

When the Pope Tried to Kill Hitler

Church of Spies: The Pope's Secret War Against Hitler

by Mark Riebling

Basic Books, New York, 2015

375 pages, \$29.99.

Ronald J. Rychlak

Pope Pius XII and the Nazis: far too many writers have wandered into this fascinating subject without bringing anything new to the table. Many of the late pope's critics have simply repeated information that appeared in already discredited books and articles, but even some supporters have done little more than parrot earlier accounts. Thus, as one who has read almost all of the books on the topic, I approached Mark Riebling's *Church of Spies* cautiously.

The first chapter seemed promising as it covered the outbreak of World War II and the new pope's first encyclical, *Summi Pontifictus* and its striking condemnation of racism. Unlike many other writers, Riebling acknowledged Pius XII's profound and express statement that there was no room for distinction between Gentiles and Jews in the Catholic Church. That was good, but Riebling also wrote about the perception that Pius was insufficiently outspoken and the problems that created between Catholics and Jews. It looked like the book might go either way, but then Riebling came out with a line that smacks the reader upside the head: "The last day during the war when Pius publicly said the word 'Jew' is also, in fact, the first day history can document his choice to help kill Adolf Hitler." Fasten your seatbelt; you're in for one heck of a ride.

It has long been known that the pope tipped off the Allies

about at least one planned coup attempt and certain German troop movements, and other writers have noted that Pius was involved on the periphery with efforts to topple Hitler. Riebling, however, uses documents from German, Italian, Vatican, and other archives to prove that rather than being on the periphery, Pius was deeply involved in the various plots to assassinate Hitler.

The assassination plot began inside the German high command in August 1939. Hitler had already ordered the extermination of those who were mentally or physically defective, he had begun his war against the Jews, and he was just days away from invading Poland. He called together his top generals and admirals to brace them for the invasion, which would be carried out with "merciless severity." The Führer, who saw Catholicism as incompatible with Nazism and particularly hated Pope Pius XII, capped off his talk by saying that he would "snuff out the least flicker of Polish strength by liquidating thousands of Catholic priests."

The head of German military intelligence, Admiral Wilhelm Canaris, had once admired Hitler. A year earlier, however, he became disillusioned when

Hitler began turning ferociously on Germany's own citizens, including some German officers. Although he was a Protestant, extermination of Catholic priests was the final straw. Canaris already had a small circle of like-minded friends. Now they made the fateful decision to depose Hitler, even if they had to kill him.

The logistics of any coup would be complicated enough, but the Canaris group was also concerned about how the Allies would respond. They did not want to see a repeat of the Treaty of Versailles, the harshness of which had assisted Hitler's ascendance to power. They needed to communicate and coordinate with the Allies.

The question was how to make contact with Allied leadership.

Canaris determined that the only person with sufficient prestige and freedom to act was the pope. Canaris had known the future pope as a Vatican diplomat in Germany back in the 1920s. He knew about Pius XII's many talents and his utter disdain for Hitler. He just needed someone to help him make contact.

Munich attorney Josef Müller was a war hero and devout Catholic who had represented the Church against the Reich in legal matters. Riebling described him as "part Oskar Schindler, part Vito Corleone." In 1934, Müller survived a beating and interrogation at the hands of SS Commander Heinrich Himmler, who asked the lawyer about a controversy that had taken place in Bavaria. Without apology, Müller admitted that he had advised the Bavarian prime minister to have Himmler killed. Impressed by his courage, Himmler invited Müller to join the SS. Müller replied: "I am philosophically opposed to you. I am a practicing Catholic, and my brother is a Catholic priest. Where could I find the possibility of compromise there?" Himmler appreciated this "manly defense," and let the lawyer go. This made Müller somewhat of a legend even among Hitler loyalists.

Riebling introduces Müller in the prologue to *Church of Spies*. He is in leg irons at Flossenbürg concentration camp in 1945, hands tied behind his back, and forced to "eat his food like a dog from a plate on the floor." On the next page, he is being led to the gallows. The chapters that follow explain how and why he got there.

In addition to being an attorney, Müller was a pilot, and he often traveled to Rome on business. So, in 1939, when the conspirators tapped him as their messenger, his trips did not draw undue attention. For his first mission, German intelligence gave him a dossier of Nazi atrocities in Poland. He flew to Rome and asked the pontiff's top assistants whether Pius would be willing to contact the British government and ask for support.

Not only did Pius XII agree to assist the conspirators, saying "the German opposition must be heard," he also mobilized Catholic religious orders, especially the Jesuits and Dominicans. These orders did not report to local bishops, who might be susceptible to Nazi pressure, but to leaders of their orders, who reported directly to the pope. The head of the Jesuits in Northern Germany, Augustin Rösch, had been battling the Gestapo since well before World War II, and he became the driving force behind the pope's team in Germany. Rösch linked his group with the military intelligence unit headed by Canaris and worked on planning the coup.

Müller also built a spy network among "army, college, and law-school friends with access to Nazi officials—a community of the well-informed, who worked in newspapers, banks, and even ... the SS itself." His office soon became a clearinghouse of information for the Vatican.

The issue of a political assassination, even of Hitler, raised many questions. Riebling, however, explained that: "Over the centuries, Catholic theologians had developed a nuanced doctrine of tyrannicide, covering virtually every conceivable context." After peaceful means had been exhausted, the assassination of a tyrant could be justified if it would improve conditions in a subjugated nation without sparking a civil war. Unfortunately, Lutheran and Calvinist generals were tied to a Protestant theory of state authority, and they had a much harder time justifying such an action.

Although initially suspicious, British Foreign Secretary Lord Halifax and Francis D'Arcy Osborne, British ambassador to the Holy See, were won over by the pope's personal intervention. They would negotiate with "The Decent Germany" if Hitler could be removed. Unfortunately, there were many doubts in high British circles, and the Allies failed to take advantage of much reliable information.

The plotters organized several attempts on Hitler's life, but

he had “the luck of the devil,” surviving repeated assassination attempts. He canceled speeches without knowing that snipers were in position and ready to take him out. He missed parades where bombs were set to explode. Plotters attempted to kill him by blowing up his plane, but the bomb didn’t go off. By shifting a meeting from a concrete bunker to a wooden barracks, Hitler evaded another attempt, memorialized in the movie *Valkyrie*.

Resistance to the Führer at home began to melt away after his military victories in Belgium, the Netherlands, Norway, and France. Outside of Germany, others began to lose patience with the conspirators. Upon becoming prime minister, Winston Churchill put no faith in “decent Germans” taking out Hitler.

German military intelligence eventually learned about Müller’s work with the pope and brought him in for questioning. The lawyer was shocked when they asked him to work with them against Hitler. They gave him a cover story. He was to be a German operative using his contacts with the Vatican to spy on Italians. He would do this by posing as a conspirator seeking out Italians who might rally against Mussolini. “Müller would advance the war effort by pretending to talk peace,” explained Riebling. “But he would only be pretending to be pretending.” He actually was the anti-Axis plotter that he was pretending to be. Müller, of course, informed the Vatican of what was going on. It dramatically escalated the risk and potential reward of the pope’s work with Müller.

At this point, Vatican officials introduced the German lawyer to the concept of *Disciplina Arcani*—the “way of secrecy.” Those involved in the Vatican spy ring developed code names. Müller was known as “Herr X,” and Pius XII was called “the Chief.” Some high security meetings were held in the most secure place possible, excavation sites under Vatican City.

Plotters from Germany’s intelligence services asked “the Chief” to keep quiet: “Singling out the Nazis,” one later

explained, “would have made the German Catholics even more suspected than they were and would have restricted their freedom of action in their work of resistance.” Explaining this to a French diplomat, Pius once said: “You know which side my sympathies lie. But I cannot say so.”

In 1943, as the SS narrowed its focus, a member of German intelligence finally revealed the names of the conspirators. Müller’s dramatic flights across the Alps came to an end, and the Gestapo found his secret files, including the conditions that the plotters had established to kill Hitler, which were printed on Vatican letterhead. This sent Müller into Dachau for the remainder of the war.

When Mussolini was ousted in July 1943, Hitler ordered a division of paratroopers to the borders of St. Peter’s Square. “On one side stood German soldiers in black boots and steel helmets, with carbines on their shoulders and Lugers on their hips. On the other side were the Pope’s Swiss Guards, in ruffled tunics and plumed hats, holding medieval pikes in white gloves.” Fortunately, Hitler’s advisors talked him out of an immediate invasion, though Hitler vowed to finish the job after the war.

Hitler ultimately avoided assassination and died by his own hand, but not before the SS tracked down the resistance. The SS interrogated conspirators, tortured them, and executed or sent them to concentration camps. Some were subjected to show trials before being publicly executed.

Church of Spies reads so well that one is inclined not to reveal what happened to Müller and Rösch (spoiler alert: it’s not as bad as the prologue might suggest). In fact, that aspect of *Church of Spies*, involving multiple death sentences, paperwork problems, and well-timed favors, could be a book unto itself.

Church of Spies reads like an adventure novel, but it is

documented history. It explains the virtually universal perception of Pius XII during and after the war as a staunch opponent of the Nazis and defender of the Jews. It also reveals Moscow's perception that Pius was anti-Soviet, which certainly could account for the post-war assault on his reputation. It's a great read and an enormously important book.

Tribute to Pope Pius XII

Sister Margherita Marchione

November 2008

The career of Eugenio Pacelli ended when people were awakened in Rome soon after dawn, Thursday the 9th of October 1958. Pius XII died at 3:51 a.m., in a plain white iron bed, overhung with a white canopy, in his room on the second floor of the Papal villa in Castelgandolfo, his summer residence.

During the hours he lay in state in Castelgandolfo, mourners filled the main square in front of the building as well as roads leading from the countryside.

The Italian Government ordered three days of national mourning in Rome. Not only were Italian flags at half-staff, but all theatres and amusement places were closed.

A motorcade proceeded along the Appian Way. Pius XII's body was taken first to the Basilica of St. John Lateran, the Pope's titular church in his capacity as Bishop of Rome. Then it was taken in solemn procession to the Vatican where he laid in state for three days under Michelangelo's gigantic dome in the Basilica of St Peter.

Deep emotion was evident and many shed tears as mourners passed near Pope Pius XII's corpse. People of all races knelt in prayer. Nine solemn funeral Masses were sung in St Peter's Basilica. On the 13th, the doors were closed at noon to prepare for the funeral ceremonies which began at 4 p.m. Diplomats accredited to the Holy See and representatives from governments around the world were present, as well as his family and Sister Pascalina, who served him for forty years. A final tribute was read and buried with Pius XII: "With his death a great light went out on earth and a new star was lit in heaven."

