayed their charge in the children of their own church!

(audience cheers and applause) For shame! For shame!

And finally, under this Pope, as if it was not bad enough, to try and restore the Lateran Mass to try and gratify the mad, fascistic, followers of Archbishop Lefebvre, which will begin again to offer the Remission of Sin<sup>24</sup>, as Pope Ratzinger wants to do.

If you [attended] a Catholic infest in Sydney [Australia]<sup>25</sup>, where I just was, you'll get a certain remission from purgatory or hell, maybe temporary ... if you come a lot, give a lot, you'll get, possibly, permanent remission, from the eternal punishment that they don't know any more about, than you or I do.

This is the Sale of Indulgences<sup>26</sup>, blatantly, openly, it's the same temptation that was offered to those who set off on that Fourth Crusade that has just been apologised for ... on their way, they sacked, Byzantine Christianity<sup>27</sup> when they got to Constantinople, and went on to massacre the Arabs and Muslims.

They were offered Paradise if they died committing these terrible crimes against humanity. If you see what I mean, therefore, the stimulus to crime, the impetus to crime, the belief in certainty, the belief that a divine warrior entitles you to do whatever you like, is the sin, that must be cancelled, that must be annulled, that must be somehow apologised for ...

Now, I don't wish any ill on any fellow primate, or mammal, even if this primate claims to be in possession of a secret that is denied to me. I can forgive even that for I live in a country where their reign doesn't run, their writ doesn't apply, and they can't burn me, and silence or censor me, or tell my wife she can't use contraception, or they can't even tell Stephen he's a beast.

So, I don't at all look forward to the death of Joseph Ratzinger, I don't. Or any other Pope, not really. Except for one tiny reason which I ought to confess and share with you.

When he dies, there is quite a long interval until the Conclave can meet, maybe Cardinal Morini will still be on it, to pick another Pope. Sometimes it goes on for months until they get the white smoke. And for that time, that whole interval, it's a delicious, lucid interlude, there isn't anyone on earth who claims to be infallible. Isn't that nice?

In closing. If the human species is to rise to the full height which is demanded by its dignity, and by its intelligence, we must all of us move to a state of affairs where that condition is permanent. And I think we should get on with it.

Thank you.



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## END NOTES

These notes are mostly sourced from Wikipedia.

<sup>1</sup> **Guido Marini** (born 31 January 1965) is an Italian prelate of the Catholic Church who serves as the [bishop of Tortona](#) in northern Italy. A priest since 1989, from 2007 to 2021 he was [Master of Pontifical Liturgical Ceremonies](#), serving under [Pope Benedict XVI](#) and [Pope Francis](#).

<sup>2</sup> **Sin** is a central concept in the cult of Christianity, characterised by the belief in a supernatural Jesus Christ and God. Like many cults, Christianity insists people are guilty of behavioural problems that can only be resolved by a belief in God, and the following of rituals, such as Confession, which can resolve the guilt. Without forgiveness people risk going to Hell, a concept which functions as the ultimate threat, although in the contemporary world, Hell has lost whatever significance it had as a fear-provoking sanction. In the Catholic tradition there are 'venial' and 'mortal' sins. These are actions that 'wound' others in personal ways (venial) or serious actions that cause serious harm [mortal].

<sup>3</sup> **The Crusades** were a series of religious wars initiated in 1095 by the Roman Catholic Church. They continued, in various forms, for centuries. The most well-known Crusades took place between 1095 and 1291 in the Near East, where European Christian armies attempted to recover the city of Jerusalem from Islamic rule. There were other Crusades against Muslims in Iberia and against pagans and fellow Christians in Europe whom the Catholic Church deemed heretical. After the First Crusade (1095-1099) was launched by Pope Urban II, the large areas of the Holy Land were occupied by European Crusader States, as well as military orders such as the Knights Templar. By the end of the 18th century the Crusades had all but ended, leaving Europe and the Near East forever changed.

