

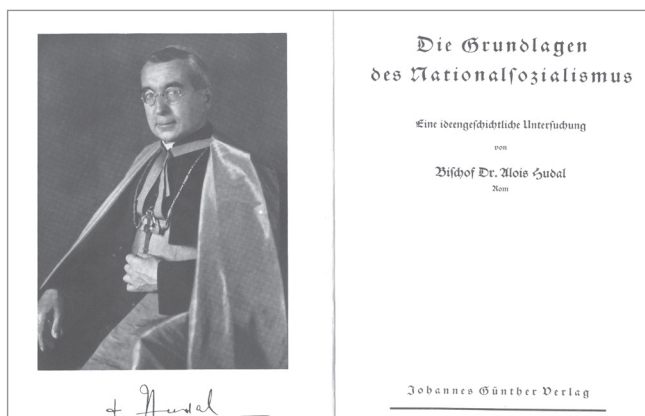
VWI invites the Institute for Contemporary History at the University of Vienna

Wednesday, 26 May 2021, 4.00 pm

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88638497285?pwd=emQ4RkZjV2NjdTJWOUxEcVdGcS9qUT09>

Gerald Steinacher

Forgive and Forget? Vatican Responses to the Nuremberg Trials and Denazification



The Austrian Catholic bishop Alois Hudal in his 1937-book *The Foundations of National Socialism*

The leadership of the Catholic Church, Pope Pius XII and his closest advisors, as well as many cardinals and bishops, were critical of the Nuremberg war crimes trials and denazification efforts after the Second World War. Their interventions ultimately culminated in demands for a general amnesty. The Vatican tried to derail many initiatives by the Allies, especially the Americans, to bring Nazi perpetrators to justice. Catholic institutions were even involved in channelling Nazi war criminals to safety overseas. Why did the Catholic Church leadership so vigorously oppose the punishment of war crimes through criminal justice? What alternatives did the Vatican and especially the Pope have in mind for dealing

with guilt and responsibility? In the immediate postwar period, many considered Pope Pius XII an outstanding moral authority, and the Catholic Church maintained a powerful position in Southern and Western Europe. Austria and Italy were predominantly Catholic, as was a substantial part of Germany. The position of the Catholic Church on the 'fair' punishment of crimes under the previous regimes is therefore particularly important for understanding these societies and the moral tenor of their time.

Commented by Linda Erker

Gerald J. Steinacher is a Senior Fellow at the VWI and the James A. Rawley Professor of History at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln. His research focusses on twentieth-century European History with an emphasis on the Holocaust, National Socialism, Italian fascism, and intelligence studies. He has published four books, edited ten, and written over seventy book chapters and journal articles on these topics, including *Nazis on the Run. How Hitler's Henchmen Fled Justice*, Oxford 2011, which was awarded a National Jewish Book Award by the Jewish Book Council in 2011.

Linda Erker is a historian based at the Institute for Contemporary History at the University of Vienna. Her research and teaching activities focus on the politics of memory and commemoration, ideological continuities in Austria beyond the ruptures of 1933/1938/1945, university history, scholarly migration to South America, and right-wing networks. Together with the VWI, she is organising a workshop in January 2022 entitled "Nazis and Nazi Sympathisers in South America after 1945. Careers and Networks in their Destination Countries".