Fifty years later, in spite of five decades of misinformation and calumny, Catholics throughout the world continue to venerate Pius XII whose efforts during World War II saved thousands of Jews from the Holocaust.

Pius XII was not a "silent pope." He explicitly condemned the "wickedness of Hitler" citing Hitler by name, and spoke out about the "fundamental rights of Jews." The wisdom of his words and actions is supported by the evidence. In his testimony at the Adolf Eichmann Nazi War Crime Trials, Jewish scholar Jeno Levai stated: "Pius XII—the one person who did more than anyone else to halt the dreadful crime and alleviate its consequences—is today made the scapegoat for the failures of others."

Pope Pius XII's peace efforts, his denunciation of Nazism and his defense of the Jewish people have been clearly documented. Albert Einstein concluded in *Time* magazine (December 23, 1940): "Only the Church stood squarely across the path of Hitler's campaign for suppressing the truth." Countless expressions of gratitude, on the part of Jewish chaplains and Holocaust survivors, give witness to the assistance and compassion of the Pope for the Jews before, during and after the Holocaust.

Rabbi David Dalin states that "to deny the legitimacy of their

collective gratitude to Pius XII is tantamount to denying their memory and experience of the Holocaust itself, as well as to denying the credibility of their personal testimony and judgment about the Pope's role in rescuing hundreds of thousands of Jews from certain death at the hands of the Nazis."

Personally and through his representatives, Pius XII employed all the means at his disposal to save Jews and other refugees during World War II. As a moral leader and a diplomat forced to limit his words, he privately took action and, despite insurmountable obstacles, saved hundreds of thousands of Jews from the gas chambers. Broadcasting in German in April 1943, Vatican Radio protested a long list of Nazi horrors, including "an unprecedented enslavement of human freedom, the deportation of thousands for forced labor, and the killing of innocent and guilty alike."

Throughout World War II, Pius XII so provoked the Nazis that they called him "a mouthpiece of the Jewish war criminals." Jewish historian and Holocaust survivor, Michael Tagliacozzo, wrote a letter to the daily newspaper *Davar* (Tel Aviv, April 23, 1985) which states: "Little known is the precious help of the Holy See. On the recommendation of Pius XII the religious of every order did their best to save Jews."

All experts who witnessed that era agree that if Pius XII had stridently attacked the Nazi leaders, more lives would have been lost. Fifty years later, I interviewed Carlo Sestieri, a Jewish survivor, who was hidden in the Vatican. In a letter to me he suggested that "only the Jews who were persecuted understand why the Holy Father could not publicly denounce the Nazi-Fascist government. Without doubt—he stated—it helped avoid worse disasters."

Pius XII's virtuous life speaks for itself. On December 13, 1954, a picture story entitled "Years of a Great Pope," appeared in *Life* magazine. The author states that Pius XII was

deserving of the title “Great Pope” because he sought “peace for the world and the spirit” during World War II.

He was truly a “Great Pope,” and it is high time everyone gave him his due.

Sister Margherita Marchione is the author of many books and articles on Pope Pius XII. She is one of the world’s foremost authorities on the subject.

Remembering a Catholic Heroine

Dr. Richard C. Lukas

November 2008

Most people had never heard of the tiny, blue-eyed lady until she passed away at ninety-eight years of age in Warsaw on May 12, 2008. Those who were aware of her inspiring story knew that she was a moral giant.

Irena Sendler had been raised a Roman Catholic by a father who taught her to respond to the needs of the poor and oppressed. “When someone is drowning,” he said, “extend a helping hand.” He practiced what he preached. At the risk of his own life, he treated poor Jews and Poles in the town of Otwock for Typhus when other physicians refused to do so. He died of the disease in 1917.

When the Germans defeated and occupied Poland in 1939, they forbade Polish welfare assistance to Jews who were locked up in ghettos and separated from gentiles. In the Warsaw Ghetto, malnutrition, disease, lack of medical assistance and

overcrowding took the grim toll of 5,000 lives every day. There weren't enough gravediggers to keep up with the corpses.

Despite the fact that Poland was the only German-occupied country where aiding a Jew carried the death penalty, Sendler risked her life to help Jews.

She headed the Children's Bureau of Zegota, the code name for the Rada Pomocy Zydom (Council for Aid to Jews), an underground organization that the Poles established exclusively to aid Jews. This group was provided with funds mostly from the Polish government, forced into exile in Great Britain by the German invasion.

Sendler witnessed the special hell the Nazis created for the Jews. "The worst [hell] was the fate of the children, the most vulnerable human beings," she said. Disguised as sanitation workers from the city of Warsaw, she and her close associate, Irena Schultz, entered the Warsaw Ghetto to rescue Jewish children from certain death.

There were four ways to exit the ghetto, all of them dangerous for the children and their rescuers. Two of them included escorting the children through a labyrinth of cellars of buildings on both sides of the ghetto and through the corridors of the Polish Court that straddled the ghetto and Warsaw itself. Another way was to get older children to a tram station near the ghetto, where a member of Zegota drove them to safety. The fourth method was by an ambulance, also driven by a Zegota operative, who took the children out of the ghetto in gunnysacks, body bags and even in coffins. Sometimes, children had to be drugged to stifle their sad cries.

Once outside the ghetto, countless numbers of altruistic Poles helped to make Sendler's operation a success. "I couldn't have done it alone," Irena admitted, observing that it took ten Poles to save one Jewish child. Some people provided temporary safehouses, others more permanent homes for the children. When

German suspicions were aroused about a family, Zegota had to move the Jewish child to another home. One Jewish boy had to be moved so often that he tearfully asked Irena, "How many mothers is it possible to have because I'm going to my thirty-second one."

Sendler's incredible operation resulted in saving approximately 2,500 Jewish children, few of whom even knew Irena's name because she, like other Zegota members, used a nom de guerre. Sendler's was "Jolanta."

Sendler had written the names of her rescued children on narrow pieces of tissue paper. She kept them in a bundle near her bed at night, intending to throw it out the window to a garden below if the Gestapo paid an unexpected visit. But on the night of October 20, 1943, the Gestapo suddenly burst into her apartment before she had the chance to throw the list of names out the window. She managed to throw the list to her friend, who was visiting her that evening. She had the wit to hide the incriminating information in her undergarments.

Imprisoned and beaten at the infamous Pawiak Prison, where hundreds of Poles had died, she refused to reveal anything to the Gestapo. Thanks to a well-placed bribe by Zegota, a Gestapo officer freed Irena on the way to her execution. She went underground, retrieved the list of names, and buried it in a bottle under an apple tree in a friend's garden. She dug up the list after the war and gave it to the Jewish Committee, which took charge of the children.

Because of the hostility of the postwar Communist regime toward any person or group which had been involved in the pro-western and anti-Communist Polish Underground, Sendler's story remained largely unknown until the 1980's and 1990's, when Poland became a democracy. Many belated honors came to her, including a Nobel Peace Prize nomination in 2007.

Irena Sendler deserves an historian and a filmmaker such as

Spielberg to tell us her compelling story of sacrifice and courage. We desperately need her and other exemplars of good to teach all of us about goodness. Irena Sendler not only saved Jewish children but also humanity's soul.

Dr. Richard C. Lukas is a retired professor of history. He has taught at universities in Florida, Ohio and Tennessee and is the author of eight books. Two of his most acclaimed books are: The Forgotten Holocaust and Did the Children Cry?

Pope Pius XII: 50th Anniversary of His Death

ad published in the New York Times

October 9, 2008

On page 11 of *Catalyst*, we reproduced the [ad](#) honoring the legacy of Pope Pius XII on the 50th anniversary of his death; this ad appeared in the October 9 edition of the *New York Times*.

Pius XII, John XII, and the Newly-Opened Archives

Ronald J. Rychlak

(Catalyst, 3/2007)

Eugenio Pacelli became Pope Pius XII in 1939, after having spent nine years as Cardinal Secretary of State. Prior to that, he had been the Vatican's representative in Germany. During his lifetime, Pius XII's opposition to Hitler was well known. Nazis condemned him, Jews thanked him, and rescuers identified him as their inspiration. More recently, however, some writers have raised questions about how actively he opposed the Nazis. One even dubbed him "Hitler's Pope."

Critics often claim that the Vatican is hiding evidence of the Pope's activities during the Holocaust because, like most nations, the Holy See keeps diplomatic records sealed for a number of years. This respects the confidentiality of people who are still living, protects state secrets, and gives archivists time to index and catalog documents. The Vatican has, however, tried to accommodate the researchers.

In the 1960s, Pope Paul VI appointed a team of four Jesuits to cull through the archives for relevant documents from the Holocaust era. By 1980, they had produced and made public 11 thick volumes of documents. This did not satisfy the critics, because the actual archives containing post-1922 documents remained closed to outsiders.

In 2003, some archives from the years 1922-1939 were opened, and in 2006 more were opened. These archives cover the years during which the Nazis came to power and during which the future Pope Pius XII was very involved in German-Vatican diplomacy. Even though these archives (not to mention the 11 volumes prepared by the Jesuits) have not been fully mined, many researches, some with personal agendas, continue to clamor for more access.

Recently, 35 such researchers petitioned the Vatican to open all Holocaust-era archives. One of the petitioners, Seymour Reich, wrote to *Jewish Week* complaining that the beatification of Pius XII before all archives were open would cause "serious problems with the Jewish community's attitude toward the

Vatican.”

One wonders whether these petitioners are aware of the new archival evidence. One piece of recently discovered evidence is a letter written in 1923, when Hitler was just emerging as a force within Germany, in which papal representative Pacelli reports that “followers of Hitler” are persecuting Jews and Catholics. The future Pope refers negatively to this group (not yet known as Nazis) as “right-wing radicals.” He also praises the “learned and zealous” Cardinal Archbishop Michael Faulhaber of Munich whom the radicals attacked because he “had denounced the persecutions against the Jews.”

It had long been known that philosopher Edith Stein (recently canonized as St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross) wrote to Pope Pius XI in 1933 concerning the Nazis and their treatment of Jews. The precise words she used, however, were not known. It had been assumed that she asked for an encyclical—a formal papal document—condemning Naziism. It turns out there was no such request.