<sup>4</sup> **The Inquisition** was a group of institutions within the Catholic Church whose aim was to combat heresy, conducting trials of suspected heretics. Studies of the records have found that the overwhelming majority of sentences consisted of penances, but that cases of repeat unrepentant heretics were handed over to the secular courts, which generally resulted in execution or life imprisonment. David Plaisted (a professor of computer science at UNC) states that "In the narrow sense, the term "Inquisition" refers to official trials conducted by Roman Catholic authorities in places like Spain and Portugal. When the question is limited to just those Inquisitions, the number of Protestants executed is likely in the thousands or tens of thousands. However, if the term is used in a broad sense—to represent all Roman Catholic activity against non-Catholics—then the numbers rise dramatically. If the historian includes forms of torture and killing that did not involve a formal trial, along with religious wars and other forms of Catholic violence enacted against Protestants and other non-Catholics (in areas outside of Spain and Portugal), then one can easily speak in terms of millions of people who were killed." <https://thecriplegate.com/how-many-people-died-in-the-inquisition/>

<sup>5</sup> **Antisemitism.** Throughout the [Middle Ages](#) in Europe, Jews were subjected to [antisemitism](#) based on Christian theology, which blamed them for killing Jesus. Even after the [Reformation](#), [Catholicism](#) and [Lutheranism](#) continued to persecute Jews, accusing them of [blood libels](#) and subjecting them to [pogroms](#) and expulsions.<sup>151</sup> Two millennia of Catholic antisemitism not only prepared Catholics to perceive Jews in a negative way but also primed them to accept anti-Jewish ideas. A strategic alliance between Hitler and the churches was sealed by a concordat in 1933, and church--state alliance permeated daily life in Nazi Germany.

<sup>6</sup> **Conversions** In 1493 Pope Alexander VI published a bull dividing new territory between Spain and Portugal for the conversion of indigenous to Catholicism. After the Aztec empire was defeated missionaries invaded Mexico and South America and millions were 'baptised' (*Philadelphia Trumpet* May-June 2013); more recently, in Canada some 150,000 First Nations, Inuit and Métis children were [taken from their families](#) over much of the last century and put in various schools, where they were forced to convert to Christianity and not allowed to speak their native languages. Many were beaten and verbally and sexually abused, and up to 6,000 are said to have died. Almost two-thirds of the 130 schools were run by the Catholic church.

<sup>7</sup> **The transatlantic slave trade** transported between 10 million and 12 million enslaved Africans across the [Atlantic Ocean](#) to the Americas from the 16th to the 19th century. It was the second of three stages of the so-called [triangular trade](#), in which arms, textiles, and wine were shipped from Europe to Africa, enslaved people from Africa to the Americas, and sugar and coffee from the Americas to Europe. The Catholic Church played a vital role in the trans-Atlantic slave trade which was introduced by the coming of the Europeans who came with the Bible in the same manner that Arab raiders and traders from the Middle East and North Africa introduced Islam. The Church was the backbone of the slave trade ... most of the slave traders and slave ship captains were very 'good' Christians'. Some historians argue that if churches had used their power, the Atlantic slave trade might have never occurred. Others argue that the Catholic church and Catholic missionaries could have also helped to prevent the colonization and brutality of colonialism in Africa. However, according to a 2015 Global Black History report, the Catholic church did not oppose the institution of slavery until the practice had already become infamous in most parts of the world. The Jesuits detailed an example of their slavery in *The Journal of Jesuits Studies* 8 (2021) 1-10: 'In April 2017 the president of the Jesuit Conference of Canada and the US apologised for 'the Society's complicity in the history of slavery and for the specific act of the notorious sale of three hundred people owned by the Maryland Jesuits in 1838.'

<sup>8</sup> **Galileo.** Galileo's championing of [Copernican heliocentrism](#) (Earth rotating daily and revolving around the sun) was met with opposition from within the [Catholic Church](#) and from some astronomers. The matter was investigated by the [Roman Inquisition](#) in 1615, which concluded that heliocentrism was foolish, absurd, and heretical since it contradicted Holy Scripture.. Galileo was tried by the Inquisition, found "vehemently suspect of heresy", and forced to recant. He spent the rest of his life under house arrest. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Galileo\\_Galilei](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Galileo_Galilei). The Pope admitted he was right in [1992](#).

