

Background: Joseph Goebbels once said that making propaganda was easy when you were winning. It certainly was easy for the Nazis to make propaganda in 1939 and 1940, when victories were everywhere. By 1944, things were different. This interesting article appeared in June, 1944, just after Rome had fallen to the Allies. It was published in *Berlin Rom Tokio*, a magazine intended to build good relations between the citizens of the three leading Axis powers. Somehow, the loss of Rome turns out to be proof of German superiority.

The source: "Rom," *Berlin Rom Tokio. Monatschrift für die Vertiefung der kulturellen Beziehungen der Völker des weltpolitischen Dreiecks*, VI (June, 1944), pp. 2-3.

Rome

The enemy marched through the gates of Rome in the 58th month of the Second World War. The gates stood wide open. They were as unscathed as the bridges over the Tiber outside the walls of the Eternal City. The city was given up without a fight. At the Führer's order, the city was demilitarized in March. At the Führer's order, Field Marshall Kesselring declared it an open city at the beginning of June. The enemy paid as little heed to the demilitarization of Rome as it did to the German willingness to leave the city without a battle. It replied to the first measure by continuing air attacks that dropped bombs in the center of the city, the Vatican. In the second case, the enemy saw a cheap opportunity to attack the retreating German troops. They obeyed the order not to fire while the enemy sought to cut off their withdrawal. For several hours Rome's suburbs were filled with the sound of machine gun fire. That revealed the ambush that the enemy tried to gain from the noble German gesture. Even in defense the Germans refused to use heavy weapons inside the city. Even in defense German soldiers held the sanctity of Rome above the defense of their own lives. Never before in history had an army withdrawn from a great city in such a way. Certainly Rome had never experienced the like of what happened in June 1944. The German soldier did not loot Rome or burn it down or use it as a defensive fortification. He saved it. He preserved it for the world, and thus gave the world a gift. Thanks to his self-denial, Rome remains what it always was: the history of Christian civilization and Western culture in stone, the most splendid monument to the European spirit, the union of Latin genius with the creative force of Germandom.

The enemy did not understand the gesture that led to the withdrawal from Rome without a battle. He saw it as a trick at best, concealing military necessity. The trick is an Anglo-Saxon concept. There is no German word for it, since the very concept is foreign to the German way of thinking. The withdrawal from Rome concealed nothing. The front south of Rome could no longer be held in the face of the enemy's overpowering strength, though it had held far longer than anyone had expected. Traitors attempted to bring the enemy into Rome on 25 June 1943 by deposing the Duce and defeating Fascism from within. The landing a few weeks later in Salerno and the betrayal of the German ally was an attempt to take Rome itself. It failed, just as the enemy's plan to celebrate Christmas 1943 in Rome failed. Rome's Easter bells did not sound for them either. The withdrawal did not happen at Pentecost. The fate of the city waited until June 1944. It would have been easy to make second Madrid of Rome. The siege of Madrid made it clear how a capable defense of an enormous sea of buildings can form an unbreakable wall against an attacker. The ancient walls of Rome are no poorer defense than the confusion of buildings at the edge of Madrid or the concrete blocks of factories in Stalingrad. It was a great temptation to defend Rome. The Allied advance could have been halted for weeks, probably even months. The decision not to defend it is no

evidence of defeat, but rather of sacrifice, and one of the hardest that the German leadership has made during this war.

Why was it necessary to make this sacrifice? In nations where one admires the decision, instead of disparaging it like the enemy, the saving of Rome may be seen as an expression of German sentimentality. We prefer another word: a consciousness of history. For centuries the German Reich was called the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation. The German Kaisers were Roman emperors. The greatest Germans strove after the honor. The world held its breath when Franz I laid down the crown, so far-reaching was his decision. Did it not represent the rejection of an historical mission of the Reich to give Europe a strong center against its enemies to the West and the East? The dualism between emperor and pope is evident throughout German history. The German Kaiser saw himself as the supreme defender of Christianity. He was the Roman emperor, and the glory of this title far exceeded any other title Europe had to offer. The "most Christian" kings of France strove in vain to win it. The Roman emperor, at the same time the German king, was the leading noble of the world. When the German Kaiser traveled to Rome, it was an event of deep political symbolism. Often imperial troops relieved the city of the popes, freeing the church state from countless difficulties, lifting the Holy City from the rule of power-hungry popes to the possession of all Christian peoples. Only the Reich was able to assure Rome's independence, without which it could never have retained its position as the center of Christianity. Its real mission was always endangered when it came under the influence of European rulers, whether the Kings of France or Spain, or later Napoleon. The removal of the papacy to Avignon showed what became of Rome when the popes were trapped in a web of politics that was aimed against the Reich, or when the Kaiser's power was insufficient to protect Rome. For centuries Rome was part of the Reich, its leaders nobles of the Reich. For centuries German thinking determined Roman form, and the Eternal City received its creative impulse from German pilgrims. In modern times, Goethe and Winkelmann, Mommsen and Gregorovius and many other Germans have left their names in the honor roll of Roman history.

The experience of Rome is an inexhaustible subject of German literature. It must be distinguished on the one hand from the pilgrimages of Catholics and from the "sight seeing" of Anglo-Saxons on the other. Meeting Rome is one of the decisive experiences of life for a German. This city like no other, despite its apparently great differences from the German nature, gives insights into its depths.

Fascism's thinking was quickly understood in Germany because it was a Roman idea. Rome also influenced German history. No one understood that better than the man who founded Fascism, Benito Mussolini. His love for German philosophy brought together the Roman and the German spirit. Such mutual recognition brought together Roman Fascism and German National Socialism into a movement with a common spirit for European renewal. It led to that political alliance called the Berlin-Rome Axis, which in the end is nothing other than the new form of the ancient relationship between the centers of German strength and government north of the Alps with the rich world of the Roman-Latin spirit south of the mountains.

The relationship between north and south, between Berlin and Rome, between National Socialism and Fascism is as alive today as ever. The fact that Rome has fallen into the hands of the enemy changes nothing. This fact is temporary, as temporary as the occupation of Rome by the Bourbon armies of Spain and France, or by Napoleon's army. Many of Rome's symbols in stone, its relics and treasures, will be sent abroad. It was no different in the past. Some voices in the USA suggest that pope be brought to Chicago, as he was once taken to Avignon. But the nature of Rome, its timeless significance for us Germans, will not change. The enemy would have attacked Rome to destroy it. There is no doubt of that. German troops gave it up to preserve it. The world gives its thanks. Even the enemy, to his embarrassment, must grant the fact.

Rome is both a spiritual a moral concept. It represents the important things for which we are fighting. It is firmly anchored in our hearts. This will remain so even if the English and the Americans and their white and colored lackeys defile the city of Roman popes and German emperors. The concept of Rome represents order and justice, freedom and faith, beauty and occidental humanity. It stands for the right of all peoples, large or small, to have their place in the sun.

Just as Berlin lives, though covered with soot, Rome lives, too, although the enemy is within its walls. Rooted in the hearts of the German and Italian peoples, it will live in the heart of the world that they will renew.