The *reply* letter to Stein, which was not seen until the new archives were opened, came from Secretary of State Pacelli. The future Pius XII assured Stein that the Vatican shared her concerns and that the Church would ultimately score a “final victory” over Nazism. The newly opened archives also show that even *before Stein sent her letter to Rome*, the Vatican had instructed its representative in Berlin to intervene with the German government on behalf of the Jews. Upon reviewing these documents, CNN’s Vatican correspondent concluded that its release “resolves a historical debate in favor of the Vatican’s position.”

An event that took place in 2003 shows why the Vatican is so concerned about archiving and indexing the documents. Shortly after new archives were opened, an Italian newspaper, *La Repubblica*, claimed that a 1934 letter had been found in which a Jesuit priest named Friederich Muckermann accused Secretary

of State Pacelli of collaboration with the Nazis. The paper reprinted what it claimed was the actual letter.

After reading the article, officials from the Congregation For the Causes of Saints called the reporter to find out where he got his information. The reporter had not seen the letter; it had been read to him over the phone by a researcher who had been given access to the archives. Vatican officials pulled the files that the researcher had been using. Not long thereafter, they found the original letter.

As printed in the newspaper the letter was about 550 words long. The letter Fr. Muckermann wrote, however, was almost three times that long. The newspaper had changed words ("unjust" charges against the Holy See were published as "just" charges) and omitted entire passages ("The whole world knows that the German Bishops have done much" against Hitler) without any indication that the letter had been edited. Obviously, someone wanted to cast the Church in a bad light, and sloppy reporting let that happen. Fortunately, the Vatican was able to issue a correction not long after the story was first published *precisely because of the care it had taken with the archives.*

A similar mistranslation hit the press in 2005, when the *New York Times* ran an article based on an unsigned document, not on Vatican letterhead and in the wrong language, that reportedly had been found in a Paris archive. According to the *Times*, this was a directive from Pius XII instructing Catholics who had taken Jewish children into their households during the Nazi occupation. Supposedly, the Pope told these rescuers not to return the children to their parents if the youngsters had been baptized.

Within a week, thanks again to careful archiving, the Pope's original instruction was found, and it was quite different from the news reports. The Pope actually said that Catholic parents had an on-going duty to the Jewish families. They were

instructed not to dump these children on the first charity group that approached them. They should, of course, return the children to their parents.

The current charge is that Angelo Roncalli, the future Pope John XXIII, was critical of Pius XII because he did not assist Roncalli's efforts on behalf of Turkish Jews. This is not new. As early as 1968, there were several false charges that John was a critic of Pius. Archbishop Loris Capovilla, John's private secretary, has expressly answered this claim:

With regard to the actions in favor of the Jews, affected particularly in Istanbul in the years 1935-1944, which was recognized and praised by Hebrew communities in Jerusalem, Istanbul, and the United States, it is obligatory to recognize that Roncalli was and declared himself the executor of the thought and the directives of Pius XII. He repeated, in fact "The papal representative is the eye, the ear, the mouth, the heart and the effective hand of the Pope."

Capovilla said that Roncalli's rescue efforts on behalf of Jews make sense "only if they are referred above everything else to Pius XII, of whom Roncalli was the careful and most faithful interpreter. Any strictly personal action, even though it be heroic, of Roncalli himself, would otherwise be inconceivable."

Throughout his life, John praised Pius. Before he was made Pope, John was offered thanks for his wartime efforts to save Jewish refugees. He replied: "In all these painful matters I have referred to the Holy See and simply carried out [Pius XII's] orders—first and foremost to save human lives." When Pius died, the future John XXIII said that Pius had been like a "public fountain" pouring forth good waters at which all the world, great and lowly, could profitably drink. As one reporter of the times wrote: "In the autumn of 1958 the world showed little doubt that one of its great ones had departed, and none showed less doubt than Angelo Roncalli."

As Pope, John prayed monthly before Pius XII's tomb and even considered taking the name "Pius XIII." One of the first things he did upon becoming Pope was to place a photo of Pius XII on his desk. He also had his predecessor's photograph published with a prayer on the back asking for his canonization. The prayer called Pius "a fearless defender of the Faith, a courageous struggler for justice and peace... a shining model of charity and of every virtue." A million of these cards were soon in circulation.

In his first Christmas broadcast, Pope John said that Pius XII's doctrinal and pastoral teaching "assure a place in posterity for the name of Pius XII. Even apart from any official declaration, which would be premature, the triple title of 'Most excellent Doctor, Light of Holy Church, Lover of the divine law' evokes the sacred memory of this pontiff in whom our times were blessed indeed." It should be noted that only a saint can be declared a Doctor of the Church.

It is true that some archives remains sealed, and historians do not have all of the evidence. At the same time, the evidence that we already have shows conclusively that Pope Pius XII intervened frequently; encouraged rescue efforts; and tried to comfort all victims, including persecuted Jews. During and after the war Pius XII's efforts were recognized by virtually everyone. As more archives are opened, after they have been properly cataloged and indexed, we can be confident that the reputation that he once enjoyed—as a firm opponent of the Nazis—will be reconfirmed. Catholics should all take pride in knowing that Pope Pius XII stood tall in a time of great difficulty.

Ronald J. Rychlak is the MDLA Professor of Law and Associate Dean for Academic Affairs at the University of Mississippi. He is the author of Hitler, the War, and the Pope (Our Sunday Visitor Press) and Righteous Gentiles: How Pius XII and the Catholic Church Saved Half a Million Jews from the Nazis (Spence Publishing).

Pius XII and Yad Vashem

by Sister Margherita Marchione, Ph.D.

(Catalyst 10/2006)

Sister Margherita Marchione is the author of several books on Pope Pius XII, the latest being Crusade of Charity: Pius XII And POW's 1939-1945.

Below the portrait of Pope Pius XII in the Israeli Holocaust Memorial, Yad Vashem, there is a statement which is contrary to the truth and is unjust. It must be repudiated. I contacted the director of Yad Vashem and asked him to consider the efforts of the Pope who helped save hundreds of thousands of Jews and other victims of the Nazis. But will Yad Vashem at least correct the errors beneath his photo?

The statement includes:

"Pius XII's reaction toward the killing of Jews during the period of the Holocaust is controversial. In 1933, as the Vatican Secretary of State, in order to maintain the rights of the Church in Germany, he signed a Concordat with the Nazi regime even at the price of recognizing the racist Nazi regime. When he was elected Pope in 1939, he put aside an encyclical against racism and anti-Semitism prepared by his predecessor."

● *Pius XII wrote his own encyclical, "Summi Pontificatus," which did deal with racism.*

"Although reports about the assassination of Jews reached the Vatican, the Pope did not protest either by speaking out or in writing."

● *This is not true. Whenever Pius XII spoke out, there was immediate retaliation by the Nazis. There were more than 60 protests!*

“In December of 1942, he did not participate in the condemnation by members of the Allies regarding the killing of Jews. Even when the Jews were being deported from Rome to Auschwitz, the Pope did not intervene.”

● *The Pope did indeed intervene. After that first day, the SS were ordered to stop the deportation of the Jews in Rome.*

“He maintained a neutral position except toward the end of the war when he appealed on behalf of the government of Hungary and of Slovakia. His silence and the absence of directives obliged the clergy in Europe to decide independently how they should behave toward the persecuted Jews.”

● *This is not true. Members of the Church were ordered to protect all refugees and Jews.*

Pius XII's sanctity has been recorded. There are many volumes of depositions for his beatification. He was a humble person who did not want his accomplishments and many good works revealed. Respecting his wishes, Sister Pascalina Lehnert—his housekeeper—implemented the Pope's charitable works and served him faithfully from 1923-1958.

In her deposition, Sister Pascalina clearly stated that Pius XII did not issue a formal condemnation of Nazism because the German and Austrian bishops feared increased retaliation and dissuaded him from making additional protests that would undoubtedly irritate Hitler. And there was retaliation. During the persecution against Catholics, the Nazis not only destroyed churches and closed schools, but also arrested priests and Catholic leaders who were sent to concentration camps. All the protests of the Holy See were reported in a

volume published in Germany in 1965.

Michael Tagliacozzo, a Jewish historian responsible for Beth Lohame Haghettaot Center in Italy, praised Pope Pius XII's wartime efforts. He recently provided the following information from *Hashavua*, the magazine of "Beth Alpha":

- Maurizio Zarfati, a resident in Acco, Hativath Golani St., wrote December 7, 1994, that he was saved with his parents, brother and sister in the monastery of the Augustinian Oblates of Santa Maria dei Sette Dolori in via Garibaldi. To permit men to enter, the Holy Father exempted them from rules of cloister. The Sisters gave up their rooms and moved to restricted quarters. ... There were 103 Jews in that convent.

- Soldier Eliyahu Lubisky, a member of the "Kibuz Beth Alpha," wrote on August 4, 1944, in the weekly *Hashavua*, that "he found more than 10,000 Jews in Rome. The refugees praised the Vatican for their help. Priests endangered their lives to save the Jews."

In general, while begging for help, the Jews who were in contact with Pope Pius XII insisted that he avoid any public action. Sister Pascalina wrote: "The Pope not only opened the doors of the Vatican to protect the persecuted, but he encouraged convents and monasteries to offer hospitality. The Vatican provided provisions for these people. He ordered me to spend his inheritance and personal funds to provide for those who wished to leave Italy and go to Canada, Brazil, or elsewhere. Note that \$800 was needed for each person who emigrated. Many times the Pope would ask me to deliver to Jewish families a sealed envelope containing \$1,000 or more."

In 1944, the Chief Rabbi of Rome, Israel Anton Zolli, gave an interview to the *American Hebrew* (July 14, 1944). Rabbi Zolli, who had been hidden in the Vatican during the German occupation of Rome, told the paper, "The Vatican has always

helped the Jews and the Jews are very grateful for the charitable work of the Vatican, all done without distinction of race.”

In his book *Antisemitismo*, Rabbi Zolli would later write: “World Jewry owes a great debt of gratitude to Pius XII for his repeated and pressing appeals for justice on behalf of the Jews and, when these did not prevail, for his strong protests against evil laws and procedures.... No hero in all of history was more militant, more fought against, none more heroic than Pius XII in pursuing the work of true charity!... and this on behalf of all the suffering children of God.”

It is well known that Zolli converted to Catholicism after the war, taking as his baptismal name the pope's, Eugenio. As Zolli would write in his memoirs: “The Holy Father sent by hand a letter to the bishops instructing them to lift the enclosure from convents and monasteries, so that they could become refuges for the Jews. I know of a convent where the Sisters slept in the basement, giving up their beds to Jewish refugees.”

