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Vatican Is Reported To Have Furnished Aid to Fleeing Nazis

The following article is based on reporting by Ralph Blumenthal and E. J. Dionne Jr. and was written by Mr. Blumenthal.

Allegations of Vatican involvement in the escape of Nazi war criminals after World War II have emerged in statements by a French Nazi-hunter and a declassified State Department report.

According to Serge Klarsfeld, a Paris lawyer who has specialized in tracking down fugitive Nazis, Walter Rauff, a former SS colonel wanted for the mass gassing of Jews in mobile death vans, told in 1962 of having been given refuge in Vatican City convents for 18 months after the war.

Chile, which has harbored the 77-year-old Mr. Rauff for more than 25 years, is now facing growing demands for his expulsion. Yesterday Israel made a formal request to Chile for Mr. Rauff's extradition. And Simon Wiesenthal, the Vienna-based Nazi-hunter, and a Los Angeles institute affiliated with him said the State Department had recently taken an interest in the case.

The formerly top secret State Department report, dated 1947 and never officially made public, called the Vatican "the largest single organization involved in the illegal movement of emigrants," including Nazis. The report was obtained by a historian of the Holocaust, Charles R. Allen Jr. of Manhattan, who made it available to The New York Times.

The reported role of Roman Catholic Church officials in helping purported Nazi war criminals escape from Europe has long been the subject of controversy. Catholic officials and others have argued that even if some priests helped Nazis escape from Europe, there is no evidence that these priests acted with the support — or even the knowledge — of the Vatican.

The 1947 report, which was prepared by a Foreign Service officer in Rome, Vincent La Vista, said that "in countries where the church is a controlling or dominating factor, the Vatican has brought pressure to bear which has resulted in the foreign missions of those Latin American countries taking an attitude almost favoring the entry into their country of former Nazi and former Fascists or other political groups, so long as they are anti-Communist."

It also said "the justification of the Vatican for its participation in this illegal traffic is simply the propagation of the faith."

At the same time, according to other historical sources, Vatican relief groups were also helping many thousands of legitimate refugees.

'It's a Big Issue'

In Rome yesterday the Rev. Romeo Panciroli, the director of the Vatican press office, said he could not comment on the report, adding that he would reply only to a written request and that he would need "at least a couple of days" to consult Vatican archives before answering. "I wasn't here at the time and it's a big issue," he said. The Times will make a written request to Father Panciroli's office.

Last summer a Vatican spokesman in Rome, the Rev. Pierfranco Pastore, was reported as having dismissed as "absolutely absurd" an article in the magazine Reform Judaism written by Mr. Allen that was based on a copy of the State Department report. Father Pastore was quoted as having told The Associated Press: "It doesn't even merit a denial. Absolutely." But yesterday Father Pastore denied that he had made these comments "on the record" and said he could not comment publicly.

The report named a "notorious" smuggler of Nazis, Dr. Willi Nix, as one who operated under "the benevolent protection of the Vatican" and who "fled to the Vatican" minutes before he was to be apprehended by the Italian authorities. It went on to list the names of 22 clerics it linked to the illegal emigration. The report also documented an "underground railroad" by Jewish groups smuggling supporters to Palestine and other illegal emigration opera-

tions by Hungarians and Communist intelligence rings.

The National Archives has confirmed the authenticity of the report, but a State Department spokesman, Joseph W. Reap Jr., said he had no information on it.

The secretary of the new Papal Embassy in Washington, the Rev. Nicholas Halligan, said he was not familiar with the matter and could not comment.

Efforts to find Mr. La Vista were unavailing. State Department personnel and retirements offices said their records did not reflect any address for Mr. La Vista now. An organization of retired Foreign Service officers in Washington also said it had no record of him.

Lack of Information Noted

The Rev. Antonio Weber, who during World War II headed the Vatican's organization for emigration aid, Opera San Raffaele, said his office had helped many people, including some 20,000 Jews fleeing Hitler, without in many cases knowing their real identities.

"We didn't know if they were or weren't war criminals," Father Weber said in an interview. "Even if these war criminals came with their real names, who knew at the time they were war criminals? We could only believe what they told us."

As efforts stepped up to gain Mr. Rauff's expulsion from Chile, the Simon Wiesenthal Center of Yeshiva University in Los Angeles said it had sent a telegram to Elliott Abrams, Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights, calling for American pressure on the Chilean Government.

In Paris last week, Mr. Klarsfeld issued the text of a statement that Mr. Rauff made in December 1962 to the Supreme Court of Chile. Mr. Klarsfeld's wife, Beate, is in Santiago, the Chilean capital, seeking the extradition of Mr. Rauff so he can stand trial for war crimes in West Germany or Israel. Chile declined to extradite Mr. Rauff in 1963 on the ground that its statute of limitations on the crimes with which he was accused had expired.

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