

Vatican Played Little Role as

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The Vatican played such a small role as peacemaker during World War II that the belligerents stopped passing peace feelers through the Holy See.

As the war moved into its fifth year, the Japanese apparently gave up any hope of using Pope Pius XII as a mediator of the separate peace Tokyo so desperately wanted between Germany and the Soviet Union. Japan wanted its German ally to concentrate its might against the United States and Great Britain, Tokyo's foes in the Pacific.

"A great many people think the Pope might do a lot to bring about peace but he will not broach the subject," Hiroshi Oshima, Japan's Ambassador to Berlin, radioed Tokyo in September 1943. "The Holy See doesn't wield as much weight as you might think and the Pope alone doesn't have as much influence in making peace as is generally thought."

Documents detailing what diplomats on both sides of the war thought about the Vatican's role have just been turned over to the National Archives. The documents are made up mostly of message traffic from Ja-

pan's diplomats in Europe whose codes were broken by the United States before America's entry into the war.

The documents make clear that the Vatican exercised little moral leadership during the war. It appears that the Pope was more concerned with the bombing of Italy and the collapse of the Germans on the Russian front than he was with bringing about peace.

When an American bombing raid killed Archbishop Montelletti of the province of Calabria, the Vatican demanded that the United States cease its bombing attacks. The villa where he was killed was draped with Italian and German flags, a clear sign that the Vatican was not as neutral as it said it was.

"The killing of the archbishop has infuriated the Pope," Ken Harada, Japan's envoy to the Vatican, radioed Tokyo in March 1943. "The Pope has once again told the Americans to stop bombing Italy."

Frequently, Papal Secretary of

State (Cardinal Maglione called in U.S. Ambassador Myron Taylor and demanded an end to what he called the "inhuman" bombing of Italian cities. Once, he pointedly asked Taylor if it was true that the U.S. planes were dropping explosive fountain pens that would go off when Italian children picked them up. Taylor told Maglione it was not true.

The mystique of the papacy even made the Germans wonder if the Pope had something to do with Italy's surrender to the Allies in 1943. But apparently the Vatican had absolutely nothing to do with it.

"Cardinal Maglione expressly denied that the Vatican had participated in the Italian armistice negotiations," Envoy Harada told Tokyo in September 1943, "and the Germans and ourselves are inclined to accept his statement."

Archbishop Francis Spellman of New York made a visit to the Vatican early in 1943 that fired rumors of a peace mission. But after interviewing Spellman, several diplomats told the

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Japanese that peace was not on Spellman's mind or the Pope's. Spellman ended up denying rumors that the Pope planned to move the Vatican to Rio de Janeiro because of the American bombing.

One reason for Spellman's visit to make the Pope feel more kindly toward the Russians, but Spellman apparently failed to sway him.

"I have heard that Spellman did his best to convince the Pope that there wasn't any danger that communism would become a problem after the war," envoy Harada told Tokyo, "but that a high Vatican spokesman told him, 'You Americans are certainly naive about communism.'"

Later, Harada said the Pope told Spellman he was upset at the way the United States and Great Britain seemed to be strengthening their ties to the Soviet Union.

Another time, the Pope told Harada personally of his fear of Soviet communism taking over Europe if Germany collapsed.

"The Papal State would dread see-

ing communism spread like wildfire over Europe after the war," Harada said after a February 1943 audience with the Pope. "I can perceive indications that they have begun to entertain less antagonism toward Germany than before."

In the early years of the war, the Vatican had poor relations with Germany because of Hitler's treatment of the Catholic Church and poor relations with Japan because of its mistreatment of the church in the Philippines.

But Vatican relations with both Axis powers improved later in the war. Mussolini told Hitler it was not good policy to antagonize the Vatican, and Japan's diplomats in Europe gave Tokyo the same advice.

One thing that disturbed the Pope was Japan's execution of American fliers shot down after bombing Tokyo for the first time.

Harada told Tokyo he convinced the Pope that the executions were just, in view of the "indiscriminate" way the American fliers dropped their bombs on "schools and hospitals."