Pope Pius XII made abundantly clear his judgment of the German aggression. In its front-page caption, the *New York Times* announced: “Pope Condemns Dictators, Treaty Violators, Racism; Urges Restoring of Poland.” The paper printed the entire text of Pius XII's encyclical, *Summi Pontificatus*, on pages 8 and 9. It was a powerful attack on totalitarianism and racism. Pius XII condemned racism not only by publicly defending his Jewish brethren and explicitly using the word “Jew,” but did so by quoting Saint Paul (Col. 3:10-11).

During his first year as pope, he created a special department for Jews in the German section of the Vatican Information Office. According to the *Canadian Jewish Chronicle* and other Jewish publications, some 36,877 papers were processed on behalf of Jewish refugees. In view of the plight of the Jewish people of Europe, resolutions were adopted at the January 1939

meeting of the Jewish Congress in Geneva. Dr. Nahum Goldmann, chairman, stated: "We record the Jewish people's deep appreciation of the stand taken by the Vatican against the advance of resurgent paganism which challenges all traditional values of religion as well as inalienable human rights upon which alone enduring civilization can be found."

Pius did more than protest. He immediately issued directives to all convents and monasteries to open their doors to protect Jews and other refugees. Some 80 percent of Italian Jews would survive the war, a much higher percentage than in many other nations. Refugees, mostly women and children, were even housed in the papal apartments at Castelgandolfo, where 28 children were born during the spring of 1944. Over 12,000 people found refuge in this papal villa. Day and night, Vatican trucks bearing the yellow and white flag brought food and other necessities to Castelgandolfo. After the war, as an expression of their gratitude, these refugees placed a memorial tablet "To Pope Pius XII, the Angelic Shepherd..." in the tower of the papal palace.

Tibor Baransky, a board member of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council and a Yad Vashem honoree, recalls that "Papal Nuncios helped the Jews. They got the orders straight from the Pope." He recounted that, while working at the age of 22 as a special representative of Angelo Rotta, the papal nuncio in Hungary, he heard from Jewish leaders who asked the pope not to raise a public outcry over the Nazi atrocities—since it would likely only increase their ferocity. (The Nazis had solidified their power in the early 1930s, and ferocious retaliation had been the typical response to every other Vatican protest.)

Working with Rotta—Pius XII's personal emissary in Hungary—Baransky carried blank documents, forged protective passes, and faked baptismal certificates to save as many Jewish lives as possible; when Nazis and their local sympathizers ignored these documents, Rotta sent Baransky to retrieve them.

In July 1944, the American Jewish Committee and other Jewish organizations organized a rally in Manhattan, New York, to protest the deportation of Hungarian Jews. In his discourse, Judge Joseph Proskauer, president of the American Jewish Committee, said: "We have seen how great was the work of the Holy Father in saving the Jews in Italy. We also learned from various sources that this great Pope has tried to help and save the lives of Jews in Hungary."

The anti-papal polemics of ex-seminarians like Garry Wills [*Papal Sin*], and John Cornwell [*Hitler's Pope*], of ex-priests like James Carroll [*Constantine's Sword*], and other lapsed or angry liberal Catholics exploit the tragedy of the Jewish people during the Holocaust to foster their own political agenda of forcing changes on the Catholic Church today.

Recently, John Cornwell conceded that he was wrong to have ascribed evil motives to Pius XII and now finds it "impossible to judge" him. Indeed, those who have slandered him contradict the words of Holocaust survivors, the founders of Israel, and the contemporary record of the *New York Times*. In short, Pius XII deserves to be honored, not castigated, at Yad Vashem.

Three Jews and a Pope

by Sister Margherita Marchione, Ph.D.

(Catalyst, 6/2006)

Recently, a Jewish group invited me to speak. When I mentioned that my topic would be Pope Pius XII, I was informed that it would not suit their needs: "My chairman thought it would open up the wounds of a few holocaust survivors in our group who

lost mothers, fathers, sisters and brothers in the gas chambers. We have a few, not many, who escaped from Germany. They still are angry that the Catholic Church did not condemn Adolf Hitler." Although this is not true, many Jewish organizations continue to state that "the Catholic Church did not condemn" the Nazi leader.

From England, Israel and the USA, three Jewish historians have refuted this distorted portrayal of world history: Martin Gilbert, Michael Tagliacozzo, and David Dalin. All three have taken issue with Daniel Goldhagen, John Cornwell, James Carroll and other writers of the past century.

As I pointed out in my own books during the past decade, why would German leaders state: "The Pope has repudiated the National Socialist New European Order... and makes himself the mouthpiece of the Jewish war criminals." When Pius XII learned about the Nazi round-up on October 16, 1943, why did he immediately send an official, personal protest through the papal Secretary of State Cardinal Luigi Maglione to German Ambassador Ernst von Weizsäcker? This protest was published in the Vatican's official "Actes." Why did the Pope provide false identification papers to potential victims? Why did he order Vatican buildings, churches, convents and monasteries to open their doors and find hiding places for Jews and other refugees? Why would Israeli Foreign Minister Golda Meir state: "When fearful martyrdom came to our people in the decade of Nazi terror, the voice of the Pope was raised for the victims." Albert Einstein stated. "Only the Church stood squarely across the path of Hitler's campaign for suppressing the truth." (*Time Magazine*, 1940)

How long will honest scholars condone statements by those who defame Pope Pius XII? Today even hardened detractors of Pius XII generally consider that, throughout the Second World War, the pope was hailed as a towering moral hero in the face of cataclysmic terror: a man solicitous on behalf of Jews and Gentiles alike who worked tirelessly for peace. Through

diplomacy, personal contact with Heads of State, and the underground railroad, he protected the Jews and other victims of the Nazis in a way that no other leader with mighty war weapons could provide. His charity and love prevailed.

No Pope throughout history did more than Pope John Paul II to create closer relations with the Jewish community, to oppose anti-Semitism, and to make certain that the evils of the Holocaust never occur again. Relations between the Catholic Church and Jewish people are marked by mutual respect and understanding. Pope John Paul II visited the Chief Rabbi at the Synagogue in Rome in 1986 and declared that "the Jews are our dearly beloved brothers," and indeed "our elder brothers in faith." He established full diplomatic relations between the Holy See and the State of Israel. A survivor of both Nazi and Communist oppression himself, John Paul II has consistently praised Pope Pius XII for his heroic leadership during World War II, and led the cause for his canonization. His successor, Benedict XVI, has followed in his footsteps.

During the early part of the nineteenth century, pogroms were going on in Poland. On December 30, 1915, the American Jewish Committee appealed to Pope Benedict XV to use his moral influence and speak out against anti-Semitism. Eugenio Pacelli, who was working in the Vatican Secretariate of State, was deeply involved in the preparation of a pro-Jewish document signed by Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Gasparri (February 9, 1916). This statement appeared in the New York Times, April 17, 1916 under the headline: "Papal Bull Urges Equality for Jews." It was printed in *Civiltà Cattolica*, April 28, 1916, v. 2, pp. 358-359, and in *The Tablet*, April 29, 1916 v. 127, p. 565.

Twenty years later, during his 1936 visit to America, Cardinal Pacelli met with two officials of the American Jewish Committee, Lewis Strauss and Joseph Proskauer, and re-affirmed Benedict XV's condemnation of anti-Semitism, promising to make its teaching better known. These facts are found in the

archives of the American Jewish Committee, and are documented by Naomi Cohen, in her official history of the AJC, *Not Free to Desist: A History of the American Jewish Committee, 1906-1966*, The Jewish Publication Society of America (Philadelphia, 1972, pp. 180, 214-215, 578, section vii).

Pius XII was sympathetic to Zionism and the creation of a Jewish state, both before and after he was Pontiff, as a number of works have shown: *Three Popes and the Jews* by Pinchas Lapide (1967); *The Papacy and the Middle East* (1986); and *Christian Attitudes Toward the State of Israel* by Paul Charles Merkley (2002). (The last fifty years of conflict in the region seem to confirm Pius XII's fears of ethnic resentments and hatreds.) On July 30, 1944, Pius XII told the newly-appointed high commissioner for Palestine "of his intention not to interfere with the Jewish aspiration to create a national State in Palestine, saying that he was animated with great sympathy for the Jews." (*The Tablet* of London, Oct. 25, 1958.) And in 1945, during a meeting with Jewish survivors of the Holocaust, Pius XII told his Jewish audience approvingly: "Soon, you will have a Jewish state." (*The Jerusalem Post*, October 10, 1958)

Recent followers of the anti-Pius XII myth, Susan Zuccotti (*Under His Very Windows*), Michael Phayer (*The Catholic Church and the Holocaust*) and David Kertzer (*The Popes Against the Jews*) make no mention of compelling documents that vindicate Pope Pius XII. The evidence in *Actes et Documents* (Libreria Editrice Vaticana) points to Pius XII's ceaseless activities for Peace. He was against Racism, Nationalism, Anti-Semitism and War. His efforts were on behalf of the persecuted: Jews, the homeless, widows, orphans, prisoners of war. It is important to note: 1. The Holy See's February 9, 1916 condemnation of anti-Semitism, which Eugenio Pacelli (the future Pius XII), then working in the Secretary of State's office, helped formulate. 2. The January 22, 1943 report written by the Nazi's Reich Central Security Office, which

condemned Pius XII's 1942 Christmas Address for "clearly speaking on behalf of the Jews" and which accused the Pontiff of being a "mouthpiece of the Jewish War Criminals." 3. The Nazi plan, reported in the July 5, 1998 issue of the Milan newspaper *Il Giornale*, which described Hitler's plan to "massacre Pius XII with the entire Vatican," because of the "Papal protest in favor of the Jews."

One wonders why the *New York Times* heralds books that cast Pope Pius as a racist and hypocrite. Compare *New York Times* book reviews, editorials and news articles that question Pope Pius's respected reputation with *New York Times* articles and editorials that praised Pius' efforts on behalf of the Jews? Why not cite the 1943 *New York Times* editorial? "...This Christmas more than ever, the Pope is a lonely voice crying out of the silence of a continent." Pope Pius XII was widely admired. If his voice of moral authority can be taken out of the social ratio, the media's voice is empowered.