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<sup>9</sup> **The Counter-Reformation** was the period of [Catholic](#) resurgence that was initiated in response to the [Protestant Reformation](#). It began with the [Council of Trent](#) (1545–1563) and largely ended with the conclusion of the [European wars of religion](#) in 1648. Initiated to address the effects of the Protestant Reformation, the Counter-Reformation was a comprehensive effort composed of [apologetic](#) and [polemical](#) documents and [ecclesiastical](#) configuration as decreed by the [Council of Trent](#). The last of these included the efforts of [Imperial Diets](#) of the [Holy Roman Empire](#), heresy trials and the [Inquisition](#), anti-corruption efforts, spiritual movements, and the founding of new religious orders. Such policies had long-lasting effects in [European](#) history with exiles of Protestants continuing until the 1781 [Patent of Toleration](#), although smaller expulsions took place in the 19th century. It also involved political activities that included the [Spanish Inquisition](#) and the [Portuguese Inquisition in Goa and Bombay-Bassein](#) etc. A primary emphasis of the Counter-Reformation was a mission to reach parts of the world that had been [colonized](#) as predominantly Catholic and also try to reconvert nations such as Sweden and England that once were Catholic from the time of the [Christianisation of Europe](#), but had been lost to the Reformation.

<sup>10</sup> **Nazism and the Church.** The head of the Catholic Church at the time of the Nazi rise to power was Pope Pius XI. Although he stated that the myths of "race" and "blood" were contrary to Christian teaching (in a papal encyclical, March 1937), he neither mentioned nor criticized antisemitism. His successor, Pius XII (Cardinal Pacelli) maintained his neutrality throughout the course of World War II.

In 1937, Pius XI was so concerned about the anti-Catholic activities of the Nazi regime. He criticized the Nazi government's persecution of the Catholic Church, and the state for putting ideological beliefs before Christian ones. Nevertheless, priests in Germany were warned not to criticize Hitler or the Nazi regime. A [Reichskonkordat](#) was signed in 1933 between the Church and German Government

- *to regulate and administer her own affairs independently, and, within the framework of her competence, to publish laws and ordinances binding on her members.*
- *to consolidate and promote the friendly relations existing between the Holy See and the German Reich...*
- *to foster good relations between the Holy See and the German Reich, an Apostolic Nuncio will as heretofore reside in the capital of the German Reich and an Ambassador of the German Reich at the Holy See.*
- *to require bishops to take an oath of loyalty to the Governor or President of the German Reich, and clergy to abstain from working in and for political parties*

As early as 1942 the Vatican received detailed information on the murder of Jews in concentration camps, the Pope confined his public statements to expressions of sympathy for the victims of injustice and to calls for a more humane conduct of the war. However, individual priests did make a stand against the government and between 1939 and 1943, 693 Catholic priests were arrested and tried for "oppositional activity".

The treaty also requires Nazi breaches of the agreement began almost as soon as it had been signed and intensified afterwards leading to protest from the Church including in the 1937 [Mit brennender Sorge](#) encyclical of Pope [Pius XI](#). The Nazis planned to eliminate the Church's influence by restricting its organizations to purely religious activities. Though some German bishops were unenthusiastic, and the [Allies](#) at the end of [World War II](#) felt it inappropriate, Pope Pius XII successfully argued to keep the Concordat in force. It is still in force today.

Church records were supplied to state authorities which assisted in the detection of people of Jewish origin, and efforts to aid the persecuted were confined to Catholic non-Aryans. While Catholic clergymen protested the Nazi euthanasia program, few, spoke out against the murder of the Jews.

<sup>11</sup> Similarly, Italian [Giordano Bruno](#) was burnt to death for 'heretical' beliefs in 1600.

