

# Why The Nazis Persecuted Priests – by L.H. Lehmann



Polish priests and civilians at the Old Market in Bydgoszcz, Poland, held captive by German Nazis in 1939.

This article is from a PDF file on [LutheranLibrary.org](http://LutheranLibrary.org). It was published by The Converted Catholic Magazine. Leo Herbert Lehmann is a former Roman Catholic priest. The article addresses the question, "If the Vatican supported Hitler and the Nazi takeover of Europe, why were so many Catholic priests also persecuted?"

MANY have wondered why so many Polish Catholic priests were imprisoned by the Nazis, and Catholic propagandists in America have used this fact as proof that the Catholic church was not friendly to Hitler's regime. Even while these things were happening during the war, we found it very difficult to convince people that persecution of priests under Fascism and Nazism was actually the work of the Catholic Church itself, in collaboration with the Gestapo.

Proof of this is now coming to light. One of the first acts of the present government in Poland was to renounce the concordat between the Vatican and the former government of Poland, chiefly because the Vatican appointed German bishops in Poland to, force obedience of Polish Catholic priests to their Nazi rulers. Among these was Bishop Karl Maria Splett, who was brought to trial in Danzig on January 31 of this year, charged, according to the N. Y. Herald Tribune report, of February 2, with "collaborating with the Gestapo... and of causing many Polish priests to be sent to concentration camps." Later reports from Warsaw stated that Bishop Splett had been found guilty and sentenced to eight years imprisonment.

It should really surprise no one that Catholic church authorities should cooperate in persecuting its own priests and people if they refuse to fall in with its political plans as set by Rome. It was for this purpose that the Inquisition was established in days gone by. In our time, the Nazi Gestapo, with Catholic Heinrich Himmler at its head, was used instead. For the object of the Vatican's Concordats with the Axis dictators was, to wipe out all liberal groups within the Catholic church, as well as in the State, and thereby unite all of Europe under the authoritarian control of Pope and

dictators. Priests in Poland and other small countries naturally resented this and joined with their people in fighting for their country's independence, against both the Nazis in government affairs, and German bishops in church matters.

Catholics in America cannot understand this, and resent every criticism of Catholic church politics as religious intolerance. They will not believe that **the most bitter enemies of the Catholic hierarchy in European countries are not Protestants or Communists, but the Catholic people and priests themselves**, who have to fight their church's politics in self-defense. What confutes the issue still more is, that **here and there even some bishop or cardinal will fight the Vatican in defense of their people's rights**. This happened in Spain where a bishop and a cardinal opposed Franco and were ousted for so doing.

The full story of the fight within the Catholic church itself between the two warring factors of liberals and authoritarians may be seen in our book, [Behind the Dictators](#).