Testimonials abound. In 1985, Cardinal Pietro Palazzini was honored by Israel's Yad Vashem as a "Righteous Gentile." He explicitly stated that Pius XII ordered him to save Jews. I interviewed him in 1995. His testimony is also clearly expressed in his memoirs.: "Amidst the clash of arms, a voice could be heard—the voice of Pius XII. The assistance given to so many people could not have been possible without his moral support, which was much more than quiet consent"(*Il clero e l'occupazione di Roma*, 1995).

Maurizio Zarfati, a resident in Acco, Hativath Golani St., 25/21 wrote December 7, 1994, that he was saved with his parents, brother and sister in the monastery of the Augustinian Oblates of Santa Maria dei Sette Dolori in via Garibaldi. To permit men to enter, the Holy Father exempted them from rules of cloister. The Sisters gave up their rooms and moved to restricted quarters. ... There were 103 Jews.

Soldier Eliyahu Lubisky, a member of the "Kibuz Beth Alpha,"

wrote on August 4, 1944, in the weekly "Hashavua," N. 178/42, that "he found more than 10,000 Jews in Rome. The refugees praised the Vatican for their help. Priests endangered their lives to save the Jews. The Pope himself participated in this work of saving Jews."

Regarding the German occupation of Rome, Michael Tagliacozzo's letter to the daily newspaper "Davàr" (Tel Aviv, April 23, 1985), states: "Little known is the precious help of the Holy See. On the recommendation of Pius XII the religious of every order did their best to save Jews. In great numbers, especially the elderly, women and children were welcomed in the convents that opened their doors offering refuge and assistance. Children in orphanages were sent to monasteries. Even in the Vatican, almost under the Pope's windows, Jews found refuge hiding from the clutches of the Gestapo. The figures show that about five thousand were hiding in ecclesiastical institutions (4238 in convents, parishes and other institutions, while 477 were living in the extraterritorial buildings protected by the Holy See).

The Pope's peace efforts, his denunciation of Nazism, his defense of the Jewish people, have been clearly documented. U.S. Army Chaplain Morris Kertzer addressed four thousand Italian Jews in the Rome synagogue and subsequently sent a report to the United States (June 9, 1944). Who can dismiss the personal testimonials by Jewish chaplains? Rabbi André Zaoui expressed gratitude "for the immense good and incomparable charity that Your Holiness extended generously to the Jews of Italy and especially the children, women and elderly of the community of Rome (June 22, 1944)." Jewish military chaplains have confirmed that Catholics in Italy, inspired by papal instruction, did much to rescue and shelter the Jewish victims of Nazi persecution, even providing false passports for them. Rabbi David de Sola Pool, chairman of the National Jewish Welfare Board wrote to the Pope: "We have received reports from our army chaplains in Italy of the aid

and protection given... From the bottom of our hearts we send you the assurances of undying gratitude."

Recently Rabbi David Dalin stated that "to deny the legitimacy of the collective gratitude of Jews to Pius XII is tantamount to denying their memory and experience of the Holocaust itself, as well as to denying the credibility of their personal testimony and judgment about the Pope's role in rescuing hundreds of thousands of Jews from certain death at the hands of the Nazis."

It is very significant that Pope Pius XII had the nearly unanimous praise of all his contemporaries, a fact mostly ignored by his detractors. Most importantly, not one of the charges against him holds up under careful analysis. He does not appeal to modern sensibilities largely because he was always teaching the Gospel and Catholic doctrine to a world deafened by nationalism and the drums of war. There is absolutely no evidence that Pope Pius XII did anything wrong or stupid; there is overwhelming evidence that he did virtually everything right, and that he acted only after the most careful and penetrating analysis of every possibility and after fervent prayer.

Testimonials of survivors of the Holocaust also make it perfectly clear that the Pope was not anti-Semitic or indifferent to the fate of the Jews and that he did everything possible to help them. In a letter to me, dated June 18, 1997, historian and Holocaust survivor, Michael Tagliacozzo, clearly expressed his sentiments: "In my study of the conditions of the Jews (*The Roman Community during the Nightmare of the Swastika*, November 1963), I pointed out the generous and vast activity of the Church in favor of the victims. I learned how great was Pope Pacelli's paternal solicitude. No honest person can discount his merits Pacelli was the only one who intervened to impede the deportation of Jews on October 16, 1943, and he did very much to hide and save thousands of us. It was no small matter that he ordered the opening of

cloistered convents. Without him, many of our own would not be alive.”

Again, August 8, 2004, he reiterated his convictions: “Any apology on the actions of Pius XII must be considered superfluous. This is clear to all men of good will and is entrusted above all to the memory of those Jews, now living, who have not forgotten the efforts and solicitude of Pope Pacelli.... One must add the countless expressions of gratitude of those whose lives were saved in the religious houses in Rome, Assisi and elsewhere. Even if gratitude was expressed directly to the Institutions who protected them, the merit goes to Pope Pacelli who, on October 16, 1943, gave orders to open the doors of the parishes, convents and monasteries to save the Jews from deportation.”

Albert Einstein concluded in *Time Magazine* (December 23, 1940): “Only the Church stood squarely across the path of Hitler’s campaign for suppressing the truth.” There are expressions of gratitude, on the part of Jewish chaplains and Holocaust survivors, who give witness to the assistance and compassion of the Pope for the Jews before, during and after the Holocaust. Among countless other Jewish authorities, Pius XII received praise from Moshe Sharett, Israeli Chief Rabbi Isaac Herzog, and Pinchas Lapide.

On April 7, 1944, Chief Rabbi Alexander Safran, of Bucharest, Rumania, presented the following statement to Monsignor Andrea Cassulo, Papal Nuncio to Rumania: “In the most difficult hours which we Jews of Rumania have passed through, the generous assistance of the Holy See was decisive and salutary. It is not easy for us to find the right words to express the warmth and consolation we experience because of the concern of the Supreme Pontiff who offered a large sum to relieve the sufferings of deported Jews $\frac{3}{4}$ sufferings which had been pointed out to him by you after your visit to Transnistria. The Jews of Rumania will never forget these facts of historic importance.”

An American newspaper carried the story of the Thanksgiving service in Rome's Jewish Temple that was heard on the radio (July 30, 1944). The Jewish chaplain of the Fifth American Army gave a discourse in which, among other things, he said: "If it had not been for the truly substantial assistance and the help given to Jews by the Vatican and by Rome's ecclesiastical authorities, hundreds of refugees and thousands of Jewish refugees would have undoubtedly perished before Rome was liberated." (*L'Osservatore Romano*, July 30, 1944).

In the summer of 1945, a petition was presented to Pope Pius XII by twenty thousand Jewish refugees from Central Europe: "Allow us to ask the great honor of being able to thank, personally, His Holiness for the generosity he has shown us when we were being persecuted during the terrible period of Nazi-Fascism."

At the end of World War II, Dr. Joseph Nathan, representing the Hebrew Commission, addressed the Jewish community, expressing heartfelt gratitude to those who protected and saved Jews during the Nazi-Fascist persecutions. "Above all," he stated, "we acknowledge the Supreme Pontiff and the religious men and women who, executing the directives of the Holy Father, recognized the persecuted as their brothers and, with great abnegation, hastened to help them, disregarding the terrible dangers to which they were exposed." (*L'Osservatore Romano*, September 8, 1945).

Reuben Resnick, American Director of the Committee to Help Jews in Italy, declared that "all the members of the Catholic hierarchy in Italy, from Cardinals to Priests, saved the lives of thousands of Jews, men, women, and children who were hosted and hidden in convents, churches, and other religious institutions" (*L'Osservatore Romano*, January 5, 1946).

On April 5, 1946, the Italian Jewish community sent the following message to His Holiness, Pius XII: "The delegates of the Congress of the Italian Jewish Communities, held in Rome

for the first time after the Liberation, feel that it is imperative to extend reverent homage to Your Holiness, and to express the most profound gratitude that animates all Jews for your fraternal humanity toward them during the years of persecution when their lives were endangered by Nazi-Fascist barbarism. Many times priests suffered imprisonment and were sent to concentration camps, and offered their lives to assist Jews in every way. This demonstration of goodness and charity that still animates the just, has served to lessen the shame and torture and sadness that afflicted millions of human beings." (*L'Osservatore Romano*, April 5, 1946).

There were many demonstrations of thanks and gratitude from the Jews saved through the assistance of Church institutions. Abramo Giacobbe Isaia Levi, a man of renowned intellect and a Senator of the Kingdom of Italy until the promulgation of the racial laws, was hidden in a convent during the Nazi occupation of Rome. He and his wife later converted to Christianity. He died in 1949 and, in his will, left a large sum of money to help elderly and impoverished Italian Jews. His beautiful estate in the center of Rome, Villa Levi, was renamed Villa Giorgina, in memory of his young daughter who died prematurely. In his will he donated it to Pope Pius XII because he had been "preserved from the dangers of evil racial persecution, overthrower of every relationship of human life" and was "grateful for the protection that was provided me in that turbulent period by the Sisters of the Infant Mary."

Popes, Cardinals and Bishops have consistently praised Pope Pius XII for his heroic leadership, his peace-making efforts and his commitment as the defender and protector of the victims of war and hatred which drenched Europe in blood during World War II. He was a moral beacon to mankind. His voice was heard around the world. It was the "Voice" of a tireless world leader whose contribution to humanity during the Holocaust is incontrovertible. It is time for Catholics to refute the careless innuendoes and unfounded accusations that

have been leveled against Pope Pius XII whose aspirations toward truth and goodness and his extraordinary World War II achievements are one of the great events of our times.

It is very significant that Pope Pius XII had the nearly unanimous praise of all his contemporaries, a fact mostly ignored by his detractors. Most importantly, not one of the charges against him holds up under careful analysis. He does not appeal to modern sensibilities largely because he was always teaching the Gospel and Catholic doctrine to a world deafened by nationalism and the drums of war. There is absolutely no evidence that Pope Pius XII did anything wrong or stupid; there is overwhelming evidence that he did virtually everything right, and that he acted only after the most careful and penetrating analysis of every possibility and after fervent prayer.

Testimonials of survivors of the Holocaust also make it perfectly clear that the Pope was not anti-Semitic or indifferent to the fate of the Jews and that he did everything possible to help them. In a letter to me, dated June 18, 1997, historian and Holocaust survivor, Michael Tagliacozzo, clearly expressed his sentiments: "In my study of the conditions of the Jews (*The Roman Community during the Nightmare of the Swastika*, November 1963), I pointed out the generous and vast activity of the Church in favor of the victims. I learned how great was Pope Pacelli's paternal solicitude. No honest person can discount his merits ... Pacelli was the only one who intervened to impede the deportation of Jews on October 16, 1943, and he did very much to hide and save thousands of us. It was no small matter that he ordered the opening of cloistered convents. Without him, many of our own would not be alive."