<sup>12</sup> **The Genocide of Serbs** in the Independent State of Croatia ([Serbo-Croatian Latin](#): was the systematic persecution of [Serbs](#) which was committed during [World War II](#) by the [fascist Ustaše](#) regime in the [Nazi German puppet state](#) known as the [Independent State of Croatia \(Serbo-Croatian\)](#) between 1941 and 1945. It was carried out through executions in [death camps](#), as well as through [mass murder](#), [ethnic cleansing](#), [deportations](#), [forced conversions](#), and [war rape](#). This genocide was simultaneously carried out with [the Holocaust in the NDH \[Croatia\]](#) as well as [the genocide of Roma](#), by combining [Nazi racial policies](#) with the ultimate goal of creating an ethnically pure [Greater Croatia](#).

<sup>13</sup> [Jozef Gašpar Tiso](#) was a Slovak politician and Roman Catholic priest who served as president of the Slovak Republic, a client state of Nazi Germany during World War II, from 1939 to 1945. In 1947, after the war, he was executed for war crimes and crimes against humanity in Bratislava.

<sup>14</sup> [Ante Pavelić](#) was a Croatian politician who founded and headed the [fascist ultranationalist](#) organization known as the [Ustaše](#) in 1929 and served as dictator of the [Independent State of Croatia](#) a fascist [puppet state](#) built out of parts of occupied [Yugoslavia](#) by the authorities of [Nazi Germany](#) and [Fascist Italy](#), from 1941 to 1945. Pavelić and the Ustaše persecuted many racial minorities and political opponents during the war, including [Serbs](#), [Jews](#), [Romani](#), and [anti-fascists](#), becoming one of the key figures of the [genocide of Serbs](#), the [Porajmos](#) and the Holocaust.

<sup>15</sup> The **General Franco** dictatorship was the period between 1939 and 1975, when [Francisco Franco](#) ruled Spain. Months after the start of the [Spanish Civil War](#) in July 1936, Franco emerged as the dominant rebel military leader and was proclaimed head of state on 1 April 1939. During the [Second World War](#), Spain did not join Germany and its allies. Nevertheless, Spain supported them in various ways throughout most of the war while maintaining its neutrality as an official policy of "non-belligerence". Because of this, Spain was [isolated](#) by many other countries for nearly a decade after World War II.

<sup>16</sup> Portugal under [Antonio de Oliveira Salazar](#) was one of the longest-surviving authoritarian regimes in Europe in the 20th century.

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<sup>17</sup> **Pope Benedict XVI** is a retired prelate of the Catholic church who served as the head of the church and the sovereign of the Vatican City state from 2005 until his resignation in 2013. Benedict's election as pope occurred in the 2005 papal conclave that followed the death of Pope John Paul II.

<sup>18</sup> **Cardinal Bernard Law** was [Archbishop of Boston](#) from 1984 until his resignation on December 13, 2002, after his involvement in the [Catholic Archdiocese of Boston sex abuse scandal](#) became public knowledge. Law was proven to have ignored or concealed the molestation of numerous underage children; Church documents demonstrate that he had extensive knowledge concerning widespread child sexual abuse committed by dozens of [Catholic priests](#) within his [archdiocese](#) over a period of almost two decades, and that he failed to report these crimes to the authorities, instead merely [transferring the accused priests between parishes](#). One priest in Law's archdiocese, [John Geoghan](#), was alleged to have [raped](#) or [molested](#) more than 130 children in six different parishes in a career which spanned 30 years.

Two years after Law resigned from his position in Boston [Pope John Paul II](#) appointed him [Archpriest](#) of the [Basilica di Santa Maria Maggiore](#) in Rome in 2004. He resigned from this position upon reaching the age of 80 in November 2011 and died in Rome on December 20, 2017, at the age of 86. Similarly, ABC News reported March 2022 that 'An Argentine court has sentenced a Roman Catholic bishop to 4 1/2 years in prison for sexual abuse of two former seminarians in a major blow to Pope Francis, who had defended [Gustavo Zanchetta](#) following initial allegations. Anne Barrett Doyle, co-director of [BishopAccountability.org](#), which tracks clerical abuse cases, issued a statement saying the ruling is "a sign that even where the Catholic Church wields power, civil societies increasingly will not tolerate sexual abuse of young adults by powerful figures -- even if the accused is a Catholic bishop, and even if that bishop is supported by Pope Francis himself." While allegations against Zanchetta emerged "in or around 2015, Pope Francis has signalled continued support for the bishop and an unwillingness to believe the victims," she said. "Most troubling, the pope refused to cooperate with prosecutors' request for information. This is old-school clericalism, not the accountability we were promised." She noted that the pope reappointed Zanchetta to his Vatican post in June 2020 despite the criminal investigation in Argentina, "a public action that seemed almost defiant on Francis' part, signalling his disregard for the allegations and the young men who made them." Carlos Lombardi of the Network of Survivors of Ecclesiastical Abuse in Argentina — and a representative of victims in the case — said the sentence was "a strong blow" to the pope "because of the public defence he has made in this case...."