Again, August 8, 2004, Tagliacozzo reiterated his convictions: "Any apology on the actions of Pius XII must be considered superfluous. This is clear to all men of good will and is entrusted above all to the memory of those Jews, now living,

who have not forgotten the efforts and solicitude of Pope Pacelli.... One must add the countless expressions of gratitude of those whose lives were saved in the religious houses in Rome, Assisi and elsewhere. Even if gratitude was expressed directly to the Institutions who protected them, the merit goes to Pope Pacelli who, on October 16, 1943, gave orders to open the doors of the parishes, convents and monasteries to save the Jews from deportation."

Several years ago in an interview, Sir Martin Gilbert, perhaps the foremost contemporary Jewish historian, noted that "Christians were among the first victims of the Nazis and that the Churches took a very powerful stand. ..." On the question of Pope Pius XII's alleged silence, he stated, "So the test for Pacelli was when the Gestapo came to Rome in 1943 to round up Jews. And the Catholic Church, on his direct authority, immediately dispersed as many Jews as they could." After years of research that began in 1959, Gilbert wrote *Never Again: The History of the Holocaust* that contains an extraordinary chapter on Pius XII's humanitarianism. Here Gilbert thanks the Vatican for what was done to save Jewish lives. We owe this historian a debt of gratitude.

But how long will honest scholars condone statements by those who defame Pope Pius XII? Today even hardened detractors of Pius XII generally consider that, throughout the Second World War, the pope was hailed as a towering moral hero in the face of cataclysmic terror: a man solicitous on behalf of Jews and Gentiles alike who worked tirelessly for peace. His charity and love prevailed. Through diplomacy, personal contact with Heads of State, and the underground railroad, he protected the Jews and other victims of the Nazis in a way that no other leader with mighty war weapons could provide.

Marc Saperstein, professor of Jewish history and director of the program in Judaic studies at George Washington University, clearly stated in an article, "A Medieval and a Modern Pope" (*The Washington Post*, April 1, 1998): "The suggestion that

Christian doctrines or practice led directly to the Nazi death camps is misleading and inappropriate. ... There were limits to the capacity of the Pope and the Roman Catholic Church to prevent a world power with military domination over a continent, from murdering the civilians it defined as its enemies. The fundamental responsibility for the Holocaust lies with the Nazi perpetrators. Not with Pope Pius XII. Not with the church. Not with the teachings of the Christian faith."

One of the evils that has enveloped the media is the fact that recent smear campaigns, mounted by misguided Jews and misinformed Catholics, are being used in what is really an intra-Catholic argument about the direction of the Church today. At the same time, Pius XII has unjustly come under attack by the opposition and a great deal of misinformation about this pontiff is being circulated. Books, articles and media reports have leveled sweeping attacks while clearly overlooking historical sources and factors. If he had denounced Adolf Hitler more explicitly, the Nazis would have responded with even more ferocity. Personally and through his representatives, Pius XII employed all the means at his disposal to save Jews and other refugees during World War II. As a moral leader and a diplomat forced to limit his words, he privately took action and, despite insurmountable obstacles, saved hundreds of thousands of Jews from the gas chambers. The Pope was loved and respected. Of those mourning his death in 1958, Jews—who credited Pius XII with being one of their greatest defenders and benefactors in their hour of greatest need—stood in the forefront.

In the 60 plus years since World War II, overwhelming numbers of the Jewish Community have heaped thanks and praise on Pope Pius XII for his concern and assistance to the Jews in their difficult years. His supporters include, but are not limited to this list: Chief Rabbi Alexander Safran, of Bucharest, Rumania, The Jewish Advocate in Boston, Jewish chaplain of the Fifth American Army, Dr. Joseph Nathan, representing the

Hebrew Commission, Reuben Resnick, American Director of the Committee to Help Jews in Italy, Abramo Giacobbe Isaia Levi, Senator of the Kingdom of Italy, Jewish scholar Jenő Levai, Moshe Sharett, Israeli Chief Rabbi Isaac Herzog, Jewish scholar Pinchas E. Lapide, Albert Einstein, U.S. Army Chaplain Morris Kertzer, Rabbi André Zaoui, Rabbi David de Sola Pool, chairman of the National Jewish Welfare Board, Jewish historian and scholar Richard Breitman, Jan Hermann and Dr. Max Pereles, from the Ferramonti-Tarsia detention camp, Marc Saperstein, professor of Jewish history and director of the program in Judaic studies at George Washington University.

In particular, one must also remember that in the summer of 1945, twenty thousand Jewish refugees from Central Europe presented the following petition to Pope Pius XII: "Allow us to ask the great honor of being able to thank, personally, His Holiness for the generosity he has shown us when we were being persecuted during the terrible period of Nazi-Fascism."

Recently, three Jews have come to the defense of Pius XII: Rabbi David Dalin, professor of history at Ave Maria University; Historian Sir Martin Gilbert whose books have contributed immensely to the history of the Holocaust; Michael Tagliacozzo, historian and Holocaust survivor. Perhaps the greatest testimony was Hitler himself who consistently complained that Pope Pius XII was "a mouthpiece of the Jewish war criminals."

The truth of the matter is that Pope Pius XII condemned Hitler and protested more than 60 times. Politically the pope could do nothing; however, in a humanitarian effort to save the lives of Jews and other victims of Nazism, he did more than any other world leader!

Margherita Marchione, PhD, author of: *Yours Is a Precious Witness: Memoirs of Jews and Catholics in Wartime Italy* (1997); *Pius XII: Architect for Peace* (2000); *Consensus and Controversy: Defending Pius XII* (2002); *Shepherd of Souls:*

A Pictorial Life of Pius XII (2002) and *Man of Peace* (2003) Paulist Press. Also, *The Fighting Nun: My Story* (Cornwell Books, New York/London, 2000), *Pope Pius XII* (Ancora Press, Milan, 2003) and *Bilingual Italian-English and Spanish-English Coloring Books. Crusade of Charity: Pius XII and POWs*. Tel. 973-538-2886, Ext. 116 / E-mail Sr.Margherita.Marchione@ATT.NET].

Revisiting the Pius War

by Eugene J. Fisher

(Catalyst 4/2006)

Patrick J. Gallo, editor, Pius XII, the Holocaust and the Revisionists: Essays. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co, 2006. 218 pages. PB. NP.

Sister Margherita Marchione, Crusade of Charity: Pius XII and POW's(1939-1945). New York: Paulist Press, 2006. 284 pages.

Ronald J. Rychlak, Righteous Gentiles: How Pius XII and the Catholic Church saved Half a Million Jews from the Nazis. Dallas: Spence Publishing Co., 2005. 378 pages.

These three books, together with David G. Dalin's *The Myth of Hitler's Pope: How Pope Pius XII Rescued Jews from the Nazis* (reviewed in the September 2005 issue of *Catalyst*), absolutely decimate the attacks on the reputation of Pope Pius XII made in the spate of books by James Carroll, John Cornwell, Daniel Goldhagen, David Kertzer, Michael Phayer, Gary Wills and Susan Zucotti. They meticulously re-examine the charges against Pius, charges which sadly have become deeply embedded in the very grain of our culture.

David Dalin is a rabbi, while Ronald Rychlak, Margherita Marchione, and Patrick Gallo are Catholic. This is of some significance since much has been made of the fact that the anti-Pius attackers are either Jews (Kertzer, Goldhagen, Zucotti) or Catholics. Protestants, in the main, have stayed out of the papal fray, having their own ambiguous history during the Holocaust with which to deal. The motivation of Jewish critics of the pope is complex. Historian Yosef Haim Yerushalmi put his finger on the nub of it in his response to Rosemary Radford Reuther in a 1974 conference when he noted that over the centuries when the Jews were in extremis they could look to the papacy for relief from attacks by secular powers, and usually received it. Thus, the inability of the Holy See to influence Nazism's genocide in the 20th century was profoundly shocking to Jews. Yerushalmi, however, goes on to note the relative weakness of the papacy in modern times in secular affairs, and to distinguish between medieval Christian anti-Jewishness and modern, racial, genocidal anti-Semitism, though noting, as have Pope John Paul II and then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, that the former was, in Yerushalmi's words, a "necessary cause" for explaining the latter, though not a "sufficient cause," being only one of a number of factors involved.

The motivation of Catholic critics of Pius is perhaps more subtle, though here again Yerushalmi shed light on it in 1974. While he acknowledges Reuther's "sincere and profound involvement in the fate of the Jews," he worries that for her it appears to be "part of a larger problem—that of the church itself," in which "she places the dawn of a new attitude toward the Jews within the context of an obvious hope for a total regeneration of the church." He goes on to note that "historically, reformist movements within the church have often been accompanied by an even more virulent anti-Semitism," citing the Cluniac reform, Martin Luther (who advocated the destruction of synagogues and the expulsion of Jews) and Calvin's Geneva, where Jews were forbidden to

reside, though maintaining a legal right of residence and freedom to worship in Rome. The defenders of Pius, I believe, are quite accurate in noting similarly that for the authors of the anti-Pius books, the critique of the Church of the 1940's is in fact a part of a larger, contemporary reformist agenda, which raises quite legitimate questions about their academic objectivity. Indeed, in the case of Reuther, the fact that she had used Jewish suffering to further her own agenda became patently clear only a few years later when she published a book rejecting the very existence of the Jewish state and declaring the Palestinians to be the true "Jews" of the time, thus placing Israel and real Jews into the category of "Nazis."

The books reviewed here are for obvious reasons reactive in nature. As Joseph Bottum notes in the epilogue to the Gallo volume, we still await "a non-reactive account of Pius' life and times, a book driven not by a reviewer's instinct to answer charges but by the biographer's impulse to tell an accurate story." He adds, I believe wisely, that "before that can be done well, the archives of Pius XII's pontificate will probably have to be fully catalogued and opened."

Rychlak's book, in a sense, comes closest to that goal, narrating Pius' life within the context of his times. His estimate that the Church, through its nunciatures (which handed out false baptismal certificates by the tens of thousands to members of "the family of Jesus") and through its monasteries and convents, rectories and other institutions saved some 500,000 Jews, is actually on the moderate side, with estimates ranging up to 800,000. Dalin, the rabbi, and Marchione agree with Rychlak that Pius in fact meets the criteria for a "Righteous Gentile" as defined by Yad va Shem, Jerusalem's Holocaust museum, which Pope John Paul II visited so reverently and penitentially during his pilgrimage there in the Millennium Year. Gallo's book is composed of essays, half of which were written by himself, half by such internationally

prominent scholars as Matteo Napolitano of Italy and Juno Levai of Hungary. Half of the essays are new for this book, half published in journals before inclusion here. Readers will be treated to the trenchant wit of Justus George Lawler and the inexorable marshalling of evidence of Ronald Rychlak. George Sim Johnson takes on the myths surrounding Pius XI's "hidden encyclical," which like a Brooklyn egg cream was in fact neither "hidden" nor an "encyclical" (since never promulgated, it remained simply a draft). Bottum himself in his essays fills in the gaps, such as the Ardeatine Massacre, and, as noted, comments incisively on the controversy as a whole.

Each volume, in its own way, attempts as well to explain why the attacks on Pius' reputation were made. Dalin, not without reason, calls it a phenomenon of the culture wars of our time, in which the "left wing," secular media latched on to the discrediting of Pius as part of its not-so-subtle attempt to discredit not just Catholicism, but religious faith in general. Gallo notes the continuity between the current charges against Pius and those made by the Soviet Union in its Cold War propaganda against the West, again with Pius as a symbolic target for a larger agenda. It is true that the current attackers have come from what would be called "the Left" and the defenders from "the Right." It may be that to adjudicate this issue, like those surrounding Pius himself as Bottum indicates, we will have to await a time when all the documentation is out and the war itself a bit more distant in time and emotions.

Dalin and Rychlak are both critical of the work of the International Catholic-Jewish Historical Commission, launched with great hope by the Holy See and the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations in December 1999, which I was asked by Cardinal Edward Idris Cassidy, then President of the Pontifical Commission of Religious Relations with the Jews, to coordinate on the Catholic side. I would

like to state that Professor Michael Marrus, on the Jewish side, and all three Catholic scholars acted with integrity and professionalism throughout what turned out to be for us all a grueling ordeal.

I believe those who read the actual statement of the group will come away with a more positive view of what the group accomplished than its critics present. The statement praises the objectivity and thoroughness of the *Actes et Documents du Satin-Seige relatifs a la Seconde Guerre Mondiale*, a 12 volume set of documents put together by four Jesuit scholars from the massive materials in the Holy See's "Secret Archives" for the period of WWII. The statement also praises the four papers produced by the group analyzing particular volumes, and the group's correspondence with its sponsors.

Marchione's *Crusade of Charity* is drawn largely from documents contained in *Actes et Documents*. It is her fourth book, all published by Paulist Press, on Pius XII. Whereas the first three were reactions to Pius' critics in general, this one centers on the massive efforts made by the Holy See during the Second World War to respond to enquiries about Prisoners of War, and family members in general, including Jewish family members who were among the missing. It shows a Holy See deeply involved in what was at the time among the most humanitarian of missions: helping people, whether Catholics, Jews or Protestants, to discover the fate of their loved ones. Page after page is touched with moving testimony to love at its most basic, and to the huge efforts of the relatively small and understaffed Vatican to cope with the thousands of requests coming to it in the midst of a world gone insane. Whatever one thinks of the Pius Wars, this is a book to read. It is a book which gives us models to emulate in one's own life.

Underlying the specific issue of Pope Pius, of course, is the deeper issue of the relationship between traditional Christian teaching on Jews and Judaism and the mindset not only of the

perpetrators but also of the bystanders of Europe during the Holocaust. For whatever the ultimate, and hopefully dispassionate historical judgment of the actions of one pope, we Catholics, as Pope John Paul II reminded us time and again, must come to grips with that history, repent its sins, and do what needs to be done to ensure that it will never happen again. A proper framing of this deeper issue can be found in *Catholic Teaching on the Shoah: Implementing the Holy See's "We Remember"* (USCCB Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations, 2001).

Eugene J. Fisher is the Associate Director of the Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington, DC.

(This is a revised and greatly expanded version of a review that first appeared in Catholic News Service.)

The Papacy and the Jews: Rabbi Dalin Sets the Record Straight

by William Doyno, Jr.

(Catalyst 9/2005)

Every day, the secular media bombards us with the idea that the Catholic Church is a backward, repressive institution, unfair to its own members and prejudiced against those outside its communion. Is it any wonder that so many Jews, and other non-Catholics—not to mention “anti-Catholic Catholics” ignorant of their own faith—have a distorted or incomplete

understanding of Catholicism? Anti-Catholicism so saturates the media that even the *Jerusalem Post*, trying to correct the record, got its story wrong: there have been no fundamental “changes” in Catholic theology regarding Jews because Catholic teaching against anti-Semitism was not introduced at Vatican II, but merely developed (with the assistance of the Holy Spirit), and applied more conscientiously to the modern world.

That John Paul II increased the warmth and trust between the two communities is undeniable; but that John Paul II began the rapprochement between the Catholic and Jewish communities—as if everything up to his pontificate was something to regret—is a myth, which he himself would rebel against, were he still alive to refute it.

Fortunately there are many Catholics and Jews who have dedicated their lives to trying to set the historical record straight. One man in that mold is Rabbi and historian David Dalin, who first came to the attention of Catholics when he published a much-discussed essay on Pius XII and the Jews in the influential *Weekly Standard* (February 26, 2001). In it, he staked out his position in defense of Pius XII, and argued that many of the wartime pope’s critics—particularly embittered, dissenting Catholics—were not really interested in the tragedy of the Jewish people but merely sought to exploit it for their own anti-papal agenda. “Jews, whatever their feelings about the Catholic Church,” he wrote, “have a duty to reject any attempt to usurp the Holocaust and use it for partisan purposes.” That remarkable essay was re-published in the important anthology Dalin co-edited, *The Pius War: Responses to the Critics of Pius XII* (See, “Why We Published *The Pius War*,” in *Catalyst*, April, 2005, pp. 8-9).

Even before he came to the attention of the wider Catholic community, Dalin was known as an exacting scholar of Judaism, having already authored several important books, and written for such journals as *Commentary*, *Conservative Judaism* and *American Jewish History*. His knowledge of

Catholicism and Catholic-Jewish history is no less impressive. And unlike so many who delve into this complicated area, Dalin has impeccable credentials: he received his B.A. degree from the University of California at Berkley, where he was elected to Phi Beta Kappa. He received his M.A. and Ph.D from Brandeis University, and his Rabbinic Ordination from the Jewish Theological Seminary in America. Dalin, in other words, is an authority on this subject, not an amateur making stray and superficial comments.

Because of his body of work and reputation, Rabbi Dalin is a much sought-after speaker and lecturer, and now teaches at Ave Maria University in Naples, Florida, where he is a Professor of history and political science.

In his new book, *The Myth of Hitler's Pope*, Dalin directly refutes the thesis of John Cornwell's notorious book, *Hitler's Pope*. He uses the occasion to explore the whole history of Catholic-Jewish relations, and compares them to Jewish-Muslim relations, which are at the heart of current geopolitical debates today.

The Myth of Hitler's Pope covers three areas of concern for Catholics and Jews. The first, of course, is the life and record of Eugenio Pacelli, who served as Pope Pius XII during the Second World War and beginning of the Cold War. Against the polemicists and mythmakers of our time, Rabbi Dalin demonstrates the humanity, courage and charity of Pius XII, both before and after he became pope.

At every stage of his life, Dalin argues, Pacelli was an outspoken foe of every aspect of Nazism. With careful documentation, much of it new, from recently released archives, Dalin proves that Pacelli, did, in fact "speak out" against anti-Semitism, racism, warmongering and the atrocities of the Holocaust. His record as papal nuncio in Germany (1917-1929), as well as when he was Cardinal Secretary of State to Pius XI (1930-1939), is quite impressive. This is

true notwithstanding the much-maligned 1933 Concordat between the Holy See and Germany, which Pacelli negotiated (on behalf of Pius XI) to protect the Church's freedom against the onslaught of the Nazis. (By doing so, he preserved at least some mobility for the Church to protect persecuted Catholics and Jews.) As pope himself, from 1939-1958, Pius XII was the architect of the Catholic Church's world-wide rescue efforts during the Holocaust, going to great lengths to protect Europe's persecuted Jewish community.

One of the most important parts of Rabbi Dalin's book is where he demolishes the claim that Pius XII was uninvolved in these rescue efforts, as if all Catholic rescue was spontaneous and independent of the pope. In fact, as Dalin proves, Pius XII gave direct orders and explicit instructions to his subordinates to rescue Jews; the result was that countless numbers of them were saved from Hitler's death camps. This was recognized at the time, after the War, and after Pius XII's death, by almost all major Jewish leaders and organizations. Dalin rightly criticizes those who attempt to diminish or explain away these powerful testimonials on behalf of Pius. Contemporary scholars like Sir Martin Gilbert, whom Dalin cites as a renowned authority, estimate that the wartime Church, under Pius XII's leadership, saved "hundreds of thousands of Jewish lives."

The second subject concerns a little known figure—Hajj Amin al-Husseini, the grand mufti of Jerusalem; according to Dalin's research, he played a significant role in Hitler's Third Reich. Al-Husseini was one of the fathers of today's radical Muslim extremists and, therefore, a notorious anti-Semite who sanctioned Hitler's policies against the Jews. And Husseini did this, openly and publicly, at the very time that Pius XII was rescuing Jews in Rome and elsewhere. The story Dalin tells about this pro-Nazi cleric—who became a hero to Yasser Arafat, and whose theories are at the root of modern-day terrorism—is truly astonishing: he juxtaposes the actions

of the two men, and chastises anti-Pius ideologues for ignoring al-Husseini's appalling record, while defaming a good and noble pope.

Writes Dalin:

"One of the most damaging side effects of the myth of Hitler's pope is that it perpetuates the myth that the Catholic Church, rather than radical Islam, has been and remains the preeminent source of anti-Semitism in the modern world...Today, sixty years after the Holocaust, the wartime career and historical significance of Hitler's mufti...should be better remembered and understood. The 'most dangerous' cleric in modern history, to use John Cornwell's phrase, was not Pope Pius XII but Hajj Amin al-Husseini, whose anti-Jewish Islamic fundamentalism was as dangerous in World War II as it is today. While in Berlin, al-Husseini met privately with Hitler on numerous occasions, and called publicly—and repeatedly—for the destruction of European Jewry. The grand mufti was the Nazi collaborator *par excellence*. 'Hitler's Mufti' is truth. 'Hitler's pope' is myth."