<sup>19</sup> **Encyclicals** A papal encyclical is one of the highest forms of communication by the pope and usually deals with some aspect of Catholic teaching — clarifying, amplifying, condemning, or promoting one or a number of issues. A papal encyclical historically is addressed to bishops and priests of a country or region or to all clergy.

<sup>21</sup> **Richard Nelson Williamson** is an English [Traditionalist bishop](#) who opposes the changes in the church brought about by the [Second Vatican Council](#). He was originally a member of the [Society of Saint Pius X](#) (SSPX).

In 1988, Williamson was one of four SSPX priests who were illicitly [ordained](#) as bishops by Archbishop [Marcel Lefebvre](#), for which Pope John Paul II declared had incurred *ipso facto* [automatic excommunication](#).<sup>[4]</sup> The [validity](#) of the excommunication has always been denied by the SSPX, who, citing canon law, argue that the consecrations were permissible due to a crisis in the Catholic Church. The excommunications, including that of Williamson, were lifted on 21 January 2009, but the suspension of the bishops from the exercise of ministry within the Catholic Church remained in force, with certain exceptions.<sup>1</sup> The exceptions were granted by Popes [Benedict XVI](#) and [Francis](#) as a way to foster dialogue and goodwill, and allow the priests limited ministry despite their [canonically irregular situation](#).<sup>[5]</sup>

<sup>22</sup> In just 100 days in 1994, about 800,000 people were slaughtered in **Rwanda** by ethnic Hutu extremists. They were targeting members of the minority Tutsi community, as well as their political opponents, irrespective of their ethnic origin. Even priests and nuns have been convicted of killing people, including some who sought shelter in churches. (BBC)

<sup>23</sup> **Condoms** In 2009 the Pope said condoms were sinful and not the answer to Africa's fight against HIV and Aids and could make the problem worse. He advocated abstinence and faithfulness in relationships. Despite the church's charitable assistance to sufferers of Aids in Africa an estimated 15 million people have died.

<sup>24</sup> **Remission of Sin** is the act of absolving or remitting sin by way of formal redemption as pronounced by a priest in the sacrament of penance, which is an action done in reparation for sin, with the intention of repairing the damage left by sin.

<sup>25</sup> Hitchens is referring here to **World Youth Day** (WYD) which was a Catholic youth festival from 15 July until 20 July 2008 in Sydney, Australia. Hitchens would not have been aware that disaffected Christians ran a case (*Vescio*) in the High Court at that time to argue federal funding of WYD was unconstitutional. The federal case did not proceed after two Catholic judges, both recipients of Honorary Doctorates from the Catholic University, and one of whom had served on the Independent Compensation Panel of the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne, said the case was not arguable with one judge dissenting.

<sup>26</sup> **Sale of Indulgences** The church outlawed the sale of indulgences in 1567 but charitable contributions, combined with other acts is encouraged. They were rekindled again in 2000 to address the issue of the declining number of Confessions with the aim of drawing people away from various forms of counselling which do not involve the concept of sin. Indulgences are a kind of heavenly bribe.

<sup>27</sup> **Byzantine** The Byzantine Empire, also referred to as the Eastern Roman Empire or Byzantium, was the continuation of the Roman Empire in its eastern provinces during Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, when its capital city was Constantinople, founded 330AD.

**Edited transcript by The Secular Association of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia, 2022.**



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