The final and perhaps most important theme of Dalin's book is the strength of Catholic-Jewish relations—not just today, but throughout the ages. For a number of years, numerous commentators—many of them Catholics, alas—have depicted the history of Catholic-Jewish relations as one long trail of tears. But while it is true that there have been difficult chapters in this relationship, it is also true that a philo-Semitic or pro-Jewish tradition has always existed in the Church—and it didn't begin at Vatican II. Employing all his skills as an historian, and without whitewashing any particular act of injustice, Dalin recounts how, with few exceptions, pope after pope, from ancient times to the present, raised a helping hand for the Jewish community:

"The historical fact is that popes have often spoken out in defense of the Jews, have protected them during times of

persecution and pogroms, and have protected their right to worship freely in their synagogues. Popes have traditionally defended Jews from wild anti-Semitic allegations. Popes regularly condemned anti-Semites who sought to incite violence against Jews. Popes employed Jewish physicians in the Vatican and counted Jews among their personal confidants and friends. You won't find these facts in the liberal attack books, but they are true."

Noting that many of Pius XII's detractors also assailed Mel Gibson's masterful "Passion of the Christ," Dalin concludes his book with the observation that secularist ideologues who attack Pius XII—or John Paul II or Benedict XVI—are really engaged in the larger cultural war, against the Judeo-Christian values they represent. Rabbi Dalin calls upon both Jews and Catholics committed to their respective faiths to wake up, recognize what is going on, and fight back. As a first step, he proposes that Pope Pius XII be formally recognized as a "Righteous Gentile" by the state of Israel, as it has recognized other heroes who rescued Jews during the Holocaust.

That proposal may shock those committed to the myth of "Hitler's Pope," because of ignorance or prejudice, but if they read this book, they may well change their mind and agree with Dalin's informed and heartfelt judgment. May Israel one day so recognize Pius XII; may the Vatican beatify and canonize him; and may Rabbi Dalin, a courageous and prophetic figure for our cynical age, live long enough to see both occur.

William Doyno Jr. is a Catholic author and commentator. A contributing editor to Inside the Vatican, he has been published in such journals as National Review, Modern Age, and Crisis, and is now researching and writing a book on the Vatican's role during the Second World War.

Why We Published The Pius War

by William Doyno, Jr.

(Catalyst 4/2005)

Eight years ago this month, the *New Yorker* magazine published a spectacularly long article entitled “The Silence.” Written by the resigned priest James Carroll (now a columnist at the *Boston Globe*), it argued that the doctrine of papal infallibility and the Church’s insistence “upon the primacy of Jesus as a means to salvation” were both false and had caused untold harm throughout history. In a misunderstanding of papal infallibility remarkable in one who had studied Catholic theology, Carroll contended that the doctrine prevented the Church from acknowledging its own guilt, causing John Paul II to remain “silent” in the face of overwhelming institutional sin. “The doctrine of infallibility,” Carroll concluded, “is like a virus that paralyzes the body of the Church.”

“The Silence,” caused a mini-sensation, becoming a focal point for anti-Catholics everywhere, and a conversation piece among the chattering classes. What made the article notable were not its attacks against the pope, its slashing attacks against papal infallibility, nor even its manifold errors about theology and Church history. What caused the greatest impact was Carroll’s attempt to blame Pope Pius XII—and, to a large extent, the Catholic Church itself—for the Holocaust.

Carroll’s charges were hardly novel. As early as 1943, Soviet propagandists concocted tales about Pius XII’s alleged collaboration with Hitler’s Germany, attempting to drive a wedge between the faithful and the Church. After the war, these Communist myths were picked up by the German playwright

Rolf Hochhuth—ironically, a former member of the Hitler Youth—whose play *The Deputy* (1963) attempted to transfer German guilt to an Italian pope. Hochhuth caricatured Pius XII as a cowardly and avaricious man who could have prevented the Holocaust with a few dramatic words, but—because of his own weak character and financial interests—chose to remain “silent.” Carroll’s *New Yorker* article resumed Hochhuth’s indictment of Pius XII, and extended it.

Although many people dismissed the *New Yorker* piece—even *Commonweal* magazine, often critical of the Vatican, called the essay “factually flawed...logically garbled...theologically incoherent”—Carroll’s attacks against the papacy encouraged anti-papal polemicists, both within and without the Church, to publish their own salvos. Within a few years, a cottage industry of attacks on Pius XII and the Catholic Church emerged: John Cornwell’s *Hitler’s Pope* (1999); Gary Wills’s *Papal Sin* (2000); Susan Zuccotti’s *Under His Very Windows* (2000); Michael Phayer’s *The Catholic Church and the Holocaust, 1930-1965* (2000); David Kertzer’s *The Popes Against the Jews* (2001); Carroll’s own *Constantine’s Sword* (2001); and Daniel Jonah Goldhagen’s *A Moral Reckoning* (2002).

On the talk-show circuits and in the academic journals, these books—despite their manifold errors—were greeted with an almost rapturous reception. One man, however, remained unconvinced: Rabbi and historian David Dalin. Disturbed and angered by what he considered the hijacking and exploitation of the Holocaust for partisan purposes, Dalin decided to respond. With degrees in both history and theology, and as a long-time participant in the Jewish-Catholic dialogue, he had both the knowledge and the authority to rebut the anti-papal polemicists, and write accurately about the Catholic Church and the Holocaust. The result was a series of essays and reviews, the most important being his first one, “Pius XII and the Jews,” a 5,000-word analysis of the entire controversy in the *Weekly Standard* of February 26, 2001.

Translated into several languages, Dalin's article became one of the most widely reprinted essays on Pius XII. What struck so many people about Dalin's work was not just his point-by-point refutation of Pius' detractors, but his dramatic conclusion: "Pius XII was, genuinely and profoundly, a Righteous Gentile."

To be sure, Dalin's essay did not please everyone, particularly those who had made a small fortune off of the Deputy Myth, or whose ideological disagreements with the Church were energized and sustained by that myth. The attack became all the more ferocious. In an essay published in the journal *First Things*, Joseph Bottum argued that although Pius's supporters had demolished the accusations against the wartime pontiff, they had lost the larger war over Pius's cultural reputation—or at least, not yet won it—because the opponents of Pius XII still wielded the most influence. Bottum's conclusion, however, may have been a bit premature.

In reality Pius's supporters were growing in influence, not just in America, but throughout the world. Discussing this matter among ourselves, we decided to put together an anthology which would do what had not yet been done: answer the recent critics of Pius XII *all at once*, within a single cover, in a comprehensive, measured fashion. The result is *The Pius War: Responses to the Critics of Pius XII*, edited by Bottum and Dalin, and published by Lexington Books.

The first hundred pages of the book collect the best essays and reviews—selected from literally hundreds of possibilities—of the various attack books which have appeared during the past decade. The criteria for selections were eloquence, force of persuasion, depth of knowledge and, above all, historical accuracy—as the contributions would be worthless unless they could prove their case.

Hence, two distinguished Church historians—Dr. Rainer Decker of Germany, and Fr. John Jay Hughes—respond, respectively, to

Cornwell's *Hitler's Pope*, and Michael Phayer's *The Catholic Church and the Holocaust*—explaining what really happened during the Nazi roundup of Rome's Jews (which was at the heart of Hochhuth's malicious play). Professor Ronald Rychlak, the foremost Pius scholar in America, deconstructs Susan Zuccotti's claim that Pius XII did "little or nothing" to assist persecuted Jews; Robert Louis Wilken, an eminent historian of Christianity at the University of Virginia, delivers a body blow to James Carroll's *Constantine's Sword*; teacher and publisher Justus George Lawler takes issue with Gary Wills' scatter-shot attacks and deeply flawed history; papal scholar Russell Hittinger responds to David Kertzer's *The Popes Against the Jews*; archival expert John Conway critiques historians who speak darkly about the Vatican's "secret" wartime archives—while never having studied the voluminous Vatican archives already released in eleven volumes; Michael Novak responds to Daniel Goldhagen's aspersions against Pius and the Church; and Kevin M. Doyle contributes the unexpected gem of the book, an analysis of the so-called "hidden encyclical," against anti-Semitism, intended by Pius XI and allegedly suppressed by Pius XII. Doyle shows that, far from remaining "hidden," the encyclical was transformed and published just six weeks after the beginning of the Second World War under a different name, *Summi Pontificatus*, condemning racism in all forms. Add to this Dalin's famous essay, and an introduction and concluding essay by Bottum.

Following these essays is my own contribution: an 80,000-word, 180-page annotated bibliography which attempts to canvass every aspect of this controversy—with a focus on demonstrating how Pius XII, far from remaining "silent," condemned anti-Semitism, racism, and genocide before, during and after the Holocaust. Constituting some two-thirds of the book, my bibliography has been very generously called "a tour de force of scholarship and highly readable to boot" (*National Review*, February 14). My purpose was to provide a kind of historical

road map, an intellectual compass, for both laymen and scholars alike, who want to know more about this subject—and want to know which authors can be trusted, which cannot—and why.

As important as we believe *The Pius War* is for recovering historical truth, it does not downplay or whitewash the sins of the “sons and daughters” of the Catholic Church, to quote John Paul II. Many of the essayists speak frankly about anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism, and the bibliography has a long section on Jewish-Catholic relations, covering every aspect of this turbulent relationship, light and dark alike.

Already we can see signs of change. A movie of Hochhuth’s *Deputy* called “Amen” was released in 2002 only to become an international flop, garnering highly negative reviews. Hochhuth himself was recently caught praising the notorious revisionist historian—and accused Holocaust-denier—David Irving, thereby discrediting himself even further. John Cornwell recently stated that he now finds it “impossible to judge” Pius XII, in light of “the debates and evidence” that followed publication of his now-discredited *Hitler’s Pope*. Even Susan Zuccotti, writing in the esteemed *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* (Fall 2004), while still maintaining her excessively skeptical attitude toward Pius XII’s involvement in rescue efforts, acknowledges evidence she previously overlooked, and now believes there is “much room for compromise and reconciliation” between participants in this debate. So, progress has been made, and continues to be made, as new archives are opened, new books are written, new perspectives are formed.

William Doyno Jr. is a Catholic author and commentator. A contributing editor to Inside the Vatican, he has been published in such journals as National Review, Modern Age, and Crisis, and is now researching and writing a book on the Vatican’s role during the